



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

Introduction

This submission by [ECPAT International](#) (EI)¹ is in response to the call for input issued by the office of the Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children on her first thematic report to the Human Rights Council aimed at exploring the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the sexual exploitation of children. This submission incorporates contributions made by members of the ECPAT Network for the purpose of this call.²

1. What is the impact of COVID-19 crisis on the nature and scope of various manifestations of sale and sexual exploitation of children, including sexual exploitation and abuse of children, both online and offline; child marriage; trafficking of children; surrogacy and sale of children; illegal adoptions and child labour?

It must be noted that comprehensive and representative evidence gathered in a scientific and systematic manner is still not available and it will need to be collected post Covid-19 from the technology companies, police, hotlines and helplines sources who are at the front line either detecting and reporting or investigating cases to identify and rescue victims. From ECPAT's perspective, this means that so far, what we know, what we heard or have had access to are either anecdotal reports or incomplete qualitative and quantitative data being shared by country level police sources, local organisations as well as child helplines and hotlines. Although very useful these sources describe an incomplete and not fully accurate picture of the situation at the global level. Future research will tell us what the real impact has been.

- What are the new forms and manifestations of sale and sexual exploitation of children in the context of COVID 19 crisis?

Online child sexual exploitation

When it comes to patterns of online offending behaviours, dynamics of abuse and exploitation with a technology component and dynamics related to exposure to online risks what we have known for years, also prior to Covid-19 crisis, is the following:

- The more time children spend online, the more they are exposed to risks;
- Exposure to risks does not equal harm done to children;
- Child predators have the ability and the drive to adapt their *modus operandi* when opportunities arise and while technologies evolve;
- When offenders come to realise that an online platform is being monitored or an offenders' online community is disrupted, they typically migrate to another one (also known as 'displacement');

¹ ECPAT International is a global network of civil society organisations, working to eradicate all forms of sexual exploitation of children. Over the past 30 years, ECPAT has become the forefront international NGO network dedicated to end this severe form of violence against children, advocating for State accountability and more robust measures across sectors to enhance the protection of victims. ECPAT currently has 119 member organizations operating in 102 countries around the world.

² [Amane](#), [CIAF/ECPAT Portugal](#), [CRCA](#), [Dar Al Amal Defence for Children - ECPAT Netherlands](#), [ECPAT Belgium](#), [ECPAT Foundation](#), [ECPAT Indonesia](#), [ECPAT Philippines](#), [End CSEC Network Malaysia](#), [EQUATIONS](#), [FAPMI/ECPAT Spain](#), [Halley Movement](#), [Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation](#), [Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children \(KAARC\)](#), [LifeLine/ChildLine](#), [ONG Raices](#), [PEaCE/ECPAT Sri Lanka](#), [Sana Sezim](#), [Save the Children Finland](#), [SAWA](#), [Tacteen Naeil/ECPAT Korea](#).



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

- The online dynamics used by offenders to sexually groom children are well known and studied;
- For quite some time now, police has flagged that they were seeing an increasing proportion of self-produced sexualised pictures compared to more 'traditional' child sexual abuse material produced by third parties;
- Research has also confirmed that the majority of individuals portrayed on child sexual abuse images while sexually offending a child are from the circle of trust of this victim. Which means that most of those producing are close to the victims;
- The type of circumstances which make children more vulnerable as well as the protective factors are also well understood and known across sectors.

All of those considerations together seem to be indicating that what the crisis has done predominantly exacerbate what pre-existed Covid-19 when it comes to online manifestations of sexual exploitation and abuse. In other words, it seems to have exacerbated the known push factors that make children more vulnerable. Future research will confirm whether this is true or not.

In terms of anecdotal evidence on the subject, some ECPAT members in different countries have identified an increase in children's vulnerability to harm in the online environment.

