



**COLLECTIVE
ACTION** End Child Sexual
Exploitation
and Abuse

South
Asia

REGIONAL WORKSHOP

26-29 August - Kathmandu, Nepal



✓ Down to Zero
Fighting sexual exploitation of children

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Disclaimer:

The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this report are those of the participating organisations and do not necessarily reflect the views of ECPAT International.

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INTRODUCTION



The South Asia Regional Workshop on Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse was held in Kathmandu, Nepal, from 26–29 August 2024. The gathering, organised and facilitated by ECPAT International, represented a unique platform for in-depth dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and strategic planning, all of which are essential for combatting the sexual exploitation of children in the region. The event brought together over 60 participants, including representatives from civil society organisations, international agencies, government entities, youth advocates, and practitioners. These individuals were unified by a shared commitment to address the persistent and urgent issue of child sexual exploitation in South Asia.

ECPAT International acknowledges the value of establishing these collaborative environments, wherein constructive dialogue concerning the evolving and multifaceted nature of child sexual exploitation can be conducted. As one participant highlighted, “Teachers are clueless about it, parents are clueless about it, kids don’t know what they’re getting into,” a reflection of the pervasive lack of understanding and resources that continues to allow exploitation to persist. The workshop constituted a crucial forum for addressing these deficiencies in knowledge and capacity, encouraging stakeholders to collectively examine how technology, migration, climate change, and shifting social structures are shaping the vulnerabilities that children face in the present era.

Throughout the four-day event, participants engaged in a series of discussions and workshops aimed at examining the multifaceted dimensions of child sexual exploitation. These discussions and workshops focused on analysing emerging trends, persistent challenges, and promising practices across various sectors. The workshop addressed a comprehensive range of subjects, including the role of technology in facilitating abuse, the impact of humanitarian crises on child vulnerability, the significance of community and familial engagement, and the necessity for intersectional approaches to support children from diverse backgrounds and identities. The diversity of expertise and perspectives facilitated a fruitful exchange of ideas and insights, particularly on evidence-based strategies and sustainable, community-rooted approaches to prevention and response.

This report presents a synthesis of the principal discussions, findings, and recommendations that emerged from the workshop. Under ECPAT International’s dedication to collaboration and the dissemination of knowledge, the objective of this report is to present a framework for future actions, strategies, and policies across South Asia. This document aims to provide a complete account of the discussions, findings, and recommendations from the workshop. By capturing the voices, insights, and commitments shared, this document seeks to inspire and guide regional and local efforts to combat child

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Teachers are clueless about it, parents are clueless about it, kids don’t know what they’re getting into

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one participant



sexual exploitation to develop a safer and more protective environment for all children in South Asia.

In light of the ongoing complexities surrounding child sexual exploitation, ECPAT International remains dedicated to providing a platform for discourse and action on this crucial issue.

The organisation's distinctive role in convening stakeholders from diverse sectors reflects a long-standing commitment to fostering regional collaboration, sharing best practices, and advocating for policies and programmes prioritising child protection. This report intends to serve both as a record of this significant gathering and as a resource for those engaged in the development of policies and practices aimed at ensuring the future freedom from sexual exploitation of every child.



EMERGING TRENDS AND LOCAL EXPERIENCES

TECHNOLOGICAL ADAPTATION BY OFFENDERS:

As technology becomes more accessible, offenders have increasingly exploited digital platforms, employing encrypted messaging apps, virtual private networks (VPNs), and hidden networks to evade detection. Such tools afford offenders a high degree of anonymity, thereby enabling them to engage in illicit activities without leaving a digital footprint that can be readily traced. Furthermore, social media platforms, which are frequently unregulated, have also become a standard tool for grooming and approaching vulnerable children.

Concurrently, the accelerated proliferation of technology, particularly across South Asia, coupled with a dearth of comprehensive online safety and sexuality education, has exacerbated the vulnerability of children to abuse. It is frequently the case that families and communities lack the requisite resources or information to equip children with the essential skills for digital self-protection, thereby leaving young people at risk. A lack of understanding of online safety basics, such as the recognition of grooming signs or the safeguarding of personal information, increases the vulnerability of children to exploitation.



The sophisticated technological adaptation by offenders presents substantial challenges for law enforcement, who often lack the specialised training, tools, and expertise to track encrypted communications or monitor dark web activity. Furthermore, the complexities of cross-border investigations present additional challenges to effectively investigating technology-facilitated sexual exploitation of children. To address this issue effectively, it is necessary to enhance digital literacy and online safety education for children while ensuring that law enforcement agencies can keep pace with evolving technology through specialised training and access to appropriate resources.



COMPLEX SOCIAL CHANGES AND FAMILY DYNAMICS:

The evolving social landscape, characterised by changing family structures, rapid urbanisation and shifting relationship patterns among younger generations, introduces new complexities to the prevention of child sexual exploitation. In South Asia, these changes frequently disrupt traditional family and community support structures, thereby increasing the vulnerability of children to exploitation. Many caregivers lack the requisite knowledge and resources to address these novel dynamics, thereby demonstrating the limitations of awareness-raising as a sole strategy for reducing exploitation risks. Furthermore, harmful stereotypes about vulnerability and abuse persist. As one participant from Bangladesh remarked, “The Government thinks that as boys cannot get pregnant their abuse is not harmful nor serious.” These misconceptions further complicate protection efforts. Other indicated that the situation in Afghanistan is not at all conducive which is leading to less reporting of cases due to complex family structure.



To effect lasting change, it is necessary to implement interventions that extend beyond awareness-raising and adopt a more long-term, behaviour-change-oriented approach. These approaches address harmful gender and social norms, challenge victim-blaming attitudes, and address deeply entrenched harmful cultural beliefs. The achievement of sustainable impact is contingent upon the maintenance of continuous, targeted engagement. This necessitates not only the support of the community but also the consistent investment and commitment of donors. The expansion of these initiatives can be effectively achieved by implementing community-based pilot programmes led by civil society organisations. When successful, these pilot models provide governments with adaptable frameworks that facilitate the implementation of child protection initiatives on a broader scale and integrate these approaches within the context of more comprehensive social welfare systems.

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The Government thinks that as boys cannot get pregnant their abuse is not harmful nor serious.”

one participant from Bangladesh

SHIFT TOWARDS PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

There is an increasing awareness of the pivotal role that prevention and community engagement play in combating the sexual exploitation of children. However, as urbanisation, migration, and the rise of digital communities challenge traditional notions of community, many organisations have struggled to adapt their approaches to these evolving dynamics. This shift presents both challenges and opportunities as the efficacy of established methods of engagement is increasingly called into question, considering the emergence of new social structures and the vulnerabilities they engender. Consequently, efforts to protect children now require the implementation

of more expansive and inclusive strategies that actively engage children, youth, families, and religious leaders, as well as the utilisation of novel digital spaces where children and adolescents increasingly interact.

