

**COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT
(CSTD)**

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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years

Submission by

ECPAT International

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the CSTD secretariat that will inform the substantive discussion at the CSTD on the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years during its 28th annual session in April 2025, in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution E/RES/2023/3, to the CSTD to conduct such substantive discussions and to report thereon, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly.

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WSIS+20 Report – ECPAT International

WSIS+20 Reporting Template

- Name of organization: **ECPAT International**
- Name of respondent: **Sendrine Constant**
- Role of respondent: **Executive Director**
- Date of response: **15 Nov. 24**

I. What is your organisation's formal role and responsibilities concerning WSIS implementation?

a. Mandates of your organization relevant to the WSIS implementation

ECPAT International's mission is to end the sexual exploitation of children wherever they are in the world, by leveraging our network of 129 members in 108 countries and the expertise in our secretariat to influence, advocate for, and secure social and legislative change. Our principal area of focus area of activity in the WSIS process has revolved around the implementation of Action Line C5: *"Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs."* As technologically-facilitated child sexual exploitation – otherwise known as Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA) – has increased dramatically in salience over the WSIS period, ECPAT International has devoted ever more resources to campaigns and projects seeking to maximise child safety online and ensure regulations keep pace with the speed of digital innovation. Given the size of ECPAT International's global footprint and our extensive network, we also focus on action lines C10 (*"Ethical dimensions of the Information Society"*) and C11 (*"International and regional cooperation"*) respectively.

b. Brief History of your organization's contribution to the World Summit on the information Society (WSIS)

As noted throughout this report, ECPAT International's overarching mission and individual projects have particular relevance to WSIS action lines C5, C10, and C11. The number of children with access to ICTs has increased dramatically in the last two decades, while the range of services, tools, and platforms exploited by those seeking to exploit children has similarly expanded. Despite the nature of this phenomenon being comparatively hidden or underreported, it is known that child sexual exploitation and abuse online is a global epidemic. Such datasets as available indicate that even open web platforms are misused tens of millions of times each year to engage in sexual exploitation of children. ECPAT International, UNICEF and INTERPOL Disrupting Harm research has shown that across 12 countries, anywhere between 1–20% of children had experienced at least one form of clear online sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year.¹ ECPAT International firmly believes that a true commitment to the protection of children demands a safe digital environment such that children can harness the advantages of ICTs while being safe from those who would seek to harm them. Consequently, ECPAT has integrated an understanding of technologically-facilitated sexual exploitation into every project, with 'online-focused' workstreams and a Head of Programme position on staff specifically dedicated to ensuring the salience of the online dimension within ECPAT activity.

c. Implementation processes and initiatives within your organization and/or in partnership with other organisations

¹ UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (2022). *Children's Experiences of Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in 12 Countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia*. Disrupting Harm Data Insight 1. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.

As part of our worldwide remit, ECPAT International is the largest network of CSOs dedicated to combating child sexual exploitation. From March 2023 to September 2024, ECPAT organised a series of **8** regional workshops in Jordan (Amman), Kenya ([Nairobi](#)), Thailand ([Bangkok](#)), Senegal ([Dakar](#)), Costa Rica (San Jose), Nepal (Kathmandu), Uzbekistan (Tashkent) and Austria (Vienna) named **Collective Action** to take stock as the use of these evidence particularly on tech-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation, in advocacy, bringing together over **551** participants including **260** CSOs from **143** countries. ECPAT is also part of **45 regional or global working groups** where we highlight specific considerations regarding the sexual exploitation of children *online and in person* in a range of contexts, from the travel and tourism industry to children in crisis in humanitarian contexts or on the move. Our Executive Director sits on the governing board of the WeProtect Global Alliance, dedicated to ending child sexual exploitation online, with an especial focus on convening civil society members of that consortium.

