

# Disrupting Harm

**Evidence from 13 countries on the context, threats, and children's perspectives of online child sexual exploitation and abuse.**

Detailed Analysis of Interviews with Government Duty Bearers

Ethiopia

*Last updated 8/3/21*

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This report is a summary of preliminary data collected for this research project. The perspectives contained herein represent the individuals interviewed and surveyed. Support from the Fund to End Violence Against Children does not constitute endorsement.

## Introduction

*Disrupting Harm: evidence to understand online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA)*, is a unique and collaborative research partnership between ECPAT International, INTERPOL, and UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. Leveraging their specific expertise, each partner sheds light on separate but interconnected areas: context, threats and children’s perspectives on online child sexual exploitation.

- Context by ECPAT International through portraying laws & policies in action;
- Threat by INTERPOL through the collection of crime and other data;
- Children’s voices by UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti through surveys with children and their caregivers.

The countries of focus in Southern and Eastern Africa region are: Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. The countries of focus in the Southeast Asian region are: Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Research took place between 2019 and 2021. Up to nine separate research activities were undertaken in each country by the three project partners. Preliminary analysis for each activity was first conducted before the results across all the nine activities were consolidated into each national country report.

This report is the preliminary analysis conducted by ECPAT International of interviews conducted with an identified sample of government duty bearers whose mandates include addressing online child sexual exploitation and abuse at a national level. The aim of interviews was to identify emerging issues and trends, recent progress and upcoming plans and priorities in Ethiopia’s current legislative and policy environment.

In Ethiopia, nine interviews with a total of nine participants were conducted from July 2020 to September 2020.

ID Number	Ministry/Government Agency	Position
RA1-ET-01-A	Ministry of Women, Children and Youth	Director, Child Rights Advocacy and Wellbeing
RA1-ET-02-A	UNICEF Ethiopia	Child Protection Specialist
RA1-ET-03-A	Ministry of Innovation and Technology	Director, Women, Children and Youth
RA1-ET-04-A	Ministry of Education	Team leader of the Directorate of Gender under Ministry of Education
RA1-ET-05-A	Federal Attorney General	
RA1-ET-06-A	Federal Supreme court- Child Justice Project Office	Head, Child Justice Project Office
RA1-ET-09-A	Ministry of Culture and Tourism	
RA1-ET-12-A	Cyber-crime Division	Deputy Inspector
RA1-ET-13-A	UNODC	

In Ethiopia, the Interviews were conducted utilising a semi-structured interview schedule that allowed for exploration of emerging issues. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted both in-person and virtually.

## Public awareness of the threat of OCSEA

All nine senior government duty-bearers that were interviewed were in consensus that *any* awareness of OCSEA among the public, policymakers and frontline workers is still very low in Ethiopia. Respondents noted that there is some level of awareness about offline sexual abuse of children, with at least four respondents noting that there has been attention on this topic in comparison to very little attention on OCSEA:

*“There is no understanding of online sexual abuse, almost everybody is not aware of it. Offline sexual exploitation of children, people are more aware”* (RA1-ET-03-A, Director, Directorate of Women, Children, and Youth, Ministry of Innovation and Technology);

*“We have been focusing on offline sexual exploitation but we are not aware of the level of exposure of children to online sexual exploitation”* (RA1-ET-05-A, Representative, Federal Attorney General’s Office).

Contributing to low levels of awareness is the fact that there are very few targeted programmes geared towards building public awareness on OCSEA or child online protection in general. A representative from the Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth described OCSEA as a ‘recent agenda and as being in its infant stages in Ethiopia’ (RA1- ET-01- A). The respondent stated that the government's attention was drawn to OCSEA in 2019, through the regional meetings organised by the Commission of the African Union to strengthen the capacity and action of African Union Member States in addressing OCSEA:

*“OCSEA was not our focus issue or focus agenda (...) For my ministry, we only started working on OCSEA in 2019 after the first meeting conducted by the African Union”<sup>1</sup>* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

The respondent added that due to this, there are no programmes and projects on OCSEA implemented by either government or non-government agencies. He indicated that ongoing programmes are on the sexual exploitation of children in general:

*“OCSEA is a recent agenda. It is at its infant stage here. We do not have OCSEA projects or programmes so far. No one is working on this issue, even the UN agencies and international NGOs. They are working on child sexual exploitation in general but no one is working on online sexual exploitation of children in Ethiopia”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

The only ongoing awareness creation programme touching on OCSEA, which only two out of the nine respondents were aware of, is the outreach programme by the Ministry of Education on child online safety.

The representative from the Ministry of Education indicated that this child online safety outreach programme targets children and youth, but only those around the cities as they are considered more vulnerable due to their access to the Internet. Though the outreach programme started before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was intensified during the pandemic as a result of increased exposure of children to online risks:

*“We give training to children and youth through drama or programmes on TV but we fail because of infrastructure. We are not able to reach all the children in Ethiopia. Mostly Internet is available around the city, and this is where most children are vulnerable so the Ministry of Education has been targeting children around the cities”* (RA1-ET-04-A, Acting Team Leader, Gender Directorate, Ministry of Education).

