



ECPAT'S SUBMISSION

Call for input for the Special Rapporteur's thematic report on addressing the vulnerabilities of children to sale and sexual exploitation in the framework of the SDGs

8 April 2022

Introduction

This submission by [ECPAT International](#)¹ is in response to the call for input issued by the Office of the Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children to inform the thematic report on *addressing the vulnerabilities of children to sale and sexual exploitation in the framework of the SDGs*.

This submission incorporates contributions made by 16 members of the ECPAT Network for the purpose of this call.²

1) Collected data, including updated data on vulnerable groups of children and information pertinent to the reporting examples of vulnerable groups of children under the framework of SDGs.

Given that the evidence on online child sexual exploitation is scant and rarely comprehensive, the [Disrupting Harm Project](#), a research partnership between ECPAT International, Interpol and UNICEF assessed the context, threat and collect children's perspectives of online child sexual exploitation and abuse in 13 countries in Southeast Asia and Eastern and Southern Africa (Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda). At the time of this submission reports for [Kenya](#), [Uganda](#), [Tanzania](#), [Ethiopia](#) and [Thailand](#) have been launched. Main learnings included: 1) most offenders of online child sexual exploitation and abuse are someone the child already knows; 2) while most children did not tell anyone the last time they were subjected to online sexual exploitation and abuse, if they do, they tend to disclose to people they know rather than reporting to a helpline or the police; 3) among children who were subjected to online sexual exploitation and abuse through social media, Facebook/Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp were the most common platforms where this was reported to have occurred; 4) law enforcement, justice, and social support systems lack awareness, capacity, and resources to respond to cases of online child sexual exploitation and abuse; and 5) children Disrupting Harm spoke to were not successful bringing their cases to justice through the court system.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness that we lack a comprehensive understanding of how sexual exploitation affects boys. In 2019, ECPAT International began a [Global Initiative to Explore the Sexual Exploitation of Boys](#) to focus attention with dedicated research – a global literature review

¹ ECPAT International is a global network of civil society organisations, working to eradicate all forms of sexual exploitation of children. Over the past 30 years, ECPAT has become the forefront international NGO network dedicated to end this severe form of violence against children, advocating for State accountability and more robust measures across sectors to enhance the protection of victims. ECPAT currently has 122 member organizations operating in 104 countries around the world.

² [Amane](#), [ChildALERT/ECPAT New Zealand](#), [Child in Need Institute \(CINI\)](#), [Coalition Umwana Ku Isonga](#), [ECPAT France](#), [ECPAT Germany](#), [ECPAT Indonesia](#), [ECPAT Taiwan](#), [FAPMI/ECPAT Spain](#), [Fundación PANIAMOR](#), [Fundacion Quito Raymi](#), [Jordan River Foundation](#), [Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children \(KAACR\)](#), [Kinderschutz Schweiz-ECPAT Switzerland](#), [PEaCE/ECPAT Sri Lanka](#), [Uganda Youth Development Link](#).



on the issue and new primary data collection in Belgium, Bolivia, Gambia, Hungary, India, Morocco, Pakistan, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand - as well as advocacy and programming to put the sexual exploitation of boys firmly on the global agenda. Findings so far confirm clear links between sexual exploitation of boys and homelessness, mental health issues and substance misuse. It also clearly highlights that globally, boy victims are much less likely to report and be identified, and if they do come forward, they face significant barriers to accessing help.

During 2020-2021, ECPAT International engaged in a six-country research project in partnership with the WeProtect Global Alliance and ECPAT member organisations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Mexico, Moldova and Peru. This innovative project used the [‘Survivor Conversations’ approach](#) to firmly centre young survivors in research on the increasing problem of child sexual exploitation and abuse online. The [research](#) was conceived to centre the perspectives of survivors on the availability, quality and effectiveness of support services for children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse online.

In response to this call for contribution, members of the ECPAT Network shared the following insights on their national contexts.

