Preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse
A Model National Response: Maturity Model

The Model National Response framework was first published in 2015 as a non-prescriptive and dynamic tool that sets out the capabilities needed to ensure an effective and coordinated national response to prevent and respond to child sexual exploitation and abuse online. During 2021, UNICEF and WeProtect Global Alliance undertook a review of how the Model National Response has been implemented across 42 countries (representing all regions and income groupings) to highlight lessons learnt, best practice and inform future iterations of the model. The Framing the Future[1] report was launched at the Alliance's Global Summit in June 2022.

Based on the evidence collected in the Framing the Future review, WeProtect Global Alliance released an updated framework[2] in 2022 making it more responsive to today's challenges and opportunities. In partnership with UNICEF, the Alliance has now developed a Maturity Model that will facilitate tailored national responses and foster a climate of continuous improvement[3]. To accompany this Maturity Model, a self-assessment tool[4] has been developed and refined in consultation with a diverse cross-section of Alliance member governments. This practical tool aims to support governments to self-assess their progress against the Maturity Model.

The Maturity Model proposes four broad phases for each capability from 'building' to 'maturity'. Successful national responses are acquired through a blend of capabilities, continuous refinement and improvement and not by 'achievement' of each capability in isolation. It is important to recognise that the capabilities within the Model National Response are interdependent and should be approached holistically, taking a systems-based approach. Different circumstances and contexts mean that countries do not always move through the phases in a linear or predictable fashion.

1. https://www.weprotect.org/framing-the-future/
2. https://www.weprotect.org/model-national-response/
3. The model outlined draws on: UNICEF's Child protection system strengthening approach (https://www.unicef.org/documents/child-protection-systems-strengthening) and the Digital Trust and Safety Partnership's maturity rating scale.
4. https://www.weprotect.org/maturity-model-self-assessment-tool/

Model National Response: Maturity Model

Capabilities	Sub-domain	Criteria according to four phases of the Maturity Model			
		Building	**Enhancement**	**Integration**	**Maturity**
		Overall characterised by limited or ad-hoc existence of the capability.	Overall characterised by increased attention to the capability and introduction or improvement of the capability in terms of scope and quality.	Overall characterised by scale-up of the capability and integration within formal systems with increasing attention to quality, accountability and sustainability.	Overall characterised by nationwide application, consistency and alignment with international standards, accountability (including monitoring and oversight) as well as sustainability (i.e. integrated within formal systems and budgeted for).

Policy, legislation and governance	Leadership	**Building**	**Enhancement**	**Integration**	**Maturity**
		No identified ministries / agencies at national government level to coordinate or lead work to address child sexual exploitation and abuse online.	Lead ministries / agencies identified in national strategy/policy but there are constraints due to limited authority, human or financial resources, and/or limited mandate.	Lead ministries / agencies functional and are adequately resourced with work underway to coordinate across government at national and decentralised levels, as well as outside of government.	Accountable, multi-stakeholder, cross-sector national body/bodies in place with a clear mandate (including a national strategy that drives initiatives and coordinates efforts across government at national and decentralised level, as well as outside government) and resources to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse online. Leaders are willing to engage in international and cross-industry collaboration.

Policy, legislation and governance	Legislation	**Building**	**Enhancement**	**Integration**	**Maturity**
		Legislation to address child sexual abuse and exploitation (including online) does not exist.	Legislation to address child sexual abuse and exploitation (including online and offline) exists but is not in line with international or regional children's rights law or has gaps in addressing emerging technologies and crimes.	Legislation to address child sexual abuse and exploitation (including online and offline) exists, is flexible to accommodate emerging technologies, and reflects emerging crime trends and new offences. Supporting legislation is in place that enables law enforcement to proactively investigate and prosecute perpetrators, identify and protect victims, and enforce penalties commensurate to offences.	A comprehensive and effective legal framework is in place in line with international and regional children's rights standards to prosecute offenders (nationally and internationally), support victims, and enable online service providers to review, and report suspected illegal child sexual abuse content and potentially harmful content and conduct. The statute of limitations is removed for victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation (including online). Legal provisions are in place to protect children from criminal liability in case of self-generated sexual images and videos, and when intended solely for own private use.

Criminal justice	Dedicated law enforcement	**Building**	**Enhancement**	**Integration**	**Maturity**
		No law enforcement unit with an explicit remit to respond to child sexual exploitation and abuse (including online).	Dedicated law enforcement unit but there are constraints due to limited authority, human or financial resources, limited mandate.	Dedicated law enforcement unit functional and adequately resourced including specialist knowledge, skills, systems, technological tools and resources to respond to child sexual exploitation and abuse online.	Law enforcement is equipped to carry out complex, cross border and victim-focused investigations that are recorded, risk-assessed and triaged consistently. There is systematic training for law enforcement professionals and services for trauma-informed victim support, overall coordination between law enforcement and victim support services, adequate psychological support for frontline workers, and technological tools available to enable effective investigations.

