

Framing the future:

**How the Model National Response framework
is supporting national efforts to end child
sexual exploitation and abuse online**

Executive Summary



Acknowledgements

This report was written by Afroz Kaviani Johnson, Child Protection Specialist, Programme Group, UNICEF, under the overall guidance of Chloe Setter, Head of Policy, and Paul Ghent, Chief Operating Officer, WeProtect Global Alliance.

The support of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children is also appreciated – as a member of the Steering Committee for this study and for its financial support of the UNICEF review of national responses in low- and middle-income countries, which this report also draws upon.

See full report for references

May 2022

© WeProtect Global Alliance 2022.
Published by WeProtect Global Alliance,
Email: info@weprotectga.org,
Website: www.weprotect.org

Cover photo credit: Shutterstock.com



The WeProtect Global Alliance supports its members to develop coordinated multi-stakeholder responses to tackle online child sexual exploitation and abuse. This work is guided by the Model National Response (MNR). The MNR builds on many years of work by experts and practitioners, as well as global frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). At the 2015 WeProtect summit in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, governments and organizations agreed to establish and deliver, in their own countries, a coordinated national response to online child sexual exploitation and abuse, guided by the MNR.

This review sets out how and where the MNR has been implemented in the six years since its introduction across 42 Alliance countries. The report does not intend to evaluate or assess country progress, capabilities or quality of services, but rather to illustrate efforts towards global learning and exchange.

The specific aims of the report are to:

- 1. Document diverse national responses to online child sexual exploitation and abuse – using the MNR framework as a guide**
- 2. Identify examples of good practice – to disseminate to the broader Alliance membership**
- 3. Highlight gaps, challenges and possible solutions – to highlight common issues to decision makers and inform future iterations of the MNR**
- 4. Inform the development of a possible future maturity model or similar framework, facilitating tailored responses to address national requirements.**

This report captures the experiences in 42 countries,¹ representing all regions and income groupings. The findings are primarily aggregated for this report, although illustrative examples are presented by country.² The examples are not exhaustive but were selected to show a variety of approaches across different contexts, as shared by survey respondents.

The primary data collection method for this report was electronically administered surveys. For 17 countries (primarily high-income countries), the data is drawn from responses to a survey issued to government representatives in February and March 2021. For 25 countries (low- and middle-income countries), the data is drawn from a survey administered to UNICEF country offices as part of a Global Partnership to End Violence-supported study to document national responses to online child sexual exploitation and abuse in low- and middle-income countries.³

Key findings

The MNR has proven to be an important framework for guiding comprehensive national action. Irrespective of political contexts, institutional setup, approaches, resource capacities and priorities, almost all countries surveyed (90 per cent⁴) have used the MNR as a reference for good practice. The MNR has also been used as a basis for policy development, as a guide for specific capabilities and as a framework for measuring progress.

Guided by the MNR, Alliance countries have applied a depth and breadth of expertise and experience across in their national responses. Governments are driving coordinated and multisectoral action and have developed many of the capabilities set out in the MNR framework in line with local circumstances and needs. Across the 42 countries, the policy and governance

(see Findings, Domain 1) and criminal justice (Domain 2) domains appear most developed, while there are notable gaps in the victim, societal, industry and media domains (Domains 3–6, respectively).

Figure 1 gives a snapshot of the capabilities in place.⁵ While this snapshot is helpful to illustrate the status at-a-glance, it is important not to oversimplify the diverse country contexts and realities on the ground.

Survey respondents provided examples of good practices, challenges and lessons learned in each domain and capability. These are briefly summarized over the page and elaborated in the report.

Figure 1
Snapshot of capabilities in place





Domain 1:

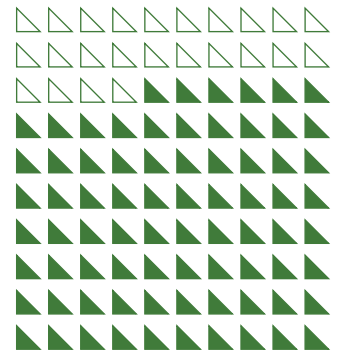
Policy and governance

Leadership: Over three-quarters of surveyed countries (76 per cent, 32 of 42) have a national multi-stakeholder governance mechanism and almost two-thirds (64 per cent, 27 of 42) have a relevant national policy or strategy. There is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of governance mechanisms and policies/strategies. International cooperation is essential to address complex jurisdictional challenges.