<sup>1</sup> African Union. (March 2019). [African Union Continental Consultation on Combatting Online Child Sexual Exploitation](#).

From the interviews, it became apparent that media reports highlighting OCSEA as an emerging threat are rare if not non-existent. None of the respondents had come across any mainstream media reports on an incident of OCSEA or discussing OCSEA, whereas only one respondent admitted to having come across social media discussions touching on OCSEA.

The low rate of Internet connectivity was considered by five out of nine respondents as a factor contributing to the low levels of awareness and limited attention given to OCSEA so far (also assumed to mean a low level of risk). At least three respondents indicated that Internet access is only available in cities, in line with the Internet Society's report<sup>2</sup> which stated that rural areas in Ethiopia are still largely unconnected to the Internet. The article indicated that only cities enjoy 3G access and 4G is only available in the capital. It also added that despite successive price cuts by Ethio telecom in 2019, Internet is still not affordable for the majority of Ethiopians. From this article, it's therefore safe to say that children that access the Internet and are thus more vulnerable to OCSEA in Ethiopia are largely those living in urban areas.

Due to this limited access, one respondent noted that *"OCSEA is not seen as a big problem"* (RA1-ET-09-A, Representative, Directorate of Women, Children, and Youth, Ministry of Culture and Tourism). Respondents had the following to say on this:

*"Lack of awareness comes from the fact that the Internet is not accessible everywhere and in every family. OCSEA is therefore not seen as a big problem"* (RA1-ET-09-A, Representative, Directorate of Women, Children, and Youth, Ministry of Culture and Tourism);

*"Internet access is only in capital cities, like Addis and Bahir Dar. Almost 85% in our country are in rural areas so Internet access is little, and not everybody in urban areas, especially children, have access"* (RA1-ET-03-A, Director, Directorate of Women, Children, and Youth, Ministry of Innovation and Technology-03- A Director, Directorate of Women, Children, and Youth, Ministry of Innovation and Technology);

*"Mostly Internet is available around the city, and this is where most children are vulnerable"* (RA1-ET-04-A, Acting Team Leader, Gender Directorate, Ministry of Education);

*"Most children are in rural areas and have no access to phones let alone the Internet"* (RA1-ET-06-A, Head, Child Justice Project Office, Federal Supreme Court).

Despite limited Internet access, one respondent indicated that Internet connection has grown in Ethiopia and that children are now using it more, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic:

*"Previously, the Internet connection was poor, but now it's better. With the COVID-19 pandemic, children are using the Internet more. Access to the Internet is definitely on the rise"* (RA1-ET-13-A, Representative, UNODC Programme Office in Ethiopia).

Another respondent acknowledged the exposure of children to the Internet, especially through mobile phones:

*"We know there is growing exposure of children through the mobile network but mostly in urban areas"* (RA1-ET-06-A, Head, Child Justice Project Office, Federal Supreme Court).

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<sup>2</sup> Internet Society. (March, 2020). [The First Ethiopia Internet Development Conference: Meeting Challenge and Opportunity Head On](#)

The sentiments of the respondent on growing Internet connection aligns with available data on Ethiopia from the International Telecommunications Union, which estimated that in 2017, 18.618% of individuals were using the Internet<sup>3</sup> compared to 1.1% of individuals in 2011. International Telecommunications Union data also shows that the rate of mobile subscriptions in 2017 was at 37.22%, which has also been rising since 2008 when it was only at 2.36%.<sup>4</sup>

Internet access expansion in Ethiopia, combined with the high percentage of Telegram (the app) users, can exacerbate OCSEA in Ethiopia. Telegram, which is popular in Ethiopia, has built in end-to-end encryption as well as a 'self-destruct' timer that removes messages and makes them untraceable. This encryption, which secures user privacy, is the same security feature offenders use to share child sexual abuse materials online. Telegram users are also capable of checking secret chats using an image serving as an encryption key.<sup>5</sup> Based on this, as Internet connectivity continues to grow in Ethiopia, so will the problem of OCSEA. One respondent indicated that though at the moment Internet access is low and OCSEA is not perceived as a problem: *"in future when Internet access will be booming, the problem of OCSEA may rise"* (RA1-ET-09-A). Based on this, the Ethiopian government has the opportunity to put in place the necessary preventive measures, in preparation for the inevitable growth in Internet connectivity and its accompanying risks of OCSEA.

At least six respondents recommended awareness creation on OCSEA to the public as a preventive measure. Besides educating the public on OCSEA, the representative from the Ministry of Education specifically recommended the integration of child online protection into the Ethiopian school curriculum:

*"We have to work on the life skills of the children, on how they can safely use the Internet and other devices. Within the curriculum, there should be some modification to include this. Parents should also be engaged on this issue so they can know what their children are doing on their devices"* (RA1-ET-04-A, Acting Team Leader, Gender Directorate, Ministry of Education).

