



# Global Model Missing Child Framework

November 2019



**International Centre**  
FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

Model Missing Child Framework

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# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW



The purpose of our Global Missing Children's Center is to protect children around the world from going missing or being abducted by providing resources for governments, law enforcement, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and families on prevention as well as appropriate actions to take in the event a child does go missing.

Recognizing the importance of a globally coordinated and standardized approach to the registration, management, investigation, and recovery of missing children, in August 2015, we published our Model Missing Child Framework. We have updated the Framework to follow the trends and changes we have seen in the last years. This includes the support for family during and after an investigation as well as the need for continued risk assessment.

This Framework outlines a robust, multi-faceted national missing child strategy and includes legislative provisions, policies, practices, systems, mechanisms, tools, and other key initiatives. It represents a best practice and an important step in changing the way each community responds when a child goes missing.

It focuses on the child's best interests and the protection of children's rights. When implemented alongside other child protection mechanisms like the [U.N. Convention of the Rights of the Child](#) and its Optional Protocols, the *Model Missing Child Framework*:

- Augments the community's ability to protect children from violence, including sexual exploitation and trafficking.
- Helps achieve the [U.N. Sustainable Development Goal 16.2](#) on Ending the Abuse, Exploitation, Trafficking, and all Forms of Violence Against and Torture of Children.
- Contributes to the [World Health Organization's INSPIRE](#) strategy for ending violence against children, in particular the "Implementation and Enforcement of Laws" strategy and core indicators 3.1 through 3.6 (i.e., laws and policies, awareness of laws, review of legal and policy framework).

A child who is missing is vulnerable to all kinds of child protect violations and therefore missing should be included in every country's national child protection strategy.

## Country's who have applied the Framework

Albania	Guatemala
Argentina	Jamaica
Colombia	Kenya
Dominican Republic	South Korea
Ecuador	Spain
Greece	Taiwan

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



International Centre  
FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

These are the core elements of our Model Missing Child Framework. Each element is critical to launching, implementing, and sustaining a model platform to protecting children.



# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 1. DEFINITION

### National legislation with a definition of “missing child”

Establish clear definitions at the national level<sup>1</sup> to assist with internal processes related to reporting missing children and investigating such cases.

A proposed definition of a “missing child” is: **Any person under the age of 18 whose whereabouts are unknown.**

There are many different types of missing children cases and each category requires a different, yet immediate, response. As such, it is critical that countries implement national policies delineating how the different cases will be investigated. Sample categories include:

### Endangered Runaway

A child who is away from home without the permission of their parent(s) or legal guardian(s).

### Family Abduction

The taking, retention, or concealment of a child or children by a parent, other family member, custodian, or their agent, in derogation of the custody rights, including visitation rights, of another parent or family member.

### Non-Family Abduction

The coerced and unauthorized taking of a child by someone other than a family member.

### Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing

Facts are insufficient to determine the cause of a child’s disappearance.

### Abandoned or Unaccompanied Minor

A child, not accompanied by an adult legally responsible for them, including those travelling alone without custodial permission, those separated by an emergency, those in a refugee situation, and those who have been abandoned or otherwise left without any adult care.

This list is in no way exhaustive, will vary by country, and should be developed to respond to local needs and context. For example, in Latin America, due to historical incidents, many countries refer to missing children as children who disappeared during political/civil unrest in the late 1970’s. In the Caribbean and/or Asia, the primary concern may be for children who went missing as a result of natural disasters such as hurricanes or earthquakes.

<sup>1</sup> If federal/national legal systems do not allow for a federal/national definition, then legislation in each state, province, etc. should define “missing child.”

A missing child is considered missing if the child under 18 years of age is no longer in the care or control of their legal guardian and have not been removed by law. They are considered missing until returned to appropriate care and control.

[Royal Canadian Mounted Police](#)

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 2. REPORTING MECHANISM

Countries should have a mechanism in place that allows the public to easily report a child missing and provide leads on a case. The reporting mechanism should offer a safe place for children to call when in need of help, and should make educational materials/information available to the public on the issue.

