

 Safe Online
Annual Report 2025





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Published by Safe Online in July 2026

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Form
AI	Artificial Intelligence
COP	Child Online Protection
CSAEM	Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Material
CSAM	Child Sexual Abuse Material
CSEA	Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
FSO	Fund Statement of Operations
G20	Group of Twenty
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
INHOPE	International Association of Internet Hotlines
ISPCC	Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
IWF	Internet Watch Foundation
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NCMEC	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OCSE	Online Child Sexual Exploitation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OSAEC	Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TF-CSEA	Technology-Facilitated Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
UK	United Kingdom
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar

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Introduction



From the Executive Director

When Safe Online began its work in 2016, the field we now take for granted barely existed. Most governments trying to protect children from online harms were operating blind, without data on how many children were affected, without a shared language for the harms, and without the laws, institutions or tools to respond. Nearly a decade later, much of that foundation has been built. Safe Online, and its donors and grantees, have been at the centre of building it.

This report marks our tenth year. It is a moment to take stock, not only of what we have funded, but of what we have helped bring into being: a global field for child online safety where there was once only a scattering of isolated efforts.

Over the past decade we have mobilised more than USD 100 million and supported initiatives in over 120 countries, making Safe Online the only global fund dedicated to this cause. But the numbers are not the whole story.

What I am proudest of is harder to count: the convening, the standard-setting, the patient work of connecting researchers to practitioners, governments to technology companies, and evidence to action. Over almost a decade of building, learning, convening and influencing, Safe Online has become part of the connective tissue of this field, an institution others rely on to set direction, broker collaboration, and move resources to where they matter most. In a real sense, we have become part of the global infrastructure for keeping children safe online.

That progress stands against a darkening backdrop. Tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse is growing at an alarming pace; every second, ten cases of technology-facilitated child sexual abuse are reported worldwide. Artificial intelligence is no longer an emerging threat but a present reality, accelerating old harms and enabling new ones faster than our systems can respond. The case for this work has never been more urgent.

If there is one lesson from this decade, it is that sustainable change is never the product of isolated projects. It comes when evidence, technology, institutions, sectors, policy and collaboration reinforce one another. When child safety becomes embedded in how systems work, rather than bolted on after harm has occurred.

That conviction is now guiding a moment of transformation for Safe Online itself. After being hosted within UNICEF for nearly a decade, to whom we owe an immense debt of gratitude, we are becoming an independent foundation, with a new home in Geneva and a new chapter opening in 2027. Independence will allow us to grow: to move faster, deploy funding in innovative ways, partner more widely, and broaden our mission to meet the full scale of the challenge. We will deepen our commitment to ending tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, even as AI intensifies it, and we will move further upstream.

This move reflects our belief that we cannot keep children safe unless we also build digital ecosystems for their wellbeing. It is in that spirit that we have launched Weave Wellbeing, a new initiative dedicated to the mental health and wellbeing of children and adolescents in the digital age.

We step into this chapter with gratitude for how far we have come, clear-eyed about how far there is still to go, and more determined than ever to meet the moment.



Marija Manojlovic
Executive Director, Safe Online

Safe Online impact in numbers (2016–2025)

Child online safety is a challenge that no single organisation, government, or technology company can solve alone. It requires evidence to identify where and how the harm is happening, technology to detect and remove it, laws that make it illegal, enforcement capacity to enforce those laws, and communities that know how to protect their children.

Safe Online was built on the belief that these pieces must work together. In the last decade, we have helped a number of countries, frontline organisations, tech companies and communities in this effort:



Key child online safety threats and trends in 2025

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) continues to grow at an alarming pace, driven by rapidly evolving technologies, expanding digital platforms, and the increasing misuse of artificial intelligence (AI), exposing more children than ever before to new and intensified forms of harm. Every second, 10 cases of technology-facilitated child sexual abuse are reported globally.

Despite global efforts to combat it, child sexual abuse material (CSAM) continues to proliferate online, reaching unprecedented scale and complexity. **INHOPE** processed nearly 4.8 million reports of suspected CSAM – a **450% increase compared to 2024**. Of these, 67% are classified as illegal. 91% of victims in these reports are aged 3-13, and 98% are girls.

Artificial intelligence poses profound risks to child online safety, accelerating existing threats and enabling new forms of exploitation and abuse. The US-based **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's (NCMEC's) CyberTipline** received **21.3 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation** – these included 61.8 million images, videos and other files related to suspected child sexual exploitation. Among the total reports received, 1.5 million indicated a nexus between generative AI and child sexual exploitation. Additionally, the **Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)** identified **3,443 AI-generated child sexual abuse videos in the United Kingdom (UK)**, an increase of 26,385% compared with the previous year, when just 13 such videos were recorded. Of these, 65% (2,233 videos) were classified as Category A, the most

extreme classification. By comparison, for the full year (2025), 43% of non-AI criminal videos seen by the IWF were Category A..

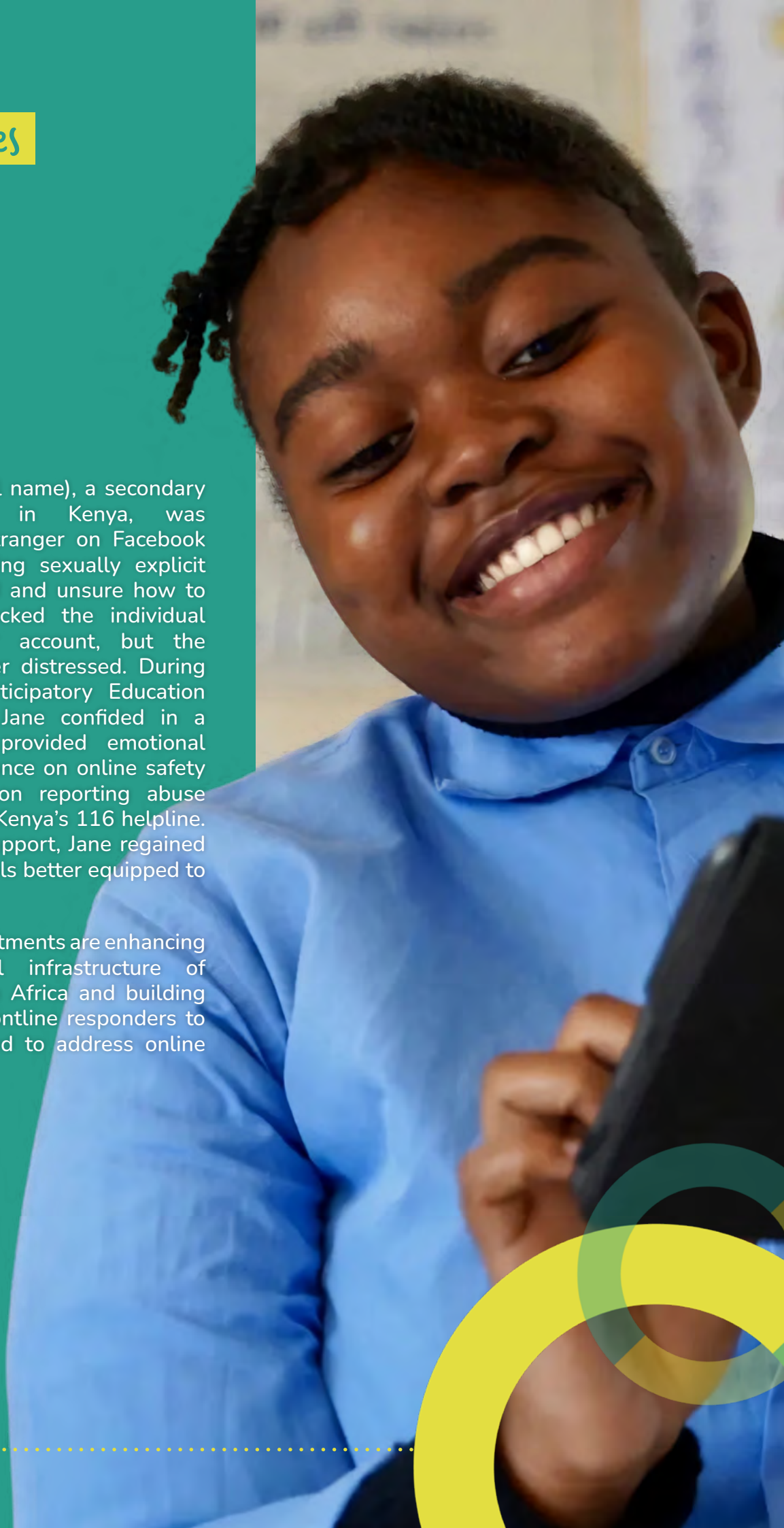
The rise in online enticement is a worrying trend. The **NCMEC received 1.4 million reports of online enticement**, a 156% increase from 2024. Childlight's **Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ITL Index 2025)** found that across Western Europe, 19.6% of children have experienced online solicitation before the age of 18 (against 13.5% in the past year). A **Thorn study** found that 25% of young people report receiving a solicitation to exchange sexual imagery, engage in sexual talk, or participate in sexual interaction in return for something of value before turning 18.

