



PROTECTING CHILDREN IN MOZAMBIQUE FROM ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE: THE WAY FORWARD

Children in Mozambique are facing harm from online sexual exploitation and abuse. According to *Disrupting Harm* data, 13% of internet-using children aged 12-17 in Mozambique were subjected to clear instances of online sexual exploitation and abuse. This included being blackmailed to engage in sexual activities, having their sexual images shared without their permission, or being coerced to engage in sexual activities through promises of money or gifts. Furthermore, public awareness and understanding of the risks remain low, prevention efforts are underdeveloped, and children are not always able to access specialist support when needed. The government, law enforcement, justice professionals, industry and society can all do more to respond to online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA) and disrupt the harm this is causing children in Mozambique.

Recommended actions

To support the implementation of a sustained response to OCSEA, *Disrupting Harm in Mozambique* lays out an actionable blueprint to protect children through a series of evidence-based recommendations spanning legislation, law enforcement, justice processes, social services, and public awareness. These recommendations call on the Government of Mozambique and its partners to act, educate and invest.

Act

- Establish or appoint a lead government body to coordinate OCSEA response and prevention, avoid duplication efforts across ministries by streamlining the mandates and responsibilities for efficient use of resources.
- Explicitly criminalise live-streaming of child sexual abuse, online grooming of children for sexual purposes, and the sexual extortion of children committed or facilitated in the online environment.
- Amend the legislation on child sexual abuse material in order to explicitly cover depictions of a child's body for sexual purposes, as well as types of content other than solely visual material, and bring it fully into line with the standards set by the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.
- Remove discrepancies in the penalties associated with conduct related to child sexual abuse material, to ensure equal protection for children, no matter their age nor the purpose for which the material was produced, possessed or transferred.
- Allow for anonymous reporting of crimes, including OCSEA, to the police.
- Implement communications campaigns to inform children and the general public about the available reporting mechanisms. It is important that these services are strengthened and well-resourced to ensure they can provide children with the support they need.
- Develop and implement guidelines on interviewing children during the criminal justice process and train prosecutors and judges on how to handle OCSEA cases and deliver child-friendly justice.

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- Provide children who report online sexual exploitation and abuse offences – and their caregivers – with a standard information package about their rights, including the right to compensation, and the procedures that will follow.
- Create mechanisms for collaboration on OCSEA between law enforcement and civil society organisations, including secure information exchange platforms for sharing evidence.
- Collect data and monitor OCSEA cases on the national and local levels. Systematic recording and classification of cases by law enforcement will facilitate in developing evidence-based prevention and response mechanisms to OCSEA.
- Prioritise establishing a national connection to INTERPOL's International Child Sexual Exploitation database, allowing law enforcement in Mozambique to join a community of law enforcement officers from 67 member countries working to address OCSEA. This will reduce duplication of efforts and enable a more effective response through collaboration and proactive surveillance.

Educate

- Deliver a nationwide, community-based awareness and education campaign on the threat of OCSEA to help those with a duty of care for children – such as caregivers, teachers and medical staff – to recognise the risks and benefits of online communication tools and understand how to be involved in a child's internet use and have a more open dialogue where a child could face harm online.
 - Invest in improving digital literacy of children, caregivers and teachers. This could be done by adding computer and online protection classes to the school curriculum and disseminating messages in local languages about the use of digital platforms and technologies via TV, radio and school meetings. If possible, build on existing awareness campaigns.
 - Ensure that children receive age-appropriate and culturally appropriate sex education, including information on sexual consent, personal boundaries, the risks and responsibilities of online activities (e.g. when taking, sending and receiving sexual images), and how to seek help if needed. Ensure that information reaches all children, including out-of-school children, children with disabilities, children affected by migration and street-connected children.
- Regularly train police officers, prosecutors, judges, lawyers, courtroom staff and child protection officers on OCSEA and child-friendly procedures. Ensure these trainings are provided in areas outside the urban centres too. Existing child protection training materials can be adapted to include OCSEA.
 - Promote awareness of OCSEA among relevant private sector entities, including internet, mobile and financial services providers, to ensure companies of all sizes have a better understanding of the risks children face online and of measures needed to combat OCSEA. Promote multi-sectoral initiatives, to develop and/or strengthen internal child protection policies.