This can be done through a dedicated toll-free telephone hotline and/or a simple website managed/maintained by law enforcement or by a non-governmental organization (NGO) working in conjunction with the responsible investigative agency.

### The reporting mechanism should be:

- Available nationwide 24 hours/day, 7 days/week
- Free of charge
- Accessible to both children and adults
- Staffed by properly-trained personnel

There should be no waiting period to intake a report of a missing child, and a standardized intake form should be used to record all reports of missing children. Consideration should be given to implementing policies that protect the identity of anyone calling in to report a child missing or when a child is seeking help/support.

The agency should maintain the confidentiality of the information that is reported by the public, as long as it does not put a child or the public in greater danger. However, in order to keep the best interest of the child at the forefront, the information should be shared between the NGO and responsible investigative agency.

Long-term sustainability is paramount to the success of the reporting mechanism and must be considered from inception. Whether a hotline or a website, basing the reporting mechanism on a public-private partnership model has the potential to provide greater access to current technology and other resources to support – and sustain – the reporting mechanism.

Once the reporting mechanism is up and running, it also can serve as the platform for awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of public support to the success of missing children investigations.



# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 3. INVESTIGATION

### A. Immediate Response

Time is of the essence when a child is reported missing. When a child goes missing, it may be an indication of underlying issues or problems in the child's life. Therefore, it is important that responses be well-coordinated and carried out so that each hour is used efficiently.

A study conducted in the United States found that in the 735 cases of missing child homicides analyzed, 76.2% of the children who died were murdered within the first three hours of going missing.<sup>2</sup> In this context, it is crucial that the report of a missing child be taken immediately and that **no waiting period** exists either in written policy or in practice. The intake of the report should occur immediately, and the investigation should begin without delay.

Many countries have changed their policies and laws to ensure no time delay occurs. This is true even when missing children are believed to have gone missing previously as they, too, are at high risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, along with a whole host of other crimes/harms.

It is vital that no time is wasted as the risk of harm experienced by the child while missing increases with each passing hour.

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Attorney General's Office, *Case Management for Missing Children Homicide Investigation* 7, 13, May 2006, at <http://www.atg.wa.gov/child-abduction-murder-research>. (last visited July 18, 2019)

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS

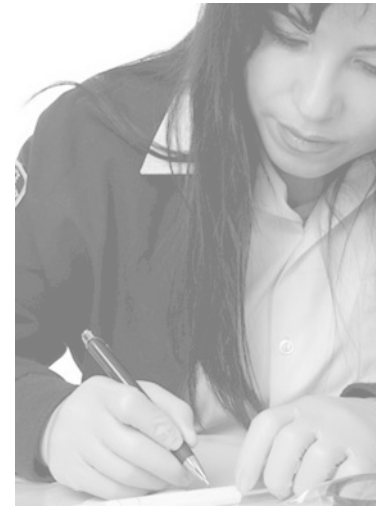


## 3. INVESTIGATION

### B. Responses and Investigative Procedures

Any agency (law enforcement or NGO) that accepts reports of missing children should have policies or standard operating procedures in place outlining their response and investigative procedures including the use of the internal case management system. These include, but are not limited to:

- Intaking a report of a missing child, including what immediate actions the individual recording the report should take;
- Interviewing suspects, family members, friends, and witnesses;
- Conducting a risk assessment;
- Developing an investigative strategy;
- Identifying the resources needed to search for the missing child;
- Determining whom to notify of the missing child (internally and externally);
- Collecting and managing forensic evidence;
- Devising special procedures for children missing abroad;
- Determining how and when to activate public appeal;
- Managing media involvement; and
- Interviewing the child after recovery to determine where the child was and what happened.



Essential personnel should be trained regularly on these responses and procedures.

When developing policies and procedures for the reporting and investigation of a missing child case, it is crucial that each response be governed by the assumption that the child is in danger until the contrary is confirmed. Law enforcement should not dismiss any reports of a missing child and should always launch an investigation immediately, no matter the child's age, race, or gender, or the circumstances of the disappearance. Consequently, it is vital that all police officers, detectives, and investigators be trained on how to handle a report of a missing child (i.e., what to look for and what questions to ask of the suspect, family, neighbors, and friends), or that specialized investigative units be readily available.

