

Finance advocacy: Governance & accountability

# Are your government's commitments to children backed by a budget?

Engage with your government on financing the systems that strengthen governance and accountability for children and adolescents.

Researched and developed by

ECONOMIST  
ENTERPRISE

 Together  
for girls

brave  
movement.

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## Finance advocacy

### Governance and accountability pillar

## What this tool covers

This document helps you turn Index findings into a concrete investment case and budget 'ask'. It walks you through what governments need to budget to improve scores for different indicators, how to time your 'ask' to the right moment in the budget cycle, how to estimate a credible figure, and how to argue for the investment.

### Only 1 country

Albania, has ratified all **8 global conventions** toward ending sexual violence against children

Index indicator 1.1

### 4 countries

have **National Action Plans** with activities to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children that are costed with timelines and assigned agency leads

Index indicator 1.2.1

### Just 2 countries

Australia and Germany have fully operational government-supported **National Survivor Councils**

Index indicator 1.3.1

## How to use this tool

Start with the section that matches where you are:

- **Building your case?** Start with Why finance advocacy matters and Making the investment case.
- **Preparing for a meeting or submission?** Go to From indicators to budget lines for ready-made ‘asks’, then use Your submission paragraph to draft your written request.
- **Not sure about timing?** Check When to make budget ‘asks’ to find the right moment in the budget cycle.
- **Need a number?** Go to How to put a number on your ‘ask’ for five practical costing approaches.

Use this alongside the Fact sheet for background, the [Meeting guide](#) when presenting your ask, and the [Email templates](#) to follow up in writing.

## Why finance advocacy matters

The global average for the Governance and Accountability pillar is the lowest at 42 out of 100. No country scored above 85 out of 100 for **budget transparency** and the **global average is 52**. Finance advocacy is critical to ensure the public knows how much the government is investing in prevention and response for sexual violence against children.

Laws and policies without budgets are promises without plans. The Out of the Shadows Index Governance and Accountability pillar tracks whether governments have put the political architecture in place to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children and adolescents: international commitments, budgeted and specific national action plans, survivor and youth engagement, and collecting prevalence data.

Even when these frameworks exist, they only work if they are funded. Every law, policy, program, and service depends on transparent, sustained, dedicated financing. Too often, however, government offices struggle to allocate budget for new initiatives. This financing gap is one of the biggest barriers to progress — and your advocacy can help close it.

## Prioritize safeguarding

Review the Brave Movement's tools for [\*\*Safe advocacy\*\*](#), [\*\*Safe advocacy events\*\*](#), and [\*\*Trauma-informed meeting tips\*\*](#) to ensure you are ready and you are fully supporting any survivor advocates accompanying you on our journey.

Consult our full [\*\*Risk-assessment toolkit\*\*](#) and consider implementing recommended mitigation strategies.

## From indicators to budget lines

The Index's seven Governance and accountability indicators cover key laws, policies, programs, and services that governments should have in place to take coordinated national action to end childhood sexual violence.

Use this guide to strengthen your advocacy requests. The tables below can help you to create targeted 'asks' to decision-makers within the right Ministry (for example: Foreign Affairs, Social Welfare, or Finance), at the right moment. You do not need to address all areas at once — identify where your country received the lowest-score and start there.

| Indicator                                                              | What it tracks                                                                                                        | Budget-line-to target                                                                                                                                                         | Template language                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1.1<br/>National commitments</b>                                    | Whether the country has ratified key international instruments on child protection.                                   | Ministry of Foreign Affairs / Ministry of Justice: treaty ratification (i.e., Convention on the Rights of the Child), reporting, implementation of international obligations. | “Allocate resources for the legislative and administrative costs of ratification, domestication, and implementation of outstanding international instruments protecting children from sexual violence, including [name specific convention/protocol].”                         |
| <b>1.2.1<br/>National Action Plan (NAP): violence against children</b> | Whether the country has a funded, time-bound action plan addressing sexual violence against children and adolescents. | Lead ministry for child protection / inter-ministerial coordination: plan development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.                                            | “Allocate [amount] for the development, implementation, and annual review of a costed national action plan to address violence against children and adolescents, with specific objectives, timelines, and responsible actors for addressing sexual violence against children.” |
| <b>1.2.2<br/>NAP: child safety online</b>                              | Whether the country has a national action plan addressing online sexual violence against children and adolescents.    | Ministry responsible for digital policy / child protection: online safety strategy development, coordination with law enforcement and internet service providers (ISPs).      | “Allocate [amount] for the development and implementation of a national action plan on child online safety, with dedicated objectives on preventing and responding to online sexual violence against children.”                                                                |

