DECADE OF CHANGE

A Stocktake of the Technology-Facilitated Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Ecosystem in the Phillipines

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Safe Online

Evident

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Acronyms

ACG	Anti-Cybercrime Group (of the Philippine National Police)
CANE	Protocol for Case Management of Child Victims of Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation
CPN	Child Protection Unit
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSAEM	Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Material
CSAM	Child Sexual Abuse Material
CSEA	Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
CSPC	Committee for the Special Protection of Children
CWC	Council for the Welfare of Children
DepEd	Department of Education
DILG	Department of the Interior and Local Government
DOJ	Department of Justice
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
FIU	Financial Intelligence Unit
IACACP	Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography
IACAT	Inter-agency Council Against Trafficking
ICSE	International Child Sexual Exploitation Database
IJM	International Justice Mission
IRR	Implementing Rules and Regulations
ISP	Internet Service Provider
JSCC	Justice Sector Coordinating Council
KYC	Know Your Customer (banking anti-fraud requirement)
LCAT	Local Committees on Anti-Trafficking
LGU	Local Government Unit
MAKABATA	Mahalin At Kalingain Ating Mga Bata (Hotline)
MLAT	Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty
MNR	Model National Response
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBI	National Bureau of Investigation (of the Philippine National Police)
NCC	National Coordination Center Against OSAEC and CSAEM
NCMEC	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (USA based)
OSAEC	Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children
PICACC	Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Center
RCAT	Regional Council Against Trafficking
SO	Safe Online
TF-CSEA	Technology Facilitated Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
TWG	Technical Working Group
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WCPC	Women and Children Protection Center (of the Philippine National Police)

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A Note on Terminology

In the Philippines, the term 'online sexual abuse and exploitation of children' (OSAEC) is commonly used, including in legislation and regulatory definitions. Increasingly, the term 'technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse' (TF-CSEA) is being adopted on a global level. This term better accounts for the reality that abuse and exploitation rarely exists discretely online or offline but has aspects of being facilitated by technology.

We endeavour to use 'technology-facilitated CSEA' throughout the report, however, interview respondents and cited documentation sometimes refers to OSAEC which has been retained.

I. WHY MEASURING SYSTEMS CHANGE MATTERS

Introduction & Purpose

Technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (TF-CSEA) continues to evolve rapidly in scale, complexity and reach. As digital environments expand and diversify, so too do the risks faced by children, requiring coordinated and adaptive responses across sectors, institutions and national contexts.

Since its inception in 2016, *Safe Online* has supported global efforts to address TF-CSEA[1] through investments in evidence-building, innovative solutions, cutting-edge technologies and cross-sectoral programmes. Through its decade of investments in more than 180 projects in over 100 countries, Safe Online helps to build the global evidence base and facilitates advocacy and collective action for the rights and safety of children in the digital world.

Despite growing investment and activity in this field, there remains limited structured evidence on how change occurs at the national level, particularly in Global South contexts, where resource constraints, institutional capacity and rapidly evolving digital ecosystems shape distinct challenges and opportunities. While project-based monitoring and evaluation provides important insights into specific interventions, it often does not capture how different actors, policies and initiatives interact to produce broader systemic outcomes. As a result, there is a need for deeper understanding of the conditions and pathways through which effective and sustained change occurs.

To address this gap, Safe Online undertook two national case studies in the Global South to examine how change unfolds within different country contexts. These case studies aim to identify key drivers of progress, as well as persistent challenges and constraints, by analysing how a range of stakeholders and interventions collectively contribute to national responses. By focusing on diverse contexts, the case studies seek to generate comparative insights into how systemic change is enabled under different conditions.

The Philippines was selected as one of the case study countries due to its sustained national engagement with TF-CSEA, the presence of diverse stakeholders across government, civil society and industry and the rapid evolution of both risks and responses in recent years. As such, it provides a valuable opportunity to examine how coordinated action develops within a complex and high-pressure environment.

The Philippines case study explores how national and local actors have responded to TF-CSEA and how their combined and interacting efforts have shaped the country's evolving response. By examining this experience, the report seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of what enables effective action in complex and rapidly changing environments.

This report is intended for donors, policymakers and advocates working to strengthen child protection in digital spaces. It provides insights to inform investment strategies, policy development, advocacy and programming with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness and coherence of efforts to address TF-CSEA globally.

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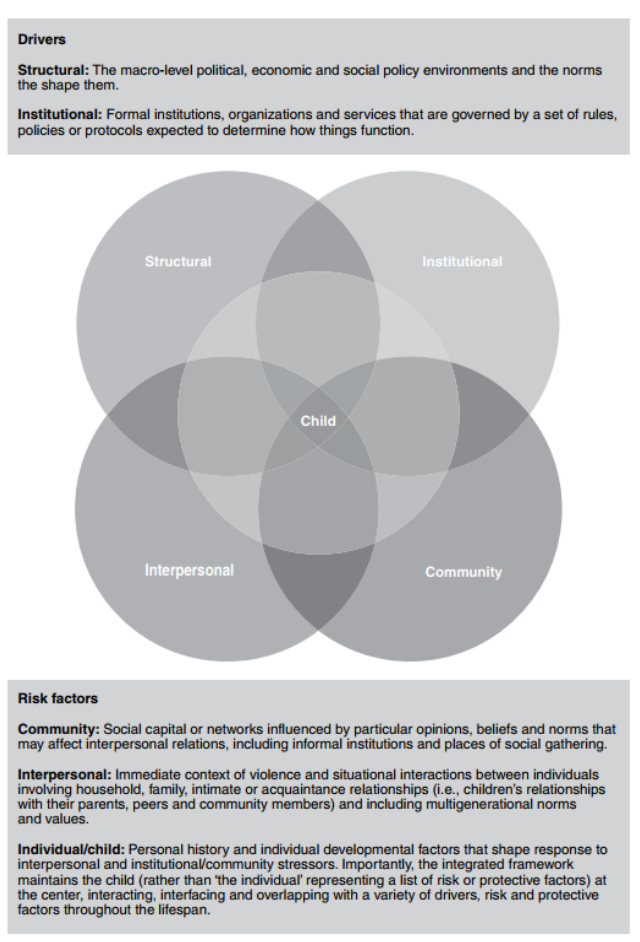
[1] Increasingly, the term 'online' is being replaced with 'technology-facilitated' to better account for the reality that abuse and exploitation rarely exists only online or offline. In the Philippines, the acronym OSAEC is commonly used, including in legal definitions (online sexual abuse and exploitation of children). We endeavour to use 'technology-facilitated CSEA' throughout the report, however, interview respondents and cited documentation frequently also refer to OSAEC.

Methodology

Analytic Framework

This case study adopts a systems-informed analytical approach to examine how change occurs within national responses to TF-CSEA. Systems analysis enables a more comprehensive understanding of complex social challenges by identifying the roles and inputs of different actors, mapping interactions between system components, and examining how combinations of interventions contribute to observed outcomes. It also supports the identification of key catalysts and constraints within the ecosystem. By analysing how these dynamics operate in practice, systems approaches can inform more effective and targeted investment and intervention strategies.

The analytical framework for this study draws on Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological systems model[2], which is widely used to understand the multiple, interacting layers that shape individual experiences and social outcomes. Building on this, Kardefelt-Winter & Maternowska[3] adapted the model (pictured) to incorporate digital environments, developing an integrated child-centred framework that reflects how online and offline factors interact within systems affecting child safety. Their framework highlights how a child's experience of violence is shaped by interactions across individual, interpersonal, community and societal domains.



To operationalise this systems perspective for the purposes of data collection and analysis, the study applies the WeProtect Global Alliance Model National Response (MNR)[4] as a structural framework. The MNR defines key domains of a national ecosystem responding to TF-CSEA and provides a shared, internationally recognised basis for analysis and cross-country comparison. The study examines the following MNR domains:

1. Policy, legislation and governance
2. Law enforcement and justice
3. Social services and survivor support
4. Industry engagement
5. Public awareness and education
6. Research, data and evidence

In consultation with Safe Online, a seventh domain was added to strengthen the analysis of resource flows and sustainability:

7. Funding models and ecosystem financing

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[2] Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[3] Kardefelt-Winther & Maternowska, C. (2019). Addressing violence against children online and offline. Nature Human Behavior, 4. 227-230.

[4] WeProtect Global Alliance. (2023). Preventing and Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A Model National Response: Maturity Model.

Data Collection

To generate the Philippines case study, a qualitative multi-method approach was employed. A comprehensive document review was conducted to establish the contextual and institutional landscape of the national response to TF-CSEA. This was followed by fifteen in-person, semi-structured interviews with 21 critical stakeholders from national and local government, civil society, and industry conducted in Manila during January and February 2026. Stakeholders were selected based on their roles and involvement across the different domains of the ecosystem. An ethical decision was taken not to collect new primary data from children for reasons set out in the limitation section below.

The WeProtect Global Alliance MNR self-assessment tool[5] informed the initial development of the overarching research questions (see Annex A), which were further refined through consultation between the research team and Safe Online. Question guides were then developed for both the document review and interviews to identify observed changes in policy, coordination, and practice, as well as pathways of change, enabling factors, constraints, and interactions across the system.

Data Analysis and Triangulation

Data analysis was guided by an adapted outcome harvesting approach,[6] which identifies observable changes in behaviours, relationships, actions or policies and works retrospectively to determine how these changes occurred and the contributions of different actors. This approach is particularly suited to complex systems where causality is non-linear and distributed. The analysis followed six iterative steps:

1. Design of the outcome harvest
2. Review of documentation and development of draft outcome descriptions
3. Engagement with stakeholders to identify observable changes
4. Substantiation of outcomes through multiple sources
5. Analysis of contribution and significance
6. Synthesis of findings into lessons and insights

Triangulation was achieved through the integration of document review, interview data and stakeholder engagement. Stakeholders from government, civil society, service providers and industry were included to capture diverse perspectives and strengthen the credibility of findings. Special attention was taken to explore both intended and unintended consequences of inputs across the seven domains.

Validation, Lived Experience Analysis and Contribution

Preliminary findings were synthesised into a draft case study report and shared in advance of a national multi-stakeholder roundtable held on 19th May, 2026 in Manila. The session included presentation of the findings and structured discussion to test interpretations, challenge assumptions and refine analysis. The roundtable was designed to inform the analysis rather than to establish consensus. It was attended by 13 of the 21 interview participants.

Throughout the process, the research team applied critical scrutiny to stakeholder inputs, recognising potential biases and incentives for positive self-reporting. Triangulation across sources, combined with the research team's contextual expertise, was used to validate findings and challenge dominant

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[5] WeProtect Global Alliance. (2023). Preventing and Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A Model National Response: Self-Assessment Tool.

[6] Wilson-Grua, R. & Britt, H. (2012). Outcome Harvesting. Ford Foundation: Cairo, Egypt.

narratives. However, it is worth noting that the primary interviewee pool of government, civil society, and industry actors shares a degree of institutional interest in describing the ecosystem's progress favourably, and triangulation predominantly among these groups may reinforce as much as counteract that shared incentive.

The clearest independent check within the methodology was therefore a separately held consultation with survivor-advocates. This was conducted with four participants who were part of the Philippine Survivor Network on 20th May, 2026 in a closed setting to ensure a safe and independent space for reflection. This enabled the integration of lived experience perspectives without institutional influence. Insights were incorporated with careful attention to ethical considerations, including safeguarding and the avoidance of tokenistic representation (see Annex B). It is noted that this group was small (n=4) and the consultation was used primarily to validate and contextualise draft findings. Future iterations of this research could strengthen the corrective function of triangulation with a more structured 'dissenting voice' review step that profiles actors without a direct stake in the ecosystem's institutional narrative.

The analysis also explored the extent to which Safe Online-funded interventions plausibly contributed to observed outcomes within the broader ecosystem. However, given the systems-level scope of the study, outcomes reflect the combined influence of multiple actors and investments. The analysis therefore focuses on contribution and interaction rather than direct attribution as is usual in project evaluations.

Presentation of Findings

Findings are presented through a series of thematic narratives that highlight key elements of system change including catalysts, enabling factors, constraints, and interactions between system components. Rather than imposing a single, unified theory of change, this approach reflects the complexity of the ecosystem and allows for the presentation of multiple, interrelated pathways of change.

This approach preserves analytical rigor while maintaining readability and accessibility.

Ethical Review and Safeguarding

The project design, methodology and tools underwent independent ethical review. Safeguarding measures were implemented throughout, including the presence of psychosocial expertise during the survivor-advocate consultation. Further details are provided in Annex B.

Limitations

The systems-wide analytical approach limits the ability to attribute observed changes to specific interventions, including those funded by Safe Online, domestic governments and others. Instead, the study focuses on understanding how multiple actors and factors interact to produce outcomes.

Much of the evidence presented reflects systemic and structural changes as reported by stakeholders. While these changes are likely to contribute to outcomes at community and individual levels, direct impacts are not consistently substantiated with empirical data. This reflects broader limitations in the measurement of downstream effects within the ecosystem. Despite obtaining departmental permission and extensive scheduling attempts, interviews were unable to be scheduled with frontline child protection social workers in government shelters and support services beyond the visit and interviews with staff at the Valenzuela Child Protection Centre.

An ethical decision was taken not to directly consult children for the study. This reflected guidance from the study's independent ethical review (see Annex B): Given the study's system-level focus on

institutional and policy change, the potential value of direct child participation was judged not to outweigh the risks and safeguarding resourcing required to engage individual children safely on such a sensitive topic. Children's perspectives were also well represented through the existing body of Philippines-specific research capturing child experiences of TF-CSEA, and participation would have had limited personal benefit to the participating children themselves. Adult survivor-advocates were givenprominent influence through the separate consultation event to critique and validate the findings, though their inputs were illustrative rather than representative and should not be interpreted as reflecting the experiences of all TF-CSEA survivors in the country. These factors occasionally limit the conclusions that can be drawn. For example, assessing the influence of child participation mechanisms for policy development described by stakeholders, identifying emerging concerns for young people, or determining the accessibility and effectiveness of prevention and response actions from children's perspectives.

II. BASELINE CONTEXT AND DYNAMICS

Going back many years, the Philippines has faced significant challenges related to the sexual exploitation of children. In the 1990s and 2000s it had become known as a destination for travelling sex offenders; for example, a study published in 2007 estimated that between 60,000 and 75,000 children were exploited in the commercial sex industry in the country.[7] Media reports also documented instances in which parents or guardians facilitated or sold the sexual services of their children in exchange for money.[8]

In the mid 2010s, awareness was increasing of the emerging, technology-facilitated forms of these crimes. Interview respondents described that frontline practitioners were increasingly observing technology as an enabler, and sometimes a feature, of the child abuse and exploitation cases they were encountering. These practice-based observations led to growing calls for robust research to better explain the phenomenon. Social norms around TF-CSEA also seemed to differ from abuse involving direct physical contact with public attitudes seemingly minimising and normalising abuse. The legal framework, and consequently police investigations and prosecutions contributed to this framing – as abuse without physical evidence was not captured well in law and thus was being deprioritised.

Initial Recognition of TF-CSEA

A growing recognition of the scale of TF-CSEA (known commonly as OSAEC in the Philippines) arose from visibility amongst practitioners in the field, particularly from child protection service providers and non-government organisations. These professionals began to see links between child sexual abuse and exploitation and online technology as early as 2006–2008.

In the medical sector, practitioners in the Philippines General Hospital's Child Protection Unit observed changes in the patterns of perpetration in the cases they were seeing. A medical doctor from Child Protection Network (CPN) explained that in recorded data about perpetrators during intake, they began to see a shift:

> *"As a doctor, because I'm also one of the paediatricians in the Child Protection Unit, we used to recognise cases based on the perpetrator. If the child comes in and he says or she says that the perpetrator is a textmate or a chatmate, as early as 2012, we observed* this increasing number of textmate/chatmate perpetrators. We knew that the online [situation] was changing." (Interview 9, Healthcare Professional)

At this time, non-governmental organisations such as Stairway Foundation conducted small exploratory studies to understand emerging TF-CSEA by experimenting with creating child profiles on online platforms to test the occurrence of grooming behaviour.

These early examples of exploratory evidence helped confirm the suspected existence of emerging technology-facilitated risks to children, even at a time when there was not yet systematic data, policy recognition or general public awareness of TF-CSEA at a national or international level.

Four interview participants described how in 2013 Terre des Hommes' 'Sweetie' project brought significant global attention to the use of technology in facilitating child sexual exploitation in the Philippines. This media campaign involved creating a computer-generated avatar of a 10-year-old

[7] The Protection Project. (2007). International Child Sex Tourism: Scope of the Problem and Comparative Case Studies.
[8] ECPAT International. (2011). Global Monitoring Status of Action Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: PHILIPPINES.

Filipina girl that was then used in online video chat rooms. During a 10-week operation, more than 20,000 men contacted the avatar, knowing clearly that it depicted an underage girl, and 1,000 users offered money for sexual acts with her via webcam. The project received international media coverage and raised awareness of the exploding threat of online sexual exploitation of children in the country.[9]

A Growing Call for Robust Evidence

Practitioner experiences together with a rising public awareness prompted calls for trustworthy data about the prevalence and nature of TF-CSEA in the Philippines. Regularly cited in interviews was a major national research project in 2016 that began to shed light on TF-CSEA: The 2016 National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children. While the study was a broad exploration of violence, the results clearly showed online contexts as a pressing concern: *"new/emerging forms of violence include online exploitation, where easy access to internet and the hidden nature of crimes committed in cyberspace leave children particularly vulnerable."*[10] The study reported that *"about 43.8 percent of children aged 13-<18 years ever experienced cyber violence."* [11]

In addition to formal research avenues, evidence-building was also undertaken in other ways. For example, collaborations between non-governmental organisations and law enforcement agencies contributed practice data.