- Coordinating grassroots civil society advocacy and campaigns through regional and thematic engagement with ECPAT network members in every region where its 129 members are located.
- Coordination of the [Dynamic Coalition on Children’s Rights in the Digital environment](#) as a workstream of the IGF, including a [session](#) at IGF Kyoto 2023.
- Convening and mobilizing civil society from Eastern and Southern Africa to discuss the policy and programming uptake of research on online child sexual abuse and exploitation via the [Disrupting Harm](#) project.
- ECPAT International is leading an InterAgency work to revise the [Terminology guidelines](#) for the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, including a number of new terminologies related to the technology-facilitated sexual abuse and exploitation of children – to ensure harmonized and rights-based narratives.
- **The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism** is a multi-stakeholder initiative with the mission to provide awareness, tools and support to the travel and tourism industry to prevent the sexual exploitation of children. With responsibility for The Code having been transferred to ECPAT International between 2011 and 2013, the number of members has continued to expand with the addition of companies operating primarily as online-only accommodation booking or facilitation platforms.

II. What have been your organization’s main contributions to the direct implementation of the WSIS outcomes and related areas of digital development since the Summit, particularly since 2015?

- a. WSIS Action Lines (as lead, co-facilitator or supporting participant)

ECPAT International’s principal area of activity in the WSIS process has revolved around the implementation of Action Line C5 *“Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs”*. We also focus on action lines C10 (*“Ethical dimensions of the Information Society”*) and C11 (*“International and regional cooperation”*) respectively.

- b. WSIS-related projects

A sample of our individual projects from the past few years demonstrates the breadth of our collaborations with marquee child rights organisations also seeking to eliminate online child sexual exploitation and abuse:

- **Project Beacon** – a multi-year project focusing on enhancing child safety online in the European Union. As part of this, ECPAT International coordinates the [European Child](#)

[Legislation Advisory Group \(ECLAG\)](#), a collective aiming to secure passage of a long-term, child-rights-based, future-proof Child Sexual Abuse Regulation in the EU. Significant progress has been achieved in centring the voices of children and survivors to a debate that has become polarised, through multi-sectoral panels and working groups, with ECPAT members facilitating dialogue between children, technology companies, national governments, and Members of the European Parliament. Through the VOICE research initiated by ECPAT International, Eurochild and Terre des Hommes Netherlands, in **15 countries in the EU, Asia and South America**, almost 500 children and over 6,000 caregivers shared their insights and views on children's online safety. It revealed that children often rely on their instincts to navigate the digital world due to a lack of actual or perceived alternatives, increasing their vulnerability to digital harm. The April 2024 event "Speaking Up for Child Safety Online," at the Institute of Natural Sciences in Brussels, gathered 250 participants, including representatives from the European Parliament, the European Commission, children themselves, and tech industry leads. The event served as a catalyst to discuss the future of child safety online and contribute to urgent debates taking place across the EU on this topic. In a poll held by ECPAT International and NSPCC about child safety online, more than half of all 23,090 EU citizens surveyed in 15 EU countries declared that the attitude towards child safety online of MEPs will influence how they vote at a future election. This is part of our ongoing [Child Safety ON!](#) campaign.

- **Disrupting Harm** - In a unique multi-year and ongoing collaboration ECPAT International, INTERPOL and UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti have combined forces to assess the context and threat of online child sexual abuse and exploitation within south-east Asia, southern and eastern Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa. Nine additional legal and policy analyses were also completed for **Armenia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Morocco, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Tunisia** and three more drafted for **Jordan, Montenegro, and Pakistan** and will form the basis for the new research reports in these countries.
- In **Peru**, ECPAT has mobilised financial authorities, the civil society movement and the financial sector (banks, money transfer platforms, cryptocurrencies) **to adopt the first Alert in Latin America to detect suspicious transactions related to sexual exploitation and trafficking of children**. ECPAT International together with its member CHS Alternativo documented the monetisation of sexual exploitation in Peru and helped drafting the Alert. ECPAT invited the head of the Peruvian Financial Unit to New York to take part in a side meeting ECPAT organised on 12 October 2023 together with the UNSRSG on Violence Against Children to discuss child protection in travel and tourism, and obtained a commitment from Peru to feature this Alert in the next Private Public Partnership the financial authorities will launch in 2024 to ensure its implementation. ECPAT is now working with the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime and the Canadian government to propose ways to further support the piloting of the use of the Alert by law enforcement authorities in Peru, while campaigning for other countries to adopt similar approach to this type of crime in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere. Recently, the Peruvian Financial Unit has initiated a **series of training with the National Prosecutor Office** to help all actors to investigate cases base on this new mode of detection.
- The innovative approach on gender, safety and help-seeking behaviours led by ECPAT with the online gaming industry demonstrated that, although children have distinct gendered experiences of multiplayer online gaming, yet the gaming ecosystem - companies, policymakers, and civil society – are not currently well equipped to address some of these issues to create safer and more inclusive gaming environments. Based on a series of round tables organised with the gaming industry: hosted by Microsoft in New York in October 2023; by a large Korean gaming company in Seoul in February 2024 and in Brussels in June 2024 ECPAT has **demonstrated the increasing trust of the online gaming industry and paving a unique way** to engage in discussions around gender-based gaming experiences for children. The focus of ECPAT on increasing child safety while challenging harmful gender norms and ideas

