



CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE ONLINE: Frontline Workers' Perspectives in Bosnia and Herzegovina



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[WeProtect Global Alliance](#) brings together experts from government, the private sector and civil society to develop policies and solutions to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse online.

The Alliance generates political commitment and practical approaches to make the digital world safe and positive for children, preventing sexual abuse and long-term harm.



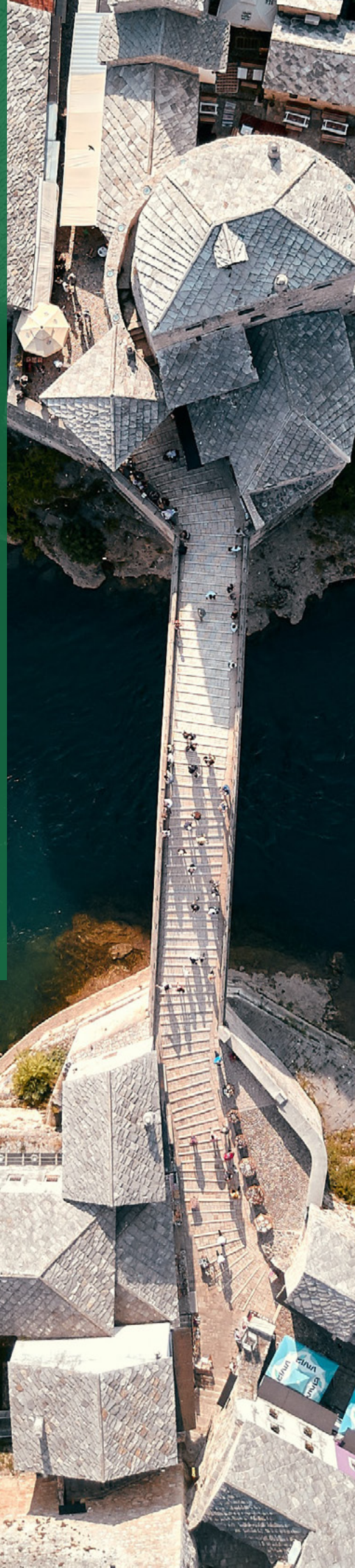
[ECPAT International](#) is a global network of civil society organisations working towards the vision of ending the sexual exploitation of children. With over 30 years of experience in engaging with and managing multi-stakeholder processes and alliances across national, regional and global levels; ECPAT is considered to be at the helm of all issues and manifestations pertaining to the sexual exploitation of children. With a Secretariat based in Bangkok (Thailand), driving strategic direction, producing key research and working on global advocacy; together with the on-the-ground efforts of 122 members in 104 countries, the network approach bridges local communities, governments and the private sector; offering a global approach combined with customised national actions.



[IFS-EMMAUS](#) is a leading civil society organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina fighting against trafficking in human beings and online child abuse and exploitation. The mission of IFS-EMMAUS is assistance to vulnerable individuals, specifically children, through rehabilitation, repatriation and reintegration. Its key activities include prevention and suppression of trafficking in human beings, online child abuse and exploitation and violence against children. IFS-EMMAUS manages the European Resource Center for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings and Other Forms of Exploitation, focusing on capacity building, research and information sharing, as well as the Safer Internet Center focusing on prevention, awareness raising, reporting, counselling and support to victims.

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INTRODUCTION



Photo by Dev Asangbam

Defining child sexual exploitation and abuse online

Child sexual abuse refers to various sexual activities perpetrated against children (persons under 18), regardless of whether the children are aware that what is happening to them is neither normal nor acceptable. It can be committed by adults or peers and usually involves an individual or group taking advantage of an imbalance of power. It can be committed with or without explicit force, with offenders frequently using authority, power, manipulation, or deception.¹

Child sexual exploitation involves the same abusive actions. However, an additional element must also be present - exchange of something (e.g., money, shelter, material goods, immaterial things like protection or a relationship), or even the mere promise of such.²

Child sexual exploitation and abuse online refers to situations involving digital, Internet and communication technologies at some point during the continuum of abuse or exploitation. It can occur fully online or through a mix of online and in-person interactions between offenders and children.

Child sexual exploitation and abuse online includes an evolving range of practices including:



Child sexual abuse material: The production, distribution, dissemination, importing, exporting, offering, selling, possession of, or knowingly obtaining access to child sexual abuse material online (even if the sexual abuse that is depicted in the material was carried out offline).



Grooming children online for sexual purposes: Identifying and/or preparing children via online technology with a view to exploiting them sexually (whether the acts that follow are then carried out online or offline or even not carried out at all).



Live streaming of child sexual abuse: Sexual exploitation which involves the coercion, threat or deception of a child into sexual activities that are transmitted ('streamed') live via the Internet for viewing by others remotely.



Other practices: Related concepts can include online sexual extortion, the non-consensual sharing of self-generated sexual content involving children, unwanted exposure to sexualised content, among others.³

1. Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children. (2016). [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International. 18.

2. *Ibid.*, 24.

3. ECPAT International. (2020). [Summary Paper: Online Child Sexual Exploitation](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.

Background

Research about child sexual exploitation and abuse online has received increased attention recently – particularly as our lives shifted further online during responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Research from global north countries is over-represented on this topic, with far fewer studies taking place in low- and middle-income countries. A continuum exists for our online and offline lives which also impacts this issue - with blurred boundaries between our physical and digital worlds. Sexual violence is also taking place in different ways: online, as well as in situations involving online and in-person elements of grooming, facilitation and sharing.

Research about online forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse is relatively rare. However, growing numbers of children are being supported by support services around the world for issues related to child sexual exploitation and abuse online. Seeking to understand and build on the strengths of such services and address their weaknesses is a priority.

Specific evidence about the quality and effectiveness of support services will enable targeted responses in which governments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector can cooperate to address this problem.

The project in Bosnia and Herzegovina

To explore child sexual exploitation and abuse online in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this project undertook an online survey of frontline support workers who were working with child survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Surveying frontline support workers aimed to provide a substantial and nuanced understanding of how child sexual exploitation and abuse online is presenting in social support services. Data from these professionals indicates knowledge and perceptions of the problem amongst workers, caregivers and the general public; identifies key vulnerabilities for children; and assesses accessibility of care to support children subjected to child sexual exploitation and abuse online.

Data from Bosnia and Herzegovina was presented – alongside data from five other countries involved in the project⁴ to a panel of experts at an online roundtable held on 26th July 2021. Insights from the roundtable helped frame the data in the overall project report and this and other countries' national reports.

4. The project was implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Mexico, Moldova and Peru. This report solely includes the findings of the activities conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similar national reports are available for all project countries along with a project report summarising the findings across the six target countries.

METHODOLOGY



Photo by Jess Zoerb

The engagement of frontline support workers through completion of a workforce survey was aimed at adding data to ‘flesh out’ a comprehensive picture of child sexual exploitation and abuse online by exploring the perceptions, knowledge and practices influencing disclosure and support provision.

Rationale

Workforce surveys have increasingly been used in research to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of social support systems. Most commonly these surveys are used by health⁵ and social work professions⁶ to measure service delivery effectiveness.

