

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

INDEX 2022



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Introduction

Child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) is still a tragic reality for far too many children around the world. In Europe, about one in five children are victims of some form of sexual violence.¹ This can include touching, rape, sexual harassment, grooming, exploitation and coercion, as well as online child sexual abuse. Children's easy and increasingly early access to the internet has brought them face to face with content that ranges from the inappropriate to the downright traumatic.

Digital technology moves fast, leaving parents, schools and governments struggling to catch up with the ever-evolving dangers of the online landscape. The Covid-19 pandemic has further complicated the problem. School closures meant that children turned to the internet to learn, play and connect with others. And while this digital accessibility is certainly to be celebrated, one cannot ignore the risks it invites.

Advances in technology have facilitated the proliferation of child sexual abuse material online. At the same time, the ability for people to maintain anonymity on the internet has made it easier for perpetrators to commit crimes and remain undetected for longer. The danger comes in two main forms: either through images (video or photos), or via text content such as text messages and chats. In many cases, this is aimed at grooming children, and luring them into sexual activities both online and offline.

The internet knows no borders; regardless of where content is created, it can be reached everywhere. A global study found that over half of respondents in Europe had experienced a form of child sexual abuse online.² Most online sexual harm against children takes place in private, either via a child's own mobile phone or laptop, or through a friend's phone. The Internet Watch Foundation's 2021 annual report found that there had been a 64% increase in reports of confirmed child sexual abuse compared to the previous year.³

¹ <https://human-rights-channel.coe.int/stop-child-sexual-abuse-in-sport-en.html>

² <https://www.weprotect.org/economist-impact-global-survey/>

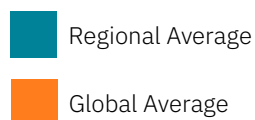
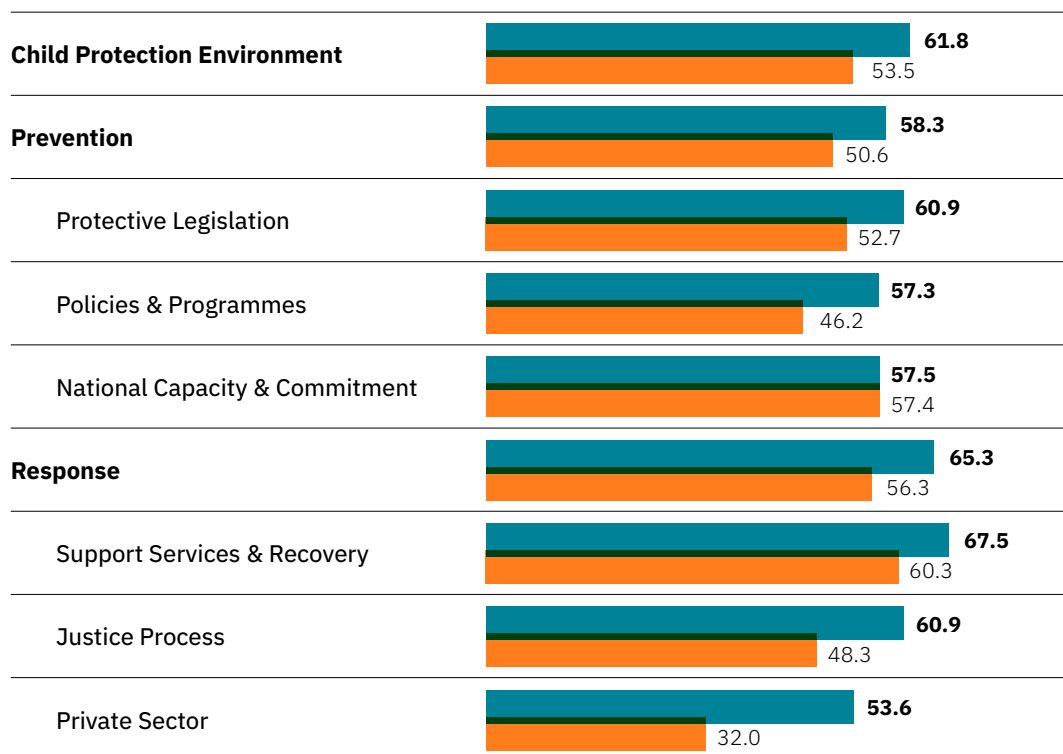
³ <https://annualreport2021.iwf.org.uk/>

