

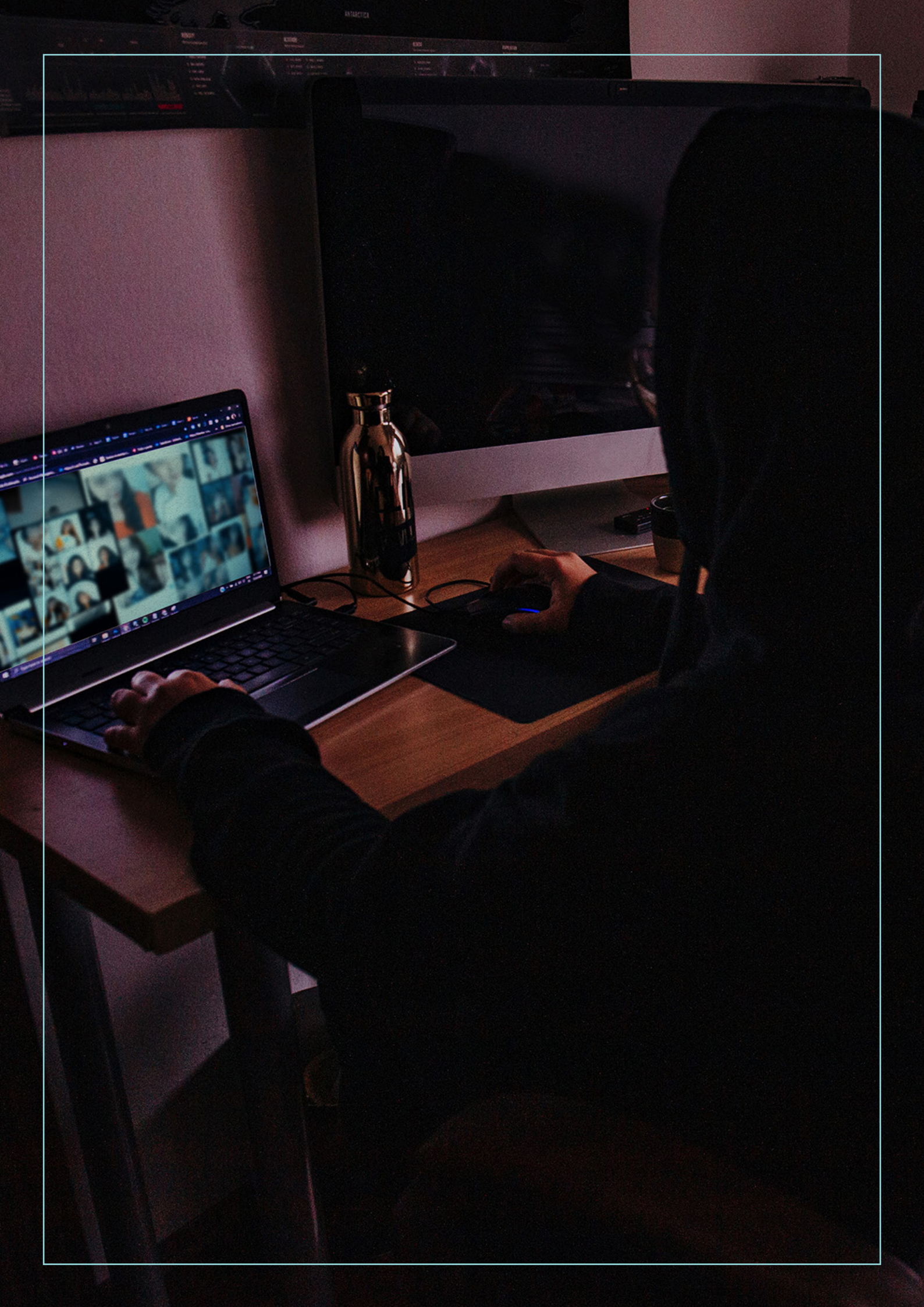
Joint Committee on Law Enforcement

Inquiry into law enforcement capabilities
to respond to cybercrime



ABSTRACT

**Tackling the cybercrime of
online sexual exploitation
of children (OSEC)**



15 December 2023

Senator Helen Polley
The Chair
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement
Inquiry into law enforcement capability to respond to cybercrime

PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2601

Tackling the cybercrime of Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC)

Dear Senator,

Destiny Rescue welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Committee's inquiry into law enforcement capability to respond to cybercrime. This submission provides world-leading examples of collaboration between law enforcement and NGOs to counter the cybercrime of Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC).

Destiny Rescue Limited is an Australian-based international NGO with more than 20 years of experience in countering child trafficking across multiple continents. We recently celebrated our 13,900th rescue of an individual from human trafficking and child sexual exploitation.

Efforts to combat OSEC need to focus on the detection and removal of abusive content and the implementation of effective measures to protect children from exploitation and abuse online.

Destiny Rescue's efforts and insights addressing this issue are enclosed.

Yours sincerely,



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Mergard'.

Paul Mergard
CEO Destiny Rescue Australia

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Executive Summary

Background

Using ICT (Information and Computer Technology) to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children is a cyber-enabled crime, as confirmed by the Australian Cyber Security Centre.¹

Destiny Rescue is an Australian-based NGO that has rescued over 13,900 individuals (mostly children) from exploitation overseas. We have over 20 years of experience in countering child sexual exploitation, including the online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC), across five regions.

The increasing prevalence of online child sexual abuse, including live streaming, is a serious and growing concern that requires urgent attention from law enforcement, technology companies and society as a whole. Efforts to combat this issue need to focus on the detection and removal of abusive content and the implementation of effective measures to protect children from exploitation and abuse online.

A comprehensive approach to address OSEC requires collaboration between various government departments, law enforcement, financial institutions, social media platforms and telecommunication companies to combat this form of exploitation effectively.²

A recent report (Nov 2023) into the behaviours and attitudes of Australian men highlights the growing risk and prevalence of abuse locally, with around **one in six** (15.1 per cent) Australian men reporting sexual feelings towards children.³

The study also highlighted that around **one in 10** (9.4 per cent) Australian men have sexually offended children (including technologically facilitated and offline abuse). Many of these are very active online, including using social media, encrypted apps and cryptocurrency to facilitate access to CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material). Australian law enforcement's capability to target Australia-based offenders in this area of cybercrime is vital to our community's ongoing efforts to counter this issue.

Scientia (The Program)

Destiny Rescue is a participating NGO and founding partner of the Program, which partners with the private sector to enhance counter-human trafficking and slavery operations - including the trafficking of children for OSEC.

The Program is designed to improve counter-human trafficking and slavery operations through the delivery of specialised intelligence technologies, training, and operational support to participating civil, public, and private sector members.

The Program fosters collaboration by providing centralised resources, capabilities, and capacity. It provides a coordination mechanism for information, intelligence, knowledge transfer, collective problem-solving, and joint operations.

Furthermore, the Program seeks to leverage the strengths and differences of participating members to increase collective capability and operational impact while reducing duplication of effort and generating cost efficiencies.

We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau (CCIB) of the Royal Thai Police, enabling formal collaboration and empowerment of the Thai Police to respond to OSEC investigations.

There are significant opportunities for increased collaboration between law enforcement and Destiny Rescue to detect Australian-based offenders. However, additional resources are needed to strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of Thai law enforcement's further utilisation of the intelligence technologies.

Destiny Rescue commends the Committee for its strong support of the continuation of collaboration by the AFP and the ACCCE with foreign law enforcement agencies, **"including capacity building in our region"** (para 7.78 of the report on child exploitation capabilities).

Recommendation 1:
That the Australian government provide immediate funding to strengthen Thai law enforcement capability to counter OSEC, ensuring the continual uploading of Thai-based CSAM to maximise the detection of Australian-based offenders.

Recommendation 2:
That Australia's legislation be amended to prohibit the use of AI to create deep fake images, including in relation to OSEC.

BACKGROUND and GLOBAL POLICY CONTEXT

Background: Destiny Rescue



Overview

Destiny Rescue is an international non-profit organisation whose mission is to rescue children from sexual exploitation (including online exploitation facilitated by cyber criminals) and help them stay free.

Founded in 2001 and operating for over 22 years, Destiny Rescue has rescued increasing numbers of victims each year since 2011 – and has now rescued over 13,900 survivors.

Destiny Rescue focuses on the child sex trafficking aspect of modern slavery. We work with governments and partner NGOs and collaborate with local law enforcement agencies to assist in removing children from harm and supporting their recovery and reintegration.

Currently operating in five regions across Asia, Africa and Latin America, Destiny Rescue partners with law enforcement and governments/NGOs that bring local expertise and cultural understanding to the fight against exploitation.

