

Location	Sierra Leone
Application Deadline	15 <sup>th</sup> May 2026
Contract Type	Consultancy to Conduct Formative Research Study of the Scale and Nature of Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children (OSEAC) Across Five (5) Districts in Sierra Leone
Working Language	English
Expected Start Date	21 <sup>st</sup> May 2026
Expected End Date	6 <sup>th</sup> August 2026

## 1. Background

The rapid expansion of digital access in Sierra Leone has created new opportunities for learning, communication, and socio-economic participation. However, along with these benefits, children are increasingly exposed to online risks, including Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSEAC). Global evidence shows that OSEAC is a growing threat that disproportionately affects children in low-resource settings where digital literacy, parental monitoring, and child protection systems may be limited.

Despite ongoing child protection efforts, there is limited empirical data on the *scale, nature, patterns, and drivers* of OSEAC in Sierra Leone. Existing reports suggest underreporting, weak legal enforcement, and limited knowledge among caregivers, service providers, and children. Due to the magnitude and potential negative impact of this issue, ChildFund recognizes that OSEAC prevention and response is a critical topic under the organization's mandate to end violence against children.

To address gaps in data at the national level and support informed policymaking and programming, ChildFund intends to conduct a comprehensive formative research assessment on the scale and nature of OSEAC across five (5) districts in Sierra Leone (Kailahun, Bombali, Koinadugu, Western Area Urban, and Western Area Rural)

## 2. OSEAC Programme Context

ChildFund Sierra Leone is implementing child protection and development interventions aimed at safeguarding children and adolescents from emerging risks, this includes within digital environments and issues such as the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children (OSEAC).

OSEAC is a growing global and national concern, requiring evidence-based, context-specific programming and advocacy. According to ChildFund's global OSEAC

framework, effective interventions must be grounded in strong situational analysis and data on children's online experiences, risks, and protective factors.

This formative research is therefore critical to:

- Generate baseline data and evidence on children's exposure to online risks
- Understand behavioral, social, and systemic drivers of OSEAC and online abuse
- Inform program design, implementation strategies, and advocacy efforts

The study aligns with ChildFund's OSEAC Theory of Change, which emphasizes strengthening capacities at individual, community, and national levels to prevent and respond to online abuse.

ChildFund's OSEAC programming is guided by a holistic and multi-level approach, focusing on:

- Empowering children and youth to safely navigate digital environments
- Strengthening families, communities, and protection systems
- Promoting policy and advocacy actions to create systemic change

The formative research will serve as the Assessment phase within the "Assessment–Analysis–Action (Triple A)" model, which underpins ChildFund's global OSEAC programming approach.

### **3. Purpose of the Consultancy**

The overall purpose of this consultancy is to conduct formative research study on the prevalence, characteristics, risk factors, and response mechanisms related to OSEAC in five selected districts in Sierra Leone. Given the complex and evolving nature of the digital landscape, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive baseline assessment on online safety for children in Sierra Leone. Such assessment will provide a detailed understanding of the current online safety landscape, identify key risks, map and assess the effectiveness of existing measures. It will also offer valuable insights into the awareness and behaviors of children, caregivers, educators, and service providers regarding online safety.

The findings from this study will be instrumental in developing targeted strategies and interventions to enhance online safety for children and youth. By identifying the most common online risks and understanding the factors that contribute to these risks, ChildFund, other development partners, and the government can design and implement more effective programs and policies. Additionally, the study will provide data and information which can be used as reference in awareness raising efforts about the importance of online safety and encourage greater collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and community stakeholders.

The study will:

- Determine the scale, nature, and patterns of OSEAC and online abuse
- Identify key risks and protective factors affecting children
- Assess knowledge, attitudes, and practices among children, caregivers, and stakeholders
- Map existing systems, services, and policy responses
- Generate evidence to inform project design and policy advocacy

## **4. Objectives**

### **4.1 General Objective**

To generate robust and context-specific evidence on OSEAC to inform ChildFund Sierra Leone's programming and advocacy interventions.

### **4.2 Specific Objectives**

- Assess children's access to and use of digital technologies
- Identify forms and prevalence of online risks and exploitation
- Analyze behavioral and socio-cultural drivers of OSEAC
- Examine reporting mechanisms and help-seeking behaviors, and their effectiveness
- Assess institutional capacity and service availability, and barriers to access these services
- Identify gaps in policy, legal frameworks, and system response

## **5. Key Questions Relating to Indicators**

The baseline assessment will be guided by the following key research questions which are aligned to core OSEAC domains and will inform indicator measurement so at endline evaluation ChildFund is able to gauge the impact of its intervention by comparing benchmark against endline values.

