

ECPAT International

CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

2024 - 2029



ECPAT International would like to thank everyone who contributed to the development of this strategy, and in particular the children and young people who have participated in the consultations and shared their ideas, advice and recommendations to make our work more engaging for them and with them, from Fundación Quitu Raymi y la Red de Organizaciones por la Defensa de los Derechos de la Niñez y Adolescencia – RODDNA in Ecuador; Hinton Child Rights Foundation in Hungary; Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN) in Nepal; KIOTA WOMEN HEALTH AND ORGANIZATION (KIWOHEDE) in the Republic of Tanzania, UGANDA YOUTH DEVELOPMENT LINK in Uganda.

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Foreword

Sexual exploitation of children is increasing globally. We have to renew our approach to effectively address this crime.

But, how can we be effective if we don't engage with the first ones concerned by this, the children? Girls and boys from around the world seem to be old enough to learn about sexuality online, left on their own to figure out safety features of technologies, to attend educational, sport, religious and cultural institutions that have no child protection and safeguarding culture and policies, and to be asked to repeat traumatizing experiences over and over again in justice and social procedures to "serve" justice and fight impunity. But when it is time to engage them in combatting sexual exploitation, most adults reject the option. Too costly and complicated. Too long. It incurs risks. It is not appropriate. This could victimise them, trigger them. And so on.

In a world where we, adults and organisations, have mastered the narrative to explain why it is best to do it for children rather than with children, we must process the evidence before us that the usual approaches have failed. And a key factor has been our hesitation and reluctance to engage with children in general, including survivors, in building appropriate and fit-for-purpose prevention and response strategies, as their right, but also as an imperative to ensure adequacy with their needs.

ECPAT International intends to be bold in the area of child participation. This does not mean that child participation is imposed on people, that we will take undue risks, and that we extract from children a voice for the benefit of our interest, at the expenses of their wellbeing. It is a commitment to work hard to create the conditions for this participation to be meaningful, empowering, influential, systematic and safe.

This policy details this commitment to transform a vision into guidance to ensure we do no harm to children, while championing ways to maximise opportunities child participation entails in the fight against sexual exploitation, not the least for the children themselves.

Some adults see us, as young people, as incapable of giving them advise about sexual exploitation.

Consultation with children, ECPAT



Guillaume Landry
Executive Director – ECPAT International

Table of Contents

Foreword	
Introduction to the strategy	1
Process for developing the strategy	3
Who is this strategy for?	4
Why is child and youth participation important?	5
Recognising the barriers and challenges of children and young people's participation, including young survivors, in addressing child sexual exploitation	7
Building an understanding of what child participation is	8
ECPAT International Key Strategic Priorities and Commitment to Ensuring the participation of children, including young survivors of child sexual exploitation	10
A CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION: Foster a culture of child and youth participation, including young survivors, within the Secretariat and across the ECPAT network	12
Disrupt barriers to participation through reflective approaches	12
Share learning and build consensus and principles across the ECPAT network and other actors on how children and young people, including young survivors, can be safely and meaningfully engaged in addressing child sexual exploitation	12
Safeguard adequate support, resources and timeframes to ensure meaningful child and youth participation	13
Promote, build on and support sustainability in participatory processes and mechanisms	13
PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE: Promote and encourage opportunities for engagement and collaboration to address child sexual exploitation for all children	15
Document and share learning about our, our ECPAT members' and other actors work to support and facilitate participatory models, processes and activities with children and young people, including young survivors	15
Connect our ECPAT members and other child protection actors to strengthen capacities and elevate learning and opportunities for engaging children more meaningfully	15
Explore opportunities and partnerships to connect child and youth activists working on this issue	16
ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE: Mobilise and advocate for wider commitment to child and youth participation, including young survivors, in addressing child sexual exploitation	18
Engage children and young people in shaping the agendas	18
Generate evidence and promote understanding of why child and youth participation is important and beneficial	18
Advocate for adults in power to listen to, and give due weight to the needs and perspectives of children and young people, including young survivors	19
Build on the evidence, generated with children and young survivors, to inform our advocacy	19
TEST, LEARN AND SHARE: Pilot and test transformative models of engagement with children, including young survivors, learn from and with children, and share our learning across sectors to address child sexual exploitation	21
Pilot and test new approaches	21
Dedicate time and resources for more inclusive participation models for groups of children who may face additional barriers	21
Develop partnerships (technical and financial) to support and promote children's solutions	22

Introduction to the strategy

ECPAT International is the world's largest influencing network fully dedicated to ending the sexual exploitation of children, with a membership of 125 civil society organisations in 104 countries.

ECPAT International has a strong history of progressive action in realising participation rights for children and young people¹, including young survivors of child sexual exploitation. This work started in 1997 during the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action. Since then, ECPAT has been bold in its implementation of new projects and models creating spaces and opportunities for children and young people to inform and influence action within the organisation and in the broader sector. This has included ground-breaking work with young survivors through the **Youth Partnership Project (YPP)**, meant to ensure that the voices of victims of child sexual exploitation are taken into account in policy, legislation, programs and practice at local, national, regional and international levels and the establishment of the **ECPAT International Child and Youth Advisory Committee (EIYAC)**. More recently, ECPAT International has developed new methodologies to prioritise and centre the voices of young survivors, including boys, in research. ECPAT International have also initiated opportunities for children and young people across the globe to contribute to key conversations on how to keep children safe both online and offline. In taking stock of our work on child and youth participation over the last 30 years, this has allowed us to reflect on the achievements, but also to identify some of the blockages that may have impeded, what was, a radical and progressive trajectory towards strengthening child and youth participation in the area of child sexual exploitation. The process of developing this strategy has allowed us to reflect not only on our internal learning, but also to understand the current external landscape.

Through this process, it is evident that there is growing recognition that the participation of those affected by a particular issue is not just “nice to have” but a matter of right, choice and an absolute necessity. We have identified several important trends that have helped us to shape our own position:

- » Actors within the broader international child protection sector are seeking to push the boundaries of ‘child participation’. They are reinvisioning and rethinking what our role as adult professionals should be in facilitating and supporting children and young people to advocate for their rights, moving from working **for** children to working **with** children.
- » The child rights sector, including the academic community, is increasingly acknowledging the benefits of participatory research and recognising the value of practice-based knowledge, identifying these as critical pathways to decolonising knowledge and challenging ‘adulthood’ - the oppression experienced by children and young people from adults.
- » Within the broader sector, encompassing modern slavery, trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence, there has been an increased interest and a recognition of the importance and value of engaging with adult survivors of various forms of childhood sexual violence
- » The donor community have also expressed interest and a commitment to supporting child and youth-led and survivor-led programmes to address childhood sexual violence.

