



# INTERPOL's Crimes Against Children Unit

INTERPOL's Crimes Against Children (CAC) Unit works to enhance the capacity, coordination, and collaboration of law enforcement agencies to identify child victims, arrest offenders, and prevent and disrupt online child sexual abuse and exploitation (OCSEA). The CAC Unit works through long-term engagement with member countries, including the United States of America, to build and reinforce the skills necessary to carry out OCSEA operations and investigate cases. CAC is committed to partnerships, research and cooperation that raises the standards of international policing to make the world a safer place for children.

## 1. Challenge

**Law enforcement is confronted by an unprecedented level of child sexual abuse and exploitation, which is growing at an alarming rate. Law enforcement successes represent a fraction of the monumental scale of child sexual abuse and exploitation taking place globally.**

Offenders continue to operate internationally in an ongoing, relentless cycle of harm that only ends when child abuse and exploitation are proactively confronted and stopped.

### Numbers vs Capacity

- *The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) processes on average 87,000 reports of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) every day, which equates to over 32 million reports annually. By 2030 they estimate referrals to exceed 62 million annually (over 7000 every hour).*
- *According to the International Association of Internet Hotlines (INHOPE), an NGO providing a global network of 54 hotlines allowing public reporting of CSAM online, 500,000+ individual media files were exchanged via their CSAM platform in 2022, 84% of which was new material.*
- *According to the Child Rescue Coalition (CRC), child sex offenders typically target / abuse, between 50-150 victims in their lifetime, and in the last 10 years CRC has identified over 72 million unique IP addresses worldwide sharing CSAM.*
- *In 2022, the Internet Watch Foundation investigated over 375,000 CSAM reports, an increase of 4% on 2021. Each report can include one or hundreds of images and videos. There is also an increase in Category A images (images involving penetrative sexual activity; images involving sexual activity with an animal or sadism).*

**The numbers are startling, and behind every statistic is a child that is impacted for life by this experience. In addition, the vast majority will also continue to be victimized without any positive interventions.**

**These figures are believed to be only the tip of the iceberg. We do not know the full scale and nature of the problem.**

## The United States of America and INTERPOL

The United States is a world leader in the fight against online crimes against children and a key partner for INTERPOL. Collaboration in this crime area is essential to success and the US is a driver of excellence, both in terms of the amount of case information shared and for its leadership position providing trainings, operational coordination and technical expertise around the globe.

## 2. The Role of INTERPOL

INTERPOL is the world's largest police organization, with 196 member countries working together to share data related to police investigations.

National law enforcement is the sole authorized entity with the legal power to use force, arrest offenders and begin to address cases of abuse.

A strong international network employing specialized police expertise and powerful technical tools is essential to connecting national efforts to combat child abuse.

**INTERPOL is the global leader connecting specialized units, building law enforcement capability and employing collaboration tools to safeguard child victims and stop abusers.**

The CAC Unit's victim-identification processes for identifying children have led to significant successes in removing victims from harm and prosecuting offenders, with 38,825 children and 16,812 offenders marked as identified in INTERPOL's International Child Sexual Exploitation Database (ICSE).

**The United States is the biggest user of ICSE, with 13,216 victims and 6,641 offenders identified, with participation from Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and the FBI.**



Those successes represent a fraction of the monumental scale of victimization and offending taking place globally. With the huge amounts of child abuse material circulating, and the ever-increasing variety of platforms enabling abuse and the dissemination of such material, **INTERPOL's focus on promoting Victim Identification practices is more relevant than ever.**

## Victim-Centric Approach:

- *The victim-centric approach to investigations ensures that the child victim is at the centre of attention and care, with specialized national officers working towards the victim's identification, removal from harm and support.*
- *For online crimes, the victim-centric approach is the most effective method global law enforcement has found to locate and safeguard child victims of online sexual abuse and exploitation.*
- *Images and videos are more likely to show the face of children than abusers.*
- *Analysing information found in images and videos of child sexual abuse helps national and local law enforcement find the child and make an arrest.*
- *Victim identification is a cornerstone of the international law enforcement effort to fight OCSEA.*
- *INTERPOL provides analysis, shares information with law enforcement and builds the capacity of national units to follow the victim-centric approach.*

Child protection requires detection, response and recovery. Law enforcement has to find these victims because children are unable or simply do not know how to report their abuse, trafficking or exploitation.

