

COMBATING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (CSEA)

The Combating Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA) project, implemented by PEaCE | ECPAT Sri Lanka from July 2024 to September 2025, is supported financially by Fundación Vicente Ferrer. This story highlights the significant strides made in establishing a stronger, safer, and more responsive child protection environment nationwide. Operating across all 25 districts of Sri Lanka, the project's overall goal is to "Empower children, families, communities, and service providers to prevent Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA) in line with legal and regulatory frameworks upholding the government's commitments to international human rights standards".

The project has laid a strong foundation for long-term systemic and behavioural change, reinforcing the government's national child protection agenda. The collaborative measures employed throughout the implementation period have resulted in a measurably positive shift in awareness, prevention, and reporting practices nationwide. This narrative highlights the project's key achievements, quantifiable statistics, and transformative impact, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to safeguarding children in both digital and physical realms.

Overall Progress Towards the Specific Objective

The project made strong progress in reducing CSEA risks among children under 16 by strengthening prevention and response mechanisms across all 25 districts. Through 278 grassroots-level activities, it enhanced community vigilance, improved safety measures, and reinforced support systems for child protection, empowering children, families, communities, and service providers to prevent CSEA and uphold international human rights standards.

While the specific goal of reducing reported CSEA incidents by 5% in targeted communities was only partially achieved, the data show a complex but ultimately positive trend. According to National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) data, reported CSEA cases decreased from 1,270 (baseline) to 1,225 (until August 2025), a 3.5% decrease.

Empowering Children and Youth

The first key result focused on reducing the vulnerability of children and youth to CSEA by equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify, resist, and report abuse.

Capacity Building and Awareness for Youth

The intervention with youth demonstrated exceptional results, significantly strengthening their awareness and proactive engagement in protection efforts.

- A total of 633 youth trainees from the National Youth Services Council (NYSC) participated in structured training, showing a remarkable 26.61% improvement in knowledge and attitudes regarding CSEA and Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA).
- In addition to the specialized training, 2,788 youth participated in broader community awareness sessions. Post-knowledge assessments revealed that 88.75% of these participants demonstrated a clear understanding of different types of child abuse, online exploitation, and preventive methods.
- In total, 3,421 youth were reached, who now serve as a network of informed advocates against abuse within their communities.

Direct Engagement with Children and Students

The project exceeded its targets for engaging children and youth, creating a robust peer-to-peer network for safety.

- The project reached 10,371 children and youth with prevention education, achieving 154% of the target. This group included 6,406 school students, 3,421 youth, and 544 school prefects. The gender breakdown of participants was 4,144 males and 5,857 females.
- 37 interactive awareness sessions were conducted across all 25 districts, directly benefiting 5,262 schoolchildren. These sessions were formally approved by the Ministry of Education, ensuring alignment with national child protection priorities.
- 544 school prefects were trained in a two-day capacity-building program across 10 selected districts. This training focused on empowering student leaders to identify vulnerable children, recognize early warning signs, and safely report concerns through established referral systems.
- A total of 77 interschool debates were organized in all 25 districts on the theme “Is the Internet Safe for Children?”. This initiative involved 1,144 participants (debaters and observers) and successfully empowered students as advocates for digital safety and responsible online behaviour.

Reduction in Overall Child Abuse and Victim Support

The project's preventive efforts coincided with a significant national trend in the reduction of overall reported child abuse cases.

- NCPA data shows that reported child abuse cases nationally declined from 11,127 in the baseline year to 9,724 during the project period. This reduction of 1,425 cases (12.8%) surpassed the 10% target, demonstrating enhanced responsiveness and reduced vulnerability in the targeted districts.
- A total of 57 CSEA survivors received support, including 48 girls (84%) and 6 boys (10%). The most affected age group supported was children between 12 and 15 years. Services provided included legal aid, psychosocial support, educational support and case follow-up.

Families and Community Protection

Project focused on empowering parents and establishing robust, collaborative networks at the grassroots level, recognizing the family as the primary line of protection.

Empowering Parents

The project successfully increased parental knowledge, vigilance, and confidence in identifying and responding to potential cases of abuse.