Social support to children who are subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse is generally provided within the broader context of child protection. We therefore developed and delivered a survey for child protection workers. The survey explored perceptions related to the sexual exploitation of children – in general and online; factors related to children’s access to support services; perceptions of the quality and effectiveness of such services; as well as details about the nature of their direct work with children.

Sample

ECPAT International utilised their national contacts to identify organisations supporting children from which to invite staff working at the frontline of providing support.

While the research focus was child sexual exploitation and abuse online, very few services focus exclusively on support for child sexual exploitation and abuse with an online component, or even exclusively on general child sexual exploitation and abuse. The sample therefore included a range of frontline support workers who had supported at least some children subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse over the last year.

A convenience sample of 49 frontline workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina was surveyed. Fifty-five percent of the surveyed frontline workers were employed through governmental organisations (n=27), and 29% worked in non-governmental organisations (n=14). The remaining eight reported that they worked for a hospital, clinical centre, healthcare institution, or education institution. The sample should not be considered representative of the diversity of frontline workers in the country, however, attempts to represent different types of services, both in terms of geographic location as well as type of services were made.

In order to be eligible to complete the survey, frontline workers needed to be:

- Over 18 years of age;
- At least last 12 months working in the field of social work, psychology or other social support;
- At least last 12 months managing own case load directly;
- Case load over last 12 months included at least some children;
- Case load over last 12 months included at least some cases of sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

5. Magadzire, P M et al. (2014, November). [Frontline health workers as brokers: provider perceptions, experiences and mitigating strategies to improve access to essential medicines in South Africa.](#)

6. Sadeghi, T and Fekjaer, S. (2018). [Frontline workers' competency in activation work.](#) *International Journal of Social Welfare*. 77-88; Netsayi, M. (2019). [Perceptions of frontline social workers on their contributions agenda for social work and social development.](#)

The survey

Self-administered online surveys (emailing a link) have notoriously low participation rates. Thus, the design for this project opted for in-person administration – though using an online tool with limits and designated required items for a clean dataset. While restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic meant the survey administrator had to support participants by phone in some cases, they remained on standby to support, offer guidance and troubleshoot as the participants completed the survey. The personal connection helped motivate participants to complete the survey. Data collection took place between June - August 2021. The online survey consisted of 109 multiple choices and short open-answer questions. The draft tool in English language was translated to Bosnian and checked and contextualised by IFS Emmaus. It was then pilot-tested with a small number of frontline workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina before being fielded.

The full survey in English and Bosnian can be provided on request.

Analysis

Following data collection, data was cleaned, and open-ended responses were translated to English. Survey output was integrated into a custom analytical framework where analysis was then conducted based upon exigent themes and patterns that arose from the data. Qualitative analytical components were then added.

Quantitative and qualitative themes and patterns were explored, with direct (translated) quotes from the open text responses used to illustrate dominant narratives emerging from the quantitative data, along with occasional dissenting views. Care was taken during analysis not to present any qualitative responses that may have identified participants.

It should be noted that the data are not statistically representative of the experiences of all frontline support workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the estimates, perceptions and experiences reported here offer valuable insight into the access and quality of social support for Bosnian children who have experienced sexual exploitation and abuse.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained as an integrated part of the online survey tool. To protect confidentiality, names were not requested at any stage of completing the survey. Care is also taken when presenting qualitative data in this report so that participants are not identifiable by the content of the quotes.

Challenges and limitations

The Covid-19 pandemic meant movement restrictions varied at different times during the data collection period, which had an impact on the frontline workers' survey.

The research inclusion criteria also represented a limitation. Our intent was to include support workers who worked directly at the frontline (not higher up managers). Thus, a hurdle question sought experience of working directly with children "within the last 12 months." As data collection occurred in the first half of 2021, the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic had restricted some frontline workers from doing direct client work for some time, so it is likely that some of the 56 participants who began the survey but were disqualified by hurdle questions may have been false positives.

FINDINGS



Quantitative and qualitative data from the surveyed frontline support workers are used to structure this report and draw a picture of the on-the-ground situation for preventing and responding to child sexual exploitation and abuse online in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Public perceptions and beliefs, the knowledge and practices of workers, availability and quality of reporting mechanisms and the resource levels of support services are all presented. The report concludes with recommendations for action.

Trends in child sexual exploitation and abuse online in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Gender

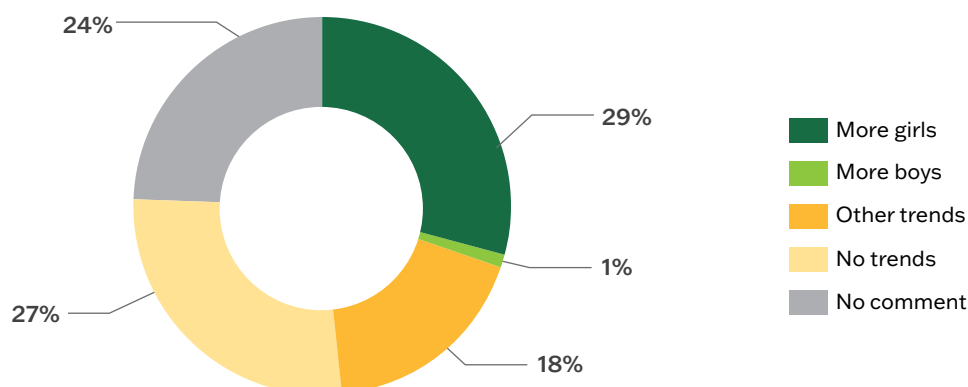
The survey data suggest that there is a higher proportion of girls than boys utilising formal reporting mechanisms and accessing support services in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In an open question, participants were asked if they thought there were trends related to gender and sexual exploitation (generally and online). Most respondents either did not provide input on this question (24%, n=11), stated that they have not noticed any gender trends (27%, n=13), or mentioned trends unrelated to gender (18%, n=9). Only one respondent mentioned boys being more affected by sexual exploitation than girls as a trend, while nearly a third (n=15) indicated that they perceived more girls than boys were affected. Providing qualitative input to this question, one frontline worker said:

“According to our statistical indicators, it has been noticed that girls are more exposed to sexual exploitation and that in most cases it is the girls who are the victims of the crimes of sexual intercourse with a child, incest, lewd acts, etc.”

Another one mentioned that shame could be one of the reasons why boys avoid to report their experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse online:

“Girls tend to report much more, boys are ashamed. Slightly bigger number of girls are victims.”

Figure 1: Gender trends identified by frontline workers (generally and online).



While the perception is that girls are more at risk, boys too are clearly seeking assistance for a range of things, including for sexual exploitation and abuse online. Eighty percent of the workers who completed the survey had provided support to girls (n=39) and most of these (n=36) had supported girls related to sexual exploitation and abuse online. But 71% of the surveyed frontline workers (n=35) had provided support to boys and of these, 24 workers had supported boys for sexual exploitation and abuse online. Indeed, some qualitative responses on the survey did suggest that boys were becoming more visible to social support services including for sexual exploitation and abuse.

“The difference in the numbers of boys and girls who are victims of sexual violence has decreased. In the past, there were more girls among the victims but over the past several years, the number of boys among victims of sexual violence has increased.”