Criminal justice

Judiciary and prosecutors

	Building	Enhancement	Integration	Maturity
Judiciary and prosecutors	Judiciary and prosecutors do not have specialist knowledge and skills on child sexual exploitation and abuse and technology-enabled offending.	Judiciary and prosecutors are developing an understanding of the risks posed by child sex offenders and the gravity of the crime and sentencing within the parameters established by relevant national legislation, but this is not systematically incorporated and/or not evident across the entire workforce.	A majority of judiciary and prosecutors understand the risks posed by child sex offenders and the gravity of the crime and sentencing within the parameters established by relevant national legislation. There is some adoption of standardised child-friendly and victim-centred protocols.	Judiciary and prosecutorial services have clear understanding of the contexts in which child sexual exploitation and abuse can take place, the potential vulnerability of victims and witnesses, and the tools and methodologies of offenders, including internationally. Judiciary and prosecutors have access to specialist training on child sexual exploitation and abuse (including online); and standardised child-friendly and victim-centred protocols are implemented nationally. Judiciary and prosecutorial services regularly adopt new best practice, including the use of technology, to minimise harm to victims and survivors and increase the efficacy of criminal justice services. Victims and survivors have readily available access to prosecutorial services across all jurisdictions.

Criminal justice

	Building	Enhancement	Integration	Maturity
Offender management process	No system to identify, manage and rehabilitate sex offenders.	Nationally adopted minimum standards of offender management are in place but there is limited formal monitoring and oversight. Efforts are underway to build the evidence-base on best practice offender prevention.	There is formal monitoring and oversight of offender management (including triaging offenders into risk categories to assess applicability of rehabilitation). National systems are in place and used to help manage offenders (e.g. child sex offender registries, restricted disclosure schemes, and/or legal tools such as court orders).	Consistent and transparent implementation of a multi-agency system to identify, manage and rehabilitate sex offenders, including national child sex offender registers or restricted disclosure schemes and statutory tools (rehabilitation and education programmes, community supervision, travel restrictions and notifications).
Access to image database	The country is not connected to Interpol's International Child Sexual Exploitation database.	The country is connected to Interpol's International Child Sexual Exploitation database, but it is not optimally used due to limited human or financial resources.	Law enforcement uses Interpol's International Child Sexual Exploitation database on a regular basis and receives ongoing training on its use. Where appropriate, there is a national child sexual abuse image database in place. Law enforcement have access to various international hash sharing and image databases.	There is a standardised and regularly maintained national child sexual abuse imagery database (with appropriate governing legislation), interoperability and currency of systems (standardisation of classification), alignment with terminology for child sexual abuse material categorisation to support international collaboration, and database users are fully trained. Law enforcement has access, and the ability to share hash sharing and image data bases with international law enforcement.

		Building	Enhancement	Integration	Maturity
Victim support and empowerment ⚖	**End-to-end support**	Limited formal support services for victims/survivors. Services are mostly delivered by civil society with minimal government oversight or funding.	Formal support services are available but are not centralised. They are not child-centred, or victim-centred.	Systematic modelling and testing of child-centred and victim-centred end-to-end support services for victims/survivors of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Specialist services available to support victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and abuse online, but not nationwide.	Fully integrated, planned and multi-stakeholder end-to-end support (informed by a risk assessment and supported by medical support, emergency accommodation, financial assistance, education, therapeutic care and potentially longer-term assistance) is delivered to child victims/survivors. Services are accessible, adequately and sustainably government-funded. They are age-, gender-, sexuality- and disability-sensitive, reach diverse, indigenous and minority ethnic communities and are informed by the lived experiences of survivors. Adequate psychological support is provided for frontline workers.
	Child protection workforce	No statutory workforce available to provide child-centred victim support.	Work is underway to introduce or strengthen social service workforce, education and licensing and accreditation systems.	Building a skilled, specialist statutory workforce that is trained, coordinated and available to provide support to victims and survivors. Trauma-informed practice is underway.	A skilled, specialist statutory workforce is trained, coordinated and available to provide victim support, including trauma-informed care. Licensing and accreditation systems as well as supportive supervision systems are fully functional. Guidelines for statutory workers and other frontline professionals on emerging and complex issues such as child 'self-generated' sexual material are available.