> *"In 2016, we shifted to addressing online sexual exploitation of children at that time...We didn't have a sense of the magnitude of the problem. And so, we worked with the [Philippines National Police] WCPC, Women and Children Protection Center, to really strengthen their capacity to investigate online sexual exploitation of children."* (Interview 7, Civil Society Officer)

Projects contributed practice-based evidence regarding TF-CSEA, such as the Safe Online supported "Ending Online Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cebu,"[12] which strengthened International Justice Mission's (IJM) work on law enforcement capacity building, survivor assistance, and prosecution of offenders, as well as Plan International's project **"**Cyber-safe Spaces for Children and Youth"[13] in Manila and Quezon City, which promoted child rights and gender equality by empowering girls and youth to prevent online exploitation and abuse. This data included insights into risk factors at the community level, data generated through investigations and frontline implementation, and lessons learned on law enforcement responses and prevention strategies at the individual, group, and community levels. This accumulation of data was critical support for the growing calls for structural changes needed to address this emerging issue:

> *"Well basically in the Philippines, amendments of the law should be backed up by data and evidence... If someone's really working on it, monitoring on it, that would really push for its amendment or revisions."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

Social Norms and Country Characteristics

Research for the case studies project showed that at the time, the public had quite superficial understanding of how TF-CSEA occurred and its impact on children. Contact forms of abuse were known and understood, but when TF-CSEA was being described, it was often understood in a way

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[9] BBC News. (2013). Computer-generated 'Sweetie' Catches Online Predators.
[10] UNICEF. (2016). National Baseline Study on Violence against Children: Philippines. p. ii.
[11] UNICEF. (2016). National Baseline Study on Violence against Children: Philippines. p. 8.
[12] International Justice Mission. (2024). Ending Online Sexual Exploitation of Children in Cebu, Philippines.
[13] Plan International. (2021). Cyber Safe Spaces Project for Children and Youth in the Cities of Manila and Quezon.

that positioned it as less serious or impactful than contact forms of abuse. A critical study of hotspot communities in metro Manila reported that young people there perceived online sexual activities as "normal" although they also regarded them as "disgusting." Online sex activities had become a source of "easy money" for the children and families and were not perceived as harmful because of anonymity and the absence of physical contact. People in the community tolerated these online practices and did not report the incidents to authorities.[14]

Interview respondents frequently referred to this common social norm characterising TF-CSEA, often summarised as the myth of "no touch, no harm."

> *"And in fact, I understand in the Philippines, one of the problems has been that people say OSAEC is 'no harm, no touch'. Yeah, no, that's not correct."* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

This dominant social norm likely meant there was significant under-reporting of TF-CSEA concerns and was an enabling factor for vulnerable families to be easily exploited in order to facilitate abuse of children for financial gains.

Research that further explored the troubling phenomenon of family facilitation of TF-CSEA highlighted a range of explanatory factors: 1) social norms that downplay the severity of the acts, 2) economic incentives, and 3) close relationships that facilitate easy access to children. Furthermore, comparably high English language proficiency, accessible and inexpensive internet nationwide, and a widespread money remittance infrastructure have been identified as enabling factors.[15]

> *The perception of the perpetrators before and the facilitators was that it's just happening online. It was that 'my child is not being touched so that's why there's no such thing as harm.'"* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

Survivor-advocates participating in the side event confirmed that many people don't fully understand the harm experienced by children depicted in child sexual abuse materials: As one survivor explained:

> *"They only see the video and do not understand the violence, coercion, threats, and abuse behind it."* (Survivor Side-Event Participant)

The survivor-advocates also reflected on the ecosystem around them, noting that community members and local-level agencies often lacked understanding of TF-CSEA or reporting and referral pathways. They identified this knowledge gap as a barrier that prevented case identification, especially when family members were involved as facilitators or perpetrators.

The Legal Framework for TF-CSEA

Since 1992, the Philippines has continuously developed its legal framework for child protection since the first *Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act.*[16]

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[14] Ramiro, L., Martinez, A. B., Tan, J. R., Mariano, K., Miranda, G. M., Bautista, G. (2019). Online child sexual exploitation and abuse: A community diagnosis using the social norms theory. Child Abuse and Neglect 96.

[15] Wilkinson, D. (2021). Best Practices in Case Management of Child Sexual Abuse and their Suitability for Online Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Philippines: A Systematic Review. IJM: Manila.

[16] Republic of the Philippines (1992). Republic Act No. 7610: Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act.

The Anti-Child Pornography Act was adopted in 2009.[17] This law defined offences related to child sexual abuse material (CSAM) which represented some aspects of TF-CSEA.[18] In 2012, the government began to recognise in law that technology was being increasingly used to enable trafficking. Amendments were made to the Anti-Trafficking Act,[19] and the Cybercrime Prevention Act[20] was also enacted to expand the scope of offenses – including to define an offence of 'cybersex' and to strengthen authority in handling digital evidence.

However, although the law began to catch up with technology to some extent, it largely remained grounded in defining the known offline crimes – such as trafficking offences – that were being enabled by technology. In a practical sense, this was also the only way that these laws were being used for prosecution by law enforcement and justice:

> *"Most of the cases were discovered not because of active police surveillance or because they realised that the children were in danger online. They were focused on exploitation, trafficking, more traditional."* (Interview 9, Healthcare Professional)

This limited justice responses to TF-CSEA as the understanding of law enforcement and justice actors and the relevant legal framework remained tied to elements of human trafficking.

The borderless nature of technology-facilitated crimes, and the increasing proliferation of tools that empowered offenders – such as encryption services – made investigation and detection increasingly difficult.

> *"One of the challenges that we encounter is especially the encryptions right now with the messages that make it more difficult to investigate and the privacy, also the privacy component of the laws that because we also have the Data Privacy Act. That's why you cannot just ask for information and then it's given to you immediately. So, somehow, it's one of the challenges that we do encounter in the implementation of the law."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

Cooperation from platforms, telecommunication companies and internet service providers was also challenging due to the absence of clear legal regulations regarding TF-CSEA. This resulted in barriers for law enforcement investigations when requesting, obtaining evidence, as well as removing abusive online content.

> *"That's why during the implementation of [Republic Act] 9775, the IACACP had difficulty in asking the internet service providers for reports and asking them to submit, you know, some things like that which are relevant to the investigation of OSAEC."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

By 2015, although the Philippines had taken commendable steps to advance its legal framework regarding TF-CSEA, gaps remained. Demand was growing for significant legal reform so that key ecosystem actors could act with less constraints.

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[17] Republic of the Philippines (2009). Republic Act No. 9775: Anti-Child Pornography Act.

[18] ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). Disrupting Harm in the Philippines: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, p. 22.

[19] Republic of the Philippines. (2012). Republic Act No 10365. An Act Further Strengthening the Anti-Money Laundering Law, amending for the Purpose Republic Act No. 9160, Otherwise Known as the "Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2001".

[20] Republic of the Philippines. (2012). Republic Act No. 10175: The Cybercrime Prevention Act, Section 4(c)(1).

A Landmark Legal Case Drew Attention to TF-CSEA in the Philippines - and Globally[21] [22]

Peter Scully was an Australian who exploited children in the Philippines who were poor and from vulnerable families. He sexually abused at least seven children (as appeared in the case file), engaged in human trafficking, and went as far as murder. Scully's offences were characterised by networked abuse, involving accomplices who provided access to the children, facilitated, and participated, as well as distributed and disseminated recorded CSAM from the offences to foreign buyers.

Scully was arrested in 2015, with the case gaining public attention in the Philippines and internationally. The publicity surrounding the case acted as an accelerator for the government to enact RA11930 and led to collaboration among multiple parties, including the Philippine National Police, prosecutors, and foreign agencies. The announcement of his life imprisonment sentence even triggered parliamentary debate regarding the reinstatement of the death penalty. The impact of the case on public sentiment and government action was clear and significant.

Ecosystem Fragmentation

Addressing TF-CSEA requires multiple actors and institutions in the ecosystem to collaborate. This includes law enforcement from local level through to specialist investigation units, social welfare policy makers and service providers, communication and technology actors from both government (policy) and industry (providers) and all levels of government administration. The ecosystem was initially highly fragmented, with weak coordination across institutions and overlapping mandates.

> *"Working on systems, I mean, that's not easy at all in this country, where everything is, for better use of the word, fragmented, right?"* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

One issue that interviewees noted is that the multiple and sometimes labyrinthine government structures in the country often necessitate parliamentary level mandates and regulations to spur compliance. But when this is in place, government entities do tend to act. (This is discussed further in chapter III). Without this regulation readily in place regarding the emerging threat of TF-CSEA, in 2015, existing structural mechanisms were being utilised to try and foreground the issue. Local government unit (LGU) child protection committees were attempting to tackle TF-CSEA cases, and interview respondents noted that both the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) and Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography (IACACP) – which included many consistent members – were being utilised to promote policy and legal reform advocacy related to TF-CSEA.

Yet it was clear from the interviews and desk review that different parts of the ecosystem were taking action without structured collaboration or coordination. There was a need to establish clear roles and mandated responsibilities within different government institutions, and to create mechanisms so that the actors across the ecosystem could work together more efficiently.

> *"Before, 10 years ago, organisations were working in silos, working independently just on their own. There was limited coordinated action from different organisations. One organisation worked on this, on that, and the other worked on a separate concern. There were no meetings together or consultations."* (Interview 16, Civil Society Officer)

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[21] Australian Broadcasting Corporation. (2015, March 7). *Australian man Gerard Peter Scully formally charged with murder, child sexual abuse in the Philippines*.

[22] Supreme Court of the Philippines. (2025, March 24). *SC upholds life sentence of Peter Scully for qualified trafficking*.

In particular, although non-governmental organisations had been observing, studying, and collecting data for a longer period than the government, they had largely operated based on their own organisational priorities, coordination with government agencies and others was attempted and well-meaning, but was ad hoc and inconsistent without being truly led by mandated government duty-bearers. This sometimes resulted in efficiencies, but duplications were also seen. Moves to influence policy or environmental changes were stilted.

This was also reflected in law enforcement, where coordination and role delineation was not strong:

> *"Prior to the enactment of the [2022 RA11930] law, there has been some issues between those two. Who's going to handle what? Who will coordinate issues of online sexual abuse and exploitation, because it's under the mandate of ACG [Anti-Cybercrime Group] and is also under the mandate of WCPC [Women and Children's Protection Center]?"* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

Establishing an Approach to Prosecution of TF-CSEA Without Requiring Child Survivors to Testify in Court[23] [24]

Between 2016 and 2019, a number of collaborative operations between Philippines police and foreign law enforcement agencies informed subsequent improvements to laws, regulations, and operational practices.

One such case involved Canadian national Philip Michael Chicoine, who was arrested in Canada in 2017. Over a period of six years, Chicoine spent more than USD 20,000 directing the procurement of live-streamed child sexual abuse from the Philippines and Romania. This resulted in what was described as the "most depraved collection" of more than 10,000 files ever seen by the Canadian Internet Child Exploitation unit investigator, including CSAM depicting the torture of children. On appeal, his sentence was increased from 12 years to 15 years' imprisonment, affirming that remotely directing abuse is a child sexual offence.

At the same time, the Philippines National Police WCPC, together with IACAT and IJM, arrested a mother in Abuyog, Leyte Province, Philippines, who sexually abused her own daughter and eight other children between the ages of two and nine. She facilitated Philip Michael Chicoine's requests for the production of child sexual abuse materials. She was sentenced to life imprisonment for qualified trafficking, life imprisonment for child abuse, and up to 17 years' imprisonment for online sexual exploitation of a minor. The court also ordered her to pay a total fine of PH₱4.5 million for the three offences.

A significant feature of this case was that no child was required to testify in court. Instead, prosecutors maximised the use of available digital evidence and worked through international cooperation to present the case.

In 2018, then Senator Loren Legarda cited this case in calling on demand-side countries to impose harsher penalties on online child sexual abuse offenders. She stated:

> *"While the Philippines can do all it can to address this, a holistic solution requires that developed countries, from which the demand for this type of exploitation usually originates, must also do their part. This calls for amending the lenient sentences that their laws mete upon those who prey on Filipino children... I am issuing a call and a challenge to our fellow legislators from other countries: raise the penalties to lower the demand and reflect the true nature of the crime in your respective countries. Truly, this is one of the worst forms of violence against women and children, with incalculable harm that traumatises children, even to the point of death."*

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[23] International Justice Mission Canada. (2019, October 24). *Canadian online sex offender who preyed on Filipino children gets longer sentence*.

[24] International Justice Mission Philippines. (2023, March 17). *Leyte court sentences online sex trafficker to life in prison*.

III. CATALYSTS AND CONSTRAINTS

Over the past decade, changes in the Philippines ecosystem for addressing TF-CSEA have been advanced by some prominent catalysts and held back by identifiable constraints. This chapter highlights effective and emerging catalysts that enabled impacts across the ecosystem. Related constraints are also flagged throughout.

Catalyst 1: Evidence as a Driver of System Change

The strategic generation and use of evidence has been a central driver of system change in the Philippines' response to TF-CSEA. Starting with the national study on violence in 2016,[25] further robust, trustworthy and quality research have continued to be generated throughout the decade, and the impact is undeniable. Rather than a single catalytic study, the cumulative development and application of a credible, nationally relevant evidence base has meant that duty-bearers could not look away – because the scale and nature of the problem was repeatedly and visibly emphasised. This has enabled shifts across policy and legal reform, advocacy, social norms and practice.

Safe Online investments have variously supported evidence generation through this period – both in terms of the robust, large-scale population representative Disrupting Harm study,[26] and through specific research projects that elucidated key characteristics of the problem – such as the Dublin City University analysis of offender behaviour and profiles.[27] Programming supported by Safe Online investments has also sometimes enabled the direct use of evidence across multiple fronts including for law enforcement strengthening, and community awareness – such as the IJM research projects into evolving TF-CSEA victim and offender patterns.[28] It is useful to note that Philippines research on TF-CSEA has also found funding from outside the Safe Online portfolio, including domestic, bilateral governments and academic sources. Roundtable participants reported that NCC has secured funding and plans to undertake a new national study in the future. (See a thorough summary table of relevant research at Annex C).

A noted constraint is that research projects have tended to be conceived and funded as stand-alone pieces. However, an emerging trend can be seen towards advocating the use of administrative data and trying to motivate government institutions to integrate collection of TF-CSEA data within existing data-gathering mechanisms. While the researchers saw limited evidence of success with this strategy yet, it could signal a positive trend towards less reliance on external funding.

Building a Credible National Evidence Base to Inform System Change

A substantial body of research emerged between 2015–2025, spanning multiple dimensions of the TF-CSEA ecosystem. This included studies quantifying the scale and severity of the problem, research examining social norms and perceptions, analyses of system gaps and institutional responses, and investigations into evolving patterns of online exploitation.

Crucially, the stakeholders emphasised in interviews that evidence needed to be nationally specific and methodologically robust in order to influence decision-making processes in the country. General

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[25] UNICEF. (2016). National Baseline Study on Violence against Children: Philippines.
[26] ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). Disrupting Harm in the Philippines: Evidence on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.
[27] Justice and Care. (2023). Understanding OSAEC trafficking in the Philippines: Analysis and recommendations for better detection, deterrence and prevention – Interim report.
[28] International Justice Mission. (2020). Behind The Screens A Compilation of Case Studies and Learnings about the Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC).

global or regional trends were insufficient to drive action – it was nationally grounded data that created traction by generating interest and keeping the topic front-of-mind for government, donors and advocates. The consistent generation of evidence – including some more specific niche projects – served to continue improving the knowledge of system actors beyond superficialities towards concrete impacts and possible solutions.

> *"When working with legislators, they often ask for numbers. They don't want it to be based only on personal experience, like the cases I handle. It really helps when there is actual research that you can quote."* (Interview 19, Human Rights Lawyer)

Beginning with the 2016 Baseline study of Violence Against Children[29] and continuing with the later representative household survey in Disrupting Harm,[30] this data concretely illustrated the scale of how many children in the Philippines were affected. Philippines represented the highest prevalence rate in the six Southeast Asian countries measured by Disrupting Harm at 20% of young people impacted in the last year. This number had huge advocacy impact and appears frequently in media and other documents.

Research exploring social norms included the 2020 Philippines Kids Online study[31] and the 2021 National Study on OSAEC.[32] These studies demonstrated the constraints that norms could have on progress where beliefs that minimised the impact of TF-CSEA – such as "no touch, no harm" – that were likely resulting in underreporting. These data informed direct programming supported by Safe Online that aimed to educate communities and systemic actors and to challenge such norms. This programmatic work reaped strong results – demonstrating proof of concept in the 2024 follow-up Safer Kids Philippines action research study that tested the impact of the interventions.[33]

Research highlighting administrative data was also emerging during the period. These studies are helpful in demonstrating system limitations. The secondary analysis of the Philippines General Hospital Child Protection Unit data[34] identified ways that TF-CSEA was being identified in the child protection system and reinforced the necessity of multidisciplinary collaboration. In addition, studies by IJM[35] [36] [37] pointed to the complications of the transnational nature of the crime and limitations in

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[29] UNICEF and Council for the Welfare of Children. (2016). National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children in the Philippines.

[30] ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). Disrupting Harm in the Philippines: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.

[31] UNICEF Philippines. (2020). Philippines Kids Online: The Online Experiences of Children in the Philippines: Opportunities, Risks and Barriers.

[32] Department of Social Welfare and Development – Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography & UNICEF Philippines. (2021). National Study on Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in the Philippines Final Report.

[33] UNICEF Philippines and Plan International (2024). SaferkidsPH Action Research on Changing Social Norms for Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children.

