

# Tackling Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth

## ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA

### Sexual exploitation of children: expanding and escalating

Millions of children and youth<sup>1</sup> worldwide face sexual exploitation, both online and offline. And this number continues to grow. Sexual exploitation often builds over time, with technology facilitating new forms — including grooming, the distribution of abusive content, and the live-streaming of child sexual exploitation. At the root of sexual exploitation are deep social and economic issues — including poverty, inequality, harmful social norms, climate-related shocks, conflict, and humanitarian crises — all of which put children and youth at greater risk.

<sup>1</sup> Children: under 18 years old. Youth: under 24 years old.

#### THE CHALLENGE

### Key Facts & Figures

Recent estimates for sexual exploitation include:



**1.7 million children** were commercially sexually exploited in 2021 (ILO, 2022)



**650 million** (or **1 in 5**) girls and women and **410 - 530 million** (or around **1 in 7**) boys and men experienced sexual violence in childhood (UNICEF, 2023)



Up to **1 in 5 children** experience online sexual exploitation (up to 20% of all children, depending on the country) (UNICEF, 2023)



**14,121 persons** were found to be trafficked for sexual exploitation worldwide in 2020- **1 in 3** of them were **children** (35%) (UNODC, 2022)

#### OUR MISSION

### Curbing the Sexual Exploitation of Children Down to Zero

The Down to Zero Alliance unites six child-focused organisations in their mission to curb the sexual exploitation of children and youth. Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Child Rights Coalition Asia, Conexión, Defence for Children - ECPAT Netherlands, Free a Girl Nederland and Plan International combine their strengths in strategic partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since 2016, within different programmes, the Alliance has collaborated with over 30 local partners and country offices in 14 countries across Asia and Latin America to prevent and protect children and youth from sexual exploitation. We take a child-centred and holistic approach — working with children, youth, parents and caregivers, community leaders, law enforcement, government agencies, and the private sector to tackle root causes and shift social norms, building a safer world for children and youth.



Children get SRHR information in the Philippines  
Photo: Terre des Hommes Netherlands

## STRATEGIC RESPONSE

### Our Scope

**Current countries of operation:** Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Laos, Nepal, Thailand, the Philippines, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala

**Previous countries of operation:** Nicaragua, Peru

## Our Holistic Approach

The Down to Zero Alliance works closely with local partners who are deeply rooted in their communities and have a strong understanding of the complexities of sexual exploitation of children, in both online and offline spaces. We take a broad and collaborative multi-stakeholder approach, bringing together professionals from different sectors to create systemic change and ensure long-term safety for children and youth. We embed gender equality, disability inclusion, and intersectionality throughout our programmes, recognising that children's vulnerability and ability to access protection are often shaped by a combination of factors such as gender, age, socio-economic status, and disability.

## CHILDREN & YOUTH AT THE CENTRE

Children and youth — including those who have experienced or are at risk of exploitation — are at the heart of our work, underpinned by an uncompromising dedication to child safeguarding at every stage. Their voices, experiences and leadership raise awareness, push for change, and shape policies. This way, the solutions truly reflect their needs and realities. By supporting their voices, we amplify their call for a world free from sexual exploitation. For inspiration, watch

[Youth Voices for Change.](#)



Scan to watch  
[Youth Voices for Change](#)

## EMPOWERING CHILDREN & YOUTH

**Peer Education** — We support children and youth to become peer educators. They learn about the risks of sexual exploitation — both online and offline — including grooming, sextortion, and live-streaming. We equip them with skills to start conversations with friends, parents, teachers, and others in their community to raise awareness and help keep each other safe.

**Strengthening Economic Resilience** — Through vocational training, adolescents and caregivers gain skills and opportunities that help them build sustainable livelihoods, reducing their vulnerability to exploitation.

**Comprehensive Physical and Mental Health Support** — Working closely with the health sector, we make sure that children and youth — including survivors of sexual exploitation — can get the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services they need. We also support survivors' mental health by offering psychosocial support (PSS), so they can heal and reintegrate into safe and supportive families and communities.