Another respondent noted the need to build the awareness of policymakers, especially those responsible for the formulation of legislation:

*"We need to work on awareness-raising of the individuals that will come up with legislation on OCSEA. They need to know what is happening"* (RA1-ET-06-A, Head, Child Justice Project Office, Federal Supreme Court).

The representative from the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth recommended for OCSEA to be made a priority child protection concern in Ethiopia:

*"OCSEA should be the government's priority issue. It should be an issue for the Ministry of Education, the justice sector, the issue of ministry mandated with technology, it should be on the agenda of the Information Network Security Agency. It should be the government's priority"* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

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<sup>3</sup> International Telecommunications Union. (n.d.) [Country ICT data until 2018 - Percentage of individual's using the Internet.](#)

<sup>4</sup> International Telecommunications Union. (n.d.) [Country ICT data until 2018 - Mobile Cellular Subscriptions.](#)

<sup>5</sup> Quartz Africa News. (February, 2018). [In a Continent Dominated by Whatsapp, Ethiopia Prefers Telegram.](#)

## Government ministries/agencies mandated to prevent & respond to OCSEA

The key government agencies with a mandate on OCSEA according to participants are:

- Ministry of Women, Children and Youth;
- The Federal General Attorney;
- Child Justice Project Office under the Federal Supreme Court;
- Federal Police Commission;
- Information Network Security Agency;
- Ministry of Innovation and Technology;
- Ministry of Education.

The respondents described what they saw as the roles of the different mandated agencies in addressing OCSEA as follows: Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth is responsible for developing child-related policies and designing programmes for the prevention of OCSEA (RA1- ET-13- A); Federal Attorney General and Federal Police Commissioner are responsible for the criminal investigation and prosecution of OCSEA (RA1 - ET-13- A); Information Network Security Agency is responsible for drafting legislation related to cybercrime in Ethiopia, supporting the investigation and takedown of child sexual abuse materials (RA1- ET-09- A); the Child Justice Project Office under the Federal Supreme Court has a central role in facilitating access to justice for the child victims (RA1- ET-01- A); the Ministry of Innovation and Technology is responsible for protecting children in the online environment (RA1- ET-01- A) and the Ministry of Education is responsible for equipping children on child online safety (RA1- ET-04- A).

Though these agencies were indicated by respondents as the main agencies with a mandate on OCSEA, only the Ministry of Education confirmed having an outreach programme touching on OCSEA. Respondents indicated that the other ministries are not yet active on this issue.

According to the respondent from the Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth, discussions on OCSEA in Ethiopia are new and the government has not initiated programmes or projects towards its prevention and response. This particular respondent described his perception of the level of the government's action in addressing OCSEA as follows:

*"OCSEA is a recent agenda. It is at its infant stage here. We do not have OCSEA projects or programmes so far. No one is working on this issue, even the UN agencies, international NGOs. They are working on child sexual exploitation in general but no one is working on online sexual exploitation of children in Ethiopia"* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

The respondent from the Ministry of Innovation and Technology confirmed this by stating that OCSEA is a new concept of which the Ministry has little knowledge about:

*"The Ministry of Innovation has not been sensitised on this issue so this is a new idea. Everyone is more aware of offline child sexual exploitation"* (RA1-ET-03-A, Director, Directorate of Women, Children, and Youth, Ministry of Innovation and Technology-03- A, Director, Directorate of Women, Children, and Youth, Ministry of Innovation and Technology).



Though there are currently no ongoing programmes on OCSEA (except the outreach activities by the Ministry of Education), the Ministry of Women Children and Youth indicated that it has taken the lead in initiating discussions on the formation of a multi-stakeholder task force on OCSEA at the national level. The ministry acknowledged that OCSEA is a cross-cutting issue, thus the need for this task force:

*“OCSEA is a crosscutting issue for most of the government ministries (...) The Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth conducted a meeting once on this issue with these ministries at the federal level. We are trying to establish a task force at the national level. The Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth is leading the current initiative and I am assigned to be the focal person on this issue. The Federal General Attorney and the Ministry of Technology have also assigned their focal persons”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

Though the formation of the task force is still at the initial stages, it’s an indication that Ethiopia has recognised the need to take action in addressing OCSEA at this point before the issue becomes explosive, and that it is aware that responses to OCSEA require a coordinated multi-agency approach. The appointment of focal persons by three of the mandated agencies – the Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth, Federal Attorney General and the Ministry of Innovation and Technology- also indicates political goodwill by these agencies to play their role. As was described by the respondent from the Ministry of Innovation and Technology, OCSEA is a new concept to them and hence there is a need for technical support to be provided to these mandated agencies in Ethiopia.