As part of the investigative response, a systematized and methodical risk assessment should be conducted. A good understanding of the seriousness and urgency of the case will enable the prioritization of resources and dictate the speed at which to respond. A thorough risk assessment is a valuable tool that should be based on personal circumstances, environmental issues, and information obtained through the initial response by law enforcement. Refer to [Risk Assessment Tool](#) published by Amber Alert Europe.



# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 3. INVESTIGATION

As each missing child investigation is unique and presents different risk factors, it is important to conduct risk assessments throughout the investigation. There are two critical risk assessments (not exclusive) that should be undertaken when investigating a missing child case, both of which are a continuous process that require reassessment when new information comes to light. The first assessment should be performed immediately upon receiving a report of a missing child to effectively determine the child's immediate level of risk. The second assessment should determine if a public appeal is appropriate and can assist in the recovery of the missing child. During both risk assessments, the best interest of the child needs to be the priority.

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 3. INVESTIGATION

### C. Support for the Family and Child

The missing child is at the center of any successful national response; however, many more people are affected by the child's disappearance. Therefore, it is important to establish a support mechanism during and after an investigation for the family of the missing child and the child once recovered.

A missing child incident can be one of the most stressful and emotional events for parents/guardians. Difficulties caused by the uncertainties of the situation, such as not knowing what has happened to the child, should not be overlooked/underestimated.

Additionally, when reporting a child missing, it may be the first time the reporting person has any contact with law enforcement and they likely will be unfamiliar with the questions asked and the general process. Consequently, it is important for any agency taking the initial report to stay calm, explain to the parent/guardian in clear steps what is going to happen and how the reporting person can help. The agency may want to assess if there is a need for a dedicated family liaison officer assigned to coordinate with the parent/guardian to help explain the investigation process as well as provide support.

A family liaison officer should have specific training on how to work with parents/guardians, support the family throughout the investigation, answer questions, and gather information that may help recover the missing child. Having a family liaison officer also can aid in the investigation as they may gain deeper insight into family dynamics and possible reasons the child may be missing. If a family liaison officer is not considered to be appropriate in a particular case, there should be a clear point of contact within law enforcement for the family.

Once a missing child is recovered, it is important to gain an understanding of not only why the child went missing but what happened while the child was missing. These questions can help law enforcement/those involved evaluate the need for special support for the child as well as reduce the possibility of the child going missing again. The child's responses also may also help determine where the child should be living and who should be the guardian.

It is important that any conversation/discussion/interview with the recovered child be conducted in a neutral environment and without judgement or prejudice. This will help officers gain the child's trust so that the child will feel more comfortable sharing information about what happened while they were missing.

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 3. INVESTIGATION

### D. Formal Agreements Between Agencies Involved in Missing Children Investigations and Child Protection Overall

Given the complexity of child protection issues, including missing children, a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach is required. Formal agreements by and between agencies can help articulate each organization's roles and responsibilities, promote collaboration, and define the jurisdiction and duties of each agency or organization to eliminate duplication of efforts and ensure a comprehensive and effective response.

These formal agreements should include government agencies, prosecutors, law enforcement, NGOs, and private sector partners that are working with children and/or advocating for children's rights.

The agreements should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis to make sure they are relevant, include new stakeholders, and describe new mechanisms for prevention, search/investigation, and recovery. It is important that they also enable information-sharing between agencies.



# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 4. REGISTRATION

### A. Comprehensive Database of Missing and Unidentified Children

Experience shows that registries are extremely helpful in the investigation of missing children cases, particularly in situations where a child travels between states/provinces or across national borders.

With increased mobility and interconnectivity around the world, it is important to be able to track these children. For that reason, it is highly advisable that countries enter missing child information into existing national crime record databases or establish a national centralized registry in which law enforcement records any child reported as missing as soon as possible so that other law enforcement officers can access the information and be on the lookout for a child entering their jurisdiction.

