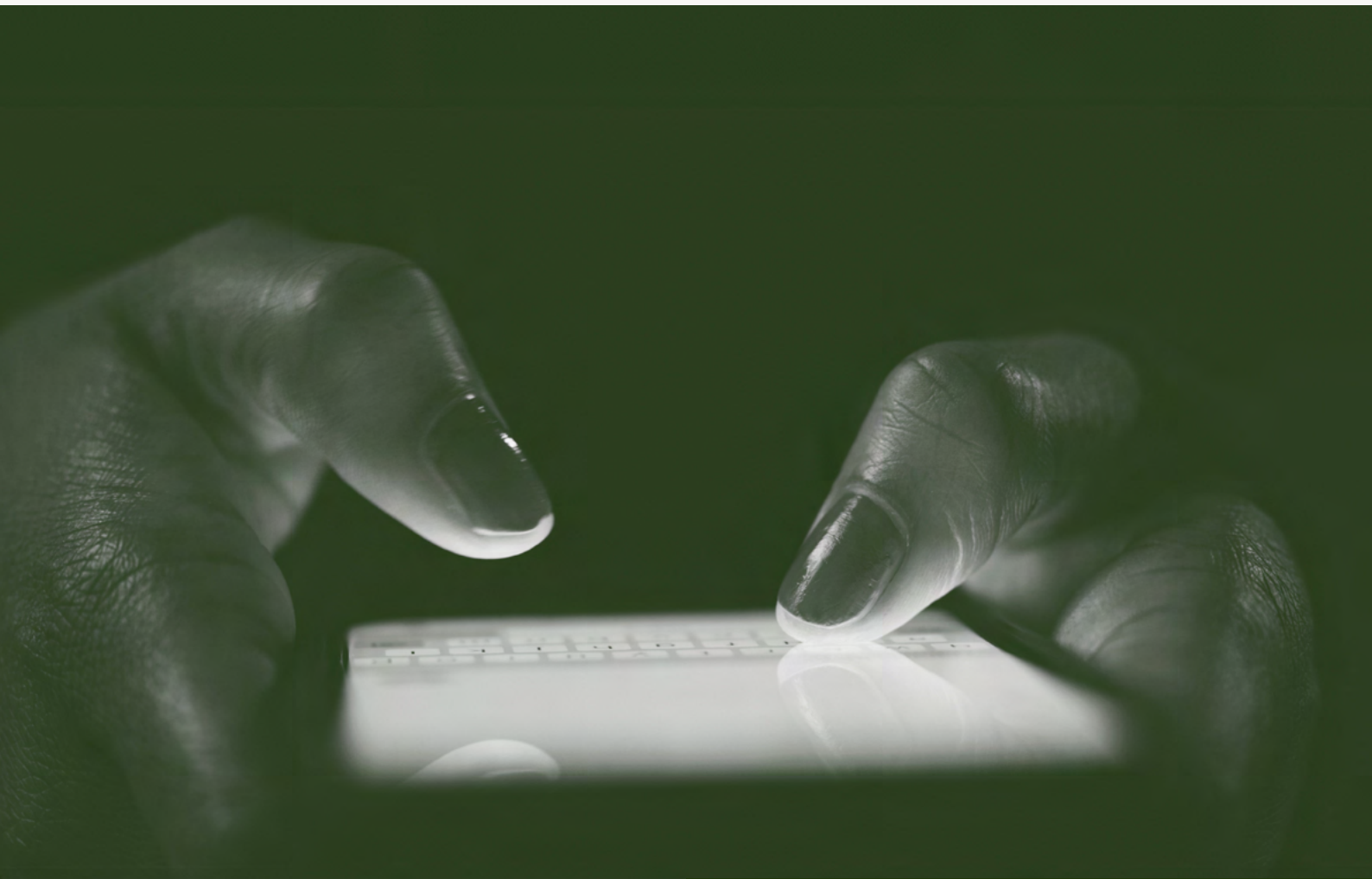


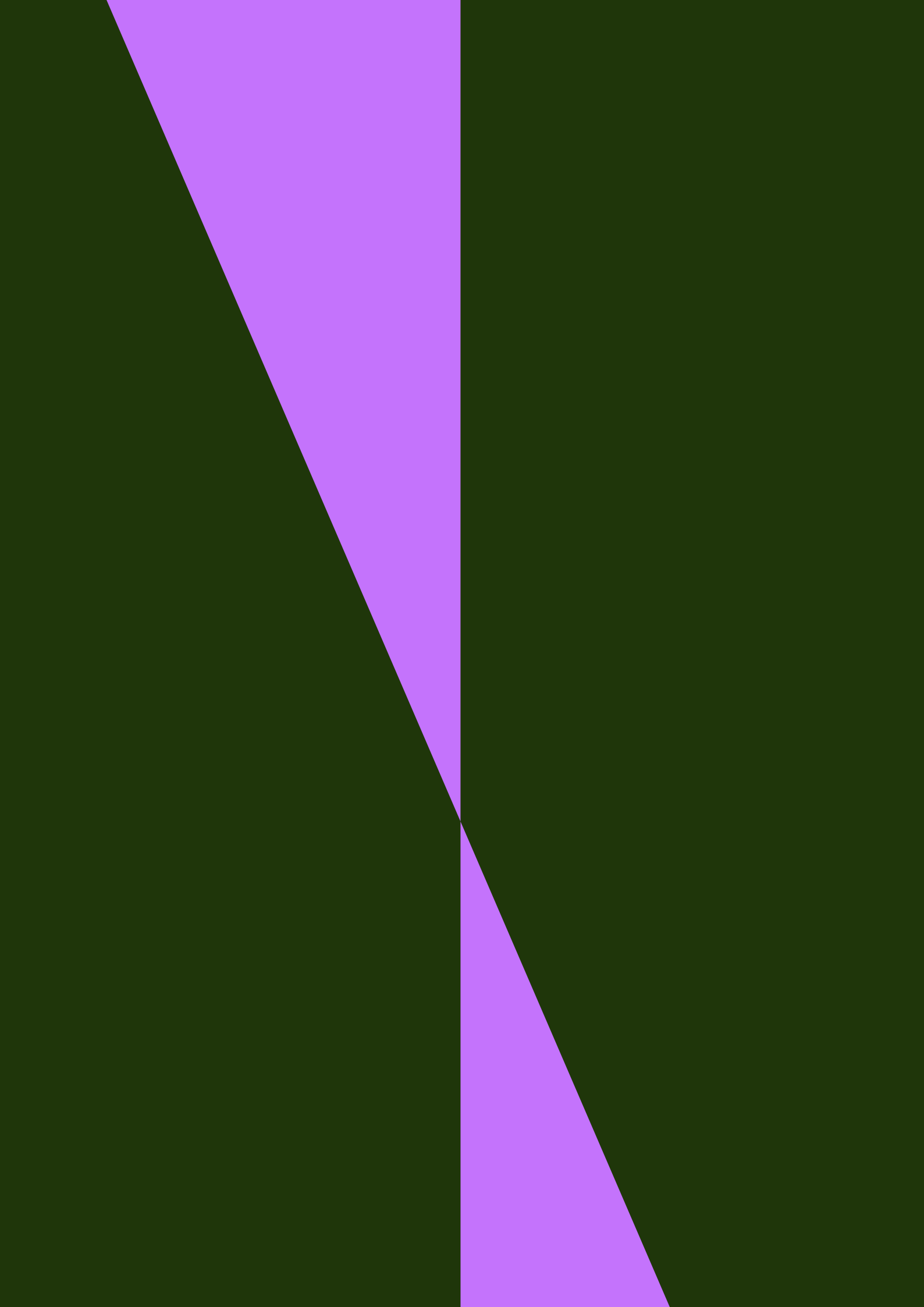


Credit: Jacob Wackerhausen/iStock

Experiencing online sexual exploitation and abuse in Kenya:

Survivor narratives and legal responses

October 2025



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About the report

Following the publication of its *Ending Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Women and Girls: A Call for International Standards* report, Equality Now has been actively advocating for legal and policy changes to address online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA). Equality Now identified three countries - India, Kenya, and the US - to undertake campaigns with local women's rights organisations that would gather evidence of survivors' lived experiences, and help increase the understanding among national and international policymakers on the changes required at both international and national levels to end technology-facilitated gender-based violence, with a focus on OSEA. In Kenya, Equality Now engaged several stakeholders to better understand the gaps, challenges, opportunities, and priorities in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse in the digital realm. This research study was commissioned to KICTANet by Equality Now. HAART Kenya, Life Bloom Services International, and Trace Kenya worked collaboratively with Equality Now and KICTANet to gather evidence of survivors' experiences in Kenya.

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This report is a joint publication by Equality Now, HAART Kenya, KICTANet, Life Bloom Services International and Trace Kenya. The report was made possible by the collective effort of a team of many individuals around the world. In particular, we acknowledge the contribution of the following people across the different organisations:

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Finally, we are deeply grateful to all the study participants for agreeing to participate and giving us their time. We would especially like to thank all the survivors, acknowledging how difficult it is to revisit experiences of violence.

Editorial Note: The testimonies of survivors have been edited for clarity, brevity, and to protect confidentiality, without altering meaning.



A just world for all women and girls

About Equality Now:

Equality Now is a worldwide human rights organisation dedicated to securing the legal and systemic change needed to end discrimination against all women and girls, everywhere in the world. Since its inception in 1992, it has played a role in reforming 130 discriminatory laws globally, positively impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of women and girls, their communities and nations, both now and for generations to come.

Working with partners at national, regional and global levels, Equality Now draws on deep legal expertise and a diverse range of social, political and cultural perspectives to continue to lead the way in steering, shaping and driving the change needed to achieve enduring gender equality, to the benefit of all.



About HAART Kenya:

Awareness Against Human Trafficking (HAART) Kenya, HAART is a Kenyan non-governmental organisation based in Nairobi that is entirely devoted to eradicating human trafficking. While HAART's core focus is on prevention, protection of victims, policy cooperation, and prosecution, the scope of its partnerships and impact areas cuts across grassroots communities, civil society organisations, national state actors, and the global community. Since its inception in 2010, HAART has organised training at the grassroots levels for more than 100,000 people and assisted over 1,200 victims of trafficking.



About KICTANet:

The Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet), is a multi-stakeholder think-tank focused on ICT policy and regulation in Kenya. It serves as a catalyst for reform in the ICT sector, guiding its work through policy advocacy, stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and research. KICTANet aims to promote an open, accessible, and rights-based ICT environment in Kenya.



About Life Bloom Services International:

Life Bloom Services International is a women-led non-profit organization founded in Sept 2004 working with vulnerable women and children survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, and women and children living with disability in Nakuru and Narok Counties in Kenya. We support them to regain choice and control over their lives, health, livelihoods in order for them to pursue a safe, prosperous, and healthy life of their choosing.

We are a team of women committed to supporting vulnerable women and children survivors of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, those at risk of trafficking, and women and children living with disability.



About Trace Kenya:

Trace Kenya is a Counter Trafficking in Persons Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) based in Coastal and Northern Kenya. It was founded in 2006 to help rescue, rehabilitate, and reintegrate women, youth, and children who were victims of human trafficking. Trace Kenya works with referral partners on issues of counter-human trafficking.