		Building	Enhancement	Integration	Maturity
Victim support and empowerment ⚖	**Compensation, remedies and complaints arrangements**	No complaint mechanisms (independent or otherwise) available for children having suffered from child sexual exploitation and abuse (including online).	Some compensation, remedies and complaints arrangements are in place, but these are not widely accessible or are inadequate to meet the needs of victims/survivors.	Compensation, remedies and complaints arrangements are in place and there is work underway to make these more accessible and responsive to the needs of victims / survivors. Victim anonymity is afforded at all stages of a complaints and compensation process.	Legislation sets out the rights for victims/survivors and support available at every stage of the justice process, including measures for complaints, compensation and remedies in line with international and regional children's rights standards (for both domestic and international victims of abuse). Mechanisms are age-, gender-, sexuality- and disability-sensitive, and are accessible and available nationwide. Victims/survivors are able to pursue justice outside of formal criminal justice mechanisms (alternative reporting mechanisms, victim impact statements etc.)
	Child helpline	No national child helpline.	Child helplines are available but are not linked to formal systems of support. There are constraints due to human and/or financial capacity.	Child helplines have formalised referral pathways to services, systems that ensure data protection and privacy of client information and efforts are underway to train operators on risks and harms associated with digital technology.	A helpline is accessible to all children, nationwide, toll-free, available 24/7, voice and text based, offering confidential support and counselling with appropriate referral mechanisms and has regular sources of funding. Options that take into account national disparity in technological access are available. Counsellors have increased knowledge of the risks and harms associated with digital technology. Helplines have robust systems to ensure data protection and privacy.

		Building	Enhancement	Integration	Maturity
Society and culture	**Child sexual exploitation and abuse hotline**	No dedicated portal or hotline for the public to report internet material suspected to be illegal abuse material in order to be removed.	A reporting portal is established to receive reports from members of the public or industry.	A dedicated hotline is established to receive reports of internet material suspected to be illegal, harmful or potentially harmful, including child sexual exploitation and abuse material. There are constraints due to human and/or financial capacity or limited public and industry reporting.	Hotlines are available 24/7, free of charge that include robust and standardised processes for receiving, prioritising, actioning and referring reports received. These specialist portals are linked to networks, such as INHOPE, the Internet Watch Foundation and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and there is cooperation between the hotline, law enforcement and the industry.
	Education programmes	No national education programmes to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation and abuse (including online).	Some education programmes are adopted, but they are not nationwide and not reaching all audiences (children, caregivers, professionals).	Systematic national education programmes are in place for children and young people, caregivers and professionals, with work underway to evaluate and measure the success of the programmes as well as to reach vulnerable cohorts that are not in school.	Systematic national education programmes are in place (including age- appropriate, accessible and inclusive content) for children and young people, caregivers and professionals (across education, safeguarding, health and police) that 1) raise awareness of child sexual exploitation and abuse (including online); 2) provide information about children's rights, available support and mechanisms to report child sexual exploitation and abuse; 3) undergo continuous monitoring and evaluation to remain adaptive to latest developments and evidence with course material regularly updated. (Continued on next page)

		Building	Enhancement	Integration	Maturity
Society and culture	**Education programmes (cont.)**				Multiple and tailored community and public awareness campaigns are in place that use different communication methods (targeted messaging for carers, young people and specific issues such as 'self-generated' material) and clear and simple access to further information and relevant services.
	Child participation	No forums or opportunities for children and young people to express their views or experiences to service providers and government bodies.	Forums established at local level, largely through efforts of civil society organisations, to enable them to discuss issues and provide feedback to service providers. owever, forums are not uniformly implemented across the country, or representative of the population, and mechanisms to ensure children's views are effectively communicated to the government do not exist or are informal.	Forums for child participation are supported by government and efforts are underway to establish or strengthen existing mechanisms and trauma-informed practices to ensure children's views are effectively communicated to the government at national, sub-national, and/or local levels.	Forums for child participation are supported by government and include participation across a diverse population of children and young people. A formal and trauma-informed mechanism is in use when engaging children through which national, sub-national and/or local government receives and responds to feedback from children and young people. The views of children and young people are given weight in policy and practices relating to child sexual exploitation and abuse (including online).
	Offender prevention and support systems	No support systems in place for offenders or those at risk of offending to prevent harm to children.	Some support systems are in place, but these are not nationwide and/or not covering all categories (i.e. convicted offenders, people with a sexual interest in children, children and young people displaying sexually harmful behaviour).	A cadre of support professionals with the appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding to provide effective treatment services is being developed and work is underway to evaluate and measure the impact of interventions to support offenders or those at risk of offending.	A robust support system is available to prevent harm to children by convicted offenders, people with a sexual interest in children and for children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours. Prevention and support systems target all forms of offending (including online).

