ECPAT International
Policy Plan 2026-2029

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I. Introduction

Sexual exploitation of children happens as the result of the abuse of a position of vulnerability, power, or trust. Children are sexually exploited in exchange for something (e.g. money, gifts, shelter, protection, or non-material benefits) for the benefit or advantage of another person.

ECPAT International is a global network committed to ending the sexual exploitation of children (SEC) in all its forms and across all contexts. This 2026–2029 Strategic Framework builds on decades of experiences, learning informed by the perspectives of children and young people, especially young victims and survivors[1] and by the work of ECPAT member organisations across 115 countries.

The strategy comes at a time when the threats facing children are evolving faster than ever. Technological change, shrinking civic space, economic and political instability, drastic funding cuts, conflict, climate change, and persistent and evolving gender inequality issues are reshaping the contexts in which children live—and the risks they face.

Our vision is clear: a world where every child is protected from sexual exploitation and able to live with dignity, safety, and offered opportunity to have control over their lives and decisions that concern them. Achieving this goal requires bold and urgent action that will lead to systemic change—transforming and confronting the harmful norms and power imbalances that allow exploitation to persist.

This framework was developed in consultation with ECPAT members. It draws on insights from our network of 142 civil society organisations across 115 countries, but also current research, programme learning, and our Theory of Change, which defines how we generate evidence, influence change, and collaborate across sectors to drive long-term impact. It also builds on evidence and learnings specifically from young survivors distilled from our various research activities, and from the consultations organized with 71 children from five ECPAT members' organizations.

Our four-year strategy sets a course for collective action rooted in rights and gender equity, driven by evidence, and accountable to children. It is a living strategy designed to be adapted, challenged, and improved in response to the world's fast-changing realities and the voices of those most affected.

While some progress has been made including regulatory shift to better protect children in the online space, sexual exploitation of children remains widespread and increasingly complex. Technology is accelerating new ways for children to be sexually exploited. These developments exist alongside long-

[1] In line with the Interagency Terminology Guidelines ECPAT will use "survivor" interchangeably or in combination with the term "victim", to refer to persons who have suffered harm and victimisation.

standing structural drivers such as socio-economic disparities, displacement and migration, humanitarian crisis, weak child protection systems, and the reinforcement of harmful gender and social norms.

Civil society organisations are increasingly concerned that existing systems to prevent and respond to child sexual exploitation are not at par with children's real-life experiences. In many cases, children do not recognise when they are being exploited or do not know who to trust for help. Even when they do ask for support, the response is often inadequate.

At the same time, many organisations that work directly with communities to protect children face significant constraints. They face growing legal restrictions, less space to operate freely, reduction in overall access to quality services, and major cuts in funding. This weakens the ability of those on the front lines to prevent and respond effectively to the sexual exploitation of children.

Children at risk are often those living in the most vulnerable situations — such as in informal settlements, in care institutions, on the streets, or on the move. All children today also face risks in digital spaces, where they may spend significant time without adequate safety measures. They are affected by layered vulnerabilities impacted by their gender, disability, ethnicity, statelessness, or sexual orientation, among others.

Wherever we find children, sexual exploitation can take place, leading to a need for more sustainable partnerships that examine the continuum of relationships in the circle of trust and the specific trajectory of each child.

To respond effectively, prevention and protection efforts must evolve. They must be better coordinated, more inclusive, and strongly grounded in the local realities and experiences of children and young survivors.

This Strategic Framework sets a new direction for ECPAT International and reflects the urgency to work together with partners, across regions and sectors, to accelerate systemic responses to end the sexual exploitation of children—everywhere.

II. Global context impacting on the sexual exploitation of children

Over the past decade, important progress has been made globally to better protect children from sexual exploitation. Laws have been strengthened, awareness has increased, and many frontline civil society

organisations — including those in the ECPAT network — report improved capacity to respond to this crime.

Legislative advances include new laws on the protection of children online, increased enforcement of anti-trafficking measures, and strengthened child safeguarding standards across schools, sports, and care institutions. Some global indicators, such as rates of child marriage, have shown some signs of decline globally, .[2]

Yet the sexual exploitation of children is evolving in scale, form, and complexity. Children are increasingly targeted by perpetrators through technologies, manipulative grooming, and evolving harmful narratives. Today's vulnerabilities are not defined only by socio-economic disparities, displacement, or humanitarian crisis and sexual exploitation coincides across both digital and physical environments, blurring boundaries and creating blind spots in protection systems.

The sharp increase in **technology-facilitated and AI generated forms of child sexual exploitation** are growing across all the regions and represent major concerns for our members. The 2025 ECPAT Member Survey[3] showed 53% of all members described online harms as having a significant disruptive impact on their work.

Digital harms are rising sharply. ECPAT's 2025 Member Survey found that deepfake abuse, the spread of child sexual abuse materials, and online victimisation of children[4]; sexual exploitation through gaming, livestreaming, and children enticed into sexually exploitative practices in exchange for money, or for various forms of reward[5] are increasing. Children often do not recognise these experiences as exploitation, while professionals struggle with unclear definitions and typologies.