Report after report has laid out the devastating and life-long consequences of CSEA. And yet, to effectively eliminate the problem, measures to combat CSEA cannot be voluntary, benevolent acts. They need to be integrated in law and policy, and with the support of non-governmental stakeholders, in a region-wide approach via a holistic framework. And this is where the importance of data comes in. Any framework that encompasses prevention as well as response to CSEA needs to be built on solid data and evidence.

The *Out of the Shadows Index* (OOSI) benchmarks how 60 countries (home to approximately 85% of the global population of children) are preventing and responding to CSEA in an attempt to develop a global assessment of how countries are addressing the issue. The index does not measure the scale of CSEA in countries, but instead focuses on how stakeholders are approaching the problem.

The availability of reliable data is the most crucial first step on the road to eliminating CSEA. At the EU level, OOSI has shown that there have been improvements in this area, with an increase in the collection of data on reported cases. There are also now more laws in the region that explicitly prevent adults from engaging in sexual activity with a minor. But more work is still needed. The hope is that an EU framework to combat CSEA can contribute to the creation of a global framework, getting us even closer to eliminating the sexual abuse and exploitation of children everywhere.

Europe & Central Asia at a glance



Executive Summary

Europe and Central Asia is a leading region in the prevention of and response to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), consistently scoring above the global *Out of the Shadows Index* (OOSI) average across categories. Regional performance across categories is primarily driven by the high performance of Western Europe and Turkey across three **key regional strengths**:

- The European and Central Asian countries assessed in the OOSI have a very high level of alignment with international standards.
- Programmes to prevent CSEA are characterised by a strong sensitivity to the broader social environment and tackle a wide range of risk factors.
- Support services for victim-survivors of CSEA are provided on a long-term basis, with follow-up medical care and mental health support available across the vast majority of countries.

Yet, European and Central Asian countries still have gaps that need to be closed.

- Increasing the specificity of protective legislation, in particular in the online sphere, is urgent. Regionally, very few countries have legislation specific to combatting online CSEA.
- Broadening education programmes to wider communities is critical to developing a successful regional prevention system, as countries lack education provision for parents and other adults.
- The European and Central Asian justice process remains unfriendly to the child, with the training of key service providers within the justice process consistently neglected.

An illustration on the left side of the page shows a person with dark hair, wearing a blue shirt and light blue pants, sitting on a large orange bird. The person is holding a paintbrush and appears to be painting the bird. The bird is a large, stylized orange shape with a small black eye and a pink beak. The background is a light blue sky with a large orange shape on the left. The entire illustration is set against a white background that is split diagonally from the bottom left to the top right.

The Out of the Shadows Index

The *Out of the Shadows Index* (OOSI) benchmarks how 60 countries (home to approximately 85% of the global population of children) are preventing and responding to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). It is the first attempt to develop a global assessment of how countries are addressing the issue. The index does not measure the scale of CSEA in countries, but instead focuses on how stakeholders are approaching the problem at the national level, as governments seek to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The question “what does a holistic, country-level approach to combating CSEA look like?” sits at the core of the OOSI framework (see [Figure 1](#)).