Since OCSEA is a novel issue on the government’s agenda, respondents indicated that it is not yet visible in government discussions on child protection or coordination forums on violence against children. One such coordination forum is the ‘National Coordination Body’ under the Federal General Attorney’s office. A representative from this office confirmed that OCSEA, as far as she knows, has neither been discussed nor is it captured in the coordination body’s strategy and action plan. She did however indicate that there is still room to include OCSEA in the action plan during a future review, commenting:

*“OCSEA has never been part of the agenda of the coordination body. We have a strategy and action plan, and as far as I know, it does not incorporate the issues of online child sexual exploitation (...) The coordination structure has a five-year strategy that has expired and now we are on the verge of revising it. This will be a good opportunity to incorporate OCSEA on this structure”* (RA1-ET-05-A, Representative, Federal Attorney General’s Office).

A UNICEF respondent also confirmed that OCSEA is not visible in government discussions:

*“For UNICEF, we have a wide range of partnerships [with different government departments and ministries] (...) In our interactions with the government, when we discuss violence against children, OCSEA is not visible at all”* (RA1-ET-02-A, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Ethiopia).

UNICEF recommended for OCSEA to be included in policy-level discussions, whereas the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth recommended for OCSEA to be prioritised by all the mandated government ministries:

*“OCSEA should be the government's priority issue. It should be an issue for the Ministry of Education, the justice sector, the issue of ministry mandated with technology, it should be on the agenda of the Information Network Security Agency. It should be the government's priority”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

Respondents also indicated the need to have an in-depth assessment of OCSEA to inform government programmes and initiatives:



*“One area of improvement is on the national overview, the data. We need to have data so we can initiate some projects to address the problem.”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth);

*“This is an emerging issue. We have been focusing on offline sexual exploitation but we are not aware of the level of exposure of children to online sexual exploitation (...) We need to have an in-depth assessment of the level of exposure to know the extent of OCSEA”* (RA1-ET-05-A, Representative, Federal Attorney General’s Office);

*“We cannot say that we have built a system to address OCSEA. The core thing is to have an assessment and then address this issue”* (RA1-ET-09-A, Representative, Directorate of Women, Children, and Youth, Ministry of Culture and Tourism ).

Duty bearers were excited to know what evidence on OCSEA will be available in 2021 as a result of the Disrupting Harm report, which will inform the government on how to bring about actions:

*“Because OCSEA is a novel idea in our country, this kind of research [Disrupting Harm] will be useful as a basis for government and policymakers to take action. In the future, we expect there will be results due to this research”* (RA1- ET-03- A, Director, Directorate of Women, Children, and Youth, Ministry of Innovation and Technology).

### Capacity and awareness

Regarding the level of awareness of policymakers in mandated government agencies, there was consensus among respondents that this was limited. Two respondents commented:

*“We are not aware, even the responsible government agencies are not aware of this issue. I can say OCSEA is in its infancy stages because its recent agenda to us”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth);

*“As policymakers and practitioners, those working at the technical level, we are not aware of the types and trends of online abuse”* (RA1-ET-05-A, Representative, Federal Attorney General’s Office).

Barring the regional meetings undertaken by the African Union, respondents noted that there were no ongoing capacity building efforts for policymakers and frontline workers. Two of the nine respondents interviewed (a representative from the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth and the representative from the Ministry of Innovation and Technology) had attended the regional meetings by the African Union on OCSEA, and based on this, the Ministry of Women has carried out one sensitization session<sup>6</sup> involving other key government ministries at the national level. Other than that, respondents were not aware of any other targeted training for policymakers on OCSEA.

### Staffing

The representative from the Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth indicated that they don’t consider there to be a major gap in the child protection workforce:

*“On the child protection workforce, though there are no child protection and child rights experts at the Kabele level, it may be a gap but we do not consider it such a big gap”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

<sup>6</sup> This was a short session that was provided within a workshop organised by Terre des Hommes Netherlands under the Girls Advocacy Alliance project. It was therefore not a specific workshop organised on OCSEA.

The Ministry explained that at the various administrative levels, federal, regional, zonal and Woreda, there are child protection and child rights experts, working under the child protection and child rights section, who implement child protection programmes. Though there are no experts at the Kebele level<sup>7</sup>, the child protection structure at the Woreda level works with community-based structures and associations to implement activities. According to the Ministry, at the federal level, the child protection section has around 20 professionals who lead national-level child protection programmes. At the other levels, the Ministry also confirmed that the officers are child rights and child protection experts. At the Woreda level, the Ministry noted that the child protection experts are few, with numbers varying between two to five per Woreda. The Ministry also indicated that some regions (e.g. Tigray) are more progressive in that they have university graduates at the Kabele level focusing on social protection but this is not in all regions, as some (e.g. the Southern Region) are struggling. The ministry indicated that there is a planned review to make this system standardised and to expand the child protection structure by employing more professionals.

The participant from UNICEF indicated that they believed there is a gap in the child protection workforce at the lower levels which has hindered the implementation of child protection programmes on the ground:

*“UNICEF is supporting the government in creating some form of child protection system. There is a new case management framework for child protection just endorsed in 2019, but who will implement this framework? We don’t have a workforce on the ground”* (RA1-ET-02-A, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Ethiopia).