These trends are unfolding alongside **shifting societal attitudes and social and gender norms**. While the numbers of women holding positions of power and opportunities for children and youth's voices[6] to be heard are on the increase, hyper sexualisation of children in media[7,8], the spread of harmful sexuality ideas and backlash against gender equality and sexuality & relationship education are slowing progress. Child and youth influence and activism is increasingly relegated to digital spaces where over-surveillance,

[2] Most progress in the past decade have been seen in South Asia, where a girl's risk of marrying in childhood has dropped by a third, from 39 per cent to 26 per cent UNICEF. .Child Marriage Data.

[3] 75 responses received and 81 surveys analysed (including multiple entries from some organisations).

[4] See Childlight | Into the Light Index Overview

[5] Thorn. Commodified Sexual Interactions Involving Minors. 2025

[6] UN Women. Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation. 2025

[7] Madi, A. (2025). The Normalization of Hypersexualization in Childhood: A Clinical and Social Psychological Analysis of Media Influences and Developmental Impact.

[8] Soriano-Ayala, E., Bonillo Díaz, M., & Cala, V. C. (2022). TikTok and Child Hypersexualization: Analysis of Videos and Narratives of Minors. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, *18*(2), 210–230.

limited civic space and protection gaps restrict their agency and voices and require nuanced understandings.[9]

Technology-related sexual exploitation risks diverting attention from other under-addressed contexts: such exploitation also occurs in schools, sports, faith institutions, humanitarian settings, informal economies, construction zones and mining areas, on cruise ships or through short-term rentals. Urbanisation, climate-change, global and internal migration trends, and economic pressures are rapidly reshaping risks

Political polarisation and shrinking civic space further exacerbate these vulnerabilities. Child rights are often used to promote ideologies that do not align with right-based approaches and regress advancements in areas such as comprehensive sexuality and relationships education[10] or gender equity. ECPAT members in regions such as South Asia, Eastern Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa reported facing 'foreign agent' laws, public backlash, and even threats of violence and 36% experienced registration or legal hurdles with over 40% reporting funding access issues. This **sharp decline in funding** for child protection issues, and isolationist policies reduce abilities to address a transborder, global problem in a cohesive manner. Prevention is further challenged by under-resourced and unprepared child protection structures.

More children live in **fragile or conflict-affected settings** than ever,[11] with limited protection from state systems. ECPAT members report significant increases in the exposure of children to risks of sexual exploitation linked to **unsafe migration routes, internal displacement**, and overstretched services **in destination countries** and children are often left in legal limbo—while perpetrators exploit such gaps with growing ease.

Despite these challenges, **civil society remains central to effective responses** and at the forefront of prevention, support, and advocacy, bringing unique legitimacy and local knowledge that no other actor can replicate. Organisations are not only adapting, they are innovating. Within the ECPAT network, **87% of members report improved collaboration and participation in joint learning initiatives**, and **89% report increased organisational credibility and reputation**, including stronger influence on national child protection systems. They are piloting new approaches, scaling peer-led initiatives, and embedding survivor and child participation into research, programming, and advocacy.

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[9] E. Kay M. Tisdall & P. Cuevas-Parra (2022) Beyond the familiar challenges for children and young people's participation rights: the potential of activism, The International Journal of Human Rights, 26:5, 792-810, DOI: 10.1080/13642987.2021.1968377

[10] Regional Workshop reports

[11] UNICEF. Protecting children in conflict zones. *By 2024 there were an estimated 460 million children — more than one in six — living in conflict-affected settings worldwide, more than twice as many as just a decade before.*

Momentum is building. Members increasingly prioritise meaningful **child participation**, gender equity, digital safety, and access to justice for survivors. They are also calling **for deeper, member-led, more equitable, regionally grounded collaboration**—moving away from top-down approaches. Civil society actors are already leading in spaces where others cannot or will not. But without stronger and fairer investment, their impact risks being stretched beyond capacity.

To meet the challenges of the next four years, the global response to sexual exploitation of children must adapt. This requires not only scaling what works but also confronting systems that perpetuate harm, resourcing local leadership, and supporting civil society's unique role in building solutions that are relevant, rights-based, and rooted in the realities children and communities face.

III. ECPAT Today and Tomorrow

ECPAT exists to protect every child from sexual exploitation — everywhere. Whether it is one child in care, on the move, in schools or online, our global network drives change that reaches both individuals and entire systems.

Through coordinated local and global action, we help shape policies, hold the private sector accountable, and keep this issue on the agenda of decision-makers. Our strength lies in our united, global movement — driving action to ensure no child is left unprotected.

The diversity of the experiences brought on by an expanding network present today in 115 countries, is a key strength of ECPAT. Our diverse and locally grounded approach allows us to capitalise on local/grassroots knowledge and practices and also effect change from the ground up, while being supported by internationally recognised advocacy. As we have evolved into the leading global voice and network against the sexual exploitation of children, our impact, ambitions, and demands for change have grown bolder than ever

ECPAT International is adapting to activate the full potential of its network and develop strategic alliances, including with children and the private sector, to generate compelling evidence to challenge systems, influence policy, and inspire action. By connecting diverse voices and fostering learning across our global network, we turn knowledge into change and ensure every child's right to protection is respected and promoted.

