EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ending Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
Lessons learned and promising practices in low- and middle-income countries
Executive Summary

Globally, 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 13 boys have been sexually exploited or abused before reaching the age of 18. Some recent research suggests that online interaction is now so ubiquitous that it is likely to feature in some form in almost all cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Increased internet penetration and advances in technology have allowed offenders to engage in child sexual exploitation and abuse in an unprecedented environment of secrecy and relative anonymity across the globe. While the full scope and extent of the threat of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse remains unknown, global statistics show alarming increases in reported cases to national hotlines and clearing houses in recent years.

A new sense of urgency: The COVID-19 pandemic, which brought with it increased emotional vulnerabilities, economic hardship and surges in unsupervised time online among children and adolescents is likely to have magnified vulnerabilities to child exploitation and abuse, particularly online. Widespread disruptions in child protection services across the world have left vulnerable children without access to adequate protection, further contributing to a new sense of urgency to address online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

The WeProtect Initiative. To tackle online child sexual abuse and exploitation globally, the UK government, with support from other national governments, leading technological companies, INTERPOL, UN agencies and civil society organizations, established the WeProtect initiative in 2014. The initiative developed the WeProtect Global Alliance Model National Response (MNR), which provides a comprehensive blueprint for effectively tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse at the national level (See Appendix 1).

Rationale and methodology

UNICEF has been working with its partners to address child sexual exploitation and abuse, including technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, through a comprehensive systems approach. This work intensified from 2015 through the implementation of a Global Programme to build capacity of governments, civil society and the private sector to tackle technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation. The first phase of the Global Programme, funded by the UK government, was implemented in 17 countries across 4 regions, and was expanded in its second phase starting in 2018 with support from the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children.

Over five years into the roll-out of the UNICEF Global Programme, this report takes stock of the current level of implementation of the MNR across selected countries, and identifies promising practices and lessons learned.
The report primarily relies on survey responses from 29 UNICEF country offices in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in all regions, as well as four field visits and a desk review of relevant literature and documents. Given the methods used and the breadth of the report, it does not aim to evaluate or provide a comprehensive review of the implementation of the MNR. Rather, it intends to provide a headline overview of the current situation across target countries to draw out promising practices and lessons learned to inform future policy and practice. The survey responses will also feed into a forthcoming global report by the WeProtect Global Alliance on how the MNR is supporting national efforts to end online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Key findings
Overall, significant progress has been made in terms of tackling online child sexual exploitation and abuse across many low- and middle-income countries in a relatively short period of time. Advances have particularly centred around strengthened policy and governance frameworks; improved capacity of law enforcement, the judiciary and prosecution services to handle such cases; the greater availability of hotlines and helplines for reporting, support and referral; and the increasing roll-out of education and awareness raising programmes on online and offline child sexual exploitation and abuse. Despite this, significant challenges remain across all six domains of the MNR (see Figure 2).

Domain 1: Policy and governance
The majority (69 per cent) of surveyed countries have some form of national governance structure to deal with online child sexual abuse and exploitation. Just over half (59 per cent) have a relevant national policy or strategy and most (79 per cent) have nationally representative research on child sexual exploitation and abuse, sometimes including online dimensions. Significant gaps remain in legislative frameworks in the majority (90 per cent) of countries. Despite the existence of some capabilities, there remain challenges in effective functioning of the governance mechanisms, limited systematic data collection and limited use of generated evidence to inform policy and practice, as well as constrained enforcement of legislation.

Domain 2: Criminal justice
All of the surveyed countries have law enforcement capability with an explicit remit to respond to offline and online child sexual exploitation and abuse. More than half of countries (72 per cent) that have such capability report it to lie with a unit responsible for cybercrimes, at times in collaboration with units specialized in investigating crimes against children or women. In these cases, effective collaboration between the different units appears to be a challenge and linkages with child protection and victim services remains unclear. Although judiciary and prosecution services in most countries (75 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively) have some knowledge and skills to enable positive outcomes for victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse, only one country reports comprehensive knowledge among both prosecutors and judges.
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and judiciary. Offender management processes is one of the least developed capabilities and more than half of all countries surveyed (57 per cent) have no offender management process in place. Approximately half of all respondent countries (48 per cent) have access to INTERPOL’s International Child Sexual Exploitation database.

