inFocus

Benchmarking of communities of practice in the frame of the Child Protection Hub project

Executive Summary

Emily Routh, Dr Damian Hatton and Kelly Crawshaw

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Executive Summary

Overview

Child Protection Hub (ChildHub) is a Community of Practice (CoP) that both implements in-person CoP activities within target countries and online CoP activities via a website called ChildHub. The online CoP, ChildHub, is an interactive platform for professionals that promotes the continuous improvement of child protection practices and policies in South East Europe. This benchmarking project focuses on the online CoP, ChildHub, and compares it with other, similar online CoPs. The main objective of this study is to understand what ChildHub is doing well and where it can improve, as well as to learn from the good practice of other organisations running similar online CoPs.

Approach

This study compares ChildHub with nine other, similar online CoPs. The methodology included reviewing ChildHub documentation, undertaking a brief, wider literature review, reviewing the nine online CoPs websites, conducting interviews with representatives from the nine online CoPs, conducting interviews with ChildHub staff, undertaking a user-feedback webinar to test and challenge initial insights, and conducting an interview with a recognised expert in CoPs.

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

For this study, ChildHub was compared with the none other online CoPs across four main areas:

- Purpose, content and features
- Users and their needs
- Results
- Sustainability

A traffic light system (red / amber / green) has been used to score each online CoP in the four areas (please see Figure 1 on the following page). The assessment is subjective, based on the information collected in the study through reviews of the websites and interviews with key contacts at each online CoP. Its purpose is to provide an overall (but crude) comparison of ChildHub against the nine other online CoPs included in the study.

Figure 1: Scorecards of the Online CoPs

Purpose, Content and Features of ChildHub

ChildHub serves a need. It is a community where people can access knowledge and resources concerning child protection. However, this need is not clearly articulated on the ChildHub website or in documents. The purposes of the CoPs included in this study are more clearly defined by some than others. The longer standing and more established CoPs have drafted supporting documents to outline their key policies and practices. It is suggested that ChildHub does the same. Some online CoPs often consider which parts of their website serve a current need and which are no longer required. It may be beneficial for ChildHub to archive old material to enable users to easily find the most relevant / topical materials of the day. Consideration should also be given to the nature of materials available on the website and their impact upon the time commitment of its users. Equally, the way users initially might find the website through popular and engaging topical content should be considered, and how these first users might be encouraged to delve deeper into the website content and features. Developing a sense of connection with others is also key to the success of a CoP. Forums are one way to develop this sense of connection, but the majority of online CoPs included in this study have found forums to be difficult to engage people in. One would be to directly connect people to each other (as in the 'Digital Candle' example here, where a questioner and expert relationship is formed), which has been successfully implemented by another online CoP

studied. An alternative would be for members to connect to other members themselves through a direct messaging service, or by random 'serendipitous' allocation (as in the 'Coffee Connections' example here).

#	Finding	Recommendation
1	The longer standing and more established online CoPs included in this study, such as IPSCAN and Sportanddev.org, have drafted supporting documents to outline their key policies and practices.	It may be beneficial for ChildHub to formalise and more clearly state its purpose and operating procedures by drafting supporting document(s) upon which the CoP is based. The benefit of such document(s) is that ChildHub's purpose, roles and the responsibilities of staff, along with the approach to sustainability may then be better defined and understood by staff.
2	It is clear from reviewing and speaking with representatives at the majority of online CoPs included in this study that forums are difficult to engage people in.	With the aim of improving the existing forums, there is much good practice and general guidance on running successful forums that ChildHub could follow, such as around the frequency of posting and establishing clear rules of engagement. However, one alternative way to connect people and facilitate dialogue would be directly connect people to each other (e.g. members could be encouraged to ask questions through ChildHub and an administrator then connects them with a relevant Resource Person), a process employed successfully by the Association of Child Protection Professionals. An alternative would be for members to connect to other members themselves, though a direct messaging service or random allocation system.
3	Once resources are no longer needed or are no longer relevant, the CPC Learning Network and The Alliance for Child protection in Humanitarian Action archives them.	ChildHub should concentrate on the things that add real value for ChildHub's members and retire / archive the parts of the site that don't. Forums, for example, should either be revised or retired. ChildHub now has an improved search function, which enables both general searching as well as searching via filters. Nevertheless, it may still be beneficial for ChildHub to archive old material to enable users to easily find the most relevant / topical materials.
4	Interviews with some Tdh Resource People and Country Associates found that prioritising the time to engage with the content on ChildHub was still a barrier for users.	To reduce the time commitment to address relevant information needs, summary level information, written in accessible / simple language, should be prioritised above more in-depth / detailed material. The translation of materials should also be extended, wherever possible, to multi-media content, considering the role of both volunteer translators and artificial intelligence translation services, such as www.wordly.ai. It is