Spain lacks scientific evidence on the number of victims but there are initiatives promoted by knowledge centres with the aim of deepening the understanding of the problem. In this regard, the project led by the Universidad Pontificia de Comillas and UNICEF stands out as it promotes a systemic change in the prevention of trafficking and the protection of its victims through the implementation of data culture in Spain.^{3,4} Additionally, the organic law 8/2021 on integral protection of children against violence incorporates the creation of a central registry of information on different forms of violence against children and adolescents, including sexual exploitation.⁵

In **New Zealand**, there has not been any major research conducted to explore the scale of trafficking for sexual purposes or other types of sexual exploitation and has only been documented through smaller scale qualitative research, in courts proceedings, in the media and anecdotally. Globally, sexual exploitation of children rates are closely tied to other measures of child vulnerability such as rates of sexual abuse, youth suicide, physical abuse, and poverty, all of which currently exist at alarming rates in New Zealand.

As shown by the existing data, in **Rwanda** children from poor families are at high risk and exposed to sale and sexual exploitation. According to the [research conducted by Never Again Rwanda](#), which analysed almost 400 cases of trafficking recorded between 2016-2018, the most common forms of human trafficking (not disaggregated by age) in Rwanda were identified to be labour and sex trafficking.

In **Germany** there is a growing number of minors identified as child victims of trafficking which is reflected in the [Situation Report on Human Trafficking and exploitation 2020](#) published by the Federal Criminal Police. Boys are increasingly identified as victims: out of the 251 minors that were identified

³ Universidad Pontificia de Comillas. (2022). [Qué sabemos y cómo lo contamos. Cultura de datos en la trata de seres humanos.](#)

⁴ Universidad Pontificia de Comillas. (2022). [Cultura de datos en la trata de seres humanos. Informe técnico de investigación.](#)

⁵ [Ley Orgánica 8/2021](#). Published on the Boletín Oficial del Estado «BOE» number 134, of the 5th June 2021. Art. 56.1.



to be sexually exploited, 60% were female and 40% male. Moreover, the Internet plays an important role, being the principal mean used by offenders to approach children.

ECPAT **Taiwan**'s hotline [Web547](#) received over 9,000 reports on child sexual abuse material, online grooming and child trafficking in 2020-2021. This service collaborates with the industries, offering notice and takedown support and using PhotoDNA technology to prevent this material from spreading. ECPAT Taiwan also cooperates with law enforcement to facilitate removal of websites selling and sharing child sexual abuse material and arrests of offenders.

In 2021, ECPAT **Indonesia** analysed 74 online media reports on cases of child sexual violence and exploitation. In 2020, cases of child sexual violence and exploitation in religious institutions/organizations were 19, while in 2021, cases increased to 74. In the first half of 2020, ECPAT Indonesia surveyed 1203 child responses related to child vulnerability to online sexual exploitation during the Covid-19 pandemic. About 25% of the children had negative experiences online during that timeframe. Such experiences included being sent "disrespectful and profanity" messages, pictures/videos that make them uncomfortable and images/videos featuring adult pornography.

2) The manifestations of sale and sexual exploitation in relation to targets 5.3, 8.7 and 16.2.

Target 5.3

The prevalence of child marriage in **Sri Lanka** is relatively low in comparison with other South Asian countries. The formal registration of marriage does not permit marriages under the age of 18, yet marriages of underage partners take place due to the absence of a system of verification. Marriage registrars have pointed out that only a form of identification (birth certificate, national identification card, passport) is required for the marriage registration, and illegal marriages take place with the parties providing fraudulent documents of identification. The registrars have no accessibility to a centralised data source to inspect the validity of these documents. Thus, the provisions on the minimal marriageable age in the marriage ordinance by itself are unable to prevent child, early and forced marriages from taking place.

Target 8.7

New Zealand was recently downgraded to Tier Two in the US Department of State's [2021 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) and this comes as no surprise to Child Alert/ECPAT New Zealand. While the Government has made some recent efforts to improve their approach to trafficking in persons, such as through the recently adopted [Plan of Action and Strategy for the Elimination of Family Violence and Sexual Violence](#), this comes after many years of insufficient resourcing and attention on this growing issue. Furthermore, the plan is in its early days and is not yet a substantive strategy. Finally, government planning in general continues to focus much more around trafficking for labour rather than trafficking for sexual purposes.

Many of the key government agencies are still unclear of what constitutes trafficking (also not properly defined in national legislation), failing to get up to speed with the current definition, and this impacts their practice and policy priorities. This has seen a continued inadequate focus on domestic trafficking.

