WeProtect
GLOBAL ALLIANCE

Annual
Review **2023**

Child sexual abuse and exploitation online is a growing, global threat that demands a global response.

It crosses geographical and sectoral boundaries which no single actor can tackle alone.

The abuse and exploitation of children online is unacceptable, and most importantly, remains preventable.

A message from our Executive Director

2023 has been a momentous year for WeProtect Global Alliance as we made further progress in our mission to bring together experts to develop policies and solutions to protect children from sexual abuse online.

Our success as a global alliance and the collective work of our members will ultimately be measured by how we support children to be able to explore digital worlds safely.

Following extensive consultation and engagement with our Global Policy Board, we began this year with an exciting new three-year strategy.

Our work during the year continued to make the case for a coordinated global response as the most efficient and effective way to end child sexual abuse online. We continued to implement a highly regarded response framework which is helping to drive legislative, policy and practice change at a country level.

We further developed our collective global knowledge base on emerging threats and issues, worked with new and existing members and strengthened partnerships. A highlight of the year was the publication of our biannual Global Threat Assessment on the emerging threats facing children online, from AI to sextortion.

We provided support for our members by supporting our members to achieve more together than they could alone, through pooling and sharing knowledge and data, solving problems and making a powerful case for change. And our members have confirmed this work is supporting many of them to change policy and practice.

Collaboration is at the heart of our work. The depth and breadth of our membership, our partners and the stakeholders we work with is testament to a strong network and our convening power across sectors globally. It has been powerful to join forums from Paris to Delhi to Nauru sharing knowledge on key threats and opportunities to better protect children.

As highlighted in our Global Threat Assessment, we will continue to focus on building preventative responses across all sectors to stop child sexual abuse online before it occurs. Public health and child-centred approaches, alongside Safety by Design principles, are critical to preventing abuse before it occurs and our work in 2024 will remain focused on these.

Pivotal to our work is ongoing engagement with children, survivors and parents, ensuring their views, perspectives and voices are heard and positively influence legislation, policy and practice. The input of children, survivors and those with lived experience of child sexual abuse keeps our work grounded and focused – thank you to those of you who contributed to our research, working groups and other activities during the year.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the Global Policy Board for their governance and support throughout 2023. And of course, many thanks to the work of the Secretariat team for their endless professionalism, enthusiasm and energy.

Working together, we collectively amplify our impact and reach wider audiences to make sure our messages reach every corner of society to tackle the complex challenges that arise in this rapidly evolving digital era. I look forward to an equally impactful 2024!

Iain Drennan
Executive Director

Our membership

276 members

102
Country governments

Governments create and implement the legal environment to prevent and respond to child sexual exploitation and abuse.

70
Private sector companies

Technology-specific and many other sectors are directly or indirectly involved in the protection of children online.

94
Civil society organisations

Civil society organisations play multiple, vital roles including supporting victims and survivors.

10
Intergovernmental organisations

International organisations work with governments to create a digital world with no safe spaces for offenders.

Our 2023–25 strategy

Collaboration
More practical cooperation between our members enables a better response to child sexual abuse, drawing on global, diverse experience and learning

Knowledge
Our members understand the scale and nature of child sexual abuse online and what they can do to respond

Empowerment
Victims and survivors and children inform and shape the global response to child sexual abuse online

Advocacy
Our members take action to deliver an effective and well-resourced response to child sexual abuse online at a national and transnational level

Key highlights

2023

180+
participants joined events or online learning hosted by the Alliance and overwhelming reported an increase in knowledge

17
new members joined, bringing total members to 276 organisations across sectors and representing 112 countries

96%
of members responding to our membership survey reported the Alliance had made a positive impact changing policy or practice

30+
recommendations made through our research reports, on legislation, education, standards, collaboration and participation

800 million
people globally were reached by our Global Threat Assessment, raising awareness of key emerging threats around child sexual exploitation and abuse online

40+
presentations by Secretariat staff at high-level and influential events and conferences across the world to build knowledge and awareness of key issues