		noted, however, that the availability of South East European languages could be a challenge with these services.
5	The findings suggested that certain static content that covered popular topics, such as how to prevent and combat violence against children (in relation to ChildHub), and topical content, such as COVID-19-related resources both had a high uptake and readership across different CoPs.	Content on the more standard / popular child protection topics should be well covered by the website (with webpages optimised to the most common search engine terms), as evidence suggests that these webpages are likely to act as an ongoing and consistent entry point for many new visitors to the website. Provided relevant links to other areas of the website are also embedded within these entry level pages, they will likely also encourage users to embark upon a deeper exploration of the website's features.

Engaging Users of ChildHub and their Needs

If ChildHub is to fully understand why its online CoP is valued by its users and is increasing in popularity, it needs to know which users are engaging most proactively on the site. Most of the other online CoPs included in this study undertake annual surveys to seek feedback from users but Apolitical goes further by undertaking interviews with target users, user testing, platform analytics and interviews with organisations who work in the target area. It is recommended that ChildHub also undertakes more detailed and regular user research and testing; the insights gained should, in turn, drive improvements to the content and usability of the site. Two key barriers to engagement remain prevalent. There is a digital divide in many countries, where some user's digital knowledge and know-how is more limited, reducing their access to and use of online services, and, secondly; supervisors of the key target audience (social workers) do not always support workers to engage with ChildHub during their working day. Further support and guidance in these two areas could be provided via ChildHub to reduce the impact of these barriers, although both issues are not entirely within ChildHubs domain of influence. ChildHub could consider using thematic working groups to generate topics of interest through a more structured process of peer-to-peer group engagement. This would also help to drive a content creation strategy aligned to relevant 'learning journeys' that ChildHub's users could pursue in future. In contrast to ChildHub, most of the other online CoPs included in the study do not provide incentives to participate. This study considers some incentives to be both appropriate and beneficial, such as the accreditation of e-Learning courses, as this provides recognition and value to users as a part of their continuous professional development which, in future, could be mapped against recognised national learning and career progression frameworks. However, the value of providing financial incentives for resource people to participate in ChildHub would be an interesting avenue for further research. It may provide a greater return on investment to ensure that committed resource people have early access to face-to-face trainings to support them in effectively playing key voluntary roles in more structured peer-to-peer engagements (e.g. such as 1:1 advisors; leading a thematic working group, or; playing a regional and / or national ChildHub governance role).