Community engagement strategies must acknowledge and address the persistent resistance and denial surrounding the issue of child sexual abuse. In numerous communities, cultural and social constraints impede frank discourse, allowing pernicious myths and misperceptions to persist unchallenged. To surmount these impediments, child protection organisations

must adopt adaptive methodologies that resonate with local beliefs and values while confronting harmful norms. For instance, enlisting the assistance of trusted community figures, such as teachers, religious leaders, and youth mentors, can facilitate the establishment of trust and the initiation of challenging conversations on child protection.

To respond effectively, organisations must adopt flexible and innovative approaches that are tailored to both physical and digital community spaces. The integration of digital literacy and online safety into community programmes can facilitate the transfer of protective knowledge and empower children to make safer choices in the online world. It is crucial to engage a diverse range of stakeholders, including family members and digital influencers, to foster resilience against sexual exploitation and to establish community-wide support for prevention initiatives.



THE INTERSECTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN:

The phenomenon of climate change-induced displacement is becoming increasingly acknowledged as a significant contributory factor in the vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation. Because of extreme weather events, rising sea levels and environmental degradation, families are compelled to migrate from their homes. The resulting instability often renders children particularly vulnerable to trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse. The loss of livelihoods, social networks and protective community structures that frequently accompany displacement creates conditions that place children at heightened risks. In such settings, families may become dependent on unfamiliar support systems or find themselves in precarious economic situations, which can create exploitable vulnerabilities.

The ramifications of climate-induced displacement for children are profound and far-reaching. The phenomenon of forced migration frequently results in the dissolution of the traditional safety nets that have hitherto protected children and exposed them to new and hitherto unanticipated risks in both urban and rural settings. In temporary shelters or informal settlements, the combination of limited security, lack of supervision, and scarcity of resources creates an environment conducive to the targeting of vulnerable children by traffickers and offenders. Moreover, children who have been displaced may be separated from their families, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation.

The correlation between climate change and heightened vulnerability highlights the imperative for integrating child protection strategies within climate resilience and disaster response plans. To address this intersection, organisations working in the fields of the environment, humanitarian assistance and child protection must collaborate to develop prevention and response mechanisms that are capable of recognising and mitigating the risks faced by children. The construction of resilience and preparedness within vulnerable communities before the advent of crises can serve to diminish the susceptibility of children to exploitation. This approach establishes a protective framework that can adapt to environmental and social challenges.



SHRINKING SPACES OF CIVIL SOCIETY:

A worrying phenomenon of diminishing civic spaces is becoming apparent in numerous South Asian countries, where governments are implementing increasingly stringent restrictions on civil society activities. This trend creates a challenging environment for organisations working on sensitive or “taboo” issues, with the sexual exploitation of children considered among such topics, as authorities impose tight controls on advocacy and public discussion. The imposition of restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, coupled with an intensified level of scrutiny applied to civil society organisations, constrains the capacity of these entities to raise awareness, mobilise communities and advocate for crucial policy reforms.



Organisations primarily focusing on child protection frequently encounter specific obstacles in obtaining resources, particularly from international funding sources. It is common for governments to implement stringent regulations on foreign funding, viewing it as a potential conduit for external influence that could challenge the prevailing national agendas. The restriction of resources impairs the capacity of civil society organisations to maintain the sustainability of their programmes and extend their reach. In some cases, organisations have encountered resistance or even active suppression from authorities, who may perceive child protection advocacy as a critique of governmental policies or a disruption to social norms.

The reduction in the scope for civic engagement has implications not only for the organisations themselves but also for the platforms available to survivors, community advocates and activists, which are restricted in terms of both the scope for voicing concerns and participation in policy shaping. To circumvent these limitations, civil society organisations are increasingly seeking innovative solutions to navigate regulatory challenges, such as the formation of coalitions, the fostering of local partnerships, and the undertaking of discreet community-based initiatives. These endeavours are designed to ensure the continuity of advocacy for the protection of children, even in the context of limited opportunities, and to identify strategies for maintaining child protection as a central topic of public discourse despite significant constraints.

DATA GAPS AND THE NEED FOR EVIDENCE:

Despite the valuable research conducted by numerous organisations on various forms of sexual exploitation of children, significant challenges remain in ensuring that this evidence is effectively utilised by critical stakeholders. It is customary practice for governments to request data to inform policy decisions and shape interventions. However, gaps in the dissemination and uptake of data mean that many opportunities for advocacy, programme design, resource allocation and baseline assessments are missed. The consequence of these missed opportunities is a weakening of the potential impact of research findings, with critical insights remaining underutilised in efforts to combat exploitation.

Despite their commitment to data collection and analysis, civil society organisations frequently encounter substantial obstacles in translating research findings into policy action. A considerable number of civil society organisations are constrained by limited resources, which impairs their capacity to expand research initiatives, engage with stakeholders, and spearhead impactful advocacy campaigns. Limited access to funding and technical

expertise can impede an organisation's capacity to present their findings in a manner that resonates with policymakers and aligns with government priorities. Furthermore, the sensitive nature of child sexual exploitation data and the complexities of navigating ethical considerations present additional challenges for organisations seeking to protect the privacy and well-being of survivors while generating actionable insights specific to said data.

To surmount these challenges, it is imperative that civil society organisations and governments establish collaborative pathways for sharing and applying evidence. The strengthening of data-sharing partnerships has the potential to enhance the reach of research findings, thereby enabling stakeholders to incorporate evidence into child protection strategies in a more effective manner. The development of organisational capacity for data analysis and communication, coupled with the establishment of sustainable funding sources, can empower civil society organisations to advocate for policy reforms that are grounded in robust, context-specific evidence.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA:

The media exerts a considerable influence on the formation of public perceptions regarding gender roles, abuse, and victimhood, particularly in the context of child sexual exploitation. It is regrettable that media coverage frequently serves to reinforce harmful stereotypes by portraying boys predominantly as perpetrators, rather than recognising their vulnerability as potential victims. Such representations not only distort public understanding of the issue but also contribute to a culture of stigma and silence surrounding male victimhood, thereby impeding boys' ability to seek support or report abuse.

Furthermore, the media often perpetuates broader stereotypes related to child sexual exploitation, presenting simplified narratives that fail to capture the complexities of abuse. The use of sensationalist and misrepresentative reporting techniques can, inadvertently, serve to perpetuate shaming and victim-blaming attitudes or diminish the perceived severity of sexual exploitation, particularly in cases involving marginalised groups. The absence of nuanced and informed reporting impedes public awareness of the systemic issues that underlie child sexual exploitation and hinders the promotion of a compassionate understanding of survivors' experiences.