Since 2023, the governance of ECPAT International has been updated to ensure not only conformity with the law, but also the adherence to the principles of good governance in the sector of non-profit organisations. The new Statutes were adopted at the end of 2023 and include a four-tier governance structure:

- The **Assembly of ECPAT Organisations**, which influences the overall strategies, policies, and organisational guidelines of ECPAT International.
- The **Members Representative Committee** consists of 10 representatives[12] elected by the members of each region from the Assembly of ECPAT Organisations. It supports the work of ECPAT International and the Supervisory Board on the orientation of strategies and the good governance of the network and ensure more regular dialogue between ECPAT International and the network.
- The **Supervisory Board** is composed of five elected members and oversees the alignment of ECPAT International with plans, budgets, missions, strategies, laws, and commitments.
- ECPAT International, an international network organisation aimed at uncovering and sharing new information on the ever-evolving battle to combat child sexual exploitation, providing a platform for exchange and knowledge transfer among across sectors, facilitating the development of joint strategies, coordinating our collective effort, and maximising our impacts.

In line with the governance changes, this Strategic Framework aims to guide ECPAT International in its function to engage with the ECPAT network and others to advance the protection of children from sexual exploitation globally.

IV. ECPAT International – Purpose, Mission, Unique positioning

Our Vision

A world where all children live and thrive safe, supported, empowered and free from sexual exploitation

Our Purpose

ECPAT International exists to promote innovation, generate evidence to promote changes by cultivating a multi-sectoral global network and strategic alliances that collaborate on **ending the sexual exploitation of children**.

Our Mission

Our mission is to push for the critical systemic and social changes necessary to end the sexual exploitation of children (SEC), with governments, intergovernmental institutions, the private sector, civil society, and the public, including children themselves.

[12] 2 for the Americas, 2 for Africa, 2 for Europe, 1 for MENA and 3 for Asia and the Pacific

Our unique positioning

ECPAT International occupies a distinctive position within the global child protection ecosystem. We are focused on the sexual exploitation of children, operating the world's largest specialist civil society network in this field. Our unique value lies in our ability to connect grassroots experiences with international influence, combining evidence with advocacy, and bridging siloed efforts through inclusive, impactful responses. ECPAT acts as a global connector, knowledge broker, and driver of systemic change—complementing, rather than duplicating, the broader mandates of peer agencies.

We are the sole global civil society network dedicated to ending sexual exploitation of children - ECPAT maintains a dedicated focus on all forms of sexual exploitation of children, bringing unmatched leadership to an issue that is often otherwise diluted within broader child protection agendas.

We are a globally connected, locally grounded network - ECPAT International and its network of over 142 member organisations in 115 countries represents the largest and most comprehensive and locally rooted networks addressing the sexual exploitation of children.

We embrace all regions of the world – ECPAT operates the largest and most diverse network of civil society organisations, across all regions of the world, where we have access to areas often overlooked or underrepresented in development.

We bridge local action and global influence - ECPAT bridges research, practice, and policy close to children to influence agendas of governments, private sector, and multilateral bodies.

We have long-standing experiences of strategic engagement with the private sector - ECPAT brings a unique record of accomplishment of engaging the private sector beyond traditional corporate social responsibility—building partnerships that drive change across industries often overlooked by child protection actors.

We have a solid convening power for collective impact - ECPAT facilitates horizontal collaborations among civil society organisations to address SEC comprehensively, through coalition-building, peer exchange, and joint campaigns.

We pioneer and champion localisation in action – ECPAT catalyses the leadership, knowledge, and lived experiences of local civil society organisations to drive change.

We drive innovation beyond technology – ECPAT's innovative approaches on overlooked regions and issues, promoting collaborative solutions on emerging trends and promising practices.

We drive transformative systems change – ECPAT focuses on changing the structures that perpetuate sexual exploitation, with a focus on shifting harmful norms promoting local empowerment and strengthening policies and industry practices.

V. Our principles of work

ECPAT International's **approach** in addressing the sexual exploitation of children is grounded on the following principles that shape our strategies, partnerships, and accountability.

- **Rights-based:** We place children's rights at the centre of our work - advocating for justice, participation, protection, the best interests of children and the recognition of children as active rights-holders and agents of change.
- **Proactive focus on prevention:** We prioritise prevention as a strategic imperative, investing in early action and upstream interventions that address the social and systemic drivers, and disrupt offending before harm occurs.
- **Child Protection Systems approach**: We aim to promote comprehensive child protection systems that integrate bold actions to address sexual exploitation of children.
- **Gender and intersectionality:** We acknowledge how age, ability, background, gender, and status, among others, shape children's experiences. We promote equitable, inclusive strategies that challenge systemic discrimination and unequal power structures.
- **Locally driven and contextual:** We centre local leadership, knowledge and lived experiences to ensure all interventions are contextually relevant, sustainable, and owned by the children and communities we serve.
- **Cross-learning and bottom-up innovation**: We promote horizontal learning, co-creation, and peer exchange across regions, sectors, and communities to scale effective solutions.
- **Multi-sectoral and multi-level engagement:** We bring together diverse actors and institutions across levels—from local to global—to foster holistic and coordinated responses.
- **Accountability and transparency:** We uphold high ethical standards, promote shared accountability, and embed participatory monitoring mechanisms to ensure we remain accountable to children, our network and all our partners.
- **Adaptability to changing realities:** We remain agile in the face of rapid shifts - technological, social, political, and environmental – while continuing to push for bold, evidence-informed change

VI. Our core strategies

Generating compelling evidence to bridge research, practice, and policy

ECPAT International bridges the gap between research, practice, and policy by generating and disseminating rigorous, locally grounded, actionable evidence that centres the perspectives and experiences of children and local frontline practitioners.