- **Parental Awareness Sessions:** The project conducted 34 parental awareness sessions across all 25 districts, surpassing the original target of 1,000 parents. A total of 2,759 parents directly benefited, with a breakdown of 490 males and 2,269 females.
- **Knowledge Improvement:** Post-session assessments at selected sites revealed that 86% of parents demonstrated a good understanding of CSEA risk factors, warning signs, and preventive actions. This significantly exceeded the 60% target, representing a remarkable 143% achievement of the expected result.

Fostering Grassroots Collaboration and Training

A key success was the establishment of strong linkages between communities and protection authorities, fostering local ownership of child protection initiatives.

- 25 collaborative programs were successfully facilitated across all districts, fully achieving the annual target. These coordination meetings involved 1,735 participants (604 males, 1,131 females), including police, child rights officers, teachers, and community representatives.
- The project trained 292 teachers (55 males, 237 females) across eight sessions, exceeding the original target of 5. Utilizing a customized ECPAT-based toolkit, the training enhanced teachers' capacity to detect, prevent, and respond to CSEA both offline and online, making them frontline advocates for child safety.
- 13 coordination meetings were organized in high-risk districts, engaging 548 representatives from Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). These sessions aimed to integrate CSEA prevention and victim support activities into existing community action plans.

System Strengthening and Public Mobilization

The project also focused on enhancing access to care for survivors, building institutional capacity, and raising public awareness through targeted awareness campaigns.

Enhancing Access to Care and Institutional Capacity

The organization significantly improved access to justice and care for survivors and bolstered the institutional workforce against cybercrimes.

- The organization supported 57 CSEA survivors to access justice and care services between July 2024 and September 2025. This represents an estimated 30 - 35% increase from the previous year, reflecting greater community trust and

improved referral linkages. Support included legal, educational, and psychosocial assistance.

- To address the growing threat of Online CSEA (OCSEA), 87 government officers were trained. This total included 31 Child Rights Promotion Officers (CRPOs) and 56 Child Protection Officers (CPOs). The training enhanced officers' technical knowledge, case-handling skills, and coordination in responding to online child sexual exploitation.
- An online Child Protection Resource Hub was developed to strengthen access to reliable information and survivor support. The hub features over 30 key information modules on topics such as reporting procedures, referral pathways, legal options, and counselling, serving children, parents, and professionals.

Community Mobilization and Awareness

The project employed large-scale campaigns and the widespread distribution of materials to mobilize communities and foster a sense of collective responsibility for child safety.

- 1,352 community members from Village Child Development Committees (VCDCs), CBOs, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) were trained through 32 sessions. This included 707 VCDC members who were trained in 16 interactive sessions in selected high-risk districts, thereby enhancing local capacity to identify and report child protection concerns.
- Three large-scale public awareness campaigns were successfully conducted in Puttalam, Gampaha, and Nuwara Eliya. These campaigns engaged 1,423 direct participants (schoolchildren, teachers, parents, police, officials, and the public) through street walks, dramas, and awareness sessions.
- The social media campaign on Facebook demonstrated strong engagement, reaching a total of 53,452 post views and generating 6,977 interactions through reactions, comments, and shares.
- Over 65,000 awareness materials, including multilingual leaflets, posters, stickers, and professional toolkits, were distributed nationwide across schools, community centres, and public gatherings.

A Foundation for Lasting Protection

The PEaCE project has laid a strong foundation for long-term, systemic change in Sri Lanka's fight against child sexual exploitation and abuse. By directly empowering over 10,000 children and youth with prevention education, strengthening the capacity of thousands of parents and community members, and enhancing the skills of hundreds of officials, the project has created a more vigilant, informed, and coordinated national child protection network. While challenges remain, the measurable decline in abuse cases, the inspiring stories of community courage, and the overwhelming demand for continued education are powerful testaments to the project's success. The combined force of enhanced awareness, strengthened reporting pathways, and improved multi-stakeholder coordination marks a significant step toward the goal - a safer environment for every child in Sri Lanka.