of masculinity has been particularly appreciated by online gaming companies and the wider tech sector, as it responds to a gap in current safety conversations. ECPAT is also **co-chairing the industry working group together with UNICEF in South-East Asia** to further engage with online service providers on how to better prevent and respond to sexual exploitation of children facilitated by technologies in the context of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action to combat online SEC. This was presented in the IGF forum of 2024.

- c. Indicators used to measure the impact of ICT in the achievement of the SDGs in your organization's area of work
- Through our advocacy in multi-sectoral stakeholder working groups, regional workshops of civil society and policymakers, and direct meetings with government stakeholders through co-implementing partners, including the UNICEF country offices, ECPAT promoted solutions that are based on evidence and adapted to local contexts. As a result, significant legislative, policy, and regulatory reform were undertaken during 2023-24. In **Kenya**, the findings were instrumental in shaping the Nairobi County Child Protection and Welfare Policy. In **Tanzania**, the findings were integrated into educational and training materials produced by the Ministry of Health. These incorporations ensure that service providers such as health professionals are better equipped to protect children from harm. In response to the recommendations, **Malaysia** made substantial legislative changes in March 2023, amending its laws to prohibit the livestreaming of sexual acts involving children and to criminalise sexual extortion involving children. In **Indonesia**, the recommendations have led to the development of a National Roadmap on Child Online Protection through a presidential decree, and the revision of national standards and training modules for integrated services to protect women and children.
 - Through our joint projects SHE LEADS and DISRUPTING HARM, ECPAT is qualitative assessing the impact of ICT on SDG 5 and 16 related to gender equality and justice. Until December 2025, in collaboration with Terres des Hommes, PLAN International, FEMNET, and DCI, ECPAT is amplifying the voices of girls and young women globally, to lead their advocacy efforts on protection, gender and online harms. ECPAT conducted seven national consultations with 163 girls and young women (GYW) in Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Ghana, who in turn led their research on online child sexual exploitation to bring the attention of world and regional leaders to gender-based harm online. Voices of survivors are also systematically collected to assess progress and challenges in accessing justice for victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse. These are presented to the Committee on the Rights of the Child as references for the development of General Comment no. 27 on access to justice.
 - ECPAT Country Overviews systematically review adoption of adequate legislation to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation, including online and through tech-facilitated means and offer a strong monitoring tool to assess progress towards SDG.
- d. What assessment has your organization made of its engagement in WSIS-related work and digital development in its areas of responsibility?

ECPAT International contributes an annual summary of the relation between its projects and activities and the progress of outcomes pursuant to the WSIS action lines. This summary is submitted upon the call for contributions each year by the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD).

III. What does your organization see as the main achievements, problems and emerging issues arising from WSIS and from digital development in its areas of responsibility since the Summit, particularly since 2015?

a. What have been the main achievements of WSIS and digital development?