#	Finding	Recommendation

6	Apolitical is the best example in this study of how to undertake user research and testing to understand what users want. This includes interviews with target users, user testing, platform analytics and interviews with organisations who work in the target area. Most of the other online CoPs included in this study only undertake annual surveys to seek feedback from users.	It is recommended that ChildHub undertakes more detailed and regular user research and testing to better understand how and why users come to ChildHub, what members are looking for, what would encourage them to engage more deeply and the challenges they face in interacting with the site. This should go further than annual member surveys, including prototyping and user testing, detailing user journeys, collecting further information through analytics (such as categorising feature use e.g. participation in webinars and resource downloads) and conducting interviews with current and potential members.
7	Two key barriers to engagement still exist- there is a digital divide, where some user's digital knowledge and know-how is limited, reducing their access to online services and, secondly; supervisors of the key target audience (social workers) do not always support workers to engage with ChildHub during their working day.	ChildHub should support greater engagement by providing relevant guidance and materials on these two topics on the website. The information would outline (for example within an FAQ section) what certain digital tools do and how to use them, for example a step-by-step guide to using Zoom, and other 'digital basics' needed for engagement. Another webpage directed towards social worker supervisors / managers might also address the topic of how ChildHub positively contributes towards supervision goals and workforce professional development. This could also be linked to further resources, guidance and tools on how to supervise social workers effectively, simultaneously providing a clear picture of how ChildHub fits into the supervision and professional development process.
8	Many of the online CoPs included in this study highlighted that different users have different needs, and the online CoP should understand and serve these differing needs (Apolitical, Sportanddev.org, ETF OpenSpace and GEinCEE). The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance uses thematic working groups to pick up on emerging issues from its members.	ChildHub could consider using thematic working groups to generate topics of interest through a more structured process of peer-to-peer group engagement. This approach (if structured) might not only drive the content creation strategy aligned to relevant user 'learning journeys' that ChildHub's users could pursue, but also present Tdh with the opportunity to align the work of ChildHub nationally towards national learning, competence and career progression frameworks, as well as regionally, towards Tdh's own priority programme areas in the countries where Tdh is the implementing ChildHub partner e.g. non-custodial measures in Access to Justice. This would add value directly to Tdh's regional strategies and present a potential route to leverage ChildHub more effectively in both Tdh advocacy efforts and project proposals, creating greater awareness of Tdh

		specialist roles and more indirect revenues for Tdh (see sustainability recommendation 16).
9	ChildHub Resource People in each country meet on a quarterly basis to discuss the priorities and needs in their countries, but it is not known whether a content creation and marketing strategy is then derived from these meetings. With regards to the type of content to publish, ETF OpenSpace has found that posting provocative content, such as in a newspaper article, receives a lot of responses, as it stirs a reaction in people to share whether they agree or disagree.	A clear content marketing strategy would be useful to promote relevant content created and support ChildHub's users in pursuing an overall 'learning journey' through ChildHub. This may include both inbound and outbound marketing strategies, and whether more provocative content should be included as a part of the approach.
10	In contrast to ChildHub, most of the other online CoPs included in the study do not provide incentives to participate (The CPC Learning Network, the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, the Association of Child Protection Professionals, Apolitical, Sportanddev.org and ETF OpenSpace). However, this study considers some incentives to be both appropriate and beneficial. For example, two of ChildHub's e-Learning courses are currently accredited by CPD in the UK, which provides recognition and value to users.	It is suggested that ChildHub continue to pursue the accreditation of further courses. However, the value of providing financial incentives to participate in ChildHub would be an interesting avenue for further research in terms of their real value and whether they lead to any unintended consequences. It may, in future, provide a greater return on investment to ensure that committed Resource People, with aligned values, have early access to face-to-face trainings to support them in building relationships and networking with their peers, and playing key voluntary roles in more structured peer-to-peer 1:1 and group engagements.

Results of ChildHub

ChildHub is not alone in struggling to define and measure what success looks like, as this challenge has also been encountered by some other online CoPs included in this study. Nevertheless, it would be beneficial for ChildHub to consider what success looks like for its' different categories of users, so that everyone at ChildHub works towards the same aims and to serve as a basis for the forthcoming impact study. There is also a need for continuous insight into existing user behaviours and how user needs are being met, to steer content strategies and ensure the site remains relevant within the different contexts. Whilst a traditional impact study is likely to support learning about existing user behaviours and what has worked historically, it may be useful to also embed monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches that provide more continuous feedback loops that can provide guidance to management on a more frequent basis to drive decision making.