## TRANSFORMING FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES

**Positive Parenting & Safe Environments** — Positive parenting approaches are promoted to help caregivers create safe and supportive home environments. Caregivers get tools and guidance to protect children from exploitation; and learn how to support child survivors in their recovery and reintegration.

**Shifting Harmful Social & Gender Norms** — Our work challenges harmful social norms, beliefs and behaviours that enable sexual exploitation, building a culture where children's rights are respected and actively protected.

## SHAPING LAWS & POLICIES

**Advocacy at All Levels** – We train children, young people, and local partners to engage with policymakers at local, national, regional, and international levels — including the EU and UN — to advocate for stronger laws and policies that prevent and respond to the online and offline sexual exploitation of children.

**Holding Key Stakeholders Accountable** – We work with law enforcement, governments, and the private sector — including internet service providers and the travel and tourism sector — to strengthen child protection, make justice systems more child-friendly for survivors, and prevent further exploitation.

## WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED?

### Towards Systemic Change (2016 - 2026)

Since 2016, the Down to Zero Alliance has been at the forefront of the fight against Sexual Exploitation of Children (SEC) across Asia and Latin America. By empowering children and youth, strengthening child protection systems, engaging the private sector, and advocating for policy reform, we have driven long-term, systemic change to protect children both online and offline.

2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025 2026

#### Down to Zero 1.0

12 COUNTRIES | January 2016 - December 2020

*Fighting against Sexual Exploitation of Children across Asia and Latin America*

##### Results that matter:

**77,485 children trained** in child rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), equipping them to protect themselves and their peers from SEC.

**Strengthened Community-Led Protection** across 12 countries, with communities trained in SEC prevention, leading to increased informal child protection networks that prevent and support SEC survivors.

Stronger Child Protection Systems through **training of 46,050 government and law enforcement officials** in youth-friendly services and policies, leading to improved legal protection following youth-friendly protocols.

Private Sector Engagement with **29,343 private sector employees trained** to detect and report SEC and **1,049 companies** adopting ethical policies against SEC.

##### Milestone: The Code

Large and small businesses in the tourism sector signed “The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism”, improving industry standards to prevent Sexual Exploitation of Children. [The Code](#)

#### Voice for Change

7 COUNTRIES | March 2020 - June 2021

*Building the lobby and advocacy capacity of children and youth to eliminate child sexual exploitation*

##### Results that matter:

- ✓ 1,636 child survivors of SEC supported with specialised services
- ✓ 232 advocacy activities conducted
- ✓ 373 youth networks supported
- ✓ 3,006 child protection personnel trained

**Amplifying Children's Voices:** More than 1,000 children and youth joined networks as advocates to strengthen community child protection systems.

**Child-Centred Responses:** Training of more than 3,000 child protection professionals to strengthen victim-centred support services for child survivors of SEC.

**Milestone: Response to SEC-related Trafficking**  
Stronger local advocacy led to anti-human trafficking committees at municipality level in border areas to prevent and stop SEC-related trafficking. In Nepal, three anti-human trafficking committees were formed to coordinate grassroots responses to SEC and cross-border trafficking.

#### Building Back Better

12 COUNTRIES | May 2021 - May 2022

*Strengthening the response to SEC in light of the COVID-19 pandemic*

##### Results that matter:

- ✓ 10,786 children trained on SEC prevention and reporting
- ✓ 84,504 community members engaged in awareness activities
- ✓ 3,852 government and law enforcement officers trained
- ✓ 309 private sector companies trained in SEC prevention

**Improving Economic Resilience:** 690 family members of SEC survivors and youth at risk received economic support training, including provision of vocational training in gastronomy, hairdressing, and IT in Bolivia, Nicaragua and Peru to empower them economically and reduce their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

**Community Engagement in Protection:** Parents, caregivers, and local leaders across 12 countries were empowered to build protective environments for children. In Bolivia, five community protection committees were established, collaborating with authorities and tourism operators to prevent SEC.

##### Milestone: Youth-led Awareness

Youth-led initiatives used theatre performances, digital campaigns, and community advocacy to raise awareness on sexual violence and how to report.