¹ ECPAT defines youth as a person up to the age of 24, as per UN. A child is understood as a person under 18.

- » Various social movements such as #MeToo have shown the power of social media as a tool for activism related to sexual harms.
- » New powerful movements and global networks are also expanding both online and offline, led by adult survivors of child sexual abuse, and children who are committed to and engaged in making changes and advocating for their rights.

While many of the social movements noted above may have received more attention in the Global North, there are numerous local grassroots movements and inspiring examples of resilience, resistance and solidarity in the face of childhood sexual violence in the Global South.²

Although various frameworks for aid effectiveness and quality have, for decades, integrated principles of accountability and participation of individuals and groups at risk of, or directly affected by an issue, the implementation of these principles, particularly when it comes to children, has not been effective. The changing landscape is bringing a driving force to promote the effective implementation of these principles and ensure that those who seek to support children and protect their

rights systematically and meaningfully engage with children and young people, including young survivors, from the identification and conception of projects through design, delivery and evaluation. Children and young people are also increasingly demanding to meaningful participation in decision making processes on matters that concern them.

ECPAT International, as a global network focused on preventing child sexual exploitation, is well placed to embrace this changing landscape and be a key player in realising the rights of children and young people to inform and influence decision-making to address childhood sexual exploitation. We are well positioned to contribute to this re-envisioning of how children and young people, including young survivors, can play a key role in helping us to understand the ever-evolving world of exploitation and to plan and shape responses for children and young people that address their needs. In doing this we can also create new mechanisms that allow us, as adult professionals, to support children and young people and help them develop the skills and competencies they need to advocate for their rights and influence today's and tomorrow's actions to address the issues affecting them.

2 See Bourke, J. (2022) *'Disgrace: Global Reflections on Sexual Violence'*. Reaktion Book.



Process for developing the strategy

ECPAT International and its members have a long history of advocating for the rights of children and young people to be heard on issues related to child sexual exploitation. In order to build from this strong foundation, and ensure we learn from previous experience and initiatives, a number of steps were taken to develop an initial draft of the strategy. This included

- » An internal mapping of ECPAT International's child and youth participation work;
- » A rapid review of trends in the sector that affect the participation of children in issues that concern them, in particular in preventing and addressing child sexual exploitation;
- » Interviews with three ex-colleagues from the ECPAT Secretariat who played a key role in earlier phases of ECPAT's child and youth participation work;
- » Thirteen interviews with current staff from ECPAT's members located across diverse regions;
- » A survey that was completed by 52 current ECPAT member organisations with representation from all regions.

This strategy is predominantly targeted at the Secretariat and identifies priorities and actions that we can take to strengthen and improve the culture for child and youth participation. Many of these actions revolve around building our own, and supporting our members' understandings and capacities so that we can create more enabling environments for child and youth participation in the future.

Children and young people have the central role in helping us to understand what we need to know to create better spaces and opportunities for them to engage. We were particularly interested in learning from children and young people around the following areas:

- » how they would like to be involved in future work on the topic of child sexual exploitation,
- » what support or resources would help them to engage,
- » which children and young people should be involved,
- » what an enabling environment would look like for them, and
- » anything else they wished to share with us about child and youth participation.

We therefore invited members who had completed a mapping exercise as part of this process, and indicated that they worked with a youth group, to facilitate a workshop with children to explore some of these topics.

Five ECPAT members agreed to coordinate this process in the following countries: Nepal, Tanzania, Ecuador, Uganda and Hungary. 71 children and young people took part in these consultations.

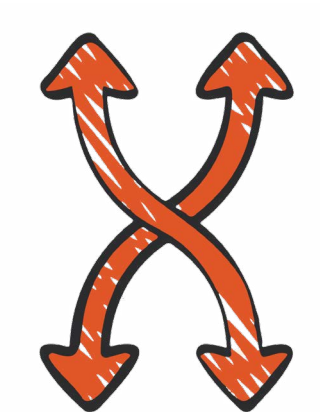
Following the feedback, we received through these consultations with children and young people, the first complete draft of the strategy was developed.

Who is this strategy for?

This strategy has primarily been developed for the **ECPAT Secretariat** to help guide our work over the next five years. It seeks to lay out our commitment in terms of what actions we will implement as a Secretariat to support the meaningful engagement of children (and young people) in addressing child sexual exploitation. It also acts as a key document to help steer us when making decisions about future projects and actions more generally. The strategy impacts on the network as a whole and therefore it also

communicates to our **ECPAT members** how, and in what ways, we will seek to learn from and support our members to strengthen their own participatory practice with children and young people.

This strategy is also for the **children and young people we engage with**. It can be used to hold us accountable to what we have committed to in terms of strengthening children and young people's participation rights.



Why is child and youth participation important?important?

Children have a right to be heard. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) children, under the age of 18, have a right to have their views and opinions heard and taken into account. Article 12 of the convention is often cited as the 'participation' article, yet other articles in the convention are also critical in helping to realise this right. This includes article 13 on access to information, together with articles 14-17 that outline rights to freedom of thought, association, privacy and access to different forms of information. The right to participation is also a fundamental principle to be upheld and promoted and a procedural right through which other rights are realised.

The Third Optional Protocol to the UNCRC allows for and encourages individual children and child-led organisations to submit reports and complaints regarding violations of their rights under the Convention. In its general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard, the Committee on the Rights of the Child explicitly recognized the role that child-led organizations and children's representatives play in the reporting process. In paragraph 131 of the general comment, the Committee "welcomes written reports and additional oral information submitted by child organizations and children's representatives in the monitoring process of child rights implementation by States parties and encourages States parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to support children to present their views to the Committee".