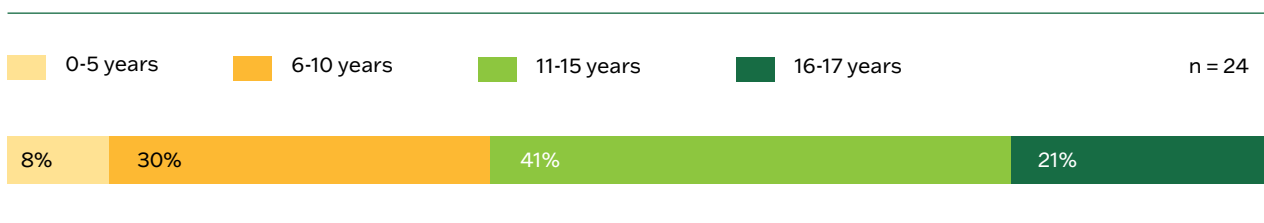
This could be an indication that previously hidden victimisation of boys is becoming more visible, in line with global research which is showing boys are frequently more represented amongst victims than we previously thought.⁷

There were also some interesting departures from expectations in the Bosnian data. Respondents were asked whether they helped children who are non-binary,⁸ and 22% (n=11) of workers, a surprisingly high proportion, responded that they did. However, respondents offered no further detail in the open questions regarding work with this population.

Age

The 24 surveyed frontline workers who had supported boys for sexual exploitation and abuse online reported that 38% of the boys (n=9) were very young when they experienced the sexual exploitation and abuse online – under ten years of age. Among these, two workers indicated they had helped boys younger than five when the sexual abuse occurred. Workers indicated that 41% of boys subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse online were between the ages of 11-15 years old and 21% (n=5) between 16-17 years old.

Figure 2: Age of boys who had experienced online sexual exploitation.



Similarly, the 36 frontline workers who had supported girls reported that 34% (n=12) were younger than ten years of age and of these, four were under five years old. Sixty-five percent of the girls were

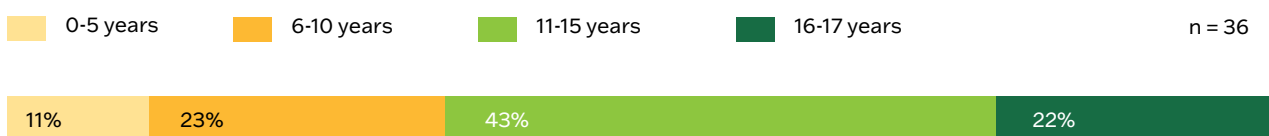
7. ECPAT International. (2021). [Global Boys Initiative: A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys](#). ECPAT International.

8. A non-binary person is someone who does not identify as exclusively a man or a woman. Someone who is non-binary might feel like a mix of genders, might use the term 'third-gender', or even feel like they have no gender at all.

between 11-17 years of age when they were subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse online. For boys and girls, these indications of very young children being affected is concerning. One worker attributed it to children's early access to Internet:

“Over time, the victims are getting younger, which is explained by the earlier availability of information technology to children.”

Figure 3: Age of girls who had experienced online sexual exploitation.

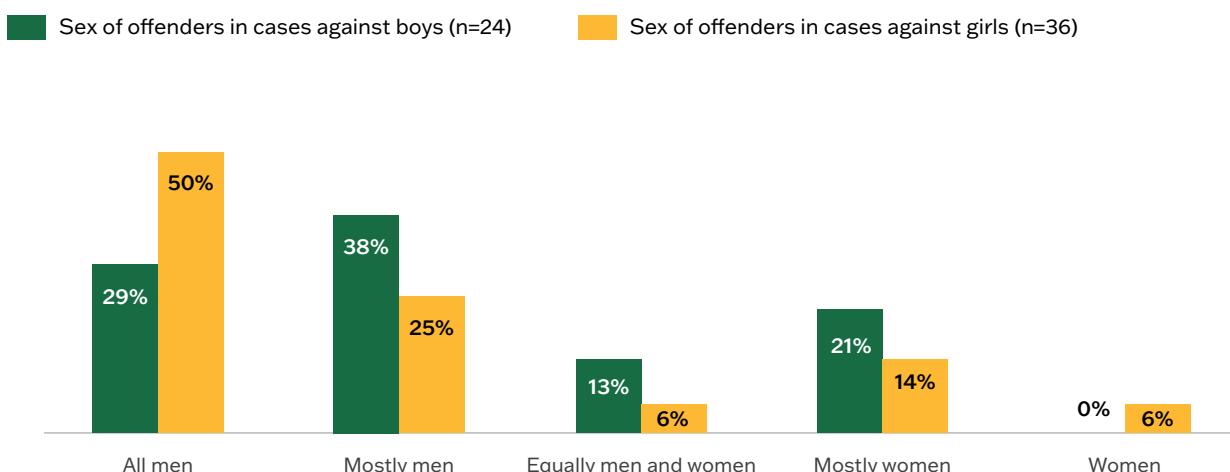


Offenders

To some extent, the survey also explored data about the offenders. When the 24 surveyed frontline workers who had supported boys subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse online were asked about the gender of the offenders, two thirds (67%, n=16) indicated that either all or most cases involved male offenders, while 21% indicated that the offenders were mostly women.

Among the 36 surveyed frontline workers who supported girls, half (50%, n=18) indicated that all of the cases involved male offenders, and 25% (n=9) perceived that mostly cases involved men, while only 14% mentioned that there were more women offenders than men.

Figure 4: Gender of offenders in cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse online.



Participants estimated very slight differences between cases involving boys and girls in terms of the origin of offenders. In both cases, the general consensus was that the offenders were most commonly nationals, with 17%–19% (workers who supported boys and girls, respectively) noting that the offenders were more often foreigners.

Respondents were also asked to share the common types of relationships that were involved in child sexual exploitation and abuse online. Participants’ responses indicated that family friends and parents/step-parents were the most common, both in cases of boys and girls.

