



IWF
Internet
Watch
Foundation

Working together
to stop child sexual
abuse online

Evaluation of IWF Reporting Portals

KEY FINDINGS DECEMBER 2025

For further information, please contact:

Juliette Rolley, Senior Project Manager, Altai Consulting, jrolley@altaiconsulting.com

Alizée Boutard Geze, Director, Altai Consulting, aboutard@altaiconsulting.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013, the IWF launched its first international Reporting Portal dedicated to reporting online child sexual abuse material (CSAM), enabling UK-based analysts to assess imagery and facilitate its removal.

Starting in 2017, Safe Online funded the creation of 30 portals in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) with limited alternatives for CSAM reporting and removal. Since then, the initiative has expanded to 53 Portals across the globe. This document presents the results of an independent evaluation of the Portal programme, commissioned by Safe Online and IWF and conducted by Altai Consulting in 2025.

Key achievements

Since its inception, the programme has established 53 operational Portals, including 51 national Portals and two multi-country Portals (in partnership with MTN and ICMEC). Collectively, they cover more than 2.8 billion people – around 34% of the global population and 37% of the world's children. All Portals are technically functional, and supported by a global network of Portal partners including government agencies, NGOs, UN agencies and law enforcement partners. Between 2014 and 2024, 2,703 reports submitted through the Portals led to CSAM removal, with steady annual growth. The material identified through the Portals is particularly severe: in 2024, 73% involved children under 10 and 57% were classified as Category A (the most extreme classification under UK law). In contexts where data on CSAM is scarce, some partners have also used Portal-generated information for advocacy, helping to demonstrate the scale of online child exploitation to policymakers.

Limitations

Despite broad coverage, Portal usage remains low, which indicates limited public understanding of the Portals' purpose and difficulties completing the reporting process correctly. The evaluation identified key barriers including low public awareness, limited Portal accessibility, poor user experience, insufficient partner resources for promotion, lack of localisation, and weak coordination with broader OCSEA initiatives.

Recommendations and way forward

In the short term, the Portals could be redesigned to offer a simpler, more intuitive, and locally relevant user experience. Partners need stronger technical and financial support to promote the Portals and increase public awareness. Expanding access through multi-channel reporting (such as WhatsApp integration) would also help reach a wider audience. At the same time, Portal usage data should be made more accessible and actionable to inform programming and advocacy. Finally, the evaluation underlines the importance of establishing a clear monitoring and evaluation framework with measurable outcomes for any Portal-related initiative.

At a broader level, the evaluation highlights the need for strategic reflection not only by IWF but also by other organisations involved in OCSEA interventions in LMICs. This includes clarifying the geographical focus and long-term sustainability model, defining transition pathways towards national ownership, and ensuring coordination with national and international complementary initiatives.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Online child exploitation and abuse in LMICs

Although comprehensive global data on the prevalence of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA¹) remain scarce, available evidence shows that the phenomenon is both widespread and rapidly growing.² The consequences for victims are severe and enduring, compounded by repeated re-victimisation each time the material is viewed or shared.³ The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) is a UK-based not-for-profit organisation working to detect and remove online CSAM. It operates the UK's national hotline, offering a safe and anonymous reporting channel for the public and working in close collaboration with industry stakeholders, law enforcement agencies, NGOs, etc.

While many high-income countries have similar national hotlines to identify and remove CSAM⁴, low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) often lack the legal frameworks, resources, and infrastructure required to establish and operate effective CSAM reporting systems. Yet, these countries are increasingly affected by the spread of CSAM, due to demographic growth, expanding internet coverage, and rising access to digital technologies by children⁵. Despite the growing threat, child protection efforts in these contexts remain largely focused on offline risks, leaving a critical gap in online safety and an urgent need for tools to identify, report, and remove CSAM.

IWF Reporting Portals

To address this gap, the IWF has been implementing Reporting Portals in countries or territories without national hotlines since 2013. Initially funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to serve British Overseas Territories (BOTs), the initiative expanded in 2017 with support from the End Violence Against Children (EVAC) Fund through its Safe Online programme. In total, 30 Portals were funded by Safe Online, aligning with its ambition to foster a safer digital environment for all children globally. Additional donors and organisations have contributed to the development of Portals in other LMICs, reaching a total of 53 active Portals as of 2025.