Emerging evidence from research illustrates the 'added value' of working with children and young people in general. This includes potential benefits for children and young people themselves, through improving confidence, self-worth, self-esteem and self-efficacy; building capacities; promoting

a sense of choice, autonomy, control and agency; and providing opportunities for 'critical consciousness' and reflection.

It is worth noting that many of these outcomes also align with principles that have been identified as critical in working in trauma-informed ways including the principle of promoting empowerment, voice and choice. This therefore becomes an added reason for why participatory opportunities also for young survivors is so critical. Further, children who are encouraged to talk are empowered to act in order to challenge abuses of their rights which is critical, even if the responsibility lies on adults to protect them.

It can also help improve services through the unique knowledge and views that children have, including when they are service users. Child participation also strengthens the accountability of professionals and organisations working alongside children and young people, including survivors. Working in meaningful, collaborative ways with children and young people promotes effectiveness and impact; contributes to the development of new ideas and ensures children and young people can exercise their rights in a safe and empowering manner. Ultimately, providing spaces for children and young people to influence decisions offers opportunities to challenge the culture of silence and stigma that surrounds, and perpetuates the sexual exploitation of children.³

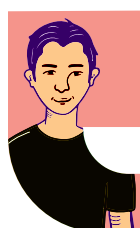
Survey responses from our members mirrored this evidence. They shared how they felt child and youth participation had not only benefitted the children and young people directly involved, but had also benefitted their own staff and led to improvements in services and programmes, which in turn led to better engagement by children and young people. A number of respondents also shared how this work led to a positive culture

3 Cody, C. et al (2023) *How might participation rights support protection rights in the context of child sexual abuse and exploitation?* (forthcoming)

shift within the wider communities they worked with. This included adults starting to recognise the abilities of children and young people and the importance of creating opportunities for child and youth participation and influence, acting upon their opinions when appropriate.

As girls, boys and adolescents we like to learn, and when it comes to our rights it is more interesting. However, the lack of information and few spaces for participation that are fun means that there is not

much interest on the part of children and adolescents.



Consultation with children, **ECPAT**

Lansdown (2018), focusing on adolescents, sets out a powerful case for ensuring participation to enhance protection:

'Having both the right and the space to be heard in safety acts as a powerful means through which to challenge situations of violence, abuse, threat, injustice or discrimination. In many societies, adolescents have no avenues through which to report abuse, and, in any case, fear that if they do, they will not be believed or will be further punished. This traditional silencing of adolescents affords impunity to abusers.

Building a culture of speaking out, together with effective channels for so doing (mechanisms for both complaints and redress), will empower adolescents to challenge and expose violations of their rights. Adults can only act to protect adolescents if they understand their concerns and the risks they face – and often, it is only adolescents who can provide that information.



4 Lansdown, G (2018) A conceptual framework for measuring adolescent participation, New York: Unicef



Recognising the barriers and challenges of children and young people's participation, including young survivors, in addressing child sexual exploitation

If child and youth participation brings so much value, why are we not seeing more examples of it in the child protection sector? It is important to acknowledge that creating safe, meaningful, inclusive and gender-sensitive spaces for children and young people, including young survivors and children with disabilities, to be heard is not always easy. It takes time, thought and planning, and it also requires resources. There are a multitude of different blocks and challenges and these will differ depending on the local context. It is therefore our responsibility, as adults, to assess that conditions for safe, meaningful and ethical participation of children and young people are met or to consider how the rights of children to both protection and participation can be supported.

Creating these safe spaces to talk specifically about child sexual abuse and exploitation are even harder. In all societies, talking about sex, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation, is still taboo and there is still a lot of stigma attached to this topic. In discussing these issues, with children in general, and with survivors in particular, there are layers of complexity to unpack. This includes the risks and concerns that engagement of young survivors may impact on their recovery in negative ways. There are fears that their engagement may re-traumatise them or may increase stigma and discrimination. Therefore, whilst there are myriad potential benefits, there are also tensions and potential risks that are inextricably entwined with children and young people's participation on this issue.

In consultation with our members, we have identified the following barriers and challenges to facilitate the meaningful engagement of children and young people:

- » Practical and logistical challenges that impacts on the ability to bring young people together and be inclusive
- » Attitudes and limiting beliefs of adults about the knowledge, experience, and abilities of children
- » Lack of a common understanding of what participation is and what it entails
- » Lack of financial and human resources
- » Reluctance of professionals and fears about opening up conversations about child sexual abuse and exploitation and related ethical and safeguarding concerns.

A number of these barriers, such as changing negative attitudes and beliefs held by adults about child and youth participation, may take time to address. Other obstacles however may be overcome through knowledge exchange and discussion; learning from others how peers have tackled some of these challenges and what has worked for them. This is where the ECPAT network can draw and benefit from its size, diversity and range of experiences.

With this strategy, we aim to put in place measures to overcome some of these barriers through commitment, development of technical expertise, joint work and influencing to ensure those responsible for the protection of children and young people are equipped with the knowledge, skills, resources and will to create the conditions, spaces and mechanisms for meaningful engagement with children and young people.



Building an understanding of what child participation is

Child participation is defined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as an **'ongoing process which includes information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes'**⁵

For the purpose of this document, the term 'participation' refers to the involvement of children and young people in decision-making on issues that affect their lives and that of the societies where they live,

specifically in proposing, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating strategies and activities to end sexual exploitation of children.

ECPAT is inspired by various models of participation and will continue to engage in exploring existing and new models to more systematically, meaningfully and safely involve children.

