

# CONTACTS RECEIVED BY CHILD HELPLINES IN 2020 WHICH RELATE TO: SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

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## BACKGROUND

Child helplines offer a unique insight into the direct experiences of the children and young people who contact them. In order to understand the issues faced by the children and young people who contact the child helplines, we survey our child helpline members every year to gather information about the contacts they received and the actions they might have taken to follow-up on these contacts. With the present summary, we aim to contribute to the preparation of the *UN Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material*, specifically to share collected data on these groups of children. Child helpline data can indeed be triangulated with other data sources to create a more comprehensive picture of this issue in the identified countries.

### Reasons for contacting child helplines

Our classification divides the reasons for contacts in three themes and 10 large issues or reasons, each of them divided in more specific sub-categories.

The first theme is Endangerment. The category **Violence** is part of this theme. Violence is defined as the mistreatment (improper treatment) or maltreatment (harmful treatment) of a child. Violence can take a number of forms, including emotional, physical, and sexual. Violence can occur in many settings, including, but not limited to, at home, at school, in the neighbourhood and online. The perpetrators can be members of the family, peers, other adults known to the child, or strangers. The present category also involves the presence of violence in the child's environment.

The sale and sexual exploitation of children falls under the category of Violence, which includes the following relevant sub-categories of interest: Commercial sexual exploitation (offline), Online sexual abuse, and Online sexual exploitation. The present document summarizes the descriptive data on contacts related to these three sub-categories, received by the child helplines **globally** and at a **regional level**.

We would like to emphasize that the present data are **help-seeking data**; they reveal the number of times that children and young people reached out to a child helpline to receive support related to these issues. They do not reflect the prevalence of these issues in these regions.

### Definitions of relevant sub-categories on sexual exploitation

Subcategory	Definition
Commercial sexual exploitation (offline)	A child performing a sexual act in exchange for (a promise of) something of value (including, <u>but not limited to</u> , money, objects, shelter, food, drugs, etc.). The use, procuring or offering of a child for <i>Prostitution</i> , for the <i>Production of Pornography</i> or for pornographic performances <sup>1</sup> . It can involve the <i>Trafficking</i> of children for commercial sexual exploitation. It can also take place in the context of <i>Travel and/or Tourism</i> . In these cases, the offence can be committed

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/WorstFormsofChildLabour/lang--en/index.htm>



	<p>by either foreign or domestic tourists and travellers, and long-term visitors<sup>2</sup>.</p>
Online sexual abuse	<p>Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that: they do not fully comprehend; they are unable to give consent to; they are not developmentally prepared for; and / or is in violation of law. Child sexual abuse can take the form of, for example, <i>Sexual molestation</i> and / or <i>Harassment</i> (unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct that has a sexual nature).</p> <p>Child sexual abuse becomes online child sexual abuse when it has occurred on social media or other online channels, or has a direct link to the online environment, for example, <i>acts of sexual abuse on a child are photographed, audio-recorded or video-recorded while live-streamed and/or uploaded online</i>, or <i>sexual extortion</i> (threatened dissemination of images of a sexual nature without consent, usually for the purpose of procuring some benefits). This can be for personal use and / or for sharing with others. These photos, audios, and videos of real children are known as <i>child sexual abuse material (CSAM)</i>. Online sexual abuse can also concern <i>Exposure to online child sexual exploitation or abuse material</i> or <i>Exposure to adult pornography</i>.</p> <p>Online child sexual abuse requires no element of exchange and is often for the mere purpose of the sexual gratification of the person committing the act of abuse.</p> <p>This sub-category also includes <i>Online grooming</i>. Grooming is when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person so they can manipulate, exploit and abuse them<sup>3</sup>. Children and young people who are groomed can be sexually abused, exploited or trafficked<sup>4</sup>. This may include the use of <i>Catfishing</i> (when someone uses images and information, often taken from other people's social media accounts, to create a new identity online or in some cases using an individual's entire identity as their own), or <i>Sock-puppetry</i> (an online identity used for purposes of deception, a false identity assumed by a member of an internet community pretending to be another person).</p>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/4706/file/What%20works.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://orgchi-tukhnakal.savviihq.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/grooming.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-abuse/>



Online sexual exploitation	<p>Online child sexual exploitation includes all acts of a sexually exploitative nature carried out against a child that is at some stage connected to the online environment. This can be distinguished from <a href="#">Online Sexual Abuse</a> by an underlying notion of exchange, for example, money, food, accommodation, drugs, affection, gifts, etc.</p> <p>Online child sexual exploitation can include, but is not limited to, <a href="#">Sexual exploitation</a> carried out while the victim is online (such as <a href="#">Enticing</a>, <a href="#">Manipulating</a> and/or <a href="#">Threatening a child into performing sexual acts in front of a webcam</a>), and/or the distribution, dissemination, import, export, offering, selling and possession of, or knowingly obtaining access to <a href="#">Child sexual abuse/exploitation material online (CSEM)</a>.</p> <p>Online child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) refers to material that depicts and/or otherwise documents acts that are sexually abusive to and/or exploitative of a child. It encompasses material depicting child sexual abuse and other sexually explicit content depicting children, such as sexual posing and computer-generated child sexual abuse material. CSEM can also be sexualised images that do not necessarily represent sexual abuse of a child. CSEM could also be photos of children at the swimming pool, for example, which have been taken without the knowledge or consent of the children or their guardians.</p>
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## 2020 DATA

