ANNEX 12

ECPAT INTERNATIONAL
GUIDANCE NOTE ON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN IN ONLINE MEETINGS

Child participation is a central pillar in preventing and ending sexual exploitation and abuse of children. Children possess unique insights into their lives, needs, concerns, and ideas rooted in their lived experiences. Too often, decisions affecting children are made solely by adults, who lack the nuanced understanding of a child's thoughts, emotions, and feelings. Adults often make assumptions about what information children are able, or not able, to provide. When adults fail to actively listen to children, the decisions they make for children may inadvertently have negative consequences. An important step in promoting child participation is creating safe spaces and forums for children to foster their involvement in activities. Online platforms and new technologies, for example, offer tremendous opportunities to reach, communicate, and engage with young people.

The use of technology and social media platforms has the potential to transform the way in which we can engage children. **Keeping everyone safe whilst using these platforms is essential.** All platforms that bring people together have the potential to present a risk to users, especially children. As users of these platforms, we have a responsibility to ensure that our communications are as secure and private as they can be.

This general guidance is designed to help ECPAT safeguard the welfare of any child involved in activities organized and/or supported by ECPAT whilst using online platforms and social media.

General considerations when using online platforms

Child Safeguarding Procedures Before the Event

▶ Conduct a risk assessment before the meeting, identifying potential risks and strategies to mitigate them. Refer to Annex 2 of the ECPAT Child Safeguarding Policy here ChildSafeguarding_ ANNEX_02_Risk Assessment Guidance.pdf

▶ Provide clear information to parents/carers about the purpose of the online activity, the participants involved (children, adults, mixed), and the contact details of those overseeing the activity. Consent forms should be signed by both parents/carers and the child, unless decided otherwise in light of age, capacity and other factors considered with the child and agreed upon based on ECPAT Child Safeguarding Policy. For consent, please refer to Annex 10 ChildSafeguarding_ANNEX_10_ Consent Form on the Use of Images.pdf

▶ If audio or video recording is planned, inform parents/carers in advance, and obtain written consent from participating children and their parents/carers. If images will be captured, ensure compliance with **ECPAT's Child Safeguarding Procedures, specifically Annex 10 above.**

▶ Prior to recording, inform child participants and give them the option to opt-out or to disable their videos and microphones.

▶ Unless otherwise agreed with the child based on a risk assessment, encourage parents/carers to ensure that children participate in visible areas of the household, avoiding closed spaces like bedrooms. Remind them of their responsibility for supervision during online activities.

Setting up an Online Meeting

▶ Choose a secure and reputable online platform for hosting the meeting or activity. Ensure it includes built-in security features such as encryption and moderation tools.

▶ Set up a registration system to collect attendee details, allowing them to receive a private message, securely by email or other closed group correspondence, with a randomly generated link and the password. Ensure that this is copied to parents and carers as well.

▶ Provide detailed joining instructions outlining the 'rules of engagement' which include:

▶ A Code of Conduct for all participants to sign, requiring them to abide by the code of conduct outlining these rules of engagement

▶ The settings will be switched to have the microphones and videos off when joining the meeting;

- Knowing who the host is and that they will have control of the screen and the chat;

- When and how participants can speak/contribute;

- How they should present themselves on screen (ie dressed appropriately, backgrounds);

- How to interact with others;

- How and when participants can leave the meeting;

- What to do in respect of rejoining if internet connections fail;

- Emphasis on respectful communication and personal responsibility for appropriate content (e.g., language, jokes, opinions);

- How to report anything of concern or anything that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Joining Instructions

As a meeting participant, you are encouraged/agree to:

▶ Participate in debate — we value all opinions

▶ Listen without preconceptions, be open to new ideas

▶ Show respect for other's opinions and different speaking styles, experiences, skills and knowledge

▶ Use inclusive and respectful language

▶ Demonstrate goodwill towards all participants

▶ Address the issue rather than criticizing the person raising that issue

▶ Do not repeat what other people have said if you agree with them (expressions of agreement are okay)

▶ Avoid aggressive verbal or non-verbal interactions

▶ Do not disrupt the speaker by interjecting or making loud asides

▶ Balance your input with others and do not dominate the speaking time

▶ Be attentive to what other people are saying, e.g. bring a drink and a snack if it helps you stay alert

▶ Ask the facilitator to call a break if the atmosphere is too tense.

