



AFP



AFP Child Protection Strategic Plan

2023 – 2026

Introduction

The AFP has a significant role to play in ensuring children and young people are safe, no matter what environment they are in. AFP Child Protection performs an investigative and coordination role within Australia for child sexual exploitation investigations. These investigations often involve multijurisdictional cooperation within Australia as well as abroad.

The AFP Child Protection Plan 2023-26 provides a focus for AFP child protection efforts and commitment to reducing the incidence and impact of crimes against children and holding those responsible for such crimes accountable.

Child Safe Organisation

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse examined what makes an organisation child safe and highlighted the need to provide an environment in which children and young people are safe, protected and respected, and where staff have the skills, confidence and knowledge to safeguard children.

In response to the Royal Commission, the Australian Government introduced the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework (the Framework), a whole-of-government policy that sets minimum standards for creating and embedding child safe cultures and practices in Commonwealth entities.

The AFP has implemented the Framework through the adoption of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and is committed to ensuring all staff are aware of their obligations and responsibilities to safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people.

The AFP Child Safe Handbook has been developed to recognise the corporate responsibility for all AFP appointees in safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young people.



Our vision

Children and young people are protected from exploitation and abuse.



Our mission

To lead a coordinated and connected policing response to crimes against children, protecting and supporting victim-survivors from further harm and holding those responsible for such crimes accountable.



Our focus

- Australians engaged in the sexual abuse of children offshore (Transnational Child Sex Offenders)
- Online syndicates facilitating the sexual abuse of children
- Australians involved in the production and supply of child abuse material (CAM)
- Preventative measures, educational resources and victim support.

Our people



AFP National Child Protection Coordination

- Coordinates and provides operational input into strategic reporting, policy and legislative reform
- Examines ways to reduce red tape and support the frontline by identifying opportunities for standardised and specialist training and implementing best-practice welfare initiatives
- Engages and supports AFP's International Command by building and strengthening relationships with our international partners
- Oversees the Joint Anti Child Exploitation Teams (JACETs¹) and Child Protection Operations to deliver a coordinated response to counter child exploitation
- Enhances AFP victim identification capabilities.



Joint Anti Child Exploitation Teams

The JACETs are joint AFP and state and territory police child protection teams located across Australia, working together to investigate child exploitation matters. JACETs are committed to sharing intelligence, risk and de-conflicting operationally to effectively identify and prosecute offenders and remove children from harm.



The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation

Established in March 2018 and led by the AFP, the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) brings together the public and private sectors, as well as civil society, to drive a collaborative national response to counter the exploitation of children². Embedded within the ACCCE are a range of operational and specialist capabilities designed to support the JACETs. These include 24/7 triaging of reports, victim identification, intelligence and covert and technical capabilities.

Our partners

The effective protection of children requires a coordinated and collaborative effort across the whole community, including industry, non-government organisations, and academia. Law enforcement – domestically and internationally – are a critical component and are central to coordinated efforts to combat child exploitation and sexual abuse.

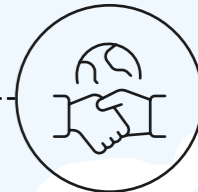
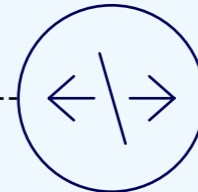
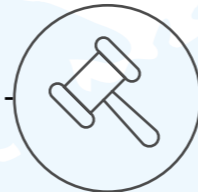
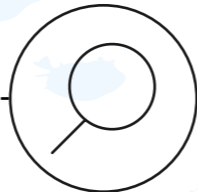
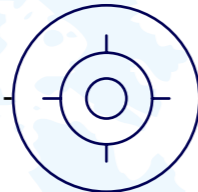
Where priorities impact on partnership arrangements domestically, the established Serious and Organised Crime Coordination Committee (SOCCC)³, and Operation Griffin⁴ will be engaged to contribute to, provide oversight of, and commit to initiatives and operations.

As child exploitation is a borderless crime, the AFP will continue to invest in critical ventures aimed at combating child exploitation, such as the ACCCE, Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT)⁵ and the Philippine Internet Crimes against Children Centre (PICACC)⁶.



Our strategy

The Child Protection Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026 will be achieved through six strategies:



Prevent

Prevention initiatives aiming to stop the exploitation of children and young people require a whole of community approach. The AFP's ThinkUKnow program engages trusted adults in a child and young person's life, including parents, carers, educators and police, to raise awareness and deliver education with the goal to prevent online child sexual exploitation.

The AFP's Online Child Safety Team manages the ThinkUKnow program and works closely with state and territory police who deliver presentations in schools as part of a community policing approach to engage children and young people, and with volunteers from AFP, state and territory police and industry partners to deliver presentations to parents, carers and teachers.