### **5.1 Questions:**

- What is the scale and nature of online sexual exploitation and abuse experienced by children and adolescents?
- What are the patterns of internet access, usage, information searching, privacy and critical thinking skills and knowledge in evaluating safe vs. risky internet content and online behavior among children and adolescents?

- What factors increase children's vulnerability to OSEAC?
- What is the level of awareness and understanding of online risks and protection mechanisms among children, caregivers, and teachers?
- How do children respond to online risks, and what are their reporting and help-seeking behaviors (i.e. do they report to other children, caregivers, other safe adults, social services, or do they not report)?
- To what extent are caregivers and communities educated about and able to prevent and respond to OSEAC? What is the level of digital literacy of caregivers?
- What systems and services are available to prevent and respond to OSEAC, and how effective are they?
- What policies, legal frameworks, and enforcement mechanisms exist to address OSEAC?
- How do digital platforms, technologies, and service providers influence OSEAC risks and responses?
- What protective factors and opportunities exist to strengthen prevention and response to OSEAC?

## 5.2 Indicator table:

Key areas	Indicators
Prevalence and Forms of OSEAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of children (6–17) reporting exposure to online sexual content</li> <li>• % of children experiencing online grooming, coercion, or exploitation</li> <li>• % of children receiving or being asked to share sexual images/messages</li> <li>• Common platforms used for OSEAC-related interactions</li> </ul>
Access, Exposure, and Digital Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of children with access to internet-enabled devices (phone, tablet, computer)</li> <li>• Average time spent online per day (by age and gender)</li> <li>• % of children using social media, gaming, or messaging platforms</li> <li>• % of children engaging with unknown people online</li> </ul>
Risk and Vulnerability Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of children lacking digital literacy or online safety awareness</li> <li>• % of children unsupervised during internet use</li> <li>• Association between vulnerability (gender, disability, poverty, schooling status) and OSEAC exposure</li> <li>• Identified social norms contributing to risk (e.g. silence, stigma, gender dynamics)</li> </ul>

<p>Awareness and Knowledge of Online</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of children who can identify online risks (e.g. grooming, exploitation)</li> <li>• % of caregivers who are aware of children's online activities</li> <li>• % of teachers integrating online safety into learning or guidance</li> <li>• Availability of digital safety education in schools</li> </ul>
<p>Reporting Behaviors and Help-Seeking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of children who report or seek help after an online incident</li> <li>• % of children who have reported OSEAC experiences</li> <li>• Preferred reporting channels (family, teachers, police, helplines)</li> <li>• Barriers to reporting (fear, stigma, lack of trust, lack of knowledge)</li> </ul>
<p>Capacity of Families and Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of caregivers monitoring children's online activities</li> <li>• % of caregivers who discuss online safety with children</li> <li>• Community-level awareness of OSEAC risks</li> <li>• Existing community mechanisms for child protection</li> </ul>
<p>Institutional and Service Response</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of child protection services addressing OSEAC</li> <li>• % of service providers trained in OSEAC response</li> <li>• Existence of reporting and referral pathways</li> <li>• Accessibility and utilization of services by affected children</li> </ul>
<p>Legal and Policy Environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of national laws/policies addressing online child protection</li> <li>• Level of enforcement of OSEAC-related laws</li> <li>• Coordination among government, law enforcement, and ICT actors</li> <li>• Gaps in implementation of policy</li> </ul>
<p>Role of ICT and Digital Ecosystem</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonly used platforms associated with risks</li> <li>• Existing online safety measures (privacy settings, reporting tools, age verification)</li> <li>• Level of engagement of ICT stakeholders in child protection</li> <li>• Gaps in platform-level safeguards</li> </ul>
<p>Protective Factors and Opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of children with access to digital safety education</li> <li>• Presence of school/community-based protection initiatives</li> <li>• Strength of peer support systems</li> <li>• Opportunities for integrating OSEAC prevention into programs and policies</li> </ul>

## Core indicators:

- Proportion of children and youth (ages 9 – 17) who talk with trusted about online-related concerns.
- Proportion of children and youth (ages 9 – 17) who talk with informed adults about online-related concerns.
- Proportion of children and youth (ages 9 – 17) who are digitally skilled internet users
- Proportion of children and youth (ages 9 – 17) who understand privacy and digital safety
- Proportion of children and youth (ages 9 – 17) who encountered any online risk or harm
- Proportion of children and youth (ages 9 – 17) with regular exposure to online harm