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 1

Collaboration

More practical cooperation between our members enables a better response to child sexual abuse, drawing on global, diverse experience and learning

During the year, 17 new members joined the Alliance. We now have a total of 276 members representing government, private sector, intergovernmental and civil society sectors from 112 countries. We welcomed Fiji as our 102nd government member, and the first from the Pacific Island nations. Other new members included Association Point de Contact, Council of Europe, DNSFilter, Ecuador, Exoclick SL, Human Trafficking Front, International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect (ISPCAN), One New Zealand, Passaporte Digital, Protect Us Kids Foundation, Raven, Search for Justice Pakistan, Sony Inc., Stop Sexting Internet Safety Center, The Cece Yara Foundation and The HUG Project.

Our reference groups, representing the private sector, civil society and government sectors, continued to meet and gather momentum. More than 125 member organisations attended five reference grup meetings during the year, sharing information, working on specific areas of focus including child and survivor participation, and discussing key issues for their respective sectors. Plans are underway to identify cross-cutting opportunities for collaboration on areas of shared interest in 2024.

By forging links with organisations focused on harms related to child sexual abuse online we add value to the wider group through our network while gaining knowledge and breaking down silos. Some of the many groups and organisations we worked with during the year include the Council of Europe's Lanzarote Committee; the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) stakeholder group; Technical Advisor on the Out of the Shadows Index; revision of the Luxembourg Guidelines; Sexual Violence Research Initiative's Stewardship Group on Child Sexual Abuse; the International Children's Code; European Child Sexual Abuse Legislation Advocacy Group (ECLAG) and the US-based Ending OSEAC Coalition.

Adidja, Plan International
Youth Campaigner

I think governments should develop laws to combat the increase in sexual abuse online and invest more in public health approaches by prioritising prevention.

We [also] need Safety by Design to put children at the centre of new technologies such as generative AI and XR, and to mitigate the risks associated with end-to-end encryption.

Our perspectives should be put at the centre of the design of new technology.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 1
Collaboration

We prioritised development of key relationships with law enforcement experts on child sexual abuse and exploitation online, participating in the INTERPOL Specialists' Group on Crimes Against Children in March. We also helped shape the Group's public statement, Fighting crimes against children through collective action. The Alliance was also appointed as an affiliate of the Virtual Global Task Force and participated in a Task Force's meeting in The Hague, where law enforcement colleagues underlined the value of the Alliance's role as a convening point for the key stakeholders needed to tackle child sexual abuse online.

We hosted a multi-sector roundtable in partnership with the UK's signals intelligence agency, GCHQ, on how to tackle the growing threat of link-sharing to child sexual exploitation and abuse online. Eighteen organisations representing eight countries participated in the discussion. Our summary report from the roundtable highlighted the volume of link-sharing is increasing and must be a key focus for collaborative preventative efforts to stop the spread of new and known illegal content.

In collaboration with Alliance members, Together for Girls and SVRI, we launched the Safe Futures Hub at the ISPCAN Summit in Edinburgh. With support from the Oak Foundation, our shared mission is to foster a collaborative global platform where stakeholders access, generate, and implement solution-oriented tools and resources rooted in robust evidence and real-world insights, including from the digital world. Through innovation, inclusive engagement, and effective knowledge sharing, we aim to spark transformative change and build a safer future for all children. Safe Futures is particularly focused on engaging under-represented and field-based voices.

We partnered with Safe Online to host a two-day technical workshop ahead of the Paris Peace Forum. The workshop built on last year's Data for Change event and focused on key findings from our Global Threat Assessment, identification of gaps and how they could be mitigated. The event was followed by a meeting of the Children Online Protection Lab hosted by the French government's Ambassador for Digital Affairs, Henri Verdier and attended by key Ministers from Europe and the US.

At the end of the year, along with the Childlight Global Child Safety Institute, ECPAT International and Safe Online we conducted a global survey to inform the review and update of the Terminology Guidelines (2016) (often referred to as the Luxembourg Guidelines).