Besides the child protection and child rights experts under the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, it was indicated that other federal government ministries, all of whom already have Directorates of Women, Children and Youth,<sup>8</sup> are also employing child protection experts in each ministry. This has been approved by the civil service coordination body and so far, five ministries have already employed child protection experts while the others are recruiting. The child protection experts will support the Directorates of Women Children and Youth on child protection matters (RA4-ET-01-A).

Another respondent also pointed out that within the criminal justice system, trained human resources were a challenge, especially in rural settings away from cities:

*“There is a lack of trained manpower, especially if you go out of the cities. Many of the graduates do not want to work in rural areas as they will lack electricity, water and the like. So there is a huge gap in the child justice system of Ethiopia”* (RA1-ET-06-A, Head, Child Justice Project Office, Federal Supreme Court ).

Even when the human resources are there for child protection, for example in the cities, it was pointed out that they are overstretched as they are few compared to the size of the population they are expected to serve: *“You can imagine five police officers assigned to deal with cases of a sub-city that has got more than 500,000 people. There is a need to have a serious and well-organised police department that will be able to deal with children’s affairs”* (RA1-ET-06-A, Head, Child Justice Project Office, Federal Supreme Court).

Based on the interviews, there is a gap in the child protection workforce especially at the Woreda and Kabele levels, which means that for OCSEA programmes at that level, there is a need to consider capacity building and working with both the government structures as well as community-based structures for the implementation of activities. At the National level, the gap is minimal considering there are professionals to support national

<sup>7</sup> Kebele is the lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia.

<sup>8</sup> The Directorates are responsible for ensuring children are considered and their rights protected in all the projects and programs and policies developed in their respective ministries.

programmes at the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth as well as child protection experts in the other federal government ministries.

### Budget and spending

All respondents indicated that so far, no budget is allocated by the government to specifically address OCSEA. For the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth it was indicated that there is a budget allocated by the government for child abuse and exploitation in general:

*“There is no specific budget for OCSEA. The budget is for child abuse and exploitation in general. It could be child abuse, corporal punishment but no specific budget for OCSEA”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

The respondent from the Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth indicated that though the government does allocate a budget for child protection, this budget is insufficient and has to be supplemented through fundraising at both national and lower levels. At the national level, the Ministry indicated that they have enough budget to address child exploitation due to support from partners such as UN agencies and international civil society agencies:

*“At the National level, from government, the budget is not enough but we have a lot of budget from different sources - [such as] the civil society agencies and from UN agencies so the budget is enough”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

At the lower level, the respondent from the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth indicated that due to the country’s economic status,<sup>9</sup> it’s not possible to allocate enough resources to all the Woredas:

*“Everyone is expecting enough budget from the government, but the government cannot allocate enough budget for all the Woredas in the country because we are a developing country and we don’t have enough budget”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

The respondent from the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth explained that the government has come up with resource mobilisation assistance structures known as ‘Community Care Coalition’, whose main objective is to mobilise community contributions either in kind or in cash to support vulnerable children within the communities. Apart from mobilising from the community, the respondent noted that there are opportunities to mobilise resources from civil society organisations and private sector entities working at the Woreda and zonal levels. However, he indicated that the capacity to mobilise these resources is lacking:

*“We have resource mobilisation assistance structures – the Community Care Coalition structures, whose main objective is to mobilise community resources, cash or in-kind to assist vulnerable children. We also have opportunities for resource mobilisation from civil society organisations working on child protection in Woreda or zonal level and the private sector. The resource is available but there is no capacity to mobilise it”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

A representative from the General Attorney’s office stated that for their office, there are resources both human and financial for the activities related to child rights in general, not just OCSEA. She noted that though their office gets a budget from the government for children's rights, this comes in a pool from the government and includes

<sup>9</sup> Ethiopia was ranked as the 25<sup>th</sup> most impoverished country in the world, and is one of the most under-developed nations – see: [World Bank 2019 - Ethiopia Country Profile](#).

a budget for women and other cross-cutting issues, therefore, it is not possible to indicate how much is for children. She also indicated that there is funding from partners such as UNICEF which is combined with government funding and facilitates child rights activities and maintains the required personnel to do the work. One participant also noted that there are however other opportunities to mobilise budget but it is the capacity to implement resource mobilisation strategies that is a challenge (RA1-ET-05-A).

From the interviews, it's clear that there is a gap in child protection resources, especially at the lower levels. Unlike the national level where the shortfall in government funding is easily mitigated by funding from partners, the lower levels do not have the same advantage. Though the government has developed a structure to assist in resource mobilisation at the lower level, this is not functioning as expected and there are therefore insufficient resources for implementing child protection programmes including ones related to OCSEA. A lack of resources is therefore a gap that needs to be addressed.

