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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2022 to
implement the outcomes of the WSIS**

Submission by

ECPAT International

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 26th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

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Submission by ECPAT International on efforts in 2022 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS

Part One: Executive summary

ECPAT International is the largest civil society network in the world dedicated to ending the sexual exploitation of children. With over 120 members in 104 countries across, our members work to prevent and respond to the diverse manifestations and evolving dynamics of child sexual exploitation. This includes trafficking for sexual exploitation, sexual exploitation of children in prostitution, in the context of travel and tourism, and sexual exploitation occurring in and through digital environments.

Indeed, several decades after the Internet was created, the world is seeing the transformational effect of digital technologies on individuals, communities, and societies. This transformation in the context of development can be powerful. However, we are also seeing with increasing clarity how these technologies are being misused to perpetrate and promote violence, hate, misinformation and fear. More specifically, digital technologies are changing the nature, dynamics and scale of child sexual exploitation both online and offline.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its SDGs present unprecedented opportunities to make progress towards ending of SEC, including specific SDG target 5.2, 8.7, and 16.2. Our work engages with WSIS action line C5 (Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs), C10 and C11. ECPAT International has been working towards these goals as follows.

First, we have conducted research into the role of technology in the sexual exploitation of children. Through several key projects between 2017 and 2022 – [Disrupting Harm](#), [Global Boys Initiative](#), [Survivors' Perspectives](#), and [Project Beacon](#) – we are building a solid evidence base from which to advocate for legal and policy change.

Second, we launched the [global progress indicators](#) to set a baseline for measuring progress over time.

Third, we cooperated closely with the ASEAN and UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office to support the [ASEAN Declaration](#) and [Regional Plan of Action for the Protection of Children from All Forms of Online Exploitation and Abuse in ASEAN](#).

Fourth, we continue to play a key role in the global ecosystem tackling the [Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism](#).

Finally, ECPAT is an active member of leading international initiatives such as the WeProtect Global Alliance, where it chairs the civil society reference group. At regional level in Asia Pacific, Latin America, Europe and Africa, we work closely with our members to further our shared goals.

For ICTs to work for the good of society, they must be safe, secure and accountable, especially for children. ECPAT will continue to strive for a world where children can enjoy the benefits of the digital world free from harm.



Part Two: Analytical overview

Over the past few years, rapid evolutions in the digital world have outpaced law and policy and continued to bypass crucial societal conversations about the role of technology in our and our children's lives. Yet we know that boys and girls across the world are experiencing sexual exploitation and abuse in digital environments. For example, research through the Disrupting Harm Project revealed that between 1 and 20% of children surveyed in 13 countries had experienced at least one form of clear online sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year¹.

To address this, governments around the world, including but not limited to the UK, Australia, and the EU are starting to act. They are implementing laws and regulatory frameworks that place obligations on digital service providers to ensure the safety and privacy of their users, in particular children.

There is increased focus on the prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation, including through offender and perpetrator-targeted interventions. However, research indicates significant gaps in services for at risk children and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse, with a particular lack of services adapted to the needs of boys, children with disabilities, children identifying as LGBTQI+ and children from other minority groups.

More attention is being paid to consulting children about all aspects of their lives, including their activities in and through digital environments. We see similarities and differences from children in different countries, and we are starting to realize the rights of children online, now enshrined in law by the General Comment 25 to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

At the same time, there has been a marked increase in the number of organisations focusing on the significant societal impact of digital technologies. While attention to the issue is crucial, a persistent lack of adequate investment in all areas of the response to violence against children makes it more important than ever to deconflict activities and programmes and ensure impact. Open collaboration is the key to progress towards ending the sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

Part Three: Description

In the context of the WSIS, ECPAT would like to focus in this submission on three areas of work: [Disrupting Harm](#), [Global Boys Initiative](#), and [Project Beacon](#).

These initiatives engage in particular with **WSIS action lines 27, 28 and 29**. They are examples of innovative policies, programmes and projects that enhancing our understanding of and action in several key areas. As we continue to advocate on the basis of data we are collecting and consultations we are facilitating, these initiatives also point to future actions and ongoing initiatives to end the sexual exploitation of children.

