

# Campaign Opportunities for Reducing Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA)

## Why is online safety important and why should we tackle CSEA?<sup>i</sup>

1. An increasing number of the world's children are going online— and spending more time there than ever before. More than a billion children and young people under 25 have access to the internet.<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 related lockdowns and school closures are driving ever more children online to learn, play and socialize.<sup>2</sup> Digital connectivity has the potential to improve children's lives by increasing their access to information and learning, and expanding opportunities for self-expression and civic engagement. At the same time life online also poses new and increasing risks for children.
2. Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) is expanding exponentially, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> The internet and the design of digital services have expanded the ways in which potential abusers can exploit or abuse children. Improvements and changes to infrastructure, network coverage, processing power, storage and computer environments (like peer-to-peer networks and the Dark Web) have changed the ways in which offenders produce and share child sexual abuse material (CSAM), leading to increased livestreaming and on-demand CSEA.<sup>4</sup> Children living in vulnerable or marginalized situations face increased risks of online abuse and exploitation as they may be more susceptible to extortion or manipulation or have fewer resources at home to protect them from online threats.
3. International and regional legislation and policymaking related to children's online safety is patchy, with a few notable advances, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child [General Comment 25](#) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment (2021); the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) updated [Guidelines on Child Online Protection \(COP\)](#) (2020); and the European Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, known as the '[Lanzarote Convention](#)', which includes online CSEA (2007).
4. Where effective laws and policies do exist, their enforcement is often weak. Law enforcement agencies frequently lack the human and financial resources, technical capacity and appropriate legal tools to investigate cybercrimes.<sup>5</sup> Referrals between child protection actors and law enforcement are inconsistent and other resources to protect children and support child survivors of online abuse are stretched, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>6</sup>
5. Children's [digital citizenship](#)<sup>ii</sup> and their ability to use technology responsibly directly affects their safety online. The digital literacy of parents, caregivers and educators can also affect children's online safety. But many children lack the skills required to protect themselves from online dangers.<sup>7</sup> Support for children's digital citizenship is important even in contexts where internet connectivity is currently low, as children need the tools to protect themselves once they, inevitably, do get online.
6. Seventy-two percent of respondents in the Child Fund Alliance (CFA) country survey agree that online safety is a critical issue for children now and in the future. Eighty percent of respondents reported a high or moderate interest in carrying out advocacy related to online safety.

<sup>i</sup> For more information, see *Summary of Key Policy Issues – Online Safety*.

<sup>ii</sup> Originally coined in 2007, **digital citizens** are those who use the internet regularly (daily) and effectively. This definition has since been expanded to include competent and positive engagement with digital technology, active and responsible participation, and lifelong learning in formal, non-formal and informal contexts (including risk management and resilience). Source: [OECD](#)

Countries in West Africa, including Sierra Leone, Benin and the Gambia, expressed interest in launching initiatives to improve children's online safety. Countries like Indonesia expressed interest in this area though mentioned potential challenges related to lack of resources and data, while countries like India and Mali expressed their belief that this will be an important area of work in the future.

## What will CFA aim to deliver and how?

7. **Policy objective:** CFA will **reduce the threat of online child sexual exploitation and abuse** by supporting worldwide action to empower and protect children and mobilizing key stakeholders to help children reach their full potential. CFA will do this by promoting legislative and policy reform, empowering children to become effective digital citizens, and ensuring that online safety efforts reach children in the most vulnerable situations.
8. The following **3 mutually reinforcing outcomes** will help CFA deliver against the above-stated policy objective. The actions included under each outcome represent an indicative list, informed by the findings of the Country Survey, desk-based research and analysis, and inputs from the Program Choices Working Group and sub-working group on children's Online Safety. **The actions listed below in bold** represent elements that have higher potential to deliver the greatest impact given CFA's existing capacities and resources. All proposed actions that include advocacy activities can be designed to elevate children's voices and promote children's participation. **The recommended actions** are discussed in further detail in paragraph 19 below.

### *Outcome 1: Laws and policies to protect children from online CSEA are strengthened.*

9. Working through key global alliances, for example the [WePROTECT Global Alliance](#) and the [Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children](#), and civil society partners in-country, CFA supports national governments to develop national-level legislation and policies that explicitly prohibit all forms of online abuse and violence against children, including online CSEA. This could also include establishing national child online protection model strategies, in-line with the ITU's guidelines on [child online protection](#).
10. CFA brokers relationships with [The Technology Coalition](#) and the [Five Country Ministerial](#) to push for the widespread adoption of the [Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) by technology firms across the globe.
11. CFA encourages governments and other stakeholders to join the [WePROTECT Global Alliance](#) and develop national strategies to tackle online CSEA in-line with WePROTECT's [Model National Response](#). In contexts where resources are stretched, CFA works with donors and other stakeholders to help to secure relevant technical or legal advice for national governments.