One of the models that ECPAT is currently referring to is the Lundy Model of Participation⁶, which is grounded in Article 12 (UNCRC) and is composed of four main elements:

SPACE: Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view

VOICE: Children must be facilitated to express their view

AUDIENCE: The view must be listened to

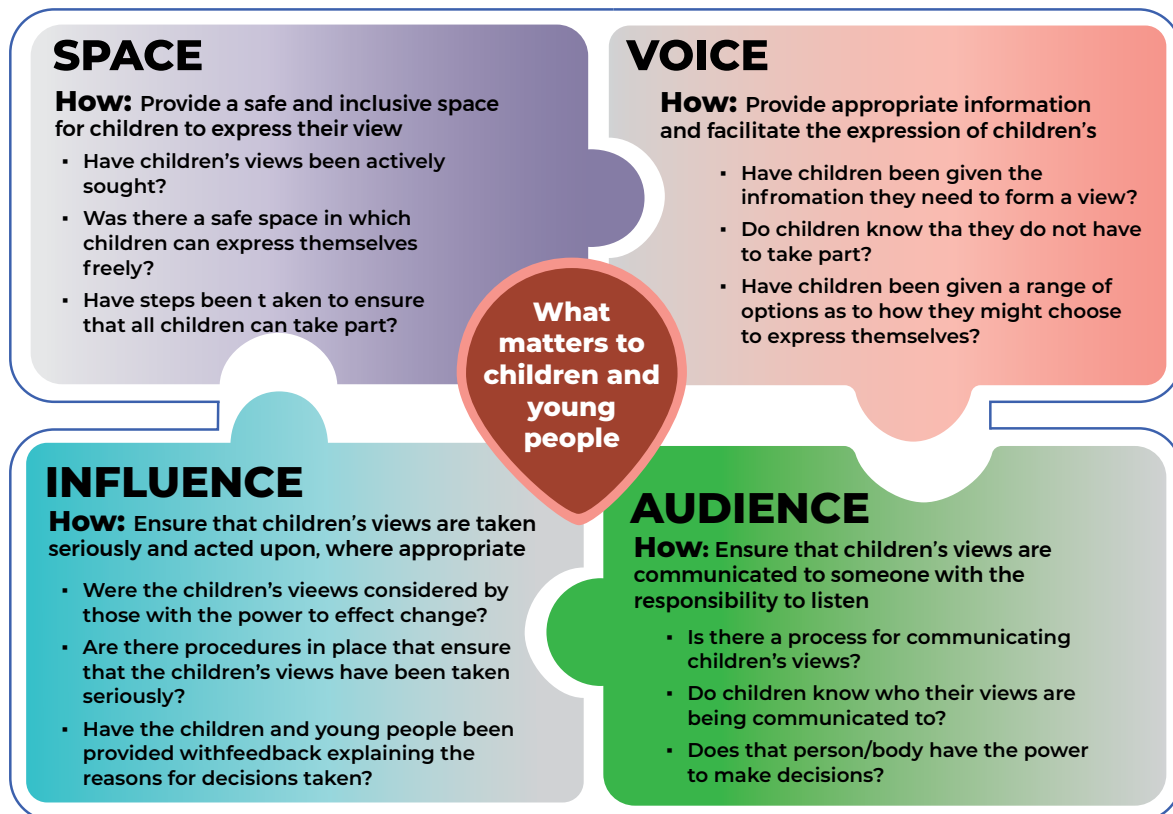
INFLUENCE: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate



5 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) 'General Comment No. 12: The right of the child to be heard' (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child: Geneva)

6 Lundy, L. (2007) 'Voice is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', British Educational Research Journal, Vol. 33, No. 6, pp. 927-42.

Checklist for Lundy's Model of Child Participation



The model helps us frame how ECPAT is currently planning to engage meaningfully with children and young people by supporting safe and meaningful opportunities to be engaged; strengthening children's capacities to express their views in ways that they choose and feel comfortable with; but also, working with duty bearers to prepare them to receive and take into

account children's views, even when they don't align with adults' conceptions, and keeping ourselves and others accountable to children's views and participation. As our work evolves, and new approaches are tested, ECPAT may revisit models that would better fit its subject matter, principles, values and the evolving context.

ECPAT International Key Strategic Priorities and Commitment to Ensuring the participation of children, including young survivors of child sexual exploitation

Over the next five years, as an organisation, we will **grow our understanding of, and illustrate our commitment** to, child and youth participation - including the participation of young survivors. As part of that commitment, we will ensure that we **promote and practice safe, meaningful, inclusive, gender-sensitive and contextual approaches to child and youth participation, including young survivors**, that aim to benefit those involved and ultimately influence positive changes for all children and society in general.

As a Secretariat, we will **pilot new approaches and strategies** that will help our team, and our members, **share, learn, reflect and access different types of guidance and support**.

We will learn from those with expertise in this area: including from children and young people we work with; our ECPAT members and from external actors. This means we will make sure our staff and members are well trained on gender-sensitive child participation approaches, understanding how our own unconscious biases about how children and gender impact child participation and could help us transform our outcomes towards more gender equity. The goal of this being to strengthen participatory processes and practices when engaging individually or collectively with the children and young people we work with.

