

Brief: Online safety

Is your country keeping up with the growing threat of online sexual violence against children?

Engage with your government to close gaps in online child protection.

Researched and developed by
ECONOMIST ENTERPRISE
Together for girls
brave movement

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Out of the Shadows

Researched and developed by ECONOMIST ENTERPRISE

Together for girls STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

brave movement

Online safety and sexual violence against children and adolescents

Closing the gap between the speed of the threat and the speed of the response

Online child sexual violence and exploitation is outpacing the systems designed to prevent it

An estimated 300 million children are affected by technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) each year.[1] Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is being produced and distributed at unprecedented scale. Grooming is happening on platforms children use every day. Cross-border exploitation makes national responses insufficient on their own. Yet the 2026 Out of the Shadows Index (OOSI) reveals that most countries have not built the legislative, institutional, or coordination frameworks needed to protect children online.

300 million
children affected by technology-facilitated CSEA each year
Childlight, 2024

60% of countries
of countries have no national online safety plan for children
Index Indicator 1.2.2

1 of 60 countries
have a fully protective online safety legislative framework per the indicators assessed
Index Indicators 4.4.1–4.4.3

1 Childlight (2024), Into the Light Index on Global Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Hosted by the University of Edinburgh and University of New South Wales.

What is online child sexual exploitation and abuse?

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) encompasses a range of technology-facilitated harms against children and adolescents. These harms are often interconnected with one another and with sexual violence that happens in-person.

- **Child sexual abuse material (CSAM):** The production, distribution, possession, or viewing of images or videos depicting the sexual abuse of a child, including technology-facilitated or AI-generated material. Every image represents a real act of harm, and its circulation constitutes ongoing re-victimization.
- **Online grooming:** A deliberate process through which an adult uses digital platforms to build trust, emotional connection, or a sense of obligation with a child for sexual purposes. It may involve befriending, flattering, or gift-giving; gradually desensitizing the child to sexual content; encouraging secrecy; and exploiting the relationship for sexual communication, image sharing, or in-person contact. Grooming can take place over weeks or months, is designed to make the child feel complicit, and can occur on any platform a child uses — social media, messaging apps, gaming platforms, or livestreaming services.
- **Livestreamed abuse:** Real-time sexual abuse of a child, broadcast to remote viewers who may direct or pay for the abuse. It is often cross-border in nature.
- **Sexual extortion:** The use of sexual images or information to coerce, blackmail, or extort a child or adolescent, often for further images, money, or compliance.
- **Image-based sexual abuse and exploitation:** The distribution of sexual images of a child or adolescent, including images initially shared voluntarily within a trusted relationship.
- **Sexual solicitation and harassment:** Unwanted sexual communication directed at a child or adolescent through digital platforms.

Governments have proven they can act, yet the response is incomplete

The Index reveals a striking contradiction. On criminalization of CSAM, governments have acted decisively: all countries have criminalized CSAM to some extent. More than two-thirds of countries have a legal framework that clearly defines and fully bans CSAM, including technology-facilitated CSAM and possession with or without a plan to share it. Fifteen countries have CSAM legislation, but need to add specificity to ensure all children are protected and perpetrators can be held accountable. No country scored 0/100. **This shows that when political will exists, near-universal legislative coverage is achievable.** But the response to harm stops there.

On online grooming, one in three countries has no legislation at all. On internet service provider (ISP) reporting of suspected CSAM, nearly two-thirds of countries impose no requirement. Only 1 of the 60 countries assessed by the Index — the Philippines — received a full score for laws against online sexual violence against children.

What the index measures: online safety indicators at a glance

1.2.2 National action plan: child safety online

Does the country have a national action plan addressing child safety online, including online sexual violence?

36 countries (60%) have no online safety plan. Albania, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania are the only three countries that have full National Action Plans that protect children from sexual violence through specific prevention and response activities or goals, clear roles and responsibilities, and explicit costs or budget and include safety from sexual violence or exploitation online.

2.1 Education

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?