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 2

Knowledge

Our members understand the scale and nature of child sexual abuse online and what they can do to respond
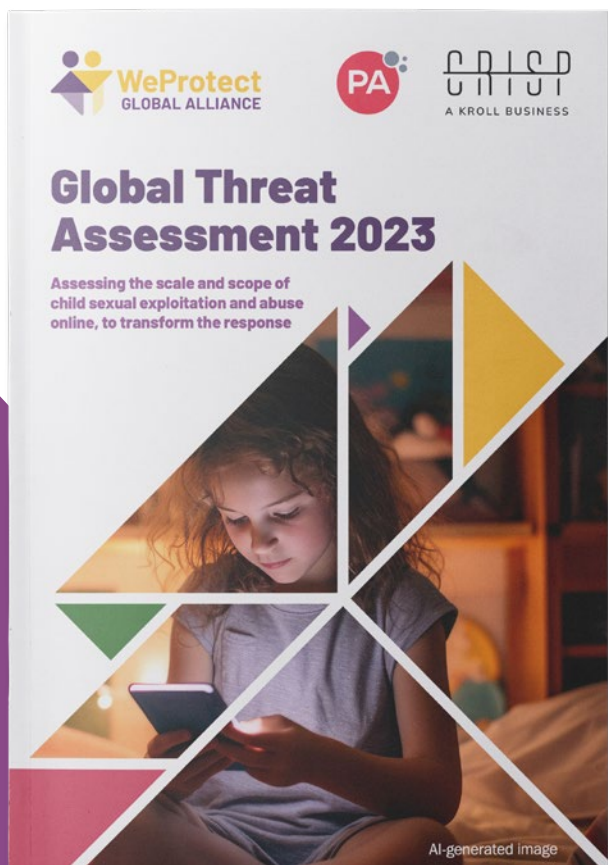
During the year we continued to make a compelling moral, operational and financial case for action, investing in research to quantify the impact and cost of abuse online and understanding future trends and risks. Our educational programmes, strategies and tools are based on emerging threats and issues, as well as frameworks to drive holistic change. Our resources were informed by research and insights, and involved co-design or collaboration with targeted cohorts, including children and survivors.

Our most recent membership survey found members highly value our knowledge products, with 96% of respondents reporting their membership has a positive impact on their work, changing organisational, regional or national policy or practice.

In October, our flagship biannual Global Threat Assessment report was published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic and French and reached more than 800 million people worldwide through media and outreach. The report noted an exponential increase in the scale and nature of child sexual abuse and exploitation online since 2019, highlighting two trends driving this increase. Firstly, an intensification of known forms of abuse, such as financial sexual extortion, and the emergence of new forms of abuse such as AI-generated child sexual abuse material. The data on how quickly children can be locked into high-risk grooming conversations on gaming platforms has been of particular interest to regulators across the world.

The Threat Assessment underlined the key features of a comprehensive response: adequate financing, international legislative and regulatory alignment, and child-centred approaches. The report made three recommendations to help inform and direct the global response - adopting a public health approach, centring children's rights and perspectives and aligning legislation globally. We will continue to drive global action aligned with these recommendations in the year ahead.

...the work of WeProtect Global Alliance is so important. This threat assessment highlights the importance of aligning internet regulation globally, of working in partnership to prevent the increase of child sexual exploitation and abuse material online and ensuring that we take a child-centered approach to fully understand the nature of the threat and gaps in our collective response.

Stephen Kavanagh
Executive Director of Police Services, INTERPOL,and WeProtect Global Alliance Board Member

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 2
Knowledge

To support ongoing development of the capabilities needed to ensure an effective and coordinated national response to prevent and respond to child sexual exploitation and abuse online, we continued to promote our Model National Response (MNR). The MNR provides guidance and support helping countries to build their response to child sexual abuse and exploitation online.