Glossary

1. **Anonymous reporting mechanisms** – Confidential systems that allow survivors, including those of OSEA, to report incidents without revealing their identity, reducing fear of retaliation and social stigma.
2. **Digital forensic capacity** – The ability of law enforcement agencies to collect, analyse, and present digital evidence related to cybercrimes, including in OSEA cases. This includes expertise in decrypting data, tracking digital footprints, and recovering deleted content.
3. **Digital literacy** – The ability to navigate, critically evaluate, and responsibly use digital technology to protect oneself from cyber threats, including OSEA.
4. **Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)** – The unauthorised creation, sharing, or manipulation of intimate images or videos without consent, commonly referred to as “revenge porn”. It also includes images or videos generated through the use of AI, commonly referred to as deepfakes.
5. **Legal awareness** – The extent to which individuals understand their rights under the law, including regarding OSEA protections and available legal recourse.
6. **Multi-stakeholder approach** – A collaborative strategy involving government agencies, civil society organisations, law enforcement, and technology companies to address OSEA through legal, technical, and educational interventions.
7. **Online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA)** – Any form of sexual exploitation or abuse enabled by digital technology, including online extortion, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, sextortion, and other digital-based sexual violence.
8. **Public awareness campaigns** – Initiatives aimed at educating communities about OSEA, digital safety, and available support services to empower victims and prevent further abuse.
9. **Online sexual extortion and coercion** – A form of online blackmail where perpetrators coerce victims into providing sexual content or acts under threat of exposing their private images or information.
10. **Social stigma** – The negative societal perception and discrimination against survivors of OSEA, which discourages reporting and leads to victim-blaming, isolation, and re-victimisation.
11. **Survivor-centred approach** – A framework prioritising survivors’ needs, dignity, and well-being by ensuring accessible reporting mechanisms, legal aid, psychosocial support, and protection from further harm. This will include survivors of OSEA.
12. **Technology-facilitated sex trafficking (TFST)** – Human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation that is facilitated or perpetrated through the use of digital technology and the internet. It is a form of OSEA.
13. **Victim blaming** – A cultural tendency to hold survivors responsible for their own exploitation, reinforcing shame and deterring them from seeking justice.

Executive summary

Online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA) is a growing and deeply harmful phenomenon globally and in Kenya. It is fuelled by increased digital access, weak prevention and protection legal, policy, and technological systems, and harmful societal norms that keep women and girls oppressed in society. This report, a collaborative effort between Equality Now, HAART Kenya, KICTANet, Life Bloom Services International and Trace Kenya, explores the multifaceted nature of OSEA, drawing from interviews with twenty survivors and insights from key stakeholders working on digital rights, gender-based violence and justice sector reform in Kenya. It explores OSEA's legal and social dimensions and proposes actionable policy and legal reforms grounded in survivor experiences.

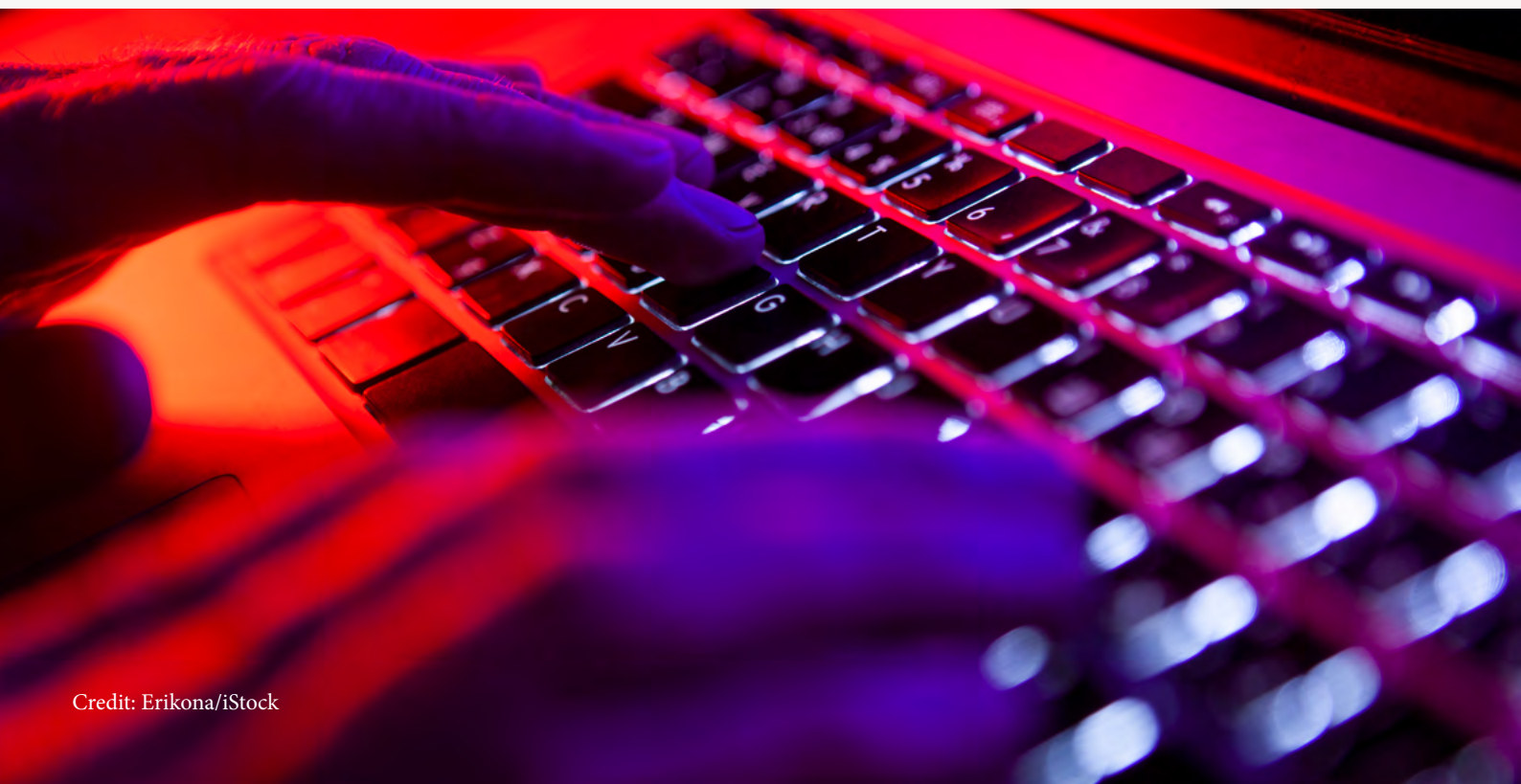
The report focuses on three core manifestations of OSEA:

- ◆ **Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)**, including non-consensual sharing of intimate images and emerging harms like deepfakes.
- ◆ **Technology-facilitated sex trafficking (TFST)**, where perpetrators exploit digital platforms to lure women and girls under false pretences of employment or migration.
- ◆ **Online sexual coercion and extortion** often involves blackmail, threats, and manipulation through digital spaces.

Survivors described how social media and digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Badoo, and Tango were weaponised against them. Many were groomed with promises of jobs or relationships, only to face exploitation, sexual violence and extortion. The consequences were devastating and included emotional trauma, stigma, and broken livelihoods. This is compounded by a justice system that too often fails them.

Key findings

- ◆ **Widespread and entrenched harm:** OSEA in Kenya is pervasive and rooted in broader patterns of gender inequality, poverty, unemployment and corruption, which drive vulnerability. Fraudulent recruitment agencies and migration pathways are major enablers of TFST. Survivors face severe psychological trauma, social stigma, economic vulnerability, and long-term health and safety risks.
- ◆ **Technology as a double-edged sword:** Digital platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok and dating apps are central tools in recruitment, coercion and abuse. While platforms could play a role in prevention and redress, survivors reported opaque, slow or unhelpful responses and weak accountability.
- ◆ **Weak legal and institutional response:** Existing laws (Sexual Offences Act 2006, Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act 2010, Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018, and Children's Act 2022) offer some protections but are poorly enforced. Barriers include limited digital forensic capacity, police corruption, slow judicial processes and weak survivor protections. Survivors often avoid reporting due to stigma, mistrust and fear of retaliation. Further, fragmented legal frameworks pose a challenge. Kenya has ratified many international and regional instruments, including the Maputo Protocol and Palermo Protocol, but has not ratified the Malabo Convention. Fragmented enforcement and weak cross-border cooperation undermine protection and accountability.
- ◆ **Barriers to justice and support:** Access to free legal aid, psychosocial support, shelters and safe reporting mechanisms is limited, particularly outside urban centres. Survivors are further silenced by stigma, victim-blaming and societal pressures.



Recommendations

To address OSEA effectively, policymakers must prioritise survivor-centred, gender-responsive reforms across five areas:

1. Legal reform

- ◆ Broaden definitions of OSEA to explicitly provide protection from deepfake IBSA, grooming, sexual extortion and coercion.
- ◆ Update existing gender-based violence and anti-trafficking laws to include online and digital dimensions.
- ◆ Align laws with international human rights obligations and enforce penalties for perpetrators and negligent platforms.

2. Jurisdiction & international cooperation

- ◆ Strengthen bilateral and multilateral agreements for cross-border investigations.
- ◆ Invest in specialised training for police, prosecutors and judges on handling cross-jurisdictional digital evidence and survivor protection in international OSEA cases.
- ◆ Establish interoperable databases between law enforcement agencies within the African region to track patterns of online exploitation, trafficking routes and offender networks. This includes establishing data-sharing protocols with tech companies, balancing access to evidence with human rights-respecting safeguards.

3. Survivor-centred reporting systems

- ◆ Develop secure mobile and web-based reporting platforms to allow survivors to:
 - ▶ Flag abusive content.
 - ▶ Request takedowns.
 - ▶ File complaints with authorities.
 - ▶ Access counselling, legal aid, and digital safety experts.
- ◆ Ensure platforms are accessible across rural/urban divides and co-designed with survivor groups and CSOs.

4. Capacity-building for justice actors

- ◆ Train police, prosecutors and judges in digital forensics, evidence preservation and metadata analysis.
- ◆ Establish modern forensic labs with the capacity to collect sex- and age-disaggregated data.
- ◆ Partner with international experts to build specialised skills on gendered dimensions of cybercrime.
- ◆ Provide mandatory gender-sensitivity and human rights training across the justice sector.

5. Public education & social norms change

- ◆ Launch multimedia campaigns (radio, TV, social media) targeting women, girls, youth, and rural communities.
- ◆ Educate the public on rights under the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018.
- ◆ Conduct community sensitisation campaigns, led by CSOs and local leaders, to dismantle stigma and promote survivor-centred narratives.

6. Strengthening survivor support

- ◆ Provide accessible legal aid, mental health services and protection mechanisms to survivors.
- ◆ Establish localised support hubs with safe spaces for confidential reporting and assistance.
- ◆ Adopt trauma-informed, survivor-centred approaches in courts and law enforcement processes.

Call to action

Kenya stands at a crossroads. By investing in survivor-centred reforms, resourcing enforcement agencies, holding platforms accountable and strengthening regional and international cooperation, the government can tackle OSEA.

This report calls on national policymakers, regional bodies such as the African Union and the East Africa Community (EAC), and international partners to act with urgency. Survivors have spoken clearly: justice delayed is justice denied. It is now up to governments, institutions, and tech companies to ensure that women and girls in Kenya can live, work, and participate in the digital age free from fear and exploitation.