Our approach prioritises emerging and overlooked issues, fosters difficult uncomfortable but necessary conversations, and translates complex evidence into accessible tools that drive practical change. Through partnerships with civil society organisations, academia, and private and public sector actors, we co-create knowledge and promote continuous learning, to inform decision making and action. We challenge harmful narratives, discriminatory frameworks and power imbalances embedded in how we perceive sexual exploitation of children.

Leading child-centred, evidence-based campaigning and advocacy for systemic change

We build a cross-sectoral movement to challenge harmful narratives, influence policy, and promote child-centred solutions. Our campaigns combine public mobilisation with targeted advocacy, using data, visual storytelling, and creative methods to drive action from awareness to systemic reform.

Grounded in evidence and collaboration, we promote accountability, strengthen capacities of those who influence and make decisions, and ensure advocacy is dynamic, inclusive, and informed by those most affected.

Convening civil society for collective impact

ECPAT leads efforts to strengthen civil society's collective power by facilitating inclusive platforms for learning, exchange, and joint action that amplify civil society voices at national, regional, and global levels.

We work to amplify civil society positioning as essential actors in shaping policy, holding duty-bearers accountable, and innovating practice.

Strengthening skills and peer learning across sectors

ECPAT catalyses learning by documenting and sharing expertise from its network and beyond. We co-develop and promote tools and guidance that support practice and policy improvement, while facilitating peer exchange to accelerate context-relevant and sustainable solutions.

Our approach values horizontal learning and locally driven adaptation. We target diverse stakeholders—including civil society organisations, private sector actors, practitioners, and future professionals but also children and young people—using methodologies tailored to their needs and roles.

Piloting and scaling innovative approaches to end the sexual exploitation of children

Innovation remains at the core of our strategy, not only through technological developments but also by addressing neglected geographies and spaces and underexplored dimensions of the sexual exploitation of children. We innovate by confronting challenging issues without shying away, engaging with nuances and complexity, challenging traditional approaches and conventions with courage, and promoting solutions that inspire and can effectively transform the way we address child sexual exploitation.

We pilot and scale adaptive, inclusive, and forward-looking interventions that respond to real-world challenges and anticipate emerging threats. We co-create and test solutions and promote new ways of thinking. These models are refined through practice and learning, with the goal of informing broader systems change.

VII. Our Strategic Objectives

ECPAT International's strategic objectives respond to critical trends shaping the landscape of child sexual exploitation. ECPAT has defined four strategic objectives to guide collective action: driving innovation, strengthening the ECPAT network, and amplifying the role of civil society, advancing meaningful collaborations with children, and engaging the private sector. Together, these four pillars aim to build more inclusive, adaptive, and effective systems to end the sexual exploitation of children everywhere.

Strategic Objective 1. Drive innovative and transformative approaches to prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation of children

The nature of child sexual exploitation is shifting rapidly, transformed among others by the influence of technology, organized crime, climate change, migration and social norms, which created new forms of exchange and payment, new ways of traveling and new ways for children to socialise and interact.

We are faced with a significant challenge: traditional responses are no longer sufficient. Harm now occurs across digital and physical spaces, affecting children in new ways, in new areas, that often go unrecognised

by current systems. Children are navigating complex realities shaped by changing ideas of agency, identity, and sexuality—yet institutions, policies, and practices struggle to keep pace.

This objective calls for bold and forward-looking strategies that challenge outdated assumptions, bring in new actors, and open space for critical dialogue and innovation. It also recognises that the voices of *all* children, especially those most marginalised, must guide how we respond to their realities today.

1.1 - Generate and apply knowledge to drive innovation and catalyse evidence-informed action for impact

We produce and use evidence to expose overlooked, emerging, and evolving forms of child sexual exploitation. We confront stigma, adult bias, and outdated narratives that prevent effective responses, particularly around issues of gender, power, consent, and identity.

Through evidence and practice, creative campaigns, honest dialogue, and collaboration with unconventional actors, we open space for brave and challenging conversations to inspire change. We centre the voices of children and young survivors, and work to shift the public and professional understanding of risk, responsibility, and protection.

Interventions: We lead and collaborate on innovative, evidence-based initiatives to challenge harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about child sexual exploitation. This includes distilling knowledge, running creative campaigns, and engaging diverse actors. We produce compelling stories, tools, and strategies to inspire the sector in how systemic changes can be done.

1.2 - Promote transformation of policies, practices, and systems to respond to evolving risks and realities

Prevention and response must evolve with the changing landscape on how children are sexually exploited. We collaborate with civil society, private sector actors and governments to test, refine, and scale innovative solutions. We document and share promising practices, promote cross-sector learning, and help translate emerging evidence into practical tools and policies.