See further details on Destiny Rescue in our submission to the Committee's inquiry into Law Enforcement Capabilities in Relation to Child Exploitation - Appendix 1.

Our Quarterly Updates (Jan - June 2023) also provide

further background on our activities – see Appendix 2.

This submission focuses on Destiny Rescue's activities and experience in collaborating with law enforcement and like-minded NGOs to counter the cybercrime of OSEC.

Online sexual exploitation of children is a cybercrime

The online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) includes various offence types, with several fitting under the umbrella term of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA). This includes the production, dissemination, and possession of child sexual exploitation material (CSEM); online grooming; "sexting"; "sextortion"; commercial sexual exploitation of children; and the live streaming of child sexual abuse.⁴

Notable offences explored in the submission include:

- Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) offending: This refers to offences involving the viewing of photographic images and videos that depict the sexual abuse of a child. CSAM is widely distributed online, with more than 29 million reports of suspected child sexual abuse material in 2021 alone⁵

- Live streaming of child sexual abuse (LSCSA): This differs from CSAM offending in that the offender is in a different geographical location to the victim and requests specific acts to be performed live by the child or to be perpetrated live against the child by another individual facilitating the abuse.⁶

A key concern for those working to address OSEC cybercrime is to determine how the viewing of CSAM is linked to involvement in the production and sharing of such material or its use in the grooming of children for sexual purposes or the commission of further sexual assaults on children (contact offending).

Most CSAM is held online. It is, therefore, important to understand how offenders inhabit and use the internet to groom children for sexual exploitation purposes.⁷

Extent of OSEC cybercrime

In 2022, there were an estimated 85 million images and videos of child sexual abuse online (which included live streaming of children being sexually abused).⁸

In 2022, the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received 32 million reports of child sexual exploitation and abuse, with 49.4 million images and 37.7 million videos.⁹

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that 28.5% of Australians had experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18, highlighting the widespread nature of this issue.¹⁰

A recent study for the Australian Institute of Criminology emphasises the interrelation between child sexual abuse live streaming, contact abuse, and other forms of child exploitation, indicating the complexity of the problem.¹¹

Live streaming CSA (LSCSA) and the risk of contact offending

It is important to recognise that CSAM is a consequence of, and fuel for, further abuse, and it is crucial to take measures to prevent its production and distribution.¹²

Live streaming is a serious and complex issue that involves broadcasting acts of sexual abuse of children electronically to people anywhere in the world. Offenders are increasingly using encrypted



communication platforms, making it difficult for law enforcement to investigate and detect these crimes. In recent years, an increase in live streamed child abuse has been noted¹³ "... with the pandemic seeing an uptick in live streaming with overseas victims."¹⁴

With evidence that demand for this type of online abuse is high, it is crucial to understand the characteristics of offenders, offences, and victims for effective disruption and prevention.¹⁵

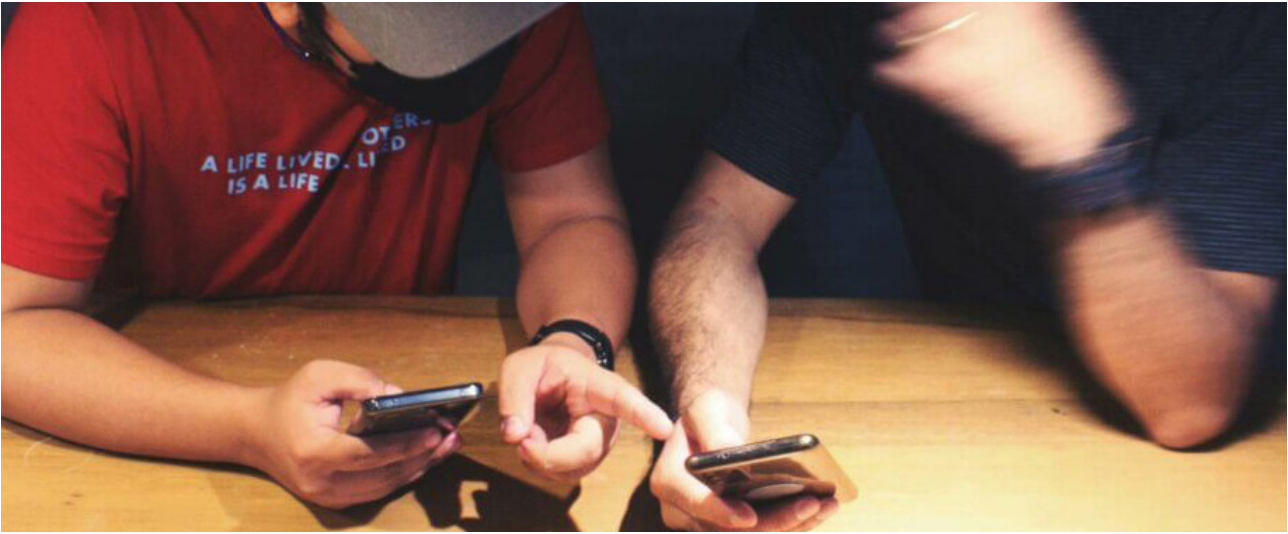
Research has identified a notable sub-group of live-streaming offenders who also engage in contact sexual offending.¹⁶

A recent Australian study of seven Australia-based men who had committed 145 CSA live streaming offences concluded that the use of CSAM and CSA live streaming should be considered by law enforcement agencies as potential risk factors for contact offending.¹⁷

Four of the seven live streaming offenders in the study discussed travelling or booked flights to travel to offend against the children in person.¹⁸

The characteristics of live streaming offenders include the use of mainstream platforms and the payment of low amounts via remittance services to view the abuse of children over live stream. Some of the abuse was categorised as involving sadistic rape and abuse of children, emphasising the severity of these offences.¹⁹

This overlap between live streaming offences and contact abuse highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing these crimes. Understanding the offline criminal behaviour of individuals who live stream child sexual abuse is crucial for effective prevention and intervention strategies.²⁰



Addressing the issue requires a multi-faceted approach that involves understanding the characteristics of offenders, offences, and victims.

Global policy reports and tools

There are many current global reports and tools that inform the context against which emerging OSEC cybercrime threats should be assessed by the Committee. These policy reports and tools include:

- *The Annual Cyber Threat Report (the Australian Cyber Security Centre);*
- *Child Sexual Abuse Material: Model Legislation & Global Review (ICMEC)²¹;*
- *The Global Threat Assessment Report (Assessing the scale and scope of child sexual exploitation and abuse online, to transform the response) (WeProtect Global Alliance);*
- *Global Principles on Digital Safety, World Economic Forum;*
- *Nowhere to Hide, 7 reports, including Online sexual exploitation of children: International and regional legal and policy framework (University of Nottingham, funded by the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery);*
- *#BehindTheScreens The Annual Report 2022 (Internet Watch Foundation);*
- *Scale of Harm (IJM);*
- *CyberTipline Data 2023 (NCMEC)²²;*
- *Basic Online Safety Expectations (First and Second Reports) (eSafety Commissioner);*
- *Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes amongst Australian men (led by the UNSW Australian Human Rights Institute).²³*

Australia-US Joint Council on Combatting Online Child Sexual Exploitation

Destiny Rescue welcomes the decision by the *Australia-US Joint Council on Combatting Online Child Sexual Exploitation* to prioritise 'Joint Law Enforcement Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region' as a key pillar of its Action Plan.

Australian Cyber Security Policy

Destiny Rescue commends the Albanese Government as the first to appoint a Cabinet Minister for Cyber Security.

We note that the *2023-2030 Australian Cyber Security Strategy* has recently been released (November 2023) and includes initiatives for strengthening regional cyber security capability.

Structure of this submission

This submission provides comments on the terms of reference of the inquiry as follows:

- A. Existing law enforcement capabilities;
- B. International, federal and jurisdictional coordination law enforcement mechanisms;
- C. Coordination efforts across law enforcement, non-government and private sector organisations;
- D. Emerging cybercrime threats and challenges;
- E. The opportunities and challenges of the existing legislative framework;
- F. Prevention and education approaches and strategies; and
- G. Other related matters.



A - Existing law enforcement capabilities

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference include:

(A.) Existing law enforcement capabilities in the detection, investigation and prosecution of cybercrime, including both cyber-dependent crimes and cyber-enabled crimes.

Policy framework

The issue of law enforcement capability in the area of OSEC facilitated by cybercriminals is vital to our community's ongoing efforts to counter this issue.

Destiny Rescue commends the Albanese Government for continuing with a range of policy and law enforcement agency initiatives to combat cyber-enabled cybercrimes, including OSEC. These initiatives include:

- The ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking Initiative (ASEAN-ACT Initiative);
- The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE);
- The eSafety Commissioner; and
- AFP and Monash University collaboration regarding the AiLECS (Law Enforcement Community Safety) Laboratory.²⁴

B - International, federal and jurisdictional coordination law enforcement mechanisms

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference include:

(B.) International, federal and jurisdictional coordination law enforcement mechanisms to investigate cybercrimes and share information related to emerging threats.

