

Out of the Shadows

Brief: Education ministers

Are schools equipping every child to recognize danger and seek help?

Engage with your government to strengthen school-based prevention and safeguarding against sexual violence.

Researched and developed by

ECONOMIST ENTERPRISE

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Briefing for Education Ministers

The education sector's role in ending sexual violence against children and adolescents

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 your country can protect children and adolescents from violence.
Commit to:

(1) **Mandate life-skills-based sexuality and reproductive health education** in lower secondary schools, which includes information about recognizing and seeking help for child sexual abuse.
(2) Ensure the curriculum covers **online safety** and the risks of sexual violence through digital technologies.
(3) Ensure **corporal punishment is banned in all settings,** including all schools.
(4) Mandate **background checks for** people working with children and adolescents, including school personnel.

9 of 60 countries

have life-skills-based sexuality and reproductive health education in lower secondary school that includes recognizing and seeking help for sexual violence and online safety

Index Indicator 2.1

60% of countries

do not require background checks for people working directly with children

Index indicator 2.3

17 of 60 countries

have prohibited corporal punishment in all settings

Index indicator 4.1

Education plays a powerful role in preventing sexual violence

Children spend a significant part of their lives in education settings, giving schools a unique opportunity to reach them with prevention information and support. Life-skills-based sexuality education can help children and adolescents recognize sexual violence and know how and where to seek help.

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has also changed the landscape of sexual violence against children. Education systems, therefore, have a critical role in equipping children with knowledge and skills to recognize different forms of technology-facilitated sexual violence, stay safe online, and seek help when needed.

Education Ministers are uniquely positioned to act

Education Ministers can make prevention and protection from sexual violence part of the education system. Ministers can ensure that every child is prepared to recognize sexual violence and seek help, every person working with children in schools is appropriately screened, and every school operates in an environment where violence is prohibited. The education sector should work in coordination with health and child protection sectors, linking young people to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and to safe referral pathways.

What the Out of the Shadows Index tracks: Education indicators at a glance

2.1 Education for students

Does the national curriculum include life skills-based sexuality and reproductive health education for lower-secondary students, including awareness of sexual violence against children and adolescents, online safety, and help-seeking?

21 of 60 countries scored 0 out of 100. This means that they do not have a curriculum in place, or information about this was not available. Additionally, half of countries have mandatory education that could be strengthened with the addition of content on sexual violence and online safety.

Only 9 of 60 assessed countries provide comprehensive sexuality education (Australia, Canada, India, Jamaica, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, the United Kingdom, and the United States). The Americas & the Caribbean is the region that performed best on this indicator (66.7/100), followed by South Asia (53.3).

- **Mandate comprehensive sexuality education for students.** This indicator is critical because a child or adolescent who has never been taught what sexual violence looks like may not recognize it when it happens.

Spotlight:
More than half of OOSI countries have life skills-based sexuality and reproductive health education included in the national curriculum.

In 26 out of 60 countries, there is explicit child sexual abuse instruction in the curriculum, while in only 10 (Australia, Canada, India, Jamaica, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, and the United States), there is a clear component of online safety and digital risks.

2.3: Background checks

Does the country require criminal background checks for all individuals working with children and adolescents?

In **36 out of 60 countries**, national legislation does not include provisions requiring criminal background checks for all people working with children and adolescents.

Only 10 countries (Australia, China, Colombia, Guatemala, Romania, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, United Kingdom) mandate criminal background checks for all nationals and non-nationals working with children and adolescents. Europe and Central Asia are the regions with the highest score (58.3/100).

- **Mandate background checks for all adults who work directly with children, including school personnel.** Children and adolescents interact with many adults in positions of authority or trust. Background checks are a core safeguarding measure that helps reduce the risk of known offenders gaining access to children in schools, childcare, sports, faith-based organizations, and other settings.

Spotlight:
In Australia, all educators are required by state or territory law to hold a Working with Children Check (WWCC). This check screens people who work or volunteer with children for suitability with the aim of keeping children safe.

4.1: Laws against corporal punishment

Has the country prohibited corporal punishment of children in all settings, including schools?

Only 17 of 60 assessed countries have prohibited corporal punishment in all settings, including the home. The Americas & the Caribbean is the region that performed better under this indicator (69.7/100), followed by East Asia & the Pacific and Europe & Central Asia (both 66.7).

- **Prohibit corporal punishment in all schools.** Corporal punishment normalizes violence against children and adolescents. Prohibition in all settings, including the school and the home, is a foundational legal protection.

Corporal punishment in schools is banned in most OOSI countries. *40 of 60 countries assessed in the Index prohibited corporal punishment in all education settings.*

In eight countries (Angola, Burkina Faso, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, and the United States), this type of violence is lawful in some or all schools. In 10 countries (Australia, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Jamaica, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania) there are policies or directives against the use of corporal punishment; however, the legislation does not explicitly prohibit it or contradicts the policy by explicitly authorizing corporal punishment in schools.

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: outoftheshadows.global/