The national centralized registry should be accessible by all law enforcement agencies including immigration and border agencies. For example, in Europe, Schengen countries have access to the Schengen Information System (SIS), which allows members to create a preventative alert for child abductions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Schengen Visa Info, EP votes for Schengen Information System upgrade, at <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/ep-votes-for-schengen-information-system-upgrade/>. (last visited July 18, 2019)

The Federal Bureau of Investigation with the United States of America established the [National Crime Information Center \(NCIC\)](#) to record all crimes including missing persons regardless of location. It provides the following files for missing person:

*Physical or mental disabilities*

*Physical danger*

*Catastrophe*

*Involuntary*

*Under 21 and does not meet previous categories*

*Above 21 and older but does not meet previous categories*

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 4. REGISTRATION

### B. Internal Case Management System to Organize and Record Case Information

Internal case management systems are a critical aspect of any agency's (law enforcement or NGO) work on missing children cases. A good case management system must track key information such as how many cases are under investigation, who is in charge of each investigation, what investigative actions have been taken, and by which agency. Such a system can highlight repeat incidents (when a child goes missing on multiple occasions), as well as leads of the possible whereabouts of the child and can possibly identify appropriate interventions to reduce the likelihood of the child going missing again. In case of long-term missing child cases, a case management system centralizing all case information can identify any gaps or new avenues of enquiry. An extensive case management system also may have the capability to allow multi-agency access to help deconflict information.

It is paramount that agencies maintain an adequate case management system containing as much information about the case as possible to ensure coordination across all fields and minimal confusion and/or duplication of efforts. It also is particularly important that essential information related to the investigation be available to every unit, agency, and organization involved to make sure that every person working on the case has access to the same information. Ideally, an internal case management system would include:

- Case categorization based on the definition of "missing child";
- Information about the missing child, any related information on the circumstances of the disappearance, any conducted searches, possible people that may be with the child, possible addresses at which the child may be;
- Information about custodial status;
- Information on unidentified children in orphanages, shelters, daycare centers, morgues, and other relevant agencies;
- Mandatory review periods during which case information and investigations are updated;
- Biometric information, including DNA, fingerprints, and dental records, of missing children and their families for cross-reference in cases where visual identification of the child may not be possible. DNA testing is very useful in helping to solve long-term missing children cases. These types of cases are often the hardest to solve as new evidence is difficult to find and witness testimony may become less reliable as time passes;
- Media activity; and
- Details of other stakeholders involved in the case.

It is vital that all staff who have access to the case management system are trained on how to properly enter information into and retrieve information from the system.

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 5. ENTRY AND EXIT REQUIREMENTS –

### Regulations regarding cross-border travel with children

It is crucial that countries have clear and comprehensive regulations regarding cross-border travel with children.

Entry and exit procedures prevent and deter potential abductions and/or trafficking, and can be linked to civil and criminal consequences for those who attempt to circumvent the system. These procedures may include requiring documentary evidence of the relationship between the adult and child, written or notarized permission from the legal guardian authorizing travel, and dual signature and physical presence requirements at the time of application for a minor's passport (as have been adopted in Canada, Romania, and South Africa).

The legal guardian also may determine if there is a need for a court decision to restrict the child's travel to preempt the possibility of parental abduction.

Additionally, the implementation of a database containing relevant entry and exit records (ideally integrated with missing children registries or databases) can be a valuable tool for law enforcement.

Countries not already party to the Hague Convention of 25 October 1980 on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction<sup>4</sup> should consider becoming signatories to assist with preventing international (parental) child abductions and returning the child to their habitual residence if abducted by a parent.



<sup>4</sup> 1980 Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, Oct. 25, 1980 Full Text, at <https://www.hcch.net/en/instruments/conventions/full-text/?cid=24>. (last visited July 18, 2019)

Transfer of the child in or out of the country shall be made in agreement by both parents, save in case of disagreement, in which case the issue shall be taken to court.

