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Experts unveil practical plan to end technology-facilitated child sexual abuse crisis: Prevention Framework launched with Global Threat Assessment 2025

WeProtect Global Alliance report finds that latest shifts in tech and society are endangering children and unveils new cross-sector tool for preventing abuse.

- There was a 1,325% rise in reports linked to AI-generated child sexual abuse material to NCMEC between 2023 and 2024.
- Societal and behavioural shifts including growing recognition of children displaying harmful sexual behaviours and links to extremism, violence and financial scams are driving online child sexual exploitation and abuse.
- New Prevention Framework launched providing practical tool for technology companies, governments, civil society organisations and intergovernmental organisations to tackle the crisis.

The Global Threat Assessment 2025, launched today by WeProtect Global Alliance, finds that global safeguards to protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse are failing to keep up with the rapidly evolving crisis.

The report shows that despite growing international momentum and legislation to tackle the issue and improved detection and removal of harmful content, both technological and societal shifts have heightened the risks to children online since 2023.

It provides a comprehensive synthesis of globally available data, expert analysis, youth and survivor perspectives and case studies from organisations working on the frontline of tackling technology-facilitated sexual abuse. The research was conducted by the CPC Learning Network at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, with contributions from an Expert Steering Committee and global leaders from WeProtect Global Alliance's membership, consisting of 350+ organisations around the world.

Iain Drennan, Executive Director of WeProtect Global Alliance said:

"The Global Threat Assessment 2025 shows that the online child sexual exploitation and abuse crisis continues to evolve along with rapid technological change, societal shifts and concerning behavioural trends, and persists as an urgent threat to children's safety around the world. Central to this year's report, however, is the message that we already have the solutions; preventative approaches are key to solving this crisis. We need every sector and every country to play their part. The Prevention Framework launched with this year's report provides an accessible and practical tool to enable that."

Technological drivers of abuse

The rapid advancement and adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has contributed to an explosion in the creation and distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM), with **NCMEC seeing a 1,325% increase in reports between 2023 and 2024 (NCMEC)**.

Perpetrators are also adapting to digital spaces such as end-to-end encryption platforms to groom children and evade detection. The report flags additional changes to the digital landscape that have significant potential to impact on children's safety in the coming years, including quantum computing, decentralisation and extended reality (XR).

The report highlights the increasingly blurred distinction between children's online and offline experiences as digital technologies are now an embedded and seamless part of most aspects of everyday life for many, permeating relationships, education, leisure and beyond. Youth access to the internet outpaces the general population by 13% and the majority of children in a study spanning 55 countries started using a digital device before the age of 10 (Slater SO et.al).

The research makes clear the need to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse in all spaces, whether digital or in-person, but reveals that 60% of the top global content-sharing platforms do not publish any information on how they address child sexual exploitation (OECD).

Societal drivers of abuse

The report finds that the criminal activity of financial sexual extortion has grown to be a major threat, with **NCMEC receiving approximately 100 reports of financial sexual extortion every day in 2024 (NCMEC)**.

The research also identifies a complex web of harms that increasingly overlap and intersect with the issue of child sexual exploitation and abuse. These include the issues of self-harm, terrorist and violent extremist content and a growing concern around children who display harmful sexual behaviours and peer-to-peer abuse.

Experts issue urgent call to move to prevention-based strategies

At the heart of this year's report is a global call to action for a decisive shift from reactive approaches which tackle the problem after abuse has taken place, towards proactive prevention, in line with public-health approaches that have been successful in reducing harms from smoking and car accidents.

The new Prevention Framework launched as part of the report provides a practical tool and tailored recommendations for civil society organisations, governments, private sector companies, academia and intergovernmental organisations, to safeguard children online. It is designed to be used alongside existing tools such as WeProtect Global Alliance's [Model National Response Framework](#) and underscores the need for cross-sector action and the centrality of including child, youth and survivor voices in the response.