Oranga Tamariki (New Zealand's Ministry for Children), the New Zealand police and the Department of Internal Affairs, do not code or record disclosures or reports of sexual exploitation in a way that is



distinct from the wider definition of abuse unless they deal with child sexual abuse material. This results in a critical lack of knowledge about the scope of sexual exploitation of children and hence prevents these agencies from adequately addressing these crimes.

Research shows that victims of people trafficking do not often trust government agencies and so it is essential that a victim-centric approach takes place alongside relevant community organisations. Any support to victims of people trafficking should take place through partnership with NGOs and relevant ethnic communities which is not yet happening consistently or in line with best practice.

It is still very unclear how a victim accesses appropriate services if they have been exploited or are a victim of forced labour, people trafficking and slavery. Child Alert/ECPAT New Zealand shares the importance of establishing a process map that clearly shows to victims of such crimes how they can access the services they need.

In **Sri Lanka**, despite the existence of legal provisions, trafficking of children, especially for sexual purposes, still persist. While highlighting certain improvements the country has made in this regard, the US Department of State's [2021 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) points at systematic insufficiencies which allow trafficking of people through illegal immigration, for foreign employment and trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation to still take place.

The Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children' Act - the main law addressing the employment of children in Sri Lanka - has several provisions on different forms of child labour. These provisions are however inconsistent depending on the form of employment, especially with regards to defining a minimum age. The law further explains under section 13 of the Act that the employment of a young person during their school hours is prohibited; yet, the minimum age of compulsory education is age of 16. In January 2021, the minimum age for employment was amended from 14 years to 16 years now aligning with provisions on compulsory education in Sri Lanka and potentially addressing risks of exploitation for children who would have been previously allowed to dropped out from school but prohibited from being legally employed.

Target 16.2

In the year 2020, the National Child Protection Authority of **Sri Lanka** reported 2237 incidents of child cruelty (wilful assault, ill-treatment, neglect, or abandonment of a person under 18 years of age by the guardian or the caretaker). According to UNICEF, which works closely with the National Child Protection Authority, about 292 cases of child abuse were reported within 32 days between March and April in 2020, 121 of which related to cruelty to children (Sri Lanka Brief, 2021). The Authority had further claimed that the number of cases of child abuse reported in the year 2021 has exceeded 3000. Only 50 incidents of domestic violence against children were reported by the Authority in the year 2020. However, during the COVID 19 lockdown, a rapid increase of 10% to 40% was reported on cruelty against children in domestic settings. These include physical abuse against children in households such as beating and torture.

There is no specific law preventing different forms of child neglect, and no proper action taken to minimise and prevent child neglect, especially in the hands of guardians, caretakers and medical professionals. In the cases reported by the Authority in 2021, 518 of the cases reported are sexual harassment while 373 reports are of grave sexual abuse.



3) Protection needs and contextual challenges amid the efforts to combat sale and sexual exploitation of children.

In **India**, Child in Need Institute (CINI) runs Childline services active in the districts of Kolkata, South-24-Parganas (Diamond Harbour sub-division), Murshidabad, Uttar Dinajpur, Darjeeling and in the railway stations of New Jalpaiguri and Sealdah in West Bengal. CINI has sought to assess the impact of COVID-19 on reported cases by using Childline data (6 Childline services) as an official source during the April 2020 to March 2021 pandemic period and April 2019 to March 2020 pre-pandemic period. Economic crisis stemming from the pandemic has increased and this is a risk of child protection, especially for children getting into the child labour force, becoming victims of child marriage and child trafficking, kidnapping and abduction.

In **New Zealand**, vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation via online platforms has increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Child Alert/ECPAT New Zealand is increasingly seeing grooming of young people on social media platforms and the normalising of children and young people selling self-generated sexual content. They can also infer, based on all available data, that some families in New Zealand may have forced their own children into sexually exploitative situations.

In **Germany** existing vulnerabilities have been amplified by the pandemic. ECPAT Germany saw a growing number of reports on child welfare endangerments, which have reached 60600 cases in 2020 5000 more than in 2019, and so far, the highest level ever recorded. The growing number of reports can also be an indicator for growing awareness and does not necessarily show an increase in cases or risks. It can however be safely assumed that the number of unreported cases (the so called “Dunkelfeld” - dark field) also grew due to contact restrictions and lock downs. Focus should be placed on building resilient child protection systems. Strategies to stay in contact with children even though schools and youth centres are closed should be brought forward.

