

Factsheet: Governance & accountability

Is commitment enough to protect children?

Engage with your government on policies, programs, and services related to sexual violence against children and adolescents.

Researched and developed by

ECONOMIST
ENTERPRISE

 Together
for girls

brave
movement.

Table of contents

About this fact sheet	1
What governance looks like when systems work	1
What the governance & accountability pillar covers	2
How to interpret each score	4
How to use this fact sheet in your advocacy	7
How governance & accountability connects to other pillars	8
Humanizing governance	9
What it is	9
What could be	10
Where to go next	11



Researched and developed by



Using the Out of the Shadows Index scores to advocate

Governance & accountability pillar

About this fact sheet

This fact sheet is one of the Out of the Shadows Index ('the Index') advocacy tools. It explains what the Governance and Accountability pillar tracks, what the scores mean, and how to use the findings in your advocacy. It is designed for civil society organizations (CSOs), survivor advocates, youth advocates, and anyone engaging with policymakers or the government on policies, programs, and services related to sexual violence against children and adolescents.

What governance looks like when systems work

A child or adolescent who has experienced sexual violence does not have to navigate the system alone. The adults around them know what to do, because the government has made protection a real priority. There are clear laws, funded plans, and named institutions responsible for preventing sexual violence against children and responding when it happens. Services are offered in the same physical location, so a child is not sent from office to office repeating their story.

Clearly defined roles mean responsibility does not fall through the cracks. Their voice is not treated as invisible, instead survivors of childhood sexual violence are formally included in the development of policies designed to protect them. Because the government regularly measures the scale of sexual violence — including online abuse — it can see where children and adolescents are being failed and act before more harm is done.

This is what strong governance makes possible. The Out of the Shadows Index Governance and accountability pillar tracks whether countries have built the foundations to deliver it.

What the governance & accountability pillar covers

The Governance and accountability pillar assesses whether a country has put in place the political commitments, plans, budgets, and data systems needed to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children and adolescents.

Its five indicators cover key laws, policies, programs, and services that governments should have in place. Read more below to find out what each indicator tracks, and how each plays a role in governance and accountability.

Indicator	What it measures	Why it matters	Score range
1.1 National commitments	Whether the country has ratified key international instruments protecting children and adolescents from sexual violence.	Ratification signals political will and creates legal obligations that advocates can hold governments to.	0-8
1.2 National Action Plan (NAP)			
1.2.1 NAP: violence against children and adolescents	Whether the country has a funded, time-bound action plan to address sexual violence against children and adolescents, with clear responsibilities.	A plan without timelines, budgets, or responsible actors is an insufficient statement of intent which needs to be backed by an implementable measurable strategy.	0-5
1.2.2 NAP: child safety online	Whether the country has a plan to address child and adolescent safety online, including online sexual violence.	Online sexual violence requires its own plan — the risks, platforms, and responses are distinct from offline violence.	0-1

Indicator	What it measures	Why it matters	Score range
1.3 Survivor and youth engagement			
1.3.1 National survivor council	Whether the country has a government-supported council where survivors shape policy.	Lived experience offers knowledge and context that no dataset can replace. National Survivor Councils improve both policy and accountability.	0-2
1.3.2 Child engagement in policy-making	Whether formal mechanisms exist for children and adolescents to influence child protection or violence prevention policies.	Children should have a voice in the systems designed to protect them.	0-2
Budgets			
Budgetary commitment	Whether the national budget includes dedicated allocations for programs that prevent and respond to sexual violence against children and adolescents.	Policies without budgets are promises without plans — dedicated funding is the clearest sign of political will.	Non-scoring
1.4 Budgetary transparency	Whether comprehensive central government budget information is made publicly available in a timely and accessible way.	Governments are stewards of public funds. Published budgets show whether pledges are backed with the resources to implement them.	0-100
1.5 Data collection	Whether the government has collected national data on the size of the problem of sexual violence against children and adolescents, including online, within the last 10 years.	You cannot plan and budget for what you do not measure. Prevalence data is therefore the foundation of an evidence-based response.	0-2

How to interpret each score

A higher score means stronger governance foundations are in place. A lower score signals gaps in the political architecture needed to protect children and adolescents from sexual violence.

