United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

Topic A: Efforts to eradicate online child sexual exploitation and abuse

Introduction:

Minors are using the internet more than they used to. According to some data collected all over the globe, every half second, a child globally makes their online debut, which presents countless opportunities. Children learn, invent, and create social networks through televisions, computers, smartphones, and game consoles. The internet has the power to spark creativity and open minds everywhere when used properly and made available to everyone. However, it can also represent some serious problems and dangers to those who are the most vulnerable: children. One example of it is the breach of private information when tech companies use it and sell it for marketing purposes, which is done with child-marketed apps, causing damage to children's health. Online sexual exploitation and abuse are the most alarming danger on the internet to children nowadays.

Nowadays, child sex offenders can contact their victims by social media platforms to then ask them for sexual content or grooming them. Any person on the internet can create and store sexual exploitative content of minors and it can even be live streamed in real time for the offenders in the comforts of their homes. As a result, the child who becomes a victim of such predators may be subject of social isolation, mental health problems, substance abuse, self-harm, suicide and even become abusive in their adulthood. Online abuse does not only stay on the web, but it follows the victim everywhere. As a result, the UNICEF considers sexual exploitation and abuse as part of their Core Commitments for children in Humanitarian Action, condemning all the acts related to online sexual exploitation of children. UNICEF is obligated to provide proper assistance to victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and assault, and if needed, lead the investigations to the best interest of every single victim.

Concepts and definitions:

- **Online sexual exploitation**: The usage of the internet or other communication technologies as a method to facilitate the sexual abuse of children and adolescents.

This can take place directly online or through a combination of offline and online interactions.

- **Online sexual abuse**: It can be any type of sexual harassment, exploitation, or abuse that takes place through screens.

- **Sexual Material**: Any material that depicts human genitalia or depicts nudity, sexual activity, sexual conduct, sexual excitement, or sadomasochistic abuse.

- **MNR**: Refers to Model National Response, a framework for countries and organizations to support them to prevent and tackle child sexual exploitation and abuse.

- **Victim**: Someone that has been hurt, damaged, or killed or has suffered, either because of the actions of someone or something else, or because of illness or chance.

- **Child**: Any human being under the age of 18 years; unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is obtained earlier.

- **Child sexual exploitation and abuse**: Engaging in sexual activities with a child who, according to the relevant provisions of national law, has not reached the legal age for sexual activities, or where coercion, force or threats are present; or abuse is made of a recognized position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family; or abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, notably because of a mental or physical disability or a situation of dependence. Child sexual abuse becomes sexual exploitation when a second party benefits monetarily, through sexual activity involving a child. It includes harmful acts such as sexual solicitation and sexual exploitation of a child or adolescent in prostitution.

Current issue:

The sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a violation of human rights and a public health issue with significant consequences, considerable efforts are being made to prevent all forms of violence against children including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that targets to end violence against children by 2030 in the Sustainable Development Goals. The UNICEF collaborates with partners across the world to prevent and respond to violence against girls, boys, and young people. Support of national coordination of multisectoral services, child protection systems, services and scaling up violence prevention programs,

parenting support community programs, school prevention programs and social allow UNICEF to anticipate and solve issues within online exploitation. Interventions for child sexual abuse mostly target adults, but there's a need for strategies that consider the unique needs of both child victims and perpetrators.

At the same time, the number of internet users has grown steadily over the past decade, driven by factors such as increasing smartphone penetration, expanding internet access, and the rise of digital services. The breakdown of internet usage shows that more than 50% of the world population are internet users (We are social, 2023). With the increment in digital usage, online grooming, live streaming of child sexual abuse, and distribution of that content have intensified. The volume of child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) online has reached record highs, with millions of images on the surface web and hidden web. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reported that, in 2022, it received 32 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation. These reports included 84.9 million images and videos of CSAM (Cybertipline,2022).

Specialized online child sexual abuse responses may overlook proven strategies for addressing physical world abuse; however, considering online sexual exploitation within its broader offline context can be beneficial instead of viewing it as a solely digital age phenomenon. Technology facilitates exploitation but it does not cause it. Child sexual abuse materials show sexual abuse of a child by someone known to them. Online child sexual abuse demands collaboration with tech sector and cross-border law enforcement cooperation. It requires a deeper understanding of how children and families use digital platforms and their online experiences. The terms 'child sexual abuse and exploitation' encompass a range of abusive acts, occurring in various settings and relationships. It is important to note that children and adolescents affected may not always recognize these experiences as sexual violence or abuse.