This includes engaging diverse sectors —from tourism and labour, to education and care—and building new partnerships with for instance the transport industry, online technology and gaming companies, volunteering organisations, sporting and religious authorities, or in institutions where children are placed or deprived of liberty, who have not been traditionally at the forefront but can influence change where it matters – in the lives of children and communities. Our work ensures that adapted responses are inclusive, locally relevant, survivor-informed, and capable of protecting all children, in all settings.

Interventions: We document learnings, share promising practices, and support locally led, cross-sector solutions. We pilot and refine innovative approaches to tackle emerging issues, develop practical tools, and promote the adaptation and scaling of effective interventions. We advocate for evidence-based change at regional and global levels through creative, audience-tailored campaigns and new advocacy approaches.

Strategic Objective 2. Strengthen and amplify the role of civil society to end the sexual exploitation of children

Civil society organisations (CSOs), who are outside government and businesses, are often the first to detect emerging risks, provide services and support to victims and survivors, mobilise communities on the latest trends, and lead advocacy for updated policies and programmes against the sexual exploitation of children. They bring deep contextual understanding and play a vital role in connecting local experiences to national and global responses. It cannot be understated how important civil society are to promote change. However, mounting challenges and threats jeopardise the pivotal role played by CSOs against this crime. ECPAT International intends to champion this voice and demonstrate why a strong CSO movement is required to succeed in eradicating the sexual exploitation of children.

2.1 - Strengthen and connect civil society to lead effective, evidence-informed, and coordinated action across levels.

We invest in the capacity of CSOs to generate and use evidence, shape local and global agendas, and advocate for context-responsive reforms. We co-create tools, models, and platforms for learning, and strengthen mechanisms for collaboration between civil society, governments, the private sector, and other key actors.

We advocate for enabling environments that allow civil society to function freely and effectively. We document and communicate the impact of CSO-led work, counter restrictive narratives, and champion the essential role of civil society in safeguarding children's rights. We promote the critical role of civil society to remain a force for systemic change. We also work to promote more sustainable, accessible funding for CSOs working to end sexual exploitation.

Interventions: We co-develop tools and facilitate learning opportunities to strengthen civil society's capacity for evidence-based advocacy and impactful change. Leveraging ECPAT's network and diverse partnerships, we act as a knowledge broker, fostering collaboration among CSOs, the private sector, UN agencies and governments, to pilot locally adapted solutions. By linking local knowledge to global policy, we aim to enhance the effectiveness and credibility of the civil society movement against the sexual exploitation of children. We also advocate for safe, independent civil society operations by countering

restrictive narratives, promoting funding access, and facilitating high-level dialogue to protect civic space against child sexual exploitation.

2.2 – Champion a powerful, effective, and coordinated ECPAT network to protect children everywhere

A strong, coordinated civil society network is vital to close gaps, amplify impact, and ensure locally grounded responses inform global action. As a global network, we enhance coordination across regions and sectors, promote ethical and quality standards, and ensure civil society voices are heard in decision-making spaces. We facilitate cross-border collaboration, amplify promising practices, and build collective power to influence policy and challenge harmful narratives that put children at risk.

Interventions: We implement interventions that strengthen collaboration and learning across our network, enabling us to work together across geographies and sectors of intervention. We maximise resources, share knowledge and learnings, foster mutual support to ensure that our collective voice is stronger, smarter, and more impactful. We promote and monitor ethical and quality standards, and act as a knowledge broker and strengthen capacities. We foster and support innovations to address new and evolving forms of child sexual exploitation and harmful narratives.

Strategic Objective 3. Champion meaningful and safe engagement with children, youth, and young survivors to end child sexual exploitation

Children have the right to participate in decisions that affect them, yet they are often excluded from shaping the very systems meant to protect them. They are too often seen as passive recipients of protection, and their views dismissed due to harmful adult attitudes, stigma, or discriminatory beliefs—especially when it comes to complex issues like sexuality, identity, or harm. These dynamics are further reinforced by adult-centric views, gender stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes, and other power imbalances.

ECPAT believes that real and lasting change is only possible when children, in all their diversities, including the more 'hard to reach', are safely and meaningfully engaged — as changemakers, not just as beneficiaries. Participation must be more than tokenistic or symbolic: it must be safe, sustained, and embedded in how we design, deliver, and evaluate interventions. This meaningful engagement is critical to turn the tide and enhance the efficiency of action globally: it requires action *with* children, rather than *for* them. Our strategy calls for urgent, humble action—recognising that children often understand today's fast-changing realities, particularly online, better than we do—and that effective protection depends on listening to and learning from their lived expertise.

3.1 - Pilot and promote innovative and sustained models of engagement with children and youth to transform systems and shift mindsets

We support the design and testing of models that demonstrate how meaningful participation and engagement can lead to stronger, more relevant prevention and response strategies. We work with civil society, governments and the private sector to institutionalise child participation models and structures systematically. We move beyond traditional approaches—such as one-time consultations or storytelling—to co-create inclusive and sustained ways of working with children, including young survivors, as equal partners.

We work with civil society organisations, allies, as well as children and youth to challenge harmful assumptions, strengthen adult capacity to engage meaningfully with children, and centre the leadership of young people to inform changes. Our aim is to re-invent, *with* children, models and practices of participation and co-design solutions to challenging inefficient approaches and outdated systems.