[34] Victoria L.M. Herrera, et al. (2022). Qualitative Analysis of Operational Deliverables of the PGH-Child Protection Unit and Child Protection Network in Advancing the Care Continuum for Child Maltreatment: A Roadmap for Setup and Evaluation. Acta Medica Philippina. 46(4).

[35] International Justice Mission. (2020). Online Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Philippines: Analysis and Recommendations for Governments, Industry, and Civil Society.

[36] International Justice Mission. (2020). Behind the Screens: A Compilation of Case Studies and Learnings about the Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC).

[37] IJM and University of Nottingham Rights Lab (2023). Estimating the Prevalence of Trafficking to Produce Child Sexual Exploitation Material in the Philippines.

data systems and law enforcement mechanisms. These studies were used practically to adjust constraints and bottlenecks within systems.

> *"We partnered with Rights Lab of University Nottingham. And they have a very good reputation in terms of conducting this kind of survey. And so, we were successful in identifying the gravity [of CSAM and live-streaming offences]. So, when we discussed that with the Department of Justice - the result of the prevalence study was that nearly half a million children were exploited by [these forms of] online sexual exploitation in 2022 alone."* (Interview 7, Civil Society Officer)

In a further example of impact, the Child Protection Unit data led to a revision of hospital intake processes:

> *"We are looking into how to elicit disclosures, how to screen for children at risk, and that includes revising, updating our interview protocols.* (Interview 9, Healthcare Professional)

Finally, research into the evolving nature of TF-CSEA crimes, such as Plan International's 2016 study[38] represented data confirming the anecdotal shifts seen by practitioners of the rapid shift of CSEA in the Philippines to online spaces. Similarly, Plan Australia's later study[39] elucidated patterns of self-facilitated livestreaming increasingly being observed, which challenges traditional characterisation of "victims" and "perpetrators."

Together, these different forms of evidence provided a multidimensional understanding of TF-CSEA, enabling more targeted advocacy, policy development and programmatic responses.

Evidence to Reinforce Advocacy

Evidence played a critical role in elevating TF-CSEA as a national priority. Quantitative studies demonstrating high prevalence rates, combined with consistent findings across multiple research efforts, made it increasingly difficult for policymakers to ignore the scale and severity of the problem.

The cumulative effect of research from domestic and international sources created sustained advocacy pressure. In particular, roundtable participants emphasised that the identification of the Philippines as a high-risk area or 'hotspot' for TF-CSEA and NCMEC's CyberTip reports are also regularly cited in government discussions, policy debates, and public communications. This data contributed to both widespread national concern and international scrutiny. The country's reputation as well as international pressure was therefore influential on policy decision-making.

> *"At the presidential level, there's a real focus on this. Because of the label that we received from outside during the pandemic, hotspot, hotspot, and then epicentre. It gives a negative, of course, negative implication to our country."* (Interview 3, Law Enforcement Officer)

Evidence regarding the social norms influence on OCSEA has successfully contributed to influencing the government's actions to incorporate varied approaches. This is not just about responding to victims and pursuing offenders, but work must also shift community norms. Policy-level recognition from government that social norms are barriers and enabler to parts of this problem is somewhat unusual in Southeast Asia where government responses tend to be focused on law and justice.

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[38] Plan International. (2016). Children and the Sex Trade in the Digital Age.
[39] Plan Australia. (2025). Safeguarding Young People from the Dark Path of Self- Facilitated Live Streaming of CSEA (2022-2025).

> *"What the government is banking on is to stop the belief that 'no touch is no harm'....So, I guess that's one of the changes in the ecosystem that they already know that even though it's happening online, it has adverse effects on every child victim-survivor."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

At the same time, evidence alone was not sufficient. Respondents emphasised the critical role of civil society organisations in interpreting, translating and strategically deploying evidence within policy spaces. Advocacy requires these sustained voices – from outside of government – to be able to be used. This takes sustained resources, technical expertise and ongoing engagement with government actors to happen.

> *"Another strength has been collaboration around knowledge translation jointly turning research into policy briefs, advocacy tools, and accessible materials, such as community dialogues and creative resources, which has helped bridge the gap between evidence and action."* (Interview 16, Civil Society Officer)

Robust evidence has played a key role in making TF-CSEA visible, urgent, and impactful enough to require systematic state response.

Evidence to Shift Social Norms and Prevention Approaches

Evidence also contributed to shifting understanding of TF-CSEA at the societal level. Research on social norms and perceptions highlighted the widespread belief that online abuse was less harmful than contact abuse often summarised as 'no touch, no harm.' These findings revealed how such beliefs contributed to underreporting and limited recognition of harms children experience.

Furthermore, these data consistently indicated that offenders were often known to the child, frequently involving family members or relatives acting as "facilitators" in exchange for payment. In many cases, abuse occurred within the home, highlighting the role of trust-based relationships in enabling TF-CSEA and making detection more difficult.

> *"DSWD and statistics of the law enforcement agencies, well, the majority of the cases are facilitated by someone who is known to the child."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

This dynamic brought added complications as children were often unable to recognise harm or seek help due to trust in their caregivers and prevailing cultural norms around family relationships.

> *"...because of the cultural dynamics of the Philippines – it's close family ties – so it's quite difficult and the children have difficulty asking for help."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

These findings contributed to a shift in understanding from an externally driven issue to one embedded within family and community contexts. As a result, stakeholders increasingly recognised the need for more holistic responses that address social norms, prevention and community-level dynamics, alongside law enforcement and legal measures. This sociological work was particularly a focus among non-governmental organisations.

Gathering Evidence through Practice and System Learning

In addition to formal research, lessons learned from field operations became a key source of evidence. Programmatic work, particularly in law enforcement, social services and health systems generated practical insights into how TF-CSEA manifests and how responses can be strengthened.

For example, the Safe Online supported grant to IJM contributed to the development of local law enforcement capacity, generating practice-based evidence that informed subsequent institutional strengthening and budget allocation.

> *"So, in 2018, 2019, IJM also advocated for the WCPC so that they can get more budget, so that they can do more rescue operations. Because of that, I think, [there is] great momentum of really highlighting this as a national issue. Then the Senate become interested in equipping the Women and Children Protection Center by providing budgets for their operations."* (Interview 7, Civil Society Officer)

In the social and health service sectors, the Child Protection Network conducted retrospective analysis of data from hospital Child Protection Units. This analysis captured shifts in case patterns as intake and history-taking processes were updated to include children's online behaviours and exposure to digital risks. These improvements enabled the identification of previously under-recognised links between online exploitation and mental health outcomes, including suicidal ideation.

> *"For example, a patient comes in for, let's say, suicidal behaviour. The doctor will probe and discovered that the child also, unknown to the parents and the family, has also been selling [sexual content] online."* (Interview 9, Healthcare Professional)

In addition, implementation revealed system gaps, prompting calls for updates to protocols, improved coordination and more comprehensive approaches to case management. This highlights the role of iterative learning in complex systems, where practice generates new evidence that feeds back into policy and programme development.

Evidence generated from field implementation is sometimes under-explored, but in the Philippines ecosystem regarding TF-CSEA there are some examples of this being used well.

Reinforcing Pathways of Change

These pathways did not operate independently. Evidence informed advocacy; advocacy influenced policy; policy shaped implementation; and implementation generated new forms of evidence. This created reinforcing cycles of learning and adaptation across the ecosystem.

Together, these dynamics illustrate how evidence functioned not only as an input but as a central mechanism through which system change was initiated, sustained and iteratively strengthened.

Catalyst 2: Emerging Examples of Amplifying Children and Survivor's Voices

For a problem that squarely impacts children there is an unquestionable responsibility to include their voices in the discourse. Gathering experiential evidence that reflects the reality of the TF-CSEA problem from the perspectives of those directly affected is one way to do this. Such evidence plays an important role in deepening understanding and ensuring that policy development is more aligned with the real world.

> *"Our anchor point would always be the voices of children because they always give this nuanced perspective."* (Interview 11, Civil Society Officer)

The main government institution in the ecosystem that holds this responsibility is the Council for the Welfare of Children. It places importance on child participation as a fundamental child right and has established national mechanisms that enable children's voices to be included in policy discussions and decision-making processes at different levels of government. Roundtable participants praised the mechanisms as systematically established and sustainable.

> *"For CWC, it is a big part of our work. We have the four core rights. You have the survival, development, protection, and participation."* (Interview 18, Government Officer)

However, the roundtable participants and survivor-advocates during side-events noted that the amplification of children's and survivors' voices remained an emerging area, with some participants going as far as describing some efforts as "empty talk" or "lip service." While participation policies exist, meaningful opportunities, time, and resources for children's involvement are not always provided. Nevertheless, a positive shift was acknowledged and emphasis on the need for consistency and continued practice to normalise the inclusion of children in decisions that affect them was stressed. Roundtable discussions also underscored the value in framing young people as customers in industry engagement for more powerful advocacy impact.

At local government levels and across particular institutions (such as within the Education system) positive examples of child participation on a range of issues that impact them were also named in interviews and written documents. Yet the genuineness of this engagement is also known to vary markedly across settings, and can depend entirely on the way it is facilitated, or even on the interests and personal agendas of participating young people themselves. True participation needs constant careful attention – it is not a one-off box to tick.

> *"We talk in meetings like this about consultation with children, but when you ask people to be concrete, there are not that many moments when that consultation is there. The consultation might be there, but whether that's brought into the discourse is another question. It's not children's responsibility to convince the lawmakers, but there's so much distance between the people in power and young people."* (Interview 11, Civil Society Officer)

Over the last decade, organisations such as IJM played a critical role in the Philippines to empower survivors' voices in the discourse about TF-CSEA specifically. This began with activities supported by their 2017 Safe Online grant, but has been latterly institutionalised in the launch of the Philippine Survivor Network in 2023. IJM has enabled safe opportunities for survivors to share their experiences and explain the psychological impacts they encountered in the justice process:

> *"Survivor leadership and survivor voice is something very powerful and they advocated directly with the Department of Justice. We also had this new judicial Congress and we requested our partners from prosecution to also attend. Then in that Congress, in that conversation, survivors are actually there to speak for themselves."* (Interview 7, Civil Society Officer)

Survivor-advocates during the side event described how in early 2026, the Philippine Survivor Network presented a position paper to the Committee on Public Order and Safety of the Republic of the Philippines, highlighting the benefits of RA 11930 and supporting the prompt enactment of Senate Bill No. 1588. The Senate Bill proposed strengthening the law through enhanced prevention, reporting, and intervention measures, stronger collaboration with the financial and digital technology sectors, and expanded long-term support for survivors. As part of government consultations, survivors were willing to share their experiences publicly to advocate for children's rights and were well supported in doing so. However, they were not always certain how their contributions had translated into concrete changes in policy or practice and the researchers were unable to clearly conclude that such advocacy directly led to changes.

Children's voices also play a role in challenging the assumptions of adults and policymakers, showing that adult perceptions that digital safety be framed as 'children needing protection' is not the most appropriate angle for the realities of children's real worlds. One example of this was identified

through the work Stairway Foundation and the Department of Education have done to develop training on digital safety:

> *"Before we developed the session guides, we conducted consultation, not just among the personnel, but also the learners, so that the messaging would come from them and also the topics of the session guides would come from them as to how they understand it."* (Interview 17, Education Personnel)

However, beyond this example, evidence of children's voices being a strong influence on the national dialogue were limited – though this was not a major focus of our intended research inquiry. Further analysis of this, perhaps in analysis co-led by young people, is warranted because the voices of children and affected individuals offsets some limitations of quantitative and system-level data, particularly in reflecting impacts and contexts that cannot be directly measured. Their inputs can also play a role in shifting rigid perspectives of adult stakeholders – even through shock – to result in policies and interventions that are more aligned with reality. The use of children's voices as evidence must always be accompanied by strong child safeguarding practices and ethical guidance.

Catalyst 3: Strengthening Coordination Mechanisms

Platforms to Strengthen Collaboration

Neutral spaces for communication, consultation, negotiation, and building shared understanding among stakeholders are needed for dialogue to strengthen collaboration.

> *"I think it's one of the things that makes it work, is providing a safe space for communication. we would always say Chatham House rules are in effect. I think that's what made them really comfortable with telling each other their problems with each other. So, the police would say, because you judges are too strict, and then the judges would say, well, because you're also not preparing well, and kind of... kind of like that. Um, that perhaps it was organised by someone not from the judiciary or not from the police side."* (Interview 19, Human Rights Lawyer)

National Committees

As noted in chapter II, advocacy regarding TF-CSEA was initially being channelled through the previously well-established and supported Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) and Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography (IACACP) - but without explicit parliamentary level mandates and regulations. Interviewees told us that Philippines governance is strongly influenced by high-level direction-setting, so government agency action would always remain piecemeal and slow without these mandates being formally established.

The 2022 passing of the Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials Act (RA11930) [40] and the accompanying 2023 implementing rules and regulations (IRR)[41] formally identified actors and government institutions and their roles in addressing TF-CSEA and designating their responsibilities formally in law and regulations.

RA11930 mandated the establishment of the National Coordinating Center on OSAEC/CSAEM (herein referred to as NCC) which represents an explicit, formal coordination mechanism for relevant government actors – a critical element for success given the complex governance context of the

[40] Republic of the Philippines. (2022). REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11930: Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act.
[41] Republic of the Philippines. (2023). Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 11930.

Philippines. The IRR sets out concrete regulatory requirements on different government stakeholders with earmarked sources of funding named.

The newly-formed NCC has a small secretariat and annual funding appropriations. It was still establishing permanent premises and staff at the time of the data collection for this study. However, the bulk of the work is ascribed to the various government agencies set out in the IRR with the NCC coordinating and monitoring their progress rather than leading/doing the work. (More on the NCC in Chapter IV).

> *"And this time, we already involved NCC in actually conducting the field testing. It's part of the national strategy, making sure it's part of the costed implementation plan, making sure that people are more and more aware of the value of addressing, especially the government."* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

National Events

Over the decade, national consultation platforms in the form of special events, such as summits, roundtable discussions, and technical forums, served as key mechanisms for disseminating research findings and field-based evidence to a wide range of stakeholders, including government, media and other ecosystem actors. This helped raise awareness and elevate TF-CSEA as a public issue.

> *"When we started talking about it, we even had a summit to discuss that. So, we invited international media, local media, government partners, and even civil society to explain the [Scale of Harm[42]] study itself and the results and how we can further use it to engage and to also engage the demand side." (Interview 7, Civil Society Officer)*

> *"The CPN, in 2023 or 2024 met with national agencies. We even invited the Philippine Statistics Authority...We had support from UNICEF and we tried to map out the administrative data. We tried to find common indicators. This was for the purpose of identifying indicators that could support reporting on progress towards the SDGs."* (Interview 9, Healthcare Professional)

The Ako Para sa Bata (I am the Child) Conference in late 2025 was also mentioned as a highlight national platform focused on TF-CSEA that attracted more than 900 attendees from government, civil society and academia.

Similarly, NGO partners in interviews described using technical platforms to validate and translate evidence into practice. Presenting research findings in platforms with stakeholders enabled continuously refining implementation strategies. The dialogue itself also has the effect of strengthening the linkage between practice and decision-making levels. Yet funding and issue fatigue also need to be considered as constraints to the impact of these approaches too.

Fragmented Child Protection Data Systems are a Constraint of Coordination Mechanisms

The development of data systems is one approach that agencies have begun to harness in order to record child protection cases. Integrated systems have the potential to standardise care and investigation processes, and to enable scraping of administrative data useful for understanding child protection challenges. Some institutions in the Philippines ecosystem have data systems to support systematic data collection and analysis, such as the Women and Child Protection Management

[42] IJM and University of Nottingham Rights Lab (2023). Estimating the Prevalence of Trafficking to Produce Child Sexual Exploitation Material in the Philippines.

Information System (WCPMIS), which is used in Child Protection Units in healthcare settings and serves as a large database linked to service delivery.

However, despite the development of data systems in some institutions in the Philippines, these appear to be constrained by disconnection, limited uptake and marked quality variations. There is no inter-agency integration. Disconnection regarding data-sharing can even occur within agencies.

At the same time, national coordination bodies have pointed out limitations in the consistency of data reporting from other levels of government and geographically.

> *"They are supposed to report to the NCC and the IACAT actually this is every quarter right or every month but not all regions are reporting but we have a lot of regions reporting so that is also one of the disconnects, since we can only have data which are reported by the task forces on how many cases were filed against OSAEC, how many convictions. So that are some of the data, so the convictions, how many cases were filed?"* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

Addressing these constraints represents an underutilised opportunity to improve coordination, with the secondary benefit of improving quality and representativeness of administrative data on TF-CSEA (and all child protection challenges). Yet, despite expressed efforts to systematically utilise systems to gather more comprehensive administrative data, this would be a mammoth task needing a very long timeframe to achieve.

> *"I think the CPIMS [Child protection Information Management System] is probably one of the biggest challenges that we face here in the Philippines because it's so fragmented. Even in one agency, they have different ways and different collection of different types of data. So, I think what we try to do is to get them to understand the importance of the streamlining focus. I'm not sure that we're there yet."* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

It is a key pillar of the NCC's new strategic plan to improve this situation by advancing data-sharing protocols, collect monitoring data, and to ultimately establish a centralised database, allowing information to flow continuously and efficiently from reporting to screening, investigation, and assistance.

> *"That's the data sharing protocol is something that we are working on right now to ensure that there would be faster response in terms of the reports that we receive...To the earlier detection and identification of victims and their immediate rescue."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

However, building an integrated, connected, and policy-relevant data system currently remains a constraint that would require significant further investment, political capital and work to build the infrastructure and encourage its utilisation across the ecosystem. It would take a significant number of years to bring to full fruition. Given how frequently this constraint recurs across the ecosystem – surfacing in coordination mechanisms, donor reporting, and case management – if it is to be prioritised and pursued, it merits an explicit, dedicated commitment rather than it being expected to be addressed as a secondary output of coordination-strengthening work.