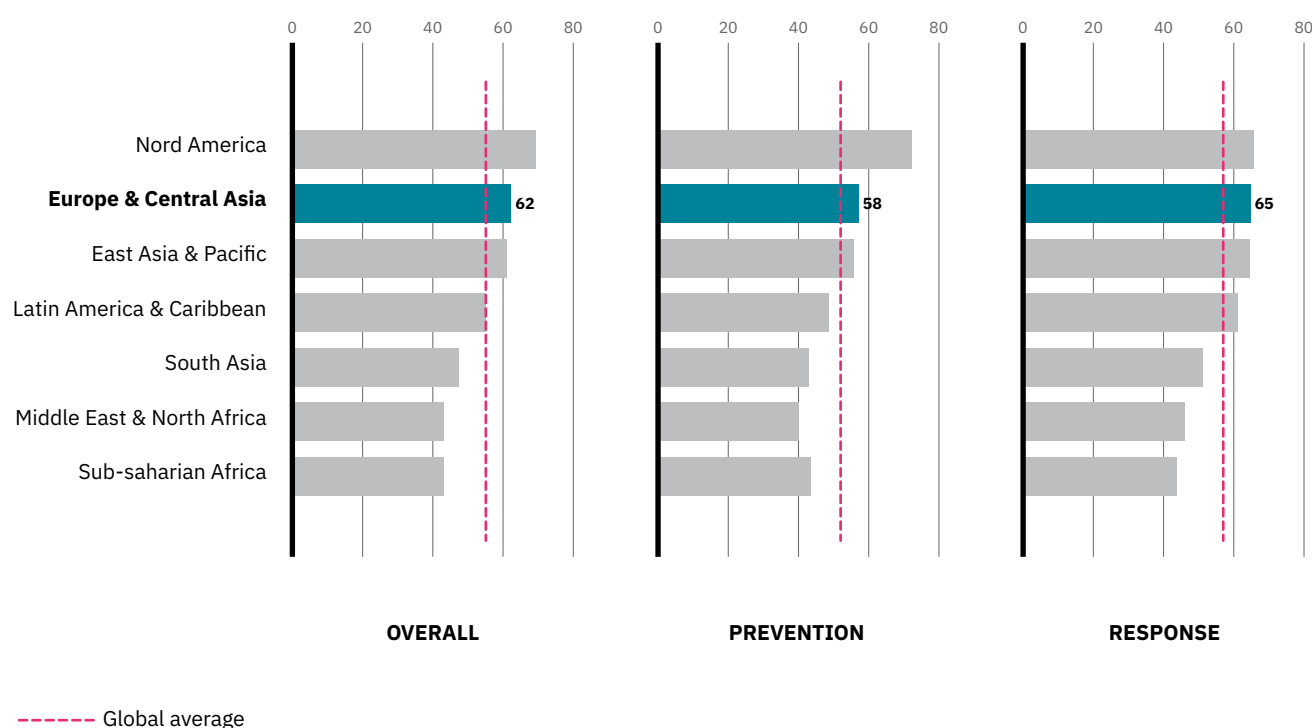
Figure 1: A holistic approach to combating CSEA

Regional overview

The *Out of the Shadows Index* covers 60 countries, selected based on a recognition that CSEA are universal problems that affect every country, regardless of wealth. In Europe and Central Asia 12 countries were assessed: Albania, France, Germany, Italy, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

Overall, Europe and Central Asia is a leading region in the prevention and response of child sexual abuse, consistently scoring above the global OOSI average across categories (see [Figure 2](#)).

Figure 2: Overall, Prevention and Response scores, by region



This high regional score across categories is primarily driven by the high performance of Western Europe and Turkey (see [Figure 3](#)).

Figure 3: Overall country scores in Europe and Central Asia



The proliferation of regional organisations across Europe and Central Asia has complemented and strengthened existing national initiatives. The European Union (EU), of which five assessed countries are member states,⁴ has played a significant part in setting out minimum legislative standards regarding the prevention and response to CSEA. It has also assisted and encouraged governments to develop national and local responses to child sexual exploitation.⁵

⁴ France, Germany, Italy, Romania and Sweden.

⁵ Save the Children, Child Sexual Exploitation: An Action Plan for Europe, 2001, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/2403.pdf/>

The EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse (2020-2025) aims to put in place a strong legal framework and facilitate a coordinated approach to protect and support children.⁶ The EU also ensures the implementation of the Directive 2011/93 on combating sexual abuse and exploitation of children across member states.⁷

In parallel, the Council of Europe, of which nine assessed countries are member states,⁸ developed the Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (also known as the Lanzarote Convention) to criminalise certain forms of sexual abuse against children.