Society and culture	Informed and ethical media reporting	Building	Enhancement	Integration	Maturity
		Media reporting on child sexual exploitation and abuse risks re-victimising and re-traumatising survivors. No regulation or guidance on standards for ethical and informed media reporting exists.	Regulation or guidance on standards for ethical and informed media reporting exists, but is not widely known or enforced.	Regulation or guidance on standards for ethical and informed media (including appropriate terminology in line with international good practice) is integrated into professional development for media personnel. Government supports, promotes and enforces regulation and guidance.	Evidence-based and sensitive media reporting enables awareness, encourages reporting, shifts harmful social norms, respects victims' and survivors' rights and dignity, and shares effective actions for prevention. Government supports, promotes and enforces regulation and guidance for ethical and informed media.

Industry	Takedown procedures and reporting	Building	Enhancement	Integration	Maturity
		No procedures are in place to enable company reporting and timely decommissioning or removal of child sexual abuse material when a company confirms its presence on its service. Internet Service Providers do not use available technical means, such as blocking or filtering to prevent access to child sexual abuse material hosted in another country but not removed at source.	Industry introduces processes and allocate resources to enable the timely identification and reporting to authorities of online child sexual abuse material.	Industry provides personnel and contractors training and support to respond effectively to incidents of child sexual exploitation and abuse online, including health and wellness programmes. Industry is mandated to report child sexual exploitation material to authorities.	Industry implements and resources procedures for the swift removal and blocking of child sexual abuse material online in line with international and regional children's rights standards. Industry personnel and contractors have requisite skills and health and wellness support to effectively deal with child sexual abuse online. Cross-industry and national and global collaboration leads to sharing of relevant expertise, practices, insights and tools. Industry is legally obliged to take proactive action with respect to conducting risk assessments, and design choices prioritising children's rights and safety.

Industry		Building	Enhancement	Integration	Maturity
	Innovative solution development	No financial and human resources are allocated to innovative solution development.	Some financial and human resources are allocated to encourage innovative technological solutions to preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse online but not widespread.	National innovation funds are in place to develop and evaluate innovative technological solutions to preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse online.	Innovative technological solutions that demonstrably enhance existing approach to preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse are consistently and effectively developed, scaled up, monitored and updated. Industry actively finances and prioritises tech solutions that are compatible with children's rights and safety online.
	Responsible business conduct	No policies or processes are in place to ensure responsible business conduct.	Some policies and processes are in place to identify and address adverse child rights impacts in the digital environment, but these efforts are not systematic nor comprehensive.	Robust child protection and safeguarding policies are in place, including a policy commitment to respect hildren's rights in the digital environment. Human rights due diligence processes are in place, including impact assessments, but these lack comprehensive integration of salient child rights issues.	Policy commitments are robustly implemented. Salient child rights issues are comprehensively embedded within human rights due diligence processes. Effective and child-friendly grievance mechanisms and remediation processes are in place. Regular transparency reporting on impacts and progress.

Research and data		Building	Enhancement	Integration	Maturity
Research and data	Research and data	No system in place to gather routine data on child sexual exploitation and abuse and no data collection plans for surveys etc.	Ad-hoc research is conducted on child sexual exploitation and abuse related issues.	Data on child sexual exploitation and abuse (including online) is collected at regular intervals and there is an effort to analyse administrative data and use it for planning purposes and monitor the effectiveness of polices and service delivery.	Nationally coordinated research and analysis produces an up-to-date and reliable view of the threats of child sexual exploitation and abuse online, vulnerability risk and responses. National policy and programmes are based on ongoing research, with measurable outcomes and regular monitoring and evaluation. Robust administrative data systems (e.g., police, courts, social services) enable government to monitor service delivery, access and effectiveness and provide regular insights for decision-makers.
	Universally agreed terminology	Terminology used is not aligned with international good practice and may cause harm to victims/survivors.	Universally agreed terminology is being discussed for use or adaptation for the country context.	National legislation, policy and media use terminology that aligns with international good practice and minimises confusion and harm to victims/survivors.	Universally agreed terminology enables information and policies to be communicated rapidly and with clarity amongst stakeholders and avoids harm to victims/survivors.

This Maturity Model is part of a series of tools and reports supporting governments and organisations to prevent and tackle child sexual exploitation and abuse. Other relevant documents can all be found at weprotect.org/model-national-response and include:

- **A Model National Response framework**
- **A self-assessment tool for the Model National Response Maturity Model**
- **A guide on how to use the Maturity Model self-assessment tool**
- **Framing the Future: reviewing the impact of the Model National Response**

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