

Briefing Paper

This briefing paper has been compiled using information included in the report *Child sexual exploitation and abuse online: survivors' perspectives in Peru*.¹



WeProtect Global Alliance brings together experts from government, the private sector and civil society to develop policies and solutions to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse online. The Alliance generates political commitment and practical approaches to make the digital world safe and positive for children, preventing sexual abuse and long-term harm.



ECPAT International is a global network of 122 civil society organisations in 104 countries working towards the vision of ending the sexual exploitation of children. With over 30 years of experience in engaging with and managing multi-stakeholder processes and alliances across national, regional and global levels; ECPAT is considered to be at the helm of all issues and manifestations pertaining to the sexual exploitation of children.



Capital Humano y Social (CHS) Alternativo is a specialised organisation active for the past 16 years for the protection of human rights, particularly those of women and children in situations of vulnerability due to human trafficking, sexual exploitation, child labour and forced labour. Its headquarters are in the city of Lima and it has four regional offices in Cusco, Loreto, Madre de Dios and Puno. CHS Alternativo has a national presence, through its various projects and allied institutions.



CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE ONLINE: Survivors' Perspectives in Peru

The Voices of Survivors research project aimed to explore child sexual exploitation and abuse online in six countries, including Peru.² Presenting the perspectives of young survivors within the research was paramount.

Two best-practice activities were undertaken:



Qualitative one-on-one 'conversations' with young people who had experienced child sexual exploitation and abuse online



An online survey of frontline support workers who were working with child survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse

1. ECPAT International and CHS Alternativo. (2021). Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Online: Survivors' Perspectives in Peru. WeProtect Global Alliance.
2. A total of six countries were involved in the Voices of Survivors project: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Mexico, Moldova and Peru.

Who participated in the project?



Defining child sexual exploitation and abuse online

Child sexual exploitation and abuse online refers to situations involving digital, Internet and communication technologies at some point during the continuum of abuse or exploitation. It can occur fully online or through a mix of online and in-person interactions between offenders and children.

Child sexual exploitation and abuse online includes an evolving range of practices including: *child sexual abuse material, grooming children online for sexual purposes, live streaming of child sexual abuse and other related behaviours* such as sexual extortion, the non-consensual sharing of self-generated sexual content involving children, unwanted exposure to sexualized content, among others.³

3. ECPAT International (2020). [Summary Paper: Online Child Sexual Exploitation](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.

Main findings and recommendations

This research puts the voices of survivors of child sexual exploitation and abuse online at the forefront of the response to this problem. The findings and recommendations presented here are mostly based on their perspectives about existing reporting mechanisms and about support services, and must ultimately be translated into strategy, policy and action by duty-bearers, service providers and law enforcement.

Recommendations

1. Promote information and awareness campaigns about risks in the online environment related to sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as about how to access help and formally report crimes.

Conversations with the young survivors generally illustrated little awareness of the preventive measures and formal reporting mechanisms that are available. In the conversations, the young women consistently discussed the need to have access to information about child sexual exploitation and abuse online through preventive strategies. These campaigns, according to them, should reach not only children and young people but also parents and the broader community. This should be made through accessible forms, for example:

“Putting up posters as I told you, because they are useful, you can read information [...]”

(VoS-PE-05)⁴

This recommendation was supported by the surveyed frontline workers. When provided the opportunity to share any last thoughts at the end of the survey, 28% (n=22) emphasised the lack of general public awareness related to this topic as a major issue in Peru. One of them said that:

“I believe that an information campaign on the matter is necessary because many adolescents are vulnerable to being caught because they are unaware of the risk to which they may be exposed.”

2. Better promote intersectoral coordination to provide a full range of specialised support services for children subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse online, including long-term assistance for those who need it.

A quality issue raised by the young women in the conversations was related to the lack of inter-institutional coordination. A number of them mentioned that at the beginning they felt that the responsibilities of the different institutions were clear, but with time it became more diffuse, giving them a sense that the cases were not adequately monitored.

Some young women also felt that the services did not necessarily meet their needs, as they did not always provide what was necessary to them such as job opportunities or financial support.

4. Please note text in green box refers to quotes from the young survivors who took part in the conversations. Text in purple box refers to the qualitative input shared by frontline workers who completed the survey.

Well-coordinated, specialised and victim-centred services should be available at any time to children and young people who have survived online sexual exploitation and abuse, including long-term assistance in situations where it is needed or requested by the victims.

“It would have helped me to have continuous psychological support to cover the emptiness and pain that the situation left me in [...] Because if they have hurt you, there is a gap that remains, which will not be filled overnight [...]”