Interventions: We co-develop, test and refine innovative participatory approaches and models that centre the engagement with all children and young people; including survivors. This includes child-led research, peer to peer initiatives, and co-design methods. We ensure ethical safeguards and continuously reflect on and adapt our own practices to lead by example and ensure children's experiences are handled with due respect, care and appropriate support. ECPAT engages in initiatives that can demonstrate in action how we can elevate participation models to step up the way we truly work with children that drive action and changes.

3.2- Connect actors across the world to foster collective capacity to embed child participation into systems and policies

Achieving meaningful participation at scale requires more than good intentions—it requires capacity, tools, political will, and culture change. We work with civil society organisations, professionals, governments, private sector and institutions to strengthen their ability to work with children in safe, respectful, and inclusive ways.

We document and share learning across our network, promote peer exchange, and foster spaces for reflection and critical dialogue. We advocate for child participation to be embedded in policies and practice and work with those shaping children's lives: from teachers and social workers to private sector actors, police forces, sports coaches, and others. Our campaigns and partnerships aim to shift both systems and public perceptions, ensuring children are seen, heard, and respected as full rights-holders.

Interventions: We are not simply facilitators of child and youth participation—we are catalysts for reimagining how it is done. We connect ECPAT members and partners, including child- and youth-led organisations, to spark dialogue, learning, and innovation around inclusive participation models that centre children most often excluded from decision-making. We challenge dominant adult-centric systems by documenting and testing new participatory approaches that strengthen the quality and accountability of protection responses to child sexual exploitation. By doing so, we aim to shift power dynamics and generate evidence that advances systemic change. We engage a wide range of actors—from governments and professionals to the private sector—to support bold campaigns and initiatives that promote meaningful and sustained child and youth participation, not as an add-on, but as a foundational element of effective child protection.

Strategic Objective 4. Mobilise and equip the private sector to protect children and address child sexual exploitation

The private sector plays an essential role in shaping the environments children live in—online and in physical spaces. As such, they have a critical responsibility and unique opportunity to prevent harm, promote protective approaches, and support long-term systemic change.

ECPAT International recognises the potential of private sector leadership in safeguarding children's rights and preventing child [13]exploitation. We work across industries, traditional, emerging and less explored, to embed child protection into business operations, promote ethical practices, and build partnerships grounded in accountability, transparency, and mutual respect.

4.1 - Engage with the private sector to embed impactful and sustained actions across industries and supply and value chains

We engage with companies across industries to analyse risks and impacts on children and integrate child protection into their operations, policies, systems, and value chains through responsible business conduct, innovation, and collaboration. From tourism and information technologies to transport, gaming, and financial institutions, we work with businesses to co-develop practical tools, build internal capacity, and ensure risks to children are identified, prevented, and addressed.

Our work bridges the gap between civil society and the private sector—offering companies the learning, support, and partnerships they need to meet their obligations, lead with purpose, and gain trust, influence, and recognition, centring child protection as a responsibility as well as a strategic advantage.

We support innovative approaches that go beyond risk mitigation to create environments where children are respected, protected, and heard. Together with forward-thinking companies, we position child protection as integral to sustainable business and brand leadership.

Interventions: We support companies in adopting tools, models and training that equip them in leading child protection in their business policies and operations. We aim to strengthen accountability, promote positive narratives, and ensure children's voices help shape responsible business conduct and long-term systemic change.

4.2 - Strengthen ECPAT network and civil society's capacity to partner with the private sector and advocate for safe environments for children

To make private sector engagement more impactful, civil society must be equipped to act as both critical friends and catalysts for innovation. We champion models that enable others to engage constructively with companies—sharing technical guidance, fostering cross-sector learning, and building mutual accountability.

We also advocate for legal and policy frameworks that make children's rights a core component of responsible business conduct. This includes both regulatory measures and voluntary initiatives—such as The Code—to ensure child protection is prioritised and implemented in practice. By influencing business practices and legal systems alike, we aim to create safer environments for children and promote private sector responsibility across physical and digital spaces.

Interventions: We strengthen civil society's capacity to engage the private sector by sharing technical expertise, practical guidance, and cross-learning opportunities. We create safe spaces for dialogue, promote joint advocacy, and ensure children's voices inform business practices. By supporting partnerships, sharing successful models, and advancing child-inclusive policies, we aim to embed child protection in business operations, services, and products. We also advocate for stronger legal frameworks, ethical standards, and regulatory measures, promoting and expanding also voluntary initiatives run with civil society organisations on the ground, like The Code as part of a balanced approach to business accountability and systemic change.

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ECPAT recognises that ambitious systems change requires work on multiple fronts simultaneously. While all four strategic objectives are mutually reinforcing and will be pursued in parallel, we will differentiate the degree of investment, scale, and intensity according to organisational capacity and available resources.

VIII.Key stakeholders and levers of change

Ending the sexual exploitation of children requires bold, sustained collaboration across sectors. ECPAT International partners with a diverse range of actors—each playing a distinct and vital role in prevention, protection, and systemic change. From grassroots civil society to global policymakers, from frontline practitioners to business leaders, and most importantly, children and young survivors themselves—our strategy recognises the unique value each brings in building a safer world for children. Our partners can be both allies who share responsibility and can co-design solutions, contribute resources or expertise but they can also be targets of influence as the protection of children often requires them to shift behaviours, adopt certain standards or practices and be held accountable.