Catalyst 4: Media and Campaigns as Enablers of Change

Engaging Media

Over the last decade, media has accelerated public recognition of TF-CSEA in the Philippines to the point of widespread domestic and international attention. Interviewees described the value of this in creating and amplifying existing public pressure on the government to act.

> *"They shared [a prosecution press release], and then it was picked up globally. And then after that, there was a great moment of awareness raising in the Philippines and also internationally. And so we received a lot of requests. IJM received a lot of requests from international media, Reuters, BBC, just because of that great moment wherein we highlighted these crimes being committed in the Philippines, not only by parents, but also by perpetrators known in the community."* (Interview 7, Civil Society Officer)

These global media attention-grabbing moments opened the doors for the voices of practitioners and communities to be heard more widely when they spoke about TF-CSEA, as well as increasing awareness of channels for public reporting. However, interviewees also noted that the use of mass media as a tool for driving policy change must be careful and considered. The ethics of balancing public awareness with the protection of children's rights, privacy, and safety must be considered. Irresponsible reporting may lead to identification, social stigma, or re-traumatisation of child victims and their families.

Survivor-advocates explained that psychosocial preparation and emotional support are needed before and after media engagement. Decisions about disclosing personal information should remain survivor-led and informed and may need advocates to protect during media engagements. They did note that over the decade, media reporting in the country had become more sensitive and survivor-centred, with less emphasis on the drama of 'raid and rescue' framed stories.

Roundtable participants emphasised the need for more regular media coverage of TF-CSEA arguing that if traffic accidents make the daily news, then child abuse should be more than an occasional story. More coverage would illustrate its ubiquity. Social media and media partners could help shape narratives that are more digestible to help frame TF-CSEA as a human-centred issue rather than only as a 'dark crime' story.

Public Campaigns

Campaigns have played an important role in building understanding of TF-CSEA, as well as in changing the community social norms.

> *"Addressing these harmful norms, addressing digital safety, it creates like, it raises the level of awareness of the stakeholders... We all know that changing the behaviour of the community takes time."* (Interview 16, Civil Society Officer)

Yet, interviewees described the difficulty of fitting this work into project-based activities. Shifting community perceptions about the impact of online exploitation requires sustained, long-term efforts and cannot be achieved through short-term interventions alone.

> *"When we went back there in 2022, in that same community, the parents and other community members already agrees that even if assuming there's no touch, it's still harmful psychologically."* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

Campaigns also inform the public about the system changes that may be taking place. Improvements can be made to the ecosystem, but if the people who are supposed to benefit are not made aware, these changes don't have the chance to come into true effect.

> *"All the technical people already know about it, now our challenge is how do you say it to ordinary people?"* (Interview 18, Government Officer)

Campaigns need to be carefully planned and targeted using the right voices and messages to meet target audiences. For example, agencies such as police Anti-Cybercrime Group conducted awareness activities in schools and communities. Beyond using hard evidence, civil society interviewees also spoke about the value of telling compelling, and emotional narratives.

> *"I think it was the Peter Scully case that really brought it to light...Of course it was still prosecuted under trafficking, but there is a lot of overlap there. Also, the fact that Terre des Hommes used 'Sweetie', the CGI-created child. They made her Filipino because there were so many Filipino child victims...that video was played in a lot of committee meetings at the legislature level and even in different government agencies to bring awareness."* (Interview 19, Human Rights Lawyer)

'Old-fashioned' community awareness raising work was named in interviews as important to impacting the ecosystem. The example of the government's designation of the annual national "Safer Internet Day" reflects efforts to institutionalise awareness raising and community dialogue related to TF-CSEA with annual activities and commemoration.

At the community level, work supported by Safe Online by Plan International illustrated participatory campaign approaches such as 'Cybersafe Spaces' that built co-leadership among both adults and youth to facilitate intergenerational and peer-to-peer learning, while also engaging the private sector, including internet service providers and local businesses

> *"We also give them sessions on leadership and communication to really shape them...So, we also organise parent support groups as well as youth support groups."* (Interview 16, Civil Society Officer)

Informants reflected that experts already understand this issue. However, a key challenge for campaigns is designing them to fit the context of target groups and sustaining this work continuously over the long term given project cycle constraints.

SaferKidsPH: Trusted Actors Speaking with One Voice

This campaign was supported by the Australian Government and enabled a partnership between UNICEF, Save the Children Philippines, and The Asia Foundation to develop and voice consistent messaging to a range of key audiences to influence social norms. SaferKidsPH engaged civil society, communities and schools, the private sector, media and others in a national conversation to improve knowledge about, and shift attitudes and beliefs that enabled TF-CSEA.

Catalyst 5: Influencing Political Will

Over the past decade, the development of political will has genuinely been a driver of system change in the Philippines' response to TF-CSEA. However, it did not emerge spontaneously. Political prioritisation was actively shaped through sustained engagement between civil society, researchers and policymakers, combing robust evidence, strategic framing and relationship-building.

Formal Parliamentary Consultation Processes

Interviewees identified formal parliamentary public consultations, particularly Senate committee hearings, as important mechanisms through which research findings, field data, and policy recommendations were able to be inserted into discussions surrounding legislative reform on TF-CSEA in the Philippines. These consultations were described as especially significant during the development of RA11930 and were led by Senator Risa Hontiveros, Chair of the Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality. The hearings were utilised by multiple actors across the TF-CSEA response ecosystem to contribute evidence and expert perspectives directly into the legislative reforms. Interviewees generally praised the process for openness in shaping the resulting reforms.

Findings from the interviews suggest that the influence of evidence during the RA11930 drafting process was shaped by several context-specific dynamics:

Quantitative evidence was more influential in legislative discussions

> *"Legislators like asking for numbers. They don't want 'based on the cases I handle' but real numbers."* (Interview 19, Human Rights Lawyer)

Interviewees described how quantitative evidence, including data on victim numbers, emerging trends, and the scale of TF-CSEA cases, appeared to carry particular weight during legislative consultations. Translating the issue into measurable indicators was seen as helping policymakers concretise the problem in ways that could be reflected in law and policy commitments. An example was given as the explanatory note accompanying House Bill 5494 which proposes amendments to RA 11930[43] which directly references data from the Disrupting Harm study.

Formal studies were frequently used during legislative deliberations

> *"When we enter into legislative conversations, for example, Senate committee hearings, et cetera, we always try to cite those studies as basis for any position."* (Interview 10, Civil Society Officer)

Interviewees emphasised that evidence presented during legislative consultations was expected by government counterparts to be supported by credible and clearly sourced research. In this context, formally cited studies from the national evidence base strengthened the legitimacy of policy recommendations and helped position advocacy arguments as evidence-based rather than opinion-driven.

Relationships between CSOs, legislators, and bill co-authors created channels for evidence sharing during the drafting process

> *"One senator is authoring it, the others are co-authoring. So sometimes we have this good relationship with the co-authors. And they reach out to us: 'There's this Bill being drafted. Before I say yes to it, what's your opinion?' Things like that."* (Interview 11, Civil Society Officer)

Interviewees described how existing relationships between civil society actors, legislators, and other stakeholders created informal pathways through which evidence and feedback could circulate during the legislative reform process. These networks enabled ongoing exchanges between policymakers

[43] Republic of the Philippines (13 October, 2025). Explanatory Note to House Bill 5494

and practitioners, particularly during periods when awareness of TF-CSEA was an emerging issue where lawmakers may have sought help with knowledge gaps as they worked.

Overall, the findings suggest that the parliamentary consultation process in the Philippines can be harnessed as an entry point through which research evidence, quantitative data, and practitioner experience could be integrated into the development of the law. The successful influence of the evidence depended on both the credibility of the data itself, but also on the ability of ecosystem actors to communicate evidence through both formal and informal channels throughout the reform process.

Direct Engagement with Lawmakers

Direct engagement allows points to be made directly, but it must be clear, concise and framed in alignment with policymakers' needs at critical moments. Interviewee described the following elements in these engagements:

Strategic framing to create policy urgency

> *"You also have to know how people in government react to certain conversations. I think the label 'global epicentre' or 'hotspot served as an entry point for more nuance in evidence-based conversations. Because once government had this on their radar, they were more open to listen."* (Interview 10, Civil Society Officer)

This reflects that presenting evidence in a way that elevates the issue to a national or global level can encourage policymakers to be more receptive and attentive.

Concise and decision-oriented communication

Interviewees suggested that evidence appeared to have greater influence when it was communicated in a direct and policy-oriented manner, particularly during high-level legislative discussions. This was reflected in public statements delivered during Senate deliberations on the proposed legislation, where quantitative evidence, high-profile criminal cases, and clear references to enforcement gaps were used.

For example, Senator Risa Hontiveros referred to UNICEF data from 2016 indicating that the Philippines was amongst the top ten countries producing child sexual abuse and exploitation materials, and highlighted reports that TF-CSEA cases increased by 264.6 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic. During Senate deliberations, these arguments contributed to the passage of the Bill with a 23-0 voting result in favour of approval. References were also made to high-profile cases, including Australian Peter Scully, who was arrested in the Philippines in 2015.[44]

These examples suggest that concise, evidence-driven messaging that directly linked the scale of the problem to legislative and enforcement solutions helped.

Providing clear and evidence-supported responses to policymakers appeared to play an important role in sustaining attention to the issue during legislative discussions.

Continuity of engagement and relationship-building

The engagements need to be responsive, consistent and sustained, rather than one-off interactions. Interviewees noted that actors within the Philippines TF-CSEA response ecosystem had been generating and communicating evidence continuously for more than a decade prior to the enactment

[44] Senate of the Philippines, (27 May 2021), Press Release: Senate OKs bill expanding protections for children versus online sexual abuse, exploitation

of RA11930. This sustained engagement appeared to contribute to maintaining policy attention on the issue over time and supported the gradual development of legislative momentum.

Interviewees also highlighted that engagement continued beyond the passage of RA11930. Senator Risa Hontiveros, who introduced the Bill in the Senate, was described as continuing to play an active role in monitoring implementation following enactment. This included convening hearings, facilitating consultations with multiple stakeholders, and identifying additional measures needed to strengthen implementation in practice.[45]

Transferring Policy Ownership

Creating spaces for high-level policymakers to interpret evidence and express policy positions is a key strategy in transforming evidence into "policy ownership," which plays an important role in shaping political will at the highest level.

In the context of TF-CSEA, presenting evidence through national-level platforms, such as summits or policy forums, provides opportunities for national leaders to clearly articulate their vision and stance on the issue. This goes beyond acknowledging the problem and serves as a form of policy signalling to government agencies and society at large.

> *"Now that they know exactly the gravity, even the President actually mandated the local police, the agencies, the government agencies, to prioritise, to allot a specific budget to addressing online sexual exploitation."* (Interview 7, Civil Society Officer)

Statement by the President at the OSAEC Summit 2024

The statement by **President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.** was repeatedly referenced during interviews. The statement was not merely an expression of concern, but a clear form of directive signalling that emphasised the unacceptability of child sexual exploitation and called for strong action from government agencies. It also conveyed a message to the public not to remain passive and to take part in protecting children, such as reporting cases through designated channels.

Beyond directing action, this communication also reflects an effort to shape "national identity framing," positioning the country as a society that does not tolerate violence against children and places strong importance on child protection. By emphasising the shared roles of the state and the public, it contributes to shaping social norms that expect all sectors to participate in prevention and response.

This reflects that expressions of political will at the highest level not only influence policy direction and resource allocation, but also play a role in shaping societal behaviour frameworks and collective expectations at the national level, thereby facilitating the translation of evidence into broader action.

[45] Philippine News Agency, (18 May 2023), DSWD, DOJ sign IRR of Anti-Online Child Sexual Abuse law.

IV: INTERACTIONS AND CONNECTIVITY IN THE ECOSYSTEM

Mapping and understanding the systemic response to TF-CSEA includes looking at the different parts, but also looking at the interactions and connections between them that enable progress to be made. The interactions and influences between system elements and levels are what Bronfenbrenner characterised as the 'mesosystem.'[46] This chapter describes prominent examples of system elements effectively interacting, coordinating and complementing each other in the Philippines TF-CSEA ecosystem.

Multi-sectoral Connectivity at National Level

The MNR sets out that national responses to TF-CSEA should include explicit actions in: Policy, legislation and governance; law enforcement and justice; social services and survivor support; industry engagement; public awareness and education; and research, data and evidence.[47] By the nature of numerous domains of work, the active engagement of different areas of government is necessitated. This means that different Ministries, institutions and branches/levels/localities must be motivated to act and collaborate. Government agencies often have specific mandates, isolated scopes, expertise and responsibilities that can result in work taken place in what can be described as isolated 'silos'. A great challenge therefore lies in ensuring that actors and actions don't occur in isolation or end up using limited resources in ways that result in duplication of efforts.

One Coordinating Body

The Coordination Challenge

When discussing Philippines TF-CSEA coordination, government interview respondents described a motivation for the country to learn lessons from past experience with fragmented responses to some issues. Philippines governance systems consist of a very centralised bureaucratic structure coupled with high local autonomy through more than 1,700 provincial, city, municipal and/or barangay government entities known as local government units (LGUs). This structure accounts for a culturally and linguistically diverse population and complex geography of more than 7,000 islands. Yet it also creates the circumstances for disconnection and coordination challenges on the national scale.

As noted in Chapter II, in order to enable the national level structures to collaborate and coordinate, existing mechanisms such as the Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography (IACACP) and Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) had been utilised for advocacy early on regarding the emerging issue of TF-CSEA. This pragmatic step allowed the issue to rise in prominence, but interviewees noted that without a parliamentary-designated mandate and set roles, government bodies in the Philippines tend to have uneven engagement dictated by internal priorities rather than responding to external, non-mandatory guidance. This is not intentional non-compliance but results from agencies prioritising their legally mandated work.

Establishment and Institutional Design of the NCC

Therefore, the establishment of a dedicated national coordinating body with legally binding mandate was praised as a vital step to government agency compliance and accountability regarding TF-CSEA.

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[46] Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[47] WeProtect Global Alliance. (2023). Preventing and Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A Model National Response: Maturity Model.

Section 30 of RA11930[48] specifically established the *National Coordination Center Against Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials* (NCC-OSAEC-CSAEM or simply NCC). Section 31 sets out the conditions for its Secretariat; section 39 apportioned its – although limited – establishment funding; and section 40 details that its ongoing financial sustainability will be handled via general government appropriations processes.

Following the passing of RA11930, Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) were jointly promulgated by the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Department of Justice on May 18, 2023, and entered into force six months thereafter.[49]

Positioning and Institutional Authority

The NCC is hosted within the Department of Justice and under the auspices of the IACAT. Thirty-seven government agencies and non-governmental organisations are represented in its formal committees and structures. Those bodies collaboratively inform policies and the NCC's strategic plan before submitting them to IACAT for final approval.

It is important to note that the member bodies are responsible for carrying out the commitments of the strategic plan, not the NCC Secretariat. The NCC Secretariat only provides operational support to facilitate implementation, and monitors progress. But the NCC's legal mandate addresses the issue of government agency non-compliance. Under Section 8, the NCC is mandated to exercise monitoring, compliance oversight, and inter-agency coordination, as well as to issue guidelines and standards to ensure effective implementation. Section 9 further empowers the NCC to compel the submission of data and reports from relevant agencies, thereby reinforcing its statutory oversight function, the NCC serves as a pivotal institutional mechanism that enables and sustains cross-agency collaboration.

The fact that there is as many as 37 agencies engaged in the work of the NCC illustrates a remarkable challenge about this work – and somewhat justifies the needs for a coordinating body in the first place. While it presents challenges in coordination, it also represents true whole-of-government engagement on this problem requiring multi-stakeholder action.

An interesting point to note is that positioning of the NCC under Justice rather than Welfare (where child protection commonly sits) does bring the influence of a powerful Ministry.

> *"Just to give you an example, our juvenile justice and welfare council, so, like, the NCC, but for juvenile justice concerns, is chaired, or is under the Department of Social Welfare and (DSWD). And so they're a lot weaker."* (Interview 19, Human Rights Lawyer)

Early Signals of Change

At the time of interviews, the NCC Secretariat was still in the stages of establishment. The first Strategic Plan for 2025-2028[50] was recently signed off and office accommodations and recruitment of the Secretariat staff was still underway. The first strategic plan will see the NCC set policy directions, oversee and monitor implementation of actions by a range of government bodies, establish

[48] Republic of the Philippines. (2022). REPUBLIC ACT NO. 11930: Anti-Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials (CSAEM) Act.
[49] Republic of the Philippines. (2023). Implementing Rules and Regulations of RA 11930.
[50] National Coordination Center Against OSAEC and CSAEM. (2025). Philippine Strategic Plan Against OSAEC-CSAEM 2025-2028.

and disseminate shared operational standards, and develop a centralised national data management system with required reporting from all LGUs.

Beyond its structural role, the NCC also serves as a platform for promoting and enabling practical collaborations amongst elements of the ecosystem. For example, law enforcement efforts, information sharing activities, victim supports, at national and international levels.

> *"Because of the presence of the Interagency Council Against Trafficking, everybody knows the role. Everybody lends a hand if in case one agency is in need of any assistance. And with the establishment of NCC, which focuses on OSAEC and CSAEM, of course, it's still the same mechanism that will work."* (Interview 3, Law Enforcement Officer)

IJM is currently mapping and developing a 'National Unified Referral Pathway' to provide further detail beyond the IRR and to clarify the coordination roles of different sectors. Stakeholders acknowledged that this will take time given the complex governance environment and limited resources.