From March to June, ECPAT Philippines has seen an increase of reports of child sexual abuse materials from an average of 1-2 per month to nearly 40. Cases reported to ECPAT Philippines, which have been referred to law enforcement, included Twitter, Facebook, Telegram and Bigo Live accounts trading photos and videos of child sexual abuse, adults grooming children to send nude images via chat applications, and websites facilitating exploitation of children in prostitution. In an unpublished rapid online survey conducted by ECPAT Philippines on May 8 - 17, 2020, over 36% of the 257 children and youth respondents have admitted to having connected with strangers online during the lockdown period. 15% indicated they have received sexual materials or messages via social media sites.

Similarly, in Finland the hotline managed by Save the Children saw an increase in the amount of reports during March-May 2020. On average in 2019, the hotline received around 240 reports per month. In March 2020, the amount of reports was 364, in April 509, and in May 548. However, towards the end of May and beginning of June, the amount of reports has decreased. The amount of reports does always vary month to month, therefore the hotline will follow the situation to see how it develops.

ECPAT Korea's hotline has also been receiving more calls related to online sexual abuse or exploitation (including grooming) since the Covid-19 outbreak. Although this increase may also have been caused as a result of the 'Nth room' criminal case.

The Dutch Hotline on Child Sexual Exploitation (EOKM) indicates an increase of notifications of child sexual abuse material during the Covid-19 period. The hotline, however, warns for the easy attribution of this increase to Covid-19, as many do, as the hotline has seen a steady increase of these notifications and material for a couple of years already. The increase during the Covid-19 period should therefore not be seen in isolation, leading to a too easy conclusion that more such material is generalised and more children being abused and exploited sexually due to Covid-19. This causality cannot be established and in the opinion of the hotline, is most probably not present.



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

The Dutch Hotline has also seen a significant increase in chats on their HelpWanted helpline, where children and youth can seek help when dealing with sexual abuse online, including sexual extortion. In April and May 2020, double the amount of chat requests of children and youth came in, as compared to January and February. In January and February, they received around 480 help requests through the chat per month. The organisation mostly perceives an increase of sexual extortion. Secondly, the number of cases of grooming increased, but was less than the increase of cases of sexual extortion. The professionals at the helpline experience that children and youth wanted to talk more as they were not in school.

ECPAT's member in Chile, ONG Raices, indicates that since the start of the lock-down, the use of the Internet has become essential to maintain contact with the outside world. However, this massive use of Internet and communications technologies has not been coupled by preventive campaigns against OCSE, noting with concern that the age of the victims dropped considerably in this period (less than 10 years old in the Magallanes Region).

ECPAT Indonesia also conducted a quick research on children's vulnerability to harm online in April 2020. The research shows that 268 out of 1203 child respondents had what was labelled as bad experiences on the Internet: 112 received inappropriate messages, 66 received videos/pictures that made them feel uncomfortable, 27 received CSAM, 24 were being asked to connect via webcam (live streaming) and talk/act inappropriately, 23 admitted their personal information were being uploaded without consent, 16 received files containing pornography.

The Belgian Police has seen a 30% increase in the number of CSAM reports during the first month of the lockdown period (1300 reports instead of 950 reports for the same period last year). These statistics must be interpreted carefully and re-adjusted with the data of the following months. This increase can be explained by the fact that predators are more active online but also because people have more time to spend on the Internet and more than the usual can report potential CSAM.

Child Focus, the Belgian INHOPE member, has announced that the number of CSAM reports have doubled since the beginning of the quarantine. The reports of sexual extortion cases against minors has even tripled.

Stop It Now, the Belgian helpline for people with paedophile feelings has also noticed an increase and a change in contact during the lockdown. Normally, 20% of contacts come from worried relatives, such as partners, family members, neighbours or friends. These people now account for 65% of the contacts made with the helpline. 30% come from people who are worried about their own feelings or behaviour, twice as many as usual.

ONG Raices in Chile, received 12 reports between April and May mostly referring to grooming and production of CSAM through social networks.

In Albania, in the center managed by ECPAT's member CRCA, during the lockdown period around 5,000 online child sexual abuse and exploitation materials were reported.