Stakeholder Group	Why we partner with them	What we bring to the table	What change we can make together	A successful partnership example
Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)	CSOs are frontline actors in prevention, support, and accountability. They bring deep local knowledge and legitimacy.	Convening power, shared tools, advocacy platforms, funding access, and safeguarding/participation guidance.	Strengthened, better-connected CSOs that influence national and global responses and co-lead advocacy.	ECPAT members in Sub-Saharan Africa led policy reform efforts and co-created child safeguarding standards.
Children and Youth	Children and young survivors offer lived insight, shape solutions, and demand accountability. They are rights-holders, not just beneficiaries.	Tools, platforms, and frameworks for ethical participation, co-design, and peer-led research and campaigns.	More inclusive, responsive strategies; empowered young people driving change in their communities and institutions.	Global consultations with 81 child survivors informed ICAT's ethical guidelines[14]; Children Know Better pilotsyouth-led advocacy.
Private Sector	Private sector actors influence the environments where sexual exploitation of children occurs, and can help to prevent harm	Evidence, legal analysis, risk and impact analysis tools, due diligence guidance, child protection frameworks, voices	Safer spaces, platforms, workplaces, and supply chains; increased accountability, prevention and	ECPAT and over 350 companies – members of The Code- created a global movement of business embedding child

[14] Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons

		and perspectives of children, survivors and local stakeholders, and partnerships for behaviour and policy change.	response mechanisms.	protection measures in their operations, services, and products.
Policy makers and Governments	They shape the laws, policies, budgets, and systems that protect children—or fail to. Political will is essential to scale and sustain impact.	Evidence, access to survivor and CSO voices, global good practice, and coalition-building support.	Child-sensitive laws, budgets, and implementation frameworks; sustained institutional commitment.	Member-led advocacy in Ecuador, Georgia and Uganda led to new policy frameworks that modernised the fight against sexual exploitation of children.
Practitioners and the Public	Frontline workers and the public shape social norms and children's everyday access to protection or harm.	Awareness campaigns, practical tools, training materials, and community mobilisation models.	Greater recognition of SEC, early identification and referral, and norm shifts around stigma, gender, and accountability.	Teacher and media campaigns in Indonesia, Nepal, or the Netherlands improved awareness and response pathways.

IX. Organisational Development

Network development strategy

The strategy and priorities to continue to grow, strengthen and increase engagement and reach of our civil society network focuses on the areas of governance and standards, communications and member engagement, capacity development, and targeted growth. An overall ambition is to improve processes and utilise resources for network engagement as efficiently as possible considering the challenging external funding environment.

We continue the rollout of the 2024 governance framework to leverage the bottom-up approach central to our added value. A key effort is to develop and rollout a comprehensive set of membership standards including a regular review process to ensure that all ECPAT organisations adhere to agreed values and policies.

We strengthen network communications by better integrating member engagement into our overall strategy, and by testing new channels and ways to deepen connection and reach across the network. This aims to increase engagement with members, provide more relevant content and create more opportunities for increasing visibility of the work of members. A key initiative is to institutionalise the use of the new customer relationship management platform and website for up-to-date information and efficient knowledge management across teams and with members.

We increase opportunities for joint learning and capacity development, using technology and online tools to reach and provide access for members in different time zones and languages. A key initiative is to setup communities of practices on different topics that are open to employees of all members.

We continue to selectively grow the network with new members. The focus is on added value, quality engagement, diversity, and a shared commitment to protect children and fight sexual exploitation. As part of this we seek to build alliances and establish new relationships with other like-minded civil society networks that play a key role in protecting children from sexual exploitation.

The network engagement strategy supports our ambition to build a powerful civil society movement with an engaged and supportive civil society network at its core.

Fit for purpose

ECPAT is adapting and transforming its ways of working to remain a centre of excellence, knowledge, and leadership in the fight against the sexual exploitation of children. We continue to invest in strong technical expertise, while staying grounded in local contexts—particularly in Global Majority Countries where 78% of our members operate. At the same time, we are building the agility, systems, and mindsets needed to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities in an increasingly complex and uncertain world.

In response to a shifting funding landscape and declining support from traditional bilateral donors, ECPAT has to adapt. We prioritise the diversification of its income streams. This includes actively pursuing new and non-traditional donors, as well as exploring innovative fundraising strategies and alternative forms of resource mobilization to ensure long-term sustainability and independence.

As an international network and organisation, we maintain high standards of ethical conduct, and we ensure transparency in our operations and governance. In working at a global level, the compliance with the variety of regulations, in countries with partners who see more and more restrictions in civil society operations, but also with global expansion of anti-laundering and anti-terrorism regulations and data

protection policies, we need to invest substantially to ensure continued adherence through dedicated and professional operations and support teams.

ECPAT's workforce has in recent years consolidated its hybrid office structure with now more than half of the team being based in their country of residence and the other colleagues in our office in Bangkok. While covering multiple time zones and regions to accommodate communications with the membership, the management of such operations is complex in human resource structures and jurisdictions.

We use learning from our cooperation, implementation, and communication in this global reality, and invest as needed in tools and capacity development, to ensure well-being, efficiency, and compliance at the standards that are expected from a global leader in the sector.