Challenges and influencing factors

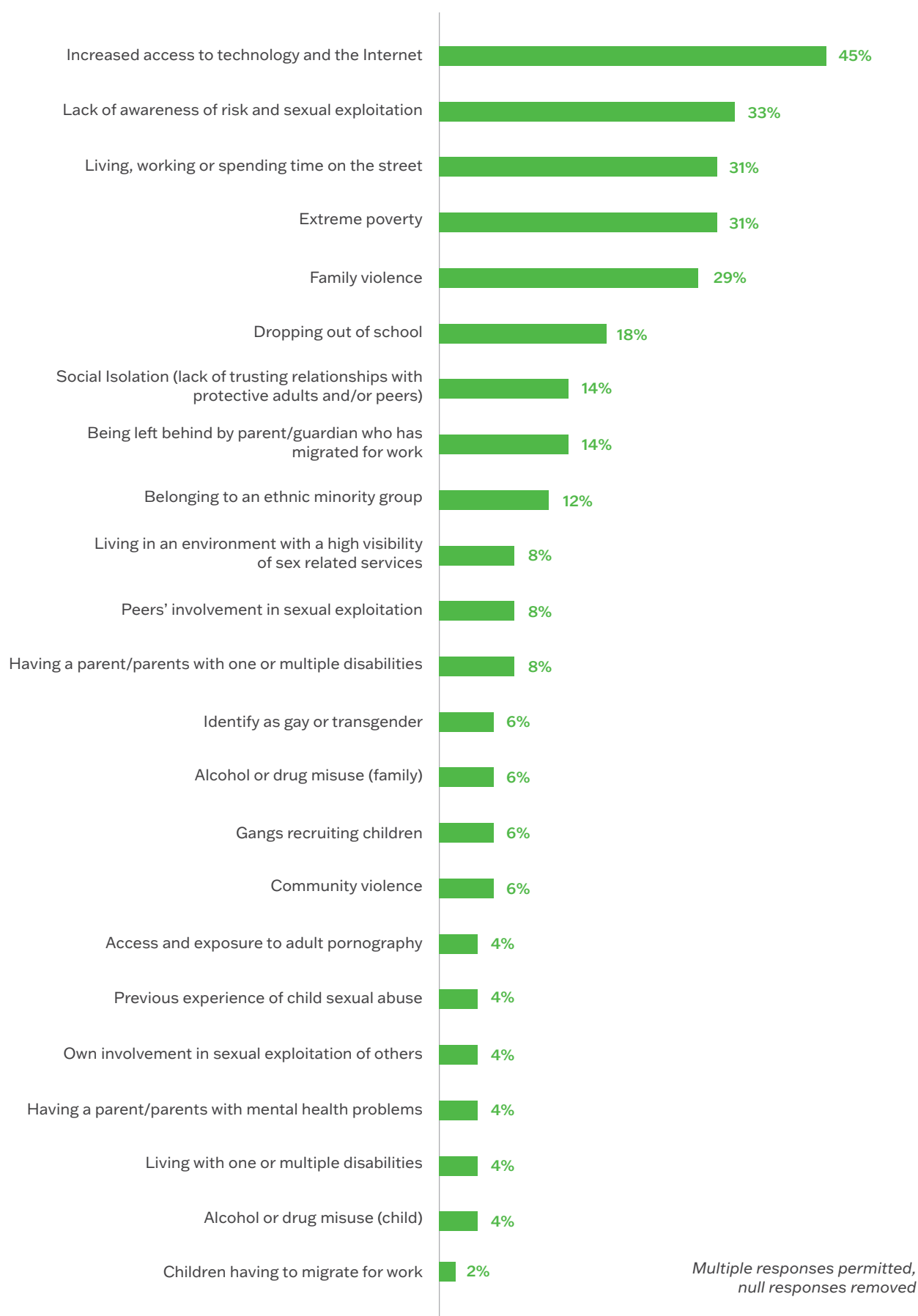
Stigma and shame were mentioned by the surveyed frontline workers as major factors that can potentially increase children’s vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse online. The responses show that there is a ‘culture of silence’ (94%, n=46) and that talking about sex and sexuality is considered taboo (88%, n=43). While prominent in the stated vulnerabilities in other project countries, these are very high proportions of workers noting the impact of stigma and discomfort discussing sex in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This indicates these factors have a strong influence, and responses must focus on these factors to have an impact.

Figure 5: Traditional beliefs and practices that potentially increase children’s vulnerability.



When presented with a list of 25 social and economic factors that could potentially increase children’s vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse online, the most commonly selected factor was “increased access to technology and the Internet” (45%, n=22), which was interestingly selected mainly by younger respondents. This was followed by “lack of awareness of risk and sexual exploitation” (33%, n=16), “living, working or spending time on the street” (31%, n=15), and “extreme poverty” (31%, n=15).

Figure 6: Social and economic factors that potentially increase children's vulnerability.



Reporting mechanisms

Awareness

The survey explored the perception amongst frontline workers of the public awareness of online forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. The majority of frontline workers (71%, n=35) considered it “poor”. A smaller fraction of the respondents answered that it was either “fair” 20% (n=10) or “good” 6% (n=3). When asked if they had further comments, the workers proposed that more education and training is needed in order to increase public awareness:

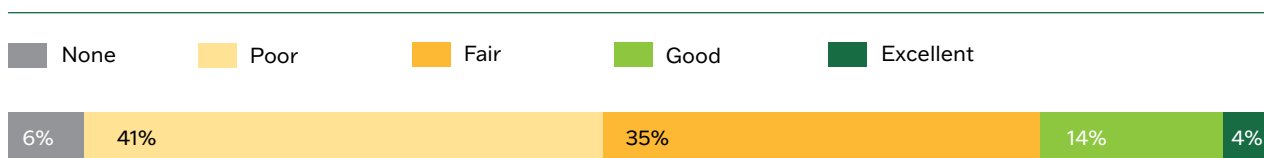
“It is necessary to educate parents and raise their awareness about the sexual exploitation of children.”

One respondent even suggested that not only the public but experts offering support in this area had a lot to learn:

“First of all, the awareness of professionals dealing with this topic should be awakened.”

The survey also covered frontline workers’ perceptions of law enforcement’s knowledge and awareness of crimes related to sexual exploitation and abuse online. Forty-seven percent of the workers considered police had none or poor knowledge on this topic. Only one worker thought police knowledge was excellent.

Figure 7: Perceptions of police knowledge and awareness of child sexual exploitation and abuse online.



Younger respondents were particularly critical with regard to public awareness on this topic. All seven respondents aged under 30 considered the public knowledge of this topic “poor”. This likely indicates young people, who have grown up with technology, are much more aware of the risks on this topic and therefore judge general public knowledge with more scrutiny.

