Online Dating & Discovery Association

13th April 2026

AN OPEN LETTER TO POLICYMAKERS AND REGULATORS - TACKLING ONLINE FRAUD: BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO INFORMATION SHARING AND MAKING DATA ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE

The Global Fraud Summit in Vienna last month provided an opportunity to bring together Ministers, senior decision-makers and experts from around the world to improve international cooperation in tackling the growing impact of fraud. As the recognised trade body for the sector, the Online Dating and Discovery Association (ODDA) was delighted to attend the event and participate in the discussions that took place across the two days.

Tackling fraud remains the number one priority for our members who already invest heavily in fraud prevention and detection. Recent figures show this investment is paying off with fraud less prevalent on dating and discovery apps than it is on social media.

However, to tackle the problem effectively requires a more joined-up approach at an international level and greater intervention by individual Government entities to enable better information-sharing and coordination between partners.

The outcomes agreed at the Summit are an important first step in protecting consumers and disrupting transnational organised fraud. Yet these efforts risk being undermined by a failure to address a key gap: smaller firms, who are disproportionately affected by fraud, face greater barriers in accessing and sharing information than larger ones.

At the heart of this problem is the growth of private sector information sharing initiatives. While they undoubtedly provide a valuable service to their members, the cost of membership is often prohibitively expensive for smaller firms leaving them excluded from accessing an incredibly valuable tool in the fight against fraud.

We therefore call on Policymakers and Regulators to enable free and fair access to fraud data for businesses of all sizes, irrespective of the sector they work in, by bringing all existing information sharing initiatives under the umbrella of a single entity.

We note the successful models established in Australia and Singapore and believe now is the time to push forward with a public commitment to create a global network of national and publicly funded anti-scam centres.

However, successful collaboration can only take place if the barriers to information sharing are removed. While we were pleased to see this point made by Lord Hanson in his speech at the Summit, it is essential that any attempts to address these challenges are done with smaller firms in mind who often have greater difficulty in meeting the stringent requirements placed on them by larger organisations.

Tackling the problem effectively is also about making sure we don't create new opportunities for fraudsters through measures designed to prevent or detect them. For example, following the introduction of new age assurance rules under the Online Safety Act (OSA) in the UK, several ODDA members reported seeing fake age verification adverts which were intended to exploit a lack of consumer awareness in the weeks following the new rules coming into effect. We've also seen an increase in attempted account takeovers as the legislation has forced fraudsters to find other ways in. These unintended consequences risk creating even bigger problems for both consumers and platforms.

To address this, we believe that all policymakers and regulators should carry out a Fraud Risk Assessment when considering new legislation, codes of practice or guidance. This would help identify any potential unintended consequences and provide sufficient time to 'design out fraud' from any future measures.

Finally, we believe that more work needs to be done to support survivors of fraud. Under-reporting and the language we use are just two of the major issues that need urgent attention. But it's also about changing our whole approach to survivors of fraud by recognising that the tactics used by fraudsters are almost identical to those used by domestic abusers.

We therefore call on policymakers and regulators to recognise victims of romance fraud in the same way we recognise victims of domestic abuse, acknowledging that both are driven by patterns of grooming, coercion and psychological control.

Anna Rowe, founder of Fraud Centre and Think Tank, Love Said, has developed a 'Romance Abuse' model which provides a clear framework for understanding this as a mechanism of harm, one that spans both digital and in-person relationships and enables a spectrum of exploitation, from financial fraud to coercive control and sexual exploitation. By recognising this shared abuse model, safeguarding responses can become consistent across sectors. At present, harms that originate online are too often treated as transactional or lower risk, leaving victims without appropriate protection and allowing coercion to remain hidden. A shift towards recognising romance abuse as a form of relational exploitation would support more effective, trauma-informed responses and reduce the risk of victims falling through gaps between systems.

With the Summit over, it is now time for action. We urge policymakers and regulators to work together in tackling the problem of online fraud to make the internet safer for everyone.

Simon Newman
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