Building on this, in partnership with UNICEF, we developed a Maturity Model and tool to support governments to self-assess their progress across key capabilities from 'building' to 'maturity'. These tools will be pivotal in helping the Alliance to understand and help direct and prioritise areas for further support and development.

During the year we hosted five regional webinars on the MNR, sharing the experiences of Kenya, Indonesia, Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Jordan in using the framework. The webinars overwhelmingly showed increased understanding by participants of the opportunities, challenges and strategies associated with delivering a whole system national response. Thailand, Poland, the United Arab Emirates and Colombia have confirmed they have used the Model National Response to shape their national strategies.

Our 2023 membership survey also asked respondents about their use of the MNR. 75% of respondents told us the MNR was useful, 60% said they had used it to guide their work and 69% said they would recommend the MNR to others.
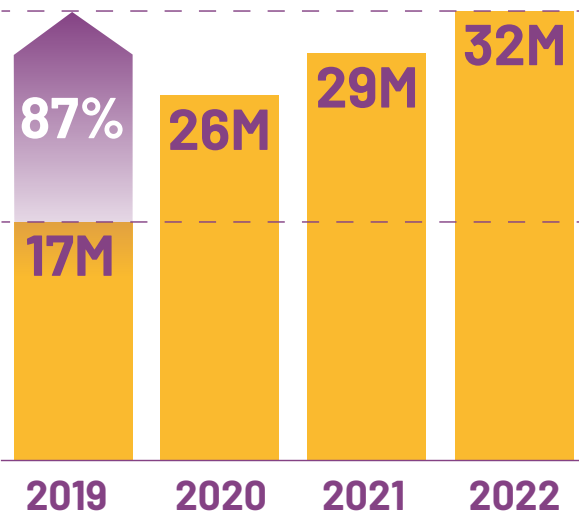
To help further build global knowledge and expertise on emerging issues and trends, we commissioned a range of research. Along with the Global Threat Assessment and our frameworks, our publications are increasingly being used to drive action in the government and private sectors, with the Alliance regarded as a key authority invited to participate and share our learning in a wide range of influential global fora.

In a study conducted by Economist Impact, we surveyed 1,000 parents/guardians of children under the age of 18 across eight countries in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa to understand how children are engaging with their parents to stay safer online and the changes that parents believe need to occur to protect children against sexual exploitation and abuse online. Our report Parents' perceptions of their children's exposure to online sexual harms highlighted that 50% of parents/guardians said that their children told them about experiencing an online sexual harm when they were under the age of nine. Parents were concerned children did not recognise harmful experiences and did not think social media and gaming platforms are doing enough to keep children safe online.

We also published another research conducted by Economist Impact: Estimates of childhood exposure to online sexual harms and their risk factors, which explores childhood experiences of 2,000 18-year-olds in four European countries: France, Germany, The Netherlands and Poland. The report enabled direct engagement with more than 60 national-level policymakers across Europe to highlight children's experiences and explore policy solutions.

Additionally, we published a series of briefings on current issues including one conducted with the University of Manchester on the risks associated with eXtended Reality (XR) and one on the issue of link-sharing to child sexual exploitation and abuse online.

2023 Global Threat Assessment

87%

17M **26M** **29M** **32M**

2019 2020 2021 2022

Number of reports

87% increase in volume of child sexual abuse material reports since 2019

Source: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2023

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 3

Empowerment

Victims and survivors and children inform and shape the global response to child sexual abuse online

Creating trauma-informed safe and ethically appropriate spaces for consulting children and survivors must be prioritised and these insights translated into strategy, policy and action by policymakers, service providers and law enforcement.

During the year, we undertook global mapping to understand where and how children and survivors are involved in participatory initiatives related to tackling online-facilitated child sexual abuse and closely related issues.

Our website now features a dynamic and growing interactive map of 110 projects from around the world and across sectors showing different ways organisations are supporting participation.

To better analyse the different approaches to engagement with children and adult survivors, we also developed a Participation Model to show different types of participation and approaches. A task and finish group of Alliance members are now working on further guidance tools for participatory work, to be launched in 2024.