## Effectiveness of Existing Policies and Laws Related to OCSEA

The main laws and policies on OCSEA were indicated as the Computer Crime Proclamation,<sup>10</sup> the Criminal Code,<sup>11</sup> and the National Children's Policy. Respondents indicated that the current laws do not cover all the manifestations of OCSEA and that this was something that needed to be progressively addressed. The views of the respondents on this were as follows:

*"I don't think the legislation is sufficient in addressing all kinds of child pornography and also the issue of online grooming. So I think there is a gap in legislation in addressing this issue of OCSEA"* (RA1-ET-05-A, Representative, Federal Attorney General's Office);

*"The Criminal Code does not touch on sexual exploitation online but focuses on offline abuse. It does not punish online sexual activity for example online grooming. It is an area that needs to be worked on. We need to come up with a law that deals specifically with OCSEA. In criminal law, the law should be very specific. It would be unconstitutional to charge someone without citing the specific law"* (RA1-ET-06-A, Head, Child Justice Project Office, Federal Supreme Court ).

Though there are currently no plans underway for new laws or amendments that address OCSEA crimes, a respondent from the General Attorney's office shared that there are intentions to assess the legal gaps and challenges in addressing violence against children and women. This she hoped will identify the legal gaps in addressing OCSEA which would eventually lead to either a new law or a revision of the existing laws. The assessment she noted would be undertaken in this Ethiopian calendar year.

One respondent pointed out that in his opinion, the law was workable. The bigger challenge to him was the implementers of the law due to their lack of training on OCSEA. He explained: *"There is no problem in the law but the problem is on its implementers or law enforcers. There are some gaps on the side of the law enforcers due to lack of training on the specific issue, otherwise, the law is workable"* (RA1-ET-12-A, Deputy Inspector and Head of Cyber Crime Investigation Division, Cyber Crime Unit).

### Challenges and limitations

Concerning the implementation of the laws, challenges and limitations identified by respondents included that laws related to OCSEA are not known by both the public and the implementers. A respondent specifically put this point across, commenting: *"There is a challenge in policy and legal framework implementation (...) We do have the Computer Crime Proclamation but I don't think it's widely known by the public, and even by the implementing government agencies. There is a lack of awareness on the laws drafted, developed and formulated by the government"* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

Closely related to the lack of awareness of the existing laws, it was indicated that members of the public and justice actors are not aware of the actions in the online environment that constitute an offence in Ethiopia. As one respondent put it, if an action constituting OCSEA is not perceived as a problem, it will consequently not be addressed under the law: *"Those working in the justice system and the public are not aware of what is considered as a crime and an offence online. This is a challenge because if it is not identified as a problem, it might not come as an issue to be addressed in the law"* (RA1-ET-05-A, Representative, Federal Attorney General's Office).

<sup>10</sup> Government of Ethiopia. (2016). [Computer Crime Proclamation No. 958/2016](#).

<sup>11</sup> Government of Ethiopia. (2005). [Criminal Code](#).

Even though Ethiopian law allows for any person to have the right to report any offence, whether or not they have witnessed its commission,<sup>12</sup> none of the respondents were aware of any OCSEA matters that had been reported by either the members of the public or even by service providers, who have a duty to report crimes stipulated in the Computer Crime Proclamation.<sup>13</sup>

Based on the interviews, there is a need to review the existing laws to ensure they comprehensively address OCSEA, as well as create awareness on OCSEA targeting both the public and justice actors on the existing laws.

### Anything currently being still developed?

There is currently nothing under development that touches on OCSEA in terms of government policy or the law.

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<sup>12</sup> Government of Ethiopia. (1961). [Criminal Procedure Code of Ethiopia](#), Article 11 (1).

<sup>13</sup> Government of Ethiopia. (2016). [Computer Crime Proclamation No. 958/2016](#), Article 27.



## Effectiveness of Law Enforcement Mechanisms for Addressing OCSEA

Within cities and towns, child protection units in police stations were indicated as the focal units for receiving cases of OCSEA. In rural settings, however, it was noted that OCSEA related complaints can be made through various structures such as the community care coalitions, the children and women affairs rural offices, through teachers and also one-stop centres. There are also six hotlines in six different regions.<sup>14</sup>

It was explained that hotlines register cases of sexual exploitation under general abuse and may not have a specific category for online abuse. A respondent explained this as follows:

*“If OCSEA is reported to the hotline, it is reported in the name of abuse in general. We do not register it separately as online sexual exploitation”* (RA1-ET-01-A, Director, Child Rights Advocacy, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth).

