

## Addendum to Input to List of issues prior to reporting for Sweden

submitted by ECPAT Sweden to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

This addendum supplements ECPAT Sweden's input to the List of issues prior to reporting, which was submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child on February 28, 2020. Since our submission, the world has seen the outbreak of a global pandemic, and we have been given the opportunity to supplement our submission with updated information, especially in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on children's rights.

In our earlier submission, we addressed four thematic areas with suggestions for questions to the Swedish government; *Lack of collection of data*, *Children have the right to safe participation online*, *Sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Sweden – a public health issue* and *A national strategy against violence against children with an action plan against sexual exploitation of children*.

Since the pandemic, it has become even more evident to us how important these areas and suggestions for questions are, in order to strengthen children's rights in Sweden. In this addendum, we would like to add the following to our input.

**Lack of collection of data:** In our earlier submission, we raised the issue of lack of systematic data collection on sexual exploitation in Sweden. The pandemic clearly illustrates the urgent need of such data collection. The US-based National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), the world's largest Hotline, reported almost a quadrupling of reports of child sexual exploitation in April 2020 compared to April 2019<sup>1</sup>. There are many other similar indications that children are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation during this pandemic. However, without systematic data collection, it is impossible to know the extent of the problem. Data is needed to address, prioritise, identify risks and trends and form strategies to address sexual exploitation of children.

**Children have the right to safe participation online:** The internet is an important arena for children with many positive features. However, as life in general it comes with risks. During the pandemic, people, including both children and perpetrators, have the opportunity to spend more time online due to e.g. schools and workplaces being closed. As early as March, ECPAT Sweden's hotline analysts raised concerns about offenders discussing on the dark web how this pandemic could benefit them. Besides NCMEC, as mentioned above, other hotlines in our network, have also reported an increase in the number of tips received during the pandemic. Although we cannot know the exact impact on sexual exploitation of children of the pandemic at this time, we would like to stress the importance of increased efforts to secure children's right to safe online participation.

**Sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Sweden – a public health issue:** Due to the severity of the crime, the extent and the consequences, sexual abuse and exploitation must be considered a public health issue. The pandemic has increased the risk of children being vulnerable to sexual exploitation and highlighted the importance of integrated, coordinated and fully funded efforts to address sexual exploitation of children over time.

**A national strategy against violence against children with an action plan against sexual exploitation of children:** Based on the above, and in light of Covid-19, the need for a national strategy against violence against children has become even more evident. A national strategy would facilitate the work against violence against children, and ensure that all forms of violence including sexual, is heeded. The

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<sup>1</sup> Brewster, Thomas. 2020. Online Child Abuse Complaints Surpass 4 million In April. This Is How Cops Are Coping Despite COVID-19. *Forbes*. May 9, 2020, available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2020/05/09/online-child-abuse-complaints-surpass-4-million-in-april-this-is-how-cops-are-coping-despite-covid-19/#7197e62148db>

European Parliament has urged member states to put in place a national strategy with a holistic multi-stakeholder approach to eradicate sexual violence and child abuse both online and offline<sup>2</sup>. A specific action plan against sexual abuse and exploitation of children pertaining to the national strategy would be imperative. The national strategy and the action plan must include child participation in every step, including in continuous evaluations of them.

The above gives our view of how the important subject of sexual exploitation of children needs to be addressed from a child right's perspective and with a holistic and multisectoral approach, with civil society organizations and the private sector as indispensable partners to law enforcement and the government.

One of the important contributions of civil society organizations in a holistic and multisectoral approach is their ability to listen to children's opinions and needs and immediately turn them into swift action. As one example; ECPAT Sweden advanced the launch of our helpline for children, because of Covid-19, to provide support and advice regarding sexual abuse and exploitation of children. The helpline has been operational for around two months and has already been contacted by around 80 children with relevant questions and concerns, despite the helpline being new and most children not being familiar with it. Because of the pandemic, ECPAT Sweden also secured the operation of our Hotline, to which members of the public may anonymously report suspected sexual exploitation of children. Because the tips received to a Hotline can concern crimes not only in Sweden but in multiple countries and jurisdictions, we considered it to be of importance to keep our Hotline in operation, since several hotlines in our network around the world did not have the same possibility to operate due to quarantine regulations.

In addition to our earlier submission, we would like to stress the importance of the Swedish government to enhance cooperation between different sectors of society and ensure sufficient long term funding for the necessary work needed to combat child sexual exploitation. With the current situation in mind, ECPAT Sweden would like to suggest to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to ask the Swedish government the following question:

*Q: How will Sweden work to enhance cooperation between different sectors of society and ensure sufficient long term funding for the necessary work needed to combat child sexual exploitation?*

We wish to thank the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child for the opportunity to supplement our submission.

Sincerely,

  
Anna Karin Hildingson Boqvist

Secretary General,

ECPAT Sweden

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<sup>2</sup> European Union: European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution on children's rights on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2019/2876(RSP))*, 26 November 2019, P9\_TA(2019)0066, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0066\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0066_EN.pdf)