5th June 2025

Re: ODDA Response to the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)

The Online Dating and Discovery Association (ODDA) is the global voice for the sector with a mission to create safe, responsible and enjoyable experiences for everyone. Representing over 300 brands, a key priority for the ODDA and its members is to prevent fraud as part of a multi-layered approach to trust and safety.

We would like to thank the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for the opportunity to participate in the Constructive Dialogue on Technical Assistance and International Cooperation, which was held in Vienna on 2nd June.

We would also like to take this opportunity to share further details about the work we have been doing with our members to tackle online fraud and our thoughts on additional measures we believe would contribute towards a significant reduction in the problem globally.

ODDA Counter-Fraud Project:

Online fraud is estimated to account for almost half of all crime. While the growth in technology and digital literacy over the past few years provides many advantages, it is not without risk. Organized crime gangs have been quick to identify opportunities to increase the reach and scale of their attacks, targeting victims all over the world.

To address this threat, the ODDA launched a counter-fraud pilot to develop a better understanding of the true scale of the problem by creating a central hub that risk assessed the Internet Protocol (IP) addresses of users attempting to access services offered by our members.

Early results of the pilot were impressive. In the first 30 days, we were able to identify approximately 8,000 individual IP addresses as known fraudsters. This information was then shared with our members who were able to block or remove them from their service.

We'll be publishing the full results of the pilot later in the year before rolling it out as a free service for all our members. Longer-term, we think there is an opportunity to develop additional capability by incorporating other types of data, such as email addresses and images. Alongside counter-fraud measures our members already deploy, our goal is to make the online dating and social discovery sector truly hostile to fraudsters and other bad actors.

Fraud Prevention Measures the Sector has Implemented More Widely:

The sector has invested heavily in innovative new technology as part of its ongoing commitment to trust and safety. The majority of services expect to increase their investment in trust and safety tech this year with over half of new apps integrating solutions at the design phase.

Within the ODDA, we've seen a big rise in dating apps seeking advice about solutions and best practice. We've also facilitated working groups - bringing together representatives from the tech industry, regulators and online dating platforms to support the development of solutions and standards that help the sector deal with evolving risk. This has led to some incredibly effective partnerships in areas such as age verification and content moderation which other sectors are now following. There is now a very healthy and growing eco system of tech firms supporting the sector, which reflects the importance that our members place on the safety of their users.

Together, these measures are beginning to make a real difference. Statistically, users are less likely to be a victim of fraud on an online dating or social discovery app than they are on a social media site - but that doesn't mean we can take our foot off the gas. We know that more needs to be done and we have identified below several opportunities for policymakers to consider.

Better Information Sharing:

Every organization captures data that can tell us a lot about fraud trends and tactics – especially financial services and big tech firms. Yet there are often barriers to sharing information with other sectors that prevent us from taking advantage of the opportunities to make a real and sustainable difference. Sometimes this is the result of organizational culture, where there is a resistance to share information because of a fear of breaching data protection rules. Sometimes it's due to commercial sensitivity or, because it exposes a potential vulnerability.

We believe that international Governments have an important role to play in enabling better cross-sector information sharing. We would like to see policymakers use the levers they have available to them to bring key stakeholders together at an international level to enable better information sharing between sectors. This could be achieved for example, through establishing a dedicated international body, perhaps under the umbrella of the UNODC, to coordinate, collect, analyse and disseminate information about organized fraud around the world.

A truly joined-up approach would make a significant dent in the problem and make it much harder for organized criminals to be successful.

More Joined-Up Working with Law Enforcement:

Awareness campaigns highlighting the tactics used by fraudsters are a tried and tested approach that seek to educate users on being able to spot potential fraud. However, on their own, they are limited in their effectiveness as they focus primarily on addressing the symptoms of the problem as opposed to its root cause. Furthermore, as we've seen over the last couple of years, scammers are becoming increasingly sophisticated using technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) to target victims. As a result, awareness campaigns will become less effective in the future.

To counter this threat, the response by law enforcement agencies in bringing down organized crime gangs needs to improve. As many countries around the world have experienced, reporting rates for online fraud are very low, with victims often feeling frustrated when no action is taken against the perpetrators. This creates a vicious circle - the less fraud is reported, the less likely it is that Governments will invest time and money into solving the problem.

While we recognise the challenges in bringing offenders to justice, we think a more joined-up approach at an international level and better resourcing is urgently needed to disrupt organized crime gangs.

The Language of Fraud - The Impact of Victim Shaming:

Being targeted by scammers can evoke many different feelings and emotions. Sadly, many people blame themselves which can often lead to them feeling ashamed which prevents them from seeking further help and support. In some cases, it can lead them to taking their own life.

We think there needs to be a widespread change in the way victims of fraud are labelled and a shift away from the current terminology that is often derogatory. For example, we should not refer to people having "fallen" for a fraud as it suggests no-one else is involved.

The ODDA and its members have worked hard to improve the support provided to victims. This includes working closely alongside victim groups, law enforcement and others to provide a range of tools and support. We believe that changing the language used to describe victims of fraud will encourage more people to come forward and help us put an end to victim-shaming.

Summary:

Tackling fraud is a priority for us at the ODDA. Our members continue to implement solutions that keep users safe online and make the sector truly hostile to organized criminals. We look forward to sharing further details of our work in this area.

Your sincerely,

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