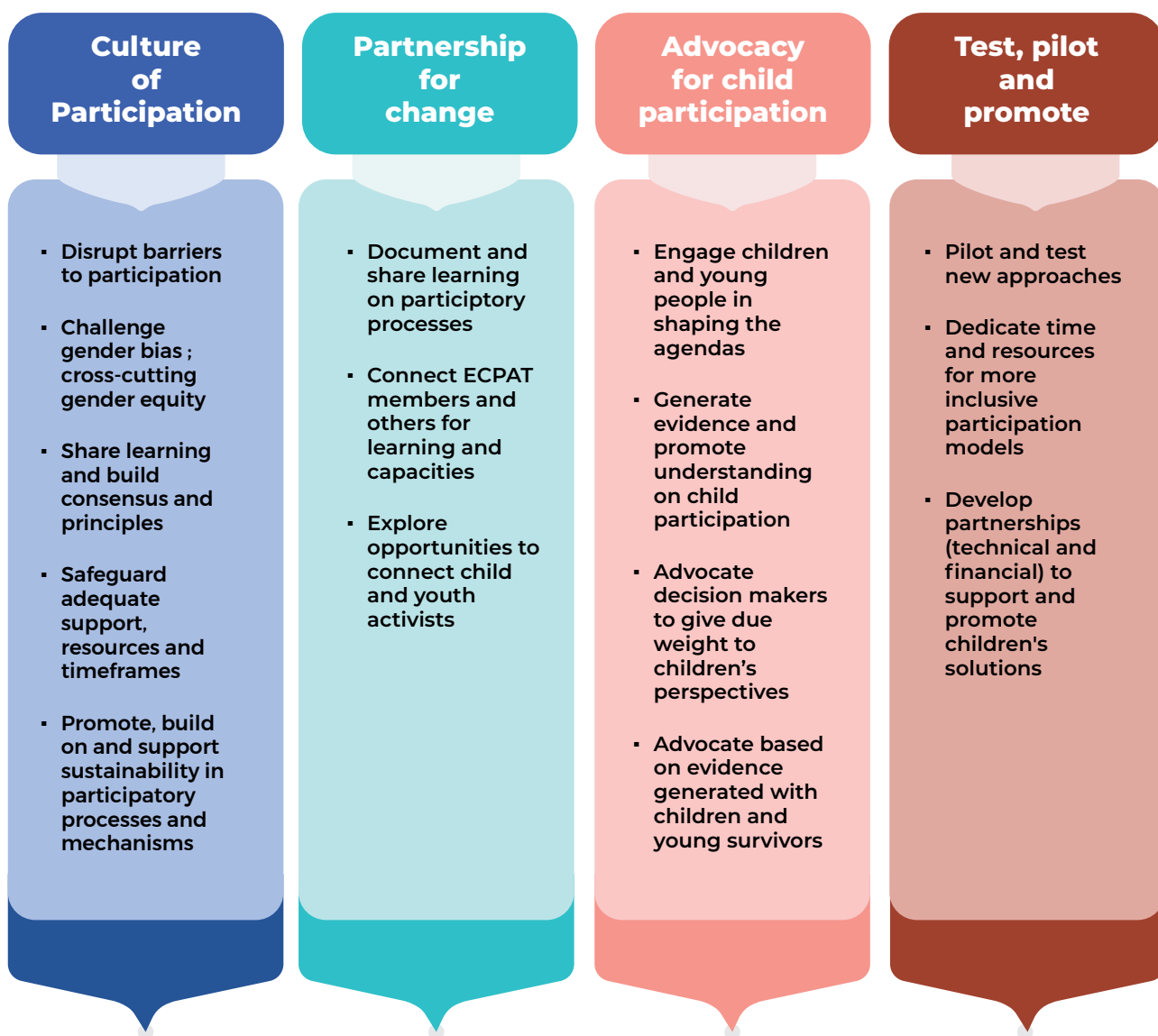
We will be bold in our decisions - Child participation calls for a profound and radical reconsideration of the status of children and the nature of the adult/child relationship. It implies a greater responsibility on the adults to enable children to participate and envisages sharing of power. There may be times where

there will be requests and opportunities for us to co-ordinate the participation of children and young people, when the conditions do not allow such efforts to be undertaken meaningfully to a high ethical standard due to limited timelines, budgets or processes. In these contexts, we will very carefully consider the opportunities and the balance of children's rights to protection and participation to ensure we give opportunities for them to be involved and consulted, but advocate for, and ensure this is done, within safe and ethical frameworks.

We will be open to be influenced by children's views - Being bold will also imply that we will courageously consider children's views, opinions and ideas even when these are challenging some of our adult preconceived ideas to allow for healthy and empowering exchanges, discussions and considerations. This also implies that we will take these views seriously and will remain open to be influenced by them and that we will actively challenge conscious and unconscious biases, about children, including on gender.

We will tackle the difficult issues head on, bring lived realities of children in debates even when their views maybe considered disturbing, controversial, or taboo, and collaboratively try to find solutions to those challenges and barriers that persist across the different contexts we work in. We will focus our attentions on **developing sustainable actions and mainstreaming child and youth participation** so that this work becomes embedded rather than an 'add on' (which can just as easily be 'taken off' at any time).

Overview of ECPAT child and youth participation strategy





A CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION: Foster a culture of child and youth participation, including young survivors, within the Secretariat and across the ECPAT network

Disrupt barriers to participation through reflective approaches

We recognize that not only is child participation a right, and brings benefits at various levels, but engaging meaningfully with children and young people implies recognizing that many existing systems and structures of societies oppress and constrain children, contribute to sexual exploitation of children, and silence young survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation. This requires us, as an organisation, to be humble to learn from and with children, and be open to disrupt and problematise these prevailing systems and structures that privilege adults' views, perspectives and decisions. These efforts will start with our own self-reflection and challenging our internal bias.

One of the first steps on this 'disruptive' journey is to explore our own personal values, beliefs, feelings, actions and behaviours when thinking about child and youth participation, including the participation of young survivors, including in terms of gender biases. What are our concerns and fears? What are our perceptions and complex biases that influence meaningful engagement of children in decision making? Are we willing to hear different perspectives from children and young people that do not align with our own? Are we ready to be challenged on what we think the problem and most effective solutions are? Through this exploration, we will map out through reflective processes, how we are, or are not, creating spaces, or enabling children and young people to create their own spaces, to share their views and concerns, and influence the agenda. At the organisational level, we will explore how ready we are to safely facilitate and support children and young people's participation and how we can elevate

children and young people's own ideas and initiatives to influence the sector. Based on learning internally and externally, we will develop tools and discussion guides to help us explore these questions. We will also share these with our members to help them explore and consider how their own values and norms may impact, and create opportunities and barriers to, meaningful child and youth participation.

Share learning and build consensus and principles across the ECPAT network and other actors on how children and young people, including young survivors, can be safely and meaningfully engaged in addressing child sexual exploitation

Realising that there are different understandings across the ECPAT network of what child and youth participation is, and what it is not, and what are the conditions and modalities to support child and youth participation, including for young survivors and through gender-sensitive approaches, it is important to build consensus and understanding as a foundation for this work. Child and youth participation can lead to both positive and negative outcomes for the children and young people involved. It is therefore critical to explore what we mean by the term 'child and youth participation' and ensure common understanding and principles of what is needed for the implementation of proper safeguards and ethical guidelines when engaging with girls and boys, and young people, particularly young survivors.

We recognise that many of our ECPAT members have developed their own definitions, guidelines and methodologies,

and that there are ongoing initiatives within the broader sector to create new sets of principles and guidelines when working with children including with young survivors. We will therefore undertake a process of review and discussion with our members to determine how we, as a network, wish to engage with children and young people, through a gender-sensitive lens. Given the different levels of participation across the network, and varied ways that our members engage with girls, boys and young people, including young survivors, both online and offline, we will work towards common understanding taking into consideration these diverse and evolving contexts. We will initiate a collaborative process, with ECPAT members and beyond, and the children and young people we work with, to develop a clear understanding of what safe, ethical, inclusive, gender sensitive and meaningful participation looks like in different contexts and agree on principles and approaches for our work on child and youth participation, including with young survivors.