## 6. Scope of Work

The research will be conducted across five (5) districts in Sierra Leone -Kailahun, Bombali, Koinadugu, Western Area Urban, and Western Area Rural with specific focus on the following groups as the primary populations of interest:

- **Children and Adolescents (Ages 9–17):** They can provide insights on their online activities and digital habits, risks they encounter, awareness of online safety and how they respond when something uncomfortable happens online etc. The assessment is expected target both in and out of school children
- **Parents and Caregivers:** They can help provide insights on how children use devices at home, parental monitoring practices, understanding of online risks, attitudes toward children's digital access, attitudes towards digital harm (e.g. are children blamed when they are the victim of abuse?)
- **Teachers and School Administrators:** Schools are major digital access points; they can provide insights on digital access, digital literacy initiatives, awareness and management of online risks among students, reporting behaviors, etc.
- **Community Leaders:** This may include chiefs/traditional leaders, religious leaders, youth leaders etc. They can help clarify community norms, beliefs, and practices around child safety and technology.
- **Child Protection Partners and Social Welfare Workers:** This may include social workers, district/community child welfare committees, NGOs and CSOs working on child protection etc.
- **Law Enforcement Agencies:** This will include Family Support Units (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police, Cybercrime Units etc. They can provide information on trends in reported cases, challenges in detection, reporting, investigations, and prosecution, capacity gaps, and attitudes towards digital harm (e.g. are children blamed when they are the victim of abuse?), etc.

- **ICT and Digital Stakeholders:** Such as Mobile Network Operators (MNOs), Internet service providers etc. They can contribute insight into online safety policies, data protection measures, platform misuse trends etc.
- **Government and Policy Actors:** This may include Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Ministry of Communications, Technology and Innovation, National Telecommunication Authority, Local councils etc. They can help contextualize policy frameworks, government response mechanisms, institutional challenges etc.

In addition, the consultant will:

- Design and implement the research methodology
- Develop and validate data collection tools
- Conduct field data collection (quantitative and qualitative)
- Undertake service mapping and stakeholder analysis
- Analyze data and triangulate findings
- Produce comprehensive reports and policy briefs

## **7. Methodology and Study Design**

ChildFund Sierra Leone will engage a qualified local research consultant or institution to conduct the formative research study on the scale and nature of OSEAC. The consultant will be responsible for developing a detailed and context-specific methodology during the inception phase, building on the framework outlined below.

The formative research will adopt a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate comprehensive and context-specific evidence on the scale and nature of OSEAC.

The quantitative component will involve a structured and representative survey designed to generate key baseline indicators related to children's exposure to online risks, digital behaviors, and access to protective mechanisms. Data collection tools will be carefully tailored to be age-appropriate and gender-sensitive, ensuring relevance for different categories of children and adolescents. Digital data collection platforms (e.g. tablets or smartphones) will be utilized to enhance data quality, accuracy, and real-time monitoring. Quantitative data will be systematically disaggregated by key variables, including age, gender, ability status, geographic location, and schooling status.

The qualitative component will complement and deepen the quantitative findings by exploring underlying dynamics, including social norms, behavioral drivers, reporting practices, and institutional capacities. This will be achieved through methods such as key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews with selected participants.

Findings from both components will be triangulated to provide a holistic understanding of OSEAC, including identification of key risk and protective factors, patterns of online engagement, barriers to reporting, and gaps within existing child protection systems. The combined evidence will inform context-responsive program design, implementation strategies, and monitoring frameworks.

To further strengthen the depth and relevance of the formative research, the study will incorporate complementary analytical approaches, including:

- **Service Mapping of Child Protection Systems:**  
A systematic mapping of existing child protection services and structures will be conducted to assess their availability, accessibility, functionality, and capacity to prevent and respond to OSEAC.
- **Stakeholder and Policy Analysis:**  
The study will analyze the roles, coordination mechanisms, and capacities of key stakeholders, alongside a review of existing policies, legal frameworks, and strategies related to online child protection, to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement.
- **Limited Digital Environment Scan (Non-Intrusive):**  
A non-intrusive review of publicly accessible online platforms will be undertaken to identify commonly used digital spaces, emerging trends, and potential risk patterns relevant to children's online engagement.

These complementary methods will enhance the overall analysis and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the enabling environment for OSEAC prevention and response.