Online CSEA is closely linked to other harms such as sex trafficking and sextortion. Of those reported missing to NCMEC in 2025, **1 in 7 children were likely victims of child sex trafficking**. **IWF 2025 data** for the UK shows more than a third of the confirmed reports of child sexual abuse imagery involved some sort of sexually coerced extortion or sextortion. Thorn's latest research, **Sexual Extortion & Young People: Navigating Threats in Digital Environments**, reveals that 1 in 7 victims aged 13-20 were driven to harm themselves as a result of sextortion. For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ (LGBTQ+) youth, who are less likely to have an offline support system, increasing their isolation, that number nearly triples to 28% compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

Case studies

Jane* (not her real name), a secondary school student in Kenya, was contacted by a stranger on Facebook who began sending sexually explicit videos. Frightened and unsure how to respond, she blocked the individual and deleted her account, but the experience left her distressed. During a community Participatory Education Theatre session, Jane confided in a counsellor who provided emotional support and guidance on online safety and information on reporting abuse through Childline Kenya's 116 helpline. With continued support, Jane regained confidence and feels better equipped to stay safe online.

Safe Online's investments are enhancing the technological infrastructure of seven helplines in Africa and building the capacity of frontline responders to be better equipped to address online CSEA.



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Approaching a decade of impact: building a safer online world for children (2016–2025)



Founded in 2016 as a key pillar of the global effort to end violence against children, Safe Online has evolved over the past decade into a catalyst for action on CSEA and technology-facilitated harms. Through strategic investments in policy, evidence, technology, and systems, it has helped place child online safety firmly on global agendas. As Safe Online marks its tenth anniversary and transitions from a UNICEF-hosted fund to an independent organisation, this is a timely opportunity to reflect on both its achievements and the lessons learned about what drives sustainable change. The foundations of credibility, trust, and scalable financing built over the last decade will guide its next chapter.

Technological advances in the last decade have increased children's vulnerability to online CSEA. Emerging technologies such as encrypted messaging, livestreaming, social media, and online gaming have further increased the scale, speed, sophistication, and persistence of online exploitation. Generative AI is no longer an emerging threat; it is a present reality that has exposed children to unprecedented risks of sexual exploitation and abuse.

This period also witnessed an unprecedented expansion of internet access into some of the world's most remote communities. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, as lockdowns and school closures necessitated a rapid shift to online education and increased children's engagement with digital platforms. While connectivity brought significant benefits, it also exposed millions of previously unconnected and unsuspecting children to the risks of online CSEA.

During the last decade, Safe Online has made significant contributions towards making the online world safer for children. It has brought the spotlight to children's online safety at the highest global forums, mobilised resources around the issue,

strengthened the broader ecosystem for protecting children online, generated evidence and shared knowledge, and incubated tools and technologies to ensure child online safety.

When Safe Online launched in 2016, there was no nationally representative data on how many children were affected, no shared language to describe the harms, and in most countries, no dedicated law enforcement units to investigate them. Nearly a decade later, this foundation has been built - across 56 countries, hotlines can now identify and report abuse; in 13 countries, specialised law enforcement units exist where none did before; and for the first time, 25 countries will have nationally representative data on how children are being harmed online.

A key lesson from this experience is that sustainable impact is achieved through ecosystem-wide, collective, interconnected efforts rather than isolated, stand-alone initiatives. When evidence generation, technology, capacity strengthening, policy influence, and multi-stakeholder partnerships are brought together, they reinforce one another to build more robust child protection systems. Safe Online's role has increasingly been to enable these connections, fostering collaboration and creating the conditions for long-term, system-level impact.

Catalysing investment and innovation

Safe Online was conceived to address the resource gap to make the digital world safer for children. Since its inception, Safe Online has mobilised more than USD 100 million in funding and supported initiatives in over 120 countries.

When Safe Online was established in 2016, child online safety was among the most underfunded areas of child

protection. Governments knew abuse was happening but had little data on its scale, few tools to detect it, and no coordinated global response. Philanthropy and official development assistance had largely overlooked the issue. Safe Online was created to change that.

Over the past decade, we at Safe Online have mobilised more than USD 100 million in funding and supported initiatives across more than 120 countries, making Safe Online the only global, dedicated funding mechanism for child online safety.

In our early years, we focused on the foundations - the laws, institutions, and trained professionals without which no technology or awareness campaign can function. We invested in building national law enforcement capacity, strengthening hotlines, and generating the first real evidence on how children were being harmed online. These were not glamorous investments. They were essential ones.

As the threat landscape shifted, so did our investment approach. From 2020, we began directing resources toward technology - funding the development of AI-powered detection tools, open-source platforms for helplines, and investigative technologies that could operate across borders. When generative AI began enabling the creation of CSAM at unprecedented scale, we moved again, prioritising research and tools specifically designed to detect and counter AI-generated harms.

That agility has been deliberate. Each funding round is shaped by structured consultation with governments, technology companies, academic experts, and civil society to identify where the gaps are most acute and where catalytic and impactful investment can move the whole field. The goal has never been to fund isolated projects. It has been to direct resources to the places where they unlock progress across the ecosystem.

Building knowledge evidence and

Safe Online has invested nearly USD 25 million in research projects all over the world, in order to better understand online threats and harms for children in the digital space across different regions.

Prior to 2016, governments and child protection actors had been trying to address online CSEA with little nationally representative data on how many children were affected, the forms of abuse they were facing, the risks they faced, or whether existing laws and response systems were adequate.

Safe Online set out to change that. Through our flagship initiatives such as **Disrupting Harm**, we are helping generate the first nationally representative evidence across 25 countries and six geographic regions on the prevalence, nature, risks, and impacts of online CSEA, as well as gaps in legal and regulatory frameworks. These reports are providing governments with the evidence needed to design stronger policies and strengthen responses and prevention efforts. Just as importantly, they are ensuring that the experiences and voices of children and communities inform decisions about their online safety.

Recognising that online risks continue to evolve, we have also invested in understanding emerging threats and connected the tech industry with researchers.