¹ Note on terminology: Academics and members of civil society have argued for adopting the term Technology-Facilitated Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (TF-CSEA) rather than Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA), to better capture the range of contexts in which such abuse occurs beyond the online sphere. However, as this report builds on existing literature and data sources that predominantly employ the term OCSEA, and because this terminology was found to be more readily understood by stakeholders interviewed, the report retains the use of OCSEA throughout, while recognising the shift in terminology.

² Prevalence estimates and nature of online child sexual exploitation and abuse: a systematic review and meta-analysis (The Lancet, Child and Adolescent Health, Volume 9, Issue 3 p184-193, March 2025)

³ 2016 International Survivors' Survey (Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 2017)

⁴ Annual Report 2024 (INHOPE, 2025)

⁵ A growing threat? Online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Cape Verde (Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2023)

1.2 Objectives

After more than ten years of implementation, and in the absence of any prior external evaluation, IWF and Safe Online commissioned an independent evaluation to take stock of the Portal programme and reflect on its future direction. The main objectives of the evaluation were to assess the effectiveness of the Reporting Portals, identify the key facilitators and barriers to their use, and provide recommendations to inform future programming.

The evaluation resulted in a detailed technical report shared internally with Safe Online and IWF. This document presents a summary of the key findings intended for public dissemination, to share learnings with organisations working on similar initiatives or interested in supporting the Portals.

1.3 Methodology

The evaluation team relied on five complementary quantitative and qualitative data collection methodologies, as presented in **Figure 1**.

Data collection methodologies used for the evaluation



Figure 1

2. FUNCTIONING OF THE REPORTING PORTALS

The IWF Reporting Portals are web-based platforms that allow individuals to anonymously report webpages, newsgroups/usenets and spam emails containing suspected images or videos of child sexual abuse (CSAM).

Reporting and removal process: Users can report content found in user groups, on websites, or via spam emails. In all cases, a URL must be provided. Once a report is submitted, IWF analysts based in the UK assess the content under UK law, following the same process as reports received through the UK hotline. If the material is confirmed to be illegal and has not already been actioned, IWF determines the country in which the content is hosted. It then follows appropriate procedures, depending on the jurisdiction, to ensure the hosting provider receives a takedown notice and that the content is removed. Confirmed CSAM is added to IWF's hash list, which is shared with IWF member organisations to ensure swift removal if the same content is re-uploaded elsewhere. URLs are also added to dynamic URL list, enabling IWF members to block CSAM prior to its removal.

Portal partners: In each country or BOT where a Portal has been launched, a designated Portal host is responsible for embedding the national Portal link on its own website and promoting it. In many cases, additional Portal partners are also involved. These may include local civil society organisations, government bodies, mobile operators, law enforcement agencies, UN agencies, or international organisations. However, the Portal host must always be a nationally registered entity. Once a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is signed with the host organisation, IWF commits to maintaining and operating the Portal on an ongoing basis.

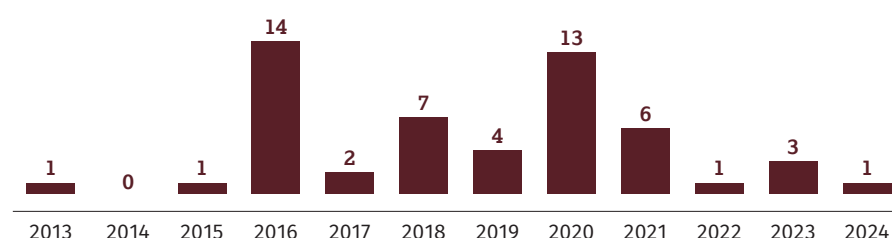
Localisation: All Portals are technically identical, but with two customisable elements: the user interface is adapted to the national language(s) in collaboration with the host, and the logos of relevant partners are displayed on the Portal homepage.

3. KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION

3.1 Programme achievements

53 operational IWF Reporting Portals: 53 Portals have been set up since 2013: 51 are national Portals dedicated to specific countries or British Overseas Territories (BOTs), and two are multi-country Portals (MTN Child Safety Online Africa Portal and ICMEC-IWF Reporting Portals). All Portals are technically operational, with no or only limited downtime reported, and no technical issues identified. All reports submitted through the Portals are processed by IWF analysts working at the UK Hotline, who are trained to assess and escalate content as needed.

Number of Reporting Portals created by year



Wide geographical coverage: As of 2025, the 51 country-specific and BOTs Portals covered a combined population of approximately 2.8 billion people, representing 34% of the global population in 2024.⁶ Including individuals in countries where the ICMEC and MTN Portals are accessible would bring this figure even higher. Given that the median age in LMICs is lower than the global average, Portal countries account for 37% of the world's children.⁷

Overview of countries with a IWF Reporting Portal



ICMEC-IWF
Reporting Portal



MTN Child Safety
Online Africa Portal



Figure 3

⁶ Altai computation based on World Bank, UN, CIA and local authorities' population data (latest available after 2021) for countries/territories having a national Portal

⁷ Altai computation based on [UNICEF](#) and World Bank data

Designated national host organisation for each Portal: IWF has signed a contract with at least one organisation per country, with one or more points of contact identified. The host organisations are responsible for hosting the Portal link and promoting the Portal. Host organisations vary by country and include government institutions, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders. In several countries, other organisations beyond the host are also involved in Portal promotion. They constitute a unique global network of partners for IWF.

Number of Portals by Portal host category

Portal host	Number of Portals	Examples
Government agency	21	Telecom regulators, Ministry of Women, Child Protection Secretariat
NGO/CSO	21	Digital Rights Foundation (Pakistan), Childline Foundation (Malaysia), Peace One Day (Mali)
Law enforcement	9	Anti-Human Trafficking & Child Protection Unit, Local Police Forces
Mobile network operator	2	MTN (Cameroon)

Table 1

Removal of (extreme) content: There is evidence that the Reporting Portals have led to the removal of CSAM from the internet. Between 2014 and 2024, 2,703 reports processed through the Portals resulted in action being taken by IWF to remove content. The number of actioned reports per year has grown steadily (despite the relatively low volumes). Each processed report potentially represents one or more victims whose abusive content has been identified and removed. The actioned reports in 2024 contained particularly severe material, with 73% involving children under the age of 10, and 57% classified as Category A, the most extreme classification under UK law. Given that many countries lack efficient and anonymous alternative channels for reporting and removing CSAM, it is likely that at least some of the content would not have been removed in the absence of the Portals.

Number of actioned reports (i.e. leading to CSAM being removed)