#### Step Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (SUFASEC)

12 COUNTRIES | March 2023 - February 2026

*Building on past Down to Zero achievements to ensure children in all their diversity are better protected from sexual exploitation*

##### Results that matter (2023-2024):

- ✓ 4,496 youth received SRHR education
- ✓ 915 youth accessed SRHR services
- ✓ 2,836 parents trained on positive parenting
- ✓ 1,056,300 people reached through a youth-led TikTok campaign in Indonesia, amplifying young voices and sparking nationwide awareness and dialogue on SRHR

##### Impact across the globe:

- ✓ **Community engagement:** In Bolivia, neighbourhood councils were formed including shopkeepers and transport workers to strengthen community responses to SEC.
- ✓ **In Bangladesh, India and Nepal** a cross-country dialogue took place on cross-border SEC and online SEC, fostering collaboration among regional partners, law enforcement, and child protection agencies to improve responses to transnational SEC cases.
- ✓ **In Indonesia and the Philippines:** Implementing partners initiated meetings with key tourism industry stakeholders (boatmen, travel agencies, hotel and resort operators) to assess risks, share best practices, and create SEC prevention strategies in tourism hotspots.



Scan for more  
information on [The Code](#)

(2023-2026)

## Step Up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children

Building on past achievements, Down to Zero's SUFASEC programme strengthens child protection through:

1. **Social Norms Change & Community Engagement** – Empowering youth champions and community networks to lead SEC prevention efforts. Children, youth and their communities take the lead in preventing SEC by raising awareness, engaging local leaders, and advocating for safer environments.
2. **Economic Resilience & Protective Services** – Providing survivors with income-generating opportunities and ensuring access to SRHR services. Children and youth have access to safe spaces, education, and economic opportunities to protect themselves from exploitation. SUFASEC enhances vocational training, SRHR services, and survivor support.
3. **Policy Advocacy & System Strengthening** – Governments and the private sector are held accountable for protecting children from SEC. Laws, policies, and child protection systems are strengthened by training advocates, engaging governments, and pushing for policy change at national and international levels.

## Voices of Impact

"I was not capable to protest against child abuse, because I was alone. Now, we are united. On the other hand, our skills and knowledge have increased through attending various programmes of SUFASEC."

- Ashik, Member of Children Group, Bangladesh

"Listening to the stories of my peers was very important for my reflection process because it broadened my perspective." - Youth leader, Indonesia

"The workshops allowed me to learn more about the issues and problems, reflecting and understanding how the problem affects me, to then have an impact on others." - Youth leader, Dominican Republic

"What makes SUFASEC truly impactful is how it empowers children and youth, especially those from marginalised and vulnerable communities, to challenge harmful social norms in unique ways."

- Oviani Fathul Jannah, SUFASEC Project Manager, Indonesia

"What I am most proud of is that with Down to Zero we reached out to decision makers for necessary policy changes, such as bringing out a law to curb social media abuses, regulating financial institutions for tracing and tracking malicious transactions, and internet service providers enacting child protection policies." - Dr. Thangaperumal Ponpandi, Country Director Terre des Hommes, India & Nepal

CHANGE STARTS HERE

## Help Bring Sexual Exploitation of Children Down to Zero

Ending the sexual exploitation of children and young people — online and offline — is our urgent mission. But we cannot achieve it alone. Creating real, lasting change takes strong partnerships. Here is how you can be part of the solution:

- ✓ **Individuals** → Speak out and raise awareness. Become a voice for child protection.
- ✓ **Private Sector** → Adopt and uphold child-safe, ethical policies across your business practices.
- ✓ **Governments & International Organisations** → Strengthen and enforce laws and policies to protect children from sexual exploitation.
- ✓ **Foundations & Institutions** → Invest in evidence-based solutions that prevent abuse and support survivors.



Youth leaders from Youth Voices for Change in Guatemala. Photo: El Refugio de la Niñez

*Join us in creating a world where every child is safe and protected from sexual exploitation.*

**Contact us to explore how we can work together: [down-to-zero@tdh.nl](mailto:down-to-zero@tdh.nl) or [downtozero.nl](http://downtozero.nl)**