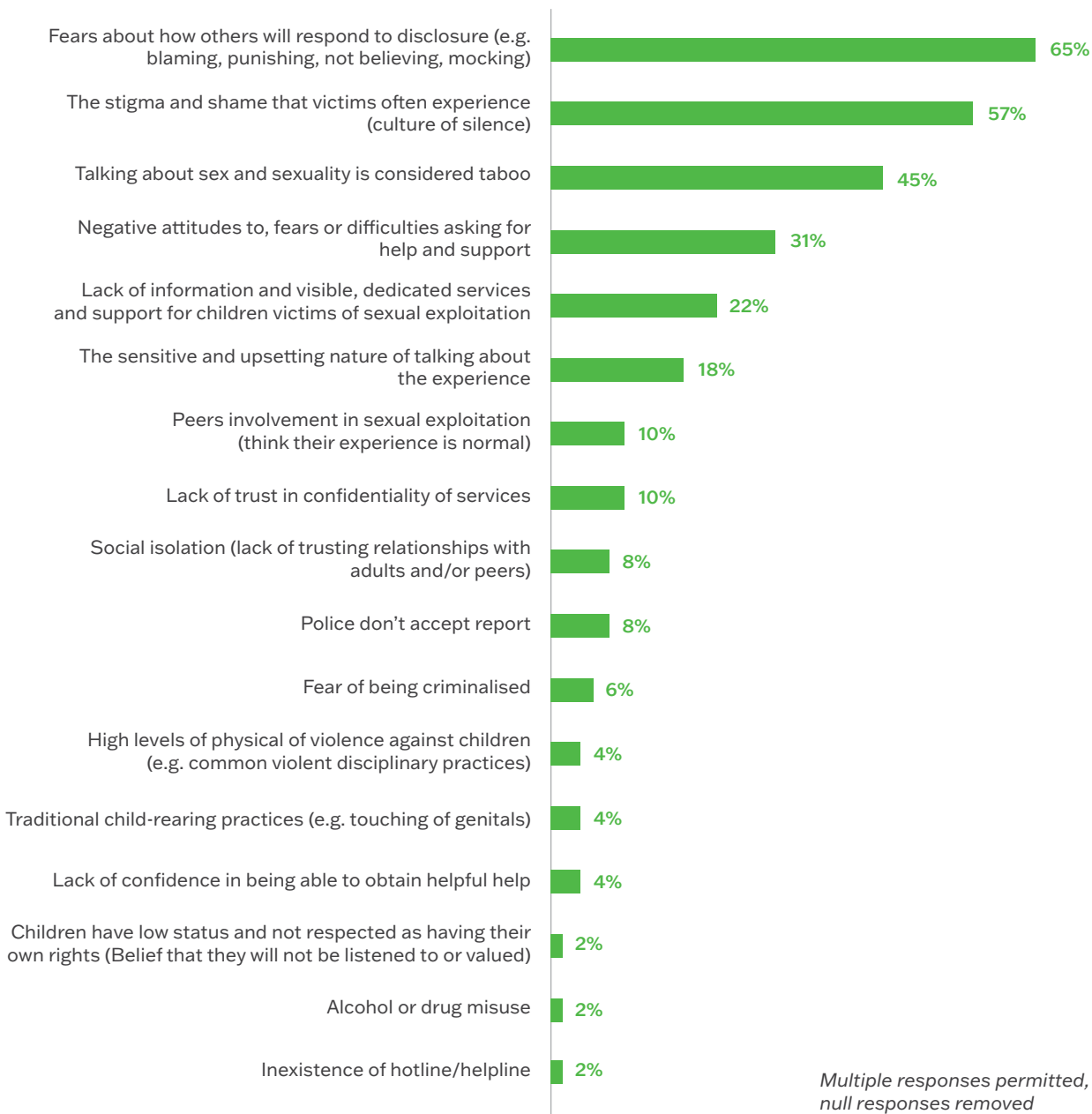
In contrast, years of experience supporting children does tend to account for something here too. Those with greater experience tended to judge community awareness as “poor” – again maybe an effect of having seen more children dealing with the fallout of online harms.

Barriers to disclosure

As part of the survey, the respondents were presented with a list of 18 factors that could potentially limit children’s disclosure of sexual exploitation and abuse online to others. As indicated in Figure 8 below, the most commonly selected barriers to reporting were “fears about how others will respond to

disclosure” (65%, n=32), followed by a pervasive culture of silence (“the stigma and shame that victims often experience”) at 57% (n=28). These views reiterate the impact of shame that children subjected to sexual exploitation feel and how the views of their communities can negatively influence the way that they react after an incident of online sexual exploitation.

Figure 8: Factors that potentially limit children’s disclosure.



Yet these fears seem to be founded. Indeed, when the surveyed frontline workers were asked what were the biggest problems raised by child clients who had experienced online sexual exploitation and abuse, the most mentioned were social isolation/marginalisation (29%, n=14), followed by fear, trauma and anxiety (18%, n=9) and shame/guilt (16%, n=8). A number of respondents commented that children:

“Fear that violence will happen again, how the community will react, whether they will be able to overcome the current situation and proceed with “normal” life.”

Others pointed to the emotional impacts on clients - they have to deal with:

“An intensive feeling of guilt.”

Support services

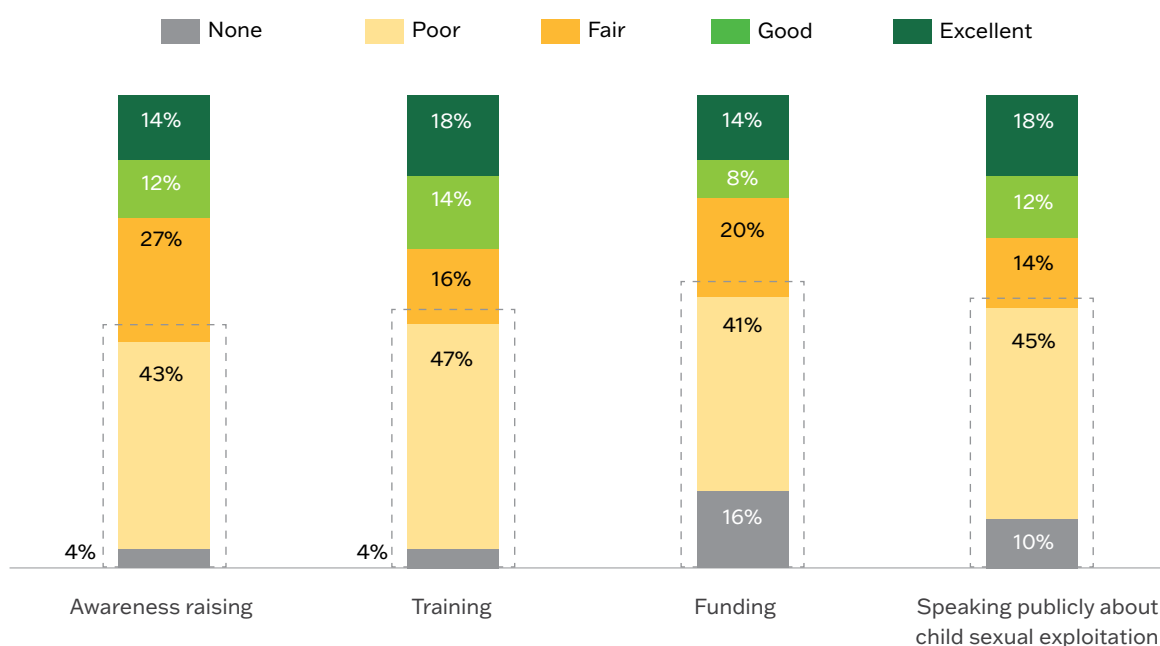
This section presents some insights on the perceived quality and accessibility of support services related to child sexual exploitation and abuse online. This is followed by an overview of the different types of support services provided in Bosnia and Herzegovina, taking into account the views of frontline workers providing these services.

Quality and availability of support services

The majority of the surveyed frontline workers provided individual support for up to ten children each month (69%, n=34). A further 18% (n=9) supported between 10 to 20 children monthly and 12% (n=6) supported more than 20 children per month.

When asked about the quality of government activities to address child sexual exploitation and abuse online in Bosnia and Herzegovina, frontline workers provided some criticisms especially about the funding and public advocacy and awareness-raising efforts of government duty-bearers. As shown in Figure 9, about a half of the respondents (47%-57%) rated the quality of the activities as either “poor” or non-existent.

Figure 9: Frontline workers’ views on the quality of government activities.



The frontline workers also expressed dissatisfaction with both the availability and quality of medical, psychological, legal and reintegration services for children who have experienced online forms of sexual exploitation and abuse in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Legal services were rated more positively, with around 29-31% of frontline workers rating the availability and quality of these services as either “good” or “excellent”. However, all four sets of services were overall rated as “poor” in terms of availability and quality by between 27%-45% of frontline workers, suggesting a broad need for improvement.

One worker commented that in order to improve quality, the organisations would need more support from the government:

“Very few organisations are involved, and moreover, they are overburdened and do not receive any support from government.”

Figure 10: Availability and quality of support services.



