



# PROTECTING CHILDREN IN VIET NAM FROM ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE: THE WAY FORWARD

**Overall, few internet-users aged 12-17 in Vietnam admitted having experienced online sexual exploitation and abuse. It is likely that children may be reluctant to speak openly about a largely sensitive subject. The study however found that 23% had accidentally seen sexual images or videos online. In addition, 5% had been sent unwanted sexual images in the past year. While great progress is made with the establishment of the *Multi-agency and Interdisciplinary Network to Protect and Rescue Children in the Online Environment* and the newly adopted *National Programme on Child Online Protection*, the government of Viet Nam, public institutions, frontline workers, industry, and caregivers can all do more to respond to online child sexual exploitation and abuse and disrupt the harm it is causing children.**

## Recommendations

*Disrupting Harm in Viet Nam [SNAPSHOT]* makes a set of evidence-based recommendations, laying out a practical and actionable blueprint to disrupt harm to children.

### Act

- Mandate the *Multi-agency and Interdisciplinary Network to Protect and Rescue Children in the Online Environment* to lead the implementation of the newly adopted National Programme on Child Online Protection.
- Integrate efforts to tackle OCSEA into additional structures and programmes that address other forms of child exploitation and abuse.
- Increase the availability and effectiveness of reporting mechanisms and ensure that helpline 111 can provide the required functions of a hotline and helpline or, alternatively, appoint an agency that can function as a hotline, i.e., to remove child sexual abuse material from the internet.
- Social media and chat platforms, such as Facebook, should work proactively to prevent sexual content from appearing on children's feeds.
- Ensure that children's needs in product development processes are prioritised.
- Ensure that social media and chat platforms make formal reporting mechanisms within platforms clear and accessible to children.
- Actively engage in international cooperation to provide oversight to prevent child sex offenders travelling, including through border management and control, in conjunction with other relevant ministries in the country and beyond.
- Prioritise the re-connection of the INTERPOL International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) Database to Viet Nam, followed by retraining on victim identification and use of the database. The ICSE database is an intelligence and investigative tool, which allows specialised investigators to share data on cases of child sexual abuse.
- Regularly gather, share and analyse information and intelligence from disaggregated data on child sexual exploitation and abuse reports (both online and offline) in order to understand the scope of threats and the pattern of offending.
- Prioritise international referrals such as those from INTERPOL, which regularly reaches out to national law enforcement authorities with referrals on intelligence pertaining to eminent threats on OCSEA.
- Conduct research on the response of the justice sector to online child sexual exploitation and abuse, and with regard to access to justice for victims of online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

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- Amend legislation to provide a clear and specific definition of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and to specifically criminalise conduct related to it, with penalties commensurate with the crime.
- Amend legislation to more precisely criminalise the activities of grooming, the live-streaming of child sexual abuse for children all ages, sexual extortion committed in the online environment and online sexual harassment specifically.

### Educate

- Ensure nationwide public awareness and education on the sexual exploitation and abuse of children – including how technology might play a role to help children, caregivers, teachers and those working with children understand the full extent of the risks.
- Improve the capacity of frontline staff in contact with children to better identify children at risk and those that have experienced online child sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Equipping caregivers with the knowledge and skills to foster safe and ongoing communication with children about their lives online (and offline). Inform children about the existence of hotlines and helplines and how to use them.

- Ensure that responses to disclosures of online child sexual exploitation and abuse always convey that it is never the child's fault.
- Teach children about formal reporting mechanisms within social media and chat platforms.
- Prioritise and allocate resources to a specialised unit and invest in the training of police officers on how to address online child sexual exploitation and abuse within their respective investigations and build evidence for prosecutions.

### Invest

- Invest in diversifying mechanisms for children to disclose concerns, seek help and formally make reports (including simple child-friendly online methods, e.g., through a chat channel as already planned by Helpline 111).
- Invest in improving the capacity of the social service workforce.
- For the Ministry of Public Security to allocate talent and resources to prevent, manage and respond to online child sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Invest in the implementation of the recommendations to take action and to educate.

## Key insights

*Disrupting Harm in Viet Nam [SNAPSHOT]* highlights the following three essential insights obtained from the research conducted in Viet Nam:

1. A large majority of children in Viet Nam have access to the internet, and most of these children go online every day. This is also the case for caregivers. However, only about one third of children have received some form of online safety training.
2. Internet-using children in Viet Nam are already being subjected to online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA). The data from the household survey suggest that there is considerable awareness of OCSEA risks among children and caregivers, but disclosure, seeking help and reporting to formal mechanisms is very low.
3. Law enforcement systems are in place. However, establishing a specialised unit and strengthening capacity through training could improve the overall response.
4. Some child-friendly court processes are provided for in laws and policies, but important OCSEA-related legislation, policies and standards are not yet enacted in Viet Nam. Further research is needed to assess the experiences of accessing justice by victims of OCSEA.

The full report and complete list of recommendations can be found [here](#).



DISRUPTING HARM

## About Disrupting Harm

*Disrupting Harm in Viet Nam [SNAPSHOT]* is part of an unprecedented multi-country research project on OCSEA focusing on 13 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and southeast Asia. This large-scale research project draws on the expertise of ECPAT International, INTERPOL, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti and their networks of partners. *Disrupting Harm* is supported by the [Fund to End Violence Against Children](#), through its Safe Online initiative.

In Viet Nam, research took place from early 2020 through to early 2021 with the cooperation of the Government of Viet Nam. A comprehensive analysis was made of the legislation, policy and systems addressing online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Viet Nam. A range of statistical data was gathered for the period 2017–2019, written interviews were conducted with key law enforcement units, and a nationally representative household survey with internet-using children and their caregivers was conducted. Data from these multiple sources

were compared and triangulated to produce the *Disrupting Harm in Viet Nam [SNAPSHOT]*. The findings and recommendations were discussed further at two national consultations in Hanoi on 19 October 2021 and 13 December 2021.

Due to complex government regulations, it was not possible to conduct interviews with children and caregivers who had accessed the justice system in Viet Nam in connection with online child sexual exploitation and abuse crimes, nor with justice professionals, front-line service providers from the private and voluntary sectors or key national public officials with specific responsibilities for responding to the risks of online child sexual exploitation and abuse. This led to a lack of qualitative data to complement and contextualise the research findings. Consequently, the conclusions of *Disrupting Harm in Viet Nam [SNAPSHOT]* are not as detailed as had initially been intended. For this reason, therefore, the report on Viet Nam is described as a “snapshot”.

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