Regional law enforcement coordination

The then UN Special Rapporteur (2012) for the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children made several detailed recommendations relevant to law enforcement agencies in the context of the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism.²⁵

Destiny Rescue is aware of the extensive cooperation arrangements currently in place between Australian and regional law enforcement agencies in this space.

Destiny Rescue does not have any specific visibility of the extent to which Australian law enforcement agencies may already be implementing the recommendations of the previous UN Special Rapporteur.

The current Special Rapporteur is Mama Fatima Singhateh, who was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2023.

The mandate of the Special Rapporteur primarily focuses on issues, trends and effects related to the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child abuse images and other forms of child sexual abuse material.

The Special Rapporteur is required to submit reports on their findings to the General Assembly and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, providing recommendations for the protection of the rights of the children concerned.

The mandate has been regularly renewed and extended, with a recent thematic study focusing on the exploitation and sexual abuse of children in the context of travel and tourism, including a closer look at the phenomenon of voluntourism.²⁶

C - Coordination efforts across law enforcement, non-government and private sector organisations

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference include:

(C.) Coordination efforts across law enforcement, non-government and private sector organisations to respond to the conduct of cybercrimes and risks of cybercrime.

CSAM (child sexual abuse material) distribution ecosystems evolving rapidly

Destiny Rescue International is encountering cases where technology providers are being used by perpetrators to commit the crime of OSEC in all five regions in which we operate.

Technology has not only enhanced and facilitated traditional forms of sexual exploitation of children, but it has also spawned rapidly evolving new forms and variations of this crime type.

The previous simple exploitation model has now evolved into a more sophisticated model, under which the recruiter (of victims) is a primary distributor of the exploitation material. This material is made available to secondary distributors who then distribute the material to their separate groups of users/offenders.

This more complex CSAM ecosystem is set out in *Figure 7* below.²⁷ In this example, there are multiple victims of the recruiter/primary distributor. There are also four secondary distributors, each with their separate online distributor groups. Multiple members of each of the four distributor groups depicted may be located in Australia.

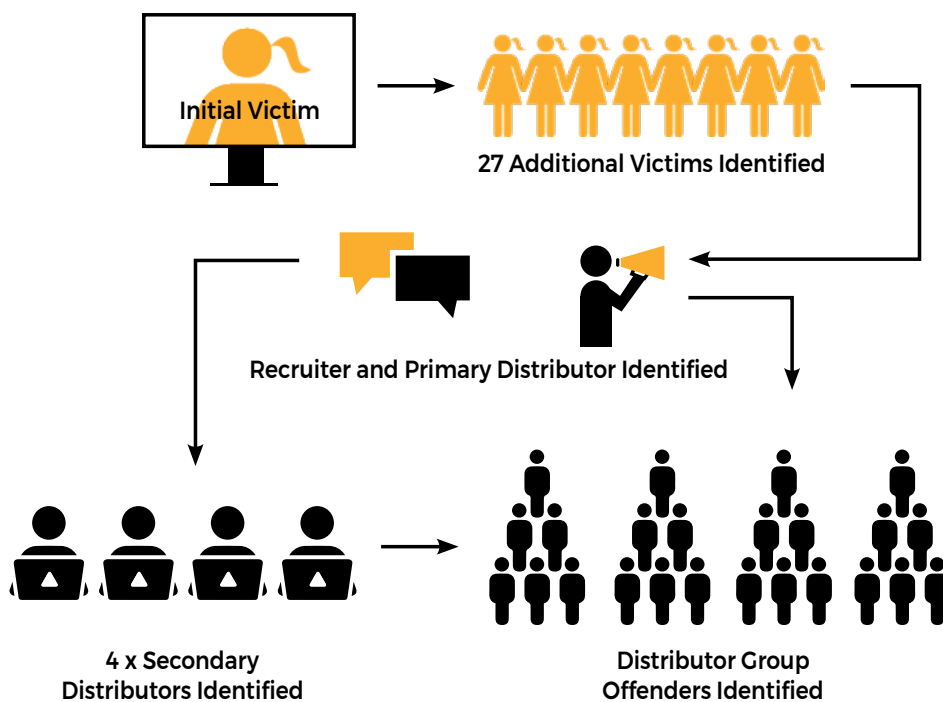


Figure 1: Evolving ecosystems of Primary and Secondary Distributors of CSAM

Disrupting Harm in Thailand

The Philippines has been a leading global hotspot for the financially motivated development of live streamed CSA, with a significant increase in the prevalence of OSEC driven by foreign demand.²⁸ There is an increased risk and evidence that Thailand is showing a similar trend to the Philippines, in this regard.

Reporting by NCMEC, together with the use of advanced technology such as Peer to Peer (p2p) analysis, shows a growing trend of significant demand for CSAEM from both within and directed toward Thailand.

The recent *Disrupting Harm in Thailand* report, released by ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (2022), estimates that 9% of Thai children aged 12-17 (approximately 400,000 children) were victims of grave instances of online sexual exploitation and abuse.²⁹

Thai Hotline is Thailand's largest domestic reporting agency for OSEC reports and is a member of the InHope network. The Hotline corroborates the prevalence of this online harm and confirms they received over 12,000 individual tip-offs in 2022 concerning OSEC.

Disrupting Harm identifies that the current approach to addressing OSEC in Thailand is hindered by a number of impediments within the prevention, intervention and enforcement sectors. For example, isolated interventions and constrained capabilities within the crime cycle produce limited and transient outcomes in the overall capability to combat this cybercrime type.

Law enforcement agencies and partners are often not equipped to combat the problem, much less prevent it.

The key stakeholders seeking to combat these rapidly evolving models of sexual exploitation of children include:

- Law enforcement organisations (LEOs) in the regional (source) country and in the overseas (demand) countries (such as Australia, US, EU, UK);
- Non-government organisations (NGOs) such as Destiny Rescue; and
- Private sector organisations (PSOs) that have adopted counter-human trafficking policies and action plans (e.g. corporate members of the World Travel and Tourism Council).



Many of these well-intentioned efforts are uncoordinated, siloed and limited, and the individual organisations are tactically inferior compared with their adversaries, who are continually exploiting new technologies.

The key insight derived from reviewing the current efforts of these stakeholders is that:

*“Cross-sector collaboration and enhanced intelligence capabilities are the most effective way to increase the effectiveness of current counter human trafficking, exploitation and slavery endeavours”.*³⁰

The key challenge is how to enhance intelligence capabilities and improve the effectiveness of cross-sector collaboration between law enforcement agencies and these other organisations (the partner organisations).

Intelligence Driven Impact.

The Program, a joint venture between Destiny Rescue, a leading intelligence firm and other local NGO partners, is a unique, multi-sector, collaborative approach to combating OSEC within Thailand.

Under this approach, partner organisations are provided with access to new digital forensic capability, ad tech, peer-to-peer networking and open-source exploitation technologies, training and operational integration support.

This maximises online detection and accelerates joint rescue operations.

In collaboration

To address the impediments to collaboration, the Program has engaged and formalised agreements with multiple government and non-government stakeholders engaged in systemic advocacy, prevention, investigation, prosecution and survivor care.

Through its inception period, the Program has signed MOUs with a total of 8 agencies, including the Cyber Crimes Investigation Unit (CCIB) of the Royal Thai Police, Thai Hotline, and For Freedom International (who

have facilitated the growth of dedicated Child Forensic Interviewing facilities within Thailand).

For example, in February 2023, the *Scientia Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)* was signed with the High Tech Crime Division of the Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau (CCIB) of the Royal Thai Police – see *Figure 2* below. The MoU enables Destiny Rescue to collaborate formally and empowers the police to respond to OSEC investigations.

The Committee recently released its report on law enforcement capability in relation to child exploitation. The Committee noted the importance of collaboration between the AFP, the ACCCE and foreign law enforcement agencies in relation to CAM offending. Destiny Rescue commends the Committee for its strong support for the continuation of this collaboration, **“including capacity building in our region”** (para 7.78 of the report on child exploitation capabilities).



Figure 2: MoU ceremony with Royal Thai Police

Building law enforcement capability

Since its inception, the Program has provided training and capacity-building workshops to over 600 Law enforcement and NGO participants actively engaged in the sector. Thailand’s local police are training to deploy this technology to identify leads, locate victims, build cases for rescue and arrest OSEC perpetrators – using our existing partnerships.