It is imperative that media practices are improved to foster a more accurate and empathetic portrayal of child sexual exploitation. The promotion of responsible reporting practices can facilitate the alteration of damaging narratives by

encouraging journalists to adopt a sensitive and accurate approach when reporting on stories. It is of the utmost importance that media organisations promote balanced coverage that recognises the diverse experiences of all victims, regardless of gender, and challenge the stereotypes that contribute to stigma. By advocating for these changes, the media can serve as a vital ally in raising awareness, challenging misperceptions, and supporting efforts to protect children from exploitation.



INADEQUATE LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS:

Although numerous South Asian countries have enacted legal and policy frameworks that are in accordance with international standards for combating the sexual exploitation of children, notable deficiencies persist in their practical implementation. These frameworks provide a robust foundation for addressing various forms of sexual exploitation. However, they are frequently outdated and unable to keep pace with evolving trends in abuse, such as technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and the sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of boys. Furthermore, the gender dimensions of child sexual exploitation are inadequately addressed, with existing legislation frequently overlooking the vulnerabilities of boys and reinforcing harmful stereotypes that prevent gender-informed equitable protection.

A significant challenge arises from lack or limited coordination between the governance systems and inconsistent procedures across regions, which result in the ineffective implementation of even well-designed legislation. Despite the existence of national legislation that calls for protective measures, local authorities frequently lack the necessary resources, training, or mandate to enforce them effectively. Furthermore, inconsistencies in law enforcement procedures diminish the efficacy of

these frameworks, leaving children vulnerable and survivors without recourse to justice. Furthermore, the complexities of coordination across jurisdictions also impede comprehensive enforcement, particularly in cases that necessitate cross-border cooperation.

In countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, the challenges are further compounded by the social and institutional denial of issues such as the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys, which obstructs efforts to provide adequate protection and support. Cultural biases that are deeply entrenched in society frequently result in the dismissal of claims of sexual exploitation and abuse involving boys, as male victimhood is often either downplayed or ignored. This absence of institutional acknowledgement not only precludes boys from accessing essential support but also constrains awareness-raising and advocacy initiatives aimed at comprehensive child protection. Addressing these gaps requires policy updates, greater investment in enforcement at all levels, and a shift in societal attitudes to acknowledge the full spectrum of child sexual exploitation and ensure that all children, regardless of gender, receive comprehensive protection.

THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

The South Asia Regional Workshop comprised a series of thematic discussions examining the multifaceted issue of child sexual exploitation and elucidating efficacious prevention and response practices. The event brought together experts, civil society representatives, and youth advocates, with each session exploring specific challenges unique to South Asia. This fostered collaboration and shared learning across sectors.

The discussion highlighted the evolving risks that children face in the digital age, where offenders employ sophisticated technology to exploit children. This emphasised the necessity for comprehensive online safety education and stronger digital safeguards. Furthermore, the participants examined the heightened risks of child sexual exploitation in humanitarian settings, where displacement and resource scarcity place children in particularly vulnerable situations. Additionally, they discussed the unique challenges of the travel and tourism sector, with issues such as voluntourism and unregulated accommodations.

Furthermore, the discussions emphasised the significance of child participation and community engagement, with a particular focus on the empowerment of children as advocates and the strengthening of local networks to foster protective environments. The following sections present a summary of the workshop's key findings, insights, and recommendations, offering guidance for stakeholders committed to combating child sexual exploitation across the region.

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

Pervasive Online Risks: The discussion highlighted the increasing prevalence of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation of children, driven by the expansion of internet access, the proliferation of digital devices, and the pervasive use of social media platforms. As the number of children and adolescents who connect online increases, the risk of sexual exploitation also rises, as offenders can gain access to potential victims more easily through digital means. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive sexuality education and safe internet practices serves to compound this risk, leaving children unprotected and unprepared to navigate the complexities of online spaces.

The necessity of providing children with the ability to securely interact online was a persistent topic of discussion, reflecting the requirement for concentrated intervention at both the educational and community levels.

Online Grooming and Cyber Threats:

The participants expressed considerable concern about the increase in online grooming, sexual extortion, and the dissemination of self-produced sexual content among children. In Nepal, for instance, it was observed that searchable closed groups are believed to be used by individuals with the intention of exploiting children sexually. These groups are meticulously managed, with rigorous admission criteria that guarantee only aligned individuals gain access, rendering them challenging for law enforcement to infiltrate. Furthermore, participants identified emerging threats, including AI-generated child sexual abuse material and the proliferation of deep fakes, which present additional challenges to the protection of children from sexual exploitation facilitated by technology.

The advent of new technologies has facilitated the creation and manipulation of content by offenders. Artificially generated child sexual abuse material is often based on the suffering and imagery of real victims, while AI chatbots can be misused by offenders to successfully groom children in a variety of contexts. The 'mainstreaming' of generative AI tools, and especially image-generators, represents a substantial challenge substantial challenge for child protection agencies, underscoring the necessity for the development of robust, updated frameworks to address these increasingly sophisticated cyber threats.



Lagging Government Response: Despite the introduction of new policies, national plans and legislation by several South Asian governments, shortcomings remain in the efficacy of these measures in reaching children, families, and informal communities. The prevailing governmental approach is frequently characterised by a greater emphasis on repression than on comprehensive prevention, empowerment, or educational initiatives. This approach has the effect of limiting the scope and effectiveness of interventions. Furthermore, discrepancies in digital platform regulation across countries impede protection efforts, as perpetrators can exploit regulatory loopholes to evade detection.

To provide genuine protection, it is imperative that governments adopt more proactive and inclusive strategies that engage children, families, and communities, while simultaneously working towards harmonised regional regulations on digital platforms. This necessitates a shift from punitive measures to preventative frameworks that facilitate education and empowerment, thereby bridging the gap between policy and practical community engagement.

Inadequate Education on Sexuality and Online Safety:

A significant factor contributing to children's technology-facilitated sexual exploitation is the dearth of comprehensive education on sexuality and online safety. In the absence of these fundamental forms of education, children are ill-prepared to identify or navigate the inherent risks associated with digital environments. In particular, LGBTQIA+ youth are at heightened risk; as a participant from Nepal observed, "LGBTQIA+ youth are very much comfortable in the online world, but they are more and more vulnerable to sexual exploitation."

This vulnerability among LGBTQIA+ youth underscores the pressing necessity for bespoke, inclusive educational provision that acknowledges the multifaceted identities and experiences of children. To address this educational deficit, it is necessary to integrate online safety and sexuality education into the school curriculum and to develop community outreach initiatives that raise awareness among both children and their caregivers.

