

2026 Advocacy snapshot: South Africa

Overview of findings:



(global average: 52.6/100)

Point of recognition: South Africa ranks 2nd in the Eastern and Southern Africa & West and Central Africa region overall (and 1st for Prevention in the region).

Explore South Africa's full results in the 2026 Out of the Shadows Index at: outoftheshadows.global/south-africa

“A law on paper cannot protect a child, promises do not protect children — only action does. South Africa must move from words to prevention, healing, and justice, because every child deserves to be safe.”

- Sheila Makhado, Survivor leader

Calls to action

**brave
movement**

- **Establish a National Survivor Council**, to enable meaningful and sustained survivor participation, ensuring that lived experience and expertise inform policy development, implementation, and accountability.
- **Improve legal protections for children and adolescents**, by establishing the age of consent at 18 with a close-in-age exemption, criminalizing intrafamilial sexual abuse, banning sexual abuse by persons in positions of authority, and criminalizing sexual exploitation of children.
- **Produce a national action plan** that addresses sexual violence against children in-person or online, with clear responsibilities, timelines, and costs, to ensure a strategic and coordinated national effort to end sexual violence against children and adolescents.
- **Expand the text-based chat counselling service** of the nationwide child helpline to be available 24/7 and on holidays.

Governance and accountability

40.4/100 (6th in the region)

Area of progress: South Africa demonstrates a commitment to accountability through **budget transparency**, with the 2nd highest score in the Index globally. It was also one of the few countries for which researchers found **clear evidence of a budget for prevention and response services**.

Opportunity for change:

South Africa does not have a current **national action plan** on sexual violence against children or **formalized, recurring mechanisms for survivor and child engagement** in policymaking related to sexual violence or child protection.

Prevention

63.3/100 (1st in the region)

Area of progress: South Africa is one of just 10 countries globally, and the only country regionally, that requires **background checks** for all adults working directly with children.

Opportunity for change:

South Africa has a nationwide **child helpline**, but the text-based counseling service is limited to certain times and days. Providing 24/7 access to this service would provide a critical resource for children and adolescents to seek support.

Explore our digital advocacy tools to support your advocacy efforts at outoftheshadows.global/en/advocacy-tools

Healing

65/100 (2nd in the region)

Area of progress: South Africa received full points for providing accessible **legal aid** to child victims of sexual violence.

Opportunity for change:

In South Africa, **medical care** for victims and survivors exists, but geographic disparities and procedural barriers can delay timely access to care.

Justice

62.8/100 (3rd in the region)

Area of progress: South Africa is the only country in the Index to receive a 100/100 score for facilitating **cross-border prosecution** of sexual violence against children.

Opportunity for change:

South Africa has no **minimum age of marriage**, while seven other countries in the region have set the minimum age of marriage at 18 with no exceptions.

Tip: Your country made pledges at the First Global Ministerial to End Violence Against Children in 2024. Use the Index findings to show your government where more action is needed to deliver on those pledges. Explore pledges at endviolenceagainstchildrenconference.org

About the Out of the Shadows Index:

The Out of the Shadows Index is the global benchmark of national governments' efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children and adolescents. The Index is researched and developed by Economist Enterprise, with advocacy and engagement efforts led by Together for Girls. Learn more at outoftheshadows.global.