*Albania Law Concerning the Rights of the Child of 2010, Article 10.1 The Right to Safe Return*



# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 6. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

Engaging the community is a crucial step in the process. Strategies outlined in this next section are important ways to do this and can be used separately or in conjunction with one another, depending on case specifics and available resources, and subject to applicable law.

Each of these strategies should have a structured, pre-approved plan in place that outlines applicable criteria, agency/stakeholder responsibilities, etc.



**\*\*IMPORTANT NOTE:** The full process, from ASSESS to DISTRIBUTION is a continuous dialog between investigative agencies and the public. The process should be reviewed and updated periodically throughout the investigation.

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 6. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

### A. Photo distribution system

Each agency working on missing children cases should have some means of distributing a missing child's photo and description to different stakeholders in the search to increase the chances of locating the child. Some distributions may only involve the law enforcement community while in others the public may be asked to help.

Not all missing child cases end up being publicized; however, it is far more efficient to have all necessary forms and procedures prepared to ensure a rapid response when photo distribution is needed. The following elements should be considered when deciding how and when to involve the public:

#### Consent

Consent from the child's guardian or appropriate authority should be sought before distributing information, but may be over-ridden in cases where law enforcement considers distribution to be essential to assist in locating the child.

#### Risk Assessment

There is a need to determine if the distribution of information will increase risk to the missing child;

#### Child's Safety and Privacy

The child's safety and best interest should be of primary concern when determining whether to distribute their photo and information.

#### Information provided

The public should receive information that can assist in identifying and recovering the missing child.

#### Geographical Dissemination

When distributing information, a geographical boundary for dissemination should be considered to help achieve the maximum impact.

#### Distribution Mechanism

The information should be distributed through various distribution channels – online and offline – in a manner appropriate to the specific case being investigated.

#### Closure and Removal of Information

Once the child has been found, every effort should be made to remove all distributed information to protect the child's privacy and rights. A process for receiving and evaluating information received as a result of publicity should be put in place to ensure that relevant tips are followed-up.

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 6. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

A photo distribution system should include disseminating photos and vital information through: Websites, social media, and apps; Screensavers, RSS feeds, and Java banners; Registered distribution lists via email and fax; and Corporate partners displaying information on TV screens, bulletin boards, other information screens, service vehicles, etc.


A well-established distribution system will bring widespread coverage, provide law enforcement with indispensable leads, and keep the missing child's information in front of the public until they are recovered.

Refer to our [Photo Distribution Framework](#) for specifics on how to create and implement.

### Example of a Missing Child Poster


## Missing

### NATHAN HENDRIX



1 of 1

**Missing date:** 11/04/2019  
**Location:** Missouri, KANSAS CITY, United States  
**Last seen:** unknown  
**Case type:** Endangered Missing  
**Circumstances:**  
Nathan may be in the company of a male juvenile.  
**Contact information:**  
1-800-843-5678 (1-800-THE-LOST)  
Kansas City Police Department (Missouri) 1-816-234-5530



**Birthdate:** 08/16/2004  
**Sex:** Male  
**Weight:** 145 lbs  
**Height:** 5'11" ft

**Current age:** 15  
**Eye Color:** blue  
**Hair Color:** blonde

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 6. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

### B. Rapid Emergency Child Alert System

Once the basic components for responding to a missing child case are in place, including a photo distribution system, consideration should be given to the implementation of a rapid emergency child alert system

Rapid Emergency Child Alert Systems provide a means to broadcast and disseminate information about the most serious missing children cases to the public. The most well-known Rapid Emergency Child Alert System is the U.S. AMBER Alert, a voluntary partnership between law enforcement, broadcasters, transportation agencies, and others.

The goal of any Rapid Emergency Child Alert System is to instantly galvanize an entire community to assist in the search for and safe recovery of a missing child by providing detailed information about the missing child, the suspected abductor, the suspected abductor's vehicle, etc. While each Rapid Emergency Child Alert System will have its own criteria for determining when an alert should be launched, depending on local needs and context, key criteria should include:

- The child is under 18 years old;
- There is information to indicate that the child is in imminent danger of serious harm or death;
- There is sufficient information available to enable the public to assist law enforcement with locating the child.