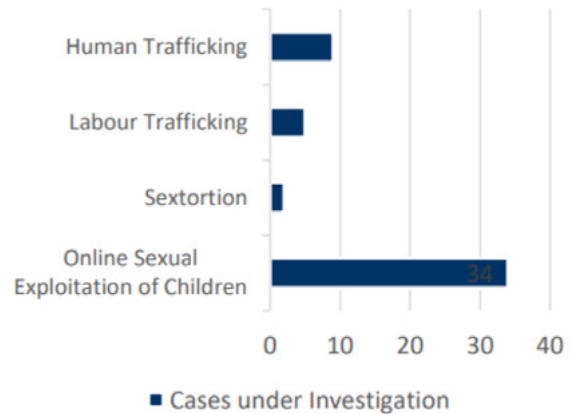
Agencies being trained include:

1. **Department of Special Investigations (DSI);**
2. **Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children (TICAC) taskforce - Royal Thai Police;**
3. **Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division (ATPD) - Royal Thai Police;**
4. **Department of Provincial Administration (DOPA);**
5. **Crime Suppression Division Royal Thai Police; and**
6. **US Homeland Security.**

Disruption

- **The Program has initiated/enhanced 49 active investigations to-date**

Cases under Investigation



- **The Program assisted partners to positively identify 32 children from OSEC investigations; shaped operations to intervene in trafficking**
- **15 persons of interest arrested**



Training and capacity-building workshops

CASE STUDIES

The Program's strength and innovations lie in its locally led and adaptive approach. Several case studies have now been made public to highlight these achievements.

The first public case study highlighting the effectiveness of the Program collaboration in Thailand was released in June 2023 on the Destiny Rescue website. This article, "A New Weapon in the Battle against OSEC", can be found in *Appendix 3*.

A second public case study was released in October 2023: "OSEC Team Takes Down Crime Syndicate in Thailand" – see *Appendix 4*.

Two case studies showcasing the connection between our work in ASEAN and the identification and conviction of Australia-based CSAM offenders are set out below.

CASE STUDY

Five-year-old girl rescued from online sexual abuse after arrest of Australian man³¹



A 5-year-old girl in the Philippines, who was suspected of being solicited by an Australian man, was rescued from online sexual abuse by Filipino authorities with the assistance of Destiny Rescue.

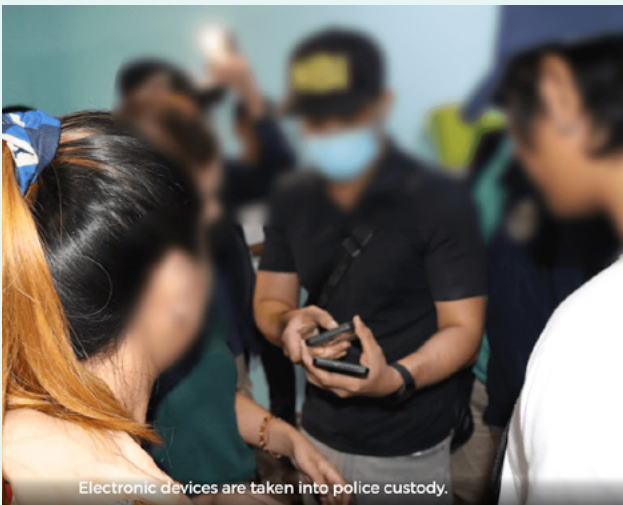
The case was brought to the Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Centre (PICACC) by the Australian Federal Police in January 2023. This was stemming from the arrest of an Australian citizen in 2022.

The man was suspected of the sexual abuse of several Filipino minors via online video chat and possession of

Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM).

The Australian Federal Police, the Philippines' Department of Justice's Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) and the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) were involved in the intelligence gathering and verification of the case.

One of the victims abused by the aforementioned suspect via online video chat, a 5-year-old girl from a northern part of the Philippines, was rescued on March 29, 2023.



Electronic devices are taken into police custody.



Evidence is extracted from the devices.

Destiny Rescue assisted with the logistics of the rescue performed by the NBI's Anti-Human Trafficking Division and Digital Forensics Library and the City Social Welfare and Development Department (CSWDO,) supported by the IACAT.

“To see the collaborative efforts of the Australian Federal Police and NBI result in the rescue of the child is amazing,” Destiny Rescue’s Philippines Country Manager said. **“We have worked on cases similar to this in the past, and it’s never an easy investigation nor operation to carry out.”**

The day the child was rescued, the pair suspected of abusing her and creating the CSAM was arrested for violating four separate Filipino laws regarding rape, online trafficking and child sexual abuse. Overwhelming evidence was gathered with a search warrant by Filipino authorities against the suspects in the form of video footage, sex paraphernalia and receipt of a money transfer from Australia to the Philippines in their name. This evidence indicated they had been trafficking, abusing and exploiting the child for over a year.

The child has been temporarily taken into the custody of the CSWDO, where she is being cared for and protected as her next steps are determined by government social workers.

The investigation further revealed the suspects abused

other children. The NBI is verifying the location and identities of the victims so they may move forward with their rescue as well.

The Australian suspect is currently before the court in Australia in relation to child exploitation-related offences.



Other evidence is photographed.

A Destiny Rescue operative in the Philippines reflected on the case. *“It was truly an unsettling experience.... However, the efforts of the law enforcers from the Philippines and Australia, together with the support of Destiny Rescue, give a fervent hope that, someday, this evil can end,”* he said.

CASE STUDY



The Girl Behind the Green Gate

5-year-old Chelsea (pictured right) was recently rescued from sexual exploitation in the Philippines.

Her rescue was the result of painstaking work by a Destiny Rescue agent ('Caleb') in collaboration with the National Bureau of Investigations (NBI) of the Philippines.

THE CASE

In October 2022, a Thai informant told the agent he had been contacted by a trafficker (TJ) through a dating site. The trafficker was offering to provide live sex videos with very young children.

One particular little girl named Chelsea was frequently offered. Caleb eventually discovered that Chelsea lived next door to the trafficker. He learned that Chelsea suffered abuse from TJ and occasionally from her mother, who was complicit in the exploitation.

After extensive research, Caleb identified the mother's public profile page and brought his research to the NBI.

Caleb relentlessly worked until he noticed a particular detail in a few pictures. The victim's mother appeared to sell clothing on the street, and behind her was a unique gate. If he could find that gate, he'd find Chelsea's home.

Using Google's street view, Caleb travelled up and down

the city streets from his computer. He painstakingly worked through the entire urban area, street by street, looking for a single gate. After hours of work, he found it.

Caleb presented the full case to the NBI and subsequently flew to the Philippines to assist in the raid. For two weeks, Destiny Rescue agents worked with the police to plan the rescue operation.

After a nail-biting few days, Chelsea was rescued from harm, TJ was arrested along with a number of other people implicated in the trafficking ring, and through using Destiny Rescue's technology solution, many referrals were sent to law enforcement agencies in Australia, NZ, USA, UK and other countries.



Surveillance being carried out



The agnets involved



The perpatrator arrested

THIS SINGLE CASE HAS RESULTED IN THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES:

- **Hundreds of Australian suspects identified** (number unublishable)
- **Multiple Australians arrested** (to date)
- **Additional suspects in four western nations**
- **Multiple children removed from harm** (to date)

These case studies demonstrate how Destiny Rescue is training Thailand's local police to deploy this technology and, as a result, why we have seen growth in OSEC leads and victim identification, covert rescue operations, and joint raids with local police.

Since the inception of the Program in mid-2022, it has revealed the extent to which there was a lack of coordination, social infrastructure and alignment amongst NGO counter-trafficking agencies, law enforcement and the private sector in responding to human trafficking.

Law Enforcement officials described a positive internal shift in perceptions of NGOs and their potential to support the Thai government's ambitions to counter trafficking.

Evaluation quotes:

- *'With the Program, we can now see deeper into the trafficking networks. We can now identify more through # ID. More powerful. Device surveillance for trafficking is helping a lot.'*
- *'The magnitude of the crime has become clearer through the Program... it has shown us the problem we thought was huge, is even bigger. This has been an insight.'*
- *'Through the Program, we have got to hear a lot of experiences from partners, from cases that they have shared, and we can now join with other partners on the rescues. Not just one NGO working; now, 1 or 2 or 3 partners come along and go together. A more well-rounded approach coming together on these cases.'*

Enhancing Australia's OSEC response by improving cyber tip reporting to Australia from source countries

Australia, as a leading consumer of CSAM within the Asia-Pacific region, faces a critical opportunity to significantly enhance the detection and reporting of OSEC.

Traditional source countries of CSAM, such as Thailand, are not adequately reporting material to cyber tip agencies. For example, the Program estimates between 150,000 and 250,000 exploitative images and videos sit within local Police and NGO (informally held) storage devices, personal computers, and investigative documents.