### *Outcome 2: Children are effective digital citizens and use technology ethically and responsibly as part of their healthy development.<sup>8</sup>*

12. In partnership with other civil society organizations, UN entities and national governments, CFA develops a "model response" to demonstrate how national governments can strengthen children's digital citizenship. CFA conducts a range of private and public advocacy efforts to promote uptake of the model, including at the UN and European Union. CFA could also promote the model response at the global-level with a digital-marketing and/or advocacy campaign, which would raise children and adolescents' voices.
13. CFA develops and leads an initiative to **mobilize high-level commitment amongst UN Member States through a global pledge to keep children safe online and empower them to become effective digital citizens** by expanding [digital citizenship educational](#) opportunities. This could culminate in a high level global pledge event on [Safer Internet Day](#) or [World Children's Day](#) in 2023. This action could be delivered through a coalition effort, for example jointly with UNESCO

and a curriculum development firm/consultant or independently by CFA.

14. CFA works with governments and civil society to **develop a global curriculum to help children become effective digital citizens, adapting existing curricula and other tools**. Drawing on the global curriculum, **CFA works with allies to develop tailored training tools and boost teachers' digital literacy** and expand their ability to deliver a [digital citizenship curricula](#) to children. Similar to above, this process could culminate with a global commitment or pledge event.
15. CFA rolls-out a national-level, digital-marketing campaign—centered around children and adolescents' voices—to help parents support their children to build safer online lives. The campaign would underscore the importance of digital citizenship, provide tips on how to stay safe online and how to report abusive content or material online, and signpost additional online resources to strengthen parents' and children's digital citizenship.
16. CFA works with children and key stakeholders to establish national-level, child-friendly mechanisms to report dangerous or inappropriate online content, conduct and contact. This could include a range of mechanisms, including technological tools, telephone hotlines, and peer-to-peer networks.

*Outcome 3: Vulnerable children and survivors of online CSEA have access to end-to-end support and effective child protection services.*

17. To help out-of-school and other vulnerable children build their [digital resilience](#), CFA works through peer networks, specialized clubs or other groups outside formal education structures to **deliver a range of low-tech and offline learning tools**.<sup>9</sup> This requires strong partnerships with [global leaders in digital citizenship education](#) to develop these tools and identify the most effective means of reaching marginalized and vulnerable children.
18. CFA supports national governments to reinforce and/or establish multi-sectoral, child-friendly protection systems and services for vulnerable children and child survivors of online (and off-line) abuse. CFA partners with law enforcement and judicial actors in-country to strengthen referrals and inter-agency cooperation, ultimately improving support for children. CFA develops and delivers targeted trainings to build the skills of law enforcement and criminal justice actors in supporting child survivors of online CSEA and ensure children are referred for specialized care provided by a range of actors.

## Recommendations

19. Given CFA's existing capacities, reach and interests, as understood by the consultant and advised by the sub-working group on Online Safety, the **actions and activities listed below are the top recommended actions as they seem most likely to deliver the greatest impact** for children while also creating new branding and fundraising opportunities for CFA. Ideally CFA would pursue these recommended actions collectively to create the greatest impact, however, selecting individual actions or a different set is also possible. More detailed information on partnerships, branding and fundraising is provided below in paragraphs 20-24.
  - a. CFA leads an initiative to mobilize high-level commitment amongst UN Member States to keep children safe online by empowering them to become effective digital citizens. This will require consistent and focused lobbying at the UN, ideally accompanied by national-level advocacy in capital cities that reinforces the campaign's messages, particularly for a target set of Member States. The goal will be to secure pledges by a target number of Member States to demonstrate their commitment. This effort would culminate in a well-publicized, global pledging event on [Safer Internet Day](#) or [World Children's Day](#). Note that these advocacy efforts (both at global and national levels) would include a central role for children, reinforcing and drawing on CFA's Child Friendly Accountability initiative. For example, CFA could work with children who have been part of the Child-Friendly Accountability trainings to help draft the text of the Global Pledge and support them to participate in lobbying events with the national authorities. CFA is well-positioned to successfully accomplish the goals outlined in this initiative given its track record of successfully promoting child participation in global and national level events; its

programmatic work in many countries on child-friendly accountability; its growing reputation as an alliance that brings forward children's voices in policy-making; its previous record of similar advocacy successes (such as that related to SDG Target 16.2); and, its pre-established multi-lateral relationships and staff presence in Brussels and New York.