Only **10 of 60 countries** have life-skills based sexuality education that includes online safety and the risks of online sexual abuse and exploitation. More than one in three countries has no sexuality education at all, including knowledge of what abuse is and how to tell someone.

4.4.1 Online grooming

Does national legislation criminalize online child grooming for sexual purposes?

22 countries (37%) have no legislation and just six, including Pakistan and Malaysia, receive a full score for clearly defining grooming as a pattern of behavior to gain a child's trust for sexual purposes and fully ban online grooming of children with or without the intent to meet.

4.4.2 Child sexual abuse material

Does the country have legislation specific to CSAM, covering technology-facilitated CSAM and possession?

Global average score: **92.1/100. 45 of 60 countries score 100/100**.

No country scores 0. This is the strongest online indicator and proof that near-universal legislation is achievable.

4.4.3 ISP duty to report

Does national legislation require internet service providers to report suspected CSAM?

38 countries (63%) impose no requirement. In Europe & Central Asia, only France, Italy, and Turkey require ISP reporting. Eastern and Southern Africa & West and Central Africa (56.3/100 average) outperforms Europe & Central Asia (25/100) and the Americas & the Caribbean (27.3/100).

4.5 Extraterritoriality and extradition

Does the country have extraterritorial jurisdiction and extradition provisions for sexual exploitation of children?

Only 1 country (South Africa) scores 100/100. 25 countries score 0/100. Online exploitation is inherently cross-border and legal frameworks have not adapted to ensure survivors receive healing and justice and perpetrators are held accountable in this reality.

Five actions governments can take now

1. **Fully criminalize online grooming as a standalone offense.** 22 countries have no legislation. Grooming is a gateway to sexual abuse and exploitation, both online and in-person, yet it is not fully criminalized in 90% of the countries assessed. Legislation must define grooming explicitly as a pattern of behavior to gain a child or adolescent's trust for sexual purposes and apply regardless of whether the perpetrator intends to meet the child or adolescent in person.

2. **Require internet service providers to detect and report suspected CSAM.** 38 countries impose no obligation. Without mandatory reporting, platforms profit from the infrastructure through which abuse material circulates. Eastern and Southern Africa & West and Central Africa has shown this is achievable

at every income level, with 9 countries scoring 100/100.

3. **Adopt a national online safety plan with funded, assigned responsibilities.** 36 countries do not have a plan that addresses online safety. Online child protection requires the same level of multi-sector coordination as offline — across law enforcement, child protection services, education, and platform regulation — but most countries have not operationalized it.

4. **Strengthen cross-border cooperation and extraterritorial jurisdiction.** Only 1 country scored 100/100 on extraterritoriality and extradition. Online exploitation does not respect borders. Without mutual legal assistance frameworks and extraterritorial jurisdiction, perpetrators exploit jurisdictional gaps and children are left unprotected.

5. **Invest in digital literacy and online safety education for children and caregivers.** 50 countries have no mandatory life-skills or sexuality education that builds awareness of online risks. Every country in the Middle East and North Africa scores 0/100. Evidence shows that engaged, informed caregivers are the strongest protective factor for children online. Education programs must reach children before exploitation does.

Income does not determine protection

- **ISP reporting:** Eastern and Southern Africa & West and Central Africa averages 56.3/100 with 9 countries at 100/100— outperforming Europe & Central Asia (average 25/100), Americas & the Caribbean (average 27.3/100). Some of the world's least-resourced countries are holding technology companies to higher standards than the wealthiest.

- **Online grooming:** El Salvador, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and South Korea all score 100/100 on grooming legislation. Income and geography are not the barriers. Political will is.

The regulatory gap is a choice, not an inevitability

Existing CSAM legislation highlights that when governments decide to act on online child sexual exploitation, they achieve near-universal coverage. The same decisiveness is needed on grooming, platform accountability, and cross-border cooperation. Use the Out of the Shadows Index to identify where your country's online protection framework falls short and work to close the gap before another child is harmed.

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 Enterprise, 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/