## **8. Ethical and Safeguarding/PSEA Considerations**

The consultant is required to:

- Facilitate and secure formal ethical approval from the appropriate line ministry in Sierra Leone, ensuring adherence to national regulatory requirements and ethical standards governing baseline assessments and data collection processes.
- The Consultant acknowledges the importance of safeguarding vulnerable populations, including children and adults at risk, from all forms of abuse, exploitation, and violence. The Consultant agrees to adhere to ChildFund's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures, as well as any relevant local laws and regulations. The Consultant will report any suspected or actual cases of abuse, exploitation, or violence to ChildFund Safeguarding Focal Point immediately. Noncompliance with this provision is a material breach of this contract and will result in immediate termination of this Agreement without notice.

## 9. Deliverables

- I. Inception report including planned data collection tools, methodology and assessment protocol and plan. This must be approved by ChildFund before research commences.
- II. Review of existing policy, reports and frameworks on OSEAC in Sierra Leone
- III. Get the required ethical approvals from Ethical Review Committee under the appropriate line government authority or Ministry.
- IV. A comprehensive training report outlining the training objectives, methodology, modules delivered, participant attendance and engagement, pre- and post-training insights, key outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations to inform subsequent project implementation.
- V. A comprehensive and well-defined data analysis plan, clearly outlining the methodologies and step-by-step procedures for calculating each indicator, including formulas, data sources, and approaches for disaggregation and interpretation of results.
- VI. Conduct district and community level field visits to gather data directly from key target groups
- VII. A PowerPoint presentation that clearly synthesizes and visually communicates the key findings and actionable recommendations, tailored for effective dissemination to key stakeholders, including donors, government institutions, educational bodies, NGOs, and private sector actors.
- VIII. Draft Report providing full literature review of Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children in Sierra Leone, and the African context.
- IX. Presentation of a summarized policy brief on OSEAC
- X. Comprehensive final formative research study report
- XI. Submission of cleaned datasets and qualitative transcripts

These elements will be refined in the inception phase and documented in the protocol to ensure the assessment yields ethically sound, statistically robust and program-relevant baseline evidence.

## 10. Roles and Responsibilities

### Consultant

- Lead all technical aspects of the study
- Ensure quality, ethics, and compliance
- Supervise data collection and analysis
- Deliver all outputs within agreed timelines

### ChildFund Sierra Leone

- Provide oversight and technical guidance
- Facilitate access to stakeholders and communities
- Review and approve deliverables

## 11. Reporting and Management

The baseline assessment will be undertaken by an external consultant under the overall leadership of the Senior ME&KML Specialist, who will oversee the end-to-end consultancy process and ensure that inputs and recommendations from ChildFund at both Regional and International Office (IO) levels are appropriately incorporated.

While continuous technical guidance and operational support will be provided throughout the study, the consultant will maintain full professional independence to safeguard the objectivity, credibility, and integrity of the assessment findings.

## 12. Assessment Timeline

The research will be conducted within a period of three (3) months (April to June 2026) upon the signing of contract between the consultant and ChildFund and scope as given in the Terms of Reference or as agreed during the signing of the contract with the project team.

### Timeline

<b>What</b>	<b>Who is responsible</b>	<b>By when</b>	<b>Who is involved</b>
Advertisement and Request for proposals	Human Resource Unit	29 <sup>th</sup> – April 2026 to 15 <sup>th</sup> May 2026	Human Resource Unit, Finance Unit, Senior ME&KML Specialist & Senior Education Specialist
Assessing proposals	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist	18 <sup>th</sup> – 20 <sup>th</sup> May 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist, RO MERL Advisor
Hiring of Consultant for baseline Assessment	Human Resource Unit	21 <sup>st</sup> May 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist
Inception meeting	Senior ME&KML Specialist	22 <sup>nd</sup> May 2025	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist and Programs and Sponsorship Director

Documentation review, desk research and update tools	Consultant	25 <sup>th</sup> – 26 <sup>th</sup> May 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist
Submission of inception report and draft tools	Consultant	28 <sup>th</sup> May 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist
First review of inception report and draft tools	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist	1 <sup>st</sup> – 2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist, RO MERL Advisor
Address comments on inception report and tools	Consultant	3 <sup>rd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> June 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist
Approval of inception report and tools	Senior ME&KML Specialist	5 <sup>th</sup> June 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist, and Programs and Sponsorship Director
Training of enumerators	Consultant	8 <sup>th</sup> to 10 <sup>th</sup> June 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist
Submit training report	Consultant	11 <sup>th</sup> June 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist
Data collection field work	Consultant	11 <sup>th</sup> - 26 <sup>th</sup> June 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist
Submit draft evaluation report	Consultant	10 <sup>th</sup> July 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist
First review of draft report	Senior ME&KML Specialist	13 <sup>th</sup> – 17 <sup>th</sup> July 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist, RO MERL