Participation mapping project

When we allow survivor advocates to influence policymaking, we allow the most affected people to be heard, lead and be involved in matters that are important to them.

There are currently gaps and loopholes in programs and policies because survivor's voices are not incorporated.

Ruby, Philippine Survivor Network Member

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 3
Empowerment

By looking at how the use of technology manifests in children's lives and what online safety means to them, we can identify steps to ensure they can enjoy all the benefits of the digital world free from the threat and long-term harm of violence and abuse.

To understand how children themselves feel about the issue of 'self-generated' sexual material and how they might be better supported, with Praesidio Safeguarding, we held consultations with children in Ireland, Thailand and Ghana on their experience of child 'self-generated' sexual material. Our resulting report, Child 'self-generated' sexual material online: children and young people's perspectives, highlighted the complexities of their experiences, motivations, feeling of stigma and shame, and how social media drives content sharing. The report made 10 recommendations around improved education, non-judgemental support, technology companies, language and structural and institutional change. It also shed light on the complexities of their experiences, motivations, feelings of stigma and shame, and how social media drives content sharing.

With the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (OSRSG VAC), we published the #MyVoiceMySafety report, based on a poll of 650 children aged 7-18 and their perceptions of online safety.

The results highlighted real gaps in how safe children feel online and made four recommendations focused on technology companies prioritising sexual exploitation and abuse when tackling online harms, shifting perceptions of possible perpetrators to increase awareness and understanding that offenders often are known to children, development (with children) of more robust and effective legislation and more comprehensive online safety education at school and home.

Let's make the internet a space where children learn about the virtues of society, not the ominous predators it harbours. A space where they post #YOLO, not #MeToo.
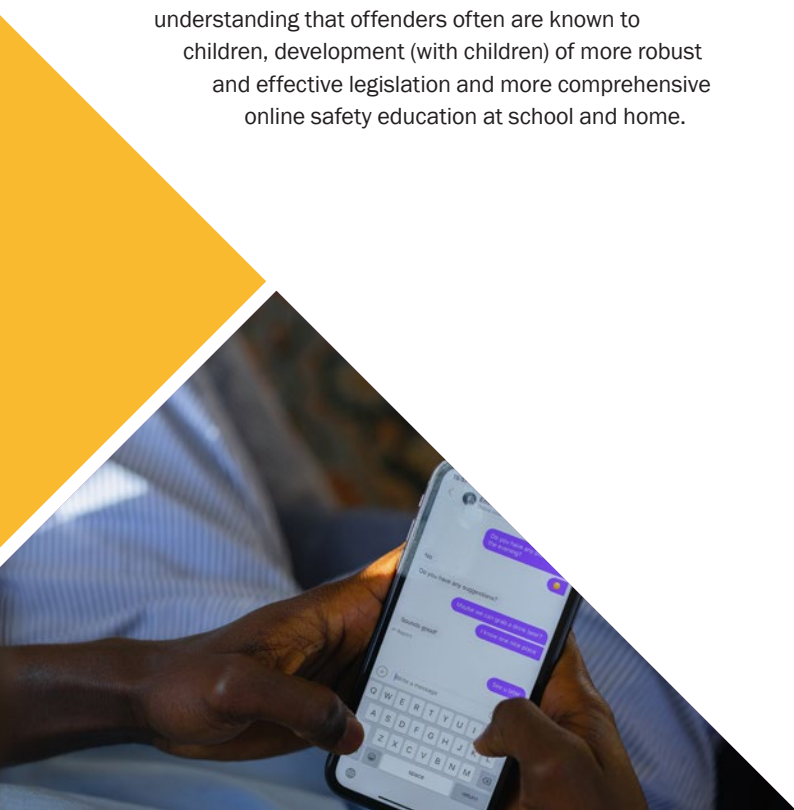
Abhinay,
member of ChildSafeNet

A high-level summary of the data emphasising young views of online violence was shared in the latest report to the Human Rights Council.