| Indicator                                          | What it tracks                                                                            | Budget-line-to target                                                                                                                     | Template language                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1.3.1<br/>National survivors council</b>        | Whether a government-supported council exists where survivors shape policy.               | Lead ministry for child protection / social welfare: council establishment, operational costs, secretariat support, participant stipends. | “Ensure budget allocation for the establishment and sustained operation of a National Survivors Council, including honoraria for council members, secretariat support, training, meeting costs, and mental health support.”<br><b><u>NSC establishment guidelines pg. 10.</u></b> |
| <b>1.3.2<br/>Child engagement in policy-making</b> | Whether formal mechanisms exist for children to influence child protection policies.      | Ministry of Social Welfare / Youth: child participation mechanisms, youth advisory bodies, consultation processes.                        | “Allocate [amount] to establish and maintain formal child and adolescent participation mechanisms in national child protection policy-making, including age-appropriate consultation processes.”                                                                                  |
| <b>1.4<br/>Budgetary transparency</b>              | Whether full government budget information is available to the public in a timely manner. | Ministry of Planning.                                                                                                                     | “Demonstrate accountability and good stewardship of public funds by publishing the national budget by [date] each year.”                                                                                                                                                          |

| Indicator                                 | What it tracks                                                                                                                                                              | Budget-line-to target                                                                                                                                                                                           | Template language                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Budgetary commitment (non-scoring)</b> | Whether the national budget includes dedicated allocations for programs preventing and responding to sexual violence against children and adolescents.                      | Ministry of Finance / Health / Education: dedicated budget lines such as (1) medical support services for victims and survivors of sexual violence and (2) school-based gender-based violence (GBV) prevention. | “Establish dedicated budget lines for programs to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children, such as (1) medical support services for victims and survivors of sexual violence and (2) school-based programs to prevent gender-based violence, with [amount] allocated across both areas in the [upcoming budget].” |
| <b>1.5 Data collection</b>                | Whether the government collected national data on the size of the problem of sexual violence against children and adolescents, including online, within the last ten years. | National statistics office / Ministry of Social Welfare: national survey design, implementation, analysis, and publication (including Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys, or VACS).                    | “Allocate [amount] to fund a national prevalence survey on sexual violence against children — including online violence — within [timeframe], with findings published and used to inform the national action plan and budget allocations.”                                                                                        |

## When to make budget ‘asks’

Finance advocacy is most effective when timed to your government’s fiscal cycle. This means making ‘asks’ during key moments when governments invite input on the budget or are actively making funding decisions. The table below outlines these key moments and what to do at each stage.

| Budget cycle stage                     | What happens                                                                                                                                                   | Your action                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Pre-budget consultations</b>        | The government invites input from stakeholders on spending priorities. Often happens 3–6 months before the budget is presented to parliament for deliberation. | Submit a written brief using the budget language above. Request a meeting with the Ministry of Finance and the lead ministry for child protection. Use your <b>Meeting toolkit</b> .                       |
| <b>Budget formulation</b>              | Ministries prepare their budget proposals. This is when line items (specific types of expenditures or initiatives) are decided.                                | Work with allied parliamentarians or ministry contacts to ensure Governance and Accountability-related budget lines are included in the draft. Provide the specific costing language from the table above. |
| <b>Parliamentary review</b>            | Parliament debates and approves the budget. Committees may hold hearings.                                                                                      | Request to present at committee hearings. Coordinate with coalition partners to amplify the ‘ask’.                                                                                                         |
| <b>Budget execution and monitoring</b> | Funds are (or are not) released and spent as allocated.                                                                                                        | Track whether allocated funds are actually disbursed. Use Index data as a benchmark. If funds are not flowing, raise this in follow-up meetings and public statements.                                     |
| <b>Audit and evaluation</b>            | Government reports on spending. Audit bodies review.                                                                                                           | Request access to spending reports. Compare actual spending to commitments. Use findings in your next budget cycle advocacy.                                                                               |

