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Ombusdman: Russian Pro-Suicide Sites Must Be Treated as Extremism

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Russian children's rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov.

Russia's children's ombudsman Pavel Astakhov has set forward new proposals to tackle teenage suicide in the country, the Izvestia newspaper reported Friday.

Sites believed to be promoting suicide should be dealt with in the same way as online material promoting extremism, Astakhov said.

He is currently proposing to create a new Kremlin working committee on the issue, involving the Prosecutor General's Office, the Investigative Committee, and the Health, Labor and Education ministries.

Media watchdog Roskomnadzor and consumer rights' service Rospotrebnadzor would also be involved alongside the children's ombudsman's service, Astakhov said.

Russia's teenage suicide rate has come under harsh public scrutiny in recent weeks after daily newspaper Novaya Gazeta published a report into pro-suicide groups on Russian social

network VKontakte.

Astakhov said that merely blocking social media communities was not a solution.

"The Prosecutor General's Office can identify and block these dangerous sites. But what's next? If they block eight such sites today, then tomorrow there will be even more," Astakhov said.

Police are now investigating the suspected administrators of several online groups deemed to be promoting suicide.

A 2011 report from the United Nations Children's Fund found that the rate of teenage suicides in Russia was three times higher than the world average.

Russian consumer watchdog Rospotrebnadzor closed about 70,000 potentially dangerous websites in 2015 for publishing information on committing suicide, yet officials warn that their popularity continues to grow.

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