Safe Online 2021 Open Call for Proposals

Focus: Strengthening capacity, networks, and systems to make the internet safe for children
Geographical targeting: Southern and East Africa and Southeast Asia
Maximum funding proposal: Up to US$ 1 million per proposal
Project duration: Maximum 3 years
Deadline for applications: 15 November 2021 Midnight EST

The primary focus of this Call is to strengthen **country level capacity, cross-sector collaboration and international cooperation** based on existing multi-stakeholder frameworks and networks, and in alignment with national efforts to tackle other forms of violence against children to enable more effective and coordinated prevention and response to online CSEA.

Building on Disrupting Harm's emerging findings and in line with the 'whole system approach' and other initiatives such as Pathfinding Countries and Safe to Learn, the End Violence Partnership invites proposals for projects aimed at strengthening national systems to combat online CSEA through **targeted measures to achieve three key objectives**:

a) Strengthen **national infrastructure**, including law enforcement, justice and social care capacity to combat online offending against children
b) Improve **early intervention** to prevent victimisation of children, and **victim support** to assist in recover
c) Engage **families and caregivers** in preventing the sexual abuse of children, and responding to harmful or otherwise unwanted experiences online

A whole system approach

Eliminating online CSEA requires a 'whole system' approach that acknowledges and addresses interdependencies between stakeholders and response measures.[1] For example, effective public education and awareness campaigns can result in increased reporting of online CSEA to hotlines, helplines and law enforcement. This in turn requires that these services, along with the criminal justice and social work sectors, are adequately resourced, with dedicated capacity and specially trained employees. Legislation must be in place to enable criminal justice actors to investigate and prosecute offences, to gather evidence from public and private sources, and to prevent the re-victimisation of children and young people, through measures such as the management of convicted sex offenders and the removal of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) from continued circulation.

Moreover, victims of online CSEA may require immediate and ongoing psycho-social support to aid their recovery. First responders in social care must therefore be equipped with the knowledge to detect such needs, but must also be able to draw on the capacity of specialist therapeutic providers who can help children move on from their abuse to fulfilling lives. At the same time, parents and caregivers have an important role to play in preventing online CSEA. By staying informed, and by starting conversations with children in their care about how to navigate online risks, caregivers can identify issues before they escalate, and explore together ways of building resilience. Knowing when and where to seek help in a difficult situation can also improve timely responses from the authorities and support services.

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[1] For more on the capacities required to tackle online CSEA, see the WPGA Model National Response; and, V. Baines (2019) Online child sexual exploitation: towards an optimal international response, Journal of Cyber Policy.

Proposals should be informed by [Disrupting Harms national reports](#) when available, or the key emerging findings and suggested activities as follows:

Objective a: Strengthen national infrastructure, including law enforcement, criminal justice and social care capacity to tackle online offending

Strengthening national infrastructure is a necessary precursor to awareness raising and survivor support, as otherwise child survivors are met with a disappointing or harmful response from law enforcement, care providers and the justice system, which data indicates is often the case - Disrupting Harm finding

Evidence from Disrupting Harm indicates that investment is urgently needed to strengthen specialist first responder capacity, including law enforcement and social support workforces. Effective and expert law enforcement and justice systems not only serve child victims better but may also act as a deterrent to offending. Increased sensitivity to children's needs in the justice system may also lead to increased reporting and disclosure over time. There is therefore evidence that other efforts to combat online CSEA depend on first strengthening national infrastructure.

Required initiatives include but are not limited to:

- Targeted capacity building that drives the continued development of specialist police child protection units with adequate resources, online CSEA expertise, equipment and technical solutions, and psychological support.
- Measures that optimize expedient investigations and prosecutions, such as those aimed at improving cross-border evidence gathering, access to data from communications service providers, and continuous knowledge building of the judiciary concerning online CSEA.
- Effective measures for preventing CSEA offending and re-offending, such as registration, notification and monitoring regimes for convicted sex offenders and helplines for people concerned about their own or another person's behavior.
- A greater focus on child-friendly first response and criminal justice, including gender-sensitive provision of law enforcement personnel, good practice in interviewing children, and minimizing re-victimisation during criminal justice proceedings.
- Measures to improve coordination of responses among government authorities and across sectors, including industry and civil society. Children's Houses ([Barnahus](#)) or Children's Centres are an example of effective cross-sector collaboration by first responders. In these centres, law enforcement, social support workers and NGOs work side by side to support child victims in a child-friendly environment.
- Measures that reduce ongoing harm to children from online CSEA, for example the work of hotlines to remove CSAM from continued circulation.