Research, analysis and monitoring: Over three-quarters of surveyed countries (83 per cent, 35 of 42) have some form of national research, analysis and monitoring on child sexual exploitation and abuse, including forms facilitated by technology. Without this, countries face challenges in setting baselines and indicators, and designing a monitoring framework for national action. There are ethical complexities and resource challenges associated with research in this field.

76%

of surveyed countries have a national multi-stakeholder governance mechanism



8 out of 15

high-income countries have legislation requiring Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to report suspected child abuse material

Legislation: While all 15 high-income countries surveyed have legislated to criminalize online child sexual abuse and exploitation and 'knowing possession' of child sexual abuse materials, only 8 have legislation requiring Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to report suspected child abuse material. In most surveyed low- and middle-income countries (88 per cent, 22 of 25), existing laws are perceived as inadequate to address child sexual exploitation and abuse online. Many countries have recently revised or are currently revising relevant legislation. The CRC⁶ and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography,⁷ the Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime,⁸ and Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse⁹ serve as benchmarks for law reform and broader reform of victim services.



Domain 2:

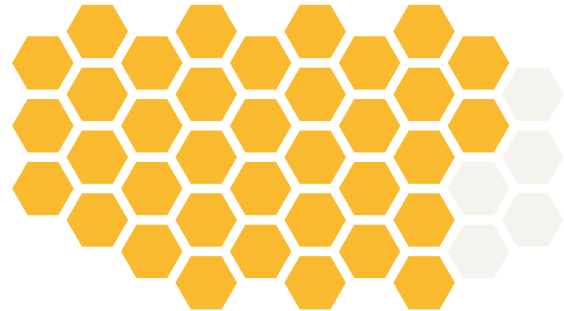
Criminal justice

Dedicated law enforcement: All 42 surveyed countries have some law enforcement capability with an explicit remit to respond to child sexual exploitation and abuse, including forms facilitated by technology. Units responsible for crimes against children tend to be understaffed and under-resourced in low- and middle-income countries. To stay ahead of new and emerging offending, many respondents emphasize the need for systematic training and capacity-building. Psychological care and mitigation tools for law enforcement officers' health and well-being are also essential.

Judiciary and prosecutors: The judiciary and prosecution service have some specialist knowledge and skills required to enable positive outcomes for victims/survivors of all forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse in almost all surveyed countries (88 per cent, 36 of 41). Some countries lack standardized child-friendly and victim-centred protocols to guide the judiciary and prosecutors. There is a need for further research with victims/survivors to understand their personal experience of the justice system and improve its services.

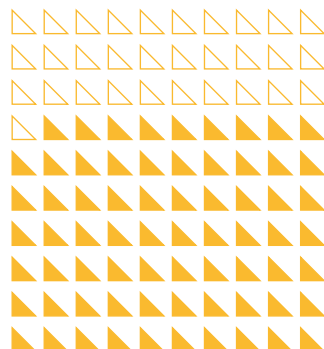
36
out of 41

surveyed countries have a judiciary and prosecution service with some specialist knowledge and skills required to enable positive outcomes for victims/survivors of all forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse



69%

of surveyed countries are connected to Interpol's International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database



Offender management: Almost three-quarters of surveyed countries (71 per cent, 30 of 42) have some processes in place to manage and/or rehabilitate child sex offenders. The 12 countries with no offender management interventions are low- and middle-income countries. There is a need to build and share empirically based good practices across all countries.

Access to image databases: Two-thirds of surveyed countries (69 per cent, 29 of 42) are connected to Interpol's International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database,¹⁰ and one-third (33 per cent, 14 of 42) have a national database. Of the 13 countries not yet connected to the ICSE database, 92 per cent (12) are low- and middle-income countries. There is a need to ensure interoperability and currency of systems in countries with multiple databases.



Domain 3: **Victim**

End-to-end support: Over two-thirds of surveyed countries (69 per cent, 29 of 42) have integrated support for victims/survivors through investigation, legal proceedings and beyond. Countries have developed case management processes, multidisciplinary teams and 'one-stop' centres to support victims/survivors. However, in many countries, policies are not fully translated into practice.

