CHILD ONLINE SAFETY

End Violence Against Children
Introduction

The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children was launched by the UN Secretary-General in 2016 with one goal: to catalyse and support action to end all forms of violence against children by 2030. The partnership has over 360 partners from every continent, all of whom bring diverse perspectives, expertise, networks and ideas to the global effort to protect children and adolescents.

Members of the End Violence Partnership include civil society organisations, governments, foundations, corporations, academic institutions, faith communities and UN agencies. Two simple beliefs unite us all:

**every child deserves to grow up without violence, and only by working together will we achieve that.**

The End Violence Fund is a vehicle for change on the ground. Recognising the growing threat of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), and with funding from the UK Home Office, in 2016, End Violence began supporting strategies to keep children safe online. In three years, we have invested $32 million in 37 initiatives, expanding our reach to over 30 countries and attracting new donors in the process.

We invest in innovative solutions that can be scaled; generate new knowledge and share learning; bring online child sexual exploitation and abuse to the forefront of high-level conversations; convene and connect organisations across sectors to strengthen their individual and collaborative efforts; and work with governments and the public to raise awareness of child online safety.

The reach of the End Violence partnership is growing. Together, we will create a world where every child grows up free from violence – both on and offline.

Today, the online window of the Fund is made possible by the continued support of the UK Home Office, along with Human Dignity Foundation and the Oak Foundation.
Today’s children are more interconnected than ever before. With over four billion Internet users across the world, the limits of children’s experiences are no longer bound by their bedroom doors, their classroom walls, or the borders of their nation. Unfortunately, the same can be said for the rest of the world – including those seeking to harm children. Though the Internet is a web of knowledge, opportunities and connectivity, it was not designed with children’s safety in mind. One in every three Internet users is a child, giving adults unprecedented and uncontrolled access to children across the globe.

As the Internet’s reach grows, every day, the number of children at risk of online sexual exploitation and abuse multiplies.

**Online child sexual exploitation and abuse**

Children’s experiences occur in two worlds – the physical and the digital – but more often than not, those worlds blend into one. The same goes with online violence, as abuse does not begin or end online. Rather, the Internet is often used as a pathway to commit physical, sexual and emotional violence. Abusers can contact children anytime, anywhere, making it very difficult for their victims to escape abuse and exploitation.

Even worse, the Internet allows abusive material – including photos and videos – to live in the digital world forever. As a result, these materials can follow children for the rest of their lives. No matter how much they try to rebuild and recover, these children know that somewhere in the world, someone is watching them at their most vulnerable. These images and videos can fall into anyone’s hands, leaving children exposed to not just their surrounding communities, but their future friends, families, teachers, and colleagues.

Knowing that an image of your suffering is being shared or sold online is hard enough. But for survivors, fearing that they could be identified – or even recognized – as an adult is terrifying.

- an analyst from Internet Watch Foundation, a grantee of the End Violence Fund
Online child sexual exploitation and abuse comes in many forms. An adult may take photos or videos of sexual acts involving children, using them for self-pleasure, financial gain, or dissemination on online platforms. These materials can also be used to blackmail children, perpetuating a cycle of more sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2017, the Canadian platform Project Arachnid found 5.1 million web pages around the world that were hosting child sexual abuse materials. The group now identifies 100,000 unique images every month.

In addition, child abuse is regularly live-streamed, creating exploitative, harmful conditions on either side of the screen. While a perpetrator rapes, assaults or debases a child, another is encouraging that abuse by watching it in real-time. Perpetrators can now pay for a child’s abuse to be livestreamed to them, and for that child to be raped and abused according to their preferences. Child abuse has become a feature of perpetrators’ on-demand entertainment, and both individuals, no matter their physical location, should be held responsible. This form of abuse mostly affects children living in poverty – and in most cases, an adult well-known to the child is the one facilitating that abuse in exchange for money.

Malicious or unintentional sharing of a child’s sexual images can also take place between peers, especially if they are leaked to an unintended audience. These types of activities are usually referred to as sexting, sextortion, sexual harassment or revenge porn.