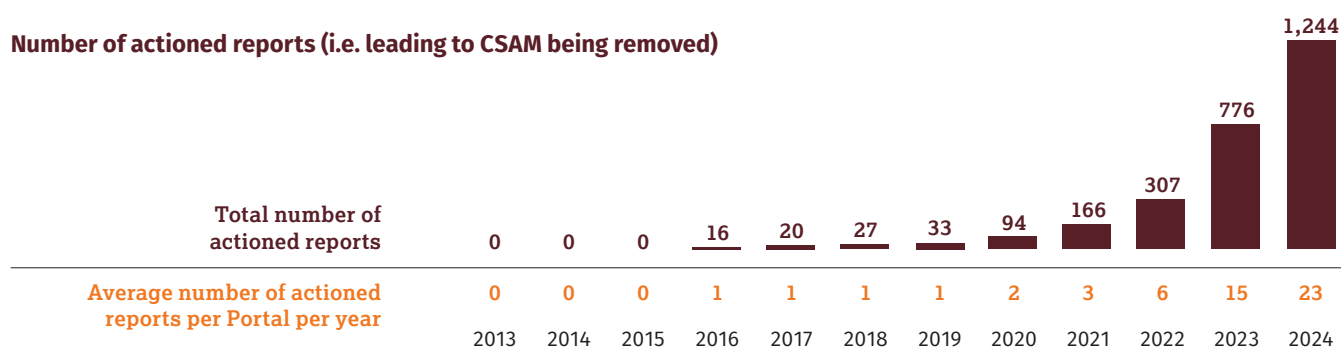


Figure 4

Details of the imagery contained in actioned reports in 2024⁸

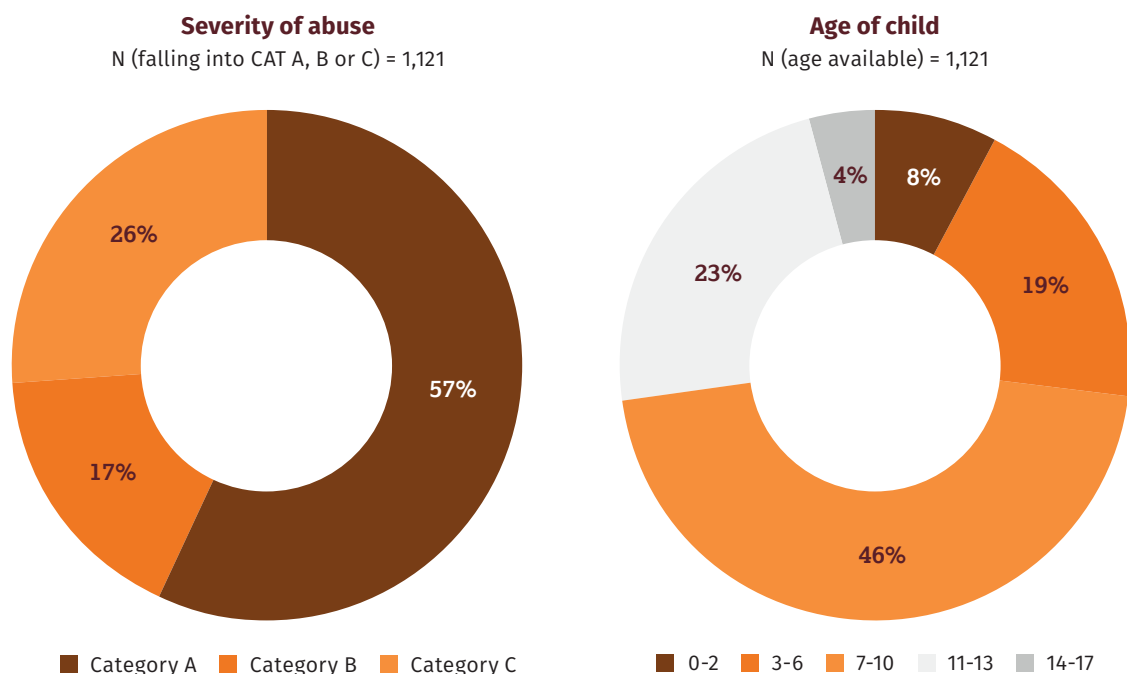


Figure 5



Comparison with the content assessed by IWF

The material reported via the Portals depicts abuse of significantly higher severity and involves much younger children than the content assessed by IWF overall. For comparison, among all images and videos assessed by IWF in 2024, 29% were Category A, 42% Category B, and 29% Category C. 73% of the children in material reported through the Portals were below 10 years old, compared with 35% of children in the material reviewed by IWF in 2024.⁹ This pattern is consistent with the finding that awareness of CSAM remains limited in most Portal countries, with individuals generally able to identify only the most extreme material.

Generation of data supporting advocacy efforts: In settings where data on CSAM is extremely scarce, several partners stated that they use the information contained in the reports to support advocacy efforts and to demonstrate to policymakers or law enforcement agencies the scale and importance of the issue. This represents an unexpected but potentially valuable use of the data generated by the Portals.