Invest

- Create a dedicated budget for OCSEA prevention and response, adequately fund all agencies involved in tackling OCSEA, and support the creation of an effective mechanism to ensure that international OCSEA referrals receive an appropriate level of police investigation.
- Invest in assessing the capacity of law enforcement responses to OCSEA. Make sure that officers are knowledgeable on OCSEA, are trained in conducting OCSEA investigations, are equipped with specialised equipment, know how to collaborate with Internet service providers and global social media platforms and how to respond to NCMEC CyberTips.
- Create a dedicated specialised police unit, or place specialised officers within an existing unit, to investigate OCSEA cases. This unit or team should be composed of officers with experience in cases of both online and offline crimes against children, and should have a public-facing reporting desk, with child-friendly spaces and technical tools and forensic capacity on-site.
- Invest in research involving justice professionals who have worked on OCSEA cases, as well as with children who have been subjected to OCSEA and have engaged with the formal justice process. While the legislation can theoretically provide support for children, confirming how it works in practice is essential for strengthening response systems.
- Dedicate resources to the police and to hotlines to improve their record keeping on OCSEA, so that more accurate and precise data can help inform prevention efforts.

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Key insights

Through various research activities, *Disrupting Harm in Mozambique* has identified six key insights:

1. In the past one year alone, 13% of internet-users aged 12-17 in Mozambique were subjected to clear examples of online sexual exploitation and abuse that included being blackmailed to engage in sexual activities, having their sexual images shared without permission, or being coerced to engage in sexual activities through promises of money or gifts. Scaled to the national population, this represents an estimated 300,000 12-17-yearold internet-using children who were subjected to any of these harms in the span of just one year.
2. Most OCSEA offenders (about 65%) are someone the child already knows. These crimes can happen while children spend time online, or in person but involving technology.
3. Children experienced OCSEA mainly through the major social media platforms, most commonly via Facebook/Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.
4. The majority of children were more inclined to disclose being victims of OCSEA to their interpersonal networks rather than to helplines or the police. A notable proportion of children (30%) did not tell anyone about their OCSEA experiences.
5. *Disrupting Harm* was not able to identify any OCSEA cases that the justice system has processed. No data on recorded national crimes related to OCSEA were available. While interviews with government officials shed some light on the response systems in Mozambique, there is an urgent need to invest in further research and evaluation of the OCSEA response mechanisms of law enforcement and judicial systems.
6. OCSEA-related legislation, policies and standards are limited in Mozambique, hindering the criminal justice system to address OCSEA and victims to access justice.

The full report and complete list of recommendations can be found at: www.end-violence.org/disrupting-harm

About Disrupting Harm

Disrupting Harm in Mozambique is part of an unprecedented, multi-country research project on OCSEA, focusing on 13 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia. This large-scale research project draws on the expertise of ECPAT, INTERPOL, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, and their global networks of partners. Disrupting Harm is supported by the [Fund to End Violence Against Children](#), through its Safe Online initiative.

In Mozambique, research took place from early 2020 to early 2021. Research activities included a comprehensive analysis of the legislation, policy

and systems addressing OCSEA in Mozambique, interviews with representatives from the Government of Mozambique and a range of public bodies and organisations active in the country, a survey with frontline service providers and a nationally representative household survey with internet-using children and their caregivers.

Data from these multiple sources were compared and triangulated to produce the *Disrupting Harm in Mozambique* national report. Recommendations from the data were presented and discussed at a national consultation event held on June 17th 2022 in Maputo.