As with endangered missing child advisories, Rapid Emergency Child Alert Systems alone are not enough. It is paramount that a comprehensive response to a report of a missing child first be established by law enforcement and relevant partner agencies, and that the Rapid Emergency Child Alert System complements the overall missing child response.

For a more detailed understanding of rapid emergency child alert systems, please review the [Rapid Emergency Child Alert System Framework](#).

# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 7. PREVENTION & AWARENESS

### A. Awareness

Continued community engagement programs to educate the public on a variety of missing children issues and law enforcement engagement with the community are keys to success in locating a missing child quickly. It is important for the public to understand and be encouraged to report a missing child as quickly as possible and not assume the child will come home on their own, even if they have done so in the past.

In some countries, law enforcement officers give prevention presentations to local school children and may distribute child identity kits, which include a recent photo, key data about the child, fingerprints, and possibly a biological sample for DNA profiling if needed later.

Parents/guardians should be advised to maintain up-to-date information of their children, including photographs, contact information for medical and dental practitioners who hold their children's records, and government-issued documents, which can be provided to the investigative agency within the first few hours of the child go missing. There are apps that can store this information for ease of update and access if needed.

When fully implemented, engaging the community in the official response may allow law enforcement to react more effectively, thereby improving the likelihood of a swift and successful recovery. In developing such policies, it is important to consider the possible role of the private sector, as well as the capabilities of the NGO community, and the ways in which NGOs can collaborate with law enforcement (i.e., distributing photographs of missing children; educating the public on the issue). A community engagement program should be developed in conjunction with a prevention framework.



# MODEL MISSING CHILD FRAMEWORK CORE ELEMENTS



## 7. PREVENTION & AWARENESS

### B. Prevention Framework

A comprehensive prevention framework should be developed and integrated into all relevant areas and practices and be part of the community engagement approach. The creation of this framework should be guided by a clear understanding of the issue of missing children both domestically and regionally, as well as the effects the experience has on children and adults alike.

Ideally, a prevention framework should include a variety of core components including:

A public awareness campaign to promote increased awareness and inform the community of available services and resources;

- An educational and awareness campaign delivered to students and educators throughout schools at all levels;
- Training for border officers and other law enforcement on possible indicators of abduction and trafficking, including victim and perpetrator profiles; and
- Judicial mechanisms/tools such as custody orders, protection orders, and safekeeping of passports by a neutral party. These tools can help prevent and deter parental child abduction.



Public awareness campaigns (i.e., poster campaigns, reading materials, educational games) inform adults and children of potential risks through the development of targeted safety materials. It is very helpful for all parties involved, from private industry and NGOs to law enforcement agencies, to form a collaborative approach and present a consistent prevention message to the community. These materials should offer tips to parents and children on how to stay safer and avoid harm, including basic safety practices such as not opening the door for or accepting gifts from strangers without the permission of an adult, not giving out personal information on the telephone or Internet, or for a child to memorize an emergency telephone number, family name, and home address.

Parents should be encouraged to maintain up-to-date information and identification of their children, including medical and dental records (whenever possible), government-issued documents, photographs, etc. If available, fingerprint records and biological samples also may be stored through a child identity kit.

Additional tips can be tailored to address specific areas of concern such as runaways, online grooming, trafficking, parental abduction, and other issues.





## HOW TO USE THE FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this Framework is to provide a country an understanding of the various elements needed to establish a multisectoral comprehensive response when children go missing. The Framework outlines the need for local stakeholders to collaborate to ensure all resources are made available when children are missing and vulnerable.

Any country interested in building such a response should begin with defining what they consider as missing as that will determine the reporting and recording of cases as well as the steps for investigation.

The Framework and each element should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they are still effective and have the desired impact. Additional elements may be added to the Framework to adapt to new trends and changes in investigations. Protecting children never stops and the Framework should be included in every country's national child protection strategy.