Under-Resourced Law Enforcement:

The investigation and prosecution of cases of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation of children presents law enforcement agencies with considerable challenges, which are compounded by a lack of resources, specialised training, and technological expertise. These constraints impede the ability of law enforcement agencies to keep pace with offenders who employ sophisticated techniques to conceal their identities and activities.

Furthermore, a deficit of trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve undermines prevention efforts and constrains grassroots engagement. A substantial number of communities are reluctant to approach law enforcement with concerns, which further isolates vulnerable children from potential protective measures.

The lack of developed community policing strategies serves to exacerbate these issues, thereby reducing the capacity of law enforcement agencies to engage in meaningful ways at the local level.

Additionally, a lack of collaboration between law enforcement agencies and civil society organisations has an adverse effect on the efficacy of prevention, reporting and rehabilitation efforts. To develop a more effective response to child sexual exploitation, it is essential to reinforce these partnerships, foster community trust, and guarantee that law enforcement has access to the resources and training required to operate effectively in a digital environment.

Universal Exposure: While technology-facilitated sexual exploitation affects children across all demographic groups, certain subgroups are disproportionately affected due to underlying social and economic factors. Issues such as human trafficking and child marriage are more prevalent in rural and impoverished communities, underscoring the necessity for targeted prevention and response strategies. However, the pervasive use of technology continues to render children from all social classes susceptible to online risks. Despite the advent of new technologies, traditional patterns of sexual exploitation persist in South Asia, creating missed opportunities for tailored interventions that address both universal and specific vulnerabilities.

Effective strategies must strike a balance between universal approaches and targeted actions that acknowledge the unique risks faced by various communities. The combination of comprehensive digital safety initiatives with targeted interventions for high-risk groups represents a promising approach to safeguarding children from the diverse forms of sexual exploitation prevalent in the region.

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LGBTQIA+ youth are very much comfortable in the online world, but they are more and more vulnerable to sexual exploitation”

participant from Nepal observed



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

The Importance of Putting the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation of Children on the Humanitarian Agenda:

Participants highlighted that there is a pressing need to accord priority to the prevention and response to child sexual exploitation within the humanitarian agenda. It is frequently the case that child sexual exploitation is either inadequately addressed or entirely overlooked within broader frameworks for the protection of children or for the prevention and response to gender-based violence. This is because such frameworks do not account for the specific dimensions and dynamics of child sexual exploitation.

It was emphasised by participants that this issue requires the implementation of specialised interventions including with the objective of identifying intermediaries who facilitate exploitation, as well as the unique transactional aspects involved, which demand proactive identification and tailored responses. In times of crisis, when the urgency of other needs can overshadow child protection, a participant from Pakistan poignantly observed that “in any disaster, child protection is never a top priority.” This situation highlights the necessity for a dedicated focus on the prevention of child sexual exploitation within the context of humanitarian response planning.

Building Resilience and Preparedness:

It is crucial to implement resilience-building strategies that anticipate and mitigate the specific vulnerabilities to child sexual exploitation in disaster-prone areas, to establish robust protective mechanisms before a crisis occurs. Proactive planning can mitigate the risk of children becoming victims of sexual exploitation during emergencies, where the collapse of social structures and increased vulnerability can precipitate an escalation of risks. The integration of child protection strategies into resilience and disaster preparedness plans guarantees that responses are not merely reactive but are structured to mitigate risks from the outset. The establishment of robust child protection protocols including a focus on risks of child sexual exploitation in advance of a crisis enables organisations to foster a safer environment for children, even in the context of an emergency.

However, participants acknowledged that this effort requires close collaboration across sectors. As one representative from Nepal emphasised, “In times of crises, no organisation can work on their own.” It is imperative that partnerships are formed between civil society organisations, government agencies and international organisations to construct effective resilience frameworks.

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in any disaster, child protection is never a top priority”

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a participant from Pakistan observed



Engaging Key Sectors and Service Providers:

It was highlighted by attendees that the involvement of both formal and informal actors across several key sectors is crucial to the success of humanitarian response operations. These sectors include, for example, the transportation industry, public transport hubs, internet service providers (ISPs) and the hospitality industry. These sectors frequently interact with populations in vulnerable situations and can therefore play a crucial role in identifying and supporting at-risk children. For instance, transit hubs and transportation providers are often utilised by traffickers to facilitate the movement of children, rendering these locations pivotal points for intervention.

The involvement of service providers in child protection concerns and the provision of tools to identify potential sexual exploitation scenarios can serve to reinforce protective measures in humanitarian settings. The incorporation of child protection into the operations of these essential sectors enables a more holistic approach to humanitarian responses, thus facilitating the provision of protection to children in real time.

Understanding and Addressing the Rights of Children:

A rights-based approach that centres children's voices and perspectives including in humanitarian interventions is essential to avoid unintended negative consequences. Participants stressed that assuming child sexual exploitation will be adequately covered by general sexual violence or child protection strategies is insufficient. Experience within South Asia and globally shows that these broader strategies often fail to capture the nuanced aspects of child sexual exploitation, leaving critical gaps in protection.

Designing interventions with children ensures that their rights are prioritised and that protective efforts are tailored to meet the specific risks and needs of children in crisis situations. This approach also fosters a deeper understanding among practitioners of the unique vulnerabilities children face, making responses more adaptive and inclusive.



The Increasing Significance of Technology

in Humanitarian Contexts: As internet access becomes increasingly vital, especially during crises, the risk of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation of children rises significantly. Those in vulnerable communities are becoming increasingly susceptible to technology-facilitated sexual exploitation of children by offenders who exploit the lack of digital literacy and safety measures to approach children online. The increasing prevalence of this threat requires a greater emphasis on digital security and safeguarding strategies within humanitarian responses.

Integrating digital literacy and safe internet practices into disaster response frameworks can assist in the protection of children, who may rely on online platforms for communication and support during periods of crisis. It is imperative that online safety education be incorporated into humanitarian programmes to protect children from the growing risks associated with technology.

The Importance of Intersectional

Approaches: The necessity for intersectional approaches to addressing child sexual exploitation in humanitarian contexts was underscored by participants, who acknowledged that children with diverse identities, including those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and children with disabilities, are exposed to distinct forms of vulnerability. These children frequently encounter intensified obstacles to accessing care and assistance, underscoring the imperative to incorporate their distinctive requirements into child protection frameworks.

Delegates from a variety of countries in the region discussed the ongoing initiatives to engage with and support children from diverse backgrounds. They observed that these endeavours are becoming increasingly acknowledged and incorporated into policy in the South Asian region. This represents a significant step forward, yet participants emphasised the necessity for further action to guarantee that all children receive appropriate assistance and are protected from sexual exploitation in humanitarian contexts.