- b. CFA strengthens partnerships with UNICEF, UNESCO and UNDP as well as curriculum designers like [Common Sense Media](#), [Digital Kids Asia-Pacific](#), and [Generation Human Rights](#) to **develop a flagship, global curriculum to strengthen children's digital citizenship** through online training. CFA also develops **tailored, online training tools for teachers** to help them boost children's digital citizenship. As desired, the curriculum and teacher training tools could be adapted to national contexts and delivered in-person in schools by teachers and/or staff of CFA member organizations. CFA is well-positioned to deliver on these actions given its track record of successfully promoting child participation, its programmatic work in many countries on child-friendly accountability; its programmatic presence in schools and communities around the world; and given its existing relationships and networks within the UN systems that it can leverage. While some actors have led national and regional efforts to strengthen children's digital citizenship, such as UNICEF and UNDP, there has been less action globally which creates space for CFA leadership in this area. Additionally, developing a global, online curriculum and online teacher training tools presents a strong branding opportunity and could help CFA demonstrate its child protection expertise and build credibility as a partner for donors, policymakers, and other members of civil society. As above, these activities could include a significant child participation element, for example by creating opportunities for children to co-design the content of the curriculum.<sup>iii</sup>
- c. CFA delivers a **range of low-tech or offline learning tools**, leveraging the partnerships and content developed through actions above. CFA draws on its experience working with vulnerable and under-served children to shape the design of these learning tools and identify the best means of delivering them, for example through clubs or peer networks established outside formal education structures. To maximize their impact and improve child participation, these learning tools are co-designed with children. Again, while some development and child rights agencies have initiated actions in this space, efforts remain patchy and generally ad hoc. This relative vacuum creates an opportunity for CFA members to work collectively to create needed leadership and momentum in this area. As described above, CFA's track record related to child participation is also a value added in this area.

## Partnerships

20. **Keeping children safe online requires partnerships with a wide range of actors**, including technology companies and other private sector actors, national policymakers and legislators, relevant line ministries, donors, law enforcement, child protection actors (civil society and multi-lateral), educators and school staff, parents, and children themselves. For some of the activities described above CFA will be able draw on existing partnerships and networks, while in other instances CFA will need to develop and nurture new partnerships.
21. CFA will identify a range of **target entities that it will engage with to promote policy and behavior change**. CFA will also identify agencies and organizations have strong experience or specialized expertise that can serve as **important allies** in the effort to reduce the threat of online CSEA. Note that some private sector partners, including technology firms, have a vested interest in preventing online CSEA and experience in developing tools to boost children's digital citizenship. Evidence suggests that the most effective strategies to promote digital citizenship are those that involve a multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral approaches, including engagement from parents and children themselves.<sup>10</sup>

	Target entities	Allies
<i>1. Laws and policies are strengthened</i>	National-level policymakers and line ministries.	UN agencies, including UNICEF, ITU, and UNODC; global networks like <a href="#">WePROTECT</a> and the <a href="#">Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children</a> ; leading civil society and

<sup>iii</sup> For example see Generation Human Right's [Unmasking: Story Map](#) curriculum developed through a youth participation model.

	experts in online CSEA, including <a href="#">ECPAT International</a> and academics such as <a href="#">Prof. Amanda Third</a> ; large technology firms, such as Google, Microsoft and Facebook, involved in <a href="#">Project Protect</a> and <a href="#">The Technology Coalition</a> ; and, regional bodies such as the European Commission, Council of Europe and African Union, ECOWAS, OAS, CELAC.
<i>2. Children are effective digital citizens</i>	Ministries of Education, other national- and local-level education agencies, schools, educators and school staff, children and their families.
<i>3. Support vulnerable children</i>	Children and their families.