Law enforcement must be proactive in its approach to locating victims and holding offenders to account.

## International Network

**INTERPOL works through long term engagement with 196 member countries to reinforce the core skills necessary to effectively carry out operations, investigate cases, identify victims, arrest offenders and help ensure victims are supported during and after the investigative and judicial processes.**

**National Specialized Units:** More specialized units doing the work results in more children safeguarded. Member countries with highly skilled crime units, like the United States, will continue to rely on INTERPOL core activities to share information. For others, INTERPOL training and capacity building engagement results in countries taking steps to establish specialized child crime units. This work must be sustained and expanded to support new units lacking specialized officers and access to effective tools.

**Regional Training, Mentorship and Collaboration:** INTERPOL has adopted a regional team approach to its operational and capacity building work, so that each region has specific officers working to increase national unit effectiveness over time. This includes working with FBI and HSI regional liaison and training officers across the globe. The operational link between trainings and ongoing cases and operations sets INTERPOL apart from other training opportunities. INTERPOL works long term and provides ongoing case support so that trainings and capacity building are followed up through the day-to-day work of national units and their collaboration with INTERPOL. Learning does not end when the training is complete. Together we move cases forward, securely share information through the ICSE network and help units address questions and issues as they confront challenges to solve cases.

**The trainings, referrals, operational information-sharing and specialist group coordination that INTERPOL supports link an international law enforcement network that is the core of front-line officers investigating international child crimes.**

### 3. The Role of Non Governmental Organizations

INTERPOL occupies a unique position to engage in partnerships across fields - government, the private sector, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The CAC team links law enforcement and these collective efforts to maximize the role of each stakeholder to fight OCSEA more effectively.

The CAC unit works with Thorn: Digital Defenders of Children, a US anti-human trafficking NGO, to leverage technical components and data to overcome technical challenges faced by law enforcement to identify children faster. The CAC Unit also works closely with NCMEC to upload CSAM to ICSE and engage with countries for follow up and with INHOPE which uses its public reporting network of hotlines to increase uploads to ICSE.

The Tim Tebow Foundation (TTF) has provided funding to law enforcement and NGOs active in online crimes against children, supporting training and operations by law enforcement. In July 2023, the CAC Unit participated in Operation Renewed Hope, hosted by NCMEC and HSI in Washington DC and supported by TTF. Operation Renewed Hope brought together 12 law enforcement agencies and private sector partners, identifying 311 probable victims in cold cases of sexual exploitation over three weeks. Referrals were sent to over 40 countries at the close of the event with additional referrals and follow up occurring afterwards. Operation Renewed Hope II will build on this success, taking place February 26<sup>th</sup> to March 8<sup>th</sup> 2024.