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

Sale and trafficking of children for sexual purposes

Our members working on national level have observed the following changes with regards to the sale and trafficking of children for sexual purposes:

- In some countries restrictions and closure of hotels and entertainment venues have resulted in children being sold by traffickers inside vehicles and also children being driven to a meeting point to meet customers there. 'Drive by' sale of children has been observed in several countries where heavy restrictions were imposed;
- Restrictions and curfews have also moved the sale and trafficking of children online. Previously used physical locations for exploitation of children have now moved to sell children through social media and messenger applications;
- Due to significant decrease of humanitarian aid and heavy restrictions on travel, we have received several reports from refugee and migrant camps indicating that children have been sold for food and basic supplies and also children themselves are forced to engage in sexual activities in exchange for sex and food;
- Due to international travel restrictions, the domestic trafficking of children has also been noted to increase in many places our members operate, creating a surge in demand for local children.

Sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism (SECTT)

As the world responded to COVID-19 push factors that facilitate or lead to sexual exploitation of children are expected to have intensified. Up to 100 million jobs are at risk of impact in the travel and tourism industry due to the pandemic, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). This is likely to dramatically increase the economic vulnerability of families, in particular in countries which depend on income from tourism. With people financially struggling due to the crisis, the circumstances may allow offenders to gain trust and access their victims more easily than ever before, both online or through physical domestic and foreign travel.

Offenders who sexually exploit children during travel are both domestic and international and are not only tourists, but also long term expats, people who work abroad and others who live in a country for extended periods. Most importantly, they are making increasing use of fast-developing technologies to commit their crimes. Under Covid-19 related travel restrictions, it is anticipated that some offenders who are grooming children online, may travel to meet when restrictions ease, or may continue to exploit through technological means. Additionally, while opportunities for foreign travel are limited, some offenders may be encouraged to offend domestically. Also, some offenders are grooming children online with the prospect of making a direct contact and abusing children once domestic, interregional, and then international travel restrictions have been eased.

In India, as tourism got hit due to Covid-19 and the restrictions on travel, jobs that earned some income to the migrant workers, unorganised tourism service providers such as guides, local transporters, street vendors, small tea shops, trinket sellers have vanished. Many of them are facing problems to pay their rents for the small rooms that they live in and to have a meal.

It is crucial to capitalise on the progress to fight sexual exploitation of children that has been made in recent years in the context of travel and tourism to ensure that the travel and tourism recovery will keep



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

child protection in focus as an inherent part of sustainable tourism development, that goes beyond contributing to natural ecosystems and cultural heritage. Governments are preparing first for a restart of the domestic tourism – it is well documented that the SECTT is very much a domestic and intra-regional crime, although more difficult to recognise, as it's easier to blame SECTT on foreigners than to address local demand.

- What are the key trends and accelerators in the context of the pandemic that may increase children's vulnerability to the sale and sexual exploitation?

Self-isolation measures and the cessation of child protection services aggravate the vulnerability of children living in poverty, in temporary shelters, in residential care institutions and children with disabilities. The closure of schools, kindergartens or other childcare centres has led to children being further away from their support groups. The impact of the crisis is still being evaluated but until now we have seen that it has strongly affected child sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence and non-observance of children's rights.

Poverty

In Albania, quarantine measures imposed by the government left families living in absolute poverty with no opportunity to generate any income (previously ensured through daily or seasonal work placements or through unregistered labour). Loss of basic family income is disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable children, making them easier prey for forced labour, family slavery and sexual exploitation. At the same time, measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 which affect the economical situation of the families, have increased girls' vulnerabilities to child, early and forced marriage.

In Namibia the regulations and restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 crisis resulted in increased unemployment, loss of income for those in informal trading, food insecurities, frustrations due to lack of access to alcohol and exacerbated already existing social problems. These social problems did not only affect adults but all people including children. ECPAT's member, Lifeline/ChildLine indicates that within the Namibian context, sexual exploitation and abuse, child labour and child marriage are bound to increase as poor families are desperate to survive the crisis and it is highly likely that many will resort to unscrupulous means of using children for financial gains and food security.