Disrupting Harm in Africa and Asia

In a unique collaboration ECPAT International, INTERPOL and UNICEF Office of Research Innocenti combined forces to assess the context, threat and collect children's perspectives of

¹ https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/DH-data-insight-1_Final%281%29.pdf



online child sexual exploitation and abuse in 13 countries in Southeast Asia and Eastern and Southern Africa. The countries included in the project are Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

This ground-breaking project was made possible with funding from the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children (GPEVAC) through its Safe Online initiative. Not only does the combined expertise of the partners makes this project unique, but Disrupting Harm also creates the possibility to compare across the 13 countries. Furthermore, qualitative data collection with frontline service providers, children, and victims and survivors provides crucial insight into the problem and the readiness of systems and society to respond. National Findings and key insights briefings are accessible via the [GPEVAC website](#).

Phase 2 of Disrupting Harm begins at the end of 2022 and will focus on countries in MENA and Latin America.

Project Beacon in the European Union

Since 2021, ECPAT International through Project Beacon has been working with its members across the EU to advocate for children’s rights to be at the heart of digital laws and policies in the EU. On 11 May 2022, the European Commission published a proposal for a regulation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse online. The regulation aims to clarify and standardise the process that technology companies must take to detect, remove, and report online child sexual abuse material and online solicitation of children. The proposal sits within a wide-ranging legal and policy landscape in the EU, and is an outcome of the EU’s commitment to protecting children from sexual abuse, ensuring their rights, and empowering them in their digital lives.

ECPAT stands for the rights of children to be protected from sexual violence, regardless of context. To that end, with our EU members we are actively engaging different stakeholder groups at EU and member state level. In addition, we believe that the voice of the EU public needs to be heard. In September 2021, ECPAT International and Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands polled eight countries across the European Union to gauge public opinion on online child protection and privacy.

We surveyed 9,410 adults—a cross section of EU society—from France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and Spain. We asked them various questions to assess what they thought of a legal obligation to use detection technology, how it would affect their online privacy, and what they would like to see as it pertains to protecting children online. The results clearly demonstrated that there was widespread public support for the use of automated tools to identify child sexual abuse material online and for the European Union to introduce longer-term legislation that will keep children safe online. [Read the summary of the findings here.](#)



Global Boys Initiative

Our [Global Boys Initiative](#) emerged in response to several key initiatives that the programmatic responses to identify and meet the particular trajectories of boys as victims of sexual exploitation are scarce. First the 2016 Global Survivors Forum organised by ECPAT International, at which male survivor-advocates of sexual exploitation explained that services for boys were extremely rare, and even where services may include boys in their work, there is limited focus on addressing the specific characteristics, experiences and supports required by boys. Second, a joint [research project](#) with INTERPOL, launched in 2018, highlighted the victimisation of boys in child sexual abuse material.

As the programmatic responses to identify and meet the particular needs of boys are scarce, ECPAT International launched the Global Boys Initiative to explore the sexual exploitation of boys, which activates our global network of member organisations in a range of research and response activities. To meet the initial challenge of limited information, the Global Boys Initiative embarked on a series of research projects globally and in 10 countries around the world, to shed light on understanding the scale and scope of sexual exploitation that takes place involving boys, how they came into these vulnerable situations, and what their needs are in terms of prevention, protection, and services.

The findings of the Global Literature Review and the country reports are very much aligned, showing us that the vulnerability and risk factors, the barriers to access and the ideas of masculinity behind the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys are a global issue that require global solutions.

ECPAT International further engaged in a series of meetings and conversations with its members, other civil society organisations, academia and partners to further understand the existing gaps in the provision of services to boys at risk and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse. On this basis, a mapping of existing practices and experiences in working with boys was launched and a community of practice activated. In this framework, some of these organisations and partners have been engaged by ECPAT International in a learning exercise to document practice to understand what works and what does not work in engaging and working directly with boys or on issues affecting them. This approach allowed the Global Boys Initiative to 1) feed the global knowledge on the issue and to collect experiences with a bottom-up approach, 2) take into account the specificities related to different context, and 3) strengthen the understanding of the issue from a practical and hands-on point of view.

The Global Boys Initiative thus aims at coordinating efforts to fill the lack of guidance and principles and answer to the question of how to implement quality prevention and response services for the protection of boys against sexual exploitation and abuse.

ECPAT International welcomes the opportunity to submit this contribution to the ongoing WSIS process. Together we can build a digital world that works for everyone in society and that embeds child protection and empowerment into design and implementation.