Initial evidence – including the quick development and endorsement of the NCCs first strategic plan – does indicate positively. More clarity in roles and responsibilities across government agencies, streamlining of coordination, clearer reporting lines and established monitoring actions can be seen. However, the NCC and its Secretariat was only recently established and must be given time to demonstrate its impact.

Emerging Constraints and Risks

The transition over to the new NCC structure also needs time to enact, while the roles and responsibilities of each agency have become clearer, there remains considerable overlap among various existing working groups, committees, and coordination mechanisms, often involving the same personnel. This is particularly evident at the local level, where staff are expected to attend multiple coordination meetings, leaving them "stuck in meetings" rather than engaged in frontline work.

These implementation challenges are compounded by the need to balance central coordination with LGU autonomy. Interview respondents noted, which was also reiterated in the roundtable event, that many LGUs continue to use committees established under the former IACACP structure to address child protection cases. Although these committees are expected to transition into the NCC framework, the adjustment process will take time.

Bureaucratic processes for the NCC are also in teething stage. For example, it was noted that a proposed amendment to RA11930 is being discussed that includes potentially moving NCC out from under IACAT so that the approvals could be more directly made by the Executive Director or directly with leadership of the Justice Department – removing the IACAT step in the middle that currently results in some friction and decision-making bottlenecks.

In addition, the role of the private sector is important but remains insufficient. The government needs to do more to promote business incentives and corporate responsibility, rather than relying solely on rights-based advocacy and messaging that businesses should act because they care for children. It's reasonable that corporate entities are driven by monetary motivations and thus advocacy should acknowledge this reality rather than be grounded in morality.

Mechanisms for Reporting TF-CSEA

In an effort to streamline reporting mechanisms, in 2024 a Presidential Executive Order No. 79 instructed the establishment of Mahalin At Kalingain Ating Mga Bata (*MAKABATA) Helpline 1383* –

a national helpline under the supervision of the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development.[51] MAKABATA Helpline should provide 24-hour services, including counselling, case reporting, and emergency response for all forms of violence against children, with a referral system to relevant agencies such as the police, hospitals, welfare services, and local authorities. Section 10 of the order stipulates that costs will be included within DSWD costs to government general appropriations.

While the MAKABATA Helpline is established, there remains inconsistency regarding reporting pathways. Many agencies continue to maintain hotlines and reporting channels which results in duplication and creates confusion for those seeking help.

> *"People can report...we also have the IACAT 1343 and for the NCC you can report through e-mail to Facebook to TikTok... Department of Education also have their reporting channels."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

> *"We introduce also the cybercrime helpline, or the police helpline, and the CWC helpline. So our learners would have a lot of options where they can report." (Interview 17, Education Personnel)*

> *"We gather walk-in complaints, and then online, on calls and referrals from other agencies and offices, even international."* (Interview 4, Law Enforcement Officer)

Administrative reporting guidelines issued by the Council for the Special Protection of Children (CSPC) require reporting agencies responsible for the system to notify local police within 24 hours, and TF-CSEA-related cases are also forwarded to the NCC.

> *"So, I think even if there are so many reporting channels, it would be more or less funnelled through our lanes."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

The research showed that while ideal pathways have been mapped out, there is extensive work needed for the country to move towards a streamlined situation. Streamlining and centralising with one contact point via MAKABATA 1383 that may refer cases to other portals and services is a future goal. Extensive time and investment to map, assess services, and to link up and maintain a referral network is necessary for this approach to truly work and is likely to take some years to achieve.

Raising awareness to ensure that the public and children feel safe to report TF-CSEA is a part of the TF-CSEA response that requires interactions of many mechanisms.

> *"The victims before are resistant to file a complaint to inform the police about the crime... But now they are already aware because we have this awareness campaign...Mostly our cases are from the victim."* (Interview 4, Law Enforcement Officer)

Interactions may occur not only within the domestic TF-CSEA ecosystem, but with global actors also. For example, CyberTip reports from NCMEC are received by the Philippines National Police, who are also connected to INTERPOL's ICSE database. These international mechanisms feed cases detected outside the country into domestic systems and bilateral international police investigations. Specially trained law enforcement officers utilise the ICSE database to support victim identification, multi-country investigations, case management, and victim assistance for domestic cases too. However, limited data integration, legal constraints, and high case volumes are constraints.

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[51] Republic of the Philippines. (2024). Executive Order No. 79: Establishing the Mahalin at Kalingain Ating Mga Bata (MAKABATA) Program, and Institutionalizing the MAKABATA Helpline 1383.

Ultimately, reporting mechanisms are not merely channels for disclosure, but the entry point to the child protection system, whose effectiveness depends on the ability to connect data, coordinate responses, and ensure timely and continuous support.

Proactive Screening

Strong child protection systems do not rely only on cases being identified only through formal reporting but includes trained and aware staff who can proactively identify concerns. Schools are a key entry point to the child protection system. The Department of Education (DepEd) has mechanisms to refer cases of child abuse identified through schools to the police and social welfare agencies, as well as coordinating awareness raising within the education system.

> *"It is a policy of DepEd to have a referral mechanism...We try to emphasise also within the school level the importance of referral, of referring incidents of abuse to the police, to the DSWD or local social welfare office."* (Interview 17, Education Personnel)

The necessary interactions between ecosystem actors can easily break down in referrals of cases like this – information must be transferred between institutions, and constraints factor in on resourcing, and expertise. For example, a teacher noting a red flag with a student must consult leadership or wait for time with a school welfare expert who might only work part-time. A child can be referred to a service that has wait lists or triages intake in ways not understood by the school or young person.

The establishment of the Learner Rights and Protection Unit within DepEd specifically intends to strengthen and formalise child protection and referral mechanisms. In practice, the Unit supports the implementation of child protection policies, facilitates the establishment of Child Protection Committees at the school level, composed of administrators, teachers, parents, community representatives, as well as student representatives. These committees are responsible for overseeing and coordinating the implementation of school-based child protection policy activities, to develop reporting channels and provides guidance, training, and awareness-raising activities that can enable student disclosures. However, this is work-in-progress. School-level committees are not consistently functional, children do not regularly use school-based reporting channels, and capacity constraints persist among personnel.

Roundtable discussions raised the supply problem regarding human resources – while the Department of Education is seeking to engage 10,000 guidance counsellors, there are only 5,000 registered guidance counsellors in the country. Consequently, teachers have been deployed to address the shortage, but these arrangements don't align with the original workforce plan.

> *"There is a lack. There's still a number of registered guidance counsellor or school counsellor associates that we need to hire. I think that is already ongoing because we want to address the disparity of the guidance counsellors that we need, and also vis-a-vis with the number of learners who needs counselling."* (Interview 17, Education Personnel)

Strengthening children's ability to recognise and respond to risks is a fundamental aspect of improving the entire TF-CSEA ecosystem's prevention effectiveness.[52] A partnership between DepEd and Stairway Foundation since 2015 developed and implemented an innovative prevention campaign for millions of Filipino learners.

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[52] ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). Disrupting Harm in the Philippines: Evidence on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

> *"Since the Department of Education came out with a child protection policy, a national child protection policy, there has been a clear mandate for them to integrate child protection education into the curriculum, or at least in special classes in schools. However, this has been a recurring challenge. So, we've tried different ideas with the Department."* (Interview 10, Civil Society Officer)

The initial iteration of this program resulted in strong materials that were delivered via a week-long national training. But the model then depended on a cascade process that saw the content taken to regional levels and then to local schools. Unfortunately, at the lower levels there was not resources or time to maintain the full training model, so messages were summarised and diluted at each level downwards, losing significant essence.

The team therefore reimaged the program to move away from reliance on cascade training, Materials were redesigned as entirely stand-alone, ready-to-use classroom sessions about digital citizenship and the risks of TF-CSEA. These new materials could be implemented immediately by teachers without training. They included lesson plans, slides, teacher guides, and guidance about responding to questions, discussions, and when children disclosed concerns.[53]

The revised approach reduced resource constraints and enabled rapid scaling across schools. In early 2026, DepEd reported they had reached more than 3.2 million students.

> *"We have numerous partners, and we're very much thankful for the technical assistance that they are giving to us. Because we have limited training also in handling certain forms of abuses amongst learners. So, they provide us with the technical know-how, and they help us in the rollout of these activities."* (Interview 17, Education Personnel)

eLearning courses have been developed to strengthen the capacity of education personnel, but they have not yet been institutionalised at scale. While child protection itself is not a complex subject, practitioners are often more concerned about the lack of supporting structures, referral systems, and operational protocols. These challenges are compounded by logistical constraints that limit the career progression of frontline workers – salary increases are limited for many frontline service providers without moving out of direct practice and into management positions.

This highlights that while the education system holds clear potential as a proactive screening point within the broader TF-CSEA response, its effectiveness ultimately depends on sustained investment in capacity, functionality, practical support systems that build practitioners' confidence and career pathways that enable professional growth, and coordination across actors. Preventing risks to children is not limited to responding to incidents, but extends to creating safe environments at multiple levels, including schools, communities, and online spaces.

Improved Coordination of Law Enforcement and Justice

Three law enforcement agencies in the Philippines play a role in TF-CSEA-related cases: the NBI under the Department of Justice, and WCPC and ACG. Each agency performs distinct yet interconnected roles when it comes to TF-CSEA, covering victim-centred investigation, specialised cybercrime functions, and the prosecution of complex and transnational criminal networks.

At the beginning of the decade, law enforcement responses to TF-CSEA relied heavily on external technical support, including assistance from organisations such as IJM and foreign law enforcement

[53] Stairway Foundation (2024). Over 3 million learners reached nationwide with anti-OSAEC and CSAEM Materials. Blog post.

agencies. Over the decade however, sustained investments in capacity development, leadership, and strategic planning have contributed to greater domestic ownership of TF-CSEA responses. Strengthened institutional capacity has enhanced confidence among law enforcement officers and supported a more proactive and internally driven approaches to case handling and system coordination.

> *"So, with regard to our justice system in the past 10 years...it has been proven that the prosecution has been more proactive. Like the DOJ is conducting trainings concerning OSAEC and CSAEM and they are conducting these trainings together with lawyers, some other prosecutors, law enforcement agencies, and other key stakeholders...and the DOJ is also conducting caravans regionally to promote this."* (Interview 4, Law Enforcement Officer)

The enactment of RA11930 contributed to strengthening inter-agency coordination by providing a more unified, though still evolving, legal and operational framework for addressing TF-CSEA. The law clarifies and expands existing mandates across agencies, assigning authority, reinforcing their complementary roles and enabling more structured coordination between victim-focused investigation and specialised cybercrime capabilities. However, from the perspective of survivors in the side-event, the enforcement of existing laws is still not sufficient in practice.

At a systems level, such coordination is not driven by legislation alone but is operationalised through ongoing efforts to encourage and enable collaboration – formally and informally. Law enforcement and justice Interviewees regularly referred to participation in collaborative processes that were often supported by Safe Online and other grants. While those projects had established practical objectives, it is clear the chances to collaborate also enabled trust- and relationship-building opportunities too.

Greater Evidentiary Powers regarding TF-CSEA

The collection of digital evidence links investigation processes with prosecution. It requires appropriate systems and forensic tools, frequently through external donor funded projects, including supported by Safe Online.

> *"Maybe 10 years ago, we did not have these kinds of tools. But now, even our regional offices have these forensic tools with certified forensic experts and examiners...That's why they're teaching investigators for proper handling of digital evidence."* (Interview 4, Law Enforcement Officer)

The requesting of evidence from 'internet intermediaries'[54] for investigation and prosecution is clearly stipulated under RA11930. It requires law enforcement investigators to seek a court-issued subpoena. Respondents must submit the requested evidence within 72 hours of receiving the court order.

> *"But under RA11930, you would need a subpoena or a court order. So that's one of the things that can also delay the process because getting a subpoena is not really easy."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

The Chief of the Philippine National Police and the Director of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group may exercise the authority to issue subpoenas for evidence. However, this authority

[54] Defined in RA11930 as "Internet intermediaries refer to persons or entities that provide infrastructure, platforms, access to, and host, transmit and index content, products and services originated by third parties on the internet. These include, among others: 1) Internet service providers; 2) Web hosting providers including domain name registrars; 3) Internet search engines and portals; 4) E-commerce intermediaries; 5) Internet payment system providers; and 6) Participative network platform providers including social media intermediaries."

does not extend to executives of the WCPC or ACG which can result in bottlenecks. During interviews, it was noted that the proposed amendments to RA11930 may address this by increasing Police Unit chiefs' authority to be able to request evidence.

One observation regarding limitations for law enforcement in obtaining evidence is that financial institutions may not fully cooperate with law enforcement, requiring authorities to rely on supplementary measures, including international cooperation, to obtain necessary evidence.

> *"If we cannot get it locally from the financial transactions, we ask the foreign partners to have it checked. it's easier for them to gather this information."* (Interview 3, Law Enforcement Officer)

In cases where service providers fail to comply with court orders, penalties may include fines for obstruction of justice or sanctions for contempt of court. This avenue is not simply a paper tiger and has been used to compel compliance. A specific example was described in a law enforcement interview where a non-compliant bank was compelled by the Supreme Court to provide evidence in this way. (The possibility of introducing Safe Harbour protections for internet intermediaries for such reporting is explored in Chapter V).

Localised Proactive Investigations

The decade has seen a shift in the way cases are identified for investigation. Before, most cases that were pursued came from international tips or through bilateral collaborations with external law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement interviewees noted a marked increase in proactive domestic investigations coming from local leads and reports. This reflects domestic progress in capacity, expertise, and resources.

> *"I think starting from 2024, 2025, we have produced a lot of, I mentioned a while ago, proactive investigation. Our investigators have become experts in this field, that they can already engage facilitators, not depending on the foreign referrals."* (Interview 3, Law Enforcement Officer)

Expansion of Knowledge to Regional and Local Settings

As would be expected anywhere, the first steps of system and capacity development in the country focused on national level, albeit centralised, mechanisms. Given the already noted complexity of governance in the Philippines, explicit strategic efforts are therefore needed to expand progress to regional and local settings. Noted efforts are underway.

In a formal sense, a useful mechanism in the Philippines that helps translate national legislation and regulation to connect with local priorities is through the issuing of local ordinances. Advocacy on TF-CSEA has led to the Department of the Interior and Local Government issuing an official directive requiring local government units to adopt their own localised ordinances related to TF-CSEA. These serve as community-level mechanisms to provide protection to local populations in line with the intent of RA11930 and enable the allocation of local budgets.

> *"So I think as of June 2025 this year, there have been 1,010 LGUs that already issued local ordinances against OSAEC."* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

A large-scale pilot project of localised 'Justice Zones' have been established in five LGUs supported by the European Union through the GOJUST Programme, with an estimated budget of approximately €19 million. The project promotes collaboration and interactions of key actors across the justice chain, including law enforcement, prosecutors, and courts, to work collaboratively at the LGU level. Committee mechanisms have been established at the local level to ensure continuity and

coordination throughout the process, from investigation to adjudication, helping to ensure that cases are handled more efficiently across the system, with pilot implementation in selected areas.

> *"Through the JSCC, we have justice zones that have been formally institutionalised...in region 10 [Northern Mindanao] in the cities of Iligan, Cagayan and Ozamiz...and this year we also hope to launch the Anti-OSAEC Justice Zone also in Region 8 [Eastern Visayas]."* (Interview 1 Government Officer)

Law enforcement capacity development was described as having reached a phase where national (but mostly centralised) capacity was showing strengths, and leadership were therefore trying to enter a phase of expanding knowledge from specialised central/regional units (WCPC and ACG) to promoting multidisciplinary teamwork at local levels.

> *"We now equip them with a multidisciplinary team, basic internet crimes against children's training. So, we are equipping the local police so that they can do their online investigation of online sexual exploitation because they're very close to the community."* (Interview 7, Civil Society Officer)

However, while intentions are clear, resources to achieve these are lacking – including forensic tools, workload pressures, and personnel capacity. Most police officers at local level have not received training and lack the skills to handle TF-CSEA cases, and while they can access support from specialised units, demand far outstrips capacity.

> *"Unfortunately, even our local police, they are not trained yet on how to handle these cases. That's why if in case there are OSAEC cases being referred on that area, our field unit will go there."* (Interview 3, Law Enforcement Officer)

The WCPC has 220 personnel at the central level out of an approved maximum of 275, and maintains local units across the three main island groups, Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, with approximately 30 personnel in each location. This is insufficient given the increasing number of cases of child exploitation. To expand nationwide coverage, there are ongoing proposals to the legislature to upgrade WCPC into a national support unit which would mean the establishment of WCPC personnel in police stations nationwide. At the same time, the ACG has regional units with approximately 20–30 personnel in Regions 4A, 3, 7, and 11.

From Operational Learning to Legal Reform

Learning from actions is critical to system improvements. Over the last decade, numerous lessons have been taken from the Philippines ecosystem for TF-CSEA that have resulted in improvements and reforms and some key examples are presented here. Going forward, part of the role of the NCC is to formally take up this action learning – to monitor operational challenges and successes for dealing with TF-CSEA and to propose policy recommendations directly to the executive and legislative branches of government that improve the national response.

Cross-border Coordination via PICACC

Lessons from law enforcement over the decade highlighted the initial lack of a dedicated mechanism for coordinating cross-border evidence cooperation. The Philippines Internet Crimes Against Children Center (PICACC) was established to address this constraint.

Interviewees also highlighted the issue of duplication in case intake and handling from foreign law enforcement agencies. Prior to the establishment of PICACC, referrals lacked clarity, resulting in overlapping work among agencies. The complexity of cross-border coordination and the limitations

of legal processes such as MLAT were also critiqued as not adequately responsive for the urgency of TF-CSEA cases.