Growing vulnerabilities in the digital environment are clearly reported by Interpol/Europol. ECPAT Germany urge for concrete measures, especially on EU level to better protect children in the online word. Despite awareness on the growing vulnerabilities of children especially in the global south, Germany lacks political momentum and developments for better protection of children abroad). ECPAT Germany also acknowledges lack of stakeholders’ engagement for a “building back better” approach. At the moment, the private sector predominantly focuses on issues that are regulated, with everything not binding not getting a lot of attention at the moment.

Since the onset of COVID-19 **Kenya** has witnessed a steady but unfortunate increase in the number of online child sexual exploitation and abuse cases reported to the Anti Human Trafficking and Child Protection Unit as well as to Childline Kenya 116. This increase happened in parallel to the COVID-19 related shift of many activities - such as learning, socialisation and entertainment - from the physical to the virtual space. Unregulated and unmonitored access and use of online communication tools and platforms by children has given offenders increased opportunity to connect, groom and exploit children. This trend has been confirmed in the [Disrupting Harm in Kenya report](#) where 10% of the 12-17 year old children interviewed said they have been asked to send images of or show in video their private parts. 7% have been offered money to do so, 4% have been threatened or blackmailed to do so and 7% had their sexual images shared with others without permission.

4) Practical measures taken to address the vulnerabilities in institutional, family and online settings to ensure no child is left behind with respect to protection against sale and sexual exploitation.

ECPAT network members shared information on a number of initiatives taken to prevent and address sexual exploitation of children.

Spain's organic law 8/2021 on integral protection of children against violence establishes measures related to prevention, protection and early detection in the different areas of children's daily life (including family, education, protection centres, health, sports, digital, police). In addition to the above, it incorporates a broad concept of what should be understood by violence against children, including, among other modalities, sexual exploitation of children. Equally relevant is the incorporation of the principle of well-treatment within the law, not only in reference to the absence of violence, but as a maximum objective in its own right, where actions must be aimed at guaranteeing children's holistic development and taking into account their best interest. In addition, special attention is paid to the right of children to be heard, which is channelled through the improvement of reporting processes and mechanisms.

In Spain, the arrival of migrant minors, often unaccompanied, is not a new problem. The Immigration Law however still does not provide full protection for these children, leading in many occasions to situations of administrative vulnerability and social exclusion. In 2021, the reform of the Royal Decree amending the Aliens Regulation was approved,⁶ so that young migrants under guardianship are not left without official documents when they reach the age of majority, which allows them to access employment.

Also noteworthy is the development of a tool for assessing the risk of situations of exploitation. Currently in the validation process, the tool aims to facilitate the early detection of risk and situations of sexual exploitation that may affect a child by way of a series of dedicated indicators.⁷

In 2019, **Jordan River Foundation (JRF)** was selected by the Child Helpline International to help promote the practices of protecting children from the dangers of the Internet, particularly of sexual exploitation in all its forms. This was done through building the capacities of its teams, especially the ones working with children, so they are able to raise awareness on and better respond to actual cases of children who are exposed to online child sexual exploitation. JRF started spreading awareness against online child sexual exploitation nationwide in Jordan through its "Child Helpline 110". JRF ran a campaign that targeted local communities through traditional and new media including social media influencers' which disseminated awareness videos, SMS awareness messages and printed materials (such as colouring books and flyers) for children, adolescents, parents and community educators. Additionally, JRF, over 176 sessions, built the capacities of 60 key national protection actors from local and international organizations and governmental entities as well as 3,600 parents, women and girls, aiming to embed and programme online child sexual exploitation awareness activities in their regular work.

ECPAT **France** coordinates - the CLICK@BLE project co-funded by the European Union which includes: intervention with 2 partners (e-enfance and Génération numérique) in schools for children between 7 and 18 years old to teach them about safe use of technologies and the risks of online child sexual exploitation; development with the Agence Kiélo, of an app "[1 clic, 1000 effets](#)" to educate children

⁶ Real Decreto 557/2011.

