



ChildFund International

Protecting Children from Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSEAC)

ChildFund®

“I didn’t understand what was happening,” says Magiting (17)*, a Filipina teenager whom neighbors coerced into sexual exploitation that was streamed online. “What they were doing was not good and not right. I was scared that somebody would tell the police and I’d be put in jail.”

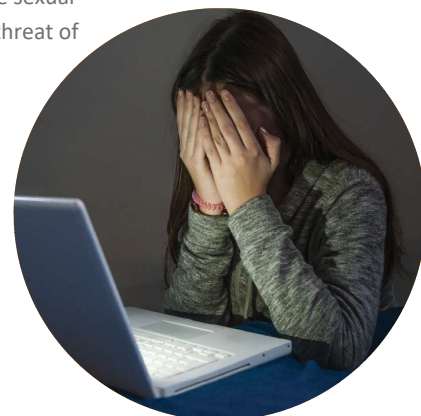
Magiting is not alone in her experience. Online sexual exploitation and abuse of children (OSEAC) is growing exponentially every year. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has experienced a 28% increase in global reports of suspected child sexual exploitation compared to March 2019. In 2020 alone, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received 21.7 million reports of suspected child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) including 65.4 million videos, images, and files.

OSEAC is the production and online publication of visuals – including videos and photographs – depicting the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, and offenders often share these visuals cross-nationally. The increasing threat of OSEAC goes hand-in-hand with the spread of easily available and cheap internet access worldwide. This horrific crime damages children’s psychosocial well-being and development and increases their vulnerability to further abuse and exploitation, including trafficking. Fueling the problem is a lack of understanding of OSEAC, in part because it is severely underreported. Many survivors do not come forward because they fear stigma, feel trapped in their abusive situations or mistakenly fear legal ramifications. Making matters worse is the fact that it is often the survivors’ own family members facilitating the abuse, as they try to lift their families out of poverty and wrongly assuming that the virtual nature of the crime makes it a harmless way to earn money.

The situation is being exacerbated by the COVID19- pandemic. As schools around the world closed to stem the spread of the virus, children were expected to complete their schoolwork online. In some areas, there has been a 50 percent increase in internet usage since the pandemic began, with a similar increase in the amount of time that children ages 6-12 spend on their screens. Because research has shown that emotionally vulnerable children -- such as those facing elevated stress levels due to the pandemic – are at a higher risk to be targeted by offenders, this is especially concerning. What’s more, the pandemic has placed caregivers in the difficult role of juggling income-generating and caregiving responsibilities. As a result, much of children’s time online is subject to limited supervision.

Together, these elements put children at great risk of OSEAC.

* Name has been changed to protect the individual’s privacy.



Our Response



With more than 80 years of experience empowering, protecting and bettering the lives of children around the globe, ChildFund is uniquely positioned to address this issue. In response to the heightened threats that children now face due to COVID19-, ChildFund launched a global plan to reach 6.3 million children and families by helping them meet their basic needs, access safe and engaging learning opportunities and keep children protected from violence, including OSEAC. But even before the onset of COVID19-, ChildFund was working to address OSEAC in our program countries.

ChildFund has joined the growing momentum across [technology companies](#), international alliances such as [NetHope](#), [WePROTECT Global Alliance](#), [civil society](#) and the media to address the scourge of this global problem. In 2019, we conducted a study among nearly 5,500 children ages 10-12 in 15 countries to determine their perceptions of violence. The results were shocking:

Children view a significant part of their environment as insecure, highlighting online spaces as one of the places with the highest risk. In fact, nearly 4 out of 10 children who participated in the research think the internet and social media are not safe spaces for people their age.