#	Finding	Recommendation
11	ChildHub is not alone in struggling to define and measure what success looks like, as this	It would be beneficial for ChildHub to consider what success looks like so that everyone works towards

	challenge was also encountered by IPSCAN, the CPC Learning Network, Apolitical and the GEinCEE.	the same aims; it would also serve as a basis for the forthcoming impact study. Ideally, this should be done through revising the current theory of change to specify short to mid-term learning and development outcomes that ChildHub aims to support for its different user personas. Success would also be more clearly defined by specifying different user journeys through ChildHub, and their learning and connecting objectives[1] as described under recommendation 8.
12	Interviews with some Tdh Resource People and Country Associates found that prioritising the time to engage in ChildHub was a barrier. For example, supervisors of social workers did not always support social workers accessing the training during working hours, so the activities were relegated to their own free time.	In addition to recommendation 7, by creating greater alignment of ChildHub 'learning journeys' against relevant national learning and competence frameworks for career progression, along with future accreditation of ChildHub training (a more long-term prospect), ChildHub can increasingly position itself as key partner in supporting organisational workforce development goals within child protection. This will not only provide greater justification for increased user access to ChildHub services during working hours, but also present ChildHub with new routes to financial sustainability (see sustainability recommendation 16 and 17).
13	There is a need for further insight into existing user behaviours to continuously steer content strategies and ensure the site remains relevant within the different contexts.	We recommend that the upcoming impact study focus upon understanding whose needs are currently being best served through ChildHub, in what ways and whether ChildHub services can be found by users elsewhere. This will help guide managements' understanding of where the strongest value propositions lie and what niche ChildHub most effectively serves. This information would then provide important insights when devising a workable business development strategy and in identifying where a commercial value can be reasonably linked to specific services.
14	Digital innovation and services are fast moving and require an agile and adaptable response to ensure services remain current and responsive to user needs and changes in context.	In relation to future monitoring and evaluation, we recommend that registration data incorporates information on users' professions (e.g. social worker, school teacher, etc), wherever possible, to gain a better understanding of the users' day-to-day context, as well as enhancing data analytics to facilitate the segmentation of data by demographics and key services provided. We would also recommend that a developmental

[1] See here, for example: https://www.trainingjournal.com/articles/feature/creating-great-learning-journey, accessed on 20.04.2021

		evaluation[2] approach is adopted by Tdh Quality and Accountability team. This means asking evaluative questions and gathering information to provide feedback and support developmental decision-making and course corrections on an ongoing basis. The evaluator acts essentially as a part of the management team whose members collaborate to conceptualise, design and test all new approaches to engaging users, delivering value and generating sustainable revenue sources in a long-term, on-going process of continuous improvement, adaptation, and intentional change. The evaluator's primary function in the team is to elucidate team discussions with evaluative questions, by presenting user feedback information and logic, and to facilitate data-based assessments and decision-making in the unfolding and developmental process of digital innovation. We would also recommend that the evaluator join a digital innovation network (such as the catalyst network in the UK or similar) as a route to tapping into ongoing digital inspiration and good practice to drive thought processes.