## How to put a number on your ask

A costed request is harder to ignore. While you do not need to develop a perfect figure, a well-reasoned estimate with a source is always stronger than a vague ‘ask’. Here are five ways to arrive at a credible number for healing services.

- 1. Benchmark against a peer country.** Use the Index to identify a comparable country that scores higher on your target indicator. Research what it budgets for the equivalent program. Frame it as: **“If [peer country] funds its National Action Plan at [amount], [your country] should aim for comparable investment.”**
- 2. Build up from cost components.** Break your ask into building blocks a Finance Ministry would recognize. Even a rough component-based estimate signals seriousness.

| Indicator                                 | Examples of components to estimate                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1.2 National Action Plan (NAP)</b>     | Plan development consultancy; inter-ministerial coordination unit; annual monitoring cycle; stakeholder consultations.                                                          |
| <b>1.3.1 Survivors council</b>            | Secretariat staff (1–2); quarterly meetings; council member honoraria; secretariat support; travel and accommodation; safeguarding provisions, including mental health support. |
| <b>1.3.2 Child engagement</b>             | Youth advisory body operations; age-appropriate consultation design; facilitator training; child-friendly materials.                                                            |
| <b>Budgetary commitment (non-scoring)</b> | Dedicated lines for victim and survivor medical support services; school-based GBV prevention programme delivery.                                                               |
| <b>1.4 Budget transparency</b>            | The full national budget published in a timely and accessible manner.                                                                                                           |
| <b>1.5 Prevalence survey</b>              | Survey design and ethics approval; fieldwork; data analysis and reporting; dissemination workshops.                                                                             |

### 3. Use published costings and reference tools:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) [INSPIRE technical package](#) includes implementation guidance with indicative cost ranges for evidence-based strategies.
- Some countries have published costed National Action Plans — search **“costed National Action Plan violence against children/adolescents” + “[your region].”**
- For survey costs, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) / [VACS implementation](#) guide outlines the process steps, which you can use to build a component-based estimate (see Approach 2).

**4. Ask the government for a figure:** Ask the relevant ministry: **“What would it cost to implement this commitment?”** This shifts the burden of costing to the actor with access to budget data, creates a paper trail, and — if the ministry cannot answer, especially if they have made a commitment — becomes its own advocacy point: the government has not costed its own promise.

**5. Use a percentage or benchmark framing:** When exact figures are unavailable, proportional asks still give specificity: **“Allocate at least [X]% of the child protection budget to...”** or **“Match the per-capita investment of [regional leader] in collecting national data on the size of the problem of sexual violence against children.”**

## REMEMBER:

Governments use rough estimates at the early stages of budget formulation. Your role is to ensure the ‘ask’ is **specific enough to be actionable and grounded enough to be taken seriously.**

## Making the investment case

Policymakers respond to different types of arguments. You do not need to use all three — pick the one that will land best in the room, and find the data that makes it real for your context.

### WHICH ARGUMENT FOR WHICH AUDIENCE?

- **Finance ministries, treasury, budget committees, donors** → Lead with the Economic Argument
- **Parliamentarians, human rights bodies, regional mechanisms** → Lead with the Rights Argument
- **Health ministries and delegations, public health agencies** → Lead with the Public Health Argument
- **Mixed audiences** → Combine two or more, eg: “This is both a legal obligation and a smart investment.”

Below each argument we show examples of real data from different regions. Your job: find the equivalent for your country. National data is always more persuasive than global averages.