Child protection workforce: Most countries surveyed (83 per cent, 34 of 41) have a skilled, specialist workforce that is trained, coordinated and available to support victims/survivors of child sexual exploitation and abuse. However, in many low- and middle-income countries, the professional cadre of social workers is still emerging. Irrespective of income status, there are still some gaps in workforce capacity in many countries. In particular, the workforce does not necessarily have sufficient expertise to identify and support child victims/survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse that has an online and/or international element.

34 out of **42**
surveyed countries have some
aspects of effective remedy
or reparations in place

Child helpline: Almost all countries surveyed (95 per cent, 40 of 42) have a national child helpline.¹¹ The government operates some child helplines, but NGOs run most. In some countries, even if operators identify a child in need of support or specialized assistance, services do not exist in their locality or at all. Some helpline operators lack specialized knowledge about risks and harms associated with digital technology.



83%

**of surveyed countries
have a skilled, specialist
workforce that is trained,
coordinated and available
to support victims/
survivors of child sexual
exploitation and abuse**



Compensation, remedies and complaints arrangements: Most countries surveyed (81 per cent, 34 of 42) have some aspects of effective remedy or reparations in place. There are significant differences between countries, partly due to different legal definitions of the terms. It is uncommon for children to turn to professionals or authorities in sexual abuse and exploitation cases in some countries. In many countries, children receive little information about their rights and how to claim them.



95% of surveyed
countries have
a national
child helpline



Domain 4: **Societal**

Reporting hotline: Distinct from a child helpline (previous), a hotline or reporting portal is set up to receive reports of child sexual abuse or exploitation online from members of the public or industry. Most countries surveyed (90 per cent, 38 of 42) have a dedicated hotline or portal. Challenges include encouraging public reporting, funding and human resource limitations, and triaging cases with sufficient information for law enforcement action.

Education programme: Over three-quarters of surveyed countries (76 per cent, 32 of 42) have a national education programme on child sexual exploitation and abuse, including forms facilitated by technology. The absence of a national education programme is viewed as a significant impediment in generating societal awareness of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Reaching vulnerable cohorts not in school requires special attention to the design and implementation of education programmes.



59%

of surveyed countries have some sort of support system for convicted child sex offenders, people with a sexual interest in children and young people displaying sexually harmful behaviour



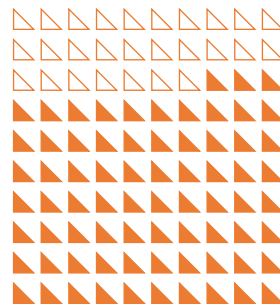
Child participation: Children and young people are encouraged to give their ideas and influence policy and practice in over two-thirds of countries (71 per cent, 29 of 41¹²). However, even where dedicated structures for child participation exist, the impact at the policy level can be challenging to observe. It is essential that such processes do not trigger or re-victimize participants.

Support systems for offenders or those at risk of offending to prevent harm to children: Over half of surveyed countries (59 per cent, 24 of 41¹³) have some sort of support system for convicted child sex offenders, people with a sexual interest in children and young people displaying sexually harmful behaviour. The 17 countries with no support systems are from low- and middle-income categories. The 'negative optics' associated with developing and providing support services for these groups is a significant challenge.



Domain 5: **Industry**

Takedown procedures and reporting: Over two-thirds of surveyed countries (73 per cent, 30 of 41¹⁴) have procedures to enable the removal or blocking of child sexual abuse material. These range from self-regulatory to legislative and judicial processes. Some survey respondents viewed the lack of formalized agreements or regulatory frameworks as a significant impediment. Other challenges include the reluctance of victims/survivors to disclose their abuse and/or limited awareness of available avenues for reporting. Some respondents report an urgent need for international alignment and cooperation on classifying child sexual abuse materials and standards for legal interoperability in data and intelligence sharing.



73%

of surveyed countries have procedures to enable the removal or blocking of child sexual abuse material

25



out of 41 of surveyed countries engages industry and proactively encourages innovative solution development and corporate social responsibility

Innovative solution development and corporate social responsibility: Government engages industry and proactively encourages innovative solution development and corporate social responsibility in over half of surveyed countries (61 per cent, 25 of 41¹⁵). Survey respondents report that the Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, the Alliance and the Virtual Global Taskforce have been important enablers for this. Industry engagement remains a challenge in many countries, especially where this is a relatively new field.