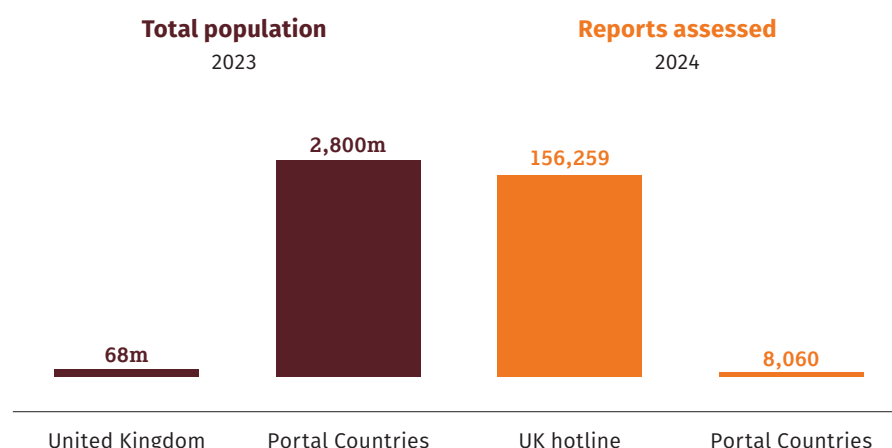
⁸ Category A: Images involving penetrative sexual activity; images involving sexual activity with an animal; or sadism. Category B: Images involving non-penetrative sexual activity. Category C: Other indecent images not falling within categories A or B.

⁹ [IWF Annual Data & Insights Report 2024](#) (IWF, 2025) – IWF assessed 1,264,393 images and videos in 2024. Age category was recorded for 650,140 children.

3.2. Limitations

Low usage of the Portals, with relatively few reports submitted compared to the population coverage. The average number of reports per Portal per year increased from just 10 in 2014 to 152 in 2024 — a positive trend, yet still limited given the population coverage. In total, 8,060 reports were submitted through the Portals in 2024, representing only around 5% of all external reports received by IWF.¹⁰ Most countries, particularly low-income ones, record fewer than ten reports annually. For comparison, the 55 INHOPE hotlines collectively processed 2.5 million CSAM reports in 2024.¹¹

Total population and number of reports submitted in the United Kingdom compared to Portal countries^{12 13}



Zoom on the main barriers to Portal usage

Limited usage is due to several factors. Research has shown that a lack of awareness about the Portals is among the most significant barriers. Limited accessibility is also a challenge, with links sometimes unavailable on partner websites, poor online referencing, and access issues related to devices and digital literacy. Poor user experience design further discourages use: according to a majority of stakeholder interviewed, Portals feature text-heavy pages, technical terminology, and complex reporting processes.

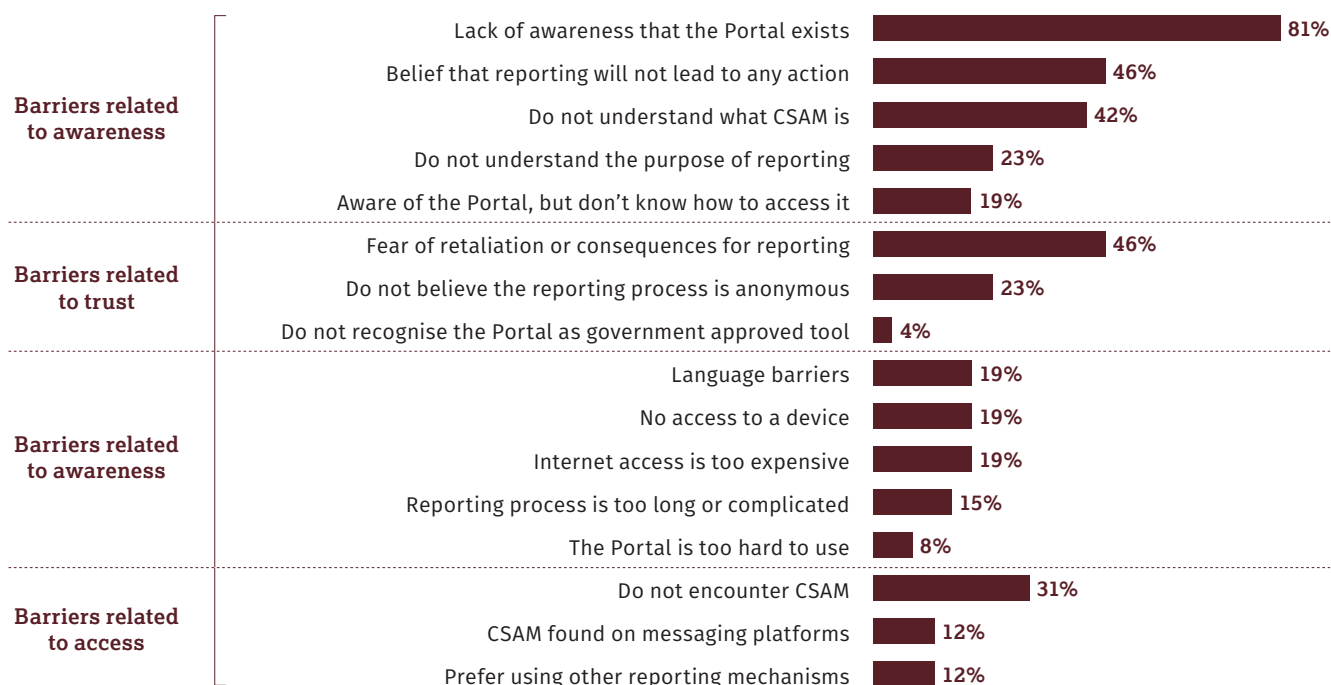
¹⁰ IWF Annual Data & Insights Report 2024 (IWF, 2025) – IWF received 156,259 external reports