### 4. Tools: ICSE and I-24/7:

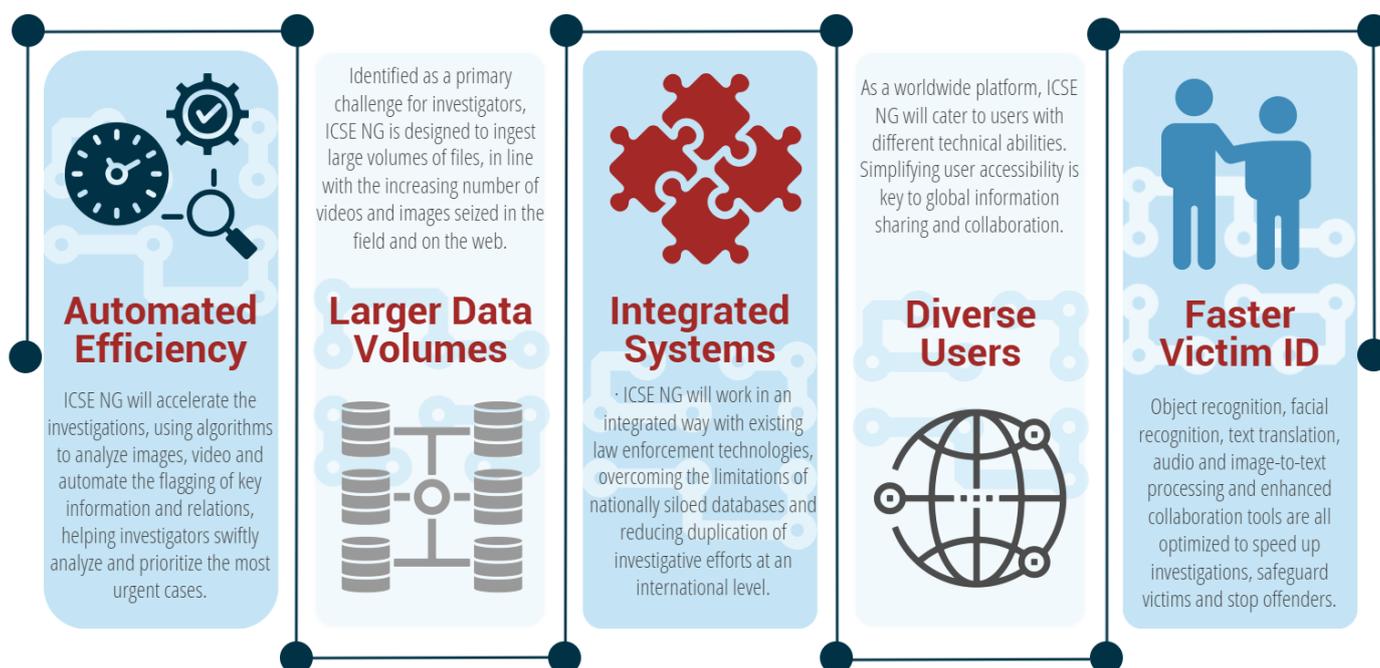
INTERPOL's ICSE Database is an essential tool for the victim-centric approach and for international cooperation between national law enforcement units like the FBI and HSI and their global counterparts. ICSE allows officers to analyze CSAM, share case data, coordinate actions and jointly advance investigations toward the successful identification of child victims and the arrest of offenders (see Case Study, Appendix I).

INTERPOL's unique I-24/7 global secure communication channel allows police in all 196 INTERPOL member countries to share sensitive and urgent police information with the network.

**ICSE Next Generation:**

**ICSE Next Generation (ICSE NG) will integrate an all-new suite of tools to enhance victim identification, including object recognition, facial recognition, text translation, and audio and image-to-text processing tools, enabling law enforcement to process large volumes of seized files in less time, ultimately leading to the rescue and protection of more victims.**

# ICSE Next Generation



The modular design will allow for the piecemeal evolution of the tool so that it adapts to emerging challenges. The new design will cater to an expanded user base, from deeply experienced users to freshly trained officers in new units, offering adapted interfaces and functionalities.

The new system will be delivered in phases over two years, first replacing ICSE and thereafter progressively adding more effective and powerful modules. Estimated cost of the development phase is 6.5m USD followed by the rollout and support phase of 5.4m USD. INTERPOL has dedicated 5.5m USD of funding to meeting these costs over two years. The total estimated costs for development, rollout and support are 11.9 USD. The current funding gap of 6.4m USD is significant.

## 5. Conclusion

In the relentless struggle against child sexual abuse and exploitation, INTERPOL's Crimes Against Children Unit stands as a unifying force for police efforts. With unwavering commitment, the CAC Unit collaborates with law enforcement agencies and NGOs worldwide, bolstering their capacity and skills to combat online child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Through long-term engagement, INTERPOL empowers member countries to rescue young victims, dismantle criminal networks, and prevent offenders from escaping justice. As the global threat grows, the CAC Unit remains steadfast.

ICSE Next Generation will accelerate the work of investigators by providing a platform that can rapidly process CSAM and automate the flagging of key information, giving officers an edge to safeguard our most vulnerable child victims. Appendix II (attached) summarizes the challenges, solutions and impact of ICSE NG.