In terms of collaboration amongst government agencies, civil society, and other entities such as private companies to address child sexual exploitation and abuse online, the responses from surveyed frontline workers were mixed, but more than half (55%, n=27) believed that this collaboration is either poor or non-existent. None of the respondents answered “excellent”.

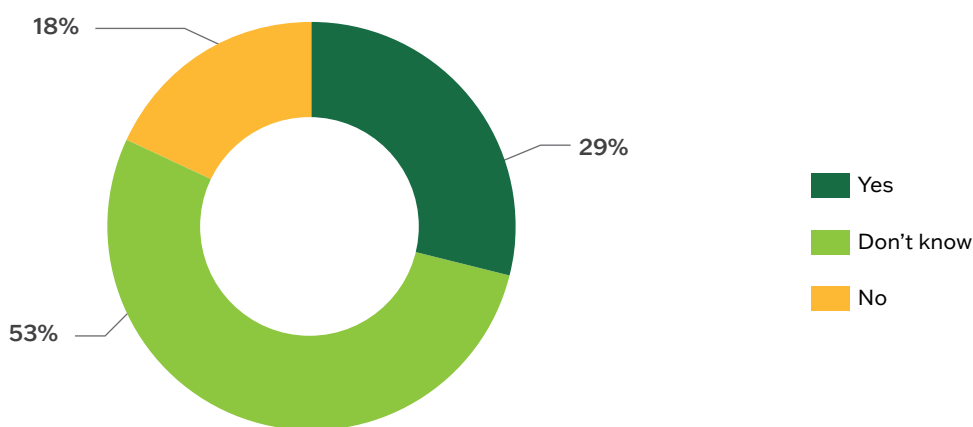
Figure 11: Frontline workers’ views on the collaboration between government agencies, civil society and other entities such as private companies.



Frontline workers were asked whether child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse online have the possibility to seek formal financial compensation via civil or criminal court proceedings, whether from convicted offenders or via State-managed funds. More than a half of the respondents (53%, n=26) indicated that they did not know the answer, while 29% (n=14) responded positively and the remaining 18% (n=9) indicated that child victims do not have the possibility to seek formal financial compensation.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Criminal Procedure Codes stipulate that the prosecutor and the court should inform the injured party about the right to file a compensation claim for material or non-material damages suffered as a result of crime, and the injured party may file such a claim during investigation or during the course of the main trial.⁹ While in theory children can claim for compensation, there is not a concrete system of compensation available for child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, and the number of children who have benefitted from the existing legal provisions is negligible.

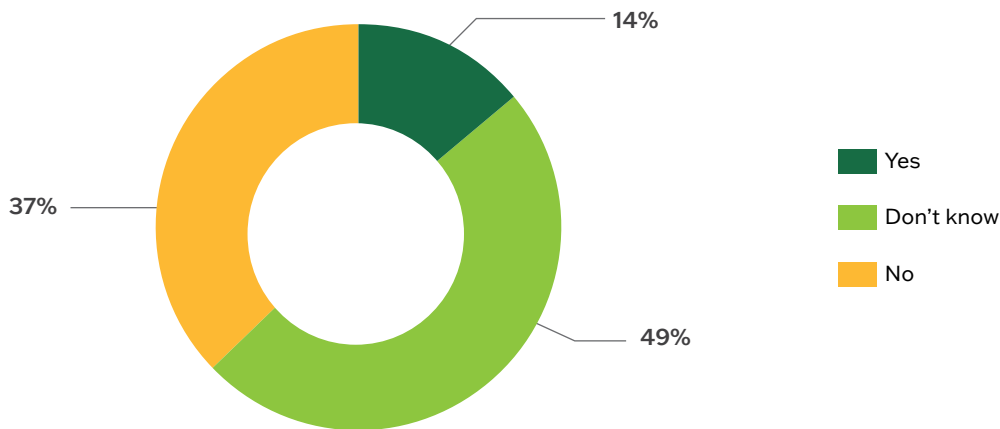
Figure 12: Frontline workers’ opinions on whether children victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse online can seek formal financial compensation.



9. See the provisions on damage compensation claims in: [Law on Criminal Procedure of the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#). Arts. 193-204. (BiH); [Criminal Procedure Code of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#). Arts. 207-218. (BiH); [Criminal Procedure Code of Republika Srpska](#). Arts. 103-114. (BiH).

When asked in the survey if they know of any children who had been subjected to online sexual exploitation and abuse and had received compensation for the crimes they suffered in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the majority of surveyed frontline workers either indicated that they did not know of any children (37%, n=18), or that they did not know how to answer the question (49%, n=24). Only fourteen percent (n=7) responded that they knew of a child who had received compensation.

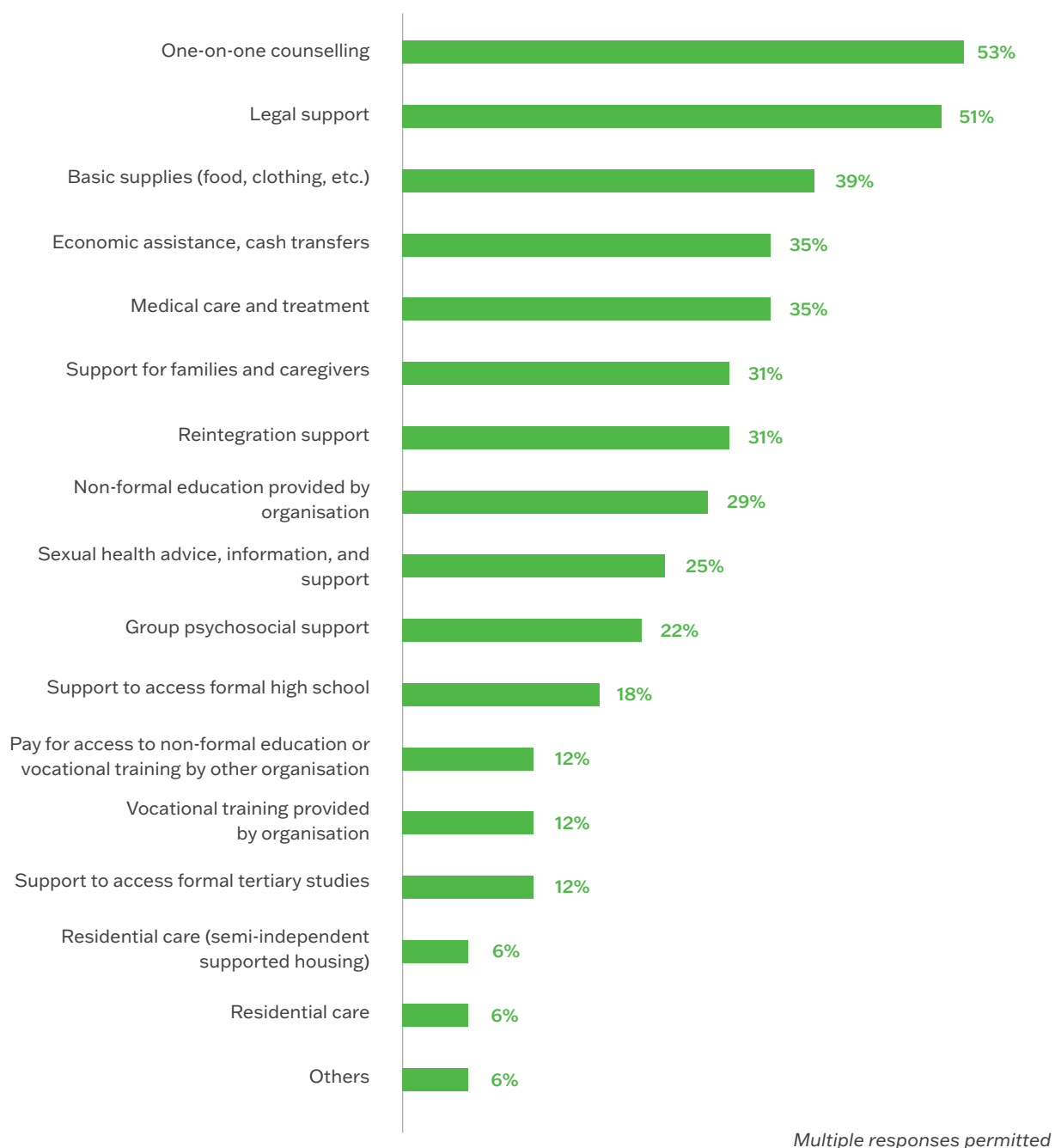
Figure 13: Based on your work experience, do you know if any child subjected to online sexual exploitation and abuse have received compensation for the crimes they suffered in Bosnia and Herzegovina?