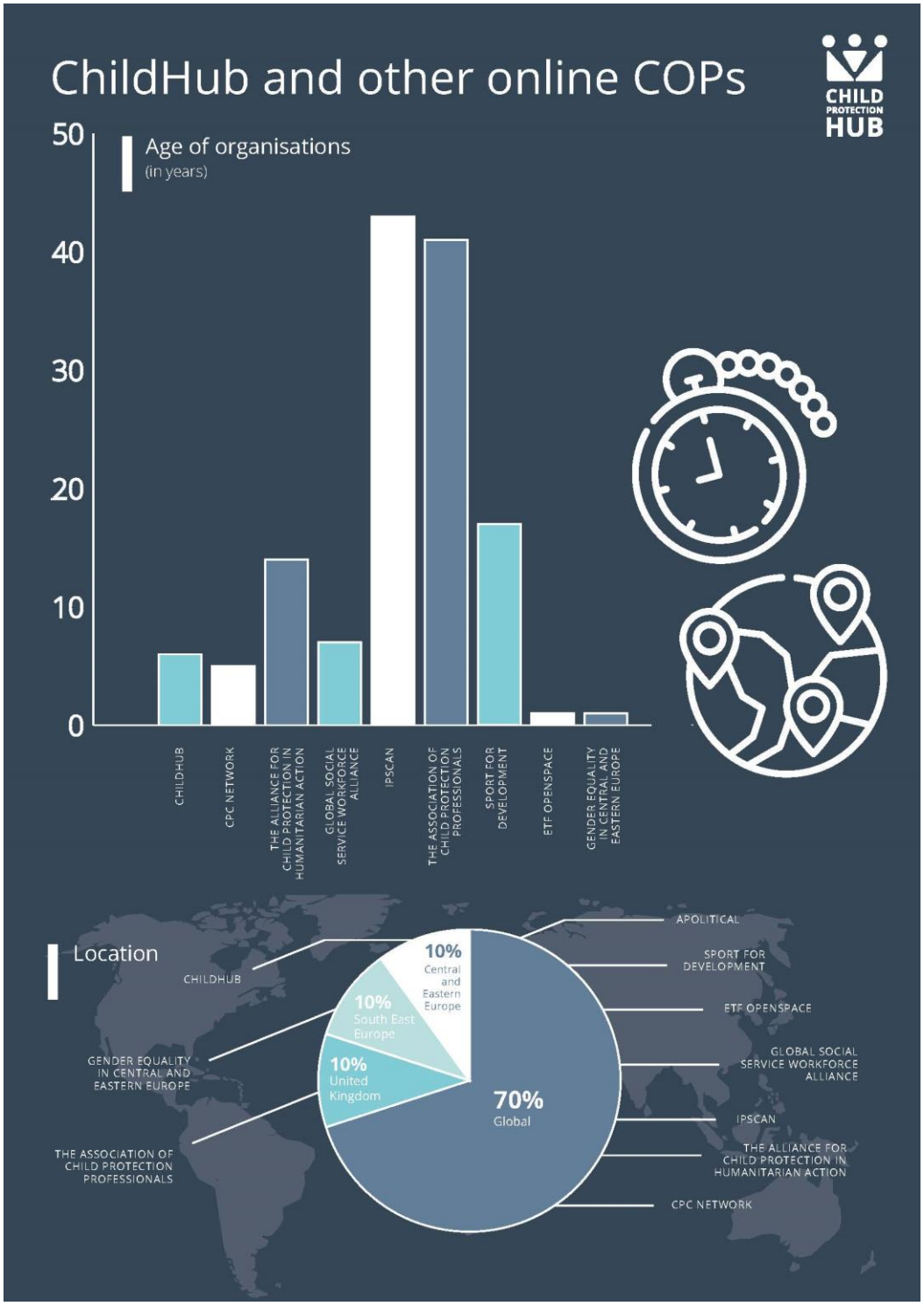
Sustainability of ChildHub

Most of the CoPs included in this study find sustainability of the CoP a challenge. Some ways in which the online CoPs have addressed sustainability include keeping running costs low, providing a service that users are willing to pay for and considering funding streams other than grants, such as sponsored content and revenue generated by products / courses offered by the online CoP. It is recommended that ChildHub does the same, first by undertaking a value for money assessment of its running costs and considering more experimental funding routes, such as sponsored content. ChildHub could also consider introducing paid-for services such as individual course fees and a paid membership option at the organisational level, with the aim of facilitating greater ownership of the online CoP from the organisational members, encouraging greater buy-in of the value of the online CoP from individual members' supervisors and further aide members in using work time to engage in ChildHub. Many of the online CoPs included in this study, including ChildHub, have been able to increase membership or participation in the online CoP over the last year, as activities have needed to move online due to COVID-19. The challenge will now be how to both keep this engagement up once in-person restrictions ease, and to monetise some aspects of the value proposition to support long-term financial sustainability.