			Advisor and Programs and Sponsorship Director
Address comments on the draft report	Consultant	20 <sup>th</sup> – 22 <sup>nd</sup> July 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist
Validation of draft report	Consultant and ChildFund	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist and Programs and Sponsorship Director
Second review of draft report	ChildFund Region & IO	27 <sup>th</sup> – 29 <sup>th</sup> July 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist, RO MERL Advisor and Programs and Sponsorship Director
Address comments on the draft report	Consultant	30 <sup>th</sup> – 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist and Programs and Sponsorship Director
Validation workshop	Consultant and ChildFund	3 <sup>rd</sup> August 2026	Consultant and team, ChildFund Staff, Local & Government Partners, INGO Representatives CSOs, etc.
Submit final evaluation report and share final version	Consultant and ChildFund	6 <sup>th</sup> August 2026	Senior ME&KML Specialist, Senior Education Specialist and IO MERL

## 13. Payment Schedule

Payment for this consultancy will be made in three tranches as follows:

Phases	%	Precondition/Deliverables
1 <sup>st</sup> Tranche	40%	After signing of contract, submission and approval of inception report, tools, work plan etc.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Tranche	30%	Completed fieldwork, Data cleaning, Draft Report, Acceptable preliminary findings presentation, feedback session with ChildFund
3 <sup>rd</sup> Tranche (Final payment)	30%	Final Report, final presentation including all annexes – approved by ChildFund (all edits and feedback incorporated and addressed).

## 14. Assessment Team

### 14.1 Qualification and Experience

ChildFund encourages both companies/firms and individual consultants to apply for this consultancy service. The consultant (or enumerators engaged in the data collection) is expected to speak English language, Krio as well as the local language within the district

The main requirements are the experiences carrying similar work in the country, general technical skills and usage of innovative and mixed methods approaches (quantitative and qualitative research techniques) to effectively and efficiently deliver the scope of the baseline and the expected outcomes with specific respects to:

- Baseline design: plan the baseline approaches and research methodologies, including quantitative and qualitative research methods.
- Baseline management: manage the baseline process from beginning to end, including conducting a baseline which is informed by primary and secondary information.
- Baseline report: prepare a baseline report that is well-structured and organized and accommodate comments from ChildFund into the final version (as relevant).

### 14.2 Main requirements include:

- At least 5 years demonstrated experience in participatory baseline study and research methodologies, experience in gender analysis, Child protection and Education themes is an added advantage.
- Proven experience in online safety, digital harms, or protection-related assessments.
- Experience working in Sierra Leone context and have the appropriate country knowledge/experience and language proficiency required for the exercise preferably in communities in the targeted five (5) Districts of Sierra Leone

- Demonstrated experience in designing age-appropriate, gender, child participation, safeguarding and disability sensitive research methodologies, tools and analysis.
- Proven experience with design and implementation of similar baseline activities required by this ToR.
- Must have led series of assessments/evaluations with reputable INGOs within and/or outside Sierra Leone
- Capacity building skills to train data collectors and staff.
- Child participation experience in engaging children in data collection directly
- Experience in quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and analysis
- Knowledge and experience with a range of statistical and qualitative data managing software and approaches (such as Kobo Collect, Commcare, ODK, SPSS or other similar softwares)
- Must have vast knowledge in the use of virtual systems like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.
- Submit the Profile summary of team members and CVs.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills in English, with the ability to produce clear, concise, and high-quality professional reports and documentation.
- Knowledge of Sierra Leone's child protection systems is an advantage.

## ANNEXES

- Table of baseline values of indicators according to indicator table.
- Power point slides on key findings
- Data set of interviews conducted
- Analyses tables and charts/diagram
- Baseline activity Photos

## Method of Application

Interested consultant(s) should submit technical and financial proposals and all updated documents through the email: [SierraLeoneProcurement@ChildFund.org](mailto:SierraLeoneProcurement@ChildFund.org) and copy [amassaquoi@childfund.org](mailto:amassaquoi@childfund.org) with email clearly marked with the title of "**Formative Research Assessment of the Scale and Nature of Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children (OSEAC) Across Five (5) Districts in Sierra Leone**". Only applicants with complete documents will go through the selection process and only shortlisted applicants will be contacted

The proposal should detail the research design: scope of work, methodology, data collection and analysis techniques, sample size and statistics, schedule of activities and budget.

The deadline for submission of Technical Proposals is **4:00 PM on 15th May 2026**. Submissions received after this time will not be considered.