### Global data

During 2020, child helplines in 54 countries<sup>5</sup> around the world reported that they received contacts related to Commercial sexual exploitation (offline), Online sexual abuse, and Online sexual exploitation. They received a total of **17 366** contacts relating to these sub-categories. The table below shows the number of contacts received globally in 2020, disaggregated per sub-category and per gender. The majority of sexual exploitation contacts were related to Online sexual abuse (79% of all sexual exploitation contacts). The other two sub-categories only represented a small portion of all sexual exploitation contacts (8% for Commercial sexual exploitation (offline), and 13% for Online sexual exploitation).

<b>Global: Sexual Exploitation</b>	<b>Girl</b>	<b>Boy</b>	<b>Nonbinary</b>	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Commercial sexual exploitation (offline)	975	303	#N/A	70	1 348 (8%)
Online sexual abuse	8 513	3 801	28	1 357	13 699 (79%)
Online sexual exploitation	1 409	654	5	251	2 319 (13%)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>10 897</b>	<b>4 758</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>1678</b>	<b>17 366</b>

### Regional level data

In 2020, the region that received the highest number of contacts related to sexual exploitation was **Europe**, accounting for more than four out of five contacts (or 85%). The remaining sexual exploitation contacts were made up from **Africa** (8%), **Asia Pacific** (4%), **Americas and Caribbean** (3%), and a small number from **MENA** (0.5%). The table below presents the regional distribution of all Sexual exploitation contacts disaggregated and per gender. The number in parentheses indicates the number of countries in each region. Please note that not all child helplines report data for each sub-category.

<b>Regional: Sexual Exploitation (All sub-categories)</b>	<b>Girl</b>	<b>Boy</b>	<b>Nonbinary</b>	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Africa (12 countries)	296	643	0	427	1 366 (8%)
Americas and Caribbean (6 countries)	179	322	0	49	550 (3%)
Asia Pacific (9 countries)	160	485	0	29	674 (4%)
Europe (24 countries)	4 086	9 400	33	1 173	14 692 (85%)
MENA (3 countries)	37	47	0	0	84 (0.5%)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4 758</b>	<b>10 897</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>1 678</b>	<b>17 366</b>

<sup>5</sup> Please refer to Annex 1 for a list of countries per region who received contacts related to sexual exploitation in 2020.



We now look separately at each of the sub-categories of Sexual exploitation. The table below presents the regional distribution of **Commercial sexual exploitation (offline)**. The regional distribution follows the same ranking as presented above, but the percentage of contacts varies.

### Commercial sexual exploitation (offline)

Regional: Commercial sexual exploitation (offline)	Girl	Boy	Nonbinary	Unknown	Totals
Africa (8 countries)	55	183	0	18	256 (19%)
Americas and Caribbean (4 countries)	14	97	0	15	126 (9%)
Asia Pacific (3 countries)	35	170	0	22	227 (17%)
Europe (11 countries)	171	510	0	15	696 (52%)
MENA (3 countries)	28	15	0	0	43 (3%)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>1 348</b>

The table below presents the regional distribution of **Online sexual abuse**. The regional distribution mostly follows the same ranking as presented above, but the percentage of contacts varies. The exception being for the region Asia-Pacific, which seems to have received proportionally fewer contacts in this sub-category.

### Online sexual abuse

Regional: Online sexual abuse	Girl	Boy	Nonbinary	Unknown	Totals
Africa (6 countries)	48	163	0	314	525 (4%)
Americas and Caribbean (5 countries)	158	204	0	19	381 (3%)
Asia Pacific (4 countries)	13	46	0	0	59 (0.4%)
Europe (23 countries)	3 580	8 096	28	1 024	12 728 (93%)
MENA (1 country)	2	4	0	0	6 (0.04%)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3 801</b>	<b>8 513</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>1 357</b>	<b>13 699</b>

The table below presents the regional distribution of **Online sexual exploitation**. The regional distribution follows the same ranking as presented above, but the percentage of contacts varies.

### Online sexual exploitation

Regional: Online sexual exploitation	Girl	Boy	Nonbinary	Unknown	Totals
Africa (7 countries)	193	297	0	95	585 (25%)



Americas and Caribbean (3 countries)	7	21	0	15	43 (2%)
Asia Pacific (4 countries)	112	269	0	7	388 (17%)
Europe (6 countries)	335	794	5	134	1 268 (55%)
MENA (1 countries)	7	28	0	0	35 (2%)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>654</b>	<b>1 409</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>2 319</b>

### Cases from children and young people

Child Helpline International encourages child helplines to submit case summaries as they are essential to support the stories told by the numbers. We use evidence-based methods to make decisions on advocacy, training, and capacity building, and these narratives to strengthen those decisions and to convince people those decisions are the right ones. With these stories of children and young people contacting child helplines we hope to amplify their voices effectively.