Similar considerations were made by ECPAT Foundation in Thailand, reporting that many parents and families have to survive on reduced income which in the long-term might lead to school drop-outs and increased child labour and exploitation.

In India, loss of livelihood for adults in the family, restriction in movements and isolation is leaving a deep scar on children - less/no food to eat, drop out from school, no medical care and increase in child trafficking resulting in child labour and child sexual exploitation. Anecdotal information highlights that the human trafficking networks are already active and under the disguise of being benevolent to the vulnerable, desperate families, offering food and monetary support to cope with this crisis situation.



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

Migrant children

Significant drop in humanitarian aid and restriction in international travel increase the vulnerability of children on the move, children in refugee and migrant camps.

Lack of opportunities for regular migration and lack of economic opportunities have left many families without the ability to access work, increasing the vulnerability of children in those communities and forcing people to engage in irregular migration and unsafe work.

In Belgium, migrant children in centres and closed centres are left on their own during Covid-19. This can undoubtedly push some of them out of the system, to obtain health protection. There is a real risk of trafficking and exploitation if they leave the Belgian reception system that it is not able to ensure their protection during the crisis. Moreover, there is a legitimate concern that reports of disappearance may not be made quickly enough in this particular context.

Domestic violence

In Albania, there has been an increase of reported cases of domestic violence against children, with one of the main reasons found being the increase of psychosocial distress in the family due to the imposition of self-isolation measures.

In Malaysia, there have been reports of increases in domestic violence due to stress, being confined in small spaces, lack of income and livelihood due to loss of income, employment and forced leave without pay.

Dar Al Amal notes that in Lebanon, children are often badly tolerated by their parents and encouraged to hang out on the streets exposing them to heightened risks.

Disruption of daily life

In Albania, suspension of all forms of travel and closure of borders came in a sudden way. Unprepared to this situation, many families faced the separation of children from parents/guardians who at the time of the suspension of travel were far away or in another country. Government actions to respond to this issue have been very slow and have often taken a long time. Another problem faced by families in the country was the closure of schools, kindergartens, day care centres for children. In those families where the parents were frontline workers, they struggled to provide care for the children, and thus significantly increasing the time that the children stayed alone at home or were obligated to move from their home and receive care from relatives.

Also during isolation time children have been more deprived of social relationships making them feel alone. This may have been a reason for abusers to benefit from this situation and begin online communication, grooming and arranging meetings when the isolation measures have dropped.

Similar considerations were made by ECPAT's member in Spain, FAPMI/ECPAT Spain, which indicated that social exclusion has been increasingly alarming, leaving children in a situation of heightened vulnerability.



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

In Sri Lanka, PEaCE/ECPAT Sri Lanka reports that children's vulnerability is rising also due to the closure of schools which might be extended till 2022.

In South Korea, all schools, academies, community centres including child counselling centres were closed in order to prevent Covid-19 infections. Although, such measures did prevent infection among children, ECPAT Korea notes with concern that the danger of sexual exploitation/abuse of children within the family may be increasing since children have to stay home and other responsible adults (who are obligated to report when witness any child abuse such as teachers, counsellors, doctors) cannot contact them directly.

Also, during the social distance order, providing counselling service for victim children was very difficult. Especially the victims of the 'Nht room' case who desperately needed support, did not receive it as they should as physical contact was prohibited.

Detection and referral of sexual violence cases

Reduction in the hours of work of law enforcement and reduction in ability of hotlines to investigate, intervene and report have led to less cases of SEC being reported and investigated.

In Belgium, the Covid-19 pandemic also has an impact on the detection and the referral of sexual violence cases. Indeed, a significant number of people capable of detecting and reporting cases of abuse are also compelled to stay home. For example, the detection work previously carried out through schools, youth centres or family planning centres is temporarily no longer possible due to the closure of these facilities. Shelters for victims of sexual violence also operate slower than usual, which gives us good reasons to fear for the protection of children.

