Tackling online violence against children

unicef ❂

for every child

What is the problem?

In the fast-changing digital world, child protection is more important than ever. Parents, caregivers, communities, and governments face new challenges in keeping children safe online. The rapid growth of digital technologies has left a gap in laws, services, and education to ensure safe and positive online experiences for children. As a result, children can be at risk of serious harm, like exploitation, trafficking, cyberbullying, and invasion of their privacy. UNICEF is actively working to address these issues and protect children from harm in the digital age.

1 For example, the US-based National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received more than 32 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation in 2022.
2 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.

Spotlight on online child sexual exploitation and abuse

Data from national hotlines and clearing houses indicate a proliferation of child sexual abuse content online.[1] UNICEF's research in low- and middle-income countries shows that **up to 20 per cent of internet-using children** in surveyed countries experienced online child sexual abuse in the last year.[2]

How do we respond?

UNICEF takes a holistic approach to address this issue. To make real and lasting change, we must strengthen all the systems that support children. This means assisting governments in developing better policies and laws and promoting responsible business practices. We also work on improving

services that directly help children and their families. Additionally, we collaborate with children, young people, families, communities, and professionals to create change at the individual and community levels, preventing and responding to online threats.

| Creating an enabling environment | Social and behavioural change |

| Improving service delivery |

Examples of UNICEF in action

Legislative reform

In many places, legislative frameworks have not kept up with the changing nature of crimes against children facilitated by technology. UNICEF is working to reform laws in many countries worldwide. For example, in Zimbabwe, UNICEF's technical support and advocacy led to the enactment of the Data Protection Act in 2021, which comprehensively criminalizes various forms of online violence against women and children. In the Philippines, the passage of new legislation to tackle online sexual abuse and exploitation was a significant achievement in 2022.

A global guide for legislative reform

Countries have asked for clear guidance on the minimum and recommended standards to protect children from online child sexual exploitation and abuse. In response, UNICEF created a global guide to enhance legislative frameworks. This guide is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, as well as other international and regional conventions. It also incorporates general comments and guidelines of treaty bodies, model laws, and good practices.

Policy and governance

UNICEF supports the development of policy frameworks and strategies to address violence against children in the digital environment, using a whole-of-government and multi-sectoral approach. In Kenya, UNICEF's assistance led to the finalization of a multi-sectoral and multi-year costed National Plan of Action to combat Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (2022-2026). Additionally, in Vietnam, the Government approved
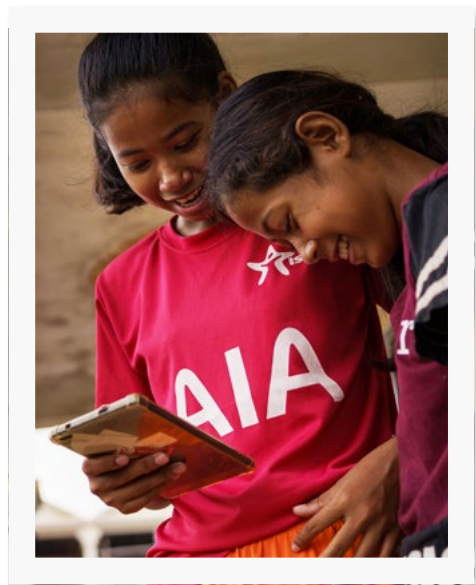
the first-ever National Programme on Child Online Protection (2021-2025), providing a blueprint for creating a safer online space for children.

Improving service delivery

UNICEF is working to enhance the capabilities of key sectors responsible for delivering services. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNICEF supported the Safer Internet Centre to better respond to and assist victims of online violence. In 2021, UNICEF's support enabled over 700 professionals to enhance their knowledge and skills in handling cybercrimes involving children, gathering digital evidence, and identifying and reporting online violence. In Tanzania, UNICEF's support and advocacy led to police receiving pre and in-service training on dealing with cases of online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Additionally, UNICEF and INTERPOL are working together under a global cooperation agreement to enhance the support provided to national law enforcement agencies in responding to this crime.

Social and behavioural change

Many countries are working to protect children in the digital space through education and prevention programs. The education sector has played a significant role in supporting these efforts. In Ecuador, with UNICEF support, the Ministry of Education is developing a protocol for safe internet use based on feedback from children.

In Ghana, around 2,000 school directors and teachers in 20 districts across 8 regions have received training on digital literacy as part of the UNICEF-supported safe schools initiative, which is being implemented in 2023.

UNICEF also harnesses social media platforms to engage children, young people and their families on issues relating to online safety. For instance, in Jordan, UNICEF and partners teamed up with social media influencers to create online safety content for children, young people and their parents, reaching almost 7 million individuals through social media and 2 million through SMS. We also use our global media channels to engage children and families on internet safety and well-being. Our cyberbullying webpage continues to be the go-to for young people to access reliable and practical

information. We also provide [tips for parents and caregivers](#) to support their children navigate the digital environment safely.

Guidance for child protection in digital education

Over the past decade, schools have increasingly adopted the use of education technologies, or EdTech, to facilitate learning and teaching within schools. Digital learning brings opportunities for children but also introduces risks that need to be managed effectively. In response to increasing requests from governments for UNICEF to provide a holistic package of support for digital education, UNICEF developed a [policy brief and accompanying technical note](#) for ministries of education on child protection in digital education.

Private sector engagement

Encouraging instances of private sector involvement are emerging. One example is from South East Asia, where UNICEF supported the inaugural 'ASEAN ICT Forum on Child Online Protection' in 2022. The forum attracted over 400 attendees and fostered a region-wide drive for the technology industry to recognize their responsibility and potential to work together towards providing a safer digital environment for children. All ASEAN member states and concerned stakeholders were urged to carry on with discussions at the national level by organizing their own spin-off events. UNICEF also ensured children's participation in the forum leading to the [Regional Call to Action from Children and Young People to the Private Sector on Child Online Protection](#).

How can you work with UNICEF?

UNICEF can execute programs on a global scale. Our extensive experience and strong relationships with policymakers instil confidence in our ability to make a positive impact. However, we cannot achieve our goals alone. Collaborative efforts and meaningful partnerships are essential to our mission of improving children's lives. We invite you to contribute to our work to keep children safe in the digital environment.

For more information

Stephen Blight
Senior Adviser – Child Protection
sblight@unicef.org

Afrooz Kaviani Johnson
Child Protection Specialist
akavianijohnson@unicef.org