The respondent from the Cyber-crime unit indicated that no OCSEA cases have been referred to them as yet, except cases of sextortion of women which sometimes involve girls under 18. None of the nine respondents were aware of OCSEA cases reported to criminal justice actors. At least six respondents attributed this lack of reporting to limited awareness of OCSEA by the public while one respondent noted the possibility that OCSEA cases are not emerging due to limited Internet connectivity. Two respondents working in the justice system pointed out that the only cases that they have come across in the justice system are about exposure of children to sexualised content (not purposely used as a grooming strategy). One respondent confirmed knowing cases of sexting. Comments from respondents included the following: -

*“I have been a prosecutor at the ground level and such cases are not as such reported. I don’t know if it’s because of lack of access to the Internet or because the public doesn’t know that some of the things are an offence or are crimes. They don’t report. Sometimes we see a case of exposure of children to sexualised material, as well as sexting but not cases of online grooming, live streaming, or child sexual abuse materials”* (RA1-ET-05-A, Representative, Federal Attorney General’s Office);

*“I am working in the court system. Cases that come concerning children are not as such related to the aspect of online child sexual exploitation (...) There is no tangible practical case of OCSEA that I can tell you”* (RA1-ET-06-A, Head, Child Justice Project Office, Federal Supreme Court);

*“Frankly speaking, I have never come across a case of OCSEA being investigated, but there is also the question of the capacity of all agencies mentioned [General Attorney office, Police and judges] in terms of investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating OCSEA”* (RA1-ET-13-A, Representative, UNODC Programme Office in Ethiopia);

*“People do not report OCSEA cases. They are not aware. This is very challenging”* (RA1-ET-12-A, Deputy Inspector and Head of Cyber Crime Investigation Division, Cyber Crime Unit).

<sup>14</sup> The hotlines are in the following locations— Addis Ababa city, Oromia region, Gambela region, Benishangul-Gumuz region, Harari region and Somali region. The hotlines do not cover the whole of Ethiopia as there are 12 geographical regions and the hotlines only cover Addis city and five regions. The hotlines are government supported and are based within the regional police offices. Though as part of the Governments Growth Plan II, the Ethiopian government planned the creation of three digit telephone lines at federal level, these were not mentioned by any respondent as having been set up.

UNICEF indicated that in an ongoing assessment on the ‘Capacity of Child Protection Systems in Ethiopia’, preliminary findings indicate that generally, for incidents of violence against children, there are low levels of disclosure and reporting to law enforcement agencies. Regarding contributing factors, the UNICEF representative indicated: *“disclosure and reporting is very very low. The study shows that sometimes there is no action so people don’t want to report. Sometimes if people report, they don’t get services. Sometimes it’s family honour so they don’t want to disclose these issues. So there is an issue of reporting”* (RA1-ET-02-A, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Ethiopia).

The lack of disclosure mentioned by UNICEF aligns with a qualitative study on violence affecting children and youth undertaken in 2019, which found that in Ethiopia, most cases of violence are unreported or dealt with through family, friends, community support, informal mechanisms or religious institutions. The study showed that in particular, vulnerable children and young people are unlikely to report cases of rape or sexual assault.<sup>15</sup>

One respondent also indicated the lack of open communication between children and their families on sexual abuse as a possible barrier to reporting of OCSEA:

*“The barrier to knowing about OCSEA is that communication on sexual exploitation and abuse is not open and sexual abuse is held to be a secret. There is no open communication between children and their families”* (RA1-ET-03- A, Director, Directorate of Women, Children, and Youth, Ministry of Innovation and Technology).

Regarding the collaboration of justice actors on OCSEA, one respondent indicated the collaboration on violence against children in general was good because the different criminal justice sectors (police, prosecutor and the judiciary) have designated units within them that deal with cases of children. These she explained, are the structures that collaborate closely on children’s matters:

*“There is strong coordination among the justice actors. Each sector has its designated structure to deal with cases of children - police have child protection units at the national and lower levels, the prosecutor has special prosecution unit focusing on children and women, these two units work closely together. The courts have child-friendly benches so they all work together well”* (RA1-ET-05-A, Representative, Federal Attorney General’s Office).

Notwithstanding this, it was indicated by the representative from the Attorney General’s office that OCSEA is not on the strategy and action plan of the coordination mechanism which brings together relevant actors to discuss matters of child justice (RA1-ET-05-A). In line with this, a respondent from the cybercrime unit indicated that there is a gap in the coordination of OCSEA as there is no forum which brings together all the justice actors and other government ministries to plan and set in place mechanisms for responding and investigating OCSEA. He indicated that though the police have forums that bring together the different police units, these discuss crimes in general, so he recommended:

*“That that all the concerned bodies like the police, government, and non-government agencies should work in collaboration and there should be a forum for OCSEA”* (RA1-ET-12-A, Deputy Inspector and Head of Cyber Crime Investigation Division, Cyber Crime Unit ).

To improve coordination on OCSEA cases, there is a need to include OCSEA in the agenda of the existing National Coordination Body and to expand participation to include the relevant agencies on OCSEA including the Cyber Crime Unit and the Information Network Security Agency.

<sup>15</sup> Young Lives. (2019). [Understanding violence affecting children and youth in Ethiopia: a qualitative study.](#)

Concerning cooperation with international actors, the Cyber Crime unit respondent confirmed that international cooperation so far is limited to the cooperation they have with INTERPOL. There has not been any collaboration with other international law enforcement agencies.