Types of support services

Frontline workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina mentioned a range of support services provided for children subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse online across the country. Psychological support was one of the most common services provided amongst the sample. When asked about the different types of direct support services provided by their organisations to children who have experienced sexual exploitation, over a half (53%, n=26) reported offering one-on-one counselling, closely followed by legal support (51%, n=25). The other three most common services provided were basic supplies (39%, n=19), economic assistance/cash transfers (35%, n=17) and medical care (35%, n=17).

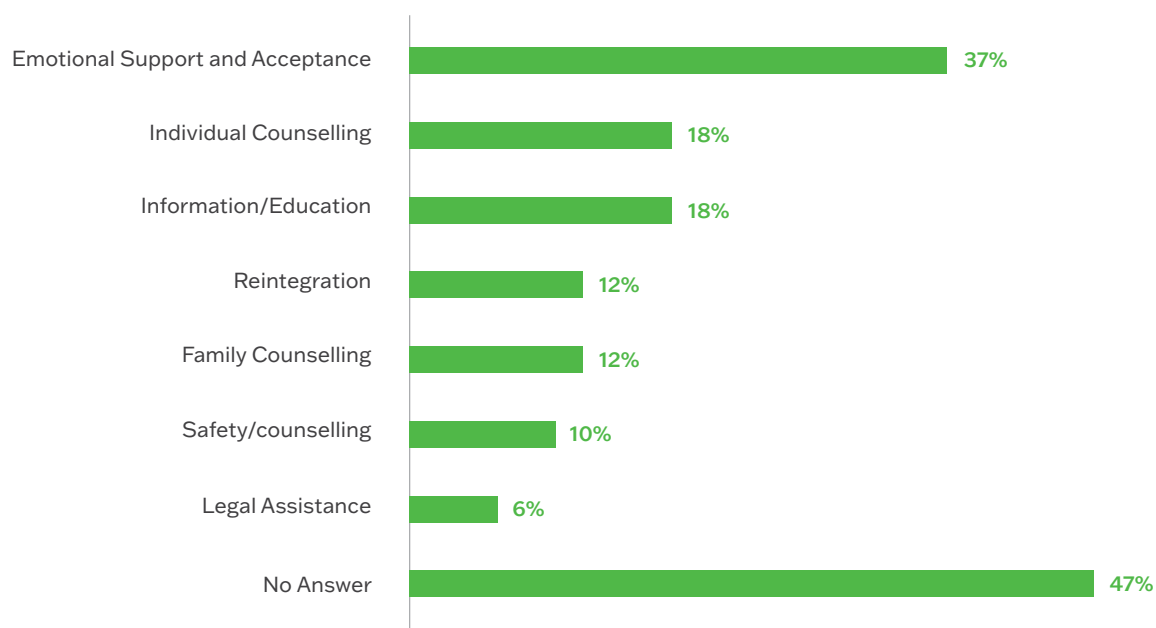
Figure 14: Direct support to children who had experienced sexual exploitation provided by the organisation.



Psychological support was indeed considered essential by the frontline workers who responded to the survey. They said that children who experienced sexual exploitation and abuse online most commonly identified emotional support/acceptance among their biggest needs (37%, n=18), followed by individual counselling (18%, n=9) and information/education (18%, n=9). A respondent elaborated that children need:

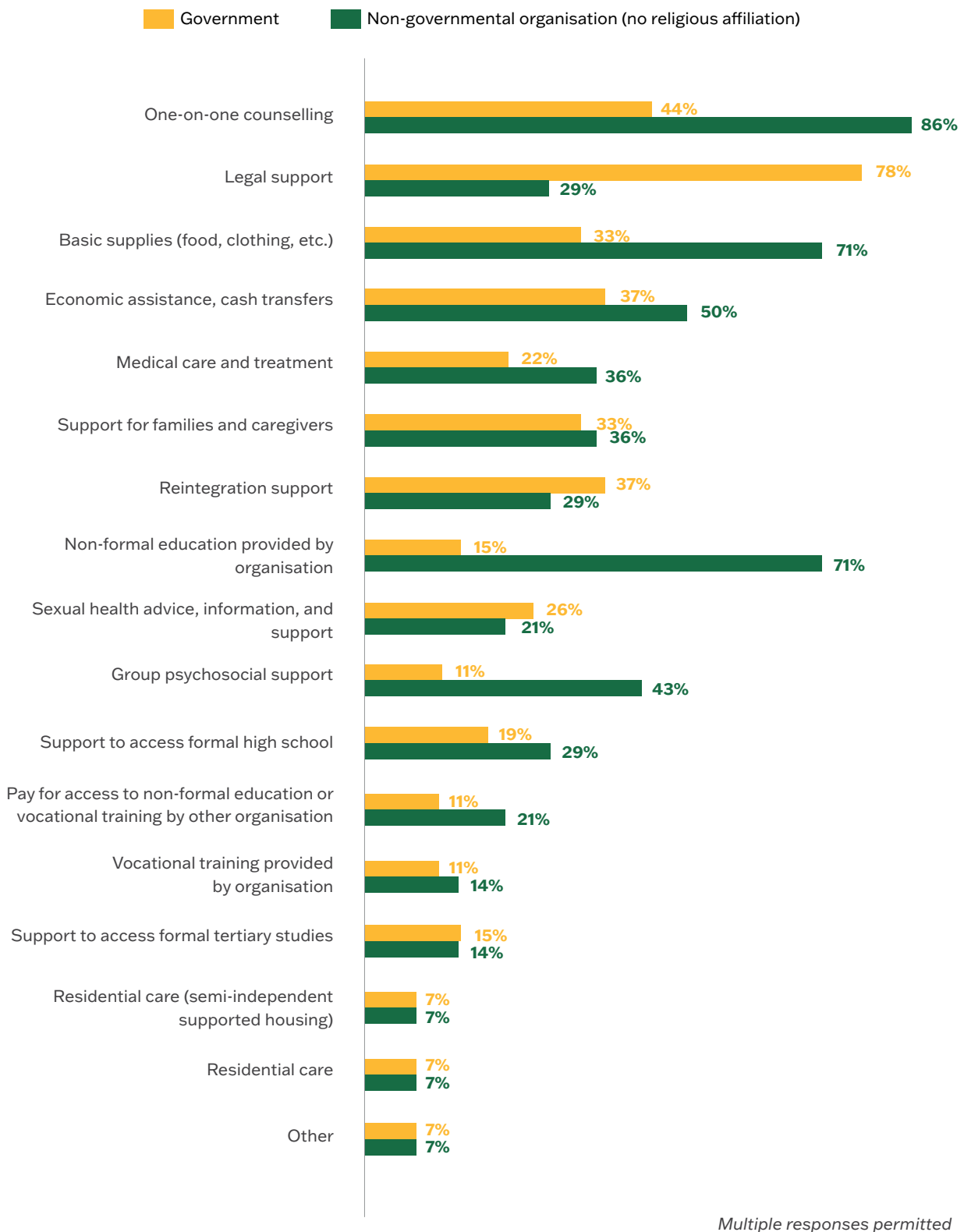
“To have someone whom they can contact if they think they are victims (to check their suspicion). Teachers and other school staff should be trained.”

