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**Contact:** Lisa MacSpadden at [lmacspadden@childfundalliance.org](mailto:lmacspadden@childfundalliance.org)

Ryan DeSouza at [RDeSouza@childfundalliance.org](mailto:RDeSouza@childfundalliance.org)

## **ChildFund Alliance Launches WEB Safe & Wise Platform to Combat Soaring Online Risks as Students Return to School**

*Rising child internet use and surges in online threats to children necessitate immediate action*

**[New York, NY]** - As children around the world are back in classrooms and engaging in online curricula and activities, a new digital platform launched by ChildFund Alliance is offering critical tools to help children, caregivers, and educators combat escalating threats to children's safety.

ChildFund's [WEB Safe & Wise platform](#) is a frontline defense against some of the most urgent risks in today's digital landscape, including the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children. With a recent doubling in reports of these heinous crimes, the tools on the WEB Safe & Wise platform are more essential than ever, equipping children to protect themselves online and to spread the message of safe digital usership to their peers.

A [Children's Advisory Council](#), with youth members from across the globe, plays a key role in determining the planning and implementation of WEB Safe & Wise activities. In addition to [resources for young people](#), the platform provides adults with guidance on [Talking to Young People About Online Safety](#), definitions related to online safety, and key [do's and don'ts](#) when engaging online.

Utilizing the network of [11 ChildFund Alliance members](#) operating in 70 countries, WEB Safe & Wise mobilizes a global coalition committed to creating a safe digital environment for children. The timing could not be more urgent. There are an estimated 750,000 online predators at any one time targeting children for sexual exploitation across numerous digital platforms, including social media and online gaming. In just the last four years, research shows an increase of more than 100% in child sexual abuse material reports.

"Statistics from partner organizations signal a crisis point when it comes to our children's safety in the digital environment," says Secretary General **Meg Gardinier** at ChildFund Alliance. "As children begin the school year, and spend increasing amounts of time on digital devices, it is paramount that we arm them with tools for safe online navigation. Our WEB Safe & Wise initiative focuses on countering threats young people face online, while also helping them learn to safely navigate the digital world."

Reports from the [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](#) (NCMEC) indicate a 106% surge in child sexual abuse material cases between 2017 and 2020, with the number of predators who are intent on abduction or sexual offense rising 82% in the last year. Meanwhile, 96% of students with access to the internet use at least one social network, making the safeguarding of digital spaces an immediate and critical issue.

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“Prior to the internet, someone with sexual interest in children felt isolated, aberrant, alone,” explained **Ernie Allen**, Chair of [WeProtect Global Alliance](#) and former CEO and founder of NCMEC. “Today they are part of a global community. They can share images, fantasies, techniques, and even real children with other people all over the world. And they can do it all with virtual anonymity.”

As part of its Global Threat Assessment, WeProtect worked with Economist Impact to conduct a global survey of 5,000 (18–20 year olds) in 54 countries to measure how many experienced online sexual harm as children. The results were alarming with 54% reporting they were victims during their childhood. The survey also highlighted the pervasiveness of the problem in every region of the world, with the highest victimization rate occurring in the US and Canada; followed by Australia and New Zealand; and Western Europe.

“As children go back to school, we recognize the acute need for digital safety and literacy for young people worldwide,” said **Ryan DeSouza**, who is leading ChildFund’s WEB Safe & Wise initiative. “Every child deserves the opportunity to harness their full potential at school, and to stay safe from the threats of online abuse. WEB Safe & Wise provides resources for students and adults to help us advocate for a safer online world.”

“Countries need legislation that protects children from the looming dangers of digital predation, coercion, and other terrible abuses that are being facilitated against children online,” explains ChildFund Alliance Board Chair **Simon Whyte**. “A key goal of WEB Safe & Wise is to strengthen laws and policies that provide this protection, and to get there, it’s critical that people understand the gravity of this threat.”

“The internet is a powerful tool for learning, one that can transform children’s lives, but it also exposes them to the risk of serious harm,” said **Dr. Howard Taylor**, Executive Director of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. “With one in three internet users in the world being a child, it’s critical to discuss the threats facing children online, and work *with them* to create a safe digital future. The WEB Safe & Wise Children’s Advisory Council provides young people from around the world the opportunity to be part of the solution to a problem that is directly impacting them.”

ChildFund Alliance urgently calls upon governments, corporations, and civil society to prioritize initiatives for children's online safety. The organization urges the creation of governmental bodies, the criminalization of online child exploitation, and the allocation of resources for parent and caregiver education. Technology partners are strongly encouraged to co-create standardized industry safety codes to protect young users from inappropriate content across all platforms.

For more details, to learn about our member activities, and to engage in our campaign, please visit <https://websafeandwise.childfundalliance.org/>.

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*ChildFund Alliance is a global network of 11 child-focused development and humanitarian organizations reaching more than 32 million children and their family members in 70 countries. Our members work to end violence and exploitation against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children, families and communities to create lasting change. Our commitment, resources, innovation and expertise serve as a powerful force to help children and families around the world transform their lives.*