Safeguard adequate support, resources and timeframes to ensure meaningful child and youth participation

For too long the sector has understood 'testimony' or 'storytelling' as 'participation'. While such processes have their place, and can be powerful, they can also be problematic and limited in their impact. We therefore instead wish to work collaboratively with girls, boys and young people, including young survivors, to understand and analyse the problems from different perspectives and to work together to formulate solutions and recommendations. This takes time and resources.

In responding to ECPAT members' concerns on how limited resources and short time frames create a barrier for high quality, meaningful child and youth engagement, part of the Secretariat's role in championing meaningful participation will be to challenge, and push back if necessary, when conditions are not meant and will refrain from adopting

approaches that request such work be undertaken when it involves unrealistic timeframes and inadequate budgets and resources.

In recognising that expertise, time and financial resources can be a significant barrier to facilitating high quality participation, the Secretariat will ensure that when submitting grants that include elements of participation, these will include adequate budget and timeframes. This, at a minimum should include resources that can be used to provide any additional support that may be required to maximise participation (e.g. for children with additional support needs) and ensure that engagement and accompaniment is safe and adequately supported. This also means including budget for staff to access professional support and supervision. We will also address the donor community to ensure these constraints are taken into account in proposal development and assessment.

Promote, build on and support sustainability in participatory processes and mechanisms

Aligning with this reflective approach and considering what we learnt from speaking to current ECPAT members and former colleagues, it is clear that we also need to rethink how we approach one-off 'participation projects'. These projects can, of course, add value and may provide a catalyst to opening up conversations with children and young people and providing opportunities to develop and strengthen participatory practices and pilot different methodologies and tools. However, once the funding stops, or when there is no longer a funded staff position to coordinate and lead this work, opportunities for children and young people to engage in the same ways tend to become unsustainable. Many in the child rights sector have now realised that meaningful child and youth participation is not just about having a one-off project, a youth advisory board, or a single staff member responsible for child participation. Instead, meaningful participation needs to be mainstreamed and embedded within core structures and processes if it is to survive the

world of unsecure funding cycles. Priority will be given then to build on and strengthen existing processes and mechanisms at national, regional and global levels to promote sustainability.

Leadership is key to creating a culture of participation. However, it is equally important that everyone within an organisation recognises and understands the value, expertise and insights that children and young people bring to our work. As our

members shared, good child and youth participation leads to policies, programmes and services that are more relatable, credible and ultimately more effective. Everyone needs to understand what providing opportunities for meaningful child and youth participation means as it impacts on decision-making with regards to: budgets, timeframes, resources, methodologies, processes, supervision and support needs, capacity development and safeguarding.

What could the organisation do to ensure that child/youth participation is not a one-off event?

answered participants from Uganda in response to the question

Making youth know his/her part in the community,

Encouraging us not to give up

To work towards this priority, the ECPAT secretariat will prioritise:

- » Opening up dialogue internally within the Secretariat to help us explore our own values, beliefs and culture and identify ways we could improve and make space for and facilitate and support opportunities for child and youth participation in different ways.
- » Building in monitoring and evaluation processes to help us consider if our work, and decision-making, is taking into account the priorities, needs and interests of children and young people we work with, including young survivors, and whether we are working to the highest ethical standards and are truly accountable.
- » Exploring different models and approaches that can embed and sustain participatory processes and mechanisms weathering the end of funding cycles and the 'aging out' of members of youth groups.
- » Developing tools and guides from our experiences to aid our ECPAT members and other professionals to unpick and start to address/ understand how organisational views and norms impact on child and youth participation.



PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE:

Promote and encourage opportunities for engagement and collaboration to address child sexual exploitation for all children

In recognising the strength that comes from the experience and diversity of members, ECPAT as a network is well placed to be at the forefront of developing new methodologies, processes and knowledge for meaningfully engaging with children and young people on issues related to child sexual exploitation. Therefore, in addition to fostering a culture of learning, reflection and commitment to child and youth participation, we will also support new practices and approaches to not only hear from children and young people, but to collaborate with, connect and support young activists and ‘changemakers’.

Document and share learning about our, our ECPAT members’ and other actors work to support and facilitate participatory models, processes and activities with children and young people, including young survivors

Over the last three decades, the Secretariat has worked collaboratively with ECPAT members across the network to develop, support and facilitate ground-breaking initiatives that have sought to enable children and young people, including young survivors, to take the lead and develop their own projects, advocate for change and undertake their own research. Such activities have led to the generation of important learning. Much of this learning has been documented, however, as is often the case within networks and organisations, when people move on, this institutional learning often gets lost or forgotten. We know that a culture of reflection and learning is key in developing safe spaces for children and young people to discuss sensitive topics. Those of us working in the sector are continuously learning, adapting and evolving in how we think

about and facilitate this work. Therefore, it is critical that we build in a culture of reflection, learning and development to help support us facilitate this, sometimes challenging, work.

Through our conversations, it was evident that a number of our ECPAT members have developed their own unique models for child and youth participation. These members shared how they had been successful at embedding and mainstreaming their model of participation or how they had developed processes for opening up intergenerational dialogue with parents, carers and community members to help support their work with children and young people. Therefore, there is a huge amount of untapped knowledge and expertise that exists across the ECPAT membership. There is an opportunity here for us to support each other, and for those with more experience to guide and mentor those with less experience who may be struggling.

Connect our ECPAT members and other child protection actors to strengthen capacities and elevate learning and opportunities for engaging children more meaningfully

The practice-based knowledge that exists across the network is impressive. Yet, we also noted that a number of members of ECPAT and across the child protection sector feel that there is a lack of skills, training or expertise to facilitate participatory work safely, particularly with young survivors. In our conversations, concerns were aired over the dangers and risks of professionals, who lacked the skills and abilities, attempting to engage children and young people, particularly young survivors, on difficult issues such as abuse and exploitation. It was

recognised that such work required a certain set of skills and sensitivities together with solid safeguarding processes.

In recognising the expertise across the ECPAT network, we will focus more on connecting our members and initiating and facilitating learning opportunities connected to child and youth participation, including the participation of young survivors, at regional and international levels. We will focus on challenging and eliminating gender biases in child participation work, and we will also work harder to document and disseminate this learning so that we can build on our organisational learning in future activities.