Introduction

Purpose and scope of report

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most entrenched human rights violations worldwide, rooted in unequal power relations, harmful gender norms and systemic discrimination against women and girls (UN Women 2022). While GBV has historically been understood in physical and offline forms, such as domestic violence, sexual violence and harmful practices, it is increasingly manifesting in digital spaces. Online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA) and the broader category of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) represent the extension of patriarchal control in new technological domains (Henry & Powell, 2018; Bailey et al., 2012). Perpetrators exploit the anonymity, speed and reach of digital platforms to harass, coerce and exploit women and girls, often replicating and amplifying the same inequalities that underpin GBV in physical spaces. In this way, OSEA and TFGBV are not separate phenomena but part of the continuum of violence that denies women and girls safety, equality and agency across physical and virtual spaces (Dragiexicz et al., 2019).

This report is part of Equality Now's ongoing global campaign to end OSEA, building on the 2021 publication, *Ending Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Women and Girls: A call for International Standards*. The report highlighted the urgent need for binding, internationally

agreed-upon principles that can serve as the foundation for national legal frameworks (Equality Now, 2021). In line with this global effort, Equality Now identified India, Kenya, the UK, and the US as focus countries in which to conduct national-level research and advocacy for legal and policy reform and implementation with key stakeholders, including government, civil society organisations, justice actors, law enforcement and technology companies.

This Kenya-focused study aims to generate evidence on how OSEA manifests in the Kenyan context and to centre the lived experiences of survivors as the basis for policy and legal reform. The report documents how women and girls are targeted through image-based sexual abuse, technology-facilitated sex trafficking and online sexual coercion and extortion. It also analyses how survivors navigate the justice system, the obstacles they encounter, including inadequate digital forensic capacity, stigma, and weak institutional response, and the opportunities for strengthening legal and policy frameworks. Lastly, the report also analyses the broader socio-economic inequalities and structural discrimination that compound vulnerabilities for women and girls. These systemic conditions make women and girls particularly vulnerable to various forms of harms, including OSEA.

Types and forms of gender-based violence

Globally, an estimated one in three women has experienced violence in her lifetime, a figure that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade despite international commitments to eliminate GBV (WHO, 2021). GBV takes multiple forms, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic, and undermines the health, dignity and agency of survivors while impeding gender equality and sustainable development (CEDAW Committee, 2017).

The advent of digital technologies and the internet has revolutionised communication and information sharing. However, this rapid expansion has led to a dimension of GBV facilitated by technology. **Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)** refers to any act of violence, harassment or exploitation that is perpetrated, enabled or amplified through digital technologies, including mobile phones, social media and other online platforms (Henry & Powell, 2018; UNODC, 2022). Forms of TFGBV include sexual exploitation and abuse that is facilitated by technology, which we refer to in this report as **online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA)**. OSEA has emerged as a pervasive issue in the digital age, transcending borders and impacting individuals globally. OSEA encompasses various forms of abuse in which technology is used to exploit individuals sexually, often amplifying the reach and anonymity of perpetrators (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023). OSEA is an umbrella term that refers to acts of sexual abuse and exploitation that are actualised and amplified through digital technology. This report focuses on three main forms, namely, **image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)**, **technology-facilitated sex trafficking (TFST)**, and **online sexual coercion and extortion**.

IBSA refers to the non-consensual creation, distribution, or sharing of intimate images or videos. It encompasses intimate images that may have been initially shared with consent but later accessed or distributed without permission, along with acts of voyeurism, blackmail and coercion, video recordings of sexual assaults, and artificial intelligence (AI)-altered or generated content such as deepfakes (Equality Now, 2021). IBSA has also been referred to as “revenge porn,” but this term fails to capture the severity of the abuse (Franks, 2022) by implying that the perpetrator was acting out of revenge after being wronged and positions the violation within the context of pornography. IBSA frequently involves threats and the dissemination of content, exacerbated by high internet penetration and low regulation, leading to impunity.

Tech-facilitated sex trafficking (TFST) refers to human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation carried out or facilitated using digital technologies and the internet (Equality Now, 2021). Traffickers are increasingly using social media, online dating sites, and digital communication tools to recruit, control and manipulate victims (UNODC, 2022). Survivors often face coercion, threats of violence and fear of criminalisation, particularly when they are immigrants or engaged in criminal activities under duress (Baker, 2021; Morrissey et al., 2021). TFST is a growing global concern, particularly in low and middle-income countries where digital tools exacerbate vulnerabilities (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023). While digital technology poses risks for enabling or facilitating sex trafficking, it also presents counter-trafficking opportunities, such as big data analytics and AI for detecting exploitation patterns (van der Watt, 2023; Kjellgren, 2022). However, legal concerns regarding jurisdiction, due process and data protection laws, along with ethical concerns such as privacy, surveillance overreach and consent, complicate these efforts. (Bhalerao et al., 2022; Musto et al., 2020).

Online sexual coercion and extortion, commonly referred to as “sextortion”, involves coercing individuals into performing sexual acts or providing explicit images under threats of exposure or harm. Online sexual extortion and coercion has become a prevalent form of online sexual violence, leveraging digital anonymity to manipulate victims into compliance (Küpeli, 2019). Survivors experience severe psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, yet legal responses remain inadequate, with many jurisdictions lacking explicit laws addressing sextortion (Rogers, 2022; Küpeli, 2019).

The prevalence of these violations is heightened by the anonymity, accessibility and global reach afforded by digital platforms. Perpetrators exploit these opportunities and existing vulnerabilities, such as socio-economic factors, to target victims across geographic and social boundaries, amplifying the scale and impact of harm.

Globally, the rise of TFGBV has prompted calls for stronger legal and policy frameworks. While international instruments such as the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention)¹ and the recently adopted UN Convention against Cybercrime² provide guidelines on digital offences, most global and regional legal frameworks remain fragmented and do not fully address emerging forms of TFGBV such as deepfake image-based abuse and online sexual coercion and extortion (UNODC, 2022; Morrissey et al, 2021). Survivors frequently face barriers in seeking justice, including jurisdictional

challenges, gaps in law, limited law enforcement expertise in digital forensics, and corporate impunity of technology platforms (Dragiewicz et al., 2019).

In Africa, TFGBV is shaped by factors, including rising internet penetration, growing socio-economic vulnerabilities and weak enforcement of existing laws. While the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, 2014 (Malabo Convention) establishes important standards, it has not been widely ratified and provides only limited attention to gendered dimensions of online harms (African Union, 2022). Across sub-Saharan Africa, cultural stigma, digital illiteracy, and under-resourced justice systems further exacerbate survivors' vulnerability (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023). Studies show that women in African digital spaces often experience online harassment, IBSA, and recruitment into trafficking networks via social media platforms (KICTANet, 2023; World Bank, 2023). In particular, the intersection of poverty, unemployment, and gender inequality creates conditions in which women and girls are disproportionately lured into exploitation through deceptive online employment or migration opportunities (UNODC, 2022).

Based on the experiences of survivors and experts in Kenya, who were interviewed, this report explores the multidimensional nature of OSEA by analysing its manifestations through three prominent forms – IBSA, TFST and online sexual extortion and coercion. The report engages survivors of these forms of OSEA as well as organisations working on digital rights, gender-based violence online and offline, and legal and policy reform in Kenya. The report examines the legal limitations, contextual realities, and the technological, legal and social dynamics that sustain these harms. The report draws on the lived experiences of survivors to offer actionable recommendations grounded in the Kenyan context.

This report highlights several relevant laws, including the Sexual Offences Act, 2006, the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018³, and the Children's Act, 2022, which prohibit forms of sexual exploitation, cyber harassment, and online child abuse. It emphasises the profound implications of OSEA on survivors and their lives, including psychological trauma, social isolation and barriers to justice. It highlights the interconnected nature of the different forms of OSEA as a subset of TFGBV, showing how one survivor can experience multiple forms of OSEA along with other harms, and across physical and digital spaces. The report also shows how survivors often face stigma and victim-blaming, deterring them from reporting their experiences or seeking support. Legal systems, too, struggle to keep pace with the evolving digital landscape, leaving many survivors without adequate protection or avenues for recourse. This report also highlights how survivors face significant barriers in reporting and prosecuting cases, including police corruption, lack of digital forensic capacity, prolonged judicial processes and pervasive stigma that discourages survivors from seeking redress.

In centring survivor experiences and legal analysis, this report seeks to bridge the gap between the lived realities of OSEA and the legal and policy responses intended to address them. By examining how IBSA, TFST and online sexual coercion and extortion manifest in Kenya's digital and legal landscape, the report highlights both the urgency and the opportunity for legal and policy reform. Ultimately, it calls for a transformative, multi-sectoral response, rooted in gender equality, digital rights and survivor agency, that can meaningfully disrupt the systems that enable OSEA.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, through interviews with 20 survivors of OSEA as well as online focus group discussions (FGDs) with key stakeholders engaged in addressing TFST, online sexual extortion and coercion and IBSA. The 20 survivors interviewed were between the ages of 14 and 36 at the time when they were abused and exploited. They live in six of the forty-seven counties of Kenya, namely Mombasa, Kilifi, Nakuru, Kisii, Kiambu and Nairobi. Although not all 20 survivor stories are detailed in this report, the survivor narratives helped provide context and understanding, as well as insights into the legal and policy gaps and opportunities to address OSEA effectively.

The data collection process was led by Kenyan organisations working with survivors of OSEA, namely, HAART Kenya, Trace Kenya, and Life Bloom. Under the overall coordination and guidance of Equality Now and KICTANet, these organisations held key informant interviews (KIIs) where they engaged a diverse group of 20 survivors to ensure an intersectional and inclusive understanding of OSEA in Kenya. The participants varied in age, geographic location, and socio-economic background, reflecting experiences from urban and rural settings. At least one participant was a migrant from a neighbouring country, adding a cross-border perspective to the findings. More details on the survivors interviewed are provided in Table 2 below.

Using a questionnaire, Annexure 1, the organisations led trauma-informed interviews ensuring ethical survivor engagement and psychosocial support. The three organisations actively worked with survivors, ensuring the well-being of the participants was and continues to be safeguarded. The survivors provided informed consent, and psycho-social support and services were available before, during, and after the interviews.

In addition to survivor perspectives, KICTANet held FGDs with representatives from five organisations actively working in human rights, gender-based violence prevention and crime research.

These organisations were:

- ◆ **Healthcare Assistance Kenya:** Providing medical and psychosocial support for survivors of abuse.
- ◆ **Amnesty International Kenya:** Advocating for human rights, including digital rights and protections.
- ◆ **FIDA Kenya:** Providing legal aid and advocacy support to survivors of gender-based violence.
- ◆ **Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW):** Supporting women's rights and access to justice.
- ◆ **The National Crime Research Centre (NCRC):** Conducting research and policy analysis on crime trends.

All organisations were identified based on their expertise and roles in addressing digital sexual crimes. Invitations were emailed, participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before engagement.

The interviews and FGDs covered the following key areas:

- ◆ **The survivors' experiences of OSEA.**
- ◆ **Current support services:** Availability and accessibility of legal, psychological, and shelter support for survivors.
- ◆ **Challenges in law enforcement:** Gaps in legal frameworks, digital evidence handling, and survivor protection.
- ◆ **Policy implications:** The effectiveness of existing policies and recommendations for legislative reforms.
- ◆ **Collaboration and stakeholder engagement:** The role of inter-agency cooperation in addressing OSEA and related crimes.