We also amplified the voices of children and survivors through a series of opinion pieces focused on our latest Global Threat Assessment and are planning work for a future youth campaign.

During the year we joined POP: Protection through Online Participation - a cross-sector collaborative project led by the UN OSRSG VAC and the International Telecommunications Union - centred on how young people are leading and engaging in digital solutions to seek protection and support from violence on and offline.

In October, we took part in a visioning workshop alongside other civil society organisations, survivor advocates and academic experts for To Zero, an ambitious, timebound initiative to support civil society stakeholders to develop a collective vision to end childhood sexual violence. This provides another key mechanism for integration of lived experience of child sexual abuse and exploitation online into wider efforts to combat violence against children.

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 4

Advocacy

Our members take action to deliver an effective and well-resourced response to child sexual abuse online at a national and transnational level

The Alliance played a pivotal role in shaping the World Economic Forum's Global Coalition on Digital Safety's Global Charter of Principles for Digital Safety which aims to advance digital safety in a rights-respecting way, drive multistakeholder alignment and enable positive behaviours and actions across the digital ecosystem. As co-chair, alongside Microsoft's Chief Digital Safety Officer, Courtney Gregoire, we worked to ensure the principles represented the views of all Alliance sectors.

In February we were invited to make a submission on digital harms to inform the United Nations Secretary-General's Bi-annual Report. Input was used to inform the Secretary-General's report on the rights of the child which was presented to the General Assembly's Third Committee and informed the 2023 General Assembly resolution on the rights of the child.

In March we moderated a panel with INTERPOL, GCHQ and the UK Home Office at the UK Embassy on the proposed EU regulation which was attended by around 100 representatives from across the debate and the region.

In August, we collaborated in an OECD-led workshop on Safety by Design and supported the drafting of OECD's Transparency reporting on child sexual exploitation and abuse online, where the Global Threat Assessment and MNR were extensively referenced.

We need to bring in a child-centred approach. We need to do more to listen to children to understand how they are navigating the digital world.
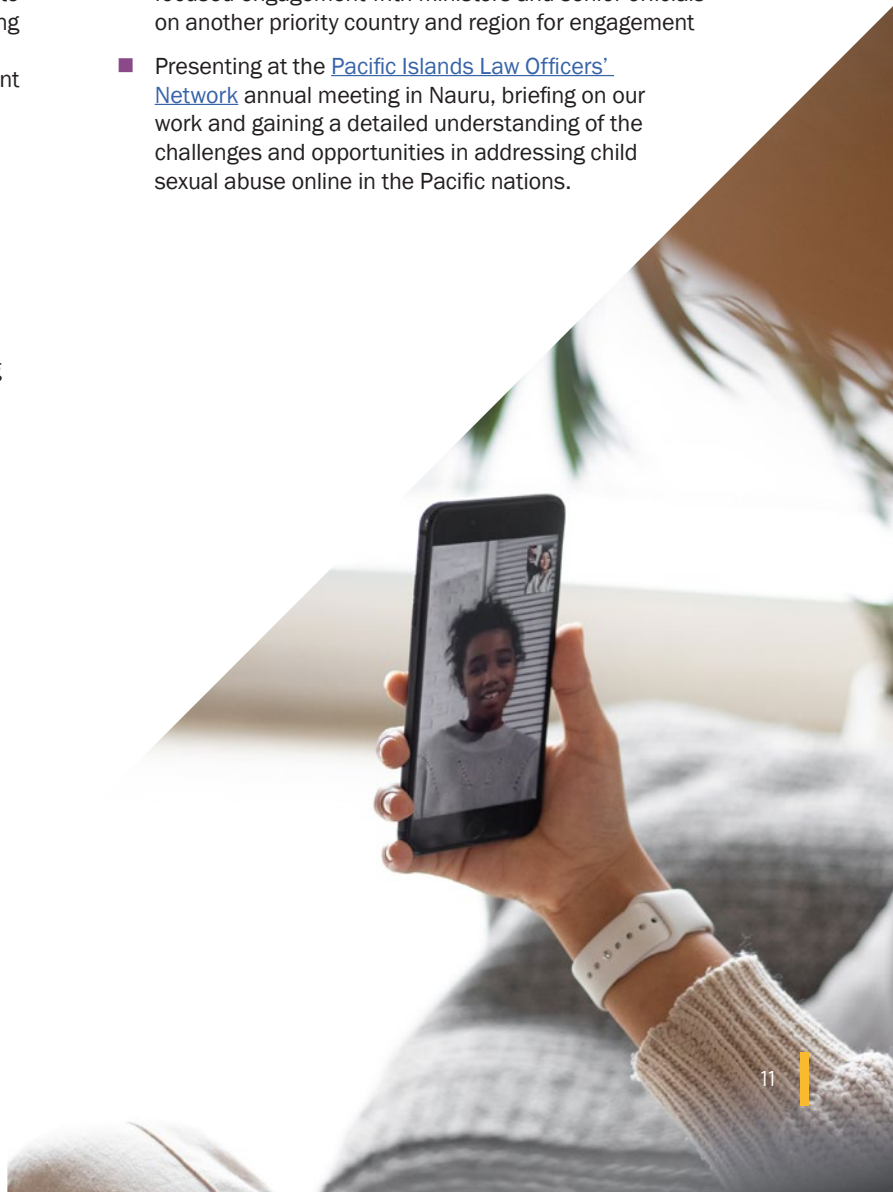
Iain Drennan,
Executive Director, WeProtect Global Alliance