The establishment of PICACC was therefore seen as a practical mechanism to responds to these structural challenges, serving as a centralised referral point and reducing duplication in operations. However, it currently operates under a memorandum of understanding and is still in the process of being developed into a permanent, legally mandated institution.

> *"But the challenge with the PICACC is it is just instituted for now by a formal MOU. There is a problem with how it can be funded. So, we already have a bill pending with both houses"* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

Operational Standardisation for TF-CSEA Case Work

At the operational level, standardised tools for working with TF-CSEA cases have been enabled with Safe Online funding.

The OSAEC Casework Handbook and the Case Management of Child Victims of Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation (CANE Protocol) establish joint case management approaches using a multidisciplinary team framework that requires coordinated action among relevant agencies, from reporting, risk assessment, child protection, medical and psychological support, investigation, to rehabilitation and reintegration. This tool was widely consulted via the Committee for the Special Protection of Children chaired by the CWC. By taking the time to consult and consolidate, the standard tool now accommodates a range of 'specialist' child protection topics, including TF-CSEA, but also offering practical guidance on other issues such as disabilities and armed conflict.

> *"For example, last year, the government launched case management protocol, right? So that's going to be super important to make sure that OSAEC cases utilise the same case management protocol."* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

It is still early days and the team was so far unable to uncover direct evidence of the protocols yet being fully employed. While the process of developing a standard national case management protocol was heralded as a success by interviewees, the roll out will still take a substantial investment in time and resourcing to have impact at the frontlines. Training in the use of the protocol to the people at the frontline will also need consideration. The traditional 'cascade' method of training is not financially viable in the complex governance and geographic environment of the Philippines.

V: FINANCING

As noted in Chapter I, exploring the current and potential funding elements of the ecosystem are critical to promoting sustainability of work to address TF-CSEA. This section identifies promising threads that were identified within the Philippines ecosystem.

Baseline Funding Landscape

Prior to the enactment of RA11930 in mid 2022, domestic Philippines government financing for child protection was primarily embedded within broader frameworks addressing violence against children. Under the Philippines Plan of Action to End Violence Against Children (2017–2022), approximately PHP548 million[55] (US$9 million) was committed during the period; however, this funding did not specifically disaggregate child abuse or TF-CSEA as a distinct category, but was the entirety of the child protection budget. Key implementing agencies of the plan included DSWD, DepEd, and CWC. While assumptions that increasing proportions of child protection money involved work on TF-CSEA, the lack of earmarking limits the ability to specifically track, prioritise or scale TF-CSEA-specific interventions.

The multi-country *Safeguarding Childhood* study[56] explored topline domestic budgeting commitments regarding CSEA for a range of countries around the world, including Philippines, between 2019 and 2023. Philippines budget allocations for child protection increased in selected sectors, with DepEd and CWC budgets rising by 162% and 64%, respectively. In contrast, the budget of DOJ remained relatively stable, despite the enactment of RA11930, which introduced additional responsibilities, including the establishment of the NCC (as already noted, initial funding for the NCC came from re-appropriated funds earmarked for the IACACP that it replaced with later budgets to come through government appropriations). In 2023, DOJ was allocated PHP99.3 million for anti-trafficking efforts; however, it is not clear whether this allocation sufficiently covered the expanded mandate and operational requirements of new NCC. With the NCC Strategic Plan being endorsed in 2025, this does allow the seeking of matching appropriations so it is expected that this domestic funding in this area will increase in ensuing years.

In addition to domestic public financing, international donor contributions to TF-CSEA and related programming for the Philippines have been, and continue to be, significant. There are a range of major granting sources beyond the US$3 million committed by Safe Online over the past decade for TF-CSEA work. A critical initiative specific to TF-CSEA was the 2019-2024 SaferKidsPH program, funded to more than AU$8 million from the Australian government. It focused on strengthening family behaviours, justice systems, and community-based child protection. UNICEF noted that Safe Online funding was significantly matched by SaferKidsPH, and the activities of the two programmes are closely linked. Interconnections include the aforementioned social norms research and innovative programming, youth engagement planning, and interventions in high-risk areas such as Angeles, Valenzuela, and Cagayan de Oro. Related programming, though not specific to TF-CSEA, includes the GOJUST project with a major EU contribution of more than €19 million.

Financial and in-kind contributions are also noted from private sector technology companies, such as through the Plan International Cyber Safe Spaces initiative, where companies such as Facebook,

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[55] Safeguarding Childhood. (n.d.). Safeguarding Childhood: An Assessment of National Transparency to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse.

[56] Safeguarding Childhood. (n.d.). Safeguarding Childhood: An Assessment of National Transparency to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse.

Google, Microsoft, TikTok, as well as mobile network operators Globe and Smart, supported communication channels, technical expertise, and online safety events such as Safer Internet Day and digital safety trainings and enhanced outreach to high-risk urban communities.

Formal Financing Architecture

The IRR for RA11930 established four budget allocation mechanisms that should be utilised to support implementation regarding TF-CSEA. The formalisation of funding accessibility within government appropriation processes is remarkably positive for potential sustainability.

Regular budget allocation through government planning processes.

Government agencies mandated under the Act are required to integrate relevant programs and corresponding funding proposals into their annual budgets (Rule VIII, Sections 131 and 135). This requirement also applies to LGUs, which must allocate funds through their local development plans and Gender and Development plans to ensure the provision of services and interventions for victims (Section 136).

Funding has begun to be allocated to national mechanisms in this way. At LGU level, the application is far from consistent. While a small number of LGUs – which have benefited from support or political will – do have consistent allocations, these are the exception rather than the rule. This is the more expedient and sustainable way to increase TF-CSEA funding but systematic monitoring is not yet functional. Yet the building blocks are in place for advocacy to focus on enacting and enabling this responsibility for money to be allocated consistently across the country. The NCC is mandated to monitor progress in this area – a great opportunity to ensure this responsibility is increasingly met.

Establishment of a Dedicated Endowment Fund

The IRR provides for the creation of an Endowment Fund to receive donations, grants, and contributions from both domestic and international sources to support program implementation regarding OSAEC (Section 132). At the time of writing this appears to not yet be established.

Creation of a Trust Fund from Penalties

A Trust Fund is established to consolidate fines and penalties collected under the Act, which are then earmarked for child protection, assistance, and related services (Section 133). At time of writing this appears to not yet be established.

Allocation of Proceeds from Forfeited Assets

Assets from the proceeds of crime forfeited under the law are designated to support rehabilitation and welfare services for child victims (Section 134). This provision has been utilised in covering establishment costs for the NCC – including for example the acquisition of office premises.

However, the IRR do not clearly establish a detailed mechanism for the creation and operation of the fund and implementation has been delayed. This is one of the issues that the proposed amendments to RA11930 currently under consideration attempts to resolve.

In addition, although the NCC Strategic Plan has been costed with support from UNICEF and has been submitted to Congress for approval, it does not clearly identify alternative options should government funding prove insufficient to support the proposed activities.

Capacity Building in Planning and Budgeting

The ability of agencies to plan, allocate, and utilise budgets in alignment with their mandates is a critical determinant of system effectiveness. Technical support from UNICEF, funded by Safe Online,

was noted in interviews as a useful approach to strengthening sustainable budget planning capacities across agencies.

> *"We've actually supported three agencies-- the Philippine National Police in terms of costing their child protection policy. the Department of Education in terms of costing, the child protection policy of the DepEd, they have their own child protection policy, and the child online safeguarding policy of the Department of Information and Communications Technology. So, we've actually created a sort of community within these three agencies where they can share their insights on how they actually develop budgets and how they advocate for it within their agency before it actually goes to the legislative arm of the government for approval, or the DBM, Department of Budget and Management."* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

This support enabled agencies to more easily and accurately estimate costs, to identify funding gaps, to reduce duplication, and to clarify institutional roles in responding to TF-CSEA.

> *"So that's the big opportunity, is that now you have a coordinated plan where the contributions of the different agencies can be reflected. And I think the initial work that was already done with some of those agencies has actually been a big eye-opener to them. what are these components? What do they look like? How can you cost them? And then how can you actually submit that budget?"* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

However, a key structural challenge remains. The way that budgets are often allocated within the government does not lend itself well to systemic actions. Funding is apportioned and earmarked based on issues. This is intentional, and as already noted, allows tracking and prioritisation, but can also have the detrimental effect of deprioritising system strengthening investments. To properly map and understand the value of system-strengthening investment takes time and analysis. However, when done, can represent a very strong argument for efficiency and return on investment – as numerous 'issues' may be impacted with strategic influx of investment in system elements.

As captured in this report already, the Philippines ecosystem has genuinely seen growing political will, with both executive and legislative actors increasingly recognising the need for sustained investment regarding TF-CSEA.

Despite this progress, there remains a need to sustain work that strengthens understanding among central budget agencies, including measuring and sharing data of impact and cost-effectiveness so that funding sustains and grows.

> *"I think for me, it's really looking into working with the Department of Finance, Department of Budget and Management, so that they will have that lens, because for them, it's just numbers, but if they have that-- knowledge, they will be more useful."* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

At the same time, efforts are underway to promote LGU-focused advocacy for local level, sustainable fund allocations. Yet this takes effort and time. During the roundtable discussions, participants spoke of the need to tailor advocacy at LGU level to each different context to identify the needs and solutions. The metaphor of 'adobo' models – tailored and adjusted to the local context, rather than 'Jollibee' (standardised cut-paste models) was highlighted.

Framing TF-CSEA within Money Laundering Responsibilities of Financial Institutions

Interview respondents identified the potential opportunity to broaden framing of TF-CSEA to foster greater government attention. TF-CSEA does not have to be presented as a 'new' area of responsibility for financial institutions but can be understood within the framework of the existing responsibilities to prevent and report anti-money laundering. Such advocacy regarding TF-CSEA could push the government to mandate requirements regarding proactive monitoring, and the taking of corrective actions on financial institutions for failing to act, by framing the issue as regulatory compliance rather than voluntary good practice.

> *"We weren't doing enough. There's not enough attention. And I also saw it as an opportunity to have material impact. If we're going to have material impact, it's going to be on payments. It's a regulated industry. We have identifiable information, and it's not hard to detect. The technology is available. There's nothing particularly novel about the tech. It's the way you detect that's a bit novel."* (Interview 15, Private Sector Representative)

> *"So FIUs [Financial Intelligence Units of Police] around the world review each other to elevate the standard of anti-money laundering laws. The Philippines was put in the grey list. And when you're in the grey list, international funding gets difficult. So, dealing with foreign financial institutions, there's an incentive to get out of it."* (Interview 15, Private Sector Representative)

Financial institutions operate under a distinct legal pathway that circumnavigates some of the challenges raised earlier where privacy legislation is intersecting with internet intermediary reporting processes. The Anti-Money Laundering Act requires covered institutions to proactively file suspicious transaction reports with the Anti Money Laundering Council and includes a safe harbour provision shielding them from liability for good-faith reporting. This existing statutory obligation, rather than a case-by-case request for evidence, is part of why the financial sector has been able to act as a more consistent source of proactive detection. This example could be used to reinforce the advocacy case to extend similarly clear, proactive reporting duties (rather than reactive, subpoena-based requests) to internet intermediaries.

This is not an academic argument. Examples of success were referred to in interviews with a particular case involving Western Union proactively reporting suspicious transactions in Cebu obtaining significant public attention.

> *"We got wind of cases of online [abuse] also...It was actually Western Union that reported, I think it was in a part of Cebu, that they reported unusual remittances. And I think it's Cordova, Cebu, if I'm not mistaken, that they were able to arrest."* (Interview 18, Government Officer)

The addressing of these cases rapidly elevated TF-CSEA into the public discourse as it showed people how institutions and the government could spot and stop crimes if the issue was given attention. However, the initial response in this case from the local government was too heavy-handed and inconvenienced many people beyond the criminals it intended to stop.

> *"But around 2020, 2021, because, for instance, in Cordoba, in Cebu, because that really got a lot of attention at the early stages when we were defining OSAEC. So, the local government unit...they issued an ordinance prohibiting payments, literally, if the one who*

will claim the payment was not related to the sender. It was really a reactive intervention within the locality." (Interview 15, Private Sector Representative)

Yet the principle stands that framing this crime in the already established criminal framework and systems to stop money laundering is an underutilised approach although overall, financial intelligence remains underutilised in efforts to combat TF-CSEA. Greater access for law enforcement and stronger government requirements for businesses to report or act on suspicious transactions are needed.

VI: CHILD-CENTRED SUPPORT

Survivor advocates who experienced rescue operations between 2012 and 2021 described improvements over the period in how survivors were assisted. Early on they reported that media filmed operations and privacy protections for survivors were limited. They described that their rights and the steps involved in the assistance process were not adequately explained and they felt confused and anxious. More recent experiences were described more positively with clearer explanations given about the assistance process and receiving greater privacy and protection during interventions.

Child-centred approaches were identified as a key outcome of the changes that have taken place within the child protection ecosystem. This was enabled by designing system elements with the child and their comfort and safety as a priority. While this sounds simple, it can be tricky to navigate as adjustments that benefit a child can contradict other priorities. For example, law enforcement processes are predominantly concerned with catching offenders, so treating the victims with care and comfort can slow the collection of evidence, and thus slow investigation and conviction. Balancing child-centred principles with a range of other priorities takes care and resources.

Section 69 of RA 11930 introduced a requirement for child-friendly and victim-centred protocols whereby all agencies responsible for prevention, protection, and victim assistance regarding TF-CSEA shall ensure that services are delivered in a child-sensitive, gender-responsive, disability-inclusive, culture-sensitive, victim-centred, trauma-informed, and safe manner. These on-paper provisions are welcomed, as they set a legal mandate for the ecosystem to accommodate children's and victims' perspectives in institutional processes. This chapter presents emerging examples of putting these principles into practice.

Child Protection Policies

Child protection policies serve as an organisational guideline for establishing concrete shared standards in protecting children. These policies organisationally introduce the idea of child-centred practices, often referring to the UNCRC Principle of the 'best interests of the child' as a driver. In the Philippines, the development of child protection policies began systematically in 2012, supported by UNICEF and child protection networks. There are examples in the country of private industry also implementing child protection policies:

> *"In the case of [telecom company], I guess it began with the child safeguarding policy. So, it really is a realisation that, I guess, among our customers, the most vulnerable are children. so that we could prevent access to sites that could be harmful to children. And that was in partnership with IWF."* (Interview 14, Private Sector Representative)

The example of the education sector was highlighted in interviews, where initial child protection policy was slowly strengthened and expanded over a decade. This has led to improved, standardised practices regarding TF-CSEA across schools countrywide.

> *"Since the Department of Education came out with a child protection policy, a national child protection policy, there has been a clear mandate for them to integrate child protection education into the curriculum, or at least in special classes in schools."* (Interview 10, Civil Society Officer)

These policies have also been expanded beyond central agencies to local levels.

> *"So, there is the Barangay Council for the Welfare of Children, and in schools, we also have the Council for the Welfare of Children. So, it is also mandated that every school should have child protection policy and child protection committee. And then in the hospital's...It is also stated in our child protection law."* (Interview 20, Local Social Worker)

This development reflects that child protection policy is not merely a conceptual framework, but a tool for practically improving systems, shaping organisational culture, and fostering shared responsibility for child protection across all levels of society.

Child-centred service delivery requires careful consideration of the psychological impacts on children of not only the harms that they have experienced, but also the potential stress and risks they may encounter from response processes. Evidence from national studies and the Disrupting Harm report indicated that "child-friendly practices are not always implemented, for example victims having to give their testimonies multiple times. This may result in non-reporting of cases, withdrawal of complaints, or retraction of statements."[57] Inappropriate response processes may even cause harm to already victimised young people. and can be a reason why children are reluctant to report.

> *"One of the main findings there is that a child is more traumatised during the rescue... Disrupting Harm also reinforced that finding...How do we deal with communities that want to hide the issue, or how do we deal with kids who are totally afraid of reporting their own family members?"* (Interview 12, Civil Society Officer)

In response to these research findings, state mechanisms have attempted to integrate trauma-informed care and child-centred approaches to formal systems. Government agencies specialising in child rights – such as the CWC and CSPC – play a role in reviewing and shaping policies and laws so that child rights are considered. Given the evidence of these considerations in the important and influential RA 11930, it appears these processes are respected and effective.

> *"When we are at the House of Representatives. if there are Bills on children, then we're supposed to give the child rights lens. We go as resource persons."* (Interview 18, Government Officer)

To translate this policy level work to the operational levels, capacity-building for personnel in the justice system and social welfare services were named in interviews – including for police officers, social workers, and medical professionals, to enable them to work with children while minimising re-traumatisation and adhering to child protection principles.

> *"Investigators nowadays are trained to be trauma-informed, victim-sensitive, in dealing with victims of assault and other charges for these cases...We have the specialist training for women and children investigators."* (Interview 4, Law Enforcement Officer)

Law enforcement interviewees reported that when children in TF-CSEA cases are rescued by police, interviews are conducted in a child-friendly room (the research team observed the facilities at the WCPC office in Manila). In-depth interviews are video-recorded and accepted by the court as evidence to reduce repeated testimony that may reinforce psychological trauma. Child victims are assessed by social workers to identify their needs and determine whether placement in a shelter is necessary, and to complete follow up home visits should they instead be placed in the community. Yet, while this progress is welcomed, limited resources mean that training and facilities exist within

[57] ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). Disrupting Harm in the Philippines: Evidence on Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. p.10.

few specialist units. Evidence of the extent to which these policies and protocols have impacted broadly at the frontline is limited.

