

OUT OF THE SHADOWS INDEX 2026 | Minister brief

# Brief for Child Protection Ministers

Building the systems that protect every child from  
sexual violence



Researched and developed by

**ECONOMIST  
IMPACT**



**Together  
for girls**  
STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

**brave  
movement.**

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## Brief for Child Protection Ministers

Building the systems that protect every child from sexual violence

### Make bold ministerial commitments to end sexual violence against children and adolescents

Use the Out of the Shadows Index ('The Index') findings to understand how to better support children and adolescents in your country. Commit to:

- (1) **Develop a national action plan for sexual violence against children and adolescents, including online safety.**
- (2) **Collect national data on sexual violence against children and adolescents.**
- (3) **Establish a national survivor council** and ensure **child and adolescent participation** in violence and child protection policies.
- (4) **Champion legislation to criminalize online grooming** of children and adolescents for sexual purposes and **require internet service providers to report child sexual abuse material (CSAM).**
- (5) **Ensure a child helpline exists and functions 24/7.**
- (6) Work with the Minister of Justice to implement **child- and adolescent-friendly justice procedures.**

### Your commitment at the World Health Assembly (WHA) 2026

Explore the Out of the Shadows Index and use your country's scores to understand how you are doing and how you can improve your prevention of and response to sexual violence against children and adolescents. Commit to a set of concrete, funded actions at the World Health Assembly 2026.

## Sexual violence against children is a systems coordination failure

Every child has a right to grow up safe. One in five girls and one in seven boys experience sexual violence.<sup>1</sup> We all have a role to play in safeguarding childhoods.

The 2026 Out of the Shadows Index finds that in most countries, coordinated action across ministries is limited or non-existent: Costed, time-bound prevention and response plans are rare, and survivors are seldom included in shaping prevention and response efforts.

**29 of 60**

countries in the Index **have no current national action plan** on sexual violence

Index Indicator 1.2.1

**24 of 60**

countries in the Index have **no national data** on the prevalence of sexual violence against children

Index Indicator 1.5

**58 of 60**

countries in the Index have **no national survivor council** to advise on child protection & violence policies

Index Indicator 1.3.1

**6 of 60**

countries **clearly define & ban online grooming of children** with or without intention to meet

Index Indicator 4.4.1

**36 of 60**

countries have **no national action plan that addresses online safety**

Index Indicator 1.2.2

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF. "Child Protection: Violence – Sexual Violence." Data.UNICEF.org. Accessed January 27, 2026.

<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/sexual-violence>

**15 of 60**countries have **no functional  
child helpline**

Index Indicator 2.5

## Child protection ministers have a unique mandate

As a child protection minister, you are the convener. You hold the mandate to coordinate across health, justice, education, and social services. A national action plan (NAP) puts that mandate into action. Structured survivor engagement creates legitimacy.

Supporting the integration of services – like psychosocial support and legal aid – in one location, facilitates healing and justice for victims and survivors.

Championing key legislation such as the elimination of corporal punishment, banning online grooming, and holding internet service providers responsible for

reporting child sexual abuse material, ensures accountability.

## Your commitment to ending violence against children

In November 2024, over 100 countries made pledges to end violence against children (EVAC) at the first Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children in Bogotá, Colombia.

<sup>2</sup> This November 2026, at the second Conference, countries will be held accountable to those pledges.

The Out of the Shadows Index provides a step-by-step guide to improving your prevention of and response to sexual violence against children and adolescents.

<sup>2</sup> The first Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children was held in Bogotá, Colombia, in November 2024, with over 100 countries making national commitments. The second conference will be hosted by the Philippines in November 2026.

## What the 2026 Out of the Shadows Index reveals

The Out of the Shadows Index assesses 60 countries – home to 83% of the world’s children – on the laws, policies, programs, and services they should have in place to end sexual violence against children and adolescents, including building blocks of good governance. The gaps identified are systemic.

Only four countries have a national action plan for ending sexual violence against children (SVAC) that contains specific activities, costing, specific timeframes, and responsibilities for preventing and responding to SVAC.

Of these, only three include objectives for both in-person and online SVAC.

Just two countries have a national survivors council to advise on child protection and violence policies, and less than a third have collected data on the prevalence of both online and offline SVAC to guide policies and investments.

## What this looks like: A child's experience

### HOW IT IS

A child discloses an experience of sexual violence to a teacher. The school contacts police, who interview the child. The child is then taken to a hospital, where a different professional asks the same questions again.

Social services open a case file but have no access to the police report or medical records. There is no national action plan with lead ministries named. There is no budget for a case coordinator. No one has asked the child what they need.

Three agencies act, but none in coordination. The child is left to carry the burden of having to tell their story over and over again.