Addressing Victim-Blaming and Challenging

Stereotypes: The persistence of victim-blaming attitudes and stigma surrounding child sexual exploitation represents a significant obstacle, even in humanitarian contexts where children's exposure to heightened risks should be readily acknowledged. In certain instances, technology-facilitated sexual exploitation of children is perceived to be a less severe offence, which in turn diminishes the sense of urgency with which it is addressed. Such attitudes impede victims and survivors from disclosing their experiences and accessing assistance, thereby constraining their access to support and justice.

It was noted by participants that advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives are of vital importance in humanitarian settings, to challenge the detrimental perceptions that currently prevail and to create an environment where children feel safe



in reporting instances of sexual exploitation. It is crucial to overcome these attitudes to establish child-centred, empathetic responses that prioritise the well-being of survivors.

The Influence of Social and Cultural Norms:

Social and cultural norms influence perceptions about both the role of aid workers and the reporting of child sexual exploitation within communities. In some regions, there may be a reluctance to report sexual exploitation if it involves aid workers, as these individuals are often regarded with a degree of authority or respect. Separately, community members may also be hesitant to report instances of child sexual exploitation

occurring within their own circles, perceiving such matters as private or fearing that disclosure would bring shame upon their family or community. These intertwined social dynamics present significant barriers to addressing child sexual exploitation, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive approaches to encourage reporting and ensure child protection.

By operating within the cultural context, organisations can establish trust and encourage community involvement in child protection, thereby creating an environment in which reporting and intervention are facilitated.



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Regulating and Addressing the Impact of

Voluntourism: The increasing popularity of voluntourism, particularly in countries such as Nepal and Sri Lanka, gives rise to considerable concerns regarding the potential risks of sexual exploitation. A considerable number of unregulated volunteer activities, particularly those involving activities with children in unregistered childcare institutions, are conducted with minimal regulatory oversight and are offered to unskilled tourists. The absence of regulations and structured monitoring creates a vulnerable environment in which children may be exposed to sexual exploitation by individuals lacking the requisite training or by those with malevolent intentions who are seeking avenues to access local children.

The discussion emphasised the necessity for ending voluntourism in orphanages and childcare institutions and the implementation of robust regulatory frameworks and monitoring mechanisms to govern all forms of volunteer activities, which needs to include the regulation of voluntourism market. It is imperative that organisations offering all forms of volunteering experiences adhere to safeguarding standards, including conducting comprehensive background checks, ensuring adequate training, and that they work only with those who have relevant professional backgrounds. As one participant from Nepal stressed, “If we want to welcome tourists, we need to make sure we can safeguard our children.” Other from Bangladesh stated “Insufficient regulatory frameworks to regulate volunteering in South Asian countries is putting children at greater risk” This captures the specific need to address “voluntourism” in as much unstructured, short-term experiences fuelled by tourism market, that need to balance alternatives to mass tourism with child protection and ensure that children are never put at risk by unregulated, short-term, and unskilled voluntourism activities.

“

If we want to welcome tourists, we need to make sure we can safeguard our children”

”

one participant from Nepal

“

Insufficient regulatory frameworks to regulate volunteering in South Asian countries is putting children at greater risk”

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one participant from Sri Lanka

Engaging with the Informal Sector: It was stressed by participants that engagement with the informal sector, including homestays and small guesthouses, is of immense importance, given their widespread use across the region. The absence of formal regulation and oversight in these accommodations increases the risk of sexual exploitation for children who may be present or employed within these environments. The informal sector, due to its lack of regulation, presents a distinctive set of challenges for child protection initiatives. At the same time, the informal sector can be an actor of change in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation of children, when engaged as part of supply chains. The informal workers are also right holders that should be ensured decent working conditions to be able to create safe environments for their own children.

Collaboration with local governments and associations representing informal business operators is essential to address the aforementioned risks posed to children. Such collaborative endeavours can facilitate the establishment of minimum safeguarding standards, training programmes and oversight mechanisms, thereby reducing the risks of sexual exploitation. It is of the utmost importance to engage the informal sectors to create a safer environment for children as part of responsible tourism practices across the region.

Engaging with the entertainment industry:

The sexual exploitation of children in both formal and informal entertainment sectors persist as a significant concern in various tourism settings. Despite the difficulties inherent in engaging with entertainment businesses on matters of child protection, given their diverse and often fragmented nature, it is imperative to regulate these industries to protect children from all forms of exploitation, including sexual.





The establishment of safeguarding guidelines for entertainment venues, particularly those situated in tourist areas, and the implementation of more rigorous age verification procedures can assist in the reduction of the risks faced by children. By incorporating training in child protection and awareness programmes into the curricula of entertainment business owners, staff, and local law enforcement, these venues can become safer spaces. Sustained, multi-sectoral collaboration is essential to guarantee the protection of children in both formal and informal entertainment settings from sexual exploitation.

Addressing Child Protection in the Evolving Landscape of Online Travel Platforms: The widespread use of online travel platforms such as Airbnb, social media, and informal homestay networks has introduced novel challenges to the field of child protection within the travel and tourism sector. The diverse landscape of accommodation options, which encompasses formal hotel chains and informal providers operating through online platforms, necessitates the development of bespoke engagement strategies to ensure the enforcement of child safety standards. The potential issues pertaining to data privacy, the inadequacy of regulatory frameworks, and the possibility of sexual exploitation within these platforms were identified as areas of concern. It is necessary that these companies collaborate directly with one another to implement effective child protection measures. This will necessitate the enforcement of robust user verification and security protocols by the relevant platforms.

The strengthening of oversight and the establishment of transparent child safeguarding policies at all levels of the industry will help to protect children from harm, ensuring that they are not inadvertently exposed to risks through these rapidly evolving travel and tourism services. A representative from Nepal reinforced this need for vigilance, stating, “Tourists are not Gods, we need to make sure children are protected.” This highlights the importance of prioritising child safety in both traditional and digital travel sectors.

The Need for a Multifaceted Approach:

The sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism can only be effectively combatted through the implementation of a comprehensive approach that integrates awareness-raising, regulation, law enforcement and active community engagement. Considering the intricate nature of the industry and the extensive array of stakeholders involved, a monolithic approach is inadequate. Consequently, a comprehensive approach is required, encompassing educational initiatives targeting tourists, training for local service providers, and rigorous regulatory measures, to effectively safeguard children.

Law enforcement must collaborate closely with the tourism sector and communities to guarantee the implementation of preventive measures and the establishment of accessible and reliable reporting mechanisms for the public. This multifaceted approach enables the development of a more resilient system capable of addressing sexual exploitation in a variety of contexts and regions.