## ECONOMIC ARGUMENT

**The core message:** Violence against children is one of the most expensive problems governments are not budgeting for. Every [currency] spent on governance — action plans, data systems, coordination structures — reduces the far greater costs of fragmented, reactive responses across health, justice, welfare, and education systems.

### Examples of real data — find the equivalent for your context:

- **Global:** The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimated that the cost of violence against children could be as high as 8% of global gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>1</sup>
- **Africa:** In South Africa, violence against children costs an estimated \$15.8 billion annually — nearly 5% of GDP. Sexual violence alone accounts for \$2.1 billion.<sup>2</sup>
- **Asia-Pacific:** In the East Asia and Pacific region, violence against children costs approximately 2% of regional GDP.<sup>3</sup>
- **Official Development Assistance (ODA) gap:** In 2020, only 0.78% of global ODA went to ending violence against children — just \$0.64 per child, the lowest since 2015.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Paola Perezniето et al., [The Costs and Economic Impact of Violence against Children](#) (London: Overseas Development Institute and ChildFund Alliance, 2014).

2 Celia Hsiao et al., “[Violence against Children in South Africa: The Cost of Inaction to Society and the Economy](#),” *BMJ Global Health* 3, no. 1 (2018): e000573

3 Xiangming Fang et al., “[The Burden of Child Maltreatment in the East Asia and Pacific Region](#),” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 42 (2015): 146–162

4 World Vision International et al., [Counting Pennies 3: Assessment of Official Development Assistance to End Violence against Children](#) (2022), 5–6

## The return on governance investment

- Countries that have conducted Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS) and used the findings to develop costed National Action Plans have been able to target resources more effectively and reduce duplication across ministries. Find examples of these to use in your advocacy.
- The WHO INSPIRE framework — which underpins UN Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 — estimates that evidence-based prevention strategies deliver significant returns on investment. Governance structures (action plans, coordination, data) are what make implementation of these strategies possible at scale.

## FIND YOUR OWN DATA

- Has your country conducted a survey on violence against children? Check [VACS data dashboard](#) | [Together for Girls](#) for Violence Against Children and Youth Survey data.
- Has a national or regional costing study been done? Search for “economic cost violence against children and youth” + “[your country].”
- What does your government currently spend on child protection coordination? Compare to their crisis response spending.
- If no national data exists, that is itself a powerful advocacy point: “We cannot budget for what we do not measure.”

## RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS ARGUMENT

**The core message:** You have likely already committed to protecting children and adolescents from sexual violence and ensuring their recovery under international conventions and agreements (see below). Budgets are how those commitments become real. A ratification without a budget line is a promise without a plan.

### **Obligations your government has likely signed up to:**

- **Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) article 39:** States must promote physical and psychological recovery of child victims of exploitation or abuse. 196 countries have ratified.
- **CRC article 19:** Governments must establish effective procedures for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment, and follow-up.
- **General comment no. 13:** “Without the necessary human and financial resources, rights remain aspirational.” Budget allocation is explicitly required.
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 16.2:** End all forms of violence against children. WHO INSPIRE strategies provide the evidence-based framework.

### **Regional instruments — find the ones your country has signed:**

- **Africa:** African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) Articles 16 & 27; Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development; East African Community (EAC) Child Policy.

- **Asia-pacific:** Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children (EVAC); South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Child Welfare; South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) commitments.
- **Americas:** Belém do Pará Convention; Organization of American States (OAS) Resolution on the Rights of the Child.
- **Europe:** Lanzarote Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

## FIND YOUR OWN DATA

- When did your country ratify the CRC? What did the Committee recommend on recovery services in the most recent Periodic Report?
- Which regional instruments has your government signed? These are powerful for peer-comparison advocacy.
- Has your country made pledges at the Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children, signed resolutions at the World Health Assembly, or other international fora? Commitments without budgets are a strong accountability lever.

## PUBLIC HEALTH ARGUMENT

**The core message:** Childhood sexual violence is a driver of chronic disease, mental illness, and premature death. Strong governance — including action plans, data collection, and budgeted services — is the infrastructure that makes a public health response possible. Without coordination, the health sector cannot respond effectively.