1.1 National commitments (0–8)

0	The country has not ratified any of the eight key international instruments. There is no formal international commitment to protecting children and adolescents from sexual violence.
1-3	The country has ratified some core instruments (such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child) but has not signed several important protocols or conventions, limiting its accountability framework.
4-6	The country has ratified most key instruments. Remaining gaps may include the Lanzarote Convention, the Budapest Convention, or the Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure.
7-8	The country has ratified all or nearly all key instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Optional Protocols, the Palermo Protocol, International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 182, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics, the Lanzarote Convention, and the Budapest Convention.

1.2.1 National Action Plan: violence against children and adolescents (0–5)

0	No National Action Plan addressing violence against children and adolescents exists.
1-2	A plan exists with some objectives on sexual violence against children and adolescents, but it lacks several components, such as prevention or response activities, timelines, responsible actors, or costing.
3-4	A plan exists with some objectives on sexual violence against children and adolescents, but it lacks one or two components, such as prevention or response activities, timelines, responsible actors, or costing.

5	A comprehensive plan exists with objectives specific to sexual violence against children and adolescents, clear timelines and milestones, designated responsible agencies, coverage of both prevention and response, and costed activities.
---	---

1.2.2 National Action Plan: child safety online (0–1)

0	No action plan addresses online sexual violence.
1	The National Action Plan on sexual violence against children (SVAC) includes online SVAC/online safety, or the country has a separate NAP on child online protection that covers online SVAC.

1.3.1 National survivor council (0–2)

0	No government-supported National Survivor Council exists, or no information is publicly available.
1	The government has committed to establishing a National Survivor Council.
2	A government-supported National Survivor Council exists, providing a formal channel for survivors to shape national policy.

1.3.2 Child engagement in national policy-making (0–2)

0	No formal or informal mechanisms exist for children and adolescents to influence national child protection or violence prevention policies, or information is not publicly available.
1	Informal or ad-hoc mechanisms exist, but they are not regular or well-documented; or a formal mechanism/body exists, but it is unclear whether children are engaged specifically on child protection or violence prevention issues.
2	Formal, recurring child engagement processes exist with structured opportunities for children to influence policy.

1.4 Budgetary transparency (0-100)

0-20	Scant or no budget information is publicly available in a timely manner.
21-40	Minimal budget information is publicly available in a timely manner.
41-60	Limited budget information is publicly available in a timely manner.
61-80	Substantial budget information is publicly available in a timely manner.
81-100	Extensive budget information is publicly available in a timely manner.
Note	According to the International Budget Partnership, "a score of 61 or above indicates a country is 'likely publishing enough material to support informed public debate on the budget.'"

Budgetary commitment to addressing sexual violence against children and adolescents (non-scoring)

Non-scoring	Does the national budget include dedicated allocations for both medical support services for victims and survivors of sexual violence and school-based programs to prevent gender-based violence.
-------------	---

1.5 Data collection (0–2)

0	No national study on sexual violence against children and adolescents has been conducted, sponsored, or endorsed by the government within the last 10 years, to understand the size of the problem of sexual violence against children or no information is publicly available.
1	A survey has been conducted in the last 10 years, but it covers only online or offline sexual violence against children and adolescents — not both.
2	A survey has been conducted within the last 10 years that covers both online and offline sexual violence against children and adolescents.

How to use this in your advocacy

In a meeting with government

Share the country's Governance and Accountability score and use it to anchor your 'ask'. For example: **"Your country scored [X] for having a government-supported National Survivor Council. This means there is no existing formal mechanism for the expertise of people with lived experienced of sexual violence against children to to inform child protection and/or violence prevention policymaking. We ask you to commit to establishing a National Survivor Council in [timeframe] and ensure it is fully functional by [timeframe] and we are eager to lend our expertise throughout the process."**

In a campaign or public statement

Lead with a human-centered framing: **"Right now a child facing online sexual violence in [country] cannot rely on the system to protect them in a consistent, coordinated way. There is no National Action Plan to address online sexual violence against children and adolescents, so prevention and response are left fragmented, under-prioritized, or dependent on individual actors rather than on a clear government strategy. The Out of the Shadows Index shows that healing services are falling short. We're calling on [government] to act."**