Data analysis

The data from the KIIs and the FGDs were analysed thematically to identify patterns and recurring challenges and opportunities, particularly concerning survivors' access to justice. Specific attention was paid to reporting procedures, investigation quality, prosecutorial hurdles, and alternative justice mechanisms. These findings were triangulated with stakeholder interviews and desktop research to ensure a robust and rounded analysis.

Ethical considerations

To protect participant confidentiality, all data were anonymised before analysis, and the names of the survivors were changed to protect their privacy. Informed consent was obtained before participation, and all participants were assured that their contributions would be used solely for research purposes. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for human research, ensuring respect, privacy, and voluntary and informed participation.

Limitations

While this study provides critical insights into the lived experiences of survivors of OSEA in Kenya, it is not without limitations. The findings should be read with an understanding of the scope, methodological constraints, and contextual challenges that shaped the research process. The key limitations are outlined below:

- ◆ **Sample size and representation:** The study draws on 20 survivor interviews and a limited number of stakeholder FGDs. While these accounts provide invaluable insights, they cannot fully capture the scope and diversity of OSEA across Kenya. The experiences of survivors in remote, marginalised or conflict-affected regions may not be adequately represented.

- ◆ **Underreporting of OSEA:** OSEA is significantly underreported due to stigma, fear of retaliation and mistrust of the justice system. As such, the cases included in this study reflect only a small fraction of the prevalence and severity of OSEA.
- ◆ **Reliance on self-reported experiences:** Survivor testimonies form the core of this report. While these narratives are essential for understanding lived realities, they are subject to the limitations of self-reporting, such as memory recall, trauma-related silences or reluctance to disclose certain details.
- ◆ **Limited access to official data:** The absence of comprehensive national data on OSEA constrained the analysis. Government agencies and law enforcement institutions in Kenya do not consistently collect or publish disaggregated statistics of reported cases of online exploitation, as well as their prosecutions and court outcomes, limiting the ability to triangulate findings.
- ◆ **Legal and policy analysis constraints:** While the report reviews existing laws and policies, it does not provide a comprehensive assessment of enforcement practices across all counties in Kenya. Gaps in access to judicial data, case law, and internal procedures of prosecutorial and investigation bodies limit the analysis in this report.
- ◆ **Ethical and security considerations:** Survivor protection was prioritised, which meant limiting the amount of identifiable detail in some case studies. While necessary for ethical reasons, this may reduce the specificity of certain examples and limit their use for legal precedent or direct advocacy.

Key findings

Credit: FG Trade Latin/iStock

This report finds that OSEA in Kenya is both widespread and deeply entrenched in broader patterns of gender inequality and socio-economic vulnerability. Drawing on survivor experiences and the insights of frontline organisations, the report shows how perpetrators use digital platforms to deceive, coerce and exploit women and girls. At the same time, systemic weaknesses in law, policy, and enforcement leave survivors without meaningful protection of justice. The key findings set out below provide an overview of the scope, impact and urgent reforms required to address OSEA in Kenya effectively:

◆ **Impact of survivors:**

Survivors face severe psychological trauma, social stigma, economic vulnerability, and long-term health and safety consequences. Many are silenced through threats, fear of community backlash, and sexual coercion and extortion.

◆ **Weak legal and institutional response:**

While Kenya has laws such as the Sexual Offences Act, 2006, Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010, and the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018, enforcement is undermined by limited digital forensic capacity, corruption, slow judicial processes and inadequate survivor protection.

◆ **Technology as a double-edged sword:**

Digital platforms play a central role in enabling OSEA, but they are slow, have opaque systems, and are inconsistent in responding to reports and removing harmful content or supporting survivors, operating with limited accountability.

◆ **Root causes of vulnerability:**

Poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, and weak governance create conditions that traffickers and exploiters take advantage of, particularly in the context of TFST, through fraudulent recruitment agencies and migration schemes.

◆ **Barriers to justice and support:**

Survivors often avoid reporting due to shame, stigma, or lack of trust in governmental institutions. When cases are reported, access to legal aid, psychological support and survivor-centred reporting systems remains limited, especially outside urban areas.

◆ **Urgent need for reform:**

Key priorities include ensuring more explicit legal definitions for emerging harms such as deepfake IBSA, stronger regulation and accountability of digital platforms, expanded survivor-centred services (legal aid, shelters, psychosocial support, safe reporting, etc.), and public awareness and digital literacy campaigns to reduce stigma and empower survivors.

Legal protections addressing online sexual exploitation and abuse

Globally, legal frameworks addressing OSEA remain fragmented. The Budapest Convention was the first global convention to guide state responses to cybercrime. However, it does not explicitly provide for forms of OSEA such as IBSA, and online sexual extortion and coercion, which weakens cross-border enforcement (Morrissey et al., 2021). The 2014 celebrity data breach dubbed “The Frapping”⁴, where images of over 100 celebrities, mostly women, were hacked and leaked online, highlighted the vulnerability of digital data and IBSA’s global impact, for example. More recently, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a Convention against Cybercrime, establishing a global framework for cyber-related offences, including non-consensual sharing of intimate images. The proposed Convention also enhances provisions on international cooperation, including technical assistance and evidence exchange between and among states. The Convention is still open for signature and will come into force once 40 countries have ratified it.

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol)⁵ aims to address human trafficking, but at the national level struggles with enforcement, particularly in cases involving digital platforms (European Parliament, 2011).

Regional legal protections

Regionally, Africa’s landmark women’s rights instrument, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), obligates States to protect women and girls from violence, exploitation, and abuse. Although it was adopted in 2003 before today’s digital landscape fully emerged, its provisions on dignity, bodily integrity and security⁶, and access to justice and equal protection before the law⁷ also apply to OSEA. The Malabo Convention emphasises cybersecurity and the need for international cooperation in addressing cybercrimes. It requires its African member states to cooperate to address cybercrimes. Further, the Convention broadly focuses on data protection and cybercrimes, not OSEA. The Convention has not received widespread adoption, with only 16 countries adopting it.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is the continent’s foremost regional treaty on children’s rights. It builds on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child but reflects the specific realities and challenges, obligating States to protect children in Africa from all forms of sexual exploitation, trafficking, and protection against harmful social and cultural practices.

Kenya has ratified these international and regional protocols, except the Malabo Convention, which it has signed but has not yet ratified. These ratifications establish strong obligations for Kenya.

In East Africa, the Nairobi Declaration on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling was adopted by the East African Community states as a regional framework to address trafficking in persons and smuggling of people. It reflects a shared recognition by East African governments that trafficking is a growing cross-border crime requiring a coordinated response among law enforcement, immigration and judicial authorities across the different countries. The Declaration commits States to also criminalise trafficking in persons in line with the Palermo Protocol and harmonise national laws, whilst protecting and supporting victims of trafficking and addressing root causes such as poverty, gender inequality, and lack of opportunities that make women, children and migrants vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation.

Taken together, these frameworks are powerful on paper; however, a main challenge is that the fragmentation of the legal framework hinders their effectiveness. Different legal frameworks operate in isolation, reducing their impact against crimes requiring a multidisciplinary approach (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023). Additionally, law enforcement agencies also lack the technical expertise and digital forensic tools needed to trace perpetrators operating on encrypted platforms (KICTANet, 2023). Public awareness is another significant shortfall, as many survivors remain unaware of existing legal protections, leading to low reporting rates and limited access to justice (Hakim, 2020; KICTANet, 2023). Lastly, these frameworks do not fully incorporate survivor-centred approaches and do not explicitly recognise digital harms, which leaves women and girls in Africa highly vulnerable to evolving forms of exploitation and abuse like OSEA.

Kenyan legal protections

Kenya has made some progress at the national level by enacting laws such as the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018, the Sexual Offences Act, 2006, the Penal Code , Cap. 63, and the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010. Below are some laws that may provide some protection from OSEA.

Applicable law	Details
Sexual Offences Act, 2006	Sections 13, 14, 17 and 18 prohibit a range of sexual offences, including sexual exploitation arising from trafficking, prostitution of children, exploitation in prostitution, and sex tourism, among others. Producing, distributing, advertising and profiteering from child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is criminalised. Displaying “obscene images, words, or sounds by means of print, audio-visual or any other media to a child” for the purposes of intending for the child to engage in a sexual act is also criminalised.
Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018	Section 37 criminalises various cybercrimes, including CSAM, online harassment, and non-consensual sharing of intimate images.
Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010	Although the Act does not specifically refer to tech-facilitated sex trafficking, the elements of trafficking, i.e. the act, means, and purpose can be broadly interpreted to include the use of technology and online platforms in the commission of the offence. Further, the government’s efforts to address trafficking online include initiatives like the Anti-Human Trafficking and Child Protection Unit, which specifically addresses online child sexual exploitation and abuse.
Kenya Information Communications Act, 1998	The Act regulates the ICT sector in Kenya. It supports the Communications Authority of Kenya’s (CAK) mandate to promote safer digital environments. The CAK’s role includes working with government agencies to promote digital literacy and awareness of online harms. Sections 29, 58, 71, and 84D prohibit the publication of “obscene” information. Although not very specific, these provisions may be applied in cases involving some forms of OSEA.
Children Act, 2022	Section 22 generally prohibits the solicitation and transmission of CSAM, providing for up to 10 years imprisonment or a fine of up to Ksh 2million or both. Section 22(4) defines online abuse as including cyberbullying, cyberstalking, cyber harassment and grooming, and prohibits sexual exploitation of children. Section 22(5) criminalises intentional transmission that places children in fear of death, violence, or bodily harm, providing for a fine of up to Ksh 2 million or up to 10 years imprisonment or both.

Penal Code, Cap. 63	Section 194, which relates to defamation, can be used to protect from IBSA; however, offenders would not be sentenced to any jail time. Section 238 prohibits the production, distribution, and consumption of CSAM.
Data Protection Act, 2019	Regulates, among other things, the collection, processing, storage, use, and disclosure of information relating to individuals processed through automated or manual means. It could be applied to incidents of non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos in cases of live-streaming of sexual abuse and image-based sexual abuse.
Evidence Act, Cap. 80	Section 78A and Part VII allow for the admission of electronic evidence and will be applicable in OSEA cases.

In addition to the laws cited above, Kenya also has a range of relevant policies. However, the policies on cybercrime and GBV may not adequately address OSEA. The National Policy on Prevention and Response to GBV, 2014, acknowledges violence against women, but lacks specific strategies for digital crimes like online sexual coercion and extortion (Hakim, 2020). The National Cybersecurity Strategy, 2022-2027, prioritises infrastructure protection over individual vulnerabilities, thus neglecting marginalised groups (KICTANet, 2023).

Kenya's Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act (2010) provides a legal foundation but lacks strong enforcement mechanisms, particularly for TFST (Morrissey et al., 2021). Kenya's National Anti-Trafficking Policy (2020) outlines victim support measures, but implementation is hindered by inadequate training and resources for law enforcement (Crawford, 2020). The use of digital technology and the internet in facilitating human trafficking, for example, in the recruitment of victims and facilitating their exploitation, remains a secondary concern, with law enforcement struggling to adapt to traffickers' evolving tactics (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023). Traffickers in Kenya increasingly use social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram to recruit victims, exploiting legal gaps. Although the Kenya Information and Communications Act (2013) and the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act (2018) primarily address cybercrimes like hacking, they fail to address aspects of TFST that are not provided for in the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023).

