

Briefing

Out of the Shadows: Shining light on the response to child sexual abuse and exploitation

– A 60-country benchmarking index

An Economist Intelligence Unit research programme

Why is the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) interested in sexual violence against children?

Global campaigns to protect children have a long history and a dedicated corps of committed advocates. In the last decade, several important research programs have sought to understand the causes, and implications, of violence against children. To date, however, no major global studies have focused specifically on a particularly disturbing and chronically under-reported dimension of this issue: sexual violence against children.

Sexual violence against children is explicitly mentioned in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (5.2, 16.2), providing a strong impetus for stakeholders the world over to look more closely at the problem. The *Out of the Shadows Index* examines how 60 countries are responding to the threat of child sexual abuse and exploitation. It does not attempt to measure the scale of the problem in each country, nor does the index incorporate information on the prevalence of sexual violence against children. Rather, it serves as tool to illustrate how countries are responding to child sexual abuse and exploitation at the national level, highlighting areas for advancement as stakeholders seek to end all forms of violence against children by 2030.

Alongside other timely initiatives, this EIU research programme, supported by the World Childhood Foundation and Oak Foundation with additional support from the Carlson Family Foundation, seeks to highlight the scourge of sexual violence against children and to point the way to solutions for reducing, and ultimately, ending it.

How has The EIU approached this issue?

Regardless of a country's economic success or its citizens' quality of life, evidence shows that sexual violence against children is pervasive and happens around the world in homes, care institutions, schools, workplaces, in travel and tourism facilities and within communities, and that this violence is increasingly being enabled by the internet. This benchmarking index provides an international perspective on how countries are responding to child sexual abuse and exploitation that afflicts millions of children day-to-day.

EIU benchmarking models are most often used as a tool for engaging governments, the private sector and policymakers in a dialogue. These models, which often take the form of indices, support the process by highlighting gaps and identifying good practices to help stakeholders improve outcomes:

- They serve as an objective, quantifiable tool to assess performance ;
- They highlight specific strengths in a geography;
- They provide a framework to draw focus to areas for attention;
- They measure progress over time (if and when the index is repeated).

This index benchmarks the context in which sexual violence against children is happening; the legal and institutional underpinnings in place to combat sexual violence; and how stakeholders are responding across 60 countries.

Categories for the framework include:

- **Environment:** The safety and stability of a country, the social protections available to families and children, and whether norms permit open discussion of the issue.
- **Legal framework:** The degree to which a country provides legal or regulatory protections for children from sexual exploitation and abuse.
- **Government commitment and capacity:** Whether governments invest in resources to equip institutions and personnel to respond appropriately, and to collect data to understand the scope of the problem.
- **Engagement of industry, civil society and media:** The propensity for addressing risks to children at the industry and community levels, as well as providing support to victims.

What is the purpose of a benchmarking index?

The objective of this research effort is to raise global awareness of child sexual abuse and exploitation—to give policymakers, the public and influencers around the world a clearer understanding of the issue; and to identify best practices and areas for attention. To this end, the index and accompanying research considers whether stakeholders (including government, the private sector, civil society, academia and the media) are acknowledging the problem, and whether they are implementing measures in response to it. The benchmarking tool allows for comparisons across countries against a set of relevant and actionable indicators. The EIU has incorporated existing measures, but also created and researched qualitative measurements in an attempt to better quantify the scope of the issue.

What do the research outputs comprise?

- An Excel-based interactive model that provides an in-depth assessment of the national propensity for countries to address child sexual abuse and exploitation across 60 countries.
- A white paper, published by The EIU in January 2019, encompassing a global discussion of sexual violence against children including interviews with subject experts, UN system representatives, NGOs, the private sector and activists working in the field. This paper also highlights the research findings and includes a detailed methodology from the initial 40-country index released on 16 January 2019.
- A customised digital hub to display the research results, through data visualisation. The hub allows for sharing of information and resources on the topic.

How have EIU indices driven progress in the past?

The EIU has constructed a number of benchmarking indexes that have helped to raise awareness, drive a public dialogue and incentivise progress in policy areas. Examples include the Nuclear Threat Initiative's *Nuclear Security Index*, which was referenced by countries during the Nuclear Security Summit process as a way of gauging their progress towards more secure nuclear materials and facilities, and the *Microscope on Financial Inclusion*, which has supported the development of financial inclusion action plans in, for example, Brazil, China and Mexico.

Which countries are covered within the Index?

To highlight the global nature of the problem, countries have been included from across regions and income levels, and represent 85% of children around the world. They include: Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, China, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Vietnam.

When will the Index launch?

The first edition of the launch of the model, white paper and digital hub occurred on January 16, 2019. A second edition with 20 additional countries will happen on May 22, 2019.

What are some of the topline, preliminary findings?

- Child sexual abuse and exploitation are ubiquitous and pressing concerns for both wealthy and poor countries alike.
- Data to measure and understand the scale of the problem are hard to collect and are lacking globally, despite efforts worldwide to combat and catalogue online child sexual abuse.
- Girls are the primary victims, and boys are overlooked (both in legal frameworks and on data collection).
- Social norms and attitudes toward sex, sexuality and gender matter.
- Country action has been most pronounced on the legal framework, while performance varies on government commitment and capacity.
- Combatting child sexual abuse and exploitation is becoming a priority in many countries, and progress is possible even in the face of limited resources.

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