### HOW IT COULD BE

A child or adolescent discloses to a teacher, who activates a single, coordinated referral pathway. A trained child protection officer conducts one joint interview with police and social services present.

Trauma-informed medical and forensic examinations take place the same day. A case coordinator tracks the child's journey across services, ensuring continuity of care.

A survivor advocate ensures the child's voice is heard and respected. Every part of the system acts in concert, so no other child has to face this again.

## What the index measures: key indicators at a glance

### 1.2 National action plans (sexual violence against children, including online safety)

Does the country have a costed, time-bound plan with assigned agencies for sexual violence against children (SVAC)?

Does the country have a national action plan specific to online safety or does the national action plan address online sexual violence against children and adolescents?

In the Index, 29 countries (48%) have no current national action plan on violence against children, 36 (60%) have no online safety plan. Only four countries received full credit for their national action plan and only three of those plans cover online safety.

- **Develop or update a costed, time-bound national action plan** — including offline and online safety with dedicated

budgets, clearly assigned agency responsibilities, and measurable targets. This is achievable at every income level: Albania, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania demonstrate this is possible across contexts.

### 1.3 Survivor and child engagement

Does the country have a government-supported survivors council and formal mechanisms for child participation?

In the Index, 56 of 60 countries score 0 out of 100 on survivors councils. Only Australia and Germany have an operational council. Yet 23 countries score 100 on child engagement in policy development (related to violence and child protection). The infrastructure exists; it must be extended to children and adolescents.

- **Put survivors and young people at the center of the system they are meant to trust.** Policies designed without those they are meant to protect lack legitimacy,

miss critical design flaws, and fail to build trust.

## 2.5 Availability of a helpline

Does the country have a nationwide, toll-free, helpline accessible to all children 24 hours a day / 7 days a week?

15 countries have no functional child helpline.

- **Ensure every child can reach a trained responder around the clock.** A toll-free, 24/7 helpline with voice, messaging, and referral services may be the first — and sometimes the only — pathway a child has to disclose violence and access support.

## 4.4 Online child sexual violence laws

Has the country criminalized online grooming and child sexual abuse material (CSAM), and required internet service providers (ISPs) to report suspected CSAM?

In the Index, 22 countries (37%) have not criminalized online grooming of children for sexual purposes; 38 (63%) do not require ISPs to report suspected CSAM.

The internet is a new frontier of the same coordination challenge and legislative frameworks are not keeping pace.

- **Close the legislative gaps on online child sexual violence by criminalizing online grooming and requiring ISPs to report suspected CSAM.**

Exploitation is moving online faster than legislative frameworks are adapting.

Child protection systems must be updated to reflect today's digital realities. The Philippines is one of the only countries to clearly define and ban the grooming of children for sexual purposes.

## 4.8 Child-friendly justice

Does national legislation provide special procedures for child survivors in the criminal justice system, including allowing children to be questioned by police, the judiciary and other authorities in a child-friendly manner, and child testimony to be video-taped and presented in the courtroom as an official piece of evidence?

In the Index, 28 countries (47%) scored 0 out of 100, including 2 high-income countries. Even among the wealthiest nations assessed, child-friendly justice is not guaranteed. Without safeguards, children disengage from the justice system and impunity persists.

- **Make child-friendly justice the standard, not the exception.**

Recorded testimony, trained officers, guardian presence during interviews, and privacy protections are necessities. Without them, children are re-traumatized by the system, families disengage, conviction

rates remain low, and perpetrators face no consequence.

## Income does not determine legal protection

### Child marriage:

National governments should set and enforce a minimum marriage age of 18 without exceptions. Low-income countries average 57 out of 100 on the child marriage indicator — outperforming upper-middle-income countries at 42. Rwanda, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of Congo score 100 out of 100, while France, Russia, and the United States score 0.

Legal protection for children is a question of political will, not resources.

### Internet Service Provider (ISP) reporting:

ISPs should be required to report suspected child sexual abuse material. Eastern and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa average 56 out of 100 on ISP duty to report, with 9 countries at 100 — outperforming Europe and

Central Asia (with a score of 25), and the Americas and the Caribbean (with a score of 27). Some of the world's least-resourced countries hold technology companies to a higher standard than the wealthiest. Again demonstrating that protection for children is a question of political will, not resources.

## About the Out of the Shadows Index

The Out of the Shadows Index is the global benchmark of governments' efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children and adolescents across four pillars: Governance and Accountability, Prevention, Healing, and Justice.

The Index is researched and developed by Economist Impact, with advocacy and engagement efforts led by Together for Girls.

The 2026 Index assesses 60 countries across 6 regions, which together are home to 83% of the world's children.

## Countries assessed:

Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam

## For the full advocacy toolkit and country-specific data:

<https://outoftheshadows.global/>