X. Funding and Financial Planning

For over 20 years, relatively stable core funding was pivotal in organising our work with a strong workforce and footprint as a Secretariat, investing in our team, systems and core functions with the network. This will come to an end in 2026. This drastic change demands rapid and significant transformation in the way we function.

Historically, ECPAT has traditionally relied on traditional donors to operate. This includes government funds, from the French and Swedish to the Dutch, German, Irish and Canadian. Governmental development investments are being cut massively everywhere in Europe and North America. Changes in global politics means that the reliance and volume of such funding is going down. Equally, established foundations such as Oak, Children's Investment Funds Foundation, Porticus, UBS Foundation, Carlson Family Foundation are stretched and solicited by increasing number of partners. ECPAT can no longer assume such relationships will suffice to continue its overall work.

ECPAT has already responded and adapted to change in the last 4 years with increasing the ratio of restricted grant funding vis-a-vis core funding. This also means that core funding is essential to complement restricted funding, but is increasingly difficult to secure, thus requiring innovative approach and more intentional, effective and strategic use and promotion of our flagship products and approaches that make ECPAT an essential actor in the child protection sector, to still secure the resources needed to deliver on our mission and strategic framework.

Today's and tomorrow's funding opportunities:

1) Traditional donors

ECPAT has had success since its creation in building strong connections with governments and foundations who have supported, support and can continue to support ECPAT. This is foundational in our strategy

forward. This refers to existing donors as well as prospective ones that fund core or projects – but they all fall in this category of traditional partners that have been prioritised in our decades of existence to secure our action. Our continued success there requires to nurture existing relationships, including through the appreciation of the quality of our project implementation, and expand them. It will not be sufficient to ensure alone the future as ECPAT as it did in the past, but it remains an important part of the strategy.

2) Faith-based donors

This is a historical line of relationships that dates back to the origin of the ECPAT movement. The faith-based funding has enabled ECPAT to conduct many critical actions since its inception. Today, these sources of funding experience similar pressure as others and it is far from being easily accessible. But there is indeed money invested that continues to be available, and oftentimes rather flexible in the way the funding processes are structured.

3) Private sector engagement

ECPAT has a long history of engagement with the private sector, most notably in travel and tourism. The successful running of The Code since the 1990s, and the revenue it generates both for ECPAT and members who are involved, are testimonies that it is possible for ECPAT to transform such relationships in a source of income.

In the Supervisory Board meeting of June 2025, five sectors were identified for offering the greatest potential for a combination of technical added value and fundraising:

a) Travel and tourism
b) Entertainment industry
c) Online Gaming Industry
d) Financial sector
e) Transport sector

Financial planning and monitoring

Annual budgets are developed by the Executive Director and approved by the Supervisory Board. The budget is clearly presented in expenditure based on secured funding and based on projected new funding during the year, with indication of levels of confidence and mitigation measures and moments for the case where projected funds are not realised.
On quarterly basis the Executive Director provides an update to the Supervisory Board of actual expenditure levels and updated projected expenditure against original budget.

For a mostly project fund based organisation, full cost-recovery through project funding, including for administration and management, is a key principle for our funding applications.

Our accounting system supports monitoring with sub-classes for each project grant, and donor report generation from these accounts sub-classes. Annual audited organisational accounts provide fund flow information per grant to provide full transparency to our project donors.

For a network and advocacy organisation, the majority of our expenses are staff costs. Other costs are travel, consultants, meeting organisation, and research. For project funds awarded to us as a consortium lead, we have partnering policies and procedures that guides the sub-awarding to project partners. A Finance and Administration Manual provides guidance and procedures for the financial and administrative processes, and is reviewed every 3-4 years and approved by the Supervisory Board.

The organisation has a Reserve Policy with a target of nine months core operational costs. In 2026 the reserve level is at target.

XI. Striving for Quality and Impact

ECPAT is committed to ensuring that our work delivers meaningful, measurable, and lasting change. Through a robust approach to Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning, we track progress against our strategic goals, generate evidence of our contribution to change, and continuously adapt and improve our work. This also underpins our accountability—to children, to our members and partners, and to the donors who support our mission.

Purpose and Approach

Our Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning prioritises learning, inclusion, and child participation over compliance. Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, we focus on contribution—not just attribution—and embed participatory, gender-sensitive, and child-inclusive tools wherever possible. MEL is used to:

- **Track progress** against strategy outcomes and outputs,
- **Generate evidence** of contribution and change,
- **Support adaptive learning**, and
- **Ensure accountability** to children, members, partners, and donors.

Measuring Change

We assess our progress across six strategic objectives, using targeted indicators and tools such as research uptake plans, advocacy tracking, participation feedback, and private sector assessments. Sample indicators include:

- **Evidence uptake** and use in policy/practice
- **Legal or policy changes** influenced by advocacy
- Strengthened **civil society collaboration and leadership**
- Quality of **child participation**
- **Private sector adoption** or promotion of child protection standards
- **Service delivery improvements** and narrative shifts

Learning Priorities

ECPAT explores how to:

- Strengthen cross-border CSO leadership and coordination
- Shift power to local actors while ensuring accountability
- Engage diverse private sector and practitioner audiences
- Promote gender equity, norm change, and child-led advocacy
- Adapt to external trends—technological, political, and demographic