Cyber tip agencies work by detecting unique 'hash' indicators of submitted abuse material, and an alert is triggered when an offender downloads and accesses this content.

Submissions are made to cyber tip agencies by both 'compliant' internet platforms and by Law Enforcement post-arrest. Agencies such as *Interpol* and the *InHope Network* work in collaboration with NCMEC to categorise its database (known as 'ICSE'), holding tight criteria for accepting and indexing exploitative material.

Destiny Rescue OSEC Agents are certified as Interpol Content Assessors, holding the relevant skills to classify exploitative images for inclusion in the ICSE database.

Thailand's most used social and messaging platform (known as '*Line*') has approximately 50 million users (70% of the total population). However, it is non-compliant with international cyber tip reporting guidelines relating to messages and visual content both sent and received. *Line* currently does not contribute exploitative content to NCMEC. This leaves a substantial amount of non-indexed OSEC material, particularly involving Thai and Filipino children, beyond the reach of conventional global reporting mechanisms.

This reporting deficiency hinders the identification of Australia-based involvement in the OSEC crime cycle. Thai Law Enforcement currently lacks the necessary infrastructure and capacity to store, assess and submit

newly found CSAM material, much of which is stored by police on personal computers and hard drives.

Immediate need for action

In a recent case (Operation Accord), in which Destiny Rescue partnered with the Royal Thai Police, it was revealed that organised criminal networks distributed over 100,000 child exploitation videos to 3,400 individuals through '*Line*', with indicators of material being distributed to Australia-based offenders.

Enquiries reveal that none of this newly discovered CSAM content was submitted to cyber tip agencies or adequately stored and/or indexed.

Destiny Rescue has identified the need to facilitate and strengthen the connection between victims, reporting agencies and Thai Law Enforcement through data compatibility with NCMEC.

In 2022, NCMEC added 1.1 million hash values to their growing list of more than 6.3 million hash values of known CSAM.³²

There is an urgent need to address the reporting gap and strengthen the monitoring and reporting capability of Thai law enforcement. By addressing these issues, cyber tips relating to Australia-based offenders will increase.

The Australia-based dimension

As highlighted in *Figure 1* on page 12, multiple Australia-based offenders are members of the separate Distribution Groups accessing the CSAM obtained by the Secondary Distributors from the Primary Distributor. The involvement of Australia-based offenders is summarised in more detail in *Figure 3*, on the next page.

The Program's intelligence technologies enable the identity of many of these Australia-based offenders to be traced.

Destiny Rescue is now actively working to provide details of recently identified Australia-based offenders to the AFP and the ACCCE.

The lack of formal capacity within Thai law enforcement to index and refer to the CSAM images referred to above significantly diminishes the ability to detect and report

such material. This leaves Australian authorities with reduced intelligence and information to act in relation to Australia-based offenders. In its recent report, *'The pursuit of equality: Inquiry*

into the rights of women and children', The JSCFADT noted the necessity for Australia to assist our regional neighbours in education and implementation of their anti-CSAM strategies (para 3.107).

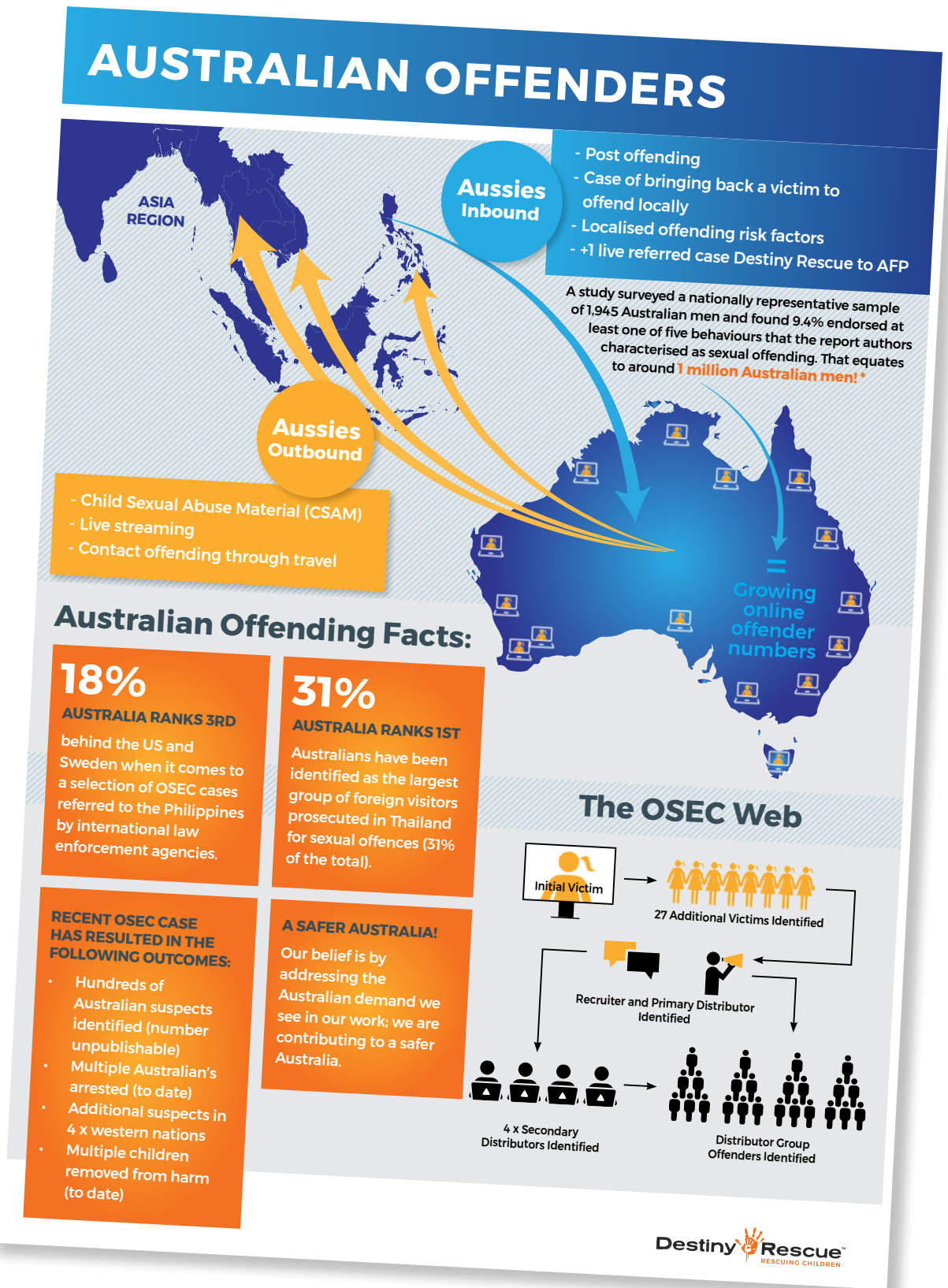


Figure 3: The involvement of Australia-based offenders

Recommendation: Resources to strengthen Thai police capability

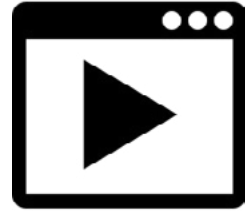
Destiny Rescue commends the Committee for its strong support of the continuation of collaboration by the AFP and the ACCCE with foreign law enforcement agencies, **“including capacity building in our region.”** (Para 7.78)

Destiny Rescue recommends that the Australian government provide funding resources to enable Thai law enforcement agencies to strengthen their anti-OSEC capabilities further. The objectives of the additional funding include:

1. **Infrastructure Enhancement:** Provide Thai law enforcement with the necessary tools and infrastructure to index and refer CSAM material detected on the ‘Line’ messaging application, with a specific focus on identifying and reporting cases involving Australia-based offenders;
2. **Formal Capacity Building:** Empower Thai law enforcement with the formal capacity to effectively index and refer CSAM images related to Australia-based offenders to reporting agencies; and
3. **Estimated Impact:** Destiny Rescue estimates that by initiating this project, it can index over a quarter of a million unique media containing child exploitation content, significantly improving the detection of Australian offenders involved in OSEC.

Recommendation 1:
That the Australian government provide immediate funding to strengthen Thai law enforcement capability to counter OSEC, ensuring the continual uploading of Thai-based CSAM to maximise the detection of Australia-based offenders.

Indexing and recording child abuse content in source countries



#123456

Giving a CSAM video a serial number.

Indexed material is sent to global tip-off bodies in NCMEC and Interpol



The serial number #123456 is recorded and compared against internet traffic in Australia.

Tip-off agencies send referrals to Australia regarding persons who are accessing this material



When an Australian views, downloads or accesses #123456 the AFP are notified of the consumer’s IP address and other relevant details resulting in more Australians being detected and held to account.