The Tech Coalition Safe Online Research Fund

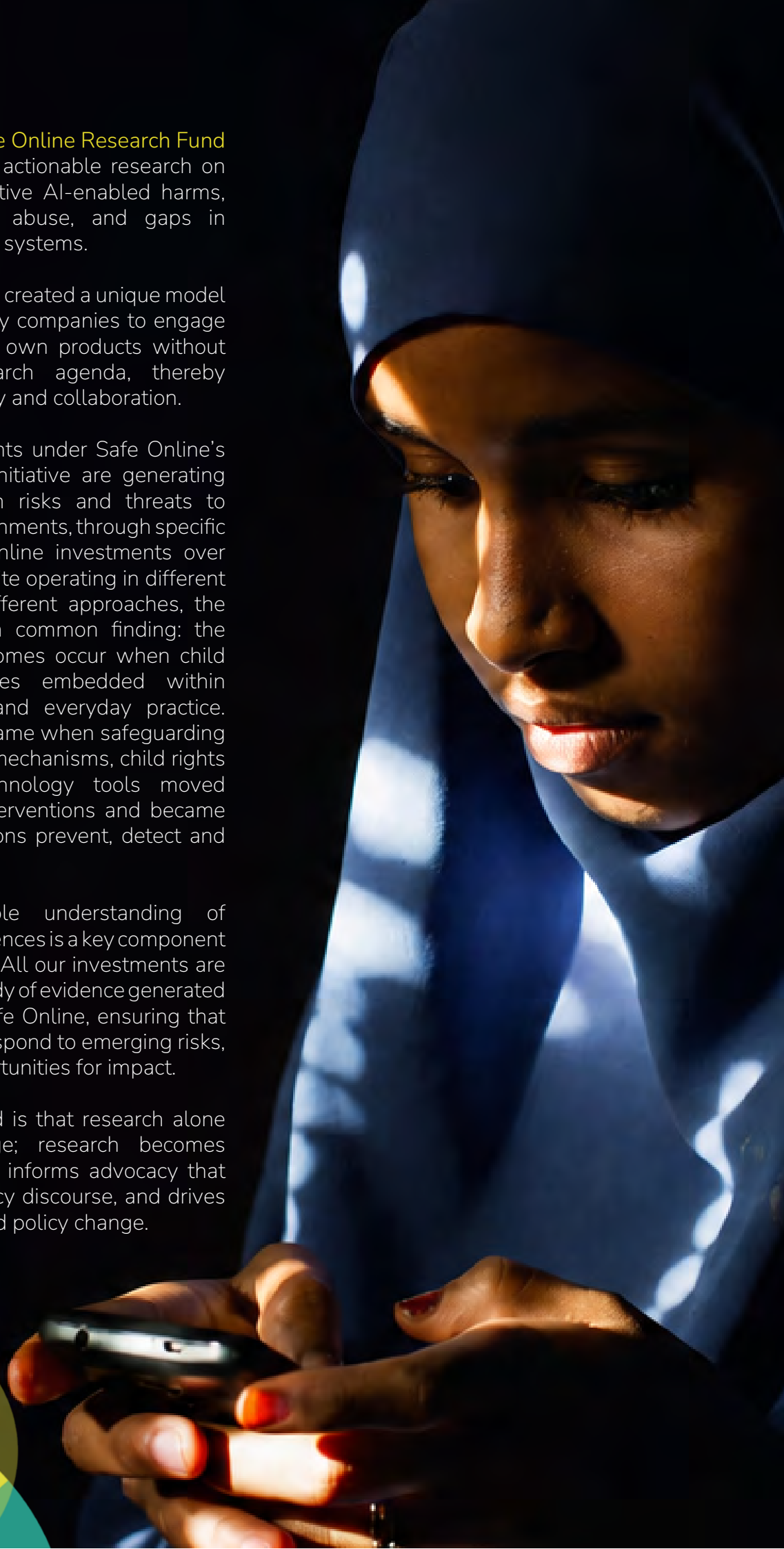
supports independent, actionable research on issues such as generative AI-enabled harms, changing patterns of abuse, and gaps in detection and response systems.

This Research Fund has created a unique model that enables technology companies to engage with research on their own products without influencing the research agenda, thereby strengthening credibility and collaboration.

Furthermore, investments under Safe Online's **Evidence Generation** initiative are generating data and evidence on risks and threats to children in digital environments, through specific evaluations of Safe Online investments over the last 10 years. Despite operating in different contexts and using different approaches, the evaluations point to a common finding: the most sustainable outcomes occur when child online safety becomes embedded within institutions, systems and everyday practice. The strongest results came when safeguarding approaches, reporting mechanisms, child rights frameworks, and technology tools moved beyond standalone interventions and became part of how organisations prevent, detect and respond to harm.

Increasing actionable understanding of children's digital experiences is a key component of Safe Online's vision. All our investments are guided by a growing body of evidence generated and synthesised by Safe Online, ensuring that resourcing decisions respond to emerging risks, identify gaps and opportunities for impact.

What we have learned is that research alone rarely delivers change; research becomes transformative when it informs advocacy that shapes public and policy discourse, and drives institutional reforms and policy change.



Building the global evidence base on digital harms to children

USD 15 million investment in 25 countries across 6 regions



Funded by



Implemented by



Implemented by ECPAT International, INTERPOL, and UNICEF Innocenti.

Total investment –
USD 15 million

One of the **largest global research initiatives on online CSEA**, strengthening the evidence base to inform child protection policies, legislation, law enforcement responses, and prevention strategies.

Implemented in 2 phases –
13 countries in Phase I, **12 countries** in Phase II.

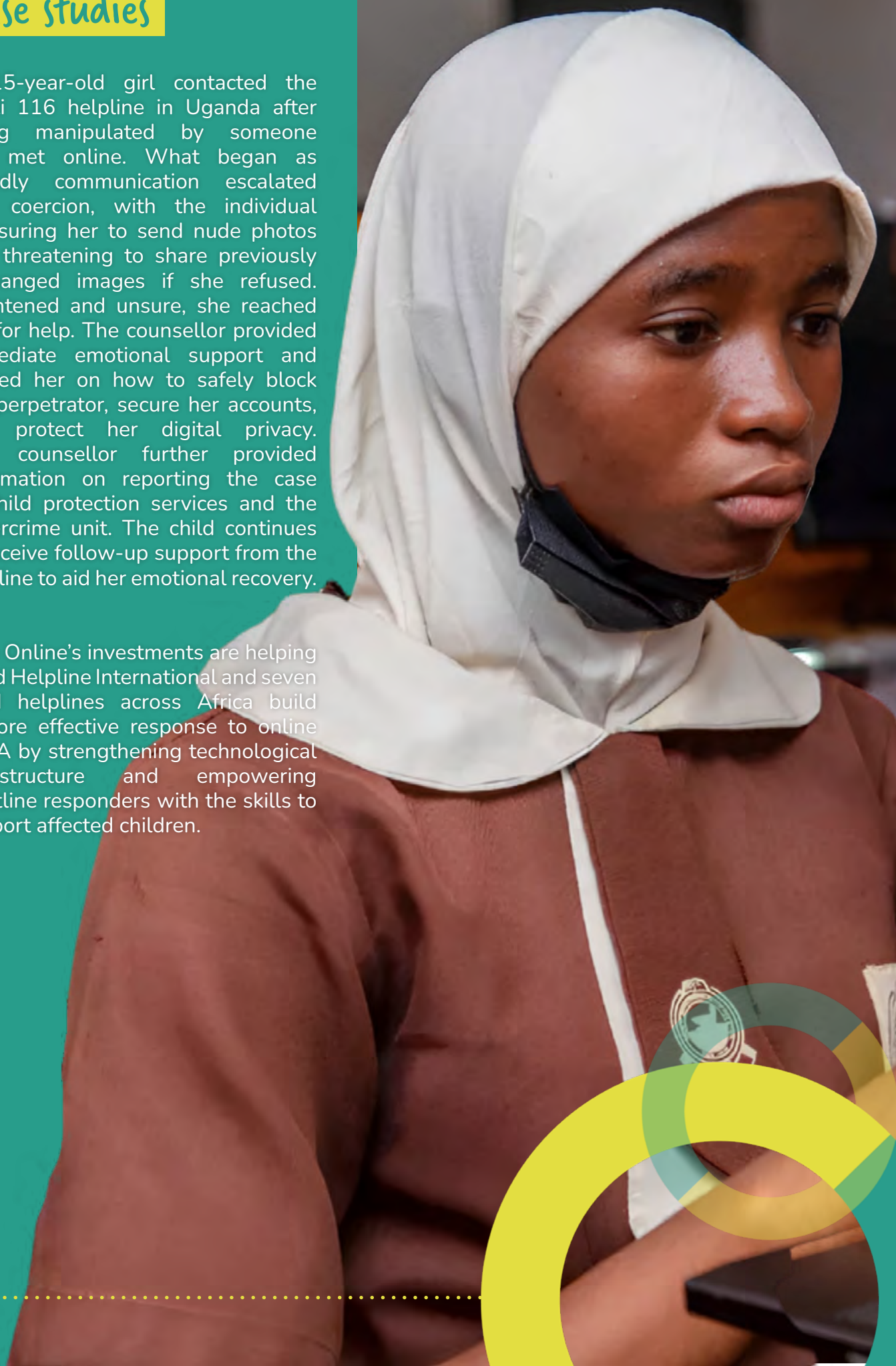
Based on **interviews and consultations** with more than **50,000 children**, survivors, caregivers, frontline professionals, law enforcement officials, and policymakers.