Domain 3: Victim

To provide integrated end-to-end support to victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse, the majority of countries surveyed (69 per cent) have a case management plan, a protocol, or applicable legislation that outlines relevant procedures. However, effective implementation of plans and procedures is a critical challenge in many countries. Availability of a trained child protection workforce appears to be significantly constrained, with only one of the countries surveyed reporting to have a comprehensively trained social service workforce in sufficient numbers to meet demand. Only one country reports having in place comprehensive remedies for victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse. The vast majority of countries (93 per cent) currently offer a child helpline. Although helplines tend to be free of charge and accessible 24/7, survey findings suggest that many face human and financial resource constraints, as well as challenges to provide effective linkages to referral systems.

Domain 4: Societal

Almost 90 per cent (26 countries) of all countries surveyed have a functioning reporting hotline or reporting portal for the public to report illegal online content including child sexual abuse material. However, there are challenges to use and uptake of hotlines, for example because of limited awareness of their existence, lack of faith in the reporting system or fear of victim-blaming. More than two-thirds of all countries surveyed (72 per cent) have a national education programme to raise awareness of online and offline child sexual exploitation and approximately two-thirds of countries surveyed (64 per cent) report that children and young people are, or have been, encouraged and enabled to participate in development of child sexual exploitation and abuse-related policy and practice. The most critical challenges in this domain relate to weak offender support systems, as the majority of countries surveyed (74 per cent) do not have any specific support system for offenders, and none of the countries surveyed report having any kind of support system for people with a sexual interest in children to prevent them from harming children.

Domain 5: Industry

The majority of countries surveyed (93 per cent) have take-down procedures in place for child sexual abuse material, although these procedures are not always regulated by law or enforced. Reasons for limited enforcement relate mostly to limited technical and human resource capacity to enforce such procedures and overall limited awareness among the technology industry and law enforcement of the procedures.

Domain 6: Communication and media

Almost half of all surveyed countries (48 per cent) report strong government support for ethical, informed and balanced media reporting of child sexual exploitation and abuse including through guidance, training, regulations and monitoring; and 68 per cent of countries have discussed, or are using, universally agreed terminology relating to child sexual exploitation and abuse. There remains work to do to translate, contextualize and use the Terminology Guidelines for the protection of children from child sexual exploitation and abuse.
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Systemic challenges and the way forward
Despite significant progress in addressing technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, challenges remain across all six domains of the MNR. Underlying these shortcomings are systemic challenges, which are particularly pronounced in LMICs. These include:

- Gaps in legislative frameworks and generally limited law enforcement capacity
- Overall weak child protection systems
- Significantly understaffed social welfare workforce, lacking professional recognition
- Limited awareness of, and sense of urgency to address, online and offline child sexual exploitation and abuse among all professional cadres.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the limited, and highly volatile, capacity of social welfare and child protection systems across the world, particularly in resource-constrained contexts. Fragmented, under-resourced and understaffed systems that were already stretched before the pandemic, are struggling to cope with increased and urgent demands for support, leaving countless vulnerable children without appropriate protection.

Systemic weaknesses in LMICs are compounded by high staff turnover across many cadres, and a widespread project-based approach to tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse. Both risk leading to limited sustainability of interventions. As there is limited evidence on child sexual exploitation and abuse, in particular the online dimension, the issue continues to be de-prioritized.

Based on the findings of this report, the following overall key actions are recommended to improve systematically the prevention and response to online child sexual exploitation and abuse in LMICs:

- **Move towards a comprehensive and integrated approach to tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse:** Technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse cannot be addressed effectively in isolation by focusing on the digital dimensions alone. Effective action to tackle technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse requires consideration of underlying vulnerabilities and risk factors to child sexual exploitation and abuse. At the same time, there is a need to be cognisant that technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse has its own dynamics and, therefore, requires specific interventions to complement broader work to address child sexual exploitation and abuse and violence against children.