Victims of online child sexual exploitation and abuse fall into all age groups – but they are increasingly getting younger. Research from ECPAT and INTERPOL in 2018 indicated that most children featured in online child sexual abuse materials are those who have not yet undergone puberty. The report also found that younger children were more likely to suffer severe abuse, including torture, violent rape or sadism. This includes infants who are only days, weeks or a few months old.

The demand for these materials is increasing: the WePROTECT Global Alliance found that one Internet forum dedicated to the abuse of infants and toddlers had over 18,000 registered members. A similar forum was found to receive more than 23 million visitors, and the United States Department of Justice reports that an aggregate 1.9 million users are registered across nine sites, all dedicated to this type of very young child sexual abuse material.
Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is perhaps the worst manifestation of what can happen when children enter the digital world unprotected. Though online child sexual exploitation is a relatively new phenomenon, traditional forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse are not—and their impacts are well-documented. Children who experience sexual abuse are more likely to be socially isolated, suffer from mental health problems, and attempt and commit suicide. They are also more likely to develop alcohol or drug dependencies. These outcomes impact every aspect of a child’s life, including their ability to develop into productive adults.

Violence affects the chemistry of a child’s brain: faced with violence, children often enter survival mode. Once they do, hormones associated with a fight-or-flight response are triggered inside children’s brains. These hormones can fracture the development of neural connections in the brain, inhibiting physical growth and decreasing children’s ability to learn. Those who experience violence in childhood are more likely to be re-victimised later in life—and they are also more likely to perpetuate a cycle of violence onto the next generation.5

The impacts of online child sexual exploitation and abuse also extend into the economic sphere. There is a wealth of research on the direct and indirect costs on child violence, including expenditure by health care systems that treat children for short- and long-term injuries; the costs associated with treating psychological and behavioural problems that arise from violence in childhood; the upkeep of social welfare systems involved with monitoring, preventing and responding to cases of violence against children; and the costs associated with finding, persecuting and jailing perpetrators of child violence through the criminal justice system.

Along with the more immediate impact, violence in childhood can result in a lifetime of missed opportunity, as research shows that adults exposed to violence in childhood have lower levels of education, employment and earning potential. In 2014, the Copenhagen Consensus found that the global cost of violence against children reached at least $3.7 trillion a year—4.3 per cent of the world’s GDP.6

How does it affect children?

We must act now

With 175,000 children going online for the first time every day, today’s children are more interconnected than ever before. As progress is made towards 100 per cent Internet connectivity worldwide, children’s safety and protection online are becoming ever more critical.

The number of reported photos and images received by the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children has grown nearly tenfold in three years, from 11 million in 2014 to 10.2 million in 2017. This number accounts for just the open web, which is publicly accessible to all. The same number almost doubled the following year, with 18.4 million reports received by the end of 2018. Meanwhile, law enforcement agencies across the world are struggling to keep
up with the volume of content, activity and digital innovation, and legislation is not keeping pace with innovations in technology and its misuse.

The expansion of the Dark Web, which is only accessible through specialised software, is another facilitator of online child sexual exploitation and abuse. From 2013 to 2018, the number of Dark Web users increased from one to four million. Users of the Dark Web can remain anonymous and, for the most part, untraceable. Because of this, many of the worst forms of child abuse happen through the Dark Web. More than 80 per cent of Internet traffic on the Dark Web is generated by visits to websites that offer child-abuse material, according to a study of “hidden service” websites conducted by the University of Portsmouth.7

The dangers that exist for children online are real and significant. But solutions are emerging. Across the world, organisations and governments are acting to end online child sexual exploitation and abuse – but we need to come together with proven solutions, coordinated commitment, and increased investment to address online violence before it spirals even further out of control.

Action by the End Violence Partnership

Investing in programmes that work

Since its inception in 2016, the End Violence Fund has invested $32 million in 37 projects focused on preventing and eliminating online child sexual exploitation and abuse (see map on page 8). The first three rounds of the Fund’s investments were used to build the foundations of an integrated response. Throughout this period, End Violence has worked with key partners in this field to expand the network of actors tackling violence against children, including the WePROTECT Global Alliance, the ITU Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, Child Dignity Alliance, Interfaith Alliance and others.