The Disrupting Harm initiative has contributed to **significant ecosystem-level changes across multiple countries**. **Cambodia's Royal Government** endorsed child online protection guidelines for the digital technology industry; **the Namibian Police (NAMPOL)** established a specialised unit to detect and respond to online CSEA; **Malaysia** amended provisions to the Sexual Offences against Children (SOAC) Act 2017; and **Indonesia** developed a National Roadmap for Child Protection in the Online Domain (2025–2029).

Case studies

A 15-year-old girl contacted the Sauti 116 helpline in Uganda after being manipulated by someone she met online. What began as friendly communication escalated into coercion, with the individual pressuring her to send nude photos and threatening to share previously exchanged images if she refused. Frightened and unsure, she reached out for help. The counsellor provided immediate emotional support and guided her on how to safely block the perpetrator, secure her accounts, and protect her digital privacy. The counsellor further provided information on reporting the case to child protection services and the cybercrime unit. The child continues to receive follow-up support from the helpline to aid her emotional recovery.

Safe Online's investments are helping Child Helpline International and seven child helplines across Africa build a more effective response to online CSEA by strengthening technological infrastructure and empowering frontline responders with the skills to support affected children.



Strengthening systems and institutions

Through its investments, Safe Online has influenced the policy landscape in more than 88 countries, supporting the development and strengthening of policies, protocols, and standard operating procedures specifically designed to address online CSEA. These efforts have contributed to the formulation of national child online safety strategies and action plans in 17 countries, while also shaping regional frameworks for collective action in the African Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Online harms are not confined by borders, sectors, or jurisdictions, and require a policy and regulatory framework that binds various sectors and stakeholders together.

When Safe Online was established, most countries lacked the policies, laws, institutions, and coordination mechanisms needed to respond effectively to the challenges of online CSEA. Building this policy and regulatory ecosystem was one of the first priorities we set out to address in order to create safer digital environments for children.

At the institutional level, we have helped strengthen the systems that protect children. In 13 countries, specialised national law enforcement units working on victim identification, including cases involving online CSEA, have been established or enhanced through Safe Online-supported initiatives. Investments have also strengthened judicial responses, embedded training curricula in induction and in-service training programmes for officials, improved referral and support pathways for child victims, and enhanced coordination among agencies responsible for child protection.

Together, these reforms have helped embed child online protection within national systems and institutions, creating the conditions for

sustainable and lasting change. They have laid the foundation for coordinated, multi-stakeholder responses that bring together governments, law enforcement agencies, civil society organisations, technology companies, educators, and communities to safeguard children from online harms.

Rights holders, particularly children, survivors and the community, are at the core of the ecosystem responding to online child sexual exploitation and abuse. We have reached millions of people through awareness and capacity-building efforts. Hundreds of thousands of children - including children with disabilities, those living in conflict-affected settings, and children from indigenous and remote communities - have gained knowledge, skills, and support to navigate the digital world more safely.

Advancing technology for child protection

In 2016, most countries lacked digital infrastructure for detecting, reporting, or responding to online CSEA. Today, 56 countries have strengthened hotlines and helplines, 44 technology tools are deployed across more than 100 countries, and law enforcement agencies that once worked in isolation are sharing intelligence across borders in real time. These numbers represent something more than our investment - they represent a field that has been built, largely from scratch, to detect and respond to online child sexual exploitation and abuse at scale.

Safe Online's approach to technology has never been to fund tools in isolation. The goal has always been to strengthen the systems those tools must live inside. That means investing in detection technologies that law enforcement can actually use, reporting platforms that connect to real response pathways, and helpline infrastructure that captures data to drive better decisions.

Looking at helplines illustrates how transformative the right technology can be when it is embedded in practice. With our support, **Tech Matters** developed **Aselo**, an open-source platform that unifies helpline counselling, case management, referrals, and reporting in a single place. Before Aselo, many helplines were managing cases through disconnected systems, limiting their ability to follow up with children or share data across agencies. Now deployed in nineteen countries - from Jamaica to Tanzania - with support from Safe Online, Aselo has reduced the administrative burden for counsellors, improved follow-up with children in crisis, and enabled helplines to generate consistent data that governments need to strengthen their responses.

At the same time, we have worked to raise the floor for the entire hotline ecosystem. Our support for **INHOPE**, the global network of internet hotlines, has helped establish common standards for how member hotlines classify, process, and report child sexual abuse material, ensuring that a hotline in one country operates to the same baseline as one in another. In a field where speed and consistency of response directly determine whether a child is protected, shared standards are not a bureaucratic exercise. They are a child protection intervention.

A strong emphasis on interoperability - ensuring that different systems, agencies, and countries can work together - has also shaped Safe Online's technology investments. Our partnership with the **INTERPOL DevOps Group** brings together law enforcement, NGOs, academia, and technology companies to co-develop tools and share them securely with officers across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This initiative facilitates research and development by an expert group of investigators, non-governmental organisations, academia, and information technology companies, and extends solutions to specialised

officers worldwide via INTERPOL's secure channels. Six tools developed through this model are now in use by hundreds of officers worldwide. In this way, Safe Online has also advanced the idea of technology as a global public good by supporting open-source tools that can be adapted and scaled across countries.

An example of our sustained investments in innovative detection technology that law enforcement can use is **Thorn Detect**. Through our investments, Thorn incubated a technology in 2018, enabling law enforcement to analyse and map dark web sites to help them identify child victims and perpetrators of online CSEA. Continued catalytic investments over subsequent years refined and scaled these solutions, culminating in Thorn Detect - an AI-powered tool now used by more than 2,000 users, including law enforcement, worldwide, that has drastically reduced the time required to identify victims and offenders.



Safe Online's commitment to focusing on underfunded issues and geographies is reflected in its investment in a project led by **Universidad de los Andes**. The initiative responded to the growing threat of livestreamed CSEA, an area where most detection tools were designed for English-speaking or Global North contexts. To fill this gap, the project developed ARTEMISA, the first AI-powered tool for detecting and deterring CSEA livestreaming on the dark web in Latin American Spanish-language environments. Now deployed in four countries and expanding across the region, ARTEMISA is helping local authorities respond more effectively to a rapidly evolving threat.