D – Emerging cybercrime threats and challenges

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference include:

(D.) Emerging cybercrime threats and challenges affecting Australian entities and individuals, including the scale and scope of cyber crimes conducted in Australia or against Australians.

Key Issues and Facts

The online sexual exploitation of children by Australia-based offenders, facilitated by cybercriminals, is a grave issue of community concern. Australia ranks third behind the US and Sweden when it comes to a selection of OSEC cases referred to the Philippines by international law enforcement agencies.³³

Access to technology

The increase in availability and access to the internet, including the availability of 5G internet in remote areas, has been a contributing factor in the rise of OSEC. There are an estimated 750,000 predators online at any one time, posing a huge danger to the 800 million children who are actively using social media.³⁴

In 2022, the more than 32 million reports of suspected online child sexual abuse, represented a historical peak. Of these, 99% were submitted by electronic service providers (ESPs), as defined by NCMEC. Among these reports, those on grooming marked an 82% increase.³⁵

Software innovation facilitates OSEC

Technology has also dramatically enhanced the electronic connection between potential perpetrators and vulnerable communities. In non-English speaking countries, the language differences between Western-based abusers and local communities previously provided a barrier between these two groups.

However, over the past five years, the rise in automatic electronic translation software has broken down these barriers. Within Thailand, for example, this simple development in technology has opened the door for abusers, paedophiles and potential traffickers to freely communicate with non-English speaking co-offenders and victims in vulnerable communities in rural and remote parts of Thailand.



AI-generated CSAM to be excluded from search results

Australia will require global search engines (like Google) to remove CSAM created by artificial intelligence (AI) from search engine results.³⁶ These AI-generated images are known as ‘deep fakes’. A new code drafted by the global platforms (at the Government’s request) will require search engines to ensure that such content is not returned in search results.³⁷

There has been a recent spike in deep fake activity involving school students (and others) using AI technology to create explicit images of classmates without their consent. The vast majority (96%) of deep fakes are non-consensual pornography. Legislative measures will be required as a matter of urgency to deal with this alarming trend.

EU AI Legislation

Destiny Rescue welcomes the announcement by the European Parliament and the EU Council of their provisional agreement on a landmark AI Act, which aims to ban AI practices “... considered to be a clear threat to people’s safety, livelihood and rights”.

Recommendation 2:
That Australia’s legislation be amended to prohibit the use of AI to create deep fake images, including in relation to child abuse material.

E - The opportunities and challenges of the existing legislative framework

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference include:

(E.) The opportunities and challenges of the existing legislative framework in supporting law enforcement to investigate and act upon instances of cybercrime

Australia's legislative framework

There are a number of dimensions to Australia's legislative framework for dealing with the cybercrime of OSEC. These threads run through various provisions of the *Criminal Code Act 1995* and the *Modern Slavery Act 2021*.

Criminal Code Act Review

Destiny Rescue provided a response to the Targeted Review of Divisions 270 and 271 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)* (the Code) regarding slavery, slavery-like offences and trafficking offences (March 2023).

This submission identified several possible gaps in the legislative tools available to law enforcement to investigate and prosecute offenders in cases of child trafficking for sexual exploitation.

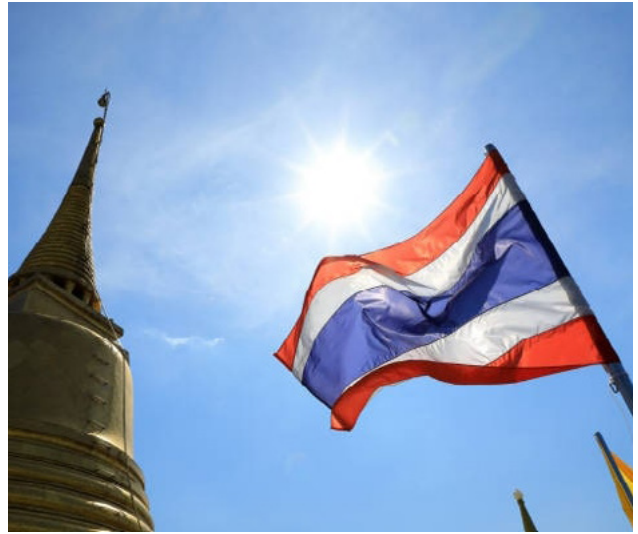
Destiny Rescue's submission was commended in the *Findings Report*, which was released recently.

In particular, we contend that the term "sexual service" is inappropriate in the context of Australia's child trafficking offences (see Division 271 of the Code). This term should be replaced with the term "sexual exploitation". This would remove a gap in the legislative provisions of the child trafficking laws in Australia (see Destiny Rescue's submission to the Targeted Review).

Modern Slavery Act review

In the context of the recent review of the *Modern Slavery Act 2021*, Destiny Rescue believes that the definition of modern slavery should be extended to cover the sexual exploitation of children.

This would remove a gap in the legislative provisions of the modern slavery laws in Australia.



Thai Government legislation reform

Thailand currently has no preventative crime legislation that protects children from online grooming. Online grooming involves a perpetrator engaging with a minor and enticing them to meet in person for sexual exploitation or share CSAM through manipulation, threat or extortion. The crime is described as 'Grooming' and is covered by legislation in most countries around the world.

In 2022, Destiny Rescue was the only NGO in Thailand invited by the Thai government to collaborate on a specialist law change Working Group to develop and initiate this law within Thailand.

In 2022, we participated in this Working Group together with members from the Office of the Attorney General, law enforcement specialists and members from the Thai parliament.

Since then, the proposal has moved to its final reading at the Thai Congress. It is anticipated to be ratified later in 2023.

The Pursuit of Equality

The JSCFADT recommends, in *The pursuit of equality*, that the government develop legislation aimed at the rights of CSAM victims, including pathways to seek civil compensation from perpetrators (Recommendation 6). Destiny Rescue supports JSCFADT's recommendations.

F - Prevention and education approaches and strategies

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference include:

(F.) Prevention and education approaches and strategies to reduce the prevalence of victimisation through cybercrime.

National campaign to prevent child sexual abuse

Destiny Rescue commends the Albanese Government for recently launching the first national campaign aimed at preventing child sexual abuse. The campaign is long overdue and is a component of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030*.

Departing traveller education campaigns

In light of the concerning ASEAN statistics cited earlier and a specific recommendation from the then UN Special Rapporteur, Destiny Rescue believes that Australia has an obligation to continue to conduct awareness-raising campaigns directed at departing travellers bound for ASEAN countries. The focus of these campaigns should be to counter the sexual exploitation and victimisation of children in the context of travel and tourism.

Online predators who travel from Australia to ASEAN to offend in person pose a significant risk of being contact offenders in Australia, too.

Destiny Rescue's [Pre-Budget Submission 2023-24](#) recommended that **\$3.65M** be allocated from the ASEAN-ACT Initiative (or other funding source) to fund a 'Safe Children, Safe Traveller' campaign directed at departing Australians travelling to Thailand and other ASEAN countries.

Destiny Rescue wishes to collaborate with Australian law enforcement agencies in relation to the implementation of any such awareness-raising campaign.

Conclusion

The issue of Australian law enforcement capability in the area of OSEC cybercrime is vital to our community's ongoing efforts to counter this issue.

A comprehensive approach to address OSEC involves collaboration between various government departments, law enforcement agencies, and telecommunication companies to combat this form of exploitation effectively.³⁸

There are significant opportunities for increased collaboration between the AFP/ACCCE and Destiny Rescue to detect Australia-based offenders. However, additional resources are needed to strengthen and enhance the effectiveness of Thai law enforcement's further training and utilisation of our technology.