In 2020, we received a few case examples related to sexual exploitation of children. We provide two examples here, as they were submitted to us (with only edits to shorten or anonymize cases further).

#### Case summary 1:

*Counselor had a call from an adult survivor in his early 20's. He began the call by asking if the hotline took calls from adult survivors, which the counselor confirmed. He then started crying to the point where it was nearly impossible to understand what he was saying. The counselor asked him to take some breathes and that when he was ready to talk, she would love to hear him out and help him in any way that I could.*

*After some time, the caller explained that he felt overwhelmed with everything going on in the world, especially COVID-19. He also shared that he has decided to take it upon himself to go on Twitter and report any and all images of child abuse on there. He mentioned that in the past hour alone he reported over 36 accounts for child abuse and that's what got him so overwhelmed, looking at all those numbers and realizing that there are real kids out there going through this hardship.*

*Counselor responded with thanking him for doing his part to end child abuse but also reminding him that he cannot pour from an empty cup and that it's important that he takes care of his mental health, especially because he is a survivor of child abuse and doing these kinds of things, like reporting disturbing videos/images on social media can be triggering and retraumatizing.*

#### Case summary 2:

*A 16-year-old girl had non-consensual photos shared by a trusted person and started receiving messages from other boys asking for more images. She sent the following message for to child helpline: "For a while, I have been thinking about giving up my own life,*



*a boy completely destroyed me, he leaked photos of me, and many boys are harassing me and asking me to send intimate photos, I have no one else by my side, no friend, everyone wants to see my worse moment. And every day I sink into my thoughts, I have crises and want to end it all. I need help, but I don't want any familiar to me know".*

*The counselor informed the teenager that she should not feel responsible for sharing these images because she sent it to someone who was supposed to be trusted. The importance of reaching out to parents or someone at the school who can help her to interrupt this cycle of violence has been reinforced and how it is possible to reach out to local authorities where it is possible to report what has happened and where she can also obtain the appropriate psychological support. The counselor also guided her how to report threaten and harassment messages on the platform and refers their hotline if any sexual content involving her was host in any page.*

## CONCLUSION

In 2020, the child helplines in our network received a number of contacts from children and young people related to Sexual exploitation: 17 366 children and young people reached out to child helplines for support when faced with sexual exploitation. The majority of those contacts (79%) were cases of Online sexual abuse.

Furthermore, the majority of those contacts were made in Europe (85% of all sexual exploitation contacts), a finding which is in line with the number of reporting child helplines in each region: Europe is the region with the highest number of reporting child helplines with 24 countries represented. That being said, the high number of countries does not suffice to account for the large number of contacts. Indeed, the second largest region is Africa with half the number of countries (i.e., 12 countries) and only 8% of all sexual exploitation contacts.

The regional distribution does not reflect prevalence numbers, as these are help-seeking data which could be influenced by a number of factors unrelated to prevalence, such as how well known a child helpline is in a given context, stigma around contacting child helplines, etc.





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## DISCLAIMER

Data presented and statements made do not capture the full scope of practices and policies of all countries and cases handled by child helplines and other child protection organisations at the national level. Data presented are meant purely for descriptive and informative purposes. These analyses are based on the data submitted to Child Helpline International by our child helplines members, as they were collected, processed, and aggregated by them to fit within our classification. Child Helpline International did not verify the accuracy, validity, or reliability of those data. The exact data can be requested from Child Helpline International.

Child Helpline International's work is firmly grounded in the principles and values enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including children's right to privacy and protection from harm. To preserve the trust and confidence children and young people place in child helplines every day, any personal details cited in case summaries has been altered and anonymised.

## ANNEX 1

The table below presents the list of countries where our member child helplines received contacts related to sexual exploitation in 2020.

Region	Countries
Africa (12 countries)	Burundi
	Kenya
	Malawi
	Mauritania
	Mauritius
	Namibia
	Nigeria
	Senegal
	South Africa
	Tanzania
	Zambia
	Zimbabwe
Aruba	



Americas and Caribbean (6 countries)	Brazil
	Chile
	Costa Rica
	Curaçao
	Uruguay
Asia Pacific (9 countries)	Bangladesh
	Cambodia
	India
	Japan
	Nepal
	New Zealand
	Philippines
	Singapore
	Thailand
Europe (24 countries)	Albania
	Austria
	Bosnia and Herzegovina
	Croatia
	Czech Republic
	Germany
	Greece
	Iceland
	Ireland
	Italy
	Latvia
	Lithuania
	Malta
	Netherlands
	North Macedonia
	Norway
	Poland
	Portugal
	Romania
	Serbia
	Slovenia
	Spain
	Ukraine
	United Kingdom
MENA (3 countries)	Algeria
	Jordan
	Palestine



## ANNEX 2

Please refer to our [\*Voices of Children and Young People: Global Child Helpline Data for 2020\*](#) for a complete picture of the reasons why children and young people reached out to child helplines in 2020.