LEAP

Leadership in Empowering and Activating Child Helplines to Protect Children Online

• 4 Regional stakeholder activation meetings and 4 regional meeting reports.

• 22 countries surveyed on the role of child helplines in the fight against child sexual abuse online.

• 1 final LEAP report – with key findings and recommendations.

• Child Helpline International’s Youth Advisory Council participation in the project.
Child Helpline International (CHI) is committed to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse in all its forms, and is proud to be a partner in the WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Child Sexual Exploitation Online. As such, Child Helpline International undertook the Leadership in Empowering and Activating Child Helplines to Protect Children Online (LEAP) project in early 2016, in partnership with UNICEF as a part of the 2015/2016 UNICEF Global Programme to Build Capacity to Tackle Online Child Sexual Exploitation. This was supported by the UK Government under the WePROTECT initiative with the aim to review the capacities of child helplines in combatting and responding to Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse online.

One of the key results of the WePROTECT initiative is the Model National Response, a descriptive model that sets out the main capabilities required at a country level to coordinate the response to child sexual exploitation and abuse. Child helplines are at the centre of the prevention and response section of the Model National Response for victims of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA).

Child Helpline International (CHI) is one of the world’s largest collective impact organisations, a network of 183 independent organisations that listen and help children and young people in 142 countries. A child’s right to be heard as enshrined in article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the founding principle of Child Helpline International and its members.

CHI coordinates the network’s global and regional advocacy, facilitates knowledge transfer, capacity building and communication amongst its child helpline members, influences policy and works with other global and regional organisation to improve children’s lives. The network receives over 14 million contacts a year from children and young people.

Key Stakeholders in the CHI LEAP Project:

- Child Helpline International
- Child Helplines
- UNICEF
- NGO’s/INGO’s/Civil Society
- National Governments
- Telecoms and ICT Sector
- Regional Political Bodies

Regional Stakeholder Activation Meetings

• 26 countries • 60 expert speakers • 180 attendees •

Child Helplines in the Model National Response

Victim1

1 Child Helpline: Victim reporting and support; referrals to services for ongoing assistance

1 Complete file:
In addition to the categories of Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA) included in the survey (e.g. children being involved in the creation or exposed to child abuse images), the consultations provided rich insights on the type of risks that children face during their online interactions. Respondents mentioned online and social media addiction, identity theft, impersonation and harassment through false social media profiles, as part of online peer to peer violence, online grooming leading to kidnapping and trafficking, and access and exposure to inappropriate content including online pornography.

Regarding priority of Child Online Protection (COP) in child helpline operations, 21% of child helplines designated it high priority, for 57% of child helplines this was in the mid-priority range, with COP partly integrated in their strategy and planning, and 29% of respondents reported that they do not yet have concrete plans around COP, but recognise it as an important topic.

The child helpline’s knowledge of their respective country’s legislation on COP varied significantly, with some being involved in providing inputs towards the drafting of country laws and others having more limited knowledge or engagement in such processes. Some child helplines mentioned that their country has no specific, or inadequate, law currently addressing COP, while others reported that the government is recognising online protection issues as an emerging trend and drafting legislation to address this. On a scale of 1-5 (five being the highest), most child helplines self-ranked themselves between rankings 2 and 3 for cooperation with referral networks on COP. Many have strong referral networks on child protection, but do not yet have formalised agreements on COP specifically.

Most child helplines and their staff have had some level of basic orientation and training on COP issues. However, in order to equip themselves to adequately handle cases of COP, they need advanced training on call response, counselling, case management, victim identification and support, legal knowledge and are keen on exchanges with expert child helplines, manuals, and protocol models.

All child helplines recognise that awareness raising among children, parents, schools, communities, and the public is a crucial step to inform target populations that they can also reach out to their child helplines on online issues. Currently online child sexual exploitation and abuse incidents are often underreported, especially by children.

Most child helplines do not yet have specific protocols for child online abuse and exploitation, and are using their standard procedures for abuse cases. Some child helplines refer such cases to police cybercrime departments using reporting mechanisms put into place by the IT departments of government state prosecutors or social welfare departments. Many child helplines report a lack of national mechanisms, protocols and trained service providers, limiting their efforts to address CSEA cases.

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1. There is an urgent need to build the capacity of child helplines to tackle online child sexual exploitation and abuse. As internet access becomes more widely available in the 17 target countries child helplines can anticipate and do much to thwart the growth of online child sexual abuse and exploitation. They can act as an early warning system and vital referral mechanism not just for cases of online sexual exploitation but other online violence and abuse. By systematic incident management system, they can also provide relevant data on trends and patterns of online CSEA.

This capacity building should focus on the following areas:

- Training for child helpline counsellors on the terminology and taxonomy of online CSEA and other online abuse as well as ongoing training on online technologies and platforms in general, including the use and abuse of the internet, social media, websites, etc.

- Training for child helpline counsellors on decision trees for referral and possible intervention on cases of online CSEA.

- Training for child helpline counsellors on call and contact response to online CSEA, from counselling to intervention.

- Training for child helpline staff at all levels, from senior management through to call responders, on data capture, collection, and analysis of contacts received on online CSEA.

2. Build capacity to use all channels of communication for children to contact child helplines, including online channels such as SMS/chat, email, message boards, etc. Where applicable relevant mobile applications can provide useful venues for reporting incident, providing guidance and seeking support.

3. Child helplines must reinforce their referral networks and partnerships with networks and entities linked to law enforcement, prosecution, reporting of illegal content online, child protection and other stakeholders such as industry players. Good practice examples of effective referral and partnership networks should be the models followed wherever possible.

4. Capacity building for child helpline staff, including senior management, in using data and stories collected to inform, advocate, influence and change policy and its enforcement and to build awareness amongst the general public.
Governments, civil society and international NGO’s should ensure that every country’s child helpline is appropriately funded and meets the minimum quality standards of Child Helpline International.

All child helplines should have effective referral networks to report, intervene, and respond to victims of CSEA as well as to help identify perpetrators. There should be written protocols with some of the referral partners like hotlines to which the general public can report online sexual abuse material and other inappropriate content, where they exist, and with law enforcement. Where written protocols are not feasible or desirable, there should be established channels of communication.

Outreach and dissemination are key to the success of child helplines in engaging with children and young people and in ensuring that they are a trusted source of information and counselling. Child helplines should be sufficiently robust to support such outreach and to cope with the outcome of successful campaigns that often result in an important increase in contacts to child helplines.

The regional approach, with its shared contexts, language, culture and other factors, is valued by all stakeholders, including governments and industry. The establishment of regional networks is strongly recommended and lends itself well to tackling cross-border nature of online CSEA.

Engaging with all stakeholders in the issue is essential: governments, law enforcement, civil society industry, and international organisations.

Child Helpline International is a key convenor/engagement partner for the regional approach and in bringing together the diverse actors that are crucial for child helplines to gear up to address and respond to the issue of CSEA and the protection of children online. In this respect the partnership with UNICEF was instrumental in bringing the lead actors together and in working collaboratively with different stakeholders to identify and solidify their role in preventing and tackling online CSEA.

Child Helplines are internationally recognised as crucial components in the fight against Child Sexual Abuse Online.

See more at www.childhelplineinternational.org