Additionally, law enforcement faces resource and expertise constraints in collecting, preserving and analysing digital evidence linked to specific elements of

human trafficking, such as online recruitment, digital facilitation of transportation or harbouring and the use of online platforms to arrange or advertise exploitation. These constraints hinder the effective investigation and prosecution of TFST cases. Survivors often fear legal repercussions because they would have illegally immigrated or would be on the wrong visa, which reinforces their reluctance to seek justice (Morrissey et al., 2021; FDG, 2024).

“Investigate travel agencies that are advertising on social media platforms. ...link the agencies with government officials. The government should involve itself in matters concerning Kenyans in the Gulf.” - T, Survivor of OSEA

Cross-border TFST complicates enforcement, as perpetrators exploit weak international cooperation mechanisms. Furthermore, Kenya's legal framework does not sufficiently protect survivors' confidentiality. It exposes survivors to recounting their experience to multiple law enforcement officials and justice officers throughout the life of a case. In some cases, police officers engage the perpetrators and informally facilitate arbitration between the perpetrator and the survivor, which exposes survivors to stigma and retaliation within their communities (FDG, 2024). Inconsistent judicial handling of TFST cases further undermines legal protections and deters survivors from pursuing justice. The Data Protection Act offers privacy protections but suffers from low public awareness, limiting its effectiveness in addressing IBSA and online exploitation (FDG, 2024). The Children Act, 2022 and the Victim Protection Act, 2014, offer some legal safeguards but are not adapted to digital exploitation (Milivojevic et al., 2020).

The Evidence Act allows for the admission of electronic evidence in OSEA cases. However, the Act is plagued by issues such as the volatility and potential manipulation of digital evidence, as well as challenges in evidence collection and the chain of custody (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023). Cross-border crimes further complicate prosecution due to gaps in international cooperation mechanisms.

In 2022, a Nairobi teacher's intimate images were stolen and used to extort her, yet authorities failed to trace the perpetrator due to inadequate investigative tools (KICTANet, 2023). Victim support remains limited, with survivors reporting a lack of counselling and legal guidance. Addressing these gaps requires legislative amendments to explicitly criminalise sexual coercion and extortion, enforce mandatory data retention policies, and enhance international collaboration.

Cultural and societal barriers further inhibit justice. Survivors often face stigmatisation, discouraging them from reporting crimes. Women, in particular, risk being labelled complicit, exacerbating victim-blaming narratives. Public awareness campaigns and digital literacy initiatives remain insufficient, leaving victims unaware of their rights and legal recourse (Hakim, 2020).

“Strengthen witness protection aspects to avoid perpetrators tampering with evidence and revictimising survivors during and after processing. More training on the data protection and safety policies, like protecting those who bring out cases first (whistleblowers) will be useful. Support services need a boost, like more pro bono lawyers to handle cases and ensure victims get justice in a timely manner.” - Grace, Survivor of OSEA

In Kenya, the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act (2018) criminalises the intentional publication of intimate images without consent, with penalties of up to KSh 200,000 (approximately US\$1,500) or a two-year custodial term. However, enforcement remains weak due to inadequate technical capacity, low public awareness and insufficient victim protection measures. To Kenya's credit, some cases have been successfully prosecuted. For example, the case involving Roshanara Ebrahim, a former Miss World Kenya contestant, whose ex-boyfriend leaked her intimate images, which led to her disqualification.⁸ As a result, she pursued legal action and was awarded US\$10,000 in damages for privacy violations under Article 31(c) of the Constitution (KICTANet, 2023). However, such legal victories are rare due to survivors' fear of exposure and lack of trust in the legal system. In addition, the definitions in the Act are overly broad and fail to address emerging abuses like deepfake IBSA.

Despite multiple international, regional and national instruments, the legal framework for addressing OSEA remains inconsistent, fragmented and poorly enforced. Overlapping, yet non-interoperable laws hinder effective cross-border cooperation, while gaps in coverage, particularly regarding emerging forms of abuse such as deepfake IBSA, online sexual coercion and extortion and TFST, leave victims without adequate protection. In Kenya, while laws such as the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, Sexual Offences Act, and the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act provide some legal recourse, enforcement is undermined by limited technical capacity, resource constraints, and the lack of effective survivor-centred approaches. Without coordinated legislative reform, improved investigative capabilities, and targeted public education, existing protections will continue to lag behind the rapidly evolving digital landscape of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Lived realities of survivors of online sexual exploitation and abuse

This report examines the harrowing experiences of survivors of online exploitation and abuse (OSEA), highlighting the diverse and interconnected ways digital platforms are used to perpetuate harm. The survivors’ experiences reveal the complexity of OSEA, with each account reflecting the profound personal and emotional toll and the systemic and societal failures survivors face when seeking justice and support.

The narratives emphasise how perpetrators exploit digital platforms to manipulate trust, exploit existing socio-economic and other vulnerabilities, and maintain control over their victims. Whether through the coercive sharing

of intimate images, deceptive promises of employment, or the misuse of messaging apps for manipulation, these stories provide critical insights into the pervasive nature of OSEA. The participants’ lived experiences also highlight the urgent need for stronger legal protections, accessible support systems, and societal awareness to address these injustices.

This report explores survivors’ experiences in detail and underscores their resilience and the importance of survivor-centred solutions to combat OSEA while supporting recovery and justice.

Table 2 shows an overview of the survivor experiences:

Name ⁹	Age at time of abuse	Form of OSEA experienced
Amina	17	I met a young man on Facebook who promised me a letter of employment. He told me to send him my private pictures. After I sent them, he started to blackmail me and forced me to perform sexual acts in exchange for the employment offer.
Ivy	32	I met a man online, and he started sending me money. I trusted him because he was sending me money. He asked to meet me and I agreed. We met at a pub. My drink was drugged. He coerced me into having sex with him and another man, and he beat me up. My teeth were shattered, and I had wounds all over my body.
Sira	38	I met Kevin* on Facebook. He offered me a high-paying position at a brand-new hotel in Nakuru. So I went to see him, only for him to lead me to a brothel. He claimed I owed him money for helping me and that I should become a prostitute to settle a false debt he claimed I owed. It turned out that Kevin was a member of a human trafficking organisation that enticed young women with fictitious job offers on social media.
Kamary	29	I was having financial difficulties, and went on Facebook to find a part-time job washing clothes. I met a woman named Lena who promised me a part-time job washing her clothes, and I went to meet her. After knowing Lena for some time, I believed we were pals, but Lena and another man named Alex* betrayed my confidence. During a party, they coerced me into drinking, and while I was drunk, they both sexually assaulted me.

Lola	37	I had financial difficulties and was selling clothes on the streets of Gilgil in Nakuru. That is where I met Mark*. We became friends, and he offered to help me sell the clothes in a better location in town. He even promised me a bigger share of the income. I trusted him, so I accompanied him to an apartment where he raped me. He threatened me not to report him.
Tonya	48	I connected with a man on the Tango dating app. He offered me a laptop and cash in exchange for sending him intimate pictures. I sent him the pictures. After that, he started to blackmail me into sending more pictures. He said he would expose the pictures he already had if I did not send more.
Suzy	41	I met a man on WhatsApp who described himself as a hotel agent in Mombasa and offered me a lucrative position. I trusted him, and he helped me move to Mombasa from Naivasha. When I arrived in Mombasa, I was not taken to a hotel but rather locked in a room where two men raped me over a period of days. I was threatened and had no way to get in touch with anyone for assistance.
Ciru	30	I spent almost two weeks chatting to a man I met on the Tag and Meet app. He was charming and assured me that he would assist me in getting a decent job in Naivasha. The first time I met him, he enticed me to go with him to a remote guesthouse in Naivasha town, where he took my phone and raped me. He threatened me at gunpoint to never tell anyone.
Stella	32	I met a man on Badoo (a dating app) and connected with him. We were chatting online for six weeks. He convinced me to meet him in Naivasha. When I arrived, he took me to a lodge. He locked the door, drugged me, and raped me. He stole my phone, ID card, and other belongings before disappearing.
Nicole	17	I was a student at a vocational centre in Naivasha when I met a man on social media who promised me a well-paying job in Mombasa. The man was a truck driver who was travelling to Mombasa. We chatted online for three months, during which he gained my trust. He offered to transport me to Mombasa from Naivasha. I went with him because I believed I was going to start working. When I arrived, I was taken to a lodge. He took my ID, and he forced me into the sex trade for months, and the man took all the payments.
T	32	I was first conned out of KSh20,000 (approx \$150) by a fake job agency I found on TikTok. Later, I came across another agency on Facebook that seemed genuine, but after paying them KSh100,000 (approx \$760), I realised they had only processed a visitor's visa instead of a work visa. When I arrived in Dubai, my employer's husband raped me several times, and their son raped me twice. I eventually escaped by convincing my employer that I needed to visit the recruitment agency.
Winfred	17	With my family struggling financially and being raised by a single mother, I saw the need to help my mother improve our situation. During this time, a friend informed me how to join online dating sites to meet men who could help me with money. I was having sex in exchange for money with 4 to 5 men a day. The sexual encounters were recorded and streamed online.

B	21	My mother was introduced to a woman who promised to find me a job as a masseuse in Nairobi. When I arrived in Nairobi, from Uganda, my home country, I discovered that the job didn't exist. Instead, the woman forced me to have unprotected sex with buyers.
N	25	I came from Kisii County looking for a job. I responded to a job advertisement to work in Malaysia. The broker shared my number with the agent who found me a job in Malaysia. The agent in Malaysia raped me twice. He took me to a hotel where I was forced to have oral sex with another man.
L	36	When I arrived in Thailand, the agent who was supposed to help me get a job did not send me the correct paperwork. The friend I was staying with told me I could not keep staying with her for free, and she started bringing men to the house to have sex with me for money.
Winimah	17	As a waitress in a pub doing her usual duties, I experienced sexual harassment from customers. It ranged from unwanted touching to derogatory images shown to me without my consent. This behaviour persisted for 5 months without my employer doing anything about it. I ended up quitting my job.
D	21	While working in an Arab country, the driver at the house would WhatsApp video call me while he was naked and ask me to have sex with him. The children in the house used to grope me while I was working, touching my private parts. My boss's brother tried to force himself on me. He touched my private parts. I kept refusing, and he offered me money to have sex with him. I kept refusing and had to fight him off.
Martha	14	I experienced trafficking by my aunt. She deceived my mother into agreeing to let me go with her so I could go to school instead of living in the village. But little did my mother know that she would use me as a sex tool. The sexual encounters I had with the men the buyers found by my aunt were recorded and shared online. My aunt later blackmailed my mother, asking her to give her money to pay for my secondary schooling.
Grace	17	I had no school fees during college, so I got involved with a lecturer as I was desperate and needed help. The lecturer had sex with me for money. 6 months later, my school friends introduced me to the online "business" of showing explicit content to buyers in exchange for money. I would upload and live-stream sexual content.
Cynthia	15	A family member sexually abused me, and my family disowned me. My father refused to pay for me to go to school because I was a girl. I was very naive and did not know about online safety. I ended up being groomed on social media. I was asked to share intimate images of myself. I later experienced sexual coercion and extortion when people started contacting me after they had seen the intimate images I had shared.

Root causes of exploitation

In Kenya, systemic socio-economic inequalities create fertile ground for sexual exploitation and abuse, both online and offline. Persistent unemployment, entrenched gender inequality, poverty and weak governance intersect to strip individuals, particularly women, of economic agency and safety. Bad actors exploit these vulnerabilities, deceiving women with false promises of employment and livelihood opportunities.