Leveraging Existing Structures: The effectiveness of utilising existing structures within the tourism sector to support child protection was a key topic of discussion amongst participants. It is more effective to work through established associations, such as transport industry groups, hotel associations, and travel agent networks, than to target individual establishments. [The Code of Conduct](#) for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism, for example, represents a foundational instrument that has previously demonstrated effectiveness and can be adapted to reflect the current dynamics of the industry.

By building on these frameworks and encouraging industry-wide participation, child protection initiatives can achieve greater reach and sustainability, thereby ensuring that all stakeholders within the travel and tourism sector are committed to safeguarding children.

CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The Significance of Meaningful

Participation: The region is witnessing an increase in the number of girls and young women who are advocating for their rights and raising their voices on issues that are critical to them and their communities. Nevertheless, the prevailing social norms and cultural expectations often render this endeavour challenging, as those who express their views are frequently subjected to censure, dismissal, or even humiliation. Participants noted that it is of the utmost importance to ensure that child and youth participation is not merely tokenistic, but rather genuinely meaningful. This necessitates the tackling of a number of obstacles, including those pertaining to consent, the safeguarding of children, ethical considerations and the constraints imposed by institutions or stakeholders who may not fully endorse or comprehend the significance of children's voices in the context of advocacy and decision-making processes.

One participant from Bangladesh noted, "Sometimes, adults need to 'unlearn' specific thoughts or patterns of understanding about the sexual exploitation of children and the response to it to fully appreciate the value of child participation." This observation underscores the importance of shifting adult mindsets to embrace the unique insights and contributions of children. It is difficult to convince the key stakeholders and families in Afghanistan and Pakistan the core importance of child participation and how children are impacted by decision made by adults on behalf of children and young people.

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Sometimes, adults need to 'unlearn' specific thoughts or patterns of understanding about the sexual exploitation of children and the response to it to fully appreciate the value of child participation”

participant from Bangladesh

Empowering Children as Leaders and Peer

Educators: The participants identified several successful initiatives across the region in which children have assumed leadership roles, educating their peers and even adults on a range of critical issues, including online safety, child rights and protection strategies. In Nepal, for instance, several organisations have employed children and young people as peer educators and leaders within community mechanisms, facilitating their active involvement in the creation of safer environments for their communities.

The empowerment of children as educators has the dual benefit of fostering their confidence and leadership abilities while simultaneously enhancing the efficacy of advocacy efforts by foregrounding the voices of those most affected. Such programmes demonstrate that children can engage in advocacy and community involvement, thereby illustrating the potential for transformative change when children are regarded and respected as knowledgeable contributors to child protection initiatives.

The Role of Structured Processes in Child

Participation: In multiple countries, organisations and government agencies have implemented structured processes to facilitate child participation, frequently establishing committees or advisory groups that include child representation. These committees provide formal platforms for children to voice their perspectives on issues affecting them, participate in organisational decision-making, and contribute to local child protection efforts. Examples of such platforms include child representation on organisational boards, involvement in interview panels for hiring staff who work with children, and participation in local committees focused on child protection and safeguarding policies and practices.

By institutionalising child participation, these structures help normalise the involvement of children and young people in decision-making processes and establish systems that ensure their voices are considered on an ongoing basis.

Addressing Contextual Factors: The efficacy and viability of child participation initiatives are contingent upon the specific governmental and social context of each country. In certain instances, resistance from specific authorities, such as those in law enforcement or the judiciary, can constitute a significant obstacle to the implementation of child participation initiatives. This is because such officials may lack familiarity with or support for the involvement of children in decision-making processes. Such resistance can impede progress, rendering the formulation of a unified child protection strategy



that incorporates the perspectives of young people a challenging endeavour.

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It is difficult to convince the key it is difficult to convince the families and key stakeholders the core importance of child participation and how children are impacted by decisions made by adults on their behalf.”

participant from Afghanistan

To surmount these contextual challenges, it is necessary to pursue sustained advocacy, educational and capacity-development initiatives with the objective of fostering greater acceptance of child participation as a necessary component of child protection.

Reaching Harder-to-Reach Children: The engagement of children who are more difficult to reach, including those who are homeless, belong to minority groups, or are victims of abuse or stigma, remains a significant challenge for initiatives that seek to promote child participation. It was observed that these children frequently have no recourse to conventional child protection services, which presents a significant obstacle to organisations attempting to incorporate their voices in matters of advocacy and decision-making. Tailored approaches must be employed to engage these children, which must recognise and address their unique circumstances. Furthermore, it is essential that persistent efforts are made to build trust and create safe spaces where they feel comfortable sharing their experiences and insights. It is imperative that child participation initiatives are inclusive and reflect the diversity of children's experiences across the region to ensure effectiveness leaving no one behind.

The emergence of children displaying

harmful sexual behaviours: The growing accessibility of online environments for children has led to an increase in the prevalence of harmful sexual behaviours among this demographic, giving rise to intricate questions concerning the most effective means of addressing this phenomenon within the context of child protection frameworks. The participants acknowledged that children who exhibit such behaviours may themselves have experienced sexual exploitation, emphasising the necessity for a nuanced response that combines protection with rehabilitation.

The addressing of harmful sexual behaviours in children necessitates the implementation of specialised approaches that are designed to protect other children from potential risks whilst simultaneously providing support and intervention for the child displaying these behaviours. This approach is intended to prevent further harm and foster positive development.

Measuring the Impact of Child Participation:

Although the significance of child participation is widely recognised, the challenge remains in measuring its tangible impact. It was observed by participants that, despite the intention of child participation initiatives to promote empowerment and inclusion, it is frequently challenging to quantify their direct outcomes and identify specific changes resulting from children's involvement. The long-term effects of child participation on policies, programmes and community attitudes must be monitored and evaluated to ascertain the qualitative benefits of these initiatives.

The development of methodologies for the assessment of the impact of child participation will enable organisations to demonstrate the value of these initiatives more effectively to stakeholders and to secure continued support for the empowerment of children as active participants in their own protection.



JUSTICE

Specialised Units and Child-Friendly

Procedures: In Sri Lanka, initiatives to provide child-sensitive legal assistance in cases of sexual exploitation have resulted in the formation of dedicated units and multidisciplinary teams with the capacity to address these complex cases. These units comprise professionals who have undergone specialised training to facilitate their work with child survivors, thereby ensuring that they approach cases with the requisite understanding and sensitivity for child protection. Furthermore, Sri Lanka and Nepal has child-friendly helplines, which provide children with a secure and convenient avenue to report abuse or seek assistance.

Another noteworthy development is the introduction of child-friendly court procedures, which are designed to create a less intimidating environment for children involved in legal proceedings and dedicated Anti Human Trafficking Unit in some countries with trained officials/individuals to deal with cases of Human Trafficking and Sexual abuse Exploitation. These initiatives represent a crucial stride towards the establishment of a justice system that is cognizant of and responsive to the distinctive needs of child victims and survivors, guaranteeing their treatment with respect and care throughout the legal process.