¹¹ INHOPE Annual Report 2024 (INHOPE, 2024)

¹² Portal countries population: Altai computation based on World Bank data

¹³ Although the Hotline is accessible worldwide, IWF outreach is almost entirely UK-focused; for order-of-magnitude purposes, the number of reports submitted through the Hotline is compared to the UK population.

Main barriers to reporting CSAM on IWF Portals



Insights from online survey of Portal partners — multiple answers

N=26 — % of Portal partners who have selected the answer

Figure 7

Low rate of valid or actionable reports. Only 9% of the reports submitted through the Portals since 2014 have been actioned by IWF analysts (meaning that the reported content was confirmed to contain illegal material and that steps were taken to have it removed from the internet). This suggests that a significant number of individuals either could not successfully submit a valid report or did not fully understand the purpose of the Portal. In 2024, 16% of non-actioned reports related to content that had already been processed, while most of the remaining reports consisted of invalid URLs or links that did not contain CSAM (e.g. non-child imagery or random pictures).

Total reports submitted per year and average number of reports submitted per Portal per year

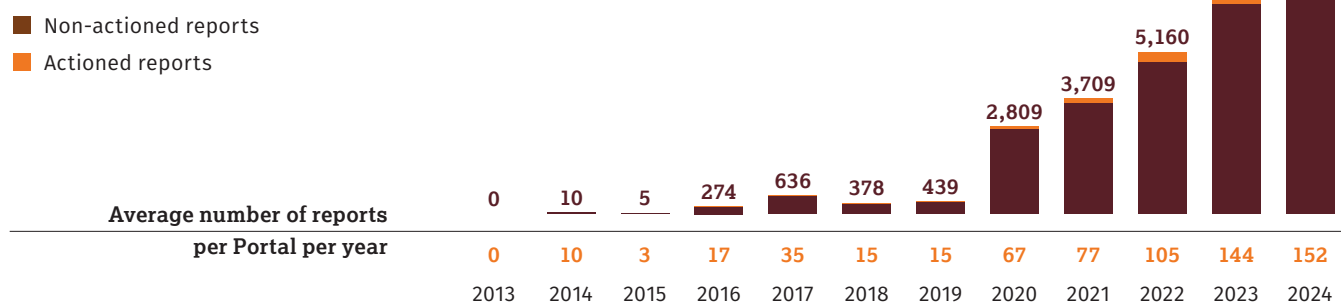
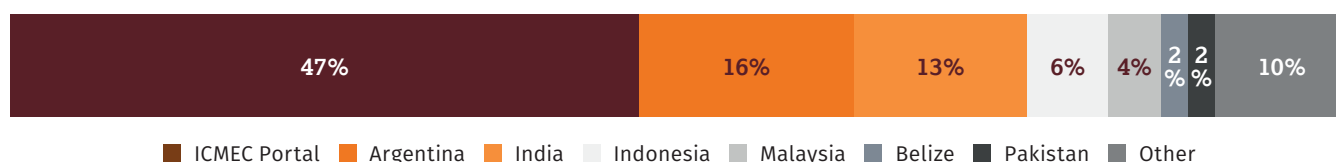


Figure 8

Disparities in Portal usage and actioned reports. There are significant differences across countries and Portals in terms of usage levels, with the ICMEC Portal accounting for approximately half of all submitted reports in 2024. Upper-middle-income countries tend to show higher levels of usage and a greater percentage of actioned content, while many low-income countries have almost no reports and no actioned content. The evaluation identified a correlation between a country's income classification, the maturity of its OCSEA response (including public policies, prevention campaigns, technical expertise of stakeholders on the topic, and the capacity of civil society organisations), and the level of Portal usage.