Survivors interviewed for this report highlighted how socioeconomic pressures push people into vulnerable circumstances where online exploitation easily spills into offline exploitation.

In Kenya, systemic socio-economic inequalities create fertile ground for sexual exploitation and abuse, both online and offline. Persistent unemployment, entrenched gender inequality, poverty and weak governance intersect to strip individuals, particularly women, of economic agency and safety.

Survivor experience - B

“My mother was introduced to a woman who promised to find me a job as a masseuse in Nairobi. When I arrived in Nairobi, from Uganda, my home country, I discovered that the job didn’t exist. Instead, the woman forced me to have unprotected sex with buyers. I tried to refuse, but because I had come to Kenya illegally, without proper documentation, and it was my first time in Nairobi, I had no one to turn to for help. I felt that I was left with no choice but to persevere.

The woman would take naked pictures of me and post them on online platforms to attract buyers. She would force me to have sex and hit me. She hit me with a metal object, and that wounded me. Because I was forced to have unprotected sex, I contracted HIV.

The woman also brought my sister to Nairobi from Uganda. My sister could not endure the situation and reported the matter to the police. That is how we were rescued. The police were very helpful. They responded immediately, collected evidence from where we were living, and closed down the facility for further investigations.

The case was referred to the court, where the woman who had deceived us into prostitution was charged with trafficking in persons and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

I was referred to HAART Kenya’s shelter for rehabilitation. There, I had mental status examinations and continued therapy sessions to help support me in my recovery.”

Survivor experience - D

“Someone needs to regulate the content posted on social media and look at what recruitment agencies post to advertise jobs abroad.

I come from Nairobi County and worked in one of the Arab countries as a housekeeper. I found the job through the agencies on social media. While working there, I faced sexual abuse from the men in the house. The driver at the house would WhatsApp video call me while he was naked, and he would ask me to have sex with him. The children in the house used to grope me while I was working, touching my private parts. My boss’s brother tried to force himself on me. He touched my private parts. I kept refusing, and he offered me money to have sex with him. I kept refusing and had to fight him off.

I was deeply disturbed and uncomfortable because of the persistent video calls and demands for sex and being groped. I did not report the abuse to law enforcement or any formal institution because I was in a foreign country.”

Economic pressures, gender inequality and limited economic agency

Kenya's economy has struggled to generate adequate formal employment, particularly for young people. While the national unemployment rate was estimated at 12.7% in 2024, youth unemployment remains disproportionately high, between 8.4% for 15 to 24 year olds and up to 67% for those between 15 and 34 years (The Star, 2025; African Liberty, 2025). Over one million young people enter the job market yearly, yet most find only informal sector work, accounting for over 85% of total employment (Citizen Digital, 2024).

The informal sector is characterised by low wages, unstable income, and gaps in labour protections, creating economic desperation. Such precarious conditions push many young people to seek opportunities elsewhere, often via irregular migration channels or online recruitment platforms, where traffickers operate with little oversight.

Gender inequality across Kenyan society compounds economic vulnerability. Women comprise a large proportion of the agricultural labour force, but have low property ownership and limited access to financial services and secure employment (World Bank, 2023). Unpaid care responsibilities and discriminatory social norms further restrict women's economic participation. Poverty disproportionately affects women, limiting access to education and increasing exposure to health risks such as HIV/AIDS (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Gendered power imbalances make it harder for women to negotiate safe working conditions or refuse coercive demands, especially in unfamiliar environments. In contexts of extreme economic strain, entire families may depend on remittances or opportunities abroad, increasing vulnerability to fraudulent recruitment.

Corruption and weak law enforcement responses further exacerbate vulnerability. Survivors interviewed spoke of barriers to justice, including that they are often not believed when they report their cases. When abuse and exploitation occur abroad, many are left without any recourse.

Survivor experience - N

"I responded to a job advertisement for a job in Malaysia. The 'broker' I used in Kenya used WhatsApp as the main means of communication, and he also made job referrals. The broker shared my number with the agent who found me a job in Malaysia. I was given directions to the office where I was supposed to start my new job in Malaysia. The man whom I was told was my supervisor in Malaysia raped me twice. He later told me that having sex with him was the only way he could arrange a working visa for me while in Malaysia. He then linked me through WhatsApp to a man he said would give me a job. This man took me to a hotel and forced me to have oral sex with him.

The Agent threatened to kill me if I ever uttered a word about the sexual abuse to anyone in Malaysia. I only reported when I returned to Kenya at the Department for Criminal Investigations (DCI) headquarters. I was asked for proof of the rape or if I could provide DNA evidence, which I did not have."

Gendered power imbalances make it harder for women to negotiate safe working conditions or refuse coercive demands, especially in unfamiliar environments. In contexts of extreme economic strain, entire families may depend on remittances or opportunities abroad, increasing vulnerability to fraudulent recruitment.

Survivor experience - T

"I found the first job agency on TikTok. I sent them KSh 20,000 (approximately US\$150) so that they could facilitate the documents for the job. After a week, I was told to travel from Molo to Nairobi, but when I tried to contact the agency, I could not reach them; they had blocked me. That is how I realised I had been conned.

I found a second job agency on Facebook. I thought they were genuine because they did not ask for money until everything was finalised. I was introduced to the agency manager once I arrived in Nairobi. When I arrived in Nairobi, I was taken to the Huduma centre to get a certificate of good conduct processed. After one week, the visa to Dubai was ready, and that's when I realised that the Agency had processed a visit visa. I asked why it was not a work visa, and they told me I could change it once I was in Dubai. Together with two other women, I was asked to transfer KSh 50,000 (approx US\$380) via Mpesa and another KSh 50,000 in cash. The agency sent our visas and air tickets via WhatsApp and told us to print them.

I got to work and one day, my boss, the woman of the house, travelled and left me with her husband. The husband then took the opportunity and told me he had always wanted me, and it was then that he raped me. After the first occurrence, he raped me two more times. The family also had a son who would visit once a week; he also raped me twice. After this experience, I lied to my boss and said that I had to go to the recruitment agency to verify my work papers. She accepted on condition that I leave my belongings behind; that is how I escaped."

Survivor experience - L

"I went to Turkey and had a nice experience. I had to come back to Kenya because my mother and father fell ill, and I had to take care of them. After five months in Kenya, I had to leave the country again for greener pastures to raise money for my parents' medical bills. I heard that Thailand had good opportunities through a friend. My mother took out a loan of KSh 15,000,000 (approx US\$116,100) so that I could pay the recruitment agency their commission to find a job as an English tutor in Thailand. The agent promised I would be given legal documents to be an English tutor once I arrived in Thailand.

I had arranged to stay with my friend when I arrived in Thailand while I waited for the documents and to be

connected to the job. On my fourth day in Thailand, my friend told me I could not just stay in the house without doing anything. So my friend brought men to the house for me to have sex with and fulfil their fetishes. The men removed my clothes and recorded everything. The men were using drugs and slapped me and told me what to do. Things continued like this for one month, and I was taken to different locations. I was recorded each time, and they would upload and stream the videos.

During the sexual acts, the men forced me to take drugs, but I would refuse, and they would force the drugs into my mouth. They wanted to have anal sex with me, but I cried and pleaded for them not to do so. In the end, they put their fingers inside my anus. At one point, some of the men urinated in my mouth and forced me to swallow it. They also had hidden cameras, and on a particular day, four men forced me to defecate in their mouths. I had to participate in these "sessions" every day from 6 am to 6 pm and only eat one meal per day. My friend was paid KSh 40,000 (approx US\$300) for each "session".

One day, I was taken to a hotel to have sex. I was spotted by an American woman when she saw me being pushed to get into the hotel. The woman waited to see if I would manage to get out for help. When I managed to get out, she approached me; she seemed to know and understand what was happening. We exchanged numbers and she gave me 100Baht (approx US\$3.00) to get something to eat. I kept in touch with the lady, and we met for coffee. The woman had arranged to have the police there for me to report what was happening to me.

The police showed me pictures of the perpetrators and warned me not to mess anything up. I feared for my life and decided to keep shut. The American woman and I planned to retrieve my passport from my friend. I pleaded with my friend for two weeks. She finally gave it back to me, and the American woman paid for all my expenses to get back home to Kenya."

The experiences of survivors underscore that exploitation is not simply the result of individual choices or criminal opportunism; it is the outcome of systemic socio-economic conditions that deny women safe, dignified, and sustainable livelihoods. Addressing these drivers requires a holistic approach encompassing economic empowerment, gender equality, stronger regulatory frameworks for recruitment agencies, and effective enforcement of laws.

The role of technology

As illustrated through survivor experiences, digital technologies have fundamentally transformed how sexual exploitation and abuse is perpetrated. Survivors across Kenya report that abuse increasingly begins or escalates online through social media, messaging apps, job platforms or livestreaming tools. These technologies allow perpetrators to groom, recruit, manipulate, blackmail and shame survivors through unprecedented reach, access, and speed, and with impunity in and outside Kenya.

Despite legal advancements, enforcement remains inconsistent across different jurisdictions. Social media platforms like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) face criticism for inadequate implementation of their policies to address OSEA. Efforts by organisations such as the Internet Watch Foundation (2023) emphasise the need for global collaboration in monitoring and removing exploitative content online.

Many survivors interviewed for this report highlighted how social media platforms like WhatsApp, TikTok, and Facebook are used to lure and coerce women into sexual exploitation.

Survivor experience - Ivy

“I met him online on Facebook when I was in high school. We’d been talking for a while, and he seemed genuine and would send me some money to pay school fees and buy food. So when he invited me to meet him in person, I agreed. We had lunch and some drinks in a pub when I got there. But he drugged me without my knowledge and took me to a room!”

When I began gaining consciousness, it wasn’t just him; there was another man with him, both naked and me too. I realised there was a lot of pain in my vagina and anus. The two men had gang raped me. When I asked what had happened, they immediately became aggressive, forcing me into more sexual acts I didn’t consent to. They held me down, and despite my screaming and pleading, they continued. I was physically hurt, and at one point, they hit me so hard that my teeth broke.

It wasn’t just the physical pain; I was terrified, humiliated and completely powerless.

After everything, I went to the police, hoping for justice, but they told me I had to pay KSh 8,000 if I wanted them to track down the two men. I’d already lost so much that day, and now it felt like I was being punished again. The system that was supposed to help me felt like another betrayal.”

According to the FGDs, digital service providers and platforms often fail to remove exploitative content, respond slowly to takedown requests, or allow abusive content to go viral due to engagement and optimised algorithms. This failure is particularly harmful in OSEA cases, where speed and discretion are critical for victim protection. Without explicit laws in Kenya requiring digital service providers and platforms to act swiftly against OSEA, survivors are left to navigate slow, opaque or ineffective redress systems. Moreover, most digital service providers and platforms operate across borders and outside Kenya’s direct jurisdiction, making enforcement even more difficult. The lack of an international legal framework governing digital service providers and platform obligations leaves victims with limited options.

Survivors are often excluded from policy discourse. Although Kenya’s legal reform processes are open for public participation, survivors are not always aware of these or the processes to engage and provide feedback. Similarly, organisations working with survivors are not always able to participate in legal reform processes, mainly because they are not organised enough to engage or are not fully aware of the processes. Further, their voices are rarely heard in content moderation debates or in legal reform conversations. Yet, as the experiences in this report show, survivors have firsthand knowledge of how digital service providers and platforms both work and fail. Prolonged harm because the content exposing or threatening them remained online, under-moderated or continued to be shared further even after complaints. Most did not know how to report the abuse to platforms, and those who tried were met with silence or impersonal automated replies.