Over the last three years, we have invested in our partners working with governments, civil society organisations and international organisations to:

- **Rescue victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse.** The International Justice Mission has worked with local authorities in the Philippines to strengthen the law enforcement and judicial response to the live-streaming of child abuse. As a result, the organisation has rescued 123 children from online sexual exploitation.

- **Create reporting hotlines and helplines for children and adults to report child sexual abuse material and access support anytime, anywhere.** World Vision Vietnam trained operators and counsellors in the Da Nang Centre for Social Work to better protect children’s safety online. World Vision Vietnam strengthened the centre’s child helpline and increased social workers’ ability to handle cases of online sexual exploitation and abuse. After just five months of operation, the helpline responded to 1,014 calls.
● **Educate children, families and communities about the risks and strategies for staying safe on the Internet.** ChildFund Australia trained over 8,700 Vietnamese adolescents on online safety. After these trainings, 91 per cent of attendees demonstrated increased knowledge and skills.

● **Partner with the information, communications and technology sector to strengthen online safety nets for children.** UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific has engaged industry partners to block and remove online child sexual exploitation and abuse content. At the same time, the agency is increasing accountability among these actors to take a stand for children.

● **Boost law enforcement's ability to handle – and prosecute – cases of online violence, keeping children safe from re-victimisation in the process.** Thorn has trained over 1,000 law enforcement officers to use technology to handle cases of exploitation on the Dark Web. As a result, the group played a key role in rescuing 847 children and arresting 447 offenders.

● **Establish and support national Child Protection Units working to identify and handle cases of online child sexual exploitation and abuse.** UNICEF Kenya has supported the establishment of the Anti-Human Trafficking and Child Protection Unit, which is now being expanded from Nairobi to Mombasa. Kenya is now linked to INTERPOL's International Child Sexual Exploitation Database and can receive and process reports from the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children.

● **Push legislative reforms at the national and international levels to keep children safe online.** In Rwanda, the University of East London partnered with 5Rights Foundation and the University of Rwanda to support Rwanda's government in its development of a Child Online Protection Policy and implementation plan. The Government approved the policy in June 2019 and established a cross-sectoral coordinating body to oversee and guide the implementation.

● **Generate knowledge, data and evidence.** To respond to the limited evidence-base on this issue, the End Violence Fund is supporting a groundbreaking multi-country study called Disrupting Harm, which aims to better inform national prevention and response strategies. This study is working to collect evidence on the scale, nature and context of online child sexual exploitation and abuse in 14 countries in Southeast Asia and Africa.

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**The future of the End Violence Fund**

In September 2019, the End Violence Fund launched a $13 million open call for solutions focused on leveraging new and existing technologies. These technologies include artificial intelligence, machine learning, data science, blockchain, virtual reality and other innovative solutions that have the potential to enhance detection and response to online violence, or those that can prevent known and emerging threats of online child sexual exploitation and abuse. In addition, the Fund has reserved $3 million for invitation-only strategic opportunities.
Sharing solutions and facilitating collaboration

The Fund feeds into our ecosystem as a partnership, providing a source of solutions from which we learn, adapt and replicate. Such solutions – along with the related challenges and opportunities – are shared both within the End Violence partnership and beyond, supporting the overall movement to end all forms of violence against children.

We are increasing our community’s understanding of online child sexual exploitation and abuse by spreading information about technologies, opportunities, and threats related to the fight for children’s safety online. At the same time, we are helping our partners integrate this area of work into existing child protection frameworks.

End Violence is also raising the profile of child online safety and the urgency to address the problem. To do so, we are identifying linkages with and between new partners and areas of work and targeting key audiences with easy-to-understand, evidence-based messaging. We are also engaging with major players in the technology field, ensuring that in their business decisions, children are considered first – not as an afterthought.