On issues of takedown of child sexual abuse materials, the Cyber Crime Unit respondent indicated that this is the responsibility of the Information Network Security Agency. However, during the three months of data collection and multiple attempts to schedule a meeting, the Information Network Security Agency was not available for an interview with the Disrupting Harm team. As a result, there are no more details on the takedown procedure and how the Information Network Security Agency collaborates with Ethio Telecom.

### Challenges and limitations

All respondents were in consensus that there is limited awareness and technical capacity of law enforcement actors to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate OCSEA cases. One respondent pointed out that generally, the capacity of the police to investigate sexual abuse and exploitation is low (RA1-ET-06-A). Several respondents (at least four) indicated that training for justice actors focus on offline child sexual abuse and exploitation and do not incorporate OCSEA:

*“I have been working in this federal court for more than 10 years, but there is no training provided for judges on OCSEA or even for police officers. I have been a coordinator for this child justice project, and we are trying to give general training and not specialised training with the Internet aspect. What is happening on the ground is that we don’t have police officers that are trained in the investigation of sexual violence”* (RA1-ET-06-A, Head, Child Justice Project Office, Federal Supreme Court).

Despite the above, there are indications that stakeholders are beginning to recognise the importance of training justice actors on OCSEA. The respondent from the child justice project under the Federal Supreme Court shared that before the COVID-19 pandemic, the child justice project was organising a training for justice actors which had incorporated a session on OCSEA.<sup>16</sup>

A representative from the Cybercrime unit mentioned that coupled with the lack of technical expertise on OCSEA, the cyber-crime unit currently lacks the required equipment (software and hardware) to effectively investigate OCSEA cases. He noted that the current software at the unit is outdated and needs to be updated: *“My unit does the investigation related to phones, computers, as well as social media platforms e.g. Facebook. The challenge is however equipment - software and hardware and training. These software’s are outdated. Its lifetime is three years or two years. We need to update so this is very challenging”* (RA1-ET-12-A, Deputy Inspector and Head of Cyber Crime Investigation Division, Cyber Crime Unit).

A representative from the UNODC pointed out that UNODC is focusing on building specialised capacity on OCSEA within the Federal Police Commission. Towards this goal, the UNODC facilitated an exposure visit of high-level police officers to the ‘Anti Human Trafficking and Child Protection Unit’ in Nairobi, Kenya,<sup>17</sup> which included around five officers. Additionally, the UNODC has so far also equipped<sup>18</sup> approximately 19 investigators from the Cyber

<sup>16</sup> This training was going to be conducted with the support of an organisation known as ‘Hope for Justice’ but was postponed due to COVID-19. The plans to undertake it are still on once the pandemic is under control in Ethiopia.

<sup>17</sup> This is the specialised unit that investigates OCSEA in Kenya.

<sup>18</sup> The training of the 19 officers was done, not through workshops but by having an expert from UNODC sit with a few officers at a time to take them through the intricacies of investigating OCSEA and obtain evidence following accepted legal standards.

Crime Unit on investigating OCSEA. The goal of UNODC is to support the Ethiopian government in setting up a specialised unit with dedicated and skilled investigators that can investigate OCSEA matters. The UNODC representative also indicated that the organisation will support this unit with all the equipment needed to make it operational and that discussions on this have been initiated with policy makers within the Federal Police Commission:

*“There’s is a cyber-crime unit in Ethiopia but in that unit, we want to establish an online child sexual exploitation crime investigation centre. We want to have what we have in Nairobi in Ethiopia. We are looking to have all the systems and are working with the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. We want to facilitate information that we get through INTERPOL and the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children and to use this information to make sure perpetrators are apprehended. Most equipment is already bought and only waiting to be installed”* (RA1-ET-13-A Representative, UNODC Programme Office in Ethiopia).

## Successes

There are no successes to note related to OCSEA specifically as Ethiopia has only just started discussing this issue.

## Challenges

The interviews identified a number of key challenges in addressing OCSEA in Ethiopia. There is limited awareness of OCSEA among the children, caregivers, communities, frontline workers, justice actors, and policymakers. There are currently no major media campaigns targeting the different sectors in society and no capacity building programmes for frontline workers, justice actors, and policymakers. Limited awareness of OCSEA may be a factor in the non-disclosure of OCSEA cases.

Lack of reporting by the public is also a challenge as no cases are coming forward from communities. Due to the lack of reporting to relevant law enforcement agencies, OCSEA has remained obscure and invisible compared to other forms of violence against children. It has not received due attention in policy discussions and coordination forums on violence against children.

A lack of awareness among the public and justice actors also lead to a gap in implementation of OCSEA related laws, as key stakeholders are unaware of what actions constitute a crime in the online space. Further, law enforcement agencies lack the technical skills as well as equipment to be able to support investigations of OCSEA.

Stakeholders also highlighted the lack of data on the trends and extent of OCSEA in Ethiopia as a challenge that is seen as an impediment to government action.