To address these challenges and digital protection gaps, Kenya’s legal framework needs urgent reform, and global platforms must be held accountable for the harm occurring on their sites. True tech accountability means designing systems that prevent abuse, centre survivor experiences, and uphold rights. This includes reimagining laws, reforming platform policies and amplifying the voices of those who bear the brunt of OSEA.

Barriers to recourse for survivors

Barriers to reporting OSEA are firmly rooted in societal stigma, legal shortcomings and digital challenges. The digital divide exacerbates reporting difficulties, particularly in low-income regions with limited legal literacy (Maggie et al., 2019). Fear of retaliation, reputational harm, and slow enforcement have also discouraged survivors from seeking justice. Legal frameworks are often outdated, failing to keep pace with digital abuse trends (McGlynn, Rackley, & Houghton, 2017).

Lack of survivor-centred support

On a global scale, victim-blaming, not being believed, and stigma deter survivors from reporting, fearing public scrutiny and social consequences. In Africa, cultural norms around sexuality further hinder reporting. In sub-Saharan Africa, survivors often face social isolation due to family honour expectations, according to the African Union (2019). Participants of the FGDs shared that survivors, especially women and young people, face societal blame, leading to isolation, reluctance to seek justice, and withdrawal from using digital platforms. In rural areas, traditional norms further discourage survivors from reporting due to fear of judgment or retaliation (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023).

“The boss told me that he was in the Illuminati and if I tried to tell the office, no one would believe me. And the office would say I do not want to work and that is why I was finding reasons to go back home.” - T, Survivor of OSEA

Survivors still fear re-victimisation and institutional inaction (Maggie et al., 2019). They often perceive law enforcement as dismissive, with one stating, “I felt my case wouldn’t matter to the police; they have bigger problems” (Morrissey et al., 2021, p. 10). Survivors frequently experience ostracisation, particularly in rural areas where cultural norms blame them for their victimisation. In one case, a Kenyan woman targeted an online sexual coercion and extortion scheme involving manipulated images, faced community backlash instead of support (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023). One survivor noted, “the fear of having my private images circulated made me hesitant to seek help” (Morrissey et al., 2021, p. 14). Feelings of shame and guilt further discourage reporting (Henry & Powell, 2018).

The absence of confidential and user-friendly reporting systems further discourages victims from seeking justice.

Some countries, such as South Korea, prioritise victim welfare through extensive support services, including legal aid and psychological assistance (Kim et al., 2023). Conversely, East African policy responses are still in early stages, often subsuming OSEA under broader cybercrime laws (Rashid Sheikh & Rogers, 2023).

“Women and girls should be given platforms to share their stories without considering stereotypes and cultural norms. There should be more emphasis on victim protection and safety during and after court proceedings.” - Winfred, Survivor of OSEA.

“Giving women and girls platforms to share their experiences without feeling judged can be done through campaign opportunities in awareness and sensitisation programmes.” - Martha, Survivor of OSEA

The survivors interviewed for this report all shared that they received psychological support from civil society organisations like HAART Kenya and Trace Kenya, sometimes years after the incident. They did not mention receiving similar support through government-led institutions.

“In support systems, I want inclusion and non-discrimination to minimise revictimisation. Courts should adopt trauma-informed approaches that recognise the psychological impact and trauma on survivors... like specialised training for legal professionals and adjustments to reduce revictimisation” - Martha, Survivor of OSEA.

Further, survivors expressed the need to have free legal services. While OSEA cases fall under the jurisdiction of the national prosecuting authority, survivors highlighted critical gaps in the criminal justice process. Prosecutors represent the State, not survivors, leaving many without personal legal guidance or emotional support. This lack of representation often results in survivors feeling invisible, disempowered and disengaged from proceedings.

Free legal aid is essential to bridging this gap. It ensures survivors are treated not as passive witnesses but as informed participants, helping them understand their rights, navigate investigations, prepare for court, and draft victim and impact statements. Legal aid also complements prosecutors by addressing survivors’ emotional needs,

clarifying procedures, and supporting engagement throughout lengthy and complex cases. Organisations such as HAART Kenya have shown the value of legal aid professionals accompanying survivors to court, offering both legal and emotional support that fosters confidence and safety.

Research shows that survivors with access to legal assistance are more likely to report crimes, persist through court processes and secure favourable outcomes. (World Bank, Women, Business and the Law, 2024; UN Women, Justice for Women, 2019) Without it, many are forced to abandon their cases, leaving perpetrators unaccountable.

Free legal aid is a vital component of a trauma-informed and survivor-centred justice system. By combining legal, psychological and economic support, it empowers survivors, strengthens prosecutions, and promotes accountability across the digital ecosystem.

“Support services should include free legal services for victims to get justice in courts of law. Emphasis should be addressed through capacity building on how to handle complex cases of tech-facilitated sex trafficking - this should also include the judiciary, police, and NGOs.” - Winimah, Survivor of OSEA

Limited enforcement and awareness

Enforcement is also weak due to inadequate digital forensic expertise within law enforcement. Perpetrators exploit encryption and digital tools to evade detection, and law enforcement struggles to collect and analyse digital evidence. Institutional weaknesses, such as delays in legal proceedings and law enforcement’s reluctance to pursue cases involving intimate partner violence, have also been credited as key detractors to OSEA reporting (Maggie et al., 2019). Many survivors are unfamiliar with digital evidence preservation, while perpetrators exploit these gaps to delete content before legal action, according to FGDs conducted in this study. Additionally, support services remain inaccessible to survivors in rural communities, as legal aid and psychosocial support are concentrated in urban centres.

Kenya leads regional anti-trafficking efforts in East Africa, but legal gaps persist. Survivors, especially immigrants, often fear approaching authorities due to potential criminalisation or deportation (Morrissey et al., 2021). Kenya’s National Anti-Trafficking Policy, 2020, provides survivor support services, but barriers such as limited resources and inadequate law enforcement capacity

hinder access. The policy primarily addresses physical trafficking, leaving the online dimensions of exploitation underregulated (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023).

“The justice system has let us down, leaving us feeling helpless and hopeless that there’s been no prosecution. Nothing has been done to stop [online exploitation] from happening to someone else. That this crime is so difficult to prosecute is frustrating and angers me. People can get away with it far too easily, and perpetrators are well aware nothing will happen to them.” - Stella, Survivor of OSEA

Law enforcement’s lack of technological expertise further impedes justice for TFST victims. The absence of centralised, survivor-friendly reporting mechanisms exacerbates victim vulnerabilities (FDG, 2024). Addressing TFST requires strengthening digital-specific legal provisions, expanding victim protection, and enhancing law enforcement capabilities to combat evolving trafficking tactics.

A significant issue is the lack of harmonised legal frameworks. While the Budapest Convention offers international guidelines, disparities in adoption and implementation create enforcement challenges. Perpetrators often evade accountability by operating in regions with weaker cybercrime legislation (Morrissey et al., 2021). In Africa, limited adoption of cybersecurity frameworks like the African Union’s Malabo Convention weakens regional responses to sextortion (Mehra & Sharif, 2024).

“People can get away with it far too easily, and perpetrators are well aware nothing is going to happen to them.” - Ivy, Survivor of OSEA

Moreover, many victims and law enforcement officers lack awareness of the legal protections available under the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018. Limited digital literacy in rural areas exacerbates this issue, preventing victims from navigating reporting mechanisms effectively (Sheikh & Rogers, 2023). Addressing these barriers requires legal reforms, improved enforcement mechanisms, and extensive awareness campaigns to ensure victims receive the support they need.

Concluding remarks

This report has shown that OSEA in Kenya is not an isolated or marginal problem, but a systemic issue rooted in gender inequality, socio-economic vulnerabilities and weak institutional responses. Survivors' experiences expose the profound personal impact of OSEA and demonstrate the urgent need for action that places their safety, dignity and recovery at the centre. OSEA is not an unavoidable consequence of being online; it results from deliberate harm, systemic negligence, and structures prioritising profit and impunity over safety and justice. The experiences of survivors in this report lay bare the urgency of change. Women and girls are being targeted, silenced, and denied redress in environments where enforcement of existing law falters, and where platforms profit but fail to protect.

Online sexual exploitation and abuse is not an unavoidable consequence of being online; it results from deliberate harm, systemic negligence, and structures prioritising profit and impunity over safety and justice.

Kenya has taken important steps by enacting legislation such as the Sexual Offences Act, the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, and the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, as well as by ratifying key regional and international instruments. However, enforcement remains inconsistent, fragmented, and poorly adapted to the evolving nature of digital harms. The failure to ratify the Malabo Protocol further highlights gaps in regional cooperation on cybercrime.

For national policymakers, the priority must be to close the gap between law and practice. This means reforming outdated provisions, explicitly addressing emerging harms such as deepfake IBSA and TFST, and ensuring accountability of digital platforms that profit from unsafe online environments. Law enforcement must be adequately resourced and trained in digital forensics, trauma-informed approaches, and survivor-centred justice. Survivors must have access to confidential reporting systems, free legal aid, psychosocial support, and protection against retaliation. Without these, justice will remain out of reach for most.

For regional and international actors, Kenya's situation reflects a broader challenge: fragmented frameworks and weak cooperation leave survivors exposed while perpetrators exploit jurisdictional loopholes. Regional bodies such as the African Union and the East African Community must prioritise harmonisation of legal standards, investment in digital evidence capabilities, and robust cross-border coordination.

Above all, survivors' testimonies call on us to move beyond rhetoric. OSEA is not only a violation of rights; it is a direct attack on women's and girls' ability to live free from fear, to participate equally in society, and to thrive in the digital age. Policymakers now have a clear roadmap: legislate with intention to address online harms, enforce with integrity and act in solidarity with survivors.

Recommendations

This report produced a range of systemic-level recommendations to strengthen the legal and other redress mechanisms available to survivors of OSEA. These recommendations are based on the experiences of survivors of OSEA in Kenya and further informed by the experiences and expertise of civil society organisations that also participated in the study. For a more detailed Action Plan for addressing OSEA, please see Annexure 1.

Legal reforms

To better address OSEA in Kenya, the following specific legal reforms are proposed:

◆ **Broaden definitions of what constitutes online safety:**

- ▶ There is a need to expand Kenya's anti-harassment and cybercrimes laws to include OSEA, defining specific online exploitation methods like extortion, coercion and grooming.
- ▶ Attention should be paid to emerging forms of OSEA, such as deepfake image-based abuse.

◆ **Strengthen existing laws:**

- ▶ Update GBV and anti-trafficking laws to ensure that they specifically address OSEA. This includes ensuring that laws such as the Sexual Offences Act and Counter Trafficking in Persons Act include the digital and online dimensions of sexual offences and human trafficking.
 - ▶ Attention should also be paid to ensuring explicit penalties for perpetrators and companies failing to protect user data from abuse and exploitation.
- ◆ All laws relevant to OSEA should be aligned with the regional and international human rights law and standards that Kenya has ratified.

