

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE: CONTACTS RECEIVED BY CHILD HELPLINES AND ACTIONS TAKEN

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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 our child helplines, we collect data on each contact received from children and young people. In this report, we provide insights into the number and the types of contacts concerning online sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) and commercial sexual exploitation received during '20 and '21 around the world, and the actions taken by the child helplines in response.

METHODOLOGY

At the end of March 2020 and again in 2021, we invited 133 of our full members to submit their data by filling in an online survey (using the software Qualtrics). The survey comprised three main parts: background information about the children and young people; reasons for why the contact with the child helpline had been made; and the actions taken beyond the provision of support during the contact. For all categories, we requested that the child helplines provide the number of contacts received in 2020 (or 2021), disaggregated by the gender of the child or young person concerned.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse is the abuse or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes or the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature¹. We define these three forms of it as follow:

Sub-category	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 ² . 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 by either foreign or domestic tourists and travellers, and long-term visitors ³ .
Online sexual abuse	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). 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</i>

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/UNICEF-Strategy-Prevent-Respond-Sexual-Exploitation-Abuse-Sexual-Harassment-January-2019.pdf>

² <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/WorstFormsofChildLabour/lang--en/index.htm>

³ <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/4706/file/What%20works.pdf>



	<p><i>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 them⁴. Children and young people who are groomed can be sexually abused, exploited or trafficked⁵. 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>
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 <i>Online Sexual Abuse</i> 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, <i>Sexual exploitation</i> carried out while the victim is online (such as <i>Enticing, Manipulating</i> and/or <i>Threatening a child into performing sexual acts in front of a webcam</i>), and/or the distribution, dissemination, import, export, offering, selling and possession of, or knowingly obtaining access to <i>Child sexual abuse/exploitation material online (CSEM)</i>.</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>

⁴ <http://orgchi-tukhnakal.savviihq.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/grooming.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-abuse/>



REASONS FOR CONTACT

Contacts concerning types of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in 2020 (globally)

58 child helplines submitted data in 2020 on contacts concerning Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA). Altogether, they report a total of **17,366** contacts regarding Sexual Exploitations and Abuse. This amounts to **2.18% of 796,445 violence-related** contacts received. Sexual Exploitation and Abuse comprises three categories: **1,348** contacts were received regarding offline commercial sexual exploitation, **13,699** regarding online sexual abuse, and **2,319** regarding online sexual exploitation. The table below presents the number of contacts received by the child helpline, disaggregated by the reason and by the gender of the child or young person:

SEA-related contacts - 2020	Boy	Girl	Nonbinary	Unknown	Total
Commercial sexual exploitation (offline)	303	975	0	70	1,348
Online sexual abuse	3,801	8,513	28	1,357	13,699
Online sexual exploitation	654	1,409	5	251	2,319
Total	4,758	10,897	33	1,678	17,366

Regional break down of contacts concerning types of SEA in 2020

Examining the data received on a regional level, we separate the child helplines that submitted their data into five regions. The table below presents the number of SEA-related contacts received in each region in the year 2020, separated by the gender of the child or young person:

SEA contacts - 2020	Boy	Girl	Nonbinary	Unknown	Total
Africa	296	643	0	427	1,366
Americas and Caribbean	179	322		49	550
Asia Pacific	160	485	0	29	674
Europe	4,086	9,400	33	1,173	14,692
MENA	37	47			84
Total	4,758	10,897	33	1,678	17,366

Contacts concerning types of SEA in 2021 (globally)

In 2021, **62 child helplines** submitted data on SEA-related contacts they received. They report a total of **11,391** contacts regarding Sexual Exploitations and Abuse, amounting to **1.76% of 647,278 violence-related** contacts received. **3,047** contacts were received regarding offline commercial sexual exploitation, **5,384** regarding online sexual abuse, and **2,960** regarding online sexual exploitation. The table below presents the contacts disaggregated by reason and gender:

SEA-related contacts - 2021	Boy	Girl	Nonbinary	Unknown	Total
Commercial sexual exploitation (offline)	151	771	18	2,107	3,047
Online sexual abuse	1,646	2,524	25	1,189	5,384



Online sexual exploitation	953	1,454	14	539	2,960
Total	2,750	4,749	57	3,835	11,391

Regional break down of contacts concerning types of SEA in 2021

The table below presents the number of SEA-related contacts received in each region in the year 2021, separated by the gender of the child or young person:

SEA contacts - 2021	Boy	Girl	Nonbinary	Unknown	Total
Africa	340	561	14	6	921
Americas and Caribbean	342	569		326	1,237
Asia Pacific	76	459	3	2,253	2,791
Europe	1,945	2,992	40	1,250	6,227
MENA	47	168			215
Total	2,750	4,749	57	3,835	11,391

Comparison between the years '20 and '21

To compare the frequency of SEA-related contacts received by the child helplines between the years, we examine a subset of child helplines that submitted their data on both years ('20 and '21). We have 45 such child helplines. The results were mixed: We find that out of the 45 child helplines, 28 (62%) reported an increase in SEA-related contacts between '20 and '21, 15 (33%) report a decrease, and 2 (4%) had the same number of SEA-related contacts on both years. The table below shows the child helplines that report increase in SEA-related contacts on a regional level:

Change in SEA-related contacts	Increasing N (% of total child helplines)	Number of child helplines who submitted data in '20 and '21
Africa	3 (43%)	7
Americas and Caribbean	4 (57%)	7
Asia Pacific	4 (57%)	7
Europe	15 (71%)	21
MENA	2 (67%)	3
Total	28 (62%)	45

REPORTS

As part of the services child helplines provide, they take actions beyond the provision of support during the contact. Specifically, in case of a SEA-related contact, the counsellor will not only provide psychosocial support during the contact but will also encourage the child to formally report the abuse or exploitation to law enforcement agencies. They will also refer the child to child protection services and/or mental health professionals for appropriate follow-up. In the case of child sexual abuse material, the child helpline will also report the materials to a dedicated online portal (such as INHOPE or IWF). We report below the



number of such reports to child sexual abuse material portals (as these can be directly linked to CSEA).

Regional break down of reports of SEA in 2020 and 2021

13 child helplines submitted data on reports made to Child Sexual Abuse Material in '20, and 11 child helplines submitted this data in '21. Based on this data, a total of **2,772 reports to Child Sexual Abuse Material** were made by child helplines around the world during '20, and **1,250** in '21.

SEA reports - 2020	Boy	Girl	Nonbinary	Unknown	Total
Africa	130	177			307
Americas and Caribbean	35	44		2	81
Asia Pacific	0	1	0		1
Europe	530	1,615	4	220	2,369
MENA	8	6			14
Total	703	1,843	4	222	2,772
SEA reports - 2021	Boy	Girl	Nonbinary	Unknown	Total
Africa	51	130			181
Americas and Caribbean	13	6		0	19
Asia Pacific	8	38	1		47
Europe	267	214	11	306	798
MENA	24	181			205
Total	363	569	12	306	1,250

IMPORTANT NOTES

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 our child helpline members to receive support related to these two issues. They do not reflect the prevalence of these issues in the country or in this region.



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. 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.

CHILD HELPLINE INTERNATIONAL

Child Helpline International is a collective impact organisation with more than 160 members in over 140 countries and territories around the world.

We coordinate information, viewpoints, knowledge and data from our child helpline members, partners and external sources. This exceptional resource is used to help and support child protection systems globally, regionally and nationally, and to help our members advocate for the rights of children and amplify their voices.

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