Pursue

Child sex offenders and syndicates will be actively pursued by investigating National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) reports, collaborating with foreign law enforcement and actioning reports from members of the public. Evidence-based and intelligence-informed target development strategies including collaborating with non-traditional partners, alongside the use of overt and covert methodologies will be utilised to pursue child sex offenders, domestically and internationally.

Investigate

ACCCE continues to commit to established protocols for timely information sharing and joint investigative activity, contribute to international and domestic operations and proactively target obfuscated activity relating to child sexual exploitation. JACETs will continue to undertake investigations within regional models into child exploitation matters, ensuring instances are accurately reported with the support of innovative technology, a highly trained workforce and good governance.

Prosecute

A commitment to a strong criminal justice approach to combatting child sexual exploitation underpins the role and function of the JACET model and the AFP's role in prosecuting child sex offenders. Prosecution strategies remain a primary tool in combatting and dismantling criminal syndicates as well as individuals producing and supplying CAM, and also those who seek to live stream abuse or travel internationally to abuse.

Advancing and emerging technologies create a crime environment that is constantly evolving. AFP Child Protection continues to collaborate with the Attorney-General's Department in monitoring the legislative framework relating to child sexual abuse to ensure it is fit-for-purpose, reflecting the needs of law enforcement and prosecutors, and supporting victims and survivors.

Disrupt

ACCCE commits to disrupting criminal activity, including the dismantling of organised crime syndicates, by targeting the production, supply and distribution of CAM. The AFP will continue to notify foreign authorities of intended overseas travel by Registered Child Sex Offenders, which may result in them being denied entry into the foreign country. We will continue to work with partners to detect and disrupt previously unknown Australian offenders who seek to travel overseas for the purpose of abusing children. Continued efforts will build intelligence exchange arrangements with domestic and international partners and industry to create a hostile and difficult environment for offenders to operate.

Capability enhancement

A commitment to strengthening relationships with international partners is critical on matters relating to child sexual exploitation, including through heading key forums and leading dialogues in the Asia Pacific region. Dedicated resources are provided to supporting international ventures and training to develop capabilities, skills and facilitate the sharing of knowledge to combat child sexual exploitation, including enhancing victim identification capabilities. Priority is also given to investing and enhancing the capabilities of child protection investigators and sharing new techniques, technology and training collaboration opportunities with our state and territory partners.

Our foundations

Underpinning the six strategies are our foundations, essential to ensure a capable and future ready posture, with the right people, processes, technology and infrastructure to maximise operational impact:



International instruments

- Australia is an international signatory to the:
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols on: the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography
 - Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
 - WePROTECT Global Alliance

Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.



Legislation

AFP will continue to use domestic legislation to ensure all types of illegal conduct are captured, including providing input and feedback for legislative reform and policy to ensure legislative frameworks remain relevant and fit-for-purpose.

Child sexual exploitation is comprehensively criminalised under the *Commonwealth Criminal Code Act 1995 (the Criminal Code)*:

- Division 474 creates offences relating to the use of a carriage service to possess, transmit, access, produce, procure, groom etc
- Division 272 expressly criminalises the procuring of a child under 16 by an Australian overseas for sexual exploitation in Australia and
- Division 271 creates an offence of child trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation encompassing both domestic trafficking and the trafficking of children into Australia for an exploitative purpose.

The AFP can use extra-territorial powers (under the *Criminal Code*) to prosecute Australian child sex offenders who offend overseas. The AFP is also committed to adhering to the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework, ensuring training and compliance regimes are in place and monitored to comply with child safety requirements.



Workforce wellbeing

Recognising the challenging and inherently distressing nature of investigating the sexual exploitation of children, the AFP is committed to supporting the frontline by ensuring workforce welfare through provision of best practice wellbeing support. Exposure to explicit material can increase the risk of change in psychological and physical health status, personal values, and interpersonal relationships of staff working in this crime type. However, staff dealing with explicit material also report significant professional and personal benefits, and find great value in their work. By applying appropriate strategies to manage the impacts of exposure to CAM, individual psychological resilience increases, personal values are reinforced, and there is an increase in appreciation of family and community. A culture that supports functional team dynamics and personal self-care is a key factor for decreasing risks associated with exposure to explicit material.



Innovation

To address the growing concerns of complex, protracted investigations and the organised nature of child exploitation networks, it is imperative that the AFP is equipped with leading technological solutions to prevent, disrupt, pursue and investigate offenders. This includes support for initiatives to enhance technical capabilities including creating fit-for-purpose information and communications technology user environments and equipment. Technology solutions need to be created to combat the challenges generated by the volume of media alleged offenders are storing on devices, activity on the dark web and end-to-end encryption.