Figure 15: Biggest needs that children say that they have, according to frontline workers.



The survey data showed some differences in terms of services available across the type of organisation, as displayed in Figure 16. The non-governmental organisations were more likely to provide one-on-one counselling, basic supplies and non-formal education, while the government organisations tended to focus more on legal and reintegration support.

Figure 16: Organisations support services vs organisations type.



In the hypothetical scenarios frontline workers were presented with in the survey, they indicated the key steps that they would recommend in a situation of sexual exploitation and abuse online. Legal action was the first step mentioned in three out of four scenarios, close to family counselling. For example, providing qualitative input on one of the scenarios,¹⁰ a worker suggested that it would be necessary to:

“Report to the police, provision of support to parents/guardians in order to help them cope with their personal problems and the child’s problems (legal, advisory and counselling), continuous professional support to the child and, if required, provision of therapeutic help to the child and her parents/guardians. Cooperation with other institutions in providing support to the child (school, healthcare provider, etc.).”

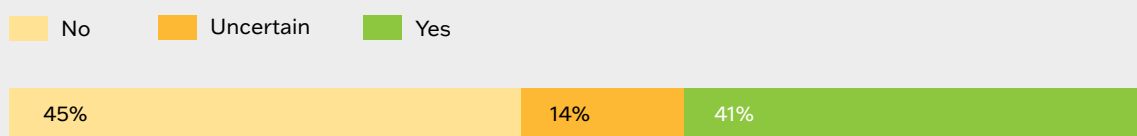
It seems to be a priority for the frontline workers to legally report the abuse and involve all the relevant institutions in order to provide the adequate support both for the child and the family, which was really encouraging to see.

The scenario-based questions were designed to understand not only what are the practical steps that the workers would take, but also whether they recognised or not situations of child sexual exploitation and abuse online. In the boxes below it is possible to see that recognising the exploitation and abuse is not always straightforward.

Scenario

Amina is a 17-year-old student. Amina has struggled to make good grades this year and is worried that Ali, a teacher who is a close family friend, will tell Amina’s dad. Amina offers to send Ali naked pictures if he promises not to talk to the family. Do you think that Amina is a victim of online child sexual exploitation and abuse?

Surprisingly, almost half of the surveyed frontline workers (45%, n=22) believed that Amina was not a victim of child sexual exploitation and abuse following her offer to send Ali naked pictures in return for his promise not to speak to her family. However, nearly the same proportion of respondents (41%, n=20) believed that Amina was a victim in this scenario, while the remaining 14% (n=7) were uncertain.



10. Scenario: Bernard, who lives in Australia, pays a 16-year-old in Bosnia, Sara, to undress while they are on a video call. Do you believe that Sara is a victim of online child sexual exploitation and abuse? Bernard secretly records the videos and later posts them online. Do you believe that Bernard has committed online child sexual exploitation and abuse? What practical steps would you take if you were the service provider supporting 16-year-old Sara?

Scenario

Recently, uncle Adin had commented on beach photos posted by his 10-year-old nephew Tarik, that he was looking handsome. Uncle Adin then wrote messages to Tarik on Facebook asking to meet secretly at his house. Do you believe that Adin has committed online child sexual exploitation and abuse?

Over half of the frontline workers (53%, n=26) believed that Adin had committed sexual exploitation and abuse online through his comments and messages to Tarik, and subsequent invitation to meet secretly at his house. Almost a quarter (22%, n=11) did not believe that these acts constituted online sexual exploitation and abuse, and a quarter (25%, n=12) were uncertain.

■ No ■ Uncertain ■ Yes



RECOMMENDATIONS



As a final question posed to the frontline workers on the survey, they were asked to share any last thoughts on child sexual exploitation and abuse online. The recommendations presented below were in part drawn from these perceptions, as important issues were raised by them. Some recommendations are also based on the overall data and previous literature on child sexual exploitation and abuse online. Additional clarification and explanations from the analyses are provided in places from the project partners contributed during the analysis and write-up stage.

1. Promote public information and awareness campaigns about risks in the online environment related to sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as introduce helplines to facilitate the reporting process.

Sixteen percent of frontline workers (n=8) emphasised the lack of general public awareness related to child sexual exploitation and abuse online as a major issue in Bosnia. One of them said that:

“Awareness raising and more education on this topic is needed.”

Another worker indicated the necessity of the:

“Introduction of SOS helpline for children victims of online sexual abuse -Education in schools -Education for parents/teachers/etc. to recognise children’s online sexual abuse.”

2. Ensure that knowledge on sex, consent and safety reaches all children.

When children do not know about sex, it enables offenders to take advantage. We must ensure that knowledge reaches all children, and include information about sex, consent, personal boundaries, what adults or others around children can or cannot do to them, risks and responsibilities when taking, sending and receiving sexual images, and how to say no to others. This will help children to identify risky or inappropriate interactions both online and in person.

3. Better promote the availability and ways to access a full range of support services by children subjected to child sexual exploitation and abuse online.

According to one worker,

“The greatest challenge that victims and their families face is the lack of any kind of support and understanding. The most serious shortcoming of our community is that there are no psychological services that could offer free psychosocial support to victims and their parents.”

Well-coordinated, specialised and victim-centred services should be available free of charge to children and young people who have survived online sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as to their family members.

4. Provide adequate and sustainable funding for all agencies involved in tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse online.

“Organisations use their own resources to address those issues, donors and the state should provide more funding.”

5. Provide training and capacity building opportunities to frontline workers on online forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as increase the resources available within the institutions.

A number of frontline workers pointed to the need to improve the capacities of professionals on sexual exploitation and abuse, especially on its online forms:

“Lack of training of professionals, this is a new phenomenon that they were not prepared for and which they can hardly cope with, licensed training programmes for professionals.”

Another worker mentioned the:

“Introduction of specialised professionals for the work with child victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse, employment of new staff, psychologists in particular, far more allocated funds for prevention activities and particularly campaigns which will raise awareness of citizens.”



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