The Global Threat Assessment 2025 also highlights the economic cost of failing to invest in prevention-based approaches and the urgent need to close the global funding gap. It cites that violence against children can cost countries up to 11% of GDP, and that \$5 billion is spent annually on incarcerating adults convicted of sex crimes against children in the United States which drastically outweighs spending on prevention (Safe Online).

The Prevention Framework is organised around four connected action areas which aim to prioritise safety by design, strengthen regulations, boost services for children, survivors and potential offenders and raise awareness and education in communities:

- Child participation and leadership
- Community education and support
- Digital safety
- Law, policy, and justice

Cassie Landers, EdD, MPH Assistant Professor and Director of the CPC Learning Network, Columbia University said:

“The 2025 Global Threat Assessment provides a powerful action-oriented framework for tackling the complex global threat of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Fast-emerging technology-driven exposures threaten and thwart children’s growth development across all domains. These threats appear faster than our capacity to shape, define and implement safeguards. But as noted in the report, there is an emerging global movement. Children’s voices are no longer silent. Rather, they have been uplifted to a vital role helping us to better understand risk factors, comprehend behavioral and physical impact, and identify realistic sustainable solutions. There is no time to wait. Public Health epidemiologists and social scientists have a critical role in filling existing data gaps and analyzing what works and why.”

To access the full Global Threat Assessment 2025 and the Prevention Framework, visit:
<http://www.weprotect.org/global-threat-assessment-25/>

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Supporting quotes from Expert Steering Committee

Aengus Ó Dochartaigh, MOORE, Preventing Child Sexual Abuse, Johns Hopkins University

“The Global Threat Assessment is more than WeProtect’s flagship publication, it is a guiding hand for the whole sector, worldwide. It is inspiring and momentous to see ‘prevention’ placed right at its heart. We have been honoured to contribute to the GTA 2025. Our collective aim must be to stop children from suffering harm in the first place, and that’s why prevention is so critical.”

Afroz Kavani Johnson, UNICEF

“Every child harmed through digital technologies is one too many. The 2025 Global Threat Assessment confirms what we are witnessing worldwide: Emerging technologies, including generative AI, are amplifying risks and adding to an already complex child protection landscape. But, momentum for change is growing. Children and young people, parents, communities, and governments are taking action. This is our moment to shift from reactive measures to proactive prevention - embedding child rights and safety-by-design into technology, and addressing the drivers of sexual abuse and exploitation including harmful norms that silence children and enable perpetrators.”

Anil Raghuvanshi, ChildSafeNet

"On behalf of ChildSafeNet, I am honoured to contribute as a member of the GTA 2025 Steering Committee. I hope the GTA 2025 report will provide a clearer understanding of policy progress, response mechanisms and the gaps that still place children at risk. It can also serve as an important tool for global advocacy, urging governments and the tech industry to strengthen action and increase investment to protect children online, especially amid emerging threats such as the harmful use of AI."

Beth Hepworth, Client Director at Protection Group International

"The Global Threat Assessment highlights that tackling the complex and rapidly evolving risks to children online requires a united, multi-stakeholder approach. Coordinated collaboration between governments, industry, civil society and law enforcement is essential. PGI is proud to have contributed to this important initiative as part of the WeProtect Global Alliance, helping to drive tangible actions and protect children from online abuse."

Carolina Piñeros, RedPapaz

"Red PaPaz is proud to have contributed to the Global Threat Assessment 2025 as part of the Steering Committee. The report shows that child protection online cannot rely on families alone; it requires state leadership, clear obligations for platforms, and sustained international cooperation. For Latin America, this is an urgent call to strengthen reporting systems, timely responses and regulatory frameworks that put children first."

Dan Sexton, Chief Technology Officer, Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)

"The WeProtect annual Global Threat Assessment is an important resource for Governments, industry, and civil society groups for understanding and tackling child sexual abuse online. The IWF are proud to have been able to contribute to this year's report, we are supportive of the public health approach and hope to see the framework and recommendations adopted across sectors."