## Branding and fundraising opportunities

22. Online CSEA and children's safety online is an issue of increasing interest to policymakers and donors and is expected to increase over the next decade, particularly as children's connectivity increases. The **high-level, global pledging event** (paragraphs 13 and 14) and the **flagship, global curriculum** (paragraph 14) present opportunities to boost CFA's profile and brand, with a view to enticing new donors and partners, while also delivering impact for children.
23. CFA could consider some **targeted media interventions** alongside the pledging event and the launch of the curriculum and teacher training tools. CFA would leverage the Secretariat's communications team, as well as the relevant Alliance Task Forces and the communications and marketing teams of various members to stage the event and promote interest and coverage. Coverage targets could be international, both industry-focused channels such as Devex and mainstream papers like The Guardian. Targets can also include national level media outlets for Members States that are pledging or adopting the curriculum. The pledge and curriculum launch events would present novel policy solutions to a major global dilemma and would also be likely to create a reasonable degree of interest and traction among media outlets. To further hook media interest, CFA could consider engaging a well-known figurehead or celebrity to attend and promote media coverage. Media coverage will both promote interest in the campaign and satisfy additional branding and reputation building goals for CFA. Mainstream media coverage will help to build CFA's credibility and brand recognition beyond the development sector, build CFA's social media followers and strengthen traction with policymakers, such as politicians, their advisors, donors and journalists.
24. A range of foundations and donors are working to address online CSEA. The [Oak Foundation](#), the [Human Dignity Foundation](#), the [World Childhood Foundation](#), and the [Carlson Family Foundation](#) could provide new sources of revenue related to reducing the threat of online CSEA and promoting children's digital citizenship. The [Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children](#) also provides funding for research and projects related to online violence against children.

## What resources are required?

25. CFA has "ready-made" capacity in areas like international and national-level advocacy, supporting educational structures through programs, working with children to raise their voices, and training teachers. By leveraging the staff resources that already exist within the CFA Secretariat, CFA member agencies and country teams, the various internal task forces and the presumed budget earmarked for the campaign (estimated between US\$50,000 and US\$100,000), CFA could carry out a bare minimum of tasks described above to constitute a

viable campaign to reduce online child CSEA. To broaden the scope and related impact of the campaign (in terms of policy change, program growth, branding and funding) CFA could consider hiring a part-time or full-time campaign coordinator who would oversee all aspects of the campaign development and roll out at the global level and would serve as a liaison and advisor to members and country teams rolling out activities at national, school and community levels.

26. Depending on the activities that CFA selects for the campaign, CFA might also hire some technical experts to assist with development of certain aspects of the campaign, depending on where the alliance deems additional support would be most beneficial. For example, this might include hiring a consultant or firm to develop the digital citizenship curriculum, a PR firm to develop a tag line and campaign visuals (and national level firms to tailor materials to different contexts), a firm to run the high-level pledge event, a consultant to develop teacher trainings, an advocacy advisor to train staff in country to carry-out advocacy meetings at national level, and/or global experts on online safety who can lend technical credibility and expertise.
27. Additionally, CFA could consider leveraging the occasion of undertaking this campaign as a unique moment to make further investments that will both contribute positively to the campaign outcomes and to the organization's longer term branding growth that will endure beyond the life of the campaign. This includes the following examples:
  - a. CFA might consider hiring a specialist, social and behavioral change communication (SBCC) firm to promote its work in target countries. This would entail on-the-ground research into existing attitudes towards safe internet use, developing a campaign of interventions to nudge schools, parents and children into adopting safer behaviors (including through digital campaigning), and a period of evaluation to check the campaign was working and then making any necessary adjustments. These communications campaigns would also include opportunities for branding.
  - b. CFA might consider efforts to boost its social media profiles and followers by engaging support from a specialist social media advisor. Social media is one of the easiest, most cost-effective ways to reach those who care about children and development directly. This could be used to bolster public support for children's digital citizenship ahead of a global event and would remain a key asset for CFA beyond the lifespan of the campaign.
  - c. CFA might also consider retaining support from an experienced communications firm to guide the campaign and also develop internal resources with longer-term longevity. Engaging top-tier agencies, with significant expertise in delivering communications support to actors like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, would likely range from US\$15,000 to US\$50,000 per month, depending on the breadth of advice required and the territories where the advice is required. This might include [Brunswick Group](#), one of the world's leading corporate communications firms, [Portland Communications](#), [Teneo](#), or [Milltown Partners](#).
  - d. CFA might consider engaging a celebrity supporter to act as a champion of the campaign and also deepen public name recognition for CFA, which again would benefit both the campaign directly and CFA overall in the longer term.

## What are the anticipated risks and mitigation measures?

28. Several factors could undermine the success of the future campaign. These should be thoroughly explored and examined to ensure appropriate plans are in place to mitigate these risks factors.
  - a. Limited financial and human resources to carry out a campaign could hinder policy and program impact, the effective growth of CFA's brand, and future fundraising opportunities. All components and elements of the campaign should be costed with an eye toward maximizing benefit and leveraging existing resources to drive delivery.
  - b. The timeframe for this campaign and the time available to ramp up a new area of work for CFA is relatively short. Start-up activities such as upskilling staff and contracting experts would need to start as quickly as possible.
  - c. Some CFA country teams may see less value in this work than others, given the perceived prevalence of online CSEA in

their countries or the percentage of children online. As noted above, supporting children's digital citizenship is important even in contexts where internet connectivity is currently low, as children need the tools to protect themselves once they, inevitably, do get online. To build support for this campaign across partner organizations and country teams, CFA could develop internal training resources for CFA staff to improve their understanding digital citizenship and the global nature of online CSEA.