Figure 9

Breakdown of 2024 reports per Portal



Portal usage by country income category¹⁴ and BOTs

	Portals in low income countries	Portals in lower middle income countries	Portals in upper middle income countries	BOT Portals
Number of Portals	10	17	11	13
Average number of reports submitted per year per Portal	11	80	208	15
Percentage of actioned reports in 2024	0%	8%	24%	2%
Total population/reports submitted in 2024	7,959,239	1,443,070	175,701	1,424

Table 2

Programme design weaknesses. The research showed that several limitations in the programme's design and implementation have constrained its ability to achieve full impact:

- **Limited technical and financial support was budgeted for Portal partners** to promote the Portal and raise awareness about CSAM, resulting in few and fragmented promotional activities.
- **Lack of localisation of the strategy:** Portal countries represent highly heterogeneous contexts, yet the Programme did not adopt differentiated approaches to reflect these variations.
- **Limited coordination with related initiatives on OCSEA** at both international and national levels, including awareness-raising efforts and other reporting mechanisms (e.g., government-led tools, INHOPE hotlines).

¹⁴ World Bank classification

4. RECOMMENDATIONS & STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

The evaluation identified (i) areas for improving the impact of the Portals and (ii) broader strategic questions to guide future programming for the Portals or similar initiatives. While these recommendations are directly relevant to partners continuing the Programme, they may also inform donors and organisations developing or supporting similar online child protection projects in LMICs.

01 Practical recommendations on the Portals

Operational recommendations to strengthen usage, promotion, and impact of the Portals



UX design



Promotion



Distribution



Portal data



M&E

02 Strategic considerations

Key questions to be considered when pursuing the Portal programme or launching similar initiatives



Country selection



Financing & sustainability



Exit & transition strategy



**Legislation & policy
Prevention**



**Criminal justice
Industry**



**Victim support
Research & data**

Ecosystem enablers
(WeProtect MNR framework)

Practical recommendations to improve the Portals

- **UX Design:** Redesign the Portals to make reporting simpler, clearer, and more user-friendly, particularly for users in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).
- **Promotion and Partner Support:** Strengthen partner capacity and resources for effective communication and outreach, and facilitate cross-learning among partners.
- **Distribution:** Enable multi-channel reporting and expand Portal accessibility (for example, through API integration with relevant platforms such as WhatsApp or integration with Aselo/Tech Matters).
- **Portal Usage Data:** Make usage data more accessible to partners and easier to use for programming and advocacy purposes (e.g., number of reports submitted, type of content reported, etc.).
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Ensure that all future Portal-related programmes include a revised Theory of Change, associated tools, and an M&E plan with measurable outcomes and indicators from the outset.

Strategic considerations

- **Country selection and geographical scope:** Define a clear vision for the Programme's geographical focus and objectives. Should the aim be to reach as many countries as possible, or to focus on a smaller number for deeper impact? Should the approach be regional/international (e.g., ICMEC and MTN Portals) or nationally driven (e.g. national Portals)?
- **Financing and sustainability:** Develop a sustainability plan to ensure the long-term continuation of Portal initiatives. Consider potential models for financial sustainability, including contributions from host organisations, governments, or private partners.
- **Exit and transition strategy:** Define clear criteria and processes for transitioning to national solutions (e.g., INHOPE hotlines, government-led cybercrime reporting systems).
- **Ecosystem Enablers:** Ensure that the necessary enablers for effective OCSEA/CSAM response are in place or being developed by other partners working on OCSEA initiatives. The Model National Response Framework developed by the WeProtect Global Alliance provides a useful reference for identifying these enablers and assessing gaps within the national ecosystem.

5. APPENDIX

IWF Reporting Portals reconstructed Theory of Change