[2] Developmental Evaluation explanation: https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/developmental_evaluation

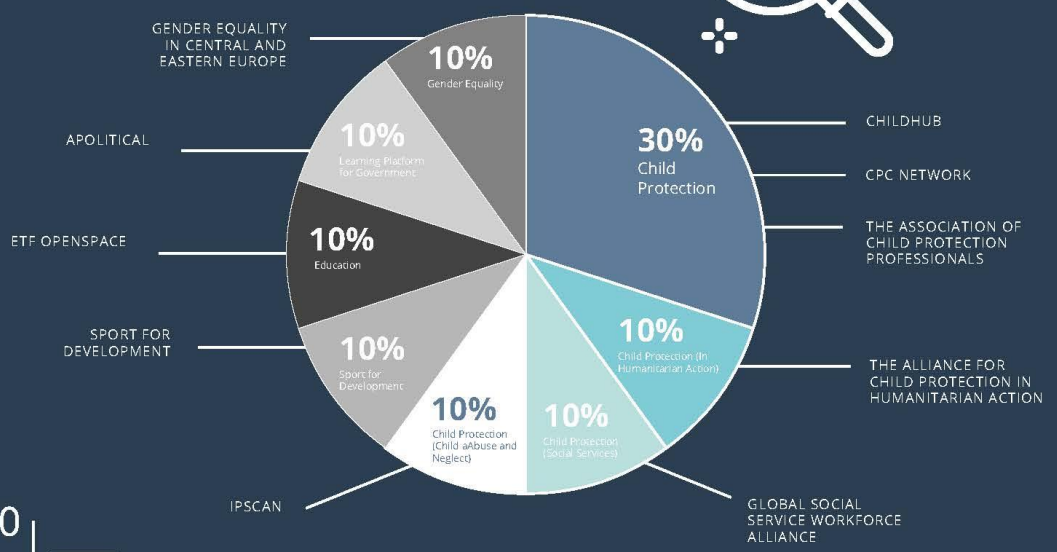
Some infographics comparing ChildHub with the other online CoPs can be found in Figure 2. The main findings and recommendations concerning the sustainability of ChildHub can be found in the following table.

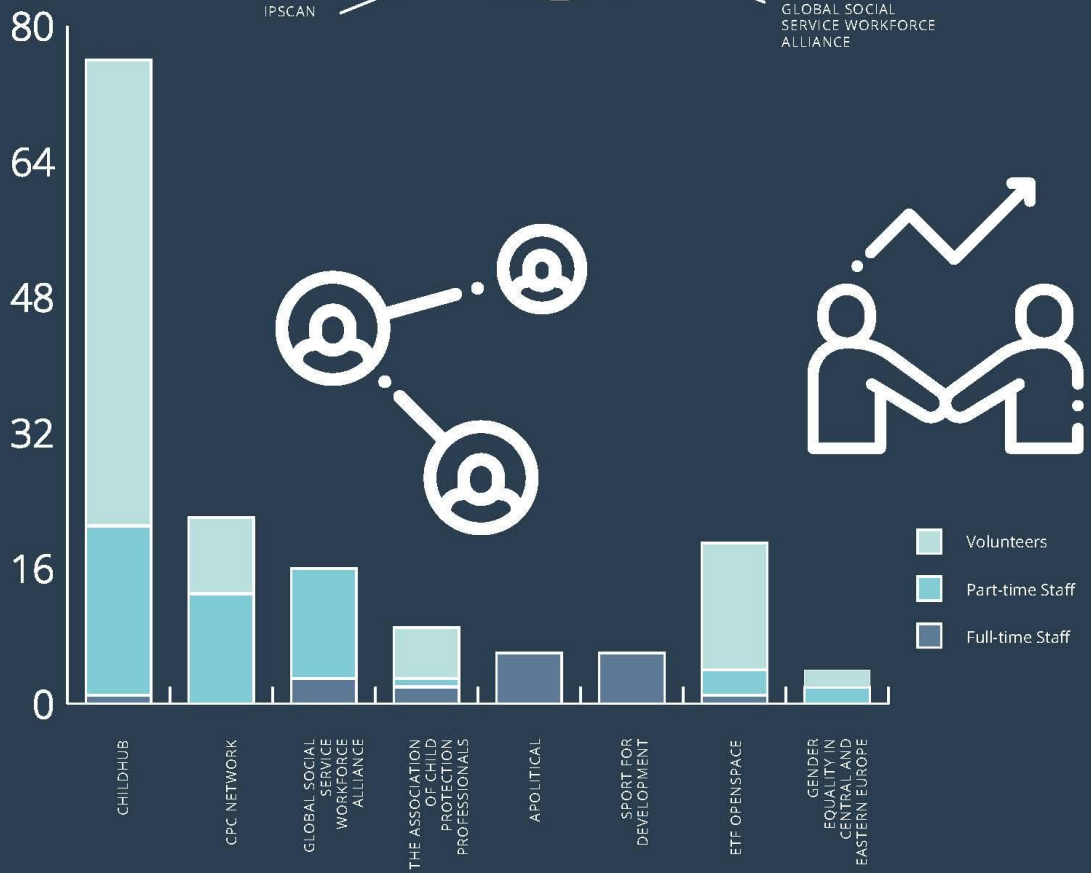
Figure 2: Infographics Comparing ChildHub with the Other Online CoPs