In 2019, ChildFund launched the #ShutdownOSEC campaign in the Philippines on social media with the country's leading civil society network for children to urge the government to prioritize OSEAC and take stronger actions to address it. With the help of the network's collective expertise, ChildFund led the charge to address exploitation by holding the OSEAC Summit, which brought together local youth, policymakers, the media and technology companies to increase their understanding of OSEAC and ensure their commitment to tackling the issue. Across the world in Mexico, we have been working with the Mexican Center for Electronic Crimes Against Minors (CENADEM) to educate our program communities on how to report suspected cases of OSEAC using the CENADEM app.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children as access and dependency to the internet has grown exponentially. To address the increased risk of OSEAC due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ChildFund is looking to build on our work through a series of projects in Indonesia, Ecuador, Kenya, Bolivia, and the United States.

- In Kenya, ChildFund partnered with Google this year to launch an online safety project with the Communications Authority of Kenya, Telecom leaders, and Civil Society Organizations to deliver the first comprehensive campaign of its kind.
- In the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ecuador, ChildFund has developed programs to address systemic issues and root causes through grassroots community awareness campaigns, at-home training activities, educational games for children and their families, and engaging the tech sector to amplify our reach to a broader audience.
- In Mexico, ChildFund is partnering with the federal government to increase awareness of and efforts to address OSEAC, including participating in government-led initiatives like National Cybersecurity Week.
- In Ecuador, ChildFund is leading the development of Ecuador's national hotline for reporting OSEAC in collaboration with the government and INHOPE, a global network of CSAM reporting hotlines. The software will be used to analyze images reported through the application and investigate their origin. Additionally, we have been partnering with child protection experts to hold workshops on OSEAC for law enforcement officials (LEOs). The meetings include educating LEOs on the harms of OSEAC, training on CSAM reporting software, and the other reporting mechanisms they should use to combat its occurrence.
- In the U.S., through support from Oak Foundation, ChildFund is bringing together domestic and international-focused civil society organizations, including UNICEF-USA, that are working to address OSEAC through different angles – awareness-raising, survivor support, law enforcement training, technology development – into one space to break down artificial silos and identify better ways of working together to advance stronger, more holistic OSEAC-related policies.

As the world becomes more interconnected, the need to combat the growing phenomenon of OSEAC is gaining urgency. While ChildFund is committed to working to protect children, ensuring children's safety in digital spaces will require a strong, lasting commitment from a wide range of actors. Together, we can achieve a safer environment for children, both online and off.

Images are stock photos and are not children in our program.

25+
Partner Orgs

1.1 Million
People Reached via
Online Campaigns

#SHUTDOWNOSEAC
#NAVEGUEMOSSEGUROS



4
Tech Collaborations
(GOOGLE, TIKTOK,
TWITTER, FACEBOOK)

1000+
Parental-Controlled
Tablets Distributed
in Ecuador

**CHILD FUND INTERNATIONAL HAS
LOCAL OFFICES IN 24 COUNTRIES AND
A WIDER ALLIANCE NETWORK IN 70
COUNTRIES.**

2000+
Youth & Caregivers
Trained in Online
Safety

100+
Youth Community
Ambassadors
Trained in Online
Safety

CHILD FUND ANTI-OSEAC PROGRAMS

#Viral Awareness Campaigns	Gamified Education Tools
Training	Coalitions
Child Safety Mapping	Family Resources

LESSONS LEARNED

- Lack of Awareness:** The most significant challenge ChildFund Country Offices have identified is the lack of awareness of online safety risks amongst policymakers, law enforcement, social service providers, and the general public.
- Lack of Data:** There are limited studies focused on expanding our understanding of OSEAC. Not only do we still not know the full extent of OSEAC prevalence, but we also have limited data on how children and youth are using digital technologies and engaging with social media. Furthermore, there is limited information on how OSEAC affects vulnerable populations like children with disabilities and which prevention interventions are the most successful.
- Capacity Building:** Law enforcement and social service providers' need for capacity-building on OSEAC.
- Lack of Coordination:** Silos between different entities working on the various facets of OSEAC. E.g., Training social service providers, survivor support, prevention, Law enforcement partnerships, duplicate OSEAC reports to agencies, and more.