What we have learned through our investments in tools and technologies is that technology is only as effective as the systems it plugs into. Integrating new tools into government workflows requires approvals, training, and institutional buy-in, all of which take time to secure. Safe Online has learned to plan for these processes - and to treat institutional readiness as part of what it funds, not an afterthought. The result is technology that lasts.

Elevating child online safety through advocacy

Safe Online has helped to elevate child online safety from a niche concern to a global, regional, and national policy priority. At a time when children's digital lives are expanding rapidly and online risks are becoming increasingly complex, we have worked to ensure that protecting children online remains firmly on the agendas of policymakers, development actors, technology companies, and international institutions.

Over the past decade, we have used advocacy, partnerships, and evidence-driven engagement to shape norms, influence discourse, and strengthen

international commitment to addressing online CSEA. Our efforts have helped bring child online safety into discussions at some of the world's most influential forums, including the G7, the United Nations, the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos, the European Union, ASEAN, and the African Union. In doing so, we have contributed to a growing recognition that protecting children online is not only a child protection issue but also a development, governance, and digital rights imperative.

Central to this achievement has been Safe Online's ability to build and sustain coalitions that drive change. Recognising that no single actor can tackle the complex and evolving risks children face online alone, we have convened governments, civil society organisations, industry leaders, researchers, and multilateral agencies around a collective agenda for action. A key example is the establishment of the **Safe Digital Futures – Invest in Children** coalition by Safe Online in partnership with the Brave Movement, World Vision, Plan International, ChildFund International and Mtoto News International, which is playing a pivotal role in embedding child online safety within international development and financing discussions.

Our experience has shown that advocacy serves as the critical link between evidence and policy action, helping translate knowledge into reforms and commitments that make the digital world safer for children.

Building a global ecosystem and movement

Child online safety is too complex, too fast-moving, and too global a problem to be solved by any single initiative or organisation. Funding individual projects, however good, was never going to be enough. What the field needed, and

largely lacked, was connective tissue: shared data, common standards, collective learning, and the relationships that allow different actors to move in the same direction.

That has been one of Safe Online's most deliberate, and sometimes least visible, contributions over the past decade. Take online CSEA data as an example. Until recently, the organisations working hardest to protect children online were doing so largely in a fragmented landscape - with inconsistent definitions, incompatible datasets, and no shared infrastructure for turning evidence into action. Safe Online's **Data for Change** initiative, launched in 2022, was built specifically to fix that. By convening governments, technology companies, civil society, and researchers around a common agenda - not just to discuss data gaps, but to close them - it has begun to create the shared evidence infrastructure the field has long needed.

The same logic runs through Safe Online's other ecosystem investments. **The Tech Coalition Safe Online Research Fund** established a model, genuinely novel in this field, that connects technology companies with research, thereby building credibility and fostering collaboration. And through the **Evaluation Advisory Group**, Safe Online has worked to strengthen how the entire field measures what works, because a field that cannot learn from itself cannot improve.

None of this is as visible as a new technology tool or a policy win. But it is what makes those wins possible, and what allows them to last. A safer internet for children will not be built by isolated actors doing good work in parallel. It will be built when those actors can find each other, trust each other, and build on each other's work. Safe Online has spent a decade helping to make that possible, and the work is far from finished.

Emerging technologies, particularly generative AI, are creating new risks faster than existing systems can respond. Meeting that challenge will require continuing to build up the ecosystem as a whole.

While Safe Online is proud of the progress achieved over the past decade, the pace of technological change underscores the urgency of the work ahead. Meeting these challenges will require sustained investment, stronger partnerships, and continued innovation across sectors. The systems, policies, and safeguards that protect children must evolve as quickly as the technologies that shape their lives. Building on a decade of learning and impact, Safe Online remains committed to advancing collective action to create a safer digital world for every child.



3

Safe Online strategic achievements 2025



Invest for impact

In 2025, Safe Online directed **nearly USD 15 million** toward the places and issues where the global response to online child abuse is most fragile, and where the right investment at the right moment can shift the trajectory for thousands of children.

The decisions about where to invest were not made in a vacuum. Before each funding round, we consulted more than 50 experts - from government officials and technology companies to frontline practitioners and academic researchers - to map where the gaps were most acute. The result is a set of interlocking projects that strengthen each other.

Some of those pieces address threats that simply did not exist a few years ago. Generative AI has made it possible to create CSAM without ever harming a real child, and without any of the traditional signals that existing detection systems are built to find. One newly funded initiative is building an automated platform specifically designed to identify and prevent AI-generated abuse content within large language models, before it can be used to harm children. This is happening now, and the tools to address harms like these are only beginning to exist.

Other investments focus on the **financial architecture of abuse**. In the Philippines, a real-time monitoring system is being built to detect and block payments linked to online child exploitation - because for many perpetrators, abuse is also a business, and cutting off the money cuts off the incentive. In Vietnam, an existing school internet safety system is being upgraded to reach children who are increasingly going online, often with little guidance on the risks they face.

Not every gap is technological. In Lebanon, **frontline social workers, law enforcement officers, and caregivers** are being equipped

with the knowledge and skills to recognise online abuse and respond effectively, because technology is only useful when the people who need it know how to act on what it tells them. In Pakistan, a **national capacity-building effort** is strengthening the institutions responsible for child online protection across the country. And through the Mindshield initiative, for the first time, the **mental health** of the law enforcement officers who investigate the most disturbing material online is being treated as a child protection issue in itself, because investigators who burn out cannot protect children.

Across all our investment pillars - networks and systems, research and data, and technologies and tools - **the 2025 cohort reflects a deliberate effort to move upstream to reach children, families, and communities before harm occurs, rather than only after.** Youth-led digital safety clubs, public awareness campaigns, and programmes exploring whether storytelling and entertainment can shift social norms around online safety are all part of a growing recognition that the most durable protection is prevention. When a child knows what grooming looks like, when a parent knows what to watch for, when a community has somewhere to turn, the ecosystem becomes more resilient for everyone.

Evidence and knowledge

Sharing knowledge to better protect children

One of the hardest problems in child online safety is not a lack of people trying to solve it. It is that the people trying to solve it, including researchers, technology companies, governments, and frontline practitioners, have historically worked in parallel rather than together. Research findings sit in academic journals that policymakers never read. Technology

companies develop safety tools without access to the independent evidence that would make them more effective. Hotline operators identify patterns in the reports they receive, but have no mechanism to share what they are seeing with the researchers studying the same phenomenon.

Safe Online has spent the past decade trying to fix that, and in 2025, that work accelerated.

One of the clearest examples is the **Tech Coalition Safe Online Research Fund** whose annual convening brought together trust and safety professionals from 12 of the world's leading technology companies and researchers from 11 independent projects for structured working sessions designed to move evidence directly into practice. Held in **Singapore alongside the Trust & Safety Professional Association's APAC Summit**, the convening was built on a simple premise: research that never reaches the people building safety systems cannot protect children. By the end, researchers had direct relationships with the industry practitioners most likely to act on their findings.

The same principle of closing the gap between knowledge and action shaped our work on data. Through the **Data for Change** initiative, experts from government, industry, civil society, and academia continued working on one of the field's most persistent problems: the fact that data on online CSEA is often inconsistent, incompatible, and highly challenging to share across organisations and borders. In 2025, new virtual learning sessions explored how children's online experiences can be documented responsibly in ways that respect children's rights while generating the evidence that decision-makers need.