Call to action

Five key priorities emerge from this review. These demand action from the Alliance, its membership, and other stakeholders concerned with protecting children in the digital environment. Examples of steps towards each priority are given in the 'Call to action' section of this report.

We call on governments and partners to:

1

Invest in comprehensive national responses to prevent and respond to online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Multisectoral, multi-layered interventions are essential to prevent and respond to online child sexual exploitation and abuse. The MNR framework can guide efficient and effective investments to tackle this issue. This requires increased investments at the individual, institutional and systemic levels.



2

Accelerate global collaboration among governments and companies to strengthen prevention and response efforts to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is borderless, meaning countries' national responses cannot be separated from the global landscape. To effectively combat the cross-border dimension of this issue, international and cross-industry cooperation are critical to support national efforts.

3

Strengthen the use and collection of data and evidence to enhance effective, sustainable national efforts to protect children.

Quality data and evidence generation are essential to improve policy, legislation, service delivery and initiatives to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse. This requires not only strengthening countries' administrative data systems for law enforcement, prosecution and social services, but also dedicated research to help better inform and track improvement.



4

Share best practices and lessons learned to support national responses to protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse.

Through sharing best practices and lessons learned, countries can continuously adapt and improve the implementation of the MNR framework within national and regional contexts. The development and implementation of interventions adapted to diverse contexts must be driven by national evidence to support sustained, effective country responses.

5

Promote the global implementation of the Model National Response framework, and its continuous refinement based on lessons learned.

As the world shifts with ever-evolving contexts and innovation, the MNR framework must be improved and adapted by incorporating lessons learned, leveraging technology and continuously refining its guidance for diverse contexts. Broader consultation can help shape future iterations of this framework and the feasibility and utility of a country maturity model.

This report illustrates how, just over six years since its introduction, the MNR has become a key tool in supporting coordinated, comprehensive and multi-stakeholder national responses in over 40 countries. These responses and the MNR framework must draw on collective learning and experience to keep pace with the increasing scale and complexity of child sexual exploitation and abuse online.

As set out in the Global Threat Assessment 2021,¹⁷ the nature of harm has continued to grow and diversify. The global community must accelerate its efforts to tackle these crimes and better protect children. This review has charted a path forward for action by the Alliance, its membership and other stakeholders to take up this urgent call.

Endnotes

1. Albania, Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, England and Wales, Finland, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Malta, Mongolia, Montenegro, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Paraguay, Philippines, Rwanda, Serbia, South Africa, Sweden, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe.
2. The report does highlight where there are notable differences between countries by income.
3. United Nations Children's Fund, *Ending Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: Lessons learned and promising practices in low- and middle-income countries*, December 2021, UNICEF, New York, <www.unicef.org/documents/ending-online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>, accessed 16 March 2022.
4. 35 of 39 countries that answered the question.
5. The summary graph does not include the legislation capability, as it was not possible to aggregate answers across all surveyed countries.
6. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, <www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>, accessed 23 March 2022.
7. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, 25 May 2000, <www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opsccrc.aspx>, accessed 23 March 2022.
8. Council of Europe, Convention on Cybercrime (ETS No. 185), <www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=185>, accessed 23 March 2022.
9. Council of Europe, Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201), <www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=201>, accessed 23 March 2022.
10. The ICSE image and video database is an intelligence and investigative tool, which allows specialized investigators from around the world to share data on cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation. The main purposes of the ICSE database are to facilitate the process of identification of child victims and to minimize duplication of efforts by law enforcement relating to victim identification; see Interpol, 'International Child Sexual Exploitation Database', <www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Crimes-against-children/International-Child-Sexual-Exploitation-database>, accessed 17 March 2022.
11. A child helpline is a support service for children and young people.
12. Not all countries answered this question.
13. Not all countries answered this question
14. Not all countries answered this question
15. Not all countries answered this question
16. *Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*.
17. WeProtect Global Alliance, Global Threat Assessment 2021, <www.weprotect.org/global-threat-assessment-21/>, accessed 8 March 2022.