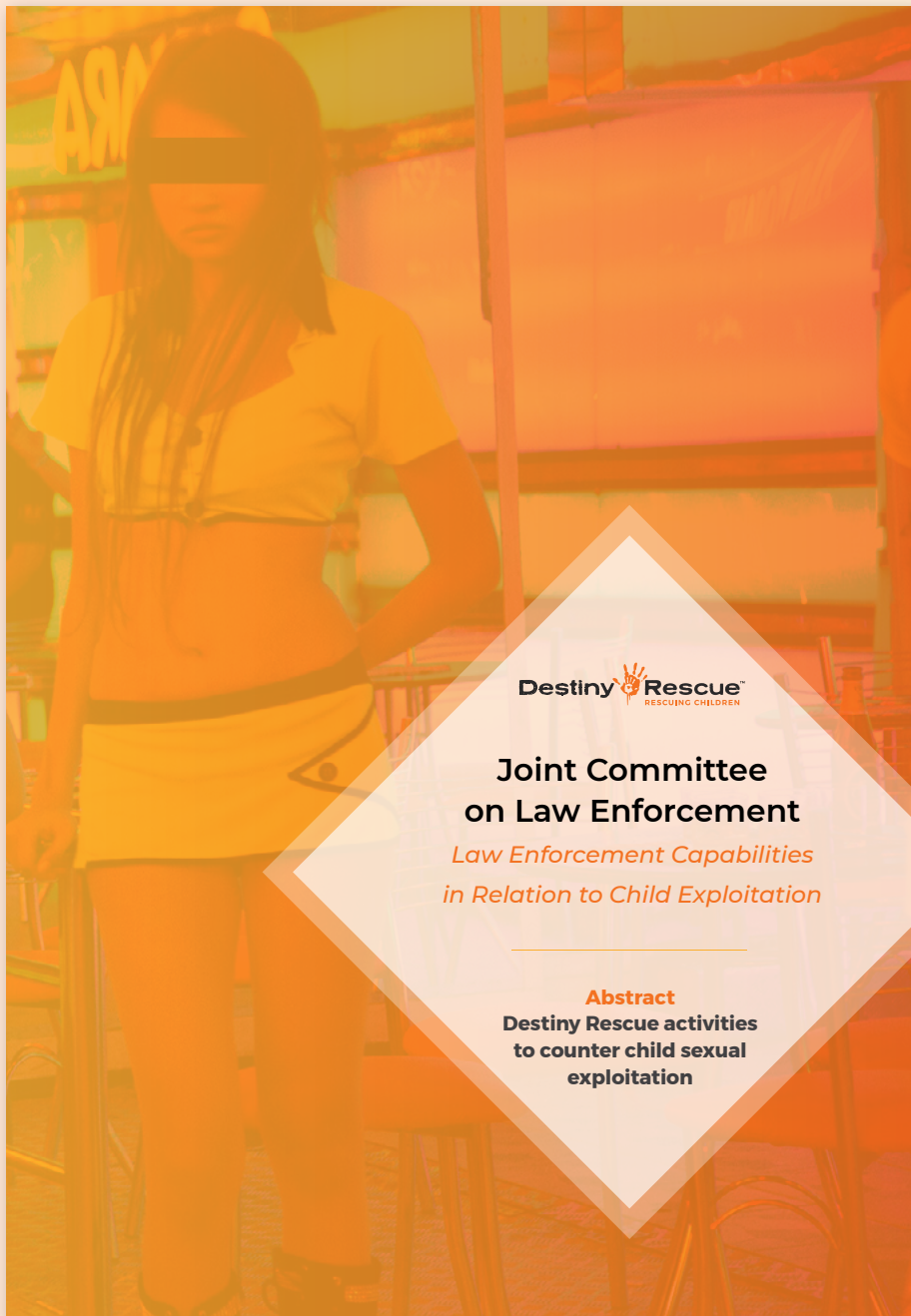
Recommendation 1:
That the Australian government provide immediate funding to strengthen Thai law enforcement capability to counter OSEC, ensuring the continual uploading of Thai-based CSAM to maximise the detection of Australia-based offenders.

Recommendation 2:
That Australia's legislation be amended to prohibit the use of AI to create deep fake images, including in relation to child abuse material.

Appendix 1:

Destiny Rescue - Joint Committee on Law Enforcement Inquiry Submission - Submission 52

More about the submission - [Click Here](#)



Appendix 2:

Destiny Rescue Quarterly Updates Jan - June 2023

JANUARY - MARCH Report - [CLICK HERE](#)

APRIL - JUNE Report - [CLICK HERE](#)



APPENDIX 3: - CASE STUDY #1



Scientia: A new weapon in the battle against OSEC (22 June 2023) [Blog link - CLICK HERE](#)

After a long wait, we are excited to announce a powerful new intelligence technology in the fight against the online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC)!

In past posts, we've discussed OSEC and talked about why cases are exploding right now. Children are exceptionally susceptible to online exploitation, and criminals have taken advantage of it. In fact, a recent report from IWF found that online internet child sexual exploitation doubled from 2020 to 2022.³⁹

Because reporting is notoriously low and traffickers and offenders often live in different countries than their victims, prosecution is long and laborious. In the meantime, criminals, hidden behind layers of security and utilising dozens of different online profiles, continue to operate unhindered.

That's why we're glad to have a new secret weapon in our arsenal.

In 2022, a top security company donated over \$5 million worth of cutting-edge security materials to Destiny Rescue to save OSEC victims in Thailand and bring their abusers to justice. If the internet is a vast labyrinth where traffickers pursue, exploit, and conceal their victims, we've just added bloodhounds to the team.

The Program

The new Program is much more than just a top-tier software suite. With 15 dedicated personnel, several of whom are on the ground in Thailand, it's a full-service investigative system unlike any other, and it's pulling back the curtain on traffickers.

While police can use the program with a warrant



The Destiny Rescue Thailand team recently held a training with law enforcement agency officials



Child online exploitation often begins with the use of a smartphone.

for more in-depth investigations, the majority of the Program's work is accomplished using only publicly accessible, legal—and, most importantly—court-admissible means. While we can't get into the minutiae of how the system works without compromising its capabilities, let's look at a few aspects that set it apart from other programs.

The following information can get a little bit technical, so here's an oversimplified snippet for the technologically impaired too intimidated to proceed further:

The new system finds traffickers and victims alike with incredible efficiency, building a body of evidence to take down perpetrators while helping police rescue children faster than ever, all without violating personal privacy laws.

Unparalleled investigative power

Our new system cuts months from investigations.

If police only pursued reported cases of OSEC, they'd only investigate a tiny fraction of abuse going on at any given time. For detectives, identifying online child abuse is like attempting to investigate a crime that no one reported. You don't know who the victim is, who the perpetrator is or where or when it was committed.

That's one big reason the Program is such a game-changer. One particular piece of the software quickly sorts through hundreds of thousands of internet images more rapidly than a human ever could, searching for child sexual abuse material (CSAM). It compares these images to identifiers supplied by the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to

single out images that might show instances of child exploitation.

What's even more impressive is that these intelligence technologies have the capability to scan peer-to-peer (P2P) networks. For the unfamiliar, P2P networks don't use regular internet channels but instead set up networks between individual computers or through private servers. Offenders share videos and pictures of child abuse through P2P networks to hide their criminal activities. Thanks to this new software, perpetrators are quickly losing what they once thought were "safe" places to share their despicable material. Once it has tracked down suspicious images, the system works to identify the person behind the profile. It produces the offender's IP address, which is essentially the unique code for a personal computer. With this code, officers have everything they need, including a physical address, to start investigating the person behind the material.

Hunting down criminals

But traditional computers and laptops aren't the only weapons OSEC traffickers use: smartphones have become a staple of the despicable business—one that criminals have used to devastating effect. Some offenders may have a dozen smartphones with different profiles associated with each one. Each of those smartphones, however, has an IP address, just like any computer.

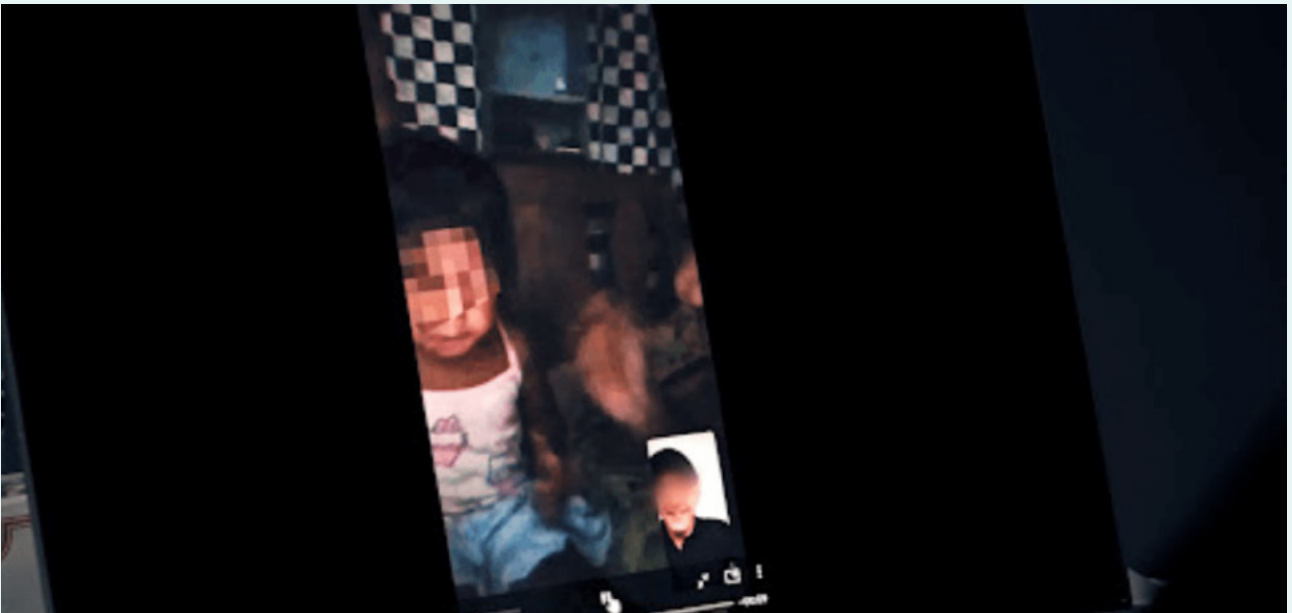
Once officers have a phone's IP address, the software can begin tracking it through ID pings off of other

devices. This isn't the same as private real-time location sharing. Instead, police can see when the perpetrator's phone connects to certain public networks. Because this information is publicly accessible, police can build a robust case composed of admissible evidence.