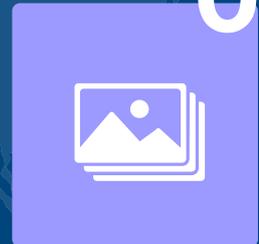
## CASE STUDY

01



Proactive **monitoring** of a dark web forum led law enforcement to the first images and videos depicting the graphic sexual abuse of a young girl aged between 7 and 9.

02



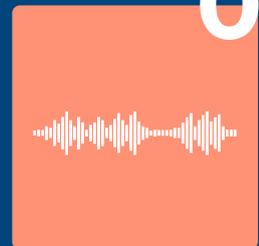
Over several months, more **images and videos** of the girl's abuse were uploaded to **ICSE** database by several countries.

03



ICSE also allows **investigators** to organize and arrange the files visually to highlight new information. While reviewing the child abuse files in ICSE, a member of the Crimes Against Children unit at **INTERPOL** noticed some specific filenames that contained what appeared to be a social media identifier. Upon further open-source research a profile was found on social media which appeared to depict the offender and the child victim.

04



The **audio** in the videos was posted to the ICSE forum dedicated to language and accent **geo-localization**, and specialized investigators from Latin America identified the language as Mexican Spanish. In other images, Australian investigators localized a building seen in the background of an image, narrowing the target jurisdiction to a specific Mexican state.

05



The child was **identified and rescued** by Mexican authorities, thanks to the collaborative work in the ICSE community.



For more information  
on ICSE

## INTERPOL'S INTERNATIONAL CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (ICSE) NEXT GENERATION



### CHALLENGES

The creation and circulation of child sexual abuse material on the Internet are growing steadily.

Abusers continue to produce, exchange and live-stream the sexual abuse of children - and in some cases, infants - with devastating consequences. Gaming platforms, social media, messaging apps and nearly any technology capable of sending digital media are being exploited to share the sexual abuse of children.

These images and videos of child sexual abuse found on the Internet are not virtual - they depict evidence of crimes involving actual children. Each time an image or video is viewed child victims are re-victimized, and reports of such images and videos amount to tens of millions per year.

In this challenging context law enforcement agencies face the task of prioritizing, triaging, and managing massive volumes of data to locate child victims and stop the abuse.



### SOLUTION

INTERPOL has united a global network of specialized investigators dedicated to victim identification in this fight against online child abuse.

Since 2009, INTERPOL's ICSE database has recorded over 38,000 identified victims and 16,000 offenders, bringing together the expertise and diverse cultural knowledge of law enforcement investigators from different countries.

Data sharing is essential. ICSE allows these investigators to analyse abuse material, share case data, coordinate actions and jointly advance investigations towards the identification of child victims.

However, following more than 15 years serving as the global platform for collaboration and investigation of online child sexual exploitation, ICSE is reaching its technical limits.

Today INTERPOL is embarking on the development of ICSE Next Generation – a new state-of-the-art database, making use of the latest technologies to become the next global platform for online child abuse investigations and victim identification.



### IMPACT

ICSE Next Generation will:

- Swiftly handle and process large volumes of data: ICSE Next Generation is designed to ingest large volumes of files, in line with the increasing number of materials seized in the field and on the web.
- Automate or reduce time-consuming tasks: ICSE Next Generation will benefit from the latest technologies, such as object recognition, visual similarity, facial recognition, text translation, audio and image-to-text processing tools, machine learning, and Artificial Intelligence algorithms to help investigators swiftly analyse and prioritize the most urgent cases.
- Integrate with existing law enforcement systems: ICSE Next Generation will work in an integrated way with existing technologies, acting as an international information exchange hub, and reducing duplication of investigative efforts at an international level.
- Embrace a diverse range of users and facilitate collaboration: As a worldwide platform, ICSE Next Generation will host users with different workflows and abilities, with simplified user accessibility to facilitate global exchanges and enhance international collaboration.



### BUDGET/TIMEFRAME

**11**  
MILLION EUR  
**5**  
YEARS

**Phase 1: Developing ICSE Next Generation (EUR 6 million)**

**Phase 2: Roll-out, training and optimization of ICSE Next Generation (EUR 5 million)**

*These estimates are based on a preliminary assessment and will be subject to revision following the on-going call for tender process.*