Discussions in the roundtable and survivor-advocate side-event confirmed that psychosocial support for survivors has not received sufficient attention, particularly in relation to long-term recovery and support for victims who do not wish to pursue legal proceedings. Survivors emphasised the need for reassurance to young people that what had happened to them was wrong, harmful and not their fault. They also highlighted the importance of being aware in advance of the processes ahead - and being given choices and control over decisions affecting them, such as the ability to choose their own social worker. In addition, there was an expectation that social workers should be involved in multidisciplinary teams and work alongside law enforcement from the outset, rather than being treated only as the endpoint of the referral process.

Promoting Child-Centred Practices in Medical Sector

Knowledge development has also been integrated into the Philippines medical profession, with "child abuse" incorporated into medical curricula, the establishment of specialised certification programs for physicians, and the inclusion of relevant content in paediatric textbooks for medical students.

> *"So that has worked at least for medicine, because if you can get the message to [trainee doctors], the training to them, even very basic, very early, then it becomes part of the profession."* (Interview 9, Healthcare Professional)

At the same time, child-focused networks in the medical sector have developed training programs for other practitioners, including police, social workers, and medical personnel, offering both basic and advanced courses to enhance expertise and promote multidisciplinary approaches. Training has also been extended to local-level personnel to support the establishment of Women and Children Protection Units in hospitals that pass on skills in managing patients with the 'best interests' principle in mind, which are now operational in nearly all areas of the country.

During the side-event, survivor-advocates noted that police officers and local authorities are often the first point of contact and are in a key position to create a sense of safety. This point necessitates that frontline personnel truly understand relevant procedures and referral mechanisms in order that they respond to young people in this first instance appropriately.

A handful of LGUs are frequently held up as strong examples but at this stage these are the exception rather than the rule.

> *"if we need to interview the child about the abuse, it's always joint interview with the social worker, with the police investigator, doctor...We are not yet ready for the video recording but soon...the videotape would be able to be used in court and it's possible, because there is a Supreme Court ruling about it."* (Interview 20, Local Social Worker)

Progress has been seen in these exemplar LGUs as a result of a combination of political will, individual champions, and sustained resourcing (see chapter VII where enabling factors in one LGU – Valenzuela City – are described in a detailed case study). Expansion of this success to more LGUs is possible, but will need the same substantial investment and work, for this to move from the exception to the norm.

> *"I guess there is challenges and limitations in terms of the, what do you call it, the custody, to let everyone be trauma-informed up to the barangay level"* (Interview 1, Government Officer)

Advocacy for Pre-Recorded Evidence in Court

TF-CSEA cases have relied on children's direct testimony as key evidence in court to establish offenses. Increasingly foregrounding child-centred perspectives, however, has named that this can be a highly stressful or re-traumatising experience for young people who have been victimised.

Advancements in digital forensics and financial tracking have enabled the justice process to shift from primary reliance on child testimony toward greater use of technical evidence such as communication metadata and financial transactions. This, coupled with increased understanding of the psychological impact on children, has led Philippines justice actors to try harder to bring cases built primarily on the digital evidence – taking the pressure off children's testimony. It also includes calls to use professionally gathered video-recorded interviews conducted during the investigation stage, in place of repeating testimony in court.

> *"We have trained personnel on using the victim in-depth interview, on video, so that our cases will be not child dependent, but rather it's evidence dependent."* (Interview 3, Law Enforcement Officer)
>
> *"We can also include the chat logs, the money remittance. it can already stand in court. And so the courts are allowing that without interviewing children."* (Interview 3, Law Enforcement Officer)
>
> *"In 2015, 2016, we were just starting to address the crime. The children were being brought at the local police. And the children thought that they were arrested. Now, because of the trauma-informed care, we were able to advocate for a child-friendly room where they will enter in that room and they will see different colours."* (Interview 7, Civil Society Officer)

The development of tools and personnel capacity, such as access to international databases, cyber patrol, and training in victim identification, plays a key role in enabling these forms of evidence to be effectively used in justice processes. This approach helps reduce the need for repeated testimony from children and lowers the risk of additional psychological harm, while maintaining the effectiveness of case prosecution.

VII: SCALING, SUSTAINABILITY, AND LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates the progress seen over the last decade in the Philippines ecosystem for addressing TF-CSEA through the establishment of numerous building blocks in law reform, policy, capacity and system building. A move towards enabling practice level changes and moving towards scale is now increasingly evident in the response.

For this new phase, sustained investment and resourcing for local level and frontline systems will be critical. Given the aforementioned complex governance structures of the country, the role of LGUs in adaptation, institutionalisation, and sustaining implementation in alignment with national standards will be a key enabling factor for success. At the same time, variations in local capacity and implementation may also become a significant source of inequality, contributing to uneven effectiveness and outcomes across different areas. Particular examples of LGUs where frontline action on TF-CSEA has been successful were frequently put forward – Valenzuela City and Quezon City were named in many interviews and the desk review. Justice Zones outside the Manila metropolitan area - supported by EU funding were also named as examples where justice processes – including regarding TF-CSEA - had shown marked improvement.

Driving Implementation at Sub-National Levels

Under the IRR of RA 11930, particularly Section 7, scaling the system to regional and local levels is specified. Local task forces – that will likely subsume local level IACACPs and technical support from central agencies are stipulated to strengthen local capacity. The Department of Interior and Local Government has mandated local government units to develop ordinances aligned with RA11930, ensuring legal consistency across all levels and numerous interviewees named that this is reported to have happened in more than 1,000 LGUs.

Structurally, there is trends towards expansion of agencies and services. Police agencies noted intentions in interviews to expand existing regional units, and that they intentionally collaborate on certain cases with the aim of building local police knowledge and capacity. As already noted, the proposed RA11930 amendments may also seek to establish the WCPC as a national support unit with national presence and to increase Police Unit chiefs' capacity to authorise investigations and request evidence from 'internet intermediaries' such as telcos and platforms, with intent to improve investigative efficiency. The Department of Education, as a gateway to child protection services, has expanded services and reporting mechanisms, including mechanisms for reporting and local case management. Numerous further health and justice initiatives have been named that also need localisation to frontlines across the country. While interviewees reflected such plans, actual progress is also acknowledged to likely be slow, and will only be commensurate with financial investments and adequate training and support of the relevant personnel. The complexity of the Philippines' governance system that will rely on actions to be spurred, sustained and funded within more than 1,700 LGUs is a further constraint. Yet acknowledgement that a raft of critical enabling building blocks are in place was palpable. A key strength of RA11930 lies not only in the legislation itself, but in the IRR as an operational framework for implementation. By translating legal mandates into agency responsibilities, coordination structures, and local implementation requirements, the IRR provides agencies and LGUs with a common direction and concrete steps for implementation. This can be used to prompt assessment of internal gaps in capacity, resources, and authority, while guiding investments, system adjustments, and investment in capacity development.

Local Ownership in Valenzuela City

The case of Valenzuela demonstrates that the development of a local child protection system did not result solely from national legislation, but from localised, long-term process of building systemic foundations and local ownership, but leveraging context-specific and perhaps unexpected influencing factors – such as reputational revival and political ambitions.

In Valenzuela City in 2015, online child sexual abuse was not widely recognised, and there were no formal mechanism for addressing it at the local level. Services for victims of CSEA existed but were fragmented. Yet the city had also been identified as a hotspot for abuse.

> *"I don't recall much about online sexual abuse...perhaps the awareness is very low at that time."*[58]

However, Valenzuela City set out to establish a Child Protection Center for their population in 2017. The idea was to build a one-stop service that brought together a multidisciplinary team, including social workers, medical professionals, police, and psychologists, to provide comprehensive services for children affected by abuse.

> *"We had established...a one-stop shop for children in need of special protection."*

This foundation was critical, as previously, child cases required referrals across fragmented agencies. They likely would complete multiple interviews with DSWD, police and medical staff. They likely had to travel outside Valenzuela City for some of these.

> *"We didn't have...a medical legal officer...the child needs to travel outside Valenzuela... that's very difficult for a child."*

A key enabling factor was vision-driven leadership that was receptive to policy innovation and prioritises child protection, with significant investment in both budget and human resources, allowing the centre to operate 24/7 with specialised staff.

> *"There are champions...we have bosses who listen."*

The former mayor of Valenzuela City is now the Secretary of DSWD. While not stated by interviewees, the work on the CPC was a demonstration of success that likely informed and assisted his political career.

Yet the outcome also took many, many years of advocacy, driven by personnel with long-term experience in child protection.

> *"Yeah, I've been with Valenzuela City government since 2000. But the Child Protection Center was only opened in 2017."*

> *"[At the start] I am the sole focal person...and the implementer...and the case manager."*

Another enabling factor was specific, external support, particularly from development organisations such as Consuelo Foundation, which provided initial technical and financial support. This enabled the development of the one-stop service model, which was later expanded and fully institutionalised by the local government.

> *"Consuelo Foundation provided PH₱700,000...and the rest [PH₱4 million] came from the local government unit."*

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[58] All quotes through this section came from one interview with a Valenzuela City representative.

The CPC was embedded into local ordinances, ensuring dedicated budget allocations (line items) and sustainable structures- this was before the stipulation to address TF-CSEA in local ordinances by the Department of Interior and Local Government. All related cases raised with women and children desks were required to be referred to the CPC, ensuring integrated care alongside the justice process.

> *"This was institutionalised through our local ordinances...the child protection system that we will follow."*

Once established, the ongoing operating budget for the CPC was integrated into the LGU annual appropriations – there is no risk of this funding discontinuing. The CPC has won awards and is something the city is proud of – a further motivation to keep the reputation strong.

> *"We have line items...the local council...continuously funds the operations."*

In order to maintain attention on the value of the CPC, the team is committed to providing timely and consistent reports regarding centre usage and also explained that child representatives are enabled to join city committees to continuously advocate for the centre.

> *"They sit with the heads of the local government units. Yeah, so just that visibility reminds people, they listen to them, they hear them."*

Following the enactment of RA11930 and its IRR, Valenzuela City was able to further quickly institutionalise and strengthen the CPC by aligning to new legislative mandates – further demonstrating its expediency.

The Valenzuela CPC experience demonstrates the value of a multidisciplinary team approach in which professionals are trained and can work together long enough to understand each other's roles and ways of working. The centre is available to the public every weekday until 10pm, supported by local government funding for doctors, social workers, mental health personnel, legal staff, and police officers stationed at the centre.

When a case is received, basic information is first gathered to assess whether it should proceed to a joint interview. If needed, the interview was conducted on the same day, with multiple professionals involved in the meeting. The police officer acts as the lead interviewer, while social workers and psychology personnel may observe and relay additional questions through the lead interviewer. This reduces the repeated retelling that survivors regularly endure and also ensures that all agencies receive the same information.

Cases then moved into profession-specific assessments, including medical examination, assessment of the family situation and social context, mental health assessment, and information on legal procedures. Practitioners meet along the way to share information and develop safety and service plans, including whether the young person may return home safely, what protective measures may be needed, what follow-up is required, and whether referrals are necessary.

The centre also collaborates with the local government through the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children, which provides basic information to the family and community, supports access to services, and follows up when families return to the community.

The CPC team noted that continuity of funding was supported by system-level drivers such as audits and governance incentives. Compliance of the centre with monitoring data requirements and successful completion of audit requirements stipulated by the Department of the Interior and Local Government help enable the continued flow of funds.

Lessons from Valenzuela City

1. **The multidisciplinary "one-stop shop" model**
   The CPC integrates social workers, police investigators, doctors, psychologists, and case management in one location. This reduces retraumatisation of children and improves coordination. The core principle of integrated services is highly transferable, even if the exact staffing structure varies.
2. **Clear protocols and role delineation**
   Valenzuela relies on national protocols issued by the Department of Justice and their own local manual of operation to clarify responsibilities and avoid overlap between disciplines.
3. **Localisation of national frameworks**
   The CPC manager emphasised that national protocols must be localised to fit local systems.
4. **Institutionalisation through local ordinances**
   A major sustainability factor was embedding the CPC with local ordinances including budget lines and mandated referral pathways.
5. **Mandatory referral and coordination mechanisms**
   The requirement that any child abuse cases reported to police or prosecutors must pass through the CPC created a coordinated ecosystem of care.
6. **Recognition of online harms as an extension of offline child protection systems**
   One important insight is that TF-CSEA/online abuse was not treated as a completely separate issue, but incorporated into existing child protection mechanisms. This systems-based approach is transferable

Some aspects of Valenzuela City's success stemmed from exceptional leadership, political will and contextual circumstances that may be harder to identify in different contexts:

1. **Strong political champions and leadership continuity**
   The CPC Manager repeatedly stressed that "we have bosses who listen." The strong support of the former Mayor Rex Gatchalian appears foundational to the CPC's success. This type of political commitment is highly context-dependent.
2. **Exceptional local government investment**
   The LGU reportedly contributed around PHP 4 million toward the CPC infrastructure, while an external grant was also secured. Many LGUs likely lack comparable fiscal capacity or political willingness to prioritise child protection at this level.
3. **Long-term institutional memory and personal leadership**
   The CPC Manager's role as a champion is central. She had worked since around 2010 as focal person, implementer, and case manager before the CPC was established. Much of the system appears built around her persistence, technical knowledge, and advocacy. Replicating such leadership capital is difficult.
4. **Existing governance culture in Valenzuela**
   The city already appears to have a governance model supportive of innovation, inter-agency collaboration, and benchmarking. This culture of collaboration and transparency that may not exist in all LGUs.
5. **Availability of specialised human resources**
   Despite acknowledging shortages, Valenzuela still manages to maintain 11 dedicated social workers, doctors, investigators, psychologists, and 24/7 access. Many municipalities may struggle to recruit or retain similarly specialised personnel.
6. **Urban scale and institutional density**
   Valenzuela is a large urban LGU with approximately 900,000 residents and relatively developed administrative systems. Smaller or rural LGUs may not have the same operational capacity, referral networks, or service demand patterns.

VIII: CONCLUSIONS

Key Lessons

Building Durable Systems

- Amend existing laws, policies and system elements rather than creating new – but siloed – outputs may take more effort to consult, refine and balance competing priorities. However, once completed, it results in adjustments to existing processes rather than the building of new, sometimes disconnected, systems. Moving beyond siloed approaches to TF-CSEA to work more integrated into existing work plans was observed to support clearer mandated responsibilities and more regular, and sustainable budget commitments.
- Legal reform can catalyse system progress but also places new demands on institutions, often exposing capacity and resourcing gaps.
- Establishing formal coordination mechanisms is necessary but alone is not sufficient. Sustained effort to improve the functioning of these mechanisms includes translating mandates into functional, day-to-day actions with accountabilities that utilise existing departmental plans and performance management systems.

Sustaining Progress

- Once building blocks are concretely established, a transition to the 'scaling' phase results in different work and priorities. This phase is not necessarily innovative and noteworthy, but is marked by a need for consistency, persistence and sustained financial commitment – suited to domestic, government appropriations rather than time-bound grants.
- Ownership of TF-CSEA actions across a range of government departments is critical for sustainability. Supporting government actors to calculate costings and seek domestic budget appropriations may be slow-moving work, but encourages ownership and enables continuity of the work.
- While domestic ownership is increasing, international actors continue to play a significant role in financing, technical capacity and operational inputs in the country.

Localising and Communicating for Impact

- Local-level success benefits from advocacy by people invested at the community to identify and tailor policy and exemplars to the local context.
- Any approach must be carefully tailored to fit unique governance structures and country contextual factors like geography, political factors, or ethnicity and language diversity.
- Advocacy may benefit from expanding to a range of reasons behind calls to action. While rights-based arguments are commonly made and warranted, additionally making the case for cost-effectiveness, logistical efficiency, reputational implications or broad social harms/benefits may also help to sway duty bearers.
- Media and public opinion are potentially powerful influencers on government but these channels of influence are less controllable and messages can be diluted or subverted. Careful and strategic engagement is necessary so that the intended message is communicated and flexible engagement in the discourse is possible.

Enhancing Capacity, Practice and Trust at the Frontline

- Some traditional capacity development approaches may not be efficient and cost-effective, particularly capacity building that relies on cascade training. However, cost-effective mechanisms (such as online training approaches) may have wider reach but reduced impact as participants may be less motivated or attentive.

- Embedding child-centred and trauma-informed approaches requires sustained investment in frontline capacity; policy alone doesn't guarantee changed practice.
- The trust of children and communities in institutions is a critical but often overlooked factor influencing reporting, cooperation and system effectiveness. System strengthening work should measure trust and actively address issues that may be resulting in low trust.
- Informal personal relationships between individuals across the ecosystem remain central to how systems function in practice, particularly for influencing policy and realising coordination. Enabling opportunities for these interpersonal relationships to grow and maintain (through collaborations, networking and face-to-face meetings) is important.

Prioritising Data, Evidence and the Outcomes Gap

- Data management systems within different institutions in the ecosystem are an opportunity to harvest data about TF-CSEA. Different institutional data systems do not have to be consolidated into one national data system, but establishing common criteria, indicators and classifiers/tags used across different systems can allow for data to be cross-compared.
- Much of the evidence in this report demonstrates progress in institutional scaffolding (such as law reforms, clarified mandates, budget allocations). These are important foundations, but gaps remain in the evidence of whether these improvements demonstrate better outcomes for children. Ongoing monitoring and research should focus on identifying this evidence.
- The impact of prevention and public awareness efforts about TF-CSEA are difficult to measure in isolation, yet do yield positives. In order to sustain TF-CSEA prevention and public awareness efforts, these messages can be systematically integrated into ongoing public health efforts rather than stand-alone.

Addressing a Changing Threat Landscape

- As the ecosystem moves into this next phase, it will also need to contend with a threat landscape that continues to evolve faster than legal and institutional responses can adapt. Notably, this study's data collection did not surface generative AI-enabled risks -including synthetic or "deepfake" CSAM and AI-facilitated grooming - as a dominant theme in the Philippines casework yet. Given the speed at which these tools are emerging globally, this is likely to change fast. The national response and monitoring evidence, such as possible future iterations of this case study series, should track these emerging threats closely.