Community-Based Advocacy and Support:

In Bangladesh, organisations have recognised the need for sensitising service providers and supporting child survivors in navigating justice pathways. Community-based sensitisation programmes aim to educate service providers on the nuances of child sexual exploitation and the challenges child survivors face. These programmes also address the limitations of government-run shelters, which often lack adequate resources, trained staff, and child-focused services.

As one regional representative remarked, “Service providers are the ‘product of the same community,’ so we also need to influence them to make a change.” This observation highlights the importance of community-based advocacy efforts that work within cultural frameworks to transform service providers’ perspectives, fostering an environment that is more supportive and responsive to child survivors of exploitation.

Addressing Gender Norms: Deeply ingrained gender norms continue to shape the justice experiences of both boys and girls, affecting their ability to seek help and report abuse. For boys, the stigma surrounding male victimhood and societal expectations of masculinity can pose significant barriers to reporting sexual exploitation, as they may fear judgment or ridicule. Girls, on the other hand, may encounter assumptions or biases related to their behaviour, which can impact the way their cases are perceived by authorities and communities alike. Addressing these gender norms is essential to creating a justice system that allows both boys and girls to seek justice without fear or prejudice. By challenging harmful stereotypes and promoting a more understanding approach to gender, service

providers and justice personnel can make the process more accessible and supportive for all children.

Overcoming Barriers in the Justice Systems:

Justice systems, both formal and informal, often present numerous obstacles for child survivors of sexual exploitation. These barriers include lengthy, complex procedures, logistical challenges, limited privacy, and the lack of diversity in the gender and age of personnel, all of which disproportionately affect marginalised groups. In Nepal, however, the judiciary has taken proactive steps to address some of these challenges by introducing closed hearings and child-friendly court setups.

These measures provide a safer, more private environment for child survivors, protecting their dignity and well-being during legal proceedings. Women accompanying child survivors in the justice process face additional barriers, and efforts to improve the system must account for these challenges. Enhancing gender diversity among justice personnel and establishing streamlined processes could further improve accessibility and inclusivity within the justice system.

The Importance of Community Engagement

and Support: Participants highlighted the need for holistic, community-based approaches to address the sexual exploitation of children. Involving communities, families, and children themselves in prevention efforts can create a foundation for a more supportive environment for survivors seeking justice. Community sensitisation, family counselling, and long-term support for survivors are vital components that can facilitate better access to justice while reinforcing protective measures.



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Service providers are the 'product of the same community,' so we also need to influence them to make a change”

one regional representative

These strategies recognise that addressing child sexual exploitation is not solely a legal issue but one that requires the active engagement of communities. By fostering an environment of understanding and support, communities can contribute to preventing exploitation and supporting survivors in their pursuit of justice.

A Growing Effort to Mainstream Gender

Sensitivity: There is a growing movement to mainstream gender sensitivity within police training and across key sectors, including social work, education, healthcare, and justice. By integrating gender-sensitive approaches across these professions, institutions can improve their capacity to prevent, identify, and respond to cases of child sexual exploitation. This integration allows for more empathetic and effective care, as professionals are better equipped to understand and address the diverse needs of children.

Gender sensitivity within child protection systems is essential to foster environments where children feel respected, supported, and understood, regardless of their gender. Through this approach, justice and support systems can evolve into more inclusive, trauma-informed spaces that prioritise the well-being of every child.

The Impact of Gender on Service Delivery:

Participants noted that gender biases within service delivery systems often lead to inadequate support for both boys and girls, underscoring the need for gender-sensitive, trauma-informed approaches. For example, service providers may unconsciously prioritise cases involving girls, while neglecting or minimising the experiences of boys due to societal perceptions. These biases hinder the effectiveness of child protection efforts, as they prevent an equitable approach to addressing the needs of all children. By implementing gender-sensitive training for service providers, organisations can foster more balanced service delivery systems that provide comprehensive support to every child affected by sexual exploitation.

Addressing the Rights of All Children,

Including Boys: The issue of addressing the sexual exploitation of boys emerged as a key focus, with participants emphasising the need for greater attention to male victimhood. Boys often face additional barriers in accessing justice, and their experiences are frequently overlooked due to societal expectations around masculinity. Participants discussed the importance of engaging families and communities to challenge harmful stereotypes and encourage boys to seek help and support when needed.

Recognising the rights of all children, including boys also presents an opportunity to involve children, families, and communities in broader discussions about masculinity, victimhood, and help-seeking behaviours. By addressing these cultural factors, stakeholders can create a more inclusive environment that recognises the diverse experiences of all children affected by sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation of boys and men is a taboo in Afghanistan, and many times it goes unreported due to social stigma.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As the fight against the sexual exploitation of children continues, participants identified several key areas for future action. Central to these efforts is the need for effective prevention strategies, strong collaboration, meaningful child participation, and improved implementation of legal frameworks. These interconnected elements must work together to create an environment that protects all children.

1. PRIORITISING PREVENTION THROUGH BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICE CHANGE:

Prevention is the cornerstone of child protection, but participants stressed that traditional awareness-raising campaigns are no longer sufficient. Addressing harmful social and gender norms, community perceptions, and online risks requires targeted social and behaviour change strategies. To be effective, these prevention efforts must engage both local communities and industries such as tourism and digital platforms, ensuring interventions reflect real-world challenges and translate into changes in practices.

Participants discussed how rapid technological expansion exposes children to increased risks of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation of children, especially in contexts where safe internet practices and sexuality education are lacking. Rural communities, where practices like child marriage and trafficking remain widespread, also require specific, tailored interventions. Furthermore, industries such as travel and tourism play a crucial role in prevention, deterring potential offenders and

addressing risks linked to voluntourism and tech xx exploitation. Collaborating with these industries to implement child protection policies is essential for fostering a culture to safeguard children.

Prevention strategies must integrate comprehensive sexuality education and online safety training into national curricula to better equip children for both digital and physical risks. Social and behaviour change initiatives should focus on addressing entrenched attitudes and gender norms that perpetuate sexual exploitation. Partnerships with key industries will ensure child protection policies are implemented across both physical and digital spaces. Sustained community engagement will foster long-term shifts in behaviour, creating a culture of protection.

While prevention is essential, it must be complemented by effective collaboration across sectors to ensure comprehensive child protection.



2. ENHANCING COLLABORATION AND STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS:

Collaboration is essential to building effective child protection systems, but participants highlighted that existing formal and customary processes often fail to function effectively. Strengthening partnerships between civil society organisations, government agencies, international organisations, and communities requires revitalising these processes, sharing resources and expertise, and ensuring alignment between different actors.