In 2015 it was noted by the ITU, lead facilitator for action line C5, that progress had been made primarily in areas of cybersecurity that are less directly relevant to the work of ECPAT International. Nevertheless, we have seen multiple areas of progress in the sphere of child protection directly pertaining to the work of ECPAT International and relevant to the substantive outcome concerned: *'Ensure special emphasis for protection and empowerment of children online. In this regard, governments and other stakeholders should work together to help all enjoy the benefits of ICTs in a safe and secure environment.'*

Perhaps the most vivid achievement directly related to the above concerns the advent of multiple new or proposed legislative regimes across Europe and North America since 2015. Measures such as the finalised UK Online Safety Act and proposed new regulations to tackle online harms across the EU, Canada, and the United States demonstrate a belated awareness of the scale of the difficulties facing children as they navigate the online world. These measures, while limited to industrialised and wealthy regions, nonetheless have a global impact given the importance of these particular markets to tech companies and the fact that primarily American-based firms are utilised by billions of users all over the world. Even where such regulations are limited, at an early stage, or otherwise subject to political debate, the increased salience of the issue likely indicates that by the time the WSIS turns 30 there will be multiple stringent legal demands on the private sector to enhance child safety online in collaboration with law enforcement and civil society.

Networks such as ECPAT (with 129 members in 108 countries), the ECPAT-coordinated European Child Legislation Advisory Group, or the WeProtect Global Alliance (on whose board the ECPAT Executive Director serves) have served to ensure the emphasis on child protection online is not reduced only to hidden battles between law enforcement and tech companies, and instead is publicised fully as a major public policy and public health issue of our time. ECPAT International's own involvement with 45 regional or global consortia is indicative of the extent to which the last ten years have seen light increasingly shone on the issue of child safety online. This directly aligns with the stated expected achievement towards *'providing an international partnership framework for increasing awareness on the risks of the children online and promoting global collaboration for their mitigation, including project implementations and delivery of technical assistance supporting cybersecurity inclusion for all vulnerable groups'*.

b. What problems, obstacles and constraints have been encountered?

We have seen an increased emphasis on common transnational sex-related crimes against children - most obviously, of co-ordinated cases of the sexual extortion of children with a strong gender aspect. The agreement in August 2024 by the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on a final text for a draft convention on cybercrime is a milestone in the fight to undermine the global rise in child sexual exploitation online to which ECPAT contributed through the Ad Hoc Committee.

Bringing actionable data and voices of survivors of online and tech-facilitated abuse to local CSOs so that they can use the evidence and knowledge to programme or advocate remains a challenge which has implications for policies and practices in local contexts. The online and tech-facilitated dimensions of child sexual exploitation cannot be ignored or treated separately anymore and need to form integral part of interventions. This requires strong engagement with governments and tech

companies to work together with CSOs and children to ensure protection of children and support their caregivers.

Putting child safety at the heart of the digital world remains a challenge with some but still insufficient progress to regulate the online world and tech companies to ensure a do no harm approach in product developments and monitoring.

In some regions, there are still significant gaps in local knowledge including with caregivers, as to how technology can be used to facilitate child sexual abuse and exploitation. ECPAT Members in MENA, particularly Morocco, spotlighted the rapid rise in abuse of children facilitated by or within the online world, a testimony vividly evidenced by the year-on-year increase in the number of reports made. In Latin America, CSOs agree on the lack of digital literacy in the region, and the obstacles this can create for effective advocacy, programming, and monitoring. Overall, the role of digital technologies in facilitating multiple forms of sexual exploitation of children, including for instance through online platforms of the tourism industry requires constant adaptation of the policies and strategies to identify risks and counteract them rapidly.

c. What new opportunities and challenges have emerged over the years since WSIS which need to be addressed?

The scale at which child sexual abuse and exploitation occurs online has grown exponentially since 2015; where progress has been made, there has often been an 'adversarial shift' by offenders seeking to leverage new technologies, platforms, or vulnerabilities to continue to exploit children as often as possible. The positive indication of more children having ready access to ICTs for assistance in education and development has a dark side: namely, the enabling of innumerable new methods for the exploitation of children by perpetrators around the world. Below we provide three clear examples of novel challenges to progress against those seeking to use ICTs to exploit children.