## Annex 1. Key Forms of Online CSEA

1. **Child sexual abuse material (CSAM)**, sometimes referred to as 'child pornography' as well as digitally-produced CSAM, CSAM refers to material depicting acts of sexual abuse and/or focusing on the genitalia of the child. Child sexual exploitation material (CSEM) encompasses all sexualized material depicting children, including 'child sexual abuse material. The distinction between CSEM and CSAM is generally one of legal status. A decade ago, there were less than one million reports of CSAM. By 2019, that number had climbed to 70 million, a nearly 50 per cent increase over figures reported in 2018. Many more remain undetected.<sup>11</sup>
2. **Livestreaming online child sexual abuse** involves the coercion of a child to participate in sexual activities, alone or with other persons. The sexual activity is, at the same time, transmitted live or 'streamed' over the Internet and watched by others remotely, often those who have requested and/or paid for the sexual abuse of the child, dictating how the act should be carried out.<sup>12</sup> This crime transcends national borders allowing perpetrators to abuse their victims from any location.<sup>13</sup>
3. **Online grooming** is a tactic used by perpetrators to establish and build a trusting relationship with a child using the Internet or other digital technologies in order to manipulate, exploit and abuse them online and/or offline.<sup>14</sup>
4. **Sexting** refers to the self-production of sexual images or the creating, sharing and forwarding of sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images through mobile phones and/or the internet. Young people engage in sexting, often consensually, with their peers but it can make them extremely vulnerable to future acts of sexual extortion or (cyber)bullying and increase the likelihood of their images being used in the production of CSAM. There are also many forms of 'unwanted sexting' or non-consensual aspects of the activity, such as sharing or receiving unwanted sexually-explicit photos or messages.<sup>15</sup>
5. **Sexual extortion, also called 'sextortion'**, is the blackmailing of a person with the help of (self-generated) images of that person in order to extort sexual acts, money, or other benefits from her/him under the threat of sharing the material without the consent of the depicted person, for example by posting the images on social media. Children or young people may be coerced into continuing to produce sexual material and/or told to perform distressing acts under threat of exposure to others of the material. In some instances, the abuse spirals so out of control that victims have attempted to self-harm or commit suicide as the only way of escaping it.<sup>16</sup>

## Annex 2. Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, How many children and young people have internet access at home? Estimating digital connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic, New York, 2020.

<https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-and-young-people-internet-access-at-home-during-covid19/>

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, COVID-19 and its implications for protection children online, New York, 2020.

<https://www.unicef.org/documents/covid-19-and-implications-protecting-children-online>

<sup>3</sup> WEProtect Global Alliance, Global Threat Assessment 2019: Working together to end the sexual exploitation of children online, London, 2019. <https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/Global%20Threat%20Assessment%202019.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-trends/crime-areas/child-sexual-exploitation>, accessed 8 February 2021.

<sup>5</sup> UNODC, Study on the Effects of New Information Technologies on the Abuse and Exploitation of Children, Vienna, 2015. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/cybercrime/Study\\_on\\_the\\_Effects.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/cybercrime/Study_on_the_Effects.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/policing/police/consultation-countering-online-child-sexual-exploitation.html>, accessed 7 February 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Save the Children International, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> ChildFund Alliance, “Definitions and sub-themes.” Online safety Sub Working Group, February 2021.

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF, Policy guide on children and digital connectivity, New York, 2018.

<https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/3141/file/PolicyLab-Guide-DigitalConnectivity-Nov.6.18-lowres.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/75e2c8d8-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/75e2c8d8-en>, accessed 1 March 2021.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.end-violence.org/safe-online>, accessed 28 February 2021.

<sup>12</sup> ECPAT International, Online Child Sexual Exploitation: A Common Understanding, Bangkok, 2017. [https://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/SECO-Booklet\\_ebook-1.pdf](https://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/SECO-Booklet_ebook-1.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> ECPAT, Briefing Paper: Emerging Global Threats Related to the Online Sexual Exploitation of Children, Bangkok, 2017. <https://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Briefing-Paper-Emerging-Issues-and-Global-Threats-Children-online- 06.06.17.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> ECPAT International, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> ECPAT International, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> ECPAT International, 2017.