STRATEGIC OUTCOME 4

Advocacy

During the year we have been a key voice in highlighting emerging threats to children's online safety and have continued to advocate for a globally aligned response. Alliance staff have spoken at more than 40 events sharing key information on emerging threats and risks, mitigation strategies and prevention approaches.

Highlights included:

- Sharing lessons from global trends in legislative reform for child online protection, as well as on law enforcement and industry collaboration at the ASEAN ICT Forum

- Speaking at the 2023 Paris Peace Forum alongside TikTok and Microsoft in a panel moderated by France's Digital Minister Barrot, advocating for a prevention and child centred approach, the value of effective and enforceable legislation and the ongoing need for voluntary action by companies

- Delivering a keynote presentation alongside the President of the Saudi Human Rights Commission and DQ Institute at the Global Cyber Security Forum in Riyadh, and joining an invitation-only briefing to senior policymakers and industry on the findings of our Global Threat Assessment

- Speaking at the UK Government's AI Safety Summit side event bringing together key countries, technology organisations, academia, and civil society and signing a joint statement on 'Tackling child sexual abuse in the age of Artificial Intelligence'

- In India, working with ICMEC and the Keralan state government and police to shape a landmark child protection track; providing a keynote address at the 16th c0c0n Cybercrime Conference, and co-organising a roundtable in Delhi with the British Asian Trust which led to the establishment of a national coordinating body to develop a comprehensive local strategy to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation online

- Briefing a high-level Chinese academic and legal delegation alongside the Great Britain China Centre and UNICEF and presenting the Global Threat Assessment findings at the Chinese World Internet Conference

- Participating in a panel on "Emerging Horizons: Navigating the Future of Online Safety" showcasing our research on self-generated material alongside TikTok, the Diana Award, and ReThink at FOSI's European Forum

- Participating in Egypt's Cybersecurity Conference, enabling focused engagement with ministers and senior officials on another priority country and region for engagement

- Presenting at the Pacific Islands Law Officers' Network annual meeting in Nauru, briefing on our work and gaining a detailed understanding of the challenges and opportunities in addressing child sexual abuse online in the Pacific nations.

Thanks to all our members, supporters, partners, funders, children and survivors who have helped shape, influence and drive this work during the year.

By working together we can make change happen to better protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse online.

Our work in 2023 was possible thanks to donations and grants from our generous donors. We would like to thank those individuals and organisations who have funded our important work.

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