At a budget advocacy moment

Pair the Governance and Accountability score with a costed proposal: **"Investing [amount] in [specific action] would address [specific gap identified by the Index]. Here is the evidence and here is the 'ask'."**

How governance & accountability connects to other pillars

The Governance and Accountability pillar does not work in isolation. It provides the foundations on which every other pillar stands:

- **Prevention:** Does the National Action Plan include prevention strategies? Are activities clearly defined and budgeted, and are roles and responsibilities for implementation clearly assigned?
- **Healing:** Are healing services funded through dedicated budget lines? Does the National Action Plan include targets for medical care and mental health access?
- **Justice:** Has the country ratified the conventions that underpin its criminal justice obligations? Does the online safety plan connect to laws against online grooming and child sexual violence material?

Advocacy tip

If you find a gap in the Governance and Accountability pillar, check the related indicators in other pillars. A weak score for National Survivors Councils (1.3.1) may connect to weak budgetary commitment or transparency (1.4), absence of integrated victim and survivor services (3.2), or a lack of special procedures for child victims in the justice system (4.8). Building a cross-pillar 'ask' strengthens your advocacy.

Humanizing governance

This vignette spans the entire Governance and accountability pillar and allows you to humanize what good governance means for the lives of children and adolescents. Use it when you want to tell the full story of what happens when the systems fail and what it looks like when they work, in a way that does not require any personal disclosure.

WHAT IT IS

A 12-year-old tells a teacher that someone has hurt them. The teacher wants to help but has nowhere to turn — there is no protocol pinned to the staff room wall, no number to call, no step-by-step guide for what happens next.

The family takes the child to a police station, where an officer says this is a matter for social services. Social services sends them to a clinic. The clinic says they need a referral. Each office asks the child to explain what happened again. No one is in charge. No one follows up.

Weeks pass. The child stops sleeping. The family tries again — but every door they knock on leads to another door. No one can tell them what services should exist, because there is no plan. No one has set aside money to protect a child or adolescent who has experienced violence. No one with lived experience of childhood sexual violence has been asked what a response should look like through a National Survivor Council. No child has ever been invited to say what safety means to them.

The government has signed international commitments to protect children and adolescents from sexual violence. But those signatures have not reached their lives.

WHAT COULD BE

A 12-year-old tells a teacher that someone has hurt them. The teacher knows exactly what to do — a National Action Plan has led to the development of a clear referral pathway, and every school has it posted. One phone call activates a coordinated response. A social worker meets the family that same day and explains every step. The child tells their story once. A caseworker stays with them through the process.

The child does not know it, but behind that response is a system that was built to find them. The government turned its international commitments into domestic law. A funded, time-bound action plan names which ministry does what, by when, and with what budget. People with lived experience shared their expertise through a National Survivors Council, shaping how the system listens and responds. Children have formal ways to say what protection should look like.

Because the government collects regular data on sexual violence against children and adolescents — including online — it can see where children are falling through the gaps, and act before more are harmed. This child is protected by design.

Bridge to action

This is the gap the Index helps us close. Each step in this journey maps to a Governance and Accountability indicator: international commitments (1.1), specific and funded National Action Plans (1.2), survivor expertise harnessed through National Survivor Councils (1.3.1), child participation (1.3.2), budgetary commitment (non-scoring) and transparency (1.4), and data systems that make children and victims and survivors visible to the state (1.5). [Country] scores [X] across these indicators. We are asking [government/ministry] to [specific action] by [year] — so that no child or adolescent is left to navigate harm in a system that was not prepared for them.

Where to go next

This document gives you the evidence. The companion toolkit resources help you turn it into action:

Document	What it gives you
Finance advocacy	Practical guidance on turning Governance and Accountability findings into budget ‘asks’, with costing entry points and sample language.
Meeting guide	A ready-to-use meeting script, intervention format, accountability questions, and follow-up prompts for government engagements.
Email templates	Pre-drafted outreach, follow-up, and escalation emails for policymaker engagement, with customizable placeholders.