Participants identified weak coordination between law enforcement and civil society organisations as a significant barrier, especially in the areas of prevention, reporting, and accessing justice. Limited collaboration and ineffective community policing approaches restrict timely interventions. However, piloting community-based child protection models through civil society organisations offers a scalable solution that governments can adopt. These models require sustained donor support to ensure long-term capacity development and impact.

To strengthen collaboration, governments and civil society organisations must build more effective partnerships focused on both prevention and response. Scaling successful pilot models will ensure that interventions reach more local communities. Enhancing community policing approaches will foster trust between law enforcement and communities, improving child protection efforts. Long-term donor engagement is essential to ensure these collaborative efforts are sustainable.

Strong intergenerational partnerships also empower children and youth, whose participation is crucial in shaping policies and interventions.



3. SUPPORTING CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION:

Involving children and youth in designing, implementing, and monitoring protection strategies against the sexual exploitation of children ensures that interventions reflect their lived experiences and address their needs. Empowering young people to advocate for their rights also helps shape relevant policies and programmes. Participation must extend beyond formal policy spaces to include peer to peer approaches and engagement with informal economic actors and industries.

Participants stressed the importance of engaging children in tackling issues such as voluntourism, which can expose children to sexual exploitation when inadequately regulated. Encouraging young people to participate in monitoring these practices ensures interventions are informed by real-world challenges. Participants also highlighted the role of the informal sector, including homestays and small-scale tourism, in child protection. Additionally, discussions pointed to the need to involve children in addressing offending behaviour, whether committed by youth or adults, ensuring preventive and rehabilitative measures are appropriate.

Future efforts should create more opportunities for children and youth to participate meaningfully in both formal policy processes and the industrial sector. Industries like tourism must work with children and civil society organisations to regulate voluntourism and implement child protection standards. Including young people in discussions about harmful sexual behaviour will help develop effective preventive and rehabilitative approaches. Participation is essential for building inclusive child protection systems that respond to children's realities.

To complement prevention, participation, and collaboration, robust legal frameworks must be translated into practical, community-level protections.

4. STRENGTHENING LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS WITH EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION:

Legal frameworks are critical for addressing the sexual exploitation of children, but their impact depends on effective implementation. While many South Asian countries have comprehensive laws, including the action plans and national frameworks in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, enforcement remains uneven. Bridging the gap between policy and practice requires community-level engagement and cross-sector coordination.

Participants noted that although detailed legislation exists, implementation is inconsistent, particularly in rural areas where child marriage and trafficking remain prevalent. Technology facilitated sexual exploitation also presents cross-border challenges, with fragmented regulations across digital platforms

limiting child protection efforts. Harmonising legal frameworks across borders and sectors was identified as a priority to close these gaps.

Future efforts must focus on scaling the implementation of existing frameworks, ensuring laws translate into meaningful protections at the community level. Governments should harmonise regulations across sectors and borders to address technology-facilitated sexual exploitation of children effectively. Embedding gender sensitivity within frameworks and expanding outreach to marginalised communities will ensure protections reach all children. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms will be essential to achieving sustainable progress and impact.



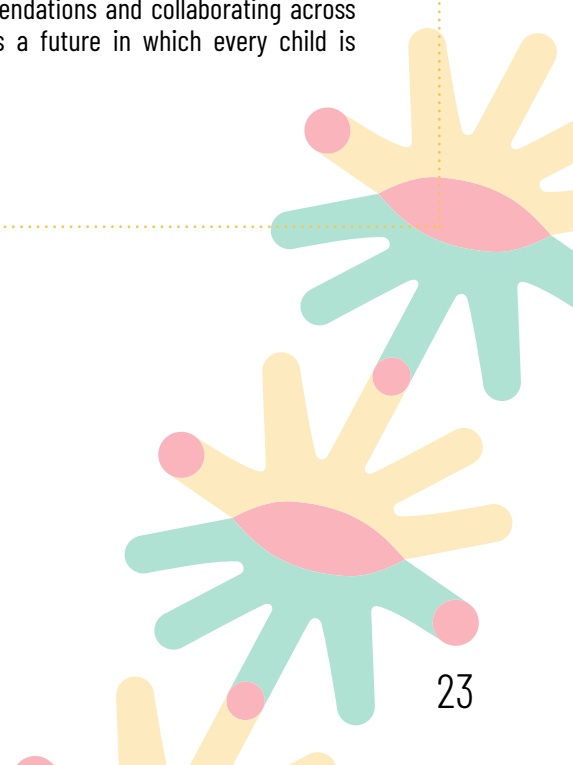
Conclusion

The South Asia Regional Workshop on Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse constituted an invaluable forum for the diverse stakeholders in attendance to convene, share experiences, and collectively develop strategies to address this complex and pressing issue. The workshop, which was organised and facilitated by ECPAT International, highlighted the organisation's distinctive role in cultivating environments where challenging discussions about child sexual exploitation can be held openly and constructively. By establishing a secure and welcoming environment for discourse, ECPAT has facilitated interactions between practitioners, advocates, government officials, and community leaders from diverse backgrounds across South Asia. These interactions have enabled the examination of promising practices and the exploration of innovative solutions to safeguard children from sexual exploitation.

The discussions held during the workshop shed light on the evolving nature of child sexual exploitation, uncovering both novel forms of sexual exploitation in digital spaces and the persistent challenges that impede protective efforts at the local community level. The participants addressed challenging topics, including the absence of regulatory frameworks governing voluntourism, the vulnerabilities resulting from humanitarian crises, the importance of child participation, and the crucial role of digital safety education. These discussions highlighted the necessity of addressing deeply entrenched social norms, strengthening legal frameworks, and implementing gender-sensitive approaches, despite the evolving nature of exploitation.

The distinctive format of this workshop facilitated not only discussion of these urgent issues but also practical sessions that encouraged participants to translate ideas into actionable plans. As a result of the workshop, each participant was able to gain a deeper understanding of the role that their organisation, community or government can play in combating child sexual exploitation and abuse. By facilitating these connections, ECPAT International has reinforced the regional network of stakeholders dedicated to the protection of children and enabled these individuals to disseminate the insights and strategies developed during the workshop to their respective communities and workplaces.

In conclusion, the South Asia Regional Workshop has served to reinforce the commitment of stakeholders across South Asia to the protection of children from sexual exploitation. The discussions held and recommendations generated represent a roadmap for collaborative action, which, if implemented, has the potential to drive noteworthy progress in the region. ECPAT International is pleased to act as a convening force, dedicated to the establishment and maintenance of spaces where professionals, communities, and advocates can engage in meaningful dialogue and strategise solutions to protect every child. By adhering to these recommendations and collaborating across sectors and communities, stakeholders can advance towards a future in which every child is genuinely free from the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.





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Fighting sexual exploitation of children