At the global level, we convened critical conversations at **RightsCon** in Taiwan, where practitioners and advocates wrestled with a tension that sits at the heart

of this work: how to protect children online without eroding the privacy, participation, and digital rights that make the internet valuable to them in the first place. There are no easy answers, but creating the space for those conversations across sectors and across borders is itself a contribution.

Standardising terminology

Underlying all of this is a more fundamental challenge: a field cannot learn from itself if it does not have a shared language. In 2025, Safe Online supported the **launch of the second edition of the Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse**, developed by ECPAT in collaboration with Childlight, WeProtect Global Alliance, and more than 40 contributing organisations. The guidelines establish consistent, survivor-centred language across research, policy, advocacy, and practice. That may sound technical. In practice, it means that when a researcher in Indonesia, a prosecutor in Ireland, and a platform's trust and safety team in California describe the same harm, they use the same words, and the evidence generated in one context can inform action in another.

Strengthening evidence for greater impact

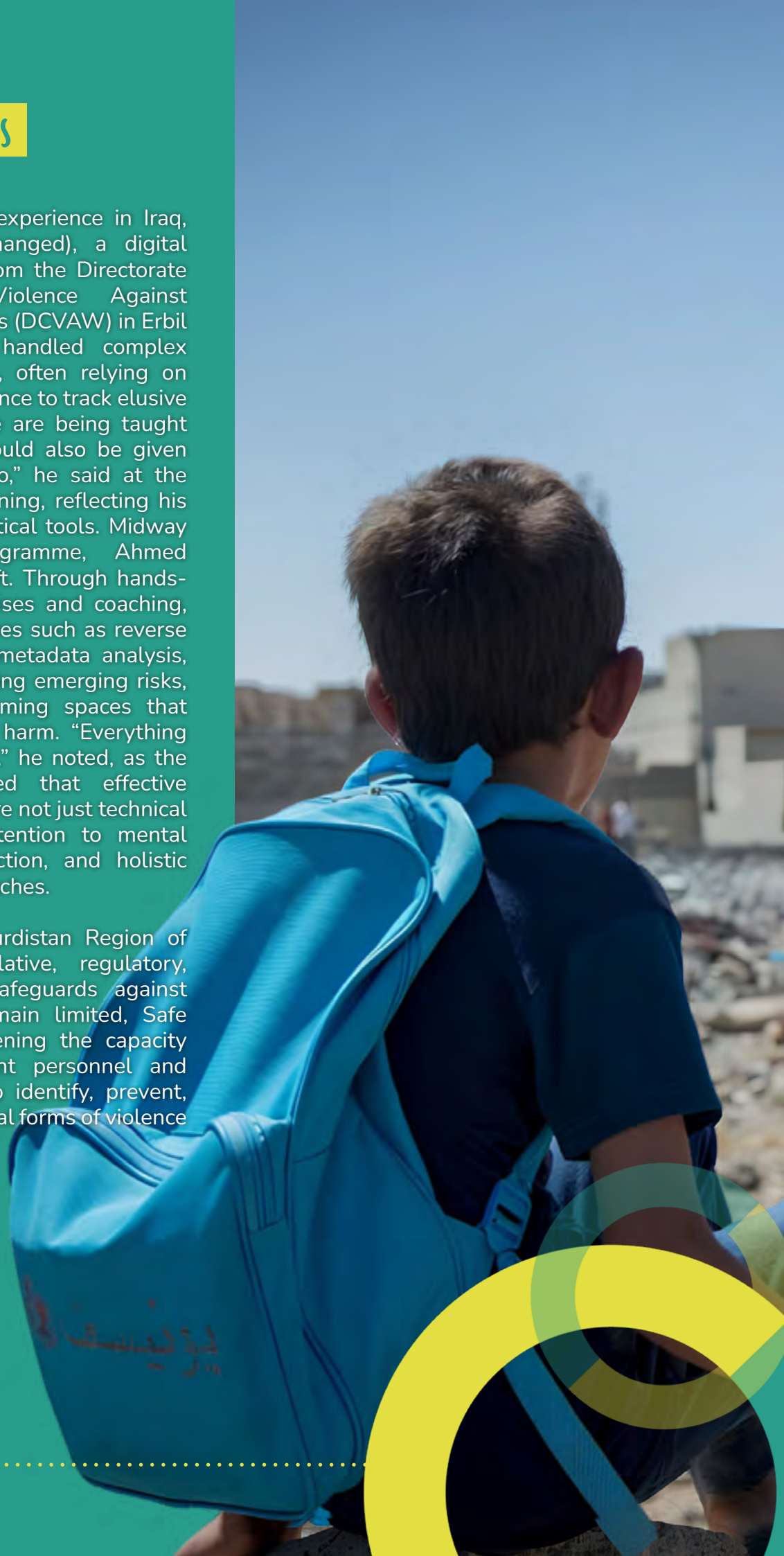
Strengthening the quality of evidence across the portfolio has also been a priority. Safe Online's **Evaluation Advisory Group** - a multidisciplinary body of researchers, practitioners, and funders - continued to provide strategic guidance on how investments are assessed and what counts as evidence of impact. Its work ensures that Safe Online's own portfolio generates results and insights that can improve practice across the ecosystem, not just within individual projects.



Case studies

With six years of experience in Iraq, Ahmed (names changed), a digital crimes specialist from the Directorate of Combating Violence Against Women and Families (DCVAW) in Erbil Governorate, had handled complex digital crime cases, often relying on instinct and persistence to track elusive perpetrators. “If we are being taught how to fly, we should also be given the wings to do so,” he said at the start of SEED’s training, reflecting his hope for more practical tools. Midway through the programme, Ahmed began to see a shift. Through hands-on cyber lab exercises and coaching, he learned techniques such as reverse image search and metadata analysis, while also recognising emerging risks, such as online gaming spaces that expose children to harm. “Everything was interconnected,” he noted, as the training emphasised that effective investigations require not just technical skills, but also attention to mental health, data protection, and holistic investigative approaches.

In Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where legislative, regulatory, and institutional safeguards against online violence remain limited, Safe Online is strengthening the capacity of law enforcement personnel and frontline officials to identify, prevent, and respond to digital forms of violence against children.



Advocacy and action

Knowledge, without power behind it, does not protect children. A study can document the scale of online abuse, or a technology tool can detect it, but unless governments choose to act, unless platforms are held accountable, unless child online safety competes successfully for the attention and resources it requires, the evidence sits on a shelf, and the harm continues.

That is why advocacy is not a secondary activity for Safe Online. It is the mechanism that turns everything else into change.

Positioning child online safety as a global investment priority

In 2025, that advocacy found its most visible expression in the launch of the **Safe Digital Futures – Invest in Children** coalition. Bringing together the Brave Movement, ChildFund International, Mtoto News, Plan International, and World

Vision International, the coalition was built around a striking and underappreciated fact: violence against children – much of it now facilitated online – costs the world an estimated 11% of global GDP. The countries least able to absorb that cost are the ones with the fewest resources to prevent it. The coalition exists to make that argument loudly, consistently, and in the rooms where financing decisions are made.

Those rooms included the **G20 Social Summit in South Africa**, where Safe Online co-organised a high-level roundtable that brought the urgency of the child online safety funding gap directly to governments whose decisions shape global development priorities. The momentum carried into a **joint open letter** to G20 leaders signed by nearly 100 organisations, calling for increased investment, coordinated cross-border action, and solutions shaped by survivors. A hundred signatures on a letter are not, by themselves, a policy change. But it is a signal to governments that the field has found its collective voice.