We recognise the importance of this and understand that it may not be appropriate for all of our members to facilitate this type of work, particularly with children and young people who are known to have experienced sexual abuse and exploitation. Yet, it was clear from our survey that members had a strong desire to access training on child and youth participation and specifically on engaging young survivors with a gender-sensitive approach. Members also shared that accessing technical support and identifying 'participation champions' across the network could be helpful.

Training opportunities are important, yet we know that in this work, practical and ethical dilemmas and challenges often arise that are not covered in standard 'off-the-shelf' training sessions and are not included in the many toolkits that exist. In recognising the practical and logistical challenges that members face in organising and facilitating child and youth participation, an initial programme of interactive webinars will be developed, drawing on the findings from the survey and interviews. This learning programme will be further developed in collaboration with those attending these initial sessions. As part of this, we will explore the potential of setting up peer-to-peer learning opportunities for colleagues within

the network who wish to share and exchange practices surrounding child and youth participation.

The goal of all of these commitments and actions is to explore different ways to strengthen, mainstream, embed and sustain participatory processes and mechanisms that are not necessarily project dependent but become part of the everyday work of the Secretariat. Through exploring these different questions and piloting these new initiatives we hope to create new models and tools that support our ECPAT members in their work.

Explore opportunities and partnerships to connect child and youth activists working on this issue

Many of the children and young people engaged in the consultation process shared that they would like the opportunity to connect with other children and young people who are engaged with ECPAT member organisations and advocating for change.

We recognise that this may be a complex task and involve overcoming various barriers. We will therefore commit to taking the time to explore with others who have been successful at facilitating such connections, the feasibility of, and resourcing that may be required, to enable us to facilitate safe and meaningful connections between peers, through gender-sensitive, trauma-informed and inclusive approaches.

We also recognise that those young people who are more active may benefit from opportunities to learn from staff at the Secretariat who have experience of advocating globally. The skills we hold within the Secretariat may be useful for young people who are leading their own projects and advocating for the rights of

children and young people locally and nationally. We will therefore consider what we could offer these young people so that our work becomes based on the principles of reciprocity and mutuality. With this, we will look for opportunities and funding to pilot mentorship programs for young 'changemakers' associated with ECPAT members.

To work towards this priority, the ECPAT secretariat will prioritise:

- » Multiplying spaces and opportunities for children and young people working with our members to inform our work and feed in ideas and priorities for shaping new research, advocacy and campaigning strategies.
 - » Facilitating opportunities for knowledge exchange, reflection, peer learning and technical support to strengthen participatory practice
 - » Advocating, and providing guidance where possible to strengthen the capacities of actors working at local, national, regional and international levels for better processes, systems and structures to enable meaningful participation of children and young people on issues relating to child sexual exploitation.
- » Facilitating opportunities for knowledge exchange, reflection, peer learning and technical support to strengthen participatory practice.
 - » Exploring partnerships both technical and financial to facilitate mentorship programmes for young 'changemakers'.
 - » Developing and promoting tools and guidance to strengthen the capacities of social, health, law enforcement and judicial professionals to listen to and involve young survivors in decisions about their own needs, care and support. A specific focus will be placed on addressing gender bias in child participation processes and activities, as well as building on existing local structures and initiatives.



ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE:

Mobilise and advocate for wider commitment to child and youth participation, including young survivors, in addressing child sexual exploitation

Child and youth participation is not just about 'voice' and creating spaces to hear those voices, it is also about having an audience and creating real opportunities to influence that audience. ECPAT International and our members can create spaces to enable children and young people's voices to be heard and we are one key audience to influence. However, in order to see real changes in the systems, structures and societies that children and young people inhabit, we also need to ensure that others are willing to listen and act on both the individual, and collective, voices of children and young people. As noted above, one of the biggest barriers our ECPAT members face is around gender norms and bias, social norms and attitudes of adults that undermine or overlook the views and abilities of children and young people. Therefore, advocating for more and better opportunities for children and young people to influence decision-making on areas related to addressing child sexual exploitation is critical.

Children and young people's voices and perspectives need to be heard at all levels within families and communities and in local, national and international spaces. It means advocating for meaningful engagement with children, with a range of stakeholders; governments, intergovernmental institutions, the private sector, civil society and the general public.

Engage children and young people in shaping the agendas

We recognise the importance of, and desire from children, young people and members for mechanisms to enable children and young people working with ECPAT members to feed in concerns, priorities and ideas

to the Secretariat. We believe that this should not be through a specific project, or through a small board of young advisors.

The secretariat will therefore initiate a new annual (or biennial) mechanism to enable children and young people to share their views and perspectives, and engage with the secretariat to shape the agenda.

In listening to children and young people who took part in the consultation process, they emphasized that such opportunities need to be fun and engaging. One group noted that adults need to do a better job of working with young people to understand how they wish to engage. In the consultations, children and young people talked about the use of sports, games but also more opportunities for online engagement. They noted that engagement activities should be effective, simple and concrete as well as relevant, child-friendly and fun. We will therefore take this on board when developing these mechanisms for engagement.

Generate evidence and promote understanding of why child and youth participation is important and beneficial

In hearing from children and young people who were part of the consultation process on the strategy, it was clear that adults, both parents and carers, and adults in power could be a barrier to, but also an enabler for, children's rights to participate. Children and young people recognised that permission was needed from parents and may not be given for various reasons such as concerns for their safety or a belief that children should focus on their education. It is assumed that perceptions of gender roles can also have an impact on this.

Children and young people shared that adults often did not recognise the value of children's opinions. Some noted that they needed encouragement from adults and that this was important in keeping them motivated. It was clear that adults, wider communities and duty bearers need to be part of the discussion. Children and young people are rights holders and part of the social fabric of communities, therefore we all need to understand the reasons and benefits of participation on these sensitive issues so that adults in power can support, encourage and value their voices. This means that in elevating children and young people's participation, we will ensure that we communicate, engage, and work with a range of actors that constitute the protective environment of the child, from families and communities to decision makers, service providers, and private sector actors.