Debra Clelland, DeafKidz International

"When a child scores zero on basic online safety – that's not just a statistic, that's a child in immediate danger being left exposed online. Every day we delay taking action, more vulnerable children are at risk."

Elena Martellozzo, Childlight, Global Child Safety Institute, University of Edinburgh

"Childlight is proud to contribute to the Global Threat Assessment 2025. Offering a critical eye to the data and methodologies ensures that the findings are robust, transparent, and actionable. This work is essential to strengthening child protection worldwide, and I am glad to represent Childlight in advancing this mission."

Sean Litton, President & CEO, Tech Coalition

"WeProtect's latest Global Threat Assessment does a great job of highlighting the key issues relating to online child sexual exploitation and abuse. As the threat evolves, these insights help industry focus innovation, expertise, and resources where they can have the greatest impact. We welcome the report's new prevention framework—getting upstream is key to stopping abuse before it happens. It's also encouraging to see innovative cross-industry



Global Alliance

solutions highlighted, including our Lantern program, showing what is possible when companies work together to build a safer digital world for children."

Nina Vaaranen-Valkonen, Executive Director, Senior Specialist, Psychotherapist at Protect Children; Victim Services and Offender Management Sub-Group Chair, Interpol SGCAC

"Protect Children works with research-based holistic methods addressing child sexual violence before it occurs. We listen to the voices and wisdom of survivors, support their parents and caregivers, produce up-to-date educational materials, conduct robust advocacy work, research offenders, and develop perpetration prevention programs. It is a great honor to share the results of our work in the Global Threat Assessment Report 2025. Our groundbreaking ReDirection Self-Help Program effectively reduces and ends urges to use child sexual abuse material by offering a low-threshold, anonymous, and CBT-based online resource that guides offenders towards behavioral change."

Ricardo de Lins e Horta, Brazil Government

"Countries in the Global South have long been fighting to eliminate double standards in online child protection. The victimization of children in digital environments is a challenge that transcends borders and demands coordinated responses involving governments, industry, and civil society. This report calls on all of us to exercise this shared responsibility."

Sambath Sokunthea, Cambodian Government

"The internet has no borders; a crime committed in one country can harm a child in another in seconds. This is why we must act together, across nations."

Soyoung Park, South Korean Regulator, KCSC

Available on request.

Wirawan Boom Mosby, The HUG Project Thailand

"Technology is evolving faster than ever, and no single institution, sector, or country can confront technology-facilitated child exploitation alone. Protecting children in this digital age is our shared responsibility—and our collective duty."

Notes to Editors

About WeProtect Global Alliance

WeProtect Global Alliance is a global movement bringing more than 350 government, private sector and civil society organisations working together to transform the global response to child sexual exploitation and abuse online.

The Alliance is the largest and most diverse global movement dedicated to ending child sexual exploitation and abuse online. It supports and generates political commitment and practical approaches to make the digital world safe and positive for children, preventing sexual abuse and long-term harm.

For more information visit <https://www.weprotect.org/>

For press enquiries please contact the WeProtect Global Alliance press office at media@weprotectga.org

About the CPC Learning Network, Columbia University

The Care and Protection of Children (CPC) Learning Network, housed at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, advances child health and well-being through research, policy, and practice. With partners in over 20 countries, the CPC generates rigorous, locally grounded evidence and tools to strengthen child protection systems and promote the well-being of children, youth, and families globally.

For more information visit <https://www.cpcln.org/>

About the Global Threat Assessment

The Global Threat Assessment is WeProtect Global Alliance's biennial report on the global scale and nature of child sexual exploitation and abuse online.

The Global Threat Assessment 2025 was researched and written by a team from the CPC Learning Network, Columbia University, with contributions and insights from an Expert Steering Committee and insights from dozens of experts from WeProtect Global Alliance's 350+ member organisations, and consultations with youth and survivor leaders. Full details and acknowledgements can be found on p.74-76 of the report.