

COVID-19 OSEC Brief

OSEC Background

- Historically, many nations in ASEAN have been a destination for foreign and domestic offenders seeking to sexually exploit or abuse children in person. These offenders can now use numerous mobile and online tools—including social media, online networks, live-streaming applications, video-sharing sites, and the dark web—to direct and watch live child sexual abuse with relative anonymity.
- Internet-based child sexual exploitation in various forms may be occurring in ASEAN nations with minimal detection and reporting to document the scale or prevalence or to identify victims in urgent need of interventions. This broad category of online harms includes the direct manipulation or “grooming” of children by sex offenders online, the distribution of previously produced child sexual exploitation materials (CSEM), and the trafficking of children by adults to create new CSEM, which IJM calls online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC). This new CSEM can take the form of photos, videos or live-streamed abuse and is often done commercially (in exchange for compensation of some sort, usually money).
- The demand for live-streamed online sexual exploitation of children in the Philippines is largely fueled by foreign sex offenders. The same may be true for other ASEAN member nations, but research is needed to confirm. In OSEC, sex offenders communicate online with traffickers, paying them to live-stream sexual abuse and exploitation of children directed by the remote offender in real time. In the cases IJM has worked on, the abusive conduct in online sexual exploitation of children is *rarely limited* to erotic displays. It usually includes forcible sexual penetration constituting rape in the Philippines and most other jurisdictions.
- Based on IJM’s own data from its collaborative casework in the Philippines, OSEC traffickers are typically financially motivated adult female (about 65%) relatives or close associates (e.g., neighbors) of victims, about half of which are 12 years old or younger at the time of rescue. About 20% of victims are boys; this is a much higher representation of boys than typically seen in establishment and street-based sex trafficking.
- Typical online sex offenders who direct and purchase OSEC—by sending payment through money transfer agencies—are sexually motivated, English-speaking men in or from demand-side countries (in regions such as Europe, North America, and Australia). The very limited data available indicates that, among confirmed criminal OSEC buyers with known ages, more than half are 50-59 years old.

- More information can be found in IJM’s OSEC Study, **Online Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Philippines: Analysis and Recommendations for Governments, Industry, and Civil Society**.
 - [Download the Full Study](#)
 - [Download the Study Summary](#)
 - [Watch the Webinar](#) (English Subtitles Available)

ASEAN Nations Snapshot: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children CyberTips

- The U.S.-based [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#) (NCMEC) has published data related to CyberTipline reports received from electronic service providers and other sources in 2019. NCMEC made available to 242 countries or territories, including ASEAN member nations, CyberTips related to online child sexual exploitation of all forms. The table below lists ASEAN member nations with their corresponding 2019 CyberTip totals, global ranking by number of CyberTips, and global ranking by number of CyberTips adjusted for population.

Nation	CyberTips	Global Rank (CyberTips)	Global Rank (CyberTips per capita)
Thailand	355,396	13 th	13 th
Philippines	801,272	6 th	15 th
Malaysia	183,407	20 th	23 rd
Cambodia	91,458	27 th	26 th
Brunei	2,070	139 th	35 th
Myanmar	233,681	18 th	42 nd
Vietnam	379,554	12 th	46 th
Lao	23,599	67 th	57 th
Indonesia	840,221	4 th	58 th
Singapore	18,426	73 rd	66 th

COVID-19 Implications and Increased Risks of OSEC

- COVID-19 lockdowns created the perfect storm for increases in online sexual exploitation of children. OSEC as committed by traffickers is a crime of opportunity. Quarantined online child sex offenders are spending more time online and vulnerable children are also confined at home, often with their traffickers. While it is difficult to measure the increase in the incidence of OSEC as a result of the COVID-19 crisis—mainly because electronic service providers are not currently detecting livestreamed abuse or production of new CSEM—NGOs and global law enforcement are concerned about indicators of the increased threat of OSEC corresponding to the pandemic response.
- The [eSafety Commissioner](#), Australia’s national independent regulator for online safety, recorded an 86-percent increase in image-based abuse reported to its office over the three weeks preceding April 9, 2020.

- The Australian Federal Police and the Australian Center to Counter Child Exploitation have also observed the emergence of child abuse forums established as a result of COVID-19 stay-at-home measures. Moreover, they have learned about [child sexual abuse sites crashing](#) in recent weeks due to the increased volume of traffic.
- Likewise, [Europol](#) reported significant increases in the downloading of CSEM in Spain and attempts to access CSEM websites in Denmark in March.
- For more data, see the WePROTECT Global Alliance [Intelligence Brief](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on online child sexual exploitation, indicating the “highly probable” increase of OSEC.

Response Considerations

- It is critical for all governments to prioritize protecting vulnerable populations from violence as part of their response to the pandemic, so that vulnerable populations made even more vulnerable by lockdown orders and quarantines are not left without the protection of the law.
- ASEAN member nations can ensure that their law enforcement units with a mandate to investigate and intervene in OSEC cases have the necessary resources (including budget, staffing, PPE) to investigate OSEC cases, rescue victims and arrest perpetrators during the pandemic.
- Increased collaboration with foreign law enforcement agencies who can provide referrals to domestic law enforcement can assist in uncovering OSEC cases that may otherwise go undetected while children are at home without access to friends, teachers, or others they may report to.