Children in low-income, insecure, conflict-ridden areas, or those separated from their families, are particularly vulnerable. However, it is essential to recognize that all children are susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation. Recent studies with consistent definitions and measures have shed light on the extensive prevalence of physical, emotional, and sexual violence against children worldwide. Additionally, child sexual abuse is gendered. While women also sexually abuse children and adolescents, most perpetrators (around 90% in most

studies) are male. Girls usually report higher rates of sexual abuse and exploitation compared to boys. Consequently, girls are the main victims of online child sexual abuse materials. On top of that, victim experiences and consequences differ for children as they grow up.

Numerous international and national laws address child sexual abuse, aiming to protect children's rights and prevent and punish these heinous crimes. Some prominent examples include: The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (OPSC), the United Nations Declaration on Violence against Children, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (Lanzarote Convention). Additionally, each country has its own laws criminalizing child sexual abuse, with varying definitions, penalties, and enforcement mechanisms.

Despite these legal frameworks, impunity for child sexual abuse remains a persistent global challenge. Factors contributing to impunity include inadequate laws and policies, weak enforcement of laws, corruption, social stigma, and cultural or traditional practices. To develop effective prevention and response strategies, it is crucial to consider gendered and developmental differences in situational, organizational, and relationship risks of abuse and exploitation for children and adolescents. Besides, 28 from the 196 UNICEF members do not sentence or criminalize any crimes done online. Those governments protect the perpetrator and abusers instead of the victims, leaving them on their own, without any assistance or legal aim, since there is no crime to be prosecuted (UNICEF, 2015). Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is a serious problem that needs to be addressed immediately and with collective action.

International initiatives:

Nowadays, the UNICEF is working to enact and enforce laws that specifically criminalize online child sexual abuse, as well as provide training and support to law enforcement agencies to effectively investigate and prosecute online child sexual abuse cases. They are also working towards raising awareness about the issue through public awareness campaigns and education programs. Additionally, they provide support to victims and their families, including counseling, legal assistance, and access to safe spaces. The UNICEF's work encompasses not only remedial initiatives for online child sexual exploitation, but also preventive strategies

including education about online safety and work with international organizations to share technical assistance to adequate legal frameworks or law enforcement capacity.

Another UNICEF's initiative is its worldwide alliance We PROTECT, which pushes governments to establish communication between the justice system, the sectors of childhood welfare, education, health technology and civil society organizations to work together to protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse. The MNR advises doing a national situation analysis to evaluate the extent and type of child sexual exploitation that occurs in a nation and evaluates susceptibilities, dangers, and countermeasures. The results of the assessment will guide national responses, including policymaking. Most of the nations surveyed (79% of the total) have started a national study, analysis, and surveillance system for child sexual abuse and exploitation, especially the sexual exploitation and abuse of children online, in the previous five years. Overall, the MNR suggests coordinated and comprehensive end-to-end assistance for victims during the inquiry, court cases, and beyond.

As part of UNICEF'S responses and solutions to eliminate the online sexual abuse, in April of 2023 an agreement of cooperation was signed with the INTERPOL to support national governments all around the world to prevent and address online child sexual exploitation. The partnership aims to support the victims and survivors to receive the support needed and to assure that the perpetrators face justice. The agreement consists of establishing special units or teams to investigate the sexual exploitation and abuse of those countries where needed and to strengthen those teams who already exist. It also helps the law enforcement personnel by giving them a system where victim and offender are registered, the digital forensics and child-friendly and survivor-centered interviewing; all of this with the help of INTERPOL's International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database.

Guiding questions:
- How can the international community foster collaborative efforts to strengthen the fight against online child sexual exploitation, considering the diverse challenges faced by nations?
- In the ever-evolving digital landscape, what innovative strategies can be devised to fortify technological safeguards and protective measures for children navigating online spaces?

- What diplomatic channels and frameworks can be effectively leveraged to encourage heightened global cooperation in combating the complex and transnational nature of online child sexual exploitation?

- Striking a balance between the right to privacy and the imperative to monitor and prevent online child sexual exploitation is crucial. How can this delicate equilibrium be maintained through diplomatic discourse and international agreements?

- Recognizing the pivotal role of education, what comprehensive measures can be implemented globally to raise awareness, empower caregivers, and equip children with the knowledge to safeguard themselves against online exploitation?

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