Recommendations

1. Policy, Legislation and Governance

Reforming the legislation and policy framework for TF-CSEA was crucial in the first phase of the Philippines response and good success has been seen to update laws, set policy, proscribe departmental mandates and establish a coordinating agency. Shifting to a phase predominantly focused on implementation and scaling is already underway.

- Legislative updates will continue (such as current moves to adjust RA11930) – particularly in terms of future-proofing for emerging threats such as generative AI-enabled ("synthetic") CSAM, AI-facilitated grooming, and the continued spread of encrypted and ephemeral platforms, but reduce the focus on law and policy to be more targeted and responsive alongside the primary drive of scaled implementation.
- Use the strategic plan of the NCC as a mechanism for monitoring and reviewing progress and underpinning advocacy for government leadership to meet the rhetoric it represents.
- Integrate goals for TF-CSEA into routine government systems like departmental annual work plans performance management systems, rather than as a separate area of focus.
- Genuinely focus on decentralising approaches to local levels. Many LGUs have already developed local ordinance about TF-CSEA that are a critical first step that sets the rhetoric. Activities can now support LGUs as co-owners to design and deliver the necessary concrete implementation activities in locally tailored prevention and responses.

2. Law Enforcement and Justice

Good progress to improve the specific institutional structures to address TF-CSEA and strengthen the technical capacity of law enforcement and justice actors has been seen. Moves to scale and make available the tools and knowledge beyond urban situated specialist units is now the priority.

- Take steps to transition to evidence-led justice processes that rely less on survivor testimony to help reduce the burden on child survivors of repeatedly recounting experiences. Aim instead to make greater use of digital forensic data and financial evidence.
- While this are introduced widely, continue to resource and actively promote the use of child-friendly and survivor-centred procedures through investigation and prosecution of TF-CSEA cases.
- Continue efforts to decentralise technical capacity and access to forensic methods and tools for investigating TF-CSEA cases beyond specialist units. This may be quickly enabled if proposals to establish the WCPC of the PNP as a standard unit are successful as this would make WCPC officers available across the country.
- Improve efficiency of digital evidence gathering and management processes to simplify obtaining data from industry and simplify using digital evidence in prosecutions.
- Strategically position TF-CSEA with anti-money laundering and financial crimes priorities to open up resourcing and to better enable complex cases to be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted.

3. Social Services and Survivor Support

Ongoing work that has explored a range of approaches for delivering social services and survivor support for TF-CSEA that are suitable for the Philippines context can be capitalised in the implementation- and scale-focused phase.

- Promote establishment of local-level interventions for TF-CSEA like the child protection centre model. Such one-stop service hubs reduce the burden and complexity of navigating

multiple agencies. However, they need local ownership, time and sustainable resourcing for numerous years to establish as trusted, workable community mechanisms.

- Ensure knowledge and skills regarding TF-CSEA is accessible to the social services workforce across the country through digital learning methods coupled with incentives such as access to salary increase for completion and mechanisms that genuinely enable and support application of new knowledge and skills.
- Work with professional associations and unions to review and expand a broader scope for salary packages and incentives that motivate frontline welfare workers Ensure that experienced professionals are not motivated away from client work into management positions due to limited opportunities to receive salary increases.
- Existing, carefully developed resources such as the TF-CSEA Casework Handbook and the Case Management of Child Victims of Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation (CANE Protocol) serve as excellent bases for training and standardising social supports related to TF-CSEA (along with other child protection concerns).
- Build on existing mechanisms for enabling and using child and survivor perspectives (such as those managed by the CWC) to further promote youth participation in policy and services regarding TF-CSEA.
- Advocate for standardised victim support services in the justice system for vulnerable populations that would include survivors of TF-CSEA. Such services could also connect survivors to mechanisms to facilitate compensation and reparations from both the state or confiscated from offenders.

4. Industry Engagement

There is an established pattern of successful industry engagement in the Philippines in legislative reform and compliance regarding TF-CSEA and RA11930 places a clearer regulatory responsibility of industry actors that can be further leveraged.

- The current situation presents an opportunity to align/embed TF-CSEA with anti-money laundering mechanisms to strengthen reach and impact of regulations on companies.
- Strengthen government regulatory engagement, accountability mechanisms and compliance obligations and enforcement for technology companies in order to improve transparency reporting, responsiveness to law enforcement requests, and cooperation in public campaigns regarding TF-CSEA.
- Enforce legal measures set out in RA11930 and the accompanying IRR such as the response timelines for platforms and telecommunications service providers to preserve and provide requested digital evidence, comply with transparency reporting obligations, and state clear requirements to proactively detect concerns using hash-matching of known CSAM and classifiers for previously unseen materials.
- Prioritise forward-looking regulatory reforms and build detection capacity for emerging and fast-evolving risks such as AI-generated ("synthetic") CSAM and AI-facilitated grooming.
- Using the example of obligations on financial institutions under the Anti-Money Laundering Act to flag suspicious transactions (while providing safe harbour shields regarding privacy), consider introducing obligations on internet intermediaries to proactively flag TF-CSEA concerns.
- Leverage opportunities to access private sector CSR to support campaigns and opportunities for collaboration knowledge brokerage regarding responses to TF-CSEA.

5. Public Awareness and Education

Success has been seen in public awareness campaigns and education project, however there is a need to evolve to integrated approaches, and to identify effective and cost-efficient approaches, and locally-driven approaches that utilise technology and are suited to the modern age.

- Integrate digital safety into existing curriculum such as sex and relationships education and other lessons for educating young people about interactions in the online world – TF-CSEA does not need to be a separate siloed topic.
- The example project for digital safety co-designed and delivered by Department of Education with support from Stairway Foundation represents a useful lesson in achieving reach and scale while preparing for realistically achievable effectiveness.
- Continue to conduct public communication campaigns using clear and accessible language to challenge harmful misconceptions. Aim to integrate this messaging in ongoing government public health priorities and digital safety training for young people and caregivers.
- Support digital-age parent/caregiver capacities with knowledge exchange that helps families to guide children towards safe and informed internet use and prioritises building and engaging in positive online contexts - rather than unachievable aims to shield young people from all risks. Tailor activities to the uneven internet access and technological capabilities of target groups across different parts of the country.

6. Research, Data and Evidence

Research evidence in Philippines regarding TF-CSEA has been consistent and ongoing. There is also shifts towards domestic funding and greater use of administrative data.

- Emerging calls to strengthen the systematic gathering and using of administrative data sourced from medical, legal, educational and welfare data management systems can be reinforced with research projects that would utilise this data. Defining and promoting consistent indicators and classifiers/tags related to TF-CSEA that could be used across separate systems would better enable cross-comparisons.
- Use monitoring capacities of the NCC to push for sharing of relevant data and explore ways of funding and partnering with academic institutions and researchers to analyse and learn from this wealth of data.
- Seek opportunities through CSR relationships to fund nationally driven research to continue monitoring the scale, severity and evolving nature of this problem. However, safeguards regarding research independence, transparency and agenda-setting are needed.
- Maintain the position of Philippines as a regional leader in the response to TF-CSEA though showcasing national progress, including by hosting regional knowledge exchange events such as the 2026 ASEAN ICT Forum and Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children.

7. Funding and Financing

Evidence of a shift towards domestic funding for a range of systemic elements in the response to TF-CSEA are emergent. This has great potential for sustaining progress.

- Continue to advocate for domestic funding for TF-CSEA, particularly at LGU levels. Existing local ordinances provide the justification for local advocacy for funds that move rhetoric to practical community-level actions.
- The enactment of RA11930 and the establishment of the NCC provides a solid basis for keeping progress regarding TF-CSEA on the national agenda and serves as a clear

justification for seeking annual budget appropriations for necessary actions across the many departments and institutions that hold some responsibilities to act.

- Continue to support government agencies to strengthen costing, budgeting, and internal resource mobilisation processes so that they may continue to apply for relevant budget appropriations. Ensure adequate reporting so that fund allocations are accountable and continue to be demonstrably justified.
- Link TF-CSEA to existing departmental plans, goals and KPIs in relevant parts of the ecosystem to strengthen accountability and sustainability.
- Find ways to collaborate and integrate TF-CSEA with anti-money laundering, FinTech and cross-border financial crime regulatory frameworks and investigative capacities.
- Dedicated funding to be sought for the wellbeing support and professional growth of frontline personnel working on TF-CSEA cases.
- . Donors could work with ecosystem actors and governments to identify work that could be sustained by domestic government budget appropriations so that funding from international partners and donors can instead be prioritised towards catalytic changes and may leverage domestic commitments.

ANNEXES

Annex A: Key Research Question Matrix

Case studies were undertaken for Kenya and the Philippines simultaneously and a consistent methodology was employed. The development and compilation of information for the initial development of the case study reports consisted of two main components: document review and key informant interviews.

Document Review

Conducted to understand and structure the case study reports that reflected each country's ecosystems for addressing TF-CSEA and specifically how change had happened in the last decade. Analysis sought to also explore relevant VAC, GBV, and cybersecurity-related risks affecting children to reflects the broader child online safety and digital safety ecosystems in each country. Review was completed of documents including project documents provided by Safe Online, outputs resulting from grants (such as papers and research reports), national laws and policies and other relevant materials from open sources that further illustrated the country ecosystems and changes that had occurred.

Key Informant Interviews

Interviews were intended to interrogate what is understood about the ecosystems in more depth. Interviews delved into both general aspects that reflect the overall ecosystem and questions specific to Safe Online supported projects. The interviews included three groups of informants: (1) grantee organisations, (2) stakeholders involved directly or indirectly involved in project implementation, including government, private sector, and civil society actors, and (3) representatives of people benefiting from ecosystem changes – resulting from Safe Online supported project activities or otherwise.

Following generation of the Case Study Reports, roundtable expert meetings with interview participants and separately with survivor advocates allowed for the further exploration and validation of the findings.

The question matrix below was organised to explore the ecosystem, dissected by the six domains of the revised MNR.[59] The seventh category is added by the team to capture questions related to mechanisms and fund management processes.

The question matrix was designed to:

- Identify key system-level developments/changes over the past decade in how the two countries addressed technology-facilitated risks and harms against children,
- Document changes across policy, governance, services, data, and public engagement,
- Understand how Safe Online supported interventions contributed to these developments – including directly funded activities, catalytic influence, partnership strengthening, enhanced multi-sector coordination,
- Explore areas of alignment between TF-CSEA work and broader VAC/GBV prevention, child protection, and cybersecurity agendas,
- Capture elements of change that may be unique to each country's context or transferable across countries,

[59] WeProtect Global Alliance (2023). Preventing and Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A Model National Response: Maturity Model.

- Identify persistent challenges, bottlenecks, and opportunities for future systems strengthening.

Comparative Lens

The question matrix integrated a comparative perspective to support cross-country learning between the Philippines and Kenya. This included:

- Identifying similarities and differences in system change trajectories,
- Comparing policy-driven, justice-driven, and data-driven reform pathways,
- Understanding contextual factors shaping progress – including political, economic, cultural, and technological dynamics,

Examining how global and regional developments influence each country's ecosystem for child online safety and technology-facilitated harm.

Annex B: Ethical Review and Safeguarding

Ethical Review

The project did not present extensive risks from an ethical perspective, however, following clarification of the methodology and sampling during the inception phase, Evident and Safe Online took the decision to submit the project for an independent, external ethical review.

A full research protocol, including detailed design, personnel, participant information sheets, consent process and forms were submitted to the HML Research and Ethics Review Lab in late 2025. Following a review with minor adjustments, an expedited review was approved on 14 January, 2026 (HML IRB #3222).

Safeguarding

The study population consisted of adult professionals who are engaged in the national ecosystem responding to technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Participants included policymakers, government officials, law enforcement personnel, social service providers, civil society representatives and industry representatives in their professional capacity.

Adult survivor-advocates took part in the side-events to the roundtables. These participants had direct experiences of TF-CSEA, however, they participated in their capacity as advocates and speaking to the situation of the national eco-system, not focusing on their personal experiences.

Inclusion Criteria

- Adults aged 18 or older,
- Individuals working in a professional capacity related to child protection, law enforcement, policy, social services, civil society or digital safety,
- Survivor-advocates who choose to participate as expert contributors and not as individuals recounting personal victimisation,
- Individuals able to provide informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

- Children and minors under age 18 (the study did not include any child participants),
- Individuals approached based on their personal experience of abuse or victimisation,
- Individuals unable to provide informed consent,
- Any group considered legally or ethically vulnerable for direct research involvement in this context.

Key Ethical Safeguards

- Clear Participant Information Sheet and informed consent,
- Separate consent for audio, video, and photography,
- Privacy protection and participant control over identification,
- No collection of personal data or health information,
- No discussions requiring disclosure of lived traumatic experiences,
- The research did not involve deception, sensitive personal data, or clinical procedures.

Annex C: Summary Table of TF-CSEA Research in the Philippines

Study	Lead	Data Collection Period	Ecosystem of the Problem	Key Constraints / Gaps	Institutional / System Response
The National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children in the Philippines (VAC Study), 2016	UNICEF & Council for the Welfare of Children	~2015	- Violence embedded in family and community contexts - Intergenerational patterns of abuse - High prevalence of violence across home, school, community, workplace, and online spaces - Violence is normalised within families, especially corporal punishment - Intergenerational transmission of violence and social norms sustaining abuse - Increasing exposure to cyber/online violence	- High underreporting - Limited access to services - Low disclosure and reporting despite high prevalence - Low awareness and utilisation of services (only ~29% aware) - Weak local systems, especially non-functional LCPCs - Limited coordination and insufficient trained personnel	- Strengthening child protection systems - Focus on prevention and early intervention - Strengthening child protection systems at national and local levels - Emphasis on prevention and early intervention - Enhancing capacity of LGUs and service providers - Promoting multi-sectoral coordination (health, justice, social services)
Children and the Sex Trade in the Digital Age, 2016	Plan	~2014–2016	- Children's experiences shaped by poverty and peer influence - Transition of exploitation into online spaces - Emerging normalisation of exploitation	- Children do not identify themselves as victims - Weak support pathways	- Child-centred approaches - Prevention and socio-economic support
The Philippines Kids Online: Opportunities, Risks and Safety Study, 2021	UNICEF	2017	- High internet use among children - Online risk embedded in everyday life	- Limited risk recognition - Low reporting rates	- Digital literacy programmes - Strengthening parental mediation
OSEC Analysis	IJM	2010–2017	- Transnational crime ecosystem - Demand driven by foreign offenders - Family-based exploitation	- Hidden nature of crime - Fragmented data systems	- Law enforcement strengthening - International cooperation
Estimating the Prevalence of	IJM and Rights Lab,	~2018–2019	- Large-scale hidden exploitation	- Lack of reliable prevalence data	- Data-driven advocacy

Study	Lead	Data Collection Period	Ecosystem of the Problem	Key Constraints / Gaps	Institutional / System Response
Trafficking to Produce Child Sexual Exploitation Material in the Philippines, 2023	University Nottingham		within communities and households	- Underestimation of scale	- Strengthening measurement systems
Behind the Screens: A Compilation of Case Studies and Learnings about OSEC, 2020	IJM	~2013–2020	- Real-time abuse via livestreaming - Networked actors (local and global)	- Difficult detection - Cross-border complexity	- Digital evidence and forensics - International prosecution efforts
SaferKidsPH Action Research on Changing Social Norms for Online Sexual Abuse & Exploitation (OSAEC) Transforming Social Norms to Protect Children Online, 2024	UNICEF	2020–2021	- Social norms as key drivers - Harm minimisation influenced by “no touch, no harm” belief	- Stigma and silence - Community non-intervention - Underreporting	- Social norms change interventions - Community engagement
Disrupting Harm, 2022	ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF	2020–2021	- Interaction of technology, behaviour, and norms - Perception gap among children - Influence of “no touch, no harm” belief	- Children do not recognise harm - Extremely low reporting - Limited system capacity	- Child-centred policy approaches - Strengthening reporting mechanisms
The National Study on OSAEC, 2021	DSWD & UNICEF	Not explicitly stated (~2020)	- Multi-level ecosystem: technology, socio-economic factors, and cultural beliefs - Role of “no touch, no harm” belief	- Weak inter-agency coordination - Investigation and prosecution gaps	- Multi-sectoral response frameworks - System strengthening
Qualitative Analysis of Operational Deliverables of the Philippine General Hospital Child Protection Unit and Child Protection Network, 2022	CPN	1997–~2017 (retrospective)	- System development as a phased process - Importance of multidisciplinary collaboration	- Weak prevention component - Uneven system development	- Roadmap for child protection system development - Emphasis on leadership and governance
The Action Research on Self-Facilitated Livestreaming of Child Sexual	Plan Australia	~2022–2025	- Emerging form of abuse: self-facilitated livestreaming	- Major evidence gap prior to study - Under-recognition of self-facilitated abuse	- Evidence used to inform National policy (DOJ, action plans) & local ordinances

Study	Lead	Data Collection Period	Ecosystem of the Problem	Key Constraints / Gaps	Institutional / System Response
Exploitation and Abuse, 2025			- Driven by interaction of economic pressure, peer influence, digital platforms - Abuse embedded in family and community contexts - Blurred boundary between victim and participation - Step-by-step pathways of exploitation mapped	- Social norms (normalisation, victim-blaming, silence) - Underreporting and hidden nature of cases - Weak local-level implementation capacity	- Strong evidence-to-action model - Multi-stakeholder coordination (LGUs, law enforcement, communities) - Translation of research into tools (policy briefs, media, animation) - Strengthening system ownership and policy uptake