ECPAT Netherlands indicated that the number of reported cases at Comensha (the Dutch coordination center against human trafficking), has decreased during the Covid-19 crisis. This does not mean that the problem has decreased, though that no/less reporting takes place. The Police is obliged to report cases at Comensha. Due to interrupted channels of work, including at the police, cases have not been identified and/or reported. Care professionals are not obliged to report cases at Comensha and need the permission of victims and their parents for reporting. They may still have identified cases during the Covid-19 period, though not have reported these.

In Spain, at the beginning of the outbreak, minors under the guardianship of the State, had difficulties accessing tech devices which reduced their possibility to report cases of sexual abuse and exploitation. Moreover, the pandemic also has an important impact on the work of organisations working for the protection of children, such as ECPAT Network members which have temporarily interrupted all training courses for professionals and young people. Less awareness-raising means less detection.



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

2. What essential protection measures, including identification, reporting, referral and investigation, have been put in place to detect and prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation cases and how effective have they been since the outbreak?

In Kenya, ECPAT's member, KAACR increased the use of a child helpline, friendly media houses and working closely with community leaders to identify, report and investigate cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

In Kazakhstan, programmes have been developed to block suspicious sites, as well as strengthened the settings for parental control of tech devices of children.

In Malaysia, two national hotlines have been set up during the Covid-19 crisis:

- Talian Kasih" at 15999 or WhatsApp to 019-261 5999 which is Under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and linked to the police;
- Malaysian National Security Council (MKN) "MYSejahtera". Although this application has been set up for monitoring of COVID-19 cases, this helpline has also been extended to receive reports of cases of abuse and violence including child sexual abuse and exploitation, domestic violence, mental health and other manifestation of issues of women and children.

These hotlines provide monitoring and advice, counselling and referrals are done as necessary. In addition, several NGOs have set up their own hotlines especially on domestic violence, child abuse and for mental and psychosocial problems. These lines are advertised widely through all the NGO networks. No studies have been conducted yet to assess the effectiveness of these hotlines.

In Albania, the measures of self-isolation and prohibition of most activities came suddenly and found most of the country government structures and other service providers unprepared. Although measures were taken for the adaptation and more functional use of the existing services in the pandemic situation, CRCA indicated that the government's efforts were focused more on protecting the population from the spread of the virus and leaving out-of-focus measures to identify, prevent sexual abuse and child exploitation.

Many of the child protection structures and organisations tried to modify their services by offering them online. Structures and organisations working for the protection of children increased efforts for awareness campaigns in the media for promoting 24h/24h services such as the National Child Help-Line, Police and emergency hotline, online platforms for reporting and other emergency services.

In South Korea, there have been many prevention methods and reporting systems established after the Covid-19 outbreak, although it is unclear whether the pandemic was the only reason behind such measures, especially with the disclose of the 'Nth room' case during the same period. An example of these measure is a new system applied in "NAVER," one of the most used web platforms in the country, which provides contact information related to child abuse and sexual exploitation when users search for 'sexual exploitation'.



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

Many ECPAT members who manage child helpline and hotlines, such as ECPAT Korea and Halley Movement in Mauritius have been expanding their services with longer operating hours and more staff.

3. Have there been any initiatives on collecting disaggregated data on specific forms and manifestations of sale and sexual exploitation of children during the pandemic and assessing the near and long-term impacts of COVID-19?

As indicated in the answer to question number 1, many ECPAT members conducted brief assessment of the work of their helplines as well as surveys with child respondents. Additional data, mostly on online reports, have been shared by local police and child helpline and hotline, as indicated in answer number 1.

4. Please, share information about challenges faced in the provision of uninterrupted healthcare, education and legal aid, as well as care recovery and reintegration services for the victims in the context of the outbreak.

In Kenya, many people are not willing to visit hospitals and dispensaries for fear of contracting Covid-19. Some have resorted to seeking alternative medical care. With regards to education, all learning institutions have been closed for over two months and only about 19% of the children can access online learning. Many children don't even have access to radio, hence government programmes on TV are benefiting very few while a few children in private schools are able to learn through Zoom. Accessing legal aid is close to impossible given the lock lockdown and secession of some cities. In terms of care, recovery and reintegration, ECPAT's member in the country, KAARC has been lobbying for child-friendly quarantine centres – only one county (Mombasa) out of 47 counties, has a specific child facility for lost and missing children who are kept there for the quarantine period.