Conducting the Meeting

▶ Set up a 'waiting room' so that the meeting host chooses when to admit people and can restrict entry to only those who are invited.

▶ **Do not share any identifying information about the participating child** or personal information about their experience that has not been cleared by the child, parents/ carers and their supporting organization.

▶ The standard practice is to use **pseudonyms**, chosen by the child, name of city and country. No real names or names of schools should be used.

▶ Have a designated safeguarding focal point in place during the meeting. This should be communicated to the child participants and how they can report to the safeguarding person any incident during the meeting or after the meeting.

▶ Communicate, in a child friendly manner, ground rules at the beginning of the meeting. This is also a good time to highlight to all participants the commitment to zero tolerance of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment or any child safeguarding incidences. Emphasize that safeguarding policies governing in- person meetings do not dissolve when meetings occur online.

▶ Make sure to communicate – in a child-friendly manner – ECPAT's reporting and response mechanisms to report misconduct and abuse.

▶ Communicate to other adult speakers that there will be children speaking. For children to be equal participants in the panel, it is important that all speakers use clear, non-discriminatory language that can be understood by everyone.

▶ Mute attendees and ask them to hold their hand up if they want to speak so that you can unmute them;

▶ Keep sharing screens restricted to the host and limit chat to the host only to avoid separate conversations taking place during the session;

▶ Ensure children's safety by filtering questions through a moderator and disabling the live chat function. This prevents any unfiltered communication to the child during the session.

▶ Be fair, neutral and promote diversity. Some children may communicate and receive information differently. For example, a child with intellectual disabilities may need materials in an easy-read format and may need to receive materials in advance. Other additional support may include sign language interpretation, etc.

▶ Do not post or request **any personal information** e.g. private email addresses, birthday, phone numbers;

▶ Remind not to accept or open files, or reply to any instant messages or contacts, phone calls, video call or screen-sharing request from someone that you do not know or have not invited into the online meeting;

▶ Ensure any incident involving inappropriate behavior is recorded and responded to in line with safeguarding policies and procedures.

▶ If using the breakout rooms assign users prior to the start of the meeting to give control as to how the rooms should be split and you can manage the necessary ratios of safeguarding of two adults.

After the Event

▶ When meetings close, the platform should be closed to all. Nobody other than the meeting facilitators should be asked to remain on-line for a one-to-one conversation without others being present.

▶ Ensure that children provide feedback on the activity. Ensure also that children are informed of the results of their participation, and that feedback from participants is monitored.

Support from Parents/Caregivers/Chaperones

▶ Brief the child on the impact of working with social media and alert the child that their image and quotes may be posted online.

▶ Have the child do a dry run and record themselves. Be prepared to provide guidance if some children need assistance. If there are technical challenges, this recording can be used if cleared by the child and parent/carer.

▶ Help the child with the visual backdrop that will be used. Make sure it is authentic to the child, but also not revealing any personal or identifying information (for example, no school banners or logos should be present, along with names of buildings or community places).

▶ Make sure the child knows that they can ask for support during the live event and that they can leave at any point during the meeting.

▶ Make sure the child does not give any personal information like their last name or any details such as addresses or private digital and social media accounts.

For the team managing the online meeting

▶ Use a registration system and set up waiting room function to ensure only recognized participants are allowed into the meeting

▶ Disable the recording function for participants and live chats to individual participants.

▶ Set up real-time captions, interpretation and sign language as necessary.