Shaping inclusive AI agendas for children's wellbeing

At the 80th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Safe Online contributed to the Clinton Global Initiative's efforts to advance the Safe Digital Futures agenda with governments, philanthropists, and private-sector partners, making the case that child online safety is not a niche cause but a global development and digital governance imperative. On the margins of UNGA, at the **AI Africa Village**, we contributed to a different but connected conversation: what does responsible AI look like when one centres children and communities rather than platforms and profit? The answer Safe Online put forward was a shift from "safety by design" to "wellbeing by design," built with communities, informed by survivor. This reflects a growing conviction: the AI governance debate will either include children or fail them. Safety should be the floor, and flourishing should be the goal.

Strengthening grantee advocacy capacity: Voices in Action Advocacy Lab Series

Over the years, we have learned that global advocacy without local capacity is brittle. Grantees working on the frontlines of child online safety often hold the most compelling evidence and the most credible voices, but many lack the skills, networks, and strategic framing needed to translate their work into policy influence. The Voices in Action Advocacy Lab Series, launched in 2025, was designed specifically to change that. By equipping grantees with advocacy tools, financing narratives, and strategies for systems-level influence, it is building a network of advocates who can carry the child online safety agenda into their own governments, platforms, and communities, thereby extending Safe Online's reach far beyond what any single organisation could achieve alone.

Measuring change

Over the past decade, Safe Online has increasingly focused on strengthening how the child online safety ecosystem measures progress, generates evidence and learns what drives sustainable systems change.

As we approached Safe Online's ten-year milestone, 2025 marked the beginning of a broader reflection process to synthesise lessons emerging from nearly a decade of investments and partnerships. This work, which informed a Learning Review, reinforced the importance of a systems approach that combines evidence, technology, institutional strengthening, research, advocacy, operational systems and collaboration to achieve sustainable change.

Using evaluations to strengthen systems change

In 2025, evaluations completed across six Safe Online-supported initiatives generated valuable evidence on effective approaches to preventing and responding to online harms against children. Beyond assessing programme performance, these evaluations contributed to organisational learning, policy influence, programme adaptation, and systems strengthening across the ecosystem.

The evaluations highlighted the importance of embedding child online safety within institutional systems and professional practice to achieve sustainable impact. They also reinforced that technology solutions are most effective when integrated into operational workflows, supported by institutional capacity and aligned with broader safeguarding and response systems.

Several evaluations demonstrated how evidence can strengthen policy dialogue, improve service delivery, support

institutional uptake and foster stronger collaboration between governments, civil society organisations, industry, and practitioners. Collectively, they contributed to a growing body of knowledge on what works to protect children in an increasingly complex digital environment.

These findings underscore the importance of continued investment in evidence generation and learning, ensuring that policy, practice, and innovation are informed by robust evidence and real-world experience.

Strengthening learning and MEL capacities across the portfolio

In 2025, Safe Online expanded its investment in strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) capacities across the portfolio through a partnership with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). The initiative supported grantees in strengthening outcome measurement, adaptive management, organisational learning, and evidence use.

The work included foundational webinars, tailored cohort-based accompaniment,

peer learning, the development of a MEL Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), and the design of a future Community of Practice to strengthen ecosystem-wide learning and exchange.

Together, these efforts reflect our growing emphasis on building stronger learning systems across the ecosystem to support more adaptive, evidence-informed, and sustainable responses to online harms against children.

Capturing the impact of the Tech Coalition Safe Online Research Fund

Safe Online strengthened the measurement and communication of the Tech Coalition–Safe Online Research Fund’s portfolio-wide impact through an **interactive digital platform** that showcases key metrics, collaboration heatmaps, and examples of partnerships fostered between researchers and industry. The platform demonstrates how strategic investments in research can strengthen evidence, collaboration, and innovation across the child online safety ecosystem.



4

Highlights from the grantees in 2025



Numbers can describe the scale of Safe Online's portfolio, but the work itself happens in a classroom in Kazakhstan, a courtroom in the Philippines, a research lab in Berlin, and a helpline call centre in Zambia. Safe Online's grantees were active across all of these places, and the cumulative effect of that work is beginning to show.

Stronger policy and legal landscape

One of the quietest but most consequential things that can happen in child online safety is a government deciding to take it seriously in law. In 2025, several did. Indonesia issued a Presidential Regulation establishing a national roadmap for child protection online through 2029: the first time the country has embedded digital child safety into its highest-level executive policy. The Philippines launched a national strategic plan specifically targeting online sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Kazakhstan went further still: it adopted a national children's programme prioritising digital protection, established child-friendly one-stop support centres in law, and signed the UN Convention against Cybercrime - three separate policy commitments in a single year.

These changes do not happen by accident. They happen because grantees have spent years building the evidence, the relationships, and the political will that make them possible. In Iraq, a task force that had been focused on technology-facilitated gender-based violence was refocused into a dedicated Online Violence Task Force: a structural shift that reflects growing institutional recognition that online child abuse requires its own coordinated response. In Pakistan, a national Child Online Protection Coordination Forum was notified to guide policy development and legal reform across the country. These efforts resulted in governments

strengthening multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms to address online CSEA.

Research to strengthen nationally representative evidence base and help keep pace with the threats

A lack of nationally representative data on gaps in policy and legal frameworks, and on the extent to which children are exposed to online harms, impedes effective national response to the challenges of online CSEA. During the year, Armenia was equipped with its first critical national evidence on how technologies are outpacing national laws and legal frameworks, as well as insights into patterns of digital offences, trends, the online spaces where online CSEA occurs, and how children experience and report abuse in the country through the launch and dissemination of its **Disrupting Harm** study.

The online harms facing children are evolving faster than most institutions can track. In 2025, Safe Online-supported research worked to close that gap, and in several cases did so in ways with immediate real-world consequences.

A **Stanford University study on AI-generated CSAM** exposed critical gaps in how schools and platforms are currently responding to a threat that is growing exponentially. Research by the International Justice Mission uncovered something that investigators had long suspected but rarely documented: direct links between forced online scamming operations and financially motivated sextortion targeting children. The findings were specific enough and credible enough to prompt engagement from the US Department of Homeland Security, Italian police, the British Columbia Securities Commission, and a sitting senator in the Philippines - across four jurisdictions, within a single research cycle.

In Ukraine, a **survey by Anglia Ruskin University** on online risks during the ongoing conflict did something no research is supposed to do but occasionally must: it identified more than 20 children at acute risk in real time, triggering immediate support. Research, in this instance, became an intervention.

In the Philippines, Plan International generated the first empirical evidence on the drivers and mechanisms of self-facilitated livestreaming of abuse, a form of exploitation that has been difficult to prosecute precisely because it involves a child's apparent participation. Those findings are now being cited in proposed amendments to national law.

Technological University Dublin implemented **NLight**, an AI-powered tool focused on victim-perpetrator behaviour, at the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC), enabling the organisation, for the first time, to hear the direct voice of the child and, as acknowledged by some officials, provides "a level of information we've never had before". The application provides an easy-to-use visual analysis of all the child web chat logs, showing topics being discussed and patterns of child-sexual-abuse-related approaches.

Building the human infrastructure that makes protection real

Technology and training are often treated as separate investments. In practice, they must go hand in hand. A detection tool without a trained investigator to act on its findings protects no one. A trained teacher without a reporting mechanism to refer children to is left with nowhere to turn. In 2025, Safe Online grantees worked to close that gap by simultaneously strengthening the tools and the people who make them work.

On the technology side, the results were tangible. In a single month, one law enforcement agency using Thorn Detect **recovered more than 100 children, arrested more than 200 abusers, and executed nearly 300 search warrants** - a scale of response that would have taken years using traditional investigative methods. The Aselo helpline platform, which unifies counselling, case management, and reporting in one place, expanded to six new countries: Tanzania, the United States, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Zambia, and Belgium, where it now supports reporting across Europe. In Jamaica and Zambia, a new AI-powered summarisation feature reduced the administrative burden on helpline counsellors, giving them more time with the children who call, and less time on paperwork.