⁷ Ministerio del Interior (2021). [Plan Estratégico Nacional contra la Trata y la Explotación de Seres Humanos \(2021-2023\)](#).



on the possible consequences of the decisions that they make online. The CLICK@BLE campaign has since 2020 been disseminated online, via Facebook, Instagram, YouTube (and shortly via Tik Tok) and has reached 1,700,000 people that year. As part of this campaign, a collaboration has been put in place with some “influencers” in order to reach more people and to benefit from their community.

ECPAT France has also organised training sessions with groups of men in Madagascar on “positive masculinity” and various other thematic areas such as violence, gender and stereotypes, masculinity and power in order to encourage non-violent behaviours toward women and girls and avoid gender-based violence. ECPAT France further trained children 15 to 18 years of age on “Affective and Sexual Education and Gender Equity” at school and child clubs in areas particularly exposed to violence in Madagascar.

Since September 2021, ECPAT France implements the “PROTECT” project to prevent trafficking of unaccompanied minors in Calais, northern France, where a significant number of unaccompanied minors are particularly at risk as they are attempting to transit into the United Kingdom. ECPAT France is developing a multidisciplinary approach reduce risks of trafficking for this group.

Through the programme “technological culture” Fundación PANIAMOR in **Costa Rica** has been consolidating a systematic work on social mobilisation aimed to increase good practices in terms of prevention and response to violence and sexual exploitation, especially online. Among the initiatives it is worth highlighting Tecnobus, a bus through which the Foundation has been providing online safety programmes across different parts of the country which empowered children in both urban and rural communities. Since 2014, the Foundation has also been implementing online training processes. In this way, girls and boys of different ages have had the opportunity to learn through e-Compa, a playful and interactive platform to raise awareness in the prevention, response and reporting of manifestations of online violence.

Parallel to these e-learnings, the Fundación PANIAMOR has also promoted spaces of trust where children and adolescents can discuss these issues with key actors in their environment. To this end, the *Crianza Tecnológica* (2014) and *e-mentores* (2018) models have promoted positive parental mediation that proposes a set of values, knowledge, resources and practices that allow parents and other people in care and training roles, to mediate the interactions of children under their care with information and knowledge technologies, so that these interactions result in an increasingly conscious enjoyment of digital citizenship.

Protection de l’enfance Suisse in **Switzerland** has created an online manual, Child Trafficking Handbook, which provides support for professionals and help them protect children. The manual presents the situations where children are at particular risk of being abused and provides an overview of the risk factors and distinctive signs of victims of child trafficking. It also points out situations in which victims of child trafficking have opportunities to get out of it – provided that the professionals are vigilant and, in case of suspicion, continue their investigations. These recommendations and checklists indicate the process to be carried out by the authorities and professionals during the investigations and interviewing potential victims of child trafficking. At each stage, it is absolutely critical to adopt a child-centered approach.

As part of the “KAFA” digital campaign, AMANE produced a campaign in **Morocco**, with the participation of students (boys and girls) between 11 and 15 years old on the risks and dangers that children incur on the web. The young users are given advice on how to best protect themselves online



and by educating about existing reporting mechanisms. The campaign informed more than 300,000 people (the general public in general and children in particular).

In **Ecuador**, Fundación Quitu Raymi along with Plan International and Child Fund created a public-private collective including all public institutions responsible for designing and executing public policies, with the goal to jointly prepare a national plan to prevent and eradicate the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

Kenya has made progressive steps in setting up measures to address online child sexual exploitation and abuse, such as the establishment of a National Technical Working Group on Child Online Protection with a committee to address online child sexual exploitation and abuse. The Technical Working Group which ECPAT's member the Kenya Alliance for the Advancement of Children (KAACR) is a member of, features representatives from the various players in the child protection sector and it is co-chaired by the Directorate of Children Services together with the Communications Commission of Kenya which is the regulatory Authority for the information and communication technology industry in the country. Further, a welcome initiative is the development of a National Plan of Action to tackle online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Kenya 2022 –2026 and of a curriculum on investigation and prosecution of online child sexual exploitation and abuse targeting the justice professionals in Kenya. The curriculum was adopted by the National Council on Administration of Justice and has seen several justice professionals – such as Kenya Police, prosecutors, lawyers and magistrates - trained as master trainers to build the capacity of officers within their specific institutions.

ECPAT Taiwan works with lawyers, counselling psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers, offering information and support to children, parents, and teachers about bullying, grooming, and sextortion through helpline [Web885](#).