In Kazakhstan, the provision of services has been very difficult because all the institutions that provide these types of services were either closed, working for limited time or online.

In Malaysia, the health services have not been disrupted and access to health care is still available in all clinics and hospitals with adjustments of cases based on appointments and severity. The Movement Control Order (MCO) has resulted in reduced access to hospitals and clinics due to travel and movement restrictions. Disadvantaged groups migrants and refugees especially, those undocumented, have faced difficulties in accessing health facilities as they are not able to afford hospital fees. Furthermore, they run the risk of being detained resulting in increased family and economic disruption. Community health and welfare services have stepped up to provide care to victims in need through home visits and online consultations. For survivors and cases of increased vulnerability, distance or remote case management has been instituted. This has required additional training of community case workers and additional tools (mobile phone, sim card, etc) to facilitate communication between survivors and case workers. During the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increased request and need for additional support from survivors, especially child mothers and unaccompanied and separated minors for food aid, cash and medical assistance. This is mainly amongst the Rohingya refugee committee. NGOs have done their best to meet these needs.



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

In Albania, access to the health system was significantly reduced by the almost total suspension of urban/interurban transport during pandemics and by measures to provide service only in the most urgent cases. Many families were unclear about how the health system would function in the period of pandemic and travel restrictions as well.

The Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection approved a "Protocol on the functioning of public and non-public residential centres providing housing services for victims/survivors of domestic violence and for victims/survivors of trafficking in the COVID-19 pandemic situation". In CRCA's experience, although this protocol was necessary and strengthened measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in residential centres, it also added more procedures and increased the duration for accepting new cases of trafficking or sexual exploitation.

In Lebanon, medical and social services centres have been operating with a reduced schedule, therefore hampering their ability to effectively respond to the needs of child victims.

In South Korea it has been difficult to provide services to child victim of sexual exploitation for a wide range of reasons including the prohibition of direct counselling; imposition of self-quarantine for staff working in the recovery/reintegration services; reticence to visit hospitals and one-stop victim support centres placed in the hospitals' perimeter; and budget cuts.

Finally, the saturation of hospital services linked to the increasing number of people infected with Covid-19 may lead to believe that the care of victims of sexual violence will be impacted by this health crisis. Youth services in certain countries are overwhelmed by requests for child placement, which have greatly increased as a result of lockdown measures. Children whose parents are hospitalised must also be placed. In Belgium, in order to deal with the lack of available foster families, a citizen movement has started, allowing children to be placed in volunteer families, but child protection professionals, while appreciating the initiative, also express their concern that these volunteer families are unknown to Youth Services and are not trained to take in foster children.

5. Have there been examples of innovative solutions to ensure effective functioning of child protection and justice systems that are resilient, adaptable and able to withstand the next crisis?

ECPAT's members indicate that most examples of innovative solutions refer to the increased use of digital platforms and tools by both NGOs and government agencies.

In Kenya, KAAACR created a platform for children to air their views on all matters related to Covid-19 through media (TV and radio stations) using Zoom.

The End CSEC Network in Malaysia notes that the pandemic has brought together most of the child related NGOs in a more cohesive and supportive way through 3 informal coalitions i.e. The Child Rights Coalition Malaysia (CRCM), Child Protection Network and Join Hands Against Modern Slavery (JHAMS). Child-related issues and specific cases arising during the pandemic are discussed online with suggestions for possible solutions, interventions, and monitoring. Prevention, awareness-raising are facilitated through online webinars from time to time. The results of all these actions are shared throughout the networks/coalitions. However, these coalitions/networks are informal. In order to maintain and sustain



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

this initiative, an organisational system with resources and funding would need to be instituted. These networks also includes a number of members from government agencies on an individual basis which would need to be formalised.

In Albania, although there has been no innovative solution to ensure the effective functioning of child protection and the justice system, the child protection system improved its coordination online.