Case studies

Operation Arkstone

Operation Arkstone has been one of the most significant child protection investigations by the AFP to date, due to its scale of offending and reach across Australia. At the most extreme end, some of the offenders inflicted acts of sexual abuse on Australian children, ranging in age from 16 months to 15 years, and this material was recorded and circulated across a number of online platforms. Other alleged offenders did not engage in direct contact offending, but accessed and traded this child abuse material in online networks, fuelling its circulation online.

Commencing initially as a referral to the ACCCE from the NCMEC in February 2020 about an online user uploading CAM to social media, the AFP discovered social media forums where some members were producing CAM, while others were accessing and circulating the material. Evidence gathering at each arrest led to the unravelling of this online network – each warrant led to the discovery of more alleged offenders and more children to be saved from ongoing abuse.

Operation ARKSTONE resulted in 26 arrests in Australia, with a total of 1359 charges and 56 victims identified. In addition, 154 referrals have been sent to international partners.

Operation Tatsuta

Operation Tatsuta was an investigation conducted by the South Australian JACET through collaboration with AFP International Command (Manila Post), PICACC, the Philippine National Police (PNP) and AFP Criminal Assets Confiscation Team (CACT).

It involved the successful prosecution of an Adelaide man who was actively participating and directing Live Online Child Sexual Abuse (LOCSA) of 13 child victims by five adult facilitators located in the Philippines.

Through information provided by the AFP, the PNP arrested five facilitators of LOCSA and rescued 15 victims of sexual exploitation.

The AFP CACT commenced civil proceedings against the offender, resulting in a restraining order being issued against his residence in South Australia, the first time this has occurred against a child sex offender. This action resolved with the offender paying \$165,000 to the Commonwealth.

In August 2022, the offender was sentenced to a total of 16 years imprisonment, with a fixed non-parole period of 10 years.

Operation Makulu

Operation Makulu commenced when a 59-year-old offender was identified and arrested at Melbourne Airport after returning from the Philippines. Chats were located on his mobile phone indicating that he was trying to locate and meet children for sexual activity in the Philippines. Search warrants at his residential and work premises located a laptop containing screen recordings of LOCSA. The AFP was able to identify the facilitator and child victim in the Philippines.

Further investigation conducted by the AFP resulted in the identification and subsequent charges of two other Australian-based offenders who had engaged with the same facilitator for the purposes of participating in LOCSA. With the assistance of the PICACC and the PNP, a further five facilitators in the Philippines were arrested and charged and 24 child victims were removed from harm.

Education initiatives

The AFP has a significant role to play in ensuring children and young people are safe, no matter what environment they are in.

ThinkUKnow

As the lead investigative agency for online child sexual exploitation, the AFP is well placed to develop education and awareness-raising initiatives in response to emerging trends to address the needs of the community.

ThinkUKnow is an evidence-based education program, delivered nationally in partnership with all state and territory police and industry partners to prevent online child sexual exploitation.

The ThinkUKnow program supports the critical work of the AFP and ACCCE, and addresses topics including self-generated child abuse material, online grooming, sexual extortion, and importantly encourages help seeking behaviour through presentations and resources.

The ThinkUKnow program incorporates up-to-date research, real case studies and examples from reports made to the ACCCE, providing increased awareness of online child sexual exploitation and best practice response.

Resources for parents, carers and teachers have been developed to encourage continued learning and conversation at home, as well as the development of teacher resources to be used in the classroom. These initiatives aim to provide opportunity for conversation between children and young people, and the adults in their life to encourage help seeking behaviours and ensure every child knows they deserve to be safe.

Over the course of this strategy, Human Exploitation Community Officer (HECO) roles will be established through the AFP-led measures of the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030. Through this enhanced prevention capability, the HECOs will undertake targeted community engagement specific to at-risk and vulnerable populations, based on operational intelligence and trends.



National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030

The AFP is implementing a suite of measures under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (2021-2030) (National Strategy), which seeks to reduce the risk, extent and impact of child sexual abuse and related harms in Australia. The National Strategy was a key recommendation from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission).

Driven by two four-year plans, the First National Action Plan (2021-2024) will be delivered by Commonwealth, state and territory governments and the First Commonwealth Action Plan (2021-2024) will be primarily delivered by Commonwealth agencies.

The AFP-led measures will boost frontline national law enforcement efforts, to prevent, disrupt, investigate and combat online child sexual abuse. This will also provide targeted and critical investment in Australian law enforcement agencies by investing in frontline operations and ensuring best-practice policing and specialist approaches nationally.