### Examples of real data — find the equivalent for your context:

- **Global prevalence:** Approximately 1 in 5 women and 1 in 7 men report experiencing sexual violence in childhood (UNICEF)<sup>5</sup>. A 2025 analysis across 80 countries found 6.1% of children reported forced sexual intercourse, with rates higher among girls and in lower-income countries.<sup>6</sup>
- **Burden of disease:** WHO classifies child sexual abuse as one of 24 risk factors contributing to the global burden of disease. Research across multiple regions shows a graded relationship: as adverse childhood experiences increase, so does the risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, depression, substance misuse, and suicide.<sup>7</sup>
- **Long-term impact:** A Lancet Public Health meta-analysis found that individuals with 4+ adverse childhood experiences face 2–3x the risk of cancer and heart disease, and 7x the risk of interpersonal and self-directed violence.<sup>8</sup>

5 UNICEF. [FAST FACTS: Violence against children widespread, affecting millions globally](#) (2024, November 4)], [Press release].

6 Alessandro Piolanti et al. “[Global Prevalence of Sexual Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis](#)” JAMA Pediatrics 179, no. 3 (2025): 264–72

7 Derong Lin et al., “[Global, regional and national burden of childhood sexual abuse and bullying in adolescents and young adults](#)” Frontiers in Psychiatry 16 (2025): 1679479

8 Hughes, Karen, et al., “[The effect of multiple adverse childhood experiences on health: a systematic review and meta-analysis](#)” The Lancet Public Health 2, no. 8 (2017)

## Why governance is a health investment:

- Without a funded National Action Plan (indicator 1.2), the health response to childhood sexual violence is fragmented — different ministries run parallel programs with no shared targets, no referral protocols, and no accountability for coverage or quality.
- Without up-to-date data on the size of the problem of sexual violence against children (indicator 1.5), the health system cannot plan. VACS data has been used in multiple countries to influence health service delivery for victims and survivors — but only where governance structures existed to translate data into action.
- Coordinated, plan-driven responses produce better health outcomes than ad hoc service provision. The Governance pillar tracks whether the infrastructure for a public health response is in place — whether they are planned, funded, and accountable.

## FIND YOUR OWN DATA

- Has your country conducted a survey on the prevalence of violence against children? Check [VACS data dashboard | Together for Girls](#) for Violence Against Children and Youth Survey data.
- What does your DHS (Demographic and Health Survey) or Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) data say about childhood violence and health outcomes?

- Does your government have a lead ministry for coordinating the response to sexual violence against children and adolescents? If not, this is itself the advocacy point.
- If no data exists, use the Index score: “[Country] scores [X] on data collection. This tells us the government does not have the evidence base needed to plan an effective response.”

## Your budget submission paragraph

Fill in the blanks below to create a paragraph you can include in a written submission, letter, or policy brief.

The Out of the Shadows Index shows that **[country]** scores **[score]** on the Governance and Accountability pillar, which tracks a government's international commitments, national action plans, survivor and youth engagement, budgetary commitment, and collection of data on the size of the problem of sexual violence against children.

The key gap identified is **[describe the lowest-scoring indicator and what it means in practice]**. To address this, we request that the **[upcoming budget / supplementary estimates / sector plan]** include a dedicated allocation of **[amount or description]** for **[specific budget line from the table above]**.

This investment would bring **[country]** in line with **[peer country or regional average / international standard / Convention on the Rights of the Child obligations]** and demonstrate a concrete commitment to ending sexual violence against children.

## Where to go next

This budget tool helps you translate your country's scores into specific, costed funding requests your government can act on. The other toolkit components help you turn evidence into action:

| Component              | What it does                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Meeting guide</b>   | 10-minute meeting script, 2-minute intervention, accountability questions.                                                                    |
| <b>Email templates</b> | Ready-to-adapt outreach and follow-up emails.                                                                                                 |
| <b>Fact sheet</b>      | Background on what the Governance and accountability pillar tracks and how scores are calculated. It can prepare you to use this budget tool. |