	Prevention	**Response**
Examples	• Interventions to prevent offending - management of convicted offenders, helplines, support for potential offenders • Domestic and international industry solutions that reduce opportunities for offending	• Specialist law enforcement and judiciary, with adequate resourcing, technical capability, and continuous development • Knowledgeable social support, healthcare and education professionals, with capacity to provide or commission specialist support

Objective b: Improve early intervention to prevent victimisation of children, and victim support to assist in recovery

Prevention is critical to ensure fewer children experience online CSEA. But when children are victimized there is a need to ensure that those seeking help for abuse that involves digital technologies receive high quality and effective support. *Without access to quality services, it is not ethical to raise awareness around online CSEA with the intent to increase reporting and disclosure. Therefore, this is a necessary precursor to awareness raising* - Disrupting Harm finding

While all activities aimed at combating online CSEA have supported children as their ultimate goal, there is a pressing need for targeted early intervention and response measures that assist in victim support and recovery. Building on more general primary prevention, these more **targeted initiatives** include but are not limited to:

- Involving young people in the design of both preventative and response services, with a view to providing resources that are necessarily more effective, because they are what children and young people want, need, and can understand.
- Programs that help children understand what is unacceptable sexual behavior, in the digital environment as well as in person. This includes building resilience through education about the importance of consent, setting boundaries and saying no, how to stay safe and in control if engaging in risky behaviors and where to go for support if things go wrong.
- Programs to strengthen digital literacy for children, and comprehensive sexuality education to enable young people to protect themselves from abuse both online and in person, to be adapted for scaled delivery through incorporation into national curricula.
- Programs that empower children and young people to use their knowledge to support their peers, and to champion online safety; while recognizing that the main responsibility should not be with children to protect themselves from these crimes.
- In addition to effective first response infrastructure above, helplines and other help-seeking mechanisms that are child-friendly, adequately resourced, and staffed by specialists.
- Measures to strengthen the provision of ongoing support to survivors of CSEA, with trained personnel and effective coordination between government authorities and across sectors.

	Prevention	Response
Examples	• Resilience building through engagement and early intervention • Programmes that help children understand what is unacceptable sexual behavior, consent and how to set boundaries • Empower children to help each other and champion safety online	• First response services designed together with children (helplines), with adequate resourcing and operational capacity • Child-friendly law enforcement, criminal justice proceedings, and healthcare provision

For instance, one way in which countries can deliver a holistic approach to engage with children on online CSEA is via the Safer Internet Centre model. By bringing together online CSEA prevention and response they can ensure better coordination, greater consistency of support, and more efficient use of resources. For example, with Safe Online's financial support the International Forum of Solidarity-EMMAUS, Save the Children and UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina have been working as a consortium to develop a Safer Internet Centre, which comprises a hotline for reports of CSAM, a helpline for children and an awareness centre. The consortium has also worked with the government to establish a National Advisory Board to coordinate action on online CSEA and is conducting an assessment of existing victim support services and documentation of best practices.

Objective c: Engage **families and caregivers** in preventing the sexual abuse of children, and responding to harmful or otherwise unwanted experiences online and offline

The important role of families and caregivers in preventing and responding to online CSEA is often overlooked and underserved. Disrupting Harm has found that *parents who use the internet less also have fewer opportunities to grow their awareness of risks or engage with children to support or guide them online. Supporting caregivers, especially older caregivers, to go online and become more familiar with the platforms that children are using are useful strategies that can help with harm mitigations and with providing support to children* - Disrupting Harm finding

Targeted initiatives are required, which center on building knowledge and skills for establishing ongoing communication with children about their lives online, sex and relationships. Among intended outcomes, these would:
- Help caregivers better understand the digital environment, so that they learn more about children's online lives and are equipped to support them as they need help and guidance.
- Empower caregivers to be more confident and knowledgeable with digital technologies.
- Empower caregivers to talk to children about relationships, consent, sex and sexual risks, both online and offline.
- Empower caregivers to start and maintain conversations with children about online activities and difficult situations, particularly those that may arise from the sharing of sexual content.
- Empower caregivers to seek professional help when their child is in difficulty.

	Prevention	Response
Examples	• Empower caregivers to start conversations with children about online activities and difficult situations • Empower caregivers to talk to children about relationships, consent sex and sexual risks, online and offline • Empower caregivers to be more knowledgeable and confident with digital technology	• Caregivers know where to seek help when their child is in difficulty • Caregivers know how to support a child victim with recovering