Advocate for adults in power to listen to, and give due weight to the needs and perspectives of children and young people, including young survivors

Part of advocating for children's voices to be heard, requires us to also step back and realise that in addition to opportunities for collective participation, we also need to acknowledge and advocate for children's 'every day' participation.

Our research over the years has documented how children and young people who have experienced child sexual exploitation are often silenced and are not provided with opportunities to inform and influence decisions about their own care following abuse. Part of our advocacy strategy is therefore also to advocate so that those professionals working directly with children and young people, particularly survivors, listen to, and give due weight to the needs, preferences and views of those they are seeking to support.

Build on the evidence, generated with children and young survivors, to inform our advocacy

Whilst recognising this need for us to advocate, given ECPAT International have been less active in regards to our child and youth participation work in recent years, we appreciate that before we can ask this of others, we need to take stock and generate our own learning and examples of high-quality practice.

We also know that a strong evidence-base is essential to advocacy. Therefore, if we wish to advocate for others to strengthen their mechanisms and processes, we also need to generate evidence to illustrate the value and benefits of children and young people's participation. Part of this includes recognising and valuing evidence gained through academic rigour but also valuing, respecting and elevating practice-based knowledge that is collated and documented by practitioners and children and young people themselves.

Given the mission and remits of the ECPAT secretariat, we usually target and influence policy makers, private sector actors, regional and international organizations, and platforms. We will therefore use knowledge, evidence and experiences from the field and to influence these actors to integrate safe and meaningful child participation in a systemic, sustainable, and meaningful way.

These actions will help us to create an environment that values the contributions and ideas of children and young people, while we will also make the efforts to engage with children and young people on their own terms, in environments that they create for themselves (such as online via social media).

To work towards this priority, the ECPAT secretariat will prioritise:

- » Drawing on the secretariat's and ECPAT members' experiences, skills and knowledge to support young activists to enhance their skills and capacities to support their own initiatives and advocacy efforts in addressing child sexual exploitation.
- » Sharing our own experience, skills, knowledge and influence to help enhance children and young people's knowledge and skills helping them lead their own initiatives and advocacy efforts
- » Influencing donors to support the development and strengthening of sustainable participatory processes and mechanisms rather than one-off participatory projects.
- » Advocating for the creation and sustaining of structures and mechanisms for meaningful participation of children targeting the private sector, regional and global institutions and governments.
- » Evidencing the value and impact of participatory approaches to address the sexual exploitation and abuse of children through research and evaluation in order to influence donors and other stakeholders to fund and create resources for engagement.
- » Encouraging donors and other stakeholders to create more favourable conditions for child and youth participation (e.g. longer time frames and the development of more sustainable mechanisms)
- » Advocating for the realisation of legal, policy and practice frameworks that guarantee children and young people's right to express their views in all areas and procedures surrounding the sexual exploitation and abuse of children
- » Measuring changes with children on how their views are contributing to positive changes in policies and practices development to challenge 'adult power over children'



TEST, LEARN AND SHARE:

Pilot and test transformative models of engagement with children, including young survivors, learn from and with children, and share our learning across sectors to address child sexual exploitation

Pilot and test new approaches

As an organisation, our mandate is to end the sexual exploitation of children. We are committed to piloting approaches and practices that will help us transform the way we engage with children, including young survivors, and the way the sexual exploitation of children is prevented and addressed.

Part of that mandate requires us to expose, and challenge how our societies have created systems and structures that almost permit society to disregard children and young people's views, and discriminate, stigmatise and silence young survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation. If we wish to stop the sexual exploitation of children, then we must:

- » confront power imbalances and address 'adulthood',
- » transform stereotypes about children, their agency and capacities and develop child participation programmes that recognise both girls and boys as equal active social actors,
- » challenge the stigma and discrimination directed towards survivors,
- » stop the silencing of children and young people, and
- » challenge the gender and social norms that fuel the sexual exploitation of children.

All of these elements contribute, and feed into the cycle of apathy towards victims and survivors and the impunity of perpetrators. ECPAT will work with its members to pilot related approaches to challenge structural drivers of oppression in different contexts, including online, and for different genders.

We will assess and evaluate the changes and document learning to inform future developments, strategically within our network and across different sectors

Dedicate time and resources for more inclusive participation models for groups of children who may face additional barriers

Within the consultations with children and young people, they drew attention to the need to hear from, and engage with ALL children. They also noted that certain groups of children, including street children, survivors of abuse, children from poor families, children on the move, children with disabilities and those from indigenous groups may need additional support to engage.

The findings from the survey, and from our interviews, uncovered particular challenges that our members had faced from working with specific groups of children and young people. Meaningful engagement with children who face various additional barriers to participate require adapted methodologies, building skill sets that are adaptable and at times additional resources to overcome the barriers. We will explore the

piloting of projects that focus on meaningfully engaging with children and young people who are even more excluded from participatory spaces and decision-making processes.

The goal of all of these new initiatives is to create more opportunities to not only hear from and engage children and young people to shape the agenda of ECPAT going forward, but to support young activists to initiate or strengthen their own child and youth-led initiatives to address child sexual exploitation; and to learn from these processes.

We all deserve to be heard, but there are also other groups of children and adolescents who do not have the opportunity to be heard.

Consultation with children, ECPAT



Develop partnerships (technical and financial) to support and promote children's solutions

During the consultations with children and young people, some children's groups vocalized that they wanted more training and support to deliver their own awareness raising, education and actions to address child sexual exploitation with their peers and within their own communities.

In talking to our members, we recognise that there are different models of child and youth participation that exist across the network. Members are collaborating with children and young people who are participating at different levels as participants, representatives, facilitators and leaders.

To work towards this priority, the ECPAT secretariat will prioritise:

- » Encouraging and supporting spaces where children and young people can co-create ideas for addressing child sexual exploitation and support children and young people to engage.
- » Drawing on the secretariat's experiences, skills and knowledge to support young activists to enhance their skills and capacities to support their own initiatives and advocacy efforts in addressing child sexual exploitation.
- » Piloting projects that enable the organisation to learn how to be more inclusive of children and young people's gender, different identities, and to adapt processes and methodologies for certain groups that are often not included due to additional barriers, for example children with disabilities.

Participation in events - it's better if there is a child there, as peers find it easier to talk to peers.

Consultation with children, ECPAT





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