Sector

Breakdown of each CoP and their sector:



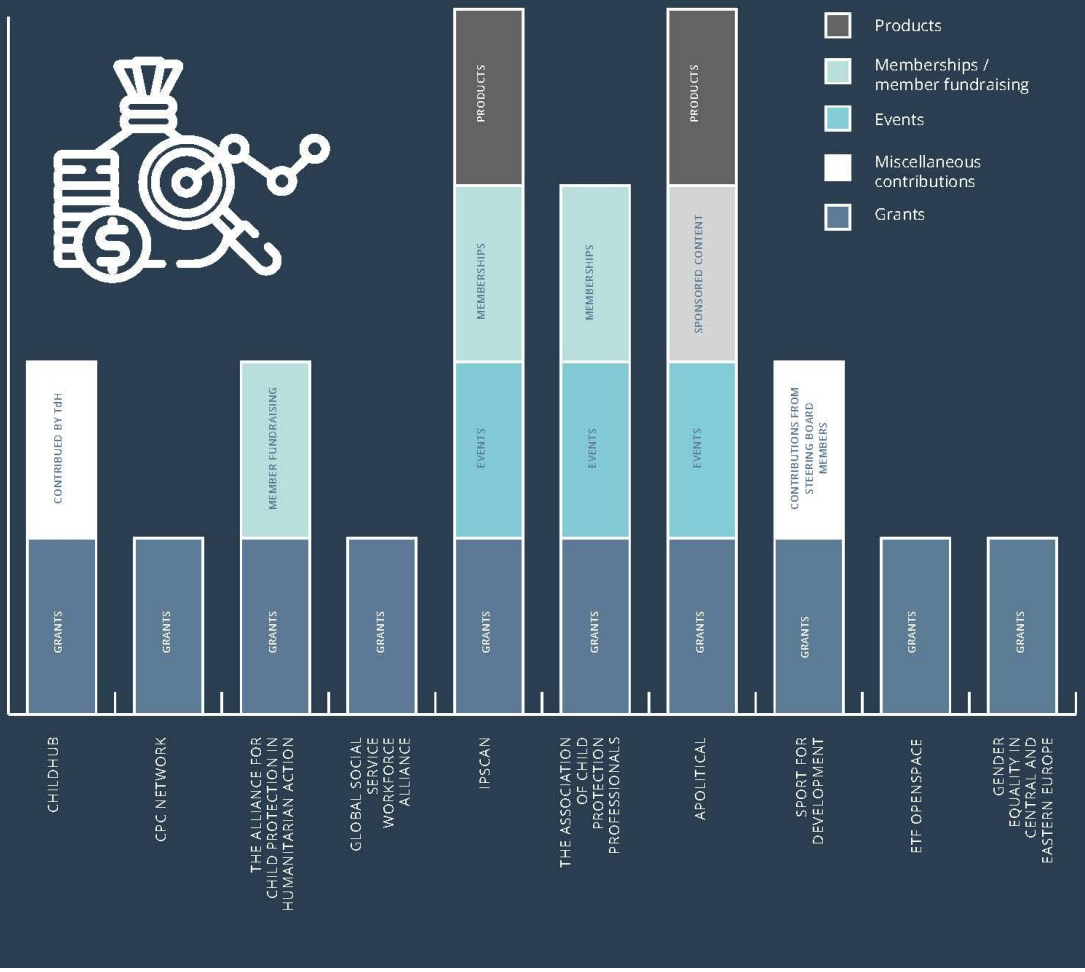


Average time spent on websites

(in seconds)

Funding

Breakdown of types of funding per CoP



#	Finding	Recommendation
15	Most of the CoPs included in this study find sustainability of the CoP a challenge. Even IPSCAN, which has been running for 43 years and is the oldest CoP in the study finds sustainability one of its biggest challenges. Another longstanding CoP, the Association of Child Protection Professionals was considered to be more sustainable than many of the others and the reason for this could be that its running costs are kept low.	ChildHub should look at not only generating more sustainable income streams, but also how to reduce its running costs. Without access to budgets, this study is not able to comment on how to do this, but perhaps a value for money assessment could be incorporated into the upcoming impact study of ChildHub, as well as considering where volunteers might extend their roles to provide further pro-bono support in some areas.
16	Whilst ChildHub predominantly serves the knowledge sharing and developmental needs of child protection actors across the region, Tdh itself has a similar internal strategic need to share its own good practice and learning from project interventions from one delegation to the next, to create more cohesive and aligned regional strategies that better utilise the combined assets and capabilities of all delegations in the region and support Tdh-specific advocacy goals.	ChildHub could be more extensively leveraged as a tool to address Tdh's own regional knowledge exchange and advocacy strategies. For example, in advocating for non-custodial measures in relation to Access to Justice programmes. ChildHub could add more direct value by aligning closely to Tdh's regional priorities and strategies for implementation, presenting a potential route to leverage ChildHub more effectively in project proposals and generate more indirect revenues for Tdh. This might seem contrary to efforts to de-centralise/ pass over ChildHub ownership to other interested partners, but whilst Tdh remains the central driver of the platform and continues to shoulder the majority financial responsibility, it is both necessary and beneficial to test the viability of