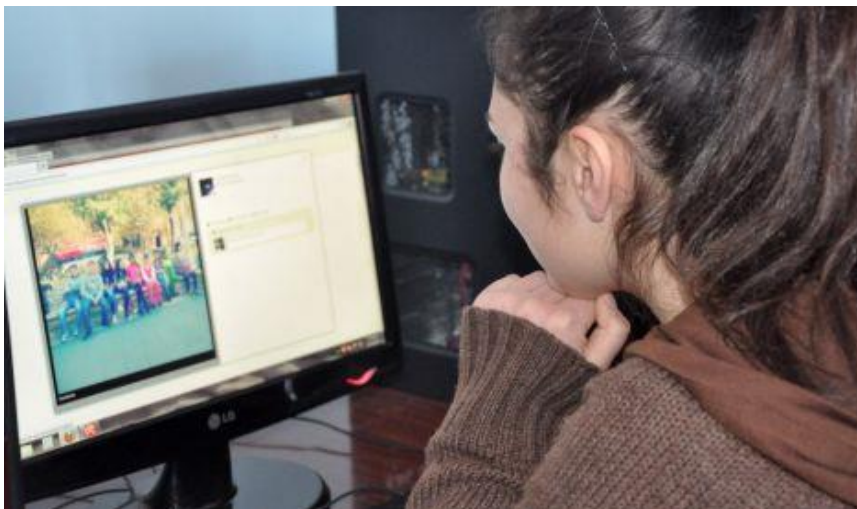


CASE STUDY

Keeping Children Safe Online

Children living in the online generation have unprecedented access to the benefits the Internet offers: information, communication, interaction and the chance to voice their views and opinions publicly. But the Internet also brings a very real risk of violence for children and young people exploring their online world. Children may be victims of bullying or humiliation on social media; they may find or be sent adult content inappropriate for their age; they may be connecting with sexual predators. Responding to the risk and effects of online violence is made more challenging by the new and unfamiliar territory of cyberspace and cybercrime; many legislative, judicial and protective systems lag behind in their ability to keep the Internet safe.

Keeping Children Safe Online (KCSO) is an approach to reduce the risk of online violence against children. KCSO was tested over three years of implementation and evaluation by six offices – Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Jerusalem–West Bank–Gaza, and Lebanon – in World Vision’s Middle East and Eastern Europe region. KCSO enhances the knowledge, awareness and skills of children, caregivers, teachers and authorities to build a culture of safe and responsible use of the Internet and mobile devices. By targeting everyone in a child’s circle of care, KCSO ensures additional layers of protection if the first layers – the child’s own choices – falter. Importantly, the approach emphasises policy alongside behaviour; it focuses on building relevant national laws, policies and procedures so that child protection systems are strong enough to respond to online cybercrime against children.



Forms of violence:

- Online bullying, exposure to pornographic content and risks of sexual exploitation.

Solutions:

- Empowering children as citizens
- Providing a continuum of services for prevention, protection and empowerment
- Enacting and enforcing laws that prohibit all forms of violence against children.

Results:

- After just two years, the capacity of children and youth to implement safety measures increased by an average of two thirds
- Three countries introduced online safety into school curricula; in all contexts, hotlines were linked to effective response and referral mechanisms
- Three out of four parents in the Lebanon evaluation recognised and were performing their role as supervisors of the online activity of children in their care.

KCSO employs several inter-connected tactics involving communities, government departments, police and legislators, child safety hotlines and private sector corporations. Children receive training to become online safety peer educators, including 'upwards' education to parents, while teachers in primary and secondary schools are encouraged through training and provision of materials to include online safety in their classes. This low-cost solution has potential to sustain and multiply knowledge across the entire population, particularly when supported by institutional inclusion in public awareness campaigns or school curricula.

The results of World Vision's KCSO projects show rapid heightening of awareness and action on online safety in all target groups. In Armenia, for instance, 80 per cent of children and 50 per cent of parents immediately began to apply principles and practices they had learnt in the training. More than 85 per cent of participating teachers in Armenia and over 90 per cent in Lebanon reported that they were more confident in teaching, monitoring and talking to their colleagues about online safety. Projects in three countries successfully advocated to have online safety included in national school curriculum. In all countries, hotlines were better equipped and connected to crime authorities, so that more rapid and coordinated policing of violations was possible. After just six months of promoting the Himaya online reporting mechanism in Lebanon, knowledge of the service increased overall from 19 to 54 per cent, and knowledge among youth increased from under 6 per cent to 80 per cent.

KCSO helped to shift longstanding cultures of conservatism and reticence when it came to talking about controversial topics such as sexual violence and child abuse. It also revealed strong potential to improve the status of children, the validity of their knowledge and the legitimacy of their participation in community dialogue. Within many communities where World Vision introduced the KCSO training,

children had previously been seen as passive recipients, not contributors. Yet in the online world, both technically and culturally, their knowledge and intuition surpassed that of their parents and often their teachers, with respect and increased consultation awarded as a result.

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Published by Advocacy & Justice for Children as a resource for World Vision staff.

Managed on behalf of Advocacy & Justice for Children by Tamara Tutnjevic Gorman.

Author: Daja Wenke. Senior Editor: Heather Elliott.

Content editor: Katie Chalk/Chalk It Up.

Production Management: Katie Fike.

Design: Friend Creative. Proofreading: Anna Claire Okeke.

Front page photo © World Vision/Ani Chitemyan: *Fourteen-year-old Armine [not her real name] surfs through different social networks, and thanks to World Vision's KCSO training she is now aware of internet safety rules and has become a strong advocate to educate her peers and protect them from possible online hazards.*