(VoS-PE-04)

3. Secure funding to provide training on victim-centred approaches to professionals within the justice system.

While legal assistance was considered useful and necessary by the young women, they repeatedly said in the conversations that they did not feel confident while navigating the justice system, either because they felt pressured or revictimised.

Any child who goes through such an experience should have access to specialists prepared to help them, offering the best possible approaches to make them feel safe. These professionals should be specialised and know the specifics of these cases.

“ [...] at times, we won't have the best lawyers, while others do, and you end up being left aside [...]”

(VoS-PE-03)

Providing final thoughts in the survey, one frontline worker highlighted that:

“Most of the professionals attending them do not have the sensitivity or the necessary training to address the cases, they do not have exclusive spaces to provide an optimal service.”

4. Young people should have access to a range of helping professionals wherever they are located, and have choices in who supports them, including being able to choose their gender.

A number of young women believe that the services would be more child-friendly if children could choose the gender of the professional they will talk to. This would make them feel more comfortable and able to talk more openly about what happened.

“They should assign a psychologist [in the legal medical examination], a woman to speak to a woman, or a man to speak to a man, because you could feel strange when a man comes to deal with you, especially if you have been raped. A more understanding psychologist, I felt that the one who supported me was very abrupt and did not understand me. I wish my grandmother was there to help me.”

(VoS-PE-06)

5. Improve the investigation, trial and prosecution of online sexual crimes against children.

In the conversations, the young women demonstrated being concerned about the lack of investigation and prosecution of online forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation. The perception of some of them is that more mechanisms of investigation and prosecution are needed:

“There must be stronger penalties and better or more effective mechanisms to capture offenders. The authorities must take more action on the matter so that this does not happen.”

(VoS-PE-01)

Therefore, law enforcement should improve approaches to conducting investigations of online forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation. Improvements are needed to ensure offenders are brought to justice and that those who have been subjected to such crimes are able to access compensation and other legal remedies. This would also encourage other children to report sexual abuse and exploitation.

“Real justice is necessary for these victims so that cases do not go unpunished, and the offenders are not left free to continue taking advantage of more girls.”

(VoS-PE-04)

Indeed, when providing final thoughts to the survey, one frontline worker said that it is necessary to:

“Prioritise the protection of children and adolescents and give more resources to prosecute the crimes.”

6. Impose legal duties on and promote collaboration with Internet service providers and social media companies.

Some young women mentioned Internet service providers should guarantee more security for children. One of them suggested that there should be an alarm that allows the companies to detect when a young person is in danger, so that the police can intervene immediately.

“Let them try to locate the victims, also the offenders; because sometimes they are the ones who demand that you upload photos that shouldn't be uploaded.”

(VoS-PE-03)

It is therefore necessary to impose legal duties on and promote collaboration with Internet service providers and social media companies to ensure they promptly comply with law enforcement requests for takedown of child sexual abuse material as well as to comply promptly with law enforcement requests for information. This will assist investigations into crimes and limit the wide distribution of child sexual abuse material.

“There are false profiles, sexual harassment, criminals who capture... Nobody sees or does anything.”

(VoS-PE-04)

Prevention and awareness campaigns through media

In the conversations the young women consistently mentioned the need to promote information and prevention on topics related to the use of Internet and social networks. A number of participants suggested that online and offline posters and advertisements should be used to promote awareness, including radio, television and social media:

“There is no prevention (...) on television; they deal with other issues, but I have never seen any prevention campaign on the matter, neither on television nor on the radio.”

(VoS-PE-10)

Another one reiterated:

“Television and radio campaigns are very important, they should be done massively.”

(VoS-PE-01)

Some young women specifically raised the need to inform parents and adult family members so they become able to educate their children about the risks involved in the use of Internet. One young woman said that these campaigns should alert about the risks of using Internet without supervision, as children could trust those who reach out to them:

“At that age, one believes that pigs fly and do not fly, when you are at that stage, you pretty much believe everything.”

(VoS-PE-04)

A number of them believe that the use of mobile phones and particularly of social media should be monitored by caregivers, who are the utmost responsible for children’s safety online:

“Regarding the applications, you always have to be careful because there are children, I can tell you, there are 8-year-old children who are on Facebook and are like this with friends ... and an older person (a pedophile) can create a false profile, sweetens the child up and it’s like that is very bad for children because they should prevent minors from having it.”

(VoS-PE-05)

Surveyed frontline workers had a similar opinion about the need to promote preventive measures. When providing qualitative input, two of them mentioned the need to address the roots of the problem, which would involve an awareness raising approach.

“The sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, goes beyond a psychological aspect; it is about addressing the issue from its roots; it is about re-educating families by generations, raising awareness, and implement the process from early ages with a preventive approach.”

Another one said that:

“Prevention work is largely neglected, the only thing that is often sought is to attack the problem, always leaving the root cause untouched.”