- **Move from project-based support to system-strengthening through statutory bodies:** Although project-based, fixed-term, interventions can deliver quick and tangible results across all domains, there is a risk that such interventions have limited long-term impact and sustainability. Instead, interventions focused on strengthening, and working through, statutory bodies or aiming to formally integrate education or training programmes into national curricula at schools, as well as in pre- and in-service training for law enforcement, judiciary and the social service workforce have considerably more potential impact in the medium to long term.

- **Invest in evidence-based policymaking and advocacy:** A systems approach that invests in building of national systems for data generation and management that provides a reliable and comprehensive evidence base on online and offline child sexual exploitation is critical to develop comprehensive and contextualized...
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政策措施和框架是有效应对儿童性虐待和剥削所必需的。

- **Strengthen multisectoral, national collaboration:** 成功应对技术促进的儿童性侵害和剥削需要不同领域和部门之间的合作，包括通信部、卫生部、教育部、司法部、社会福利部、执法单位、技术行业、社会服务工作队和社区。为了促进这一合作，需要不同利益相关者在应对技术促进的儿童性侵害和剥削时进行结构化对话，互相学习语言，创造信任，并促进相互理解。经验表明，联合国儿童基金会（UNICEF）作为拥有强大国际儿童权利专长和长期在各国国家存在背景下的可信赖合作伙伴，能够集各有关利益相关者，建立合作和信任，以采取行动。

- **Facilitate cross-border, regional and international collaboration:** 跨国、区域和国际合作是解决技术促进的儿童性侵害和剥削的重要组成部分，尤其是考虑到这一问题的跨国性质。例如，在东南亚，通过UNICEF和ECPAT的支持，东南亚国家联盟（ASEAN）已制定了一项关于保护儿童免受所有形式的网络侵害和剥削的区域宣言和行动计划。区域合作也可以支持填补知识差距，例如东亚和太平洋的一个区域多利益相关者思想库（Multi-Stakeholder Think Tank）所证明的。

- **Strengthen children’s overall digital skills, including online safety:** 在互联网上进行指导性接触是帮助儿童安全上网的关键。随着技术与儿童生活的各个方面越来越紧密地交织在一起，必须将数字安全融入现有教育计划中，以应对线下问题，如欺凌或性虐待。

- **Promote child participation and children’s agency:** 儿童在解决方案开发中对儿童网络安全挑战的参与至关重要。必须加强对儿童和青年的系统参与，以开发工具、软件或其他干预措施来增强他们的网络安全。儿童参与必须扩展到确保儿童的观点在所有影响他们的事项上得到考虑，包括行政和司法程序以及儿童保护案件管理。

关于儿童网络安全的声明表明，随着技术越来越嵌入到儿童的生活中，必须采取行动确保儿童了解数字安全的重要性，以防止被欺骗和性剥削。儿童在安全上网中的参与是关键，因为这是他们成为数字时代的积极参与者和保护者的关键。

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Figure 2: Overview of the current implementation status of the Model National Response in 29 LMICs

- National governance or oversight committee to deal with CSEA and/or online CSEA
- National policy or strategy to deal with online CSEA
- National research, analysis and monitoring of CSEA and/or online CSEA
- National legislation to address online CSEA
- Law enforcement capability with explicit remit to respond to offline/online CSEA
- Prosecutors with specialist knowledge and skills to enable positive judicial outcomes for victims
- Judiciary with specialist knowledge and skills to enable positive judicial outcomes for victims
- Offender management system
- Access to ICSE
- Case management plans to support victims of offline/online CSEA
- Social service workforce trained and available to provide support to victims of offline/online CSEA
- Remedies and reparations for victims of online/offline CSEA
- Child Helpline
- Offender support systems
- Child participation in development of CSEA-related policy and practice
- National education programme to raise awareness of offline/online CSEA
- Dedicated hotline or reporting portal
- Procedures in place to enable removal or blocking of online child sexual abuse content
- Government engagement with industry to encourage innovative solution development and CSR
- Statutory protections that allow industry to fully and effectively report online CSEA
- Government supporting ethical, informed and balanced media reporting of CSEA
- Universally agreed terminology has been debated, discussed or adopted
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References

Please see main report for full references.