different routes to achieving financial sustainability which might benefit other 'owner-partners' in future. It would also justify Tdh delegations / country partners including a ChildHub budget line within future funding proposals to raise funds towards its' core running costs (this relates to recommendation 8). This approach could, in future, be extended to other 'owner-partners'. Indirect revenues could also be generated by better leveraging the role of ChildHub within new project proposals, by positioning it as an added value component within proposals, as an innovative means of promoting and disseminating lessons learnt from project interventions, and as a means to achieving longer-term community sustainability for a specific intervention.
17	Some of the CoPs included in this study are utilising funding streams other than grants. These funding streams include sponsored	ChildHub could consider a mix of sustainable funding routes, such as sponsored content, consultancy service provision, offering costed

	content (as Sportanddev.org, Apolitical and the Association of Child Protection Professionals do), revenue generated from products/ courses offered by the online CoP (as Apolitical does) and paid events (as IPSCAN, the Association of Child Protection Professionals and Apolitical do).	products / courses, and costed events. The latter two ideas could form part of the members offer to an organisation for a paid membership (see below). These approaches would require a clear marketing and business development strategy to be worked up, to frame and operationalise the approach.
18	Interviews with some Tdh Resource People and Country Associates found that prioritising the time to engage in ChildHub was a barrier.	ChildHub could consider introducing paid memberships at the organisational level, with the aim of facilitating greater ownership of the online CoP from the organisational members, encouraging greater buy-in of the value of the online CoP from individual members' supervisors and aide members to use work time to engage in ChildHub. A member organisation could receive a discount on any ChildHub events, courses and / or products given a commercial value. Additional reporting features to demonstrate organisational member progress might also be a useful component of the membership offer.