Since 2015, the mainstreaming of end-to-end encrypted (E2EE) technologies and messaging services has proven one of the greatest challenges for those seeking to disrupt offenders, while also featuring as perhaps the most controversial point of discussion in engagement between regulators, tech platforms, and law enforcement when seeking to collaborate on eliminating OCSEA. E2EE denies service providers the ability to scan media for known child sexual abuse material, or to review chat logs providing indication of grooming or other kinds of sexual coercion. With such technology increasingly the 'default' in popular messaging apps and some social media platforms, there is a profound risk that reports of child sexual abuse and exploitation online will plummet in the coming years not from progress on the issue, but because companies have removed the ability to detect such activity and make a referral. Placing a burden of reporting on users to report instances of CSAE very likely harms children who may not be able to determine that exploitation and abuse is actually occurring by a purported friend online.

In the last two years, the revolution in generative AI has already demonstrated a stark capacity for making real-world children more vulnerable, whether via enabling enhanced grooming efforts by perpetrators, the creation of digitally manipulated confections of real-world child images and explicit content, or the encouragement of paedophilia among users seeking to wholly invent new child sexual abuse material via artificial means. Notwithstanding the increasingly popularity of generative AI models to assist children around the world in learning, development, and education, the speed at which new models are iterated and the lack of clear global standards pose a substantial risk to continued progress in the ecosystem of children's safety online.

Recent years have also seen large-scale and often coordinated financially-motivated sexual extortion of children, wherein the exchange of 'self-produced' indecent media is used to blackmail a vulnerable

child for financial gain. This crime has been evidenced and investigated globally, with urgent notification being released by multiple NGO and law enforcement consortia to spotlight the continued threat. Multiple children have taken their own lives after such interactions with those seeking to extort them, and often in a matter of hours after the engagement begins. This trend speaks to the opportunities identified by offenders in exploiting vulnerable children sexually even as an instrumental means to monetary reward, and harnesses both the comparative anonymity of online interactions and the increased willingness of children to share indecent media of themselves with peers.

The extent of peer-to-peer sharing of indecent media or peer-to-peer abuse is currently hard to gauge, but is clearly on the rise as more and more children gain access to smartphones and fast internet connections around the globe. While posing a substantial challenge, this increased digital literacy has also offered opportunities for civil society organizations, governments, tech platforms and assorted partners to spotlight digital risks for children and run effective campaigns to instruct and advise children on how to recognise danger online.

IV. Lessons learned in the implementation of the Summit outcomes in your organisation's specific areas of responsibility.

Up to date data, rapid knowledge sharing and the development of multi-stakeholders' capacities to prevent and respond in the realm of online child sexual abuse remains a key vector needed to enhance the global response to child sexual exploitation in all its forms, and we will be building on this in the year to come.

The safe, systematic and meaningful engagement with children, including survivors, is a challenge that we all need to overcome in order to build a safe Internet WITH children.

The multi-sectoral collaboration and engagement of governments and tech companies with CSOs, communities, caregivers and children is critical throughout countries but remains limited and challenging due to a lack of uniformed understanding, and shared values and responsibilities.

V. Observations or recommendations concerning the future of WSIS and digital development, taking into account the outcomes of the Summit of the Future in September 2024.

ECPAT International recognises the alignment between our organization's core mission, its ongoing projects, and the commitments and calls made in the Digital Safety section outcomes of the Summit of the Future in September 2024. We note the overlap in our advocacy efforts within the European Union and globally with the Summit's calls for the tech sector to prioritise safety-by-design, the service of diverse audiences, and improved platform transparency. We urge WSIS to consider the likely technological developments that may occur in the years to 2030, and ensure the commitments made in the Summit outcomes are sensitive to the challenges and opportunities for child protection online that will come from innovations and advances in generative AI or virtual, extended, and augmented reality systems.

VI. Please identify publications, reports and other documents by your organisation which you consider can contribute to the work of the review.

- Disrupting Harm reports: [Disrupting Harm – Safe Online](#)
- Our collaborative EU campaign: <https://www.childsafetyineurope.com/>
- Terminology guidelines on the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: [Luxembourg Guidelines - ECPAT](#)