But tools alone cannot keep children safe. Lasting impact depends on the people who interact with children every day—teachers, caregivers, social workers, and other frontline professionals—having the skills and confidence to act when risks arise. In Pakistan, 216 master trainers fanned out across two provinces to train approximately 150,000 educators on child online protection - a scale of reach that is only possible when you invest in building the trainers, not just delivering the training. In Kazakhstan, online safety content was embedded into teacher training and parent support programmes delivered through schools nationwide, making child online safety part of the routine infrastructure of education rather than a one-off intervention. In Iraq, Jordan, Madagascar, Moldova, Namibia, and Senegal, law enforcement officers and judges received specialised training to investigate and prosecute online abuse cases, building the judicial and investigative capacity that determines whether laws, however well written, are ever enforced.

Taken together, these investments reflect a hard-won lesson: sustainable child protection is not built by deploying a tool or running a training. It is built when the right tools are in the hands of people who know how to use them, connected to pathways that actually reach children in need.

Reaching children before harm reaches them

Prevention - that is, reaching children and families before abuse occurs - remains one of the field's most important and underinvested priorities. In 2025, Safe Online-supported campaigns worked at a scale that began to match the size of

the problem. In Indonesia, online safety messaging reached 48.4 million internet users. In Vietnam, the “Không Một Mình” (Not Alone) campaign educated 8 million students about the risks of online grooming and exploitation. In Pakistan, a campaign run in partnership with Telenor reached more than 1.4 million people.

These are not just communication campaigns. They are the upstream investments that make every other investment, including in hotlines, law enforcement units, and reporting mechanisms, more likely to be used when children and families need them.



Case studies

For Muhammed (name changed), a juvenile investigation officer in Sulaimani, Iraq, cases involving children are never just technical - they are deeply human. “I mainly work with survivors under eighteen, so I wanted to understand how technology is shaping these crimes,” he shared. As smartphones and online platforms become more accessible, he has seen how risks and responses vary across communities. Midway through SEED’s training, Muhammed began to rethink his approach. Beyond tools like secure data handling and digital coding, the programme emphasised trust, privacy, and survivor care.

The training also addressed the emotional toll on investigators. “Their safety must always come first,” Muhammed reflected, “but we also learned how to protect our own mental wellbeing” For him, the experience reinforced a simple truth: responding to online harm requires not just enforcement, but empathy, awareness, and a system that supports both survivors and those working to protect them.

In Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Safe Online is equipping law enforcement and frontline officials to strengthen prevention, detection, and response efforts.



5

Looking forward: The next decade of child online safety



A decade of building has prepared Safe Online for a different kind of future and for a different kind of organisation to meet it.

From 2027, Safe Online will operate as a fully independent foundation, headquartered in Geneva, alongside the institutions that shape humanitarian action, human rights, and digital governance. Almost ten years of UNICEF hosting gave us what no start-up fund can manufacture: operational infrastructure, institutional credibility, and reach into countries and conversations that would otherwise have stayed closed to us. That inheritance does not end with the hosting arrangement. It is built into how we work, and UNICEF remains a partner in the chapter ahead.

Independence is a means, not a milestone. What it unlocks is practical: faster decisions, a wider set of financing instruments, partnerships beyond those available to a hosted entity, and the ability to take positions the field needs someone to take. The years ahead are planned as a period of deliberate growth: a larger fund, a broader coalition, and a sharper role as convener and field-builder across child protection, technology and wellbeing.

Deepening our commitment to ending online CSEA

Our founding mission holds, because the threat has not relented. It has changed shape. Generative AI now lets child abuse material be produced without the traditional signals our detection systems were built to find - hashes, known victims, known

distributors - and the volume is arriving faster than the field's response capacity is growing. Staying ahead of that requires sustained investment in three things at once: the evidence base, the detection and disruption tools, and the institutions that have to use them. We will keep directing catalytic funding to the places and problems where it can shift the trajectory for children, now with greater agility to move when the threat landscape does.

Building for wellbeing, not only safety: introducing Weave Wellbeing

This chapter also reflects how our thinking has matured. Protection that begins after harm has occurred will always be protection in arrears. The more consequential work is upstream, in how digital environments, particularly AI, are designed, governed and incentivised before a child ever encounters them.

Weave Wellbeing is where that conviction becomes a commitment: an initiative to build a collaborative fund of more than USD 100 million that invests across three pillars — technology, research and systems — to promote, protect and support young people's mental health and wellbeing in the digital age. The shift it marks is from safety by design to wellbeing by design: safety is the floor we owe children; flourishing is the goal.

Wellbeing has to be woven into the fabric of technology from the start. The decade ahead will be measured by how far we get.

6

Financial summary



Safe Online Money-in; Money-out Report

As of December 31, 2025 (In United States Dollars)

Donor Contributions Received		
Donor	Earmark Area	2025 (USD)
United Kingdom Home Office	OCSE	4,974,747
OAK Foundation	OCSE	2,303,330
ICONIQ Capital	Secretariat	639,118
Tech Coalition	OCSE	318,580
Total		8,235,775
UNICEF		364,974
Less UNICEF Administrative Agent Fee (1%)		82,358
Net Contributions (in USD)		8,518,392
Allocation to Fund Account*		
Donors		
United Kingdom Home Office		4,228,535
OAK Foundation		675,700
Tech Coalition		165,130
Total		5,069,365
Allocation to Secretariat Account*		
Donors		
United Kingdom Home Office		746,212
OAK Foundation		1,627,630
ICONIQ Capital		632,727
Tech Coalition		153,450
Total		3,160,019

2025 Financial Summary of Safe Online Fund Account

As of December 31, 2025 - FSO Report as of December 31, 2025 (In United States Dollars)

2025 disbursements to grantees:	9,758,667
Funds Held in Trust	10,082,001
Breakdown of Funds Held in Trust by Earmarking Pot (as of 31.12.2025)	
OCSE (UK Home Office, Oak)	9,707,056
OCSE (Tech Coalition)	9,998
UNICEF	364,974

2025 Financial Summary of Safe Online Secretariat Account

As of December 31, 2025 (In United States Dollars)

OUTCOMES	2025
OUTCOME 1: Invest for impact	395,512
OUTCOME 2: Evidence and knowledge	721,030
OUTCOME 3: Advocacy and Collective Action	689,579
OUTCOME 4: Mental Health initiative	470,373
Cross-cutting enablers (Mgmt, Ops, Comms)	1,213,372
GRAND TOTAL	3,489,866



Case studies

Y Lien (name changed), an 8th-grade student from a highland school in Kon Tum province, Vietnam, once suffered in silence after receiving inappropriate messages from a stranger online. “I was too scared to tell anyone,” she recalls. Her life changed after joining the Champion of Change Club, supported by a Safe Online-funded project, where she learned how to identify online abuse, stay safe online, and seek help from trusted adults. “For the first time, I felt my mom was there to listen and protect me,” she says. Today, Y Lien leads peer support initiatives, raises awareness in her community, and helps other children speak up and stay safe online.

With Safe Online’s investments, in select regions of Vietnam, Plan International is working with adolescents, schools, parents, and service providers, setting up an innovative community-based survivor support model to improve the reporting of online CSEA and strengthen the quality of services for survivors.



7

Expression of thanks



Safe Online acknowledges the generous contributions of governments, foundations and coalitions whose support over the past several years has helped to create a safer digital world for children and young people.

Safe online owes special thanks to the following:



Finally, we extend our sincere gratitude to UNICEF for hosting Safe Online.





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