Jurisdiction and cross-border cooperation

Addressing OSEA demands urgent coordinated actions, as the world has become a global village. The government of Kenya is urged to:

- ◆ **Enter into more bilateral and multilateral agreements** to streamline cross-border investigations on OSEA cases, ensuring cooperation with other countries.
- ◆ **Collaborate with tech companies**, enacting data-sharing protocols that improve access to user data in OSEA cases, while upholding privacy and other human rights.
- ◆ **Consider ratifying the Malabo Convention.**

Establish confidential reporting platforms

To encourage survivors to come forward, the government of Kenya should:

- ◆ **Establish confidential and secure reporting platforms**, such as mobile apps or web-based portals, ensuring that they are accessible to the range of survivors - children and adults and across rural and urban areas.
- ◆ **Enable multiple survivor services through these platforms**, including:
 - ▶ Flagging abusive content.
 - ▶ Requesting takedowns.
 - ▶ Filing complaints with the relevant authorities.
 - ▶ Direct links to psychosocial counsellors, legal aid providers, and digital safety experts.
- ◆ Collaborate with survivor groups and organisations, social media companies and tech firms in the design of these platforms, ensuring that they are survivor-friendly and respond to their needs and that they can use them to report abuses.

Build capacity for digital forensics and evidence collection

Effective prosecution of OSEA cases requires robust evidence collection, but law enforcement agencies currently lack the necessary skills and resources. The government of Kenya is encouraged to:

- ◆ **Ensure robust evidence collection of OSEA cases and trends**, and that law and policy respond effectively to the evidence gathered.
- ◆ **Provide specialised training for police and judicial officers in:**
 - ▶ Digital forensics.
 - ▶ Evidence preservation.
 - ▶ Metadata analysis.
 - ▶ Gender-sensitive interviewing techniques to avoid retraumatising survivors.
- ◆ **Invest in modern forensic labs** to strengthen national capacity for handling OSEA, including sex- and age-disaggregated data to track patterns of exploitation of women, girls, and other vulnerable groups.
- ◆ **Partner with international cybercrime experts** to transfer knowledge and best practices, with a focus on gendered dimensions of online abuse and trafficking.
- ◆ **Provide continuous professional development to close the skills gap**, combined with mandatory gender and human rights training for law enforcement and the judiciary.
- ◆ **Integrate survivor-centred approaches**, ensuring confidentiality, protection from retaliation, and recognition of the disproportionate targeting of women and girls in OSEA cases.

Public education on rights and digital privacy

Public education campaigns should focus on bridging knowledge gaps about survivors' legal rights and digital privacy protection. Therefore, state and non-state actors are encouraged to:

- ◆ **Use diverse media channels** such as radio, TV, and social media to reach women, girls, youth and rural communities.
- ◆ **Highlight survivors' rights under the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018**, including protections against image-based sexual abuse and online harassment.
- ◆ **Ensure public awareness materials and campaigns are designed with input from survivor groups** and are delivered by civil society organisations and local leaders, who are trusted within communities and can contextualise messages.
- ◆ **Conduct community sensitisation campaigns** led jointly by CSOs and local authorities, ensuring information is accessible in local languages and culturally relevant.
- ◆ **Challenge harmful norms** that perpetuate stigma, silence survivors, or normalise online sexual exploitation and abuse.
- ◆ **Promote survivor-centred messaging** that encourages reporting, reinforces confidentiality, and reduces fear of stigma and retaliation.

Address social stigma and strengthen survivor-centred support

Stigma and victim-blaming can deter survivors from seeking help. Recommendations to government and civil society actors include:

- ◆ **Establish survivor-centred care mechanisms** that include trauma-informed counselling, legal aid, and safe spaces for reporting cases. Establishing local support hubs will provide survivors with accessible and judgment-free environments to seek assistance.
- ◆ **Expand accessible legal aid, mental health services, and protection options for OSEA survivors**, making reporting and navigating legal processes safer and easier. Ensuring survivor-centred support addresses both emotional needs and systemic barriers.
- ◆ **Build and expand institutional partnerships with CSOs** for integrated psychosocial, legal, and livelihood support.

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Endnotes

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- 9 To ensure protection of the survivors interviewed the names of the survivors and perpetrators have been changed.

Annexure 1

Action plan for addressing online sexual abuse and exploitation

The action plan table provides a structured framework for addressing online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA), including image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), technology-facilitated sex trafficking (TFST), and online sexual coercion and extortion. It highlights key objectives, actionable activities, responsible stakeholders and implementation timelines for creating a coordinated and survivor-centred approach.

- 1. **Legal reforms** emphasise the need to amend existing laws to address digital dimensions of crimes like deepfakes, sextortion, and trafficking while ensuring swift justice through expedited legal processes.
- 2. **Policy development** focuses on holding platforms accountable, engaging survivors in policy-making, and fostering regional collaboration to tackle cross-border challenges.
- 3. **Public education and awareness** aims to empower vulnerable populations, such as youth and women, through campaigns and educational programmes that promote safety and awareness of legal remedies.
- 4. **Survivor support services** prioritise the establishment of shelters, legal aid, trauma counselling, and digital evidence support units to provide holistic care for survivors.
- 5. **Technology and innovation** leverage AI tools, digital forensic training, and partnerships with tech companies to enhance detection and prevention mechanisms.
- 6. **Monitoring and evaluation** ensures the sustainability and effectiveness of interventions through measurable indicators, regular reviews and accountability frameworks.
- 7. **International cooperation** promotes harmonisation of regional and global frameworks, ensuring a unified response to OSEA.

The table provides a roadmap for governments, NGOs, tech companies and international organisations to work collaboratively toward eradicating OSEA while prioritising survivor welfare and systemic accountability.

Objective	Activities	Implementation lead	Timeline
Legal reforms	- Amend the Data Protection Act, 2019, to include IBSA offences (e.g., deepfakes). - Criminalise online coercion and extortion as a distinct crime. - Revise the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act, 2010 (CTPA) law to address TFST digital aspects. - Mandate quicker prosecution timelines.	- National governments and parliaments. - Judiciary bodies. - Regional legal organisations.	Short-Term (0-12 months)
Policy development	- Require platforms to use algorithms to detect harmful content. - Mandate user-friendly reporting and takedown mechanisms. - Develop regional frameworks for cross-border collaboration. - Engage survivors in policy-making.	- Ministries of ICT, gender, and justice. - Regional organisations (e.g., African Union).	Medium-Term (1-3 years)

Objective	Activities	Implementation lead	Timeline
Public education and awareness	- Launch multimedia campaigns to educate youth, women, and rural populations. - Distribute educational resources. - Incorporate digital safety education in schools.	- Education ministries. - CSOs and NGOs. - Media outlets and local leaders.	Short-Term (0-12 months)
Survivor support services	- Provide free legal aid and trauma-informed counselling. - Establish safe shelters and vocational training for survivors. - Create multilingual, confidential reporting platforms. - Set up digital evidence support units.	- Health and social welfare ministries. - NGOs and international organisations. - Local governments.	Medium-Term (1-3 years)
Technology and innovation	- Partner with tech companies to develop AI tools for harmful content detection. - Train law enforcement and judicial officers in digital forensics.	- Technology companies. - Judicial officers - Law enforcement agencies. - Innovation hubs.	Medium-Term (1-3 years)
Monitoring and Evaluation	- Develop indicators to track prosecution rates and survivor satisfaction. - Conduct periodic reviews and publish annual progress reports. - Identify and refine gaps.	- Independent evaluators. - Government oversight bodies. - International partners.	Long-Term (3+ years)
International Cooperation	- Harmonise regional and global legal frameworks. - Collaborate with international organisations to exchange best practices. - Enhance capacity-building efforts.	- Regional organisations. - International coalitions. - Governments.	Long-Term (3+ years)

Annexure 2

Lived experiences of women and girls in Kenya affected by online sexual abuse and exploitation

Interview questionnaire

Section 1: Background information

1. Demographics

- ▶ Age:
- ▶ Gender identity:
- ▶ Location:
- ▶ Community or marginalised group (e.g., ethnic minority, disability, LGBTQI+, etc.):

2. Education and occupation

- ▶ What is your current educational status or highest level of education?
- ▶ What is your current occupation?

Section 2: Personal experience with online sexual exploitation and abuse

3. Nature of abuse

- ▶ Can you tell us what you experienced?
- ▶ Which of the form(s) of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse would best describe what you experienced (e.g., image-based abuse, sex trafficking, sexual coercion/extortion, live streaming of sexual exploitation)?
- ▶ How did the abuse initially occur? (e.g., through social media, online dating platforms, blackmail, others, etc.)

4. Entrapment and exploitation

- ▶ How were you initially targeted? What mechanisms or platforms were used by the perpetrators?
- ▶ How did the abuse impact your daily life (emotionally, mentally, and physically)?

Section 3: Access to legal remedies

5. Reporting and investigation

- ▶ Did you report to any authorities?
- ▶ What motivated you in your decision?
- ▶ How did you report the abuse (e.g., police, helpline, advocacy organisations)?
- ▶ Did you face any challenges? If yes, what specific challenges did you face in reporting the abuse?
- ▶ How did law enforcement or other institutions (e.g., police, judiciary, advocacy organisations) respond to your case?
- ▶ What was the response time and thoroughness of the investigation process?
- ▶ Did you have any positive experiences with the authorities when you reported? If so, please tell us about it.

6. Legal process

- ▶ Tell us your experience when your case went to court?
- ▶ What offence(s) was the perpetrator(s) charged with? Do you think it captured well what you had experienced?
- ▶ Did your case face delays in court or issues related to jurisdiction?
- ▶ Were there any barriers (e.g., cost, accessibility, lack of information) that made it difficult for you to access legal remedies?
- ▶ Did you have any positive experiences with the court process? Please tell us about it.

7. Effectiveness of the legal process

- ▶ Did you feel the legal system treated your case fairly and impartially?
- ▶ Were you satisfied with the outcome of your case, if it was resolved? If not, what were the shortcomings?
- ▶ Based on your experience, what improvements would you like to see in the legal process?

Section 4: Support systems

8. Support services

- ▶ Could you access any survivor support services (e.g., counselling, legal aid, shelters)? If yes, how helpful were they?
- ▶ Did you receive adequate emotional, psychological, or legal support during the process?
- ▶ Are you in touch with other survivors (e.g., as part of a survivor support group or through informal networks)? If yes, please tell us more.
- ▶ What services would you have liked to receive that were unavailable and/or inaccessible?
- ▶ Based on your experience, what improvements would you like to see in support services?

9. Community response

- ▶ Where you able to share your experience with anyone in your community or family and friends?
- ▶ What motivated you in your decision?
- ▶ How did your community, family, or friends respond to your experience of abuse?
- ▶ Did you feel supported? If yes, please tell us more?
- ▶ If you did not feel supported, please tell us more?

Section 5: Recommendations for policy and legal reform

10. Policy gaps

- ▶ From your experience, are there any positive aspects of the law and how it is implemented that you would like the government to maintain or do more of?
- ▶ From your experience, what are the most significant issues you would like the government to address regarding its response to OSEA in Kenya?
- ▶ What specific changes do you believe are necessary in the legal and policy frameworks to support survivors better?

12. Survivor voices in policy reform

- ▶ Do you feel that survivors' voices and experiences are considered when shaping policy and legal reforms?
- ▶ How can the perspectives of women and girls affected by OSEA be better amplified in policy discussions?

13. Intersectionality

- ▶ How has being part of a marginalised community (e.g., women with disabilities, LGBTQI+, ethnic minorities) impacted your experience in seeking justice and support?



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