Amplifying the issue and reaching new audiences

End Violence is increasingly contributing to global policy discussions on child online safety with governments, the technology industry, regulators, security agencies and others, on issues including:

- **Connectivity and safety:** We bring a unique perspective from the field and make broader links with violence against children in multiple forums, including through membership of the Internet Policy and Governance (ITU) and the UNESCO Broadband Commission’s working group on child online safety.

- **Privacy, security and protection:** As the discussions around regulations, responsibility and the need for privacy are evolving, End Violence is championing children’s rights as paramount in business decisions that will impact on the ability to protect children from online harm.

- **Frontier tech and human rights:** We are a member of a newly convened, diverse group of stakeholders working on developing global guidance on artificial intelligence and children’s rights. As part of this engagement, we are looking into the principles, policies and mechanisms within new and frontier technology, and ensuring they do not exacerbate harmful norms, inequalities and outcomes that drive violence against children.
Advocacy highlight: influencing change through the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development

The Broadband Commission works to expand broadband access to accelerate progress against the Sustainable Development Goals. By 2025, the Commission plans to see the Internet reach 75 per cent of the world’s population, along with related increases in digital proficiency, financial services, and more. To ensure children’s safety is part of these plans, the Commission created a child online safety working group, to which End Violence was invited to provide technical expertise. As a result of this work, on 1 October 2019, the Broadband Commission launched a report on child safety online, along with the Child Online Safety Universal Declaration. The latter encourages private, public and non-governmental entities to demonstrate their commitment to online safety by committing to five child-focused guidelines.

The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, with its demonstrated convening capacity, neutrality, and global reach, could play a role in creating a platform for all stakeholders to engage and take action to make children safe online and situate this within the broader agenda focused on ending all forms of violence.

- Broadband Commission Report, October 2019

Take action

No matter your affiliation, we all have an essential role to play to ensure child online safety. Here are some important things you can do to protect children today:

Integrate digital skills education into both life skills and education programming

Around the world, civil society organisations and non-governmental groups are implementing education programmes for children of all ages. We urge practitioners and Ministries of Education to integrate digital skills into those programmes, teaching them not only to navigate the Internet but to protect themselves from digital risks.

Push for child online safety strategies, wherever and however possible

We call upon corporations, individuals and private companies – specifically those within the technology sector – to integrate child safety strategies into every digital innovation. To start, governments and companies can sign up to the WePROTECT Statement of Action, which will help them adapt WePROTECT’s Model National Response. This model helps coordinate responses between national entities and systems to better protect children online.
Raise awareness to online child sexual exploitation and abuse with your friends, classmates, colleagues, customers, congregations and networks. This is particularly important for those in the technology industry, as they can integrate awareness-raising materials into their products and deter abusers in the process. We also urge individuals to use the power of the Internet to crush the violence inside of it: use social media to share our message and your own.

**Invest in the End Violence Fund**

We are committed to continuing to support strong, evidence-based initiatives that make change – but we need the contributions of generous partners to do so. If you would like to invest alongside others in evidence-based solutions that target children on the ground, please consider supporting the End Violence Fund, an efficient and proven pooled-fund mechanism.

**Join the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children**

The partnership is a platform for collaboration, learning, amplification and facilitation – and we are always looking for more countries, organisations, corporations and agencies to join our cause. Please visit end-violence.org/membership-application to apply to become a member. For daily and monthly updates, follow us on social media and subscribe to our newsletter.

**Become a pathfinding country**

If you are a representative of a national government, you can also get involved by becoming one of our pathfinding countries, which aim to raise awareness, stimulate leadership commitment, and galvanise action to end violence against children. Learn more about pathfinding by visiting endviolence-org/pathfinding-countries.

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Footnotes:
7. “Study claims for than 80% of ‘dark net’ traffic is to child abuse sites.” The Guardian, 31 December 2014.
Together, we can and must end online child sexual exploitation and abuse

Universal Internet access is predicted by, at the very latest, 2050. That expansion will bring about unprecedented opportunities and incredible connections, leading to the development of communities across the globe. However, to truly harness the benefits of the Internet, we need to protect its most vulnerable users – children.

Together, we can and must ensure universal connection and universal protection go hand-in-hand. Let’s make every child safe online, wherever they may live.

Please join us.