6. How relevant and functional were the existing legal frameworks dealing with prohibition, prosecution, protection, care, assistance and prevention in relation to all forms of physical, mental and sexual violence against, exploitation and neglect of, and harmful practices in relation to children?

Due to the halt in operations of courts around the world, victims of trafficking and exploitation have suffered delays leaving them unable to work and receive compensation thus increasing their vulnerability to re-trafficking and re-exploitation.

In Albania, under the self-isolation and anti-Covid-19 measures, the Council of Ministers made an Normative Act dated 25 March 2020 "For taking special measures in the field of judicial activity, during the duration of the epidemic caused by COVID-19" establishing suspension of deadlines for filing lawsuits, complaints as well as for the performance of any procedural action in administrative, civil and criminal process, according to the provisions of this normative act. When deadlines start during the suspension period, they are postponed until the completion of the emergency period of pandemic COVID-19. But this rule does not apply in family cases related to domestic violence, child custody, children's rights, and adoption process, alimentary and in some other civil and criminal cases.

In Indonesia, during the Covid-19 crisis the e-court system has been used for all cases. Although this is undoubtedly good progress, ECPAT Indonesia indicates that the practice is not yet being smoothly run. For the first time in Belgium, it is possible to hold trials remotely, thanks to a video conference system that has been created to cope with the Covid-19. The licences for the videoconferencing programme were provided by the FPS Justice. The system makes it possible to connect judges, lawyers, defendants and interpreters. They are all visible on the big screen and can communicate. This is a pilot experiment. Priority in trials is given, among other things, to family cases involving children and makes it possible to speed up decisions involving possible protective measures.

In Malaysia, enforcement agencies in particular D11 (Sexual Offences Unit) and Attorney General's office have been monitoring and attending to cases. However, NGOs providing legal aid and victim assistance and protection have stepped up their activities to provide support for all forms of exploitation and violence.

In Palestine, an emergency plan to protect children took almost an entire month to implement. Family protection units in the police and shelters were closed from March 21 to April 30, and any children that were subjected to violence at home had no support system during this time. By the end of April 2020, 231 cases of violence and abuse of children under age 18 were reported to SAWA's 121 Helpline.



ECPAT's submission

Call for input on the thematic report on Covid-19 and SEC by the SR on the sale and sexual exploitation of children

In Belgium, new temporary care places were created to accommodate children aged 6 to 18 years in a situation of danger. The French-speaking Brussels association for mental health (*Ligue bruxelloise francophone pour la santé mentale*) has set up a helpline - free of charge - for the general public (adults, young people, elderly people) and professionals (such as frontline workers). Similarly, a SOS Parents line had been set up during the confinement to support parents who felt overwhelmed. These initiatives may lead to a decrease in violence and possibly abuse.

7. Has there been a surge of resource allocation, actions plans or coordination mechanisms, prevention and response services for the protection of children from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation?

ECPAT's members indicate that there has been very little resource allocation, actions plans and responses' coordination in their countries. In terms of funding, many ECPAT members note that new grants only focus on Covid-19 relief with little or no attention to other issues such as sexual exploitation of children.

Overall, most of the responses so far have been coming from NGOs which tried to carry out fundraising and modify their programmes to better address the sexual exploitation of children in the current situation.

In some countries, additional rounds for funding were open although not specific to child sexual exploitation.

The Finnish government has allocated an additional budget for the wellbeing of children and youth. Save the Children Finland is monitoring how actions to combat child sexual abuse are included in the budget.

In Palestine, throughout this pandemic, various COVID-19 relief funds were secured to ensure a higher capacity of calls were answered through SAWA's 121 Helpline. According to SAWA's 9th Factsheet "121 Emergency Helpline 3-Month Analysis" 78,326 attempted calls were made to the helpline, of which 82% of were answered by an operator. 2,269 cases since March 2020 have been documented through SAWA's helpline.

Some ECPAT Members, such as AMANE in Morocco, have also indicated that the current context has allowed to expand potential partnerships and subsequent mobilisation of funding.