National Strategy Themes

Each measure under the Child Protection National Strategy has been assigned to a main theme:

1. Awareness raising, education and building child safe cultures
2. Supporting and empowering victim-survivors
3. Enhancing national approaches to children with harmful sexual behaviours
4. Offender prevention and intervention
5. Improving the evidence base

AFP-led measures primarily fall under Theme 4 Offender Prevention and Intervention. Measures under this theme will enhance law enforcement cooperation and activities to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and build support programs that prevent offending, intervene before offending occurs and reduce repeat offending.



Enhancing Law Enforcement Responses

Australian law enforcement agencies work closely together to investigate child sexual abuse through the ACCCE, alongside JACETs and state or territory police child protection teams located across Australia.

The AFP will build on partnerships and activities to:

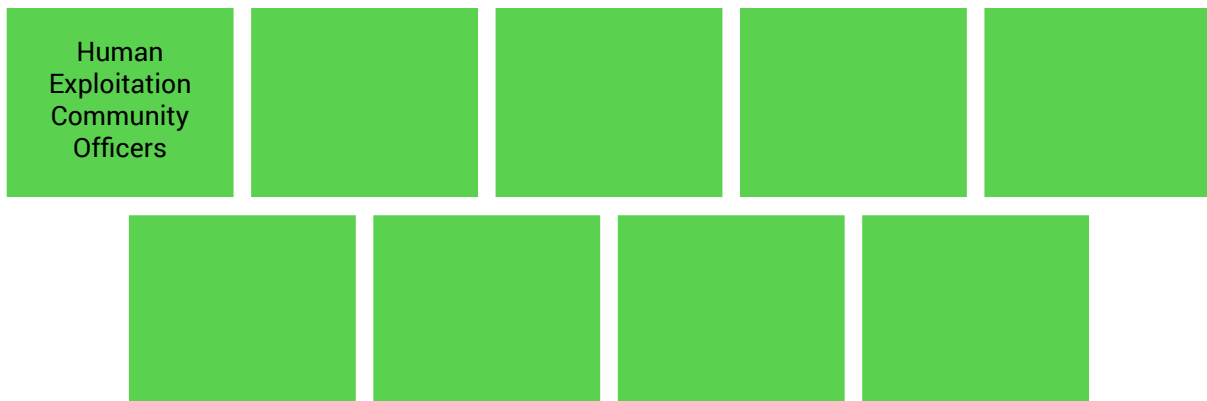
- plan for, meeting and leveraging the advances in technology to disrupt child sexual abuse
- achieve consistency in victim identification and management, particularly with vulnerable communities
- ensure interoperability, intelligence-sharing and coordination with partners for maximum efficiency and operational impact
- proactively target offenders and the disruption of the use of technology in child sexual abuse and associated profiteering.

Through our investment in the National Victim Identification Framework and implementation of Victim Liaison Coordination Officers and Human Exploitation Community Officers, the AFP, along with our child protection partners, will continue to prioritise victim welfare and support.



AFP LED MEASURES

COMMONWEALTH ACTION PLAN



NATIONAL ACTION PLAN





Resources

Report

Online child sexual exploitation, including online grooming and inappropriate contact, should be reported to the AFP-led ACCCE. If you are concerned about the possibility that your child is at risk, or you know of a child possibly at risk, report it at accce.gov.au/report.

Support

If you or someone you know are impacted by child sexual abuse and online exploitation, there are support services available at accce.gov.au/support.

If you think a child is in immediate danger call Triple Zero (000), Crimestoppers on 1800 333 000, or your local police.

Educate

Advice and support for parents and carers about how they can help protect children online can be found at thinkuknow.org.au.

Endnotes

- 1 References to JACETs within this plan also include AFP-led investigation teams not operating in a joint environment.
- 2 [ACCCE Strategic Plan 2022-2026](#).
- 3 The SOCCC is a national coordination group with representation at the Assistant Commissioner or equivalent level. Individual jurisdictions retain autonomy or decision-making in relation to all matters that are relevant to that jurisdiction. Parties will participate in joint taskforces and investigations voluntarily.
- 4 Operation Griffin is a national coordination group with representation at the Superintendent level. The purpose of Operation Griffin is to be a primary source of advice to the SOCCC on matters relating to the investigation of exploited and abused children.
- 5 The VGT is an alliance of international law enforcement agencies and private sector partners working together to combat online child sexual abuse.
- 6 The PICACC is a collective law enforcement effort to combat child exploitation across the Philippines. It involves the Philippine National Police Women and Children's Protection Center, National Bureau of Investigation Anti-Human Trafficking Division, The Australian Federal Police, The United Kingdom National Crime Agency and International Justice Mission.



AFP

afp.gov.au