Using this method, police can paint a picture of the perpetrators' routine habits and travel patterns. Outside providing vital data for a legal case, keeping an eye on their movements can yield pertinent practical information, like where the traffickers live, where victims are located and the best place and time to make an arrest.

interviewer and child psychologist to ensure the interview process for rescued children does not cause additional trauma. Once all the data-gathering and case-building are complete, our end goal is always the wellbeing of the survivors.

Trauma-informed interviewers are trained to converse gently with the child in a safe environment, letting them direct the discussion at a comfortable pace. As the conversation progresses, interviewers expertly ask questions that lead to incriminating evidence against the offender and may even lead to more rescues.



Live streaming sessions with perpetrators are both uniquely damaging to children and particularly hard to track

This new system also has the ability to root out pertinent information from any devices that police recover—which is particularly important because these phones or laptops may reveal traffickers' contacts, victim identities, P2P networks, images and other incriminating evidence. This capability not only builds the body of admissible evidence but also helps police locate more perpetrators and victims.

If the police request it, Scientia's team members on the ground can also set up physical surveillance on targets from public locations, tightening the net even further.

Trauma-informed

Despite all these powerful tools, we never lose sight of our mission: rescuing the children. The Program empowers police and social workers with training and development from an internationally licensed forensic

Conclusion

The internet is quickly becoming the new brothel. Hidden behind layers of protection and perceived anonymity, predators feel freer than ever to pursue their most depraved tendencies. And precious children are suffering as a result.

We're playing a part in changing that.

APPENDIX 4: - CASE STUDY #2



OSEC Team Takes Down Crime Syndicate in Thailand (06 October 2023) [Blog link - CLICK HERE](#)

In February 2023, Destiny Rescue's new intelligence technologies in the battle against OSEC were put to the test.

A tip-off hotline in Thailand produced a lead: someone was advertising the sale of horrific media on X (formerly Twitter). For a monthly fee, members could join an online group for access to thousands of videos and images of children being sexually abused.

That's when Scientia stepped in.

Scientia is more than just a software suite. Our new, fully-staffed program efficiently and thoroughly sorts through terabytes of data, equipping on-site investigators with the evidence they need to incriminate traffickers as we simultaneously locate and rescue exploited kids.



One in five children in Thailand are at risk of being exploited online ⁴⁰

But the police were inundated with cases when the tip came in; there simply wasn't enough manpower available to verify the tip without neglecting ongoing cases, much less tracking down suspects or victims.

Stepping into the dark

Since the police had no bandwidth to launch an investigation, our Scientia team filled that gap by building a case for them.

We were granted authorisation to immediately get to work thanks to an agreement we signed with Thailand's government.⁴¹ Caleb, one of our rescue agents specialising in OSEC cases, went undercover online. After creating a fake profile, he joined the heinous group.

What the team found was appalling.

This was no small, tight-knit band of twisted individuals. The group was actually one of four connected accounts run by six kingpins who'd organised the entire system. It had thousands of members from nearly every district in Thailand.



OSEC cases can be long and laborious, with agents spending hundreds of hours building rapport with perpetrators, verifying abuse and analysing every tiny detail while attempting to determine the location of every single victim

And the network was sharing over 50,000 files of child sexual abuse material (CSAM). They depicted victims as young as two years old.

Using Scientia's powerful software tools, the team began the laborious process of connecting fake accounts to real identities so the criminals could be identified. But they didn't stop there.

Thwarting traffickers is one of our top priorities, but our primary goal is rescuing children from sexual exploitation.

Finding the victims

While most of the videos shared in the group were essentially re-posts from other websites, about a quarter of them were newer—these videos were getting posted to the group almost as soon as they were recorded. Agent Caleb said that to create these videos, abusers “would directly target the children and manipulate these children into doing things on camera by coercion or threat.”



Social media and instant messaging platforms are among the most popular online activities for children in Thailand

Predators would contact kids online, primarily through Instagram, and worm their way into the children's lives. Using various means, they'd deceive the kids into thinking they could be trusted before eventually soliciting sexual media from the children, entrapping them. Once exploited, these kids were constantly badgered for more videos and ensnared by the threat that the traffickers would expose the images to friends or family if they failed to comply.

The next step was the most gut-wrenching. To identify the victims in the videos, agents had to watch them.

Caleb said the task of finding the children was both daunting and sickening: “We watched thousands of videos because... we don't know, firstly, the nationality of these children. They could be from anywhere in the world.”

They knew the children were actively being abused but had no way of knowing where the children lived, how old they were or even their names. This is where the professionals on the Scientia team showed the team's incredible value.

“One of our local Thai investigators actually poured through thousands of videos and plucked out every single piece of evidence they could,” Caleb said. *“They actually put names to every one of these kids.”*

Destroying the syndicate

Once the team had amassed enough evidence to build a case, they presented their findings to the Royal Thai Police (RTP).

Upon receiving the evidence, the police acted fast. After verifying our findings, they quickly got warrants for the kingpins of the organised crime network.



Earlier this year, Destiny Rescue held an OSEC training with the RTP

Officers executed the warrants swiftly, arresting all the leaders before one could inform the others that they'd been found out. Every suspect had large quantities of CSAM on them at the time of arrest. Their network was dismantled, and the websites shut down.

An unconventional rescue

With the crime leaders out of the way, our team immediately began efforts to rescue the exploited children we'd managed to identify.

But this didn't look like a normal rescue operation. Unlike traditionally trafficked children, they weren't being forced to work in a bar or held against their will. All of these exploited children were still at home.

But that doesn't mean the victims weren't vulnerable. Traffickers targeted kids from broken homes or children who were grossly neglected. Some of them were left to their own devices (literally) all day, giving predators ample opportunity to manipulate them online.

The Scientia team coordinated with Thailand's child services division to make the children safe. As soon as we provided officials with the names and addresses of the kids, social workers went to their homes and removed them from harm.

All 30 children we identified were rescued. The youngest was just 6 years old.



Scientia is a full-service investigative system unlike any other, and it's pulling back the curtain on traffickers

The kids were referred to shelters where they were gently interviewed about their experience and began healing from the trauma they'd experienced. And, despite never meeting their abusers in person, the psychological and emotional damage was profound.

"Some of those stories that were told by those kids were very heartbreaking," Caleb said. "One who was severely depressed contemplated suicide. Others had been just recently from a broken home."

A new thread

The interviews also revealed something more: this case was far from over.



According to the Internet Watch Foundation, the United States hosts more CSAM sites than any other country on the planet.⁴²

Those interviews uncovered a surprising fact: many of the children were being trafficked online from multiple sources. While the ring we'd targeted had been dismantled, these poor children revealed that those criminals weren't the only ones exploiting them; foreign traffickers were, too.

That information led the Program team to shift their focus. Caleb said they're now looking outside Thailand and toward the United States and Europe, not for victims, but for offenders. "Westerners are approaching these children and tapping into the same vulnerabilities," Caleb said.

While this information is appalling, it's not really surprising.

Children in other nations may be suffering online abuse at higher rates, but offenders in Western countries are disproportionately driving the demand for the abhorrent material.

And a new target

But these predators may not be as safe as they think. Our agents, backed by the power of the Program system, are committed to hunting the abusers down, no matter where they call home. Undaunted by the ocean between his team and the offenders, Caleb said that *"a number of foreigners we're now targeting as a result of the abuse of those children."*

OSEC is an enormous problem, and it's only growing. As long as demand increases in this sickening trade, traffickers will keep seeking out vulnerable children to exploit. But perhaps when our team and other like-minded NGOs (non-governmental organisations) help to equip police to arrest perpetrators half a world away, we can start helping take down criminals in the demand for this hideous trade.

Until then, our teams will keep doing what they always have: rescuing kids.

Appendix 5:

Destiny Rescue Australia, Annual Report, 2022

To view the Annual Report - [CLICK HERE](#)



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