CALL OUT BOX: Then and now, a work in progress

Although the first and second iterations of the *Out of the Shadows Index* are not directly comparable, it is possible to highlight where prevention of and response to CSEA gained momentum over the past three years and where progress has slowed.

Overall, countries' **median scores have risen** between the first and second iterations of the index in Europe and Central Asia (from 57.9/100 in 2019 to 63.3/100 in 2022), but the **gap between the highest performing country and the lowest performing country has widened significantly**. This gap in performance is particularly evident in the Support Services & Recovery category where the score spread between the highest performer (Sweden) and the lowest (Uzbekistan) is 75.

⁶ European Commission, EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse, 2020, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-07/20200724_com-2020-607-commission-communication_en.pdf

⁷ Directive 2011/93/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, 2011, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TEXT/?qid=1574272335934&uri=CELEX:32011L0093>

⁸ Albania, France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

The changes in the OOSI framework and findings are a result of attempts to provide a more holistic understanding of how countries are addressing CSEA and to hold governments to a higher standard. Specifically, the second iteration has integrated a more nuanced assessment of prevention, especially around the comprehensiveness of protective legislation and the provision of education to prevent CSEA.⁹ These additions have spotlighted **clear gaps in countries' prevention systems** and the need to focus efforts on a holistic approach that targets both response and prevention.

There are a few indicators that are directly comparable between the first and second iterations of the index. Below, we explore how some of those indicators have shifted since 2019:

- In the region, **the number of countries collecting prevalence data on child sexual exploitation and abuse** has decreased since the 2019 OOSI. Albania has not collected data on the prevalence of CSEA in the past three years and seven out of 12 countries in the region still have not undertaken any prevalence data collection efforts. However, **the number of countries collecting data on reported cases has increased**, with Albania joining the other 10 countries in the region in collection of such data.
- The number of countries that have **laws preventing adults from engaging in sexual activity—specifically penetration—with a minor has increased**. While in 2019, most countries except France had relevant legislation, now, in 2022, all 12 countries assessed in the region have laws that prohibit sexual penetration between adults and minors both for girls and boys.
- In the second iteration of the index, also assessed was the availability of sub-national programmes to support people troubled by their sexual thoughts about minors in addition to national programmes. This adjustment added one more country— France—to the three European countries that already received credit in 2021 (i.e. Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom). However, there has been **very little momentum to continue building support systems for potential offenders of all ages** and recent programmes are predominantly still only available at the local level across European countries.

⁹ CDC, Prevention Technical Package, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv-prevention-technical-package.pdf>

- In 2019, a majority of countries in the region had a national strategy or action plan in place that specifically addressed child sexual exploitation and/or abuse. **Many countries' programmes have expired** since the first iteration of the research and, although there are indications that some countries—including Sweden—are in the process of developing new action plans/strategies, there has been a **46% decrease in the number of countries** receiving credit on this indicator: only five countries in Europe and Central Asia still have a national strategy or action plan in place.

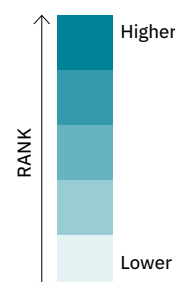


Regional strengths

Leading countries in Europe and Central Asia have a high level of alignment with international and regional conventions, strong policies and programmes promoting safe environments for children and a responsive justice process (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1: Top 5 overall performers' rankings across categories

	Prevention			Response	
Country	Protective Legislation	Policies & Programmes	National Capacity & Commitment	Support Services & Recovery	Justice Process
United Kingdom	5	2	20	= 8	1
France	15	3	= 4	= 8	3
Sweden	16	4	23	2	8
Turkey	17	11	34	= 4	6
Germany	14	8	13	26	= 9



→ Comprehensive legal framework aligned with international standards

International standards are created to lay out a minimum level of protection for those it seeks to safeguard from discrimination or harm. The alignment of national law with international standards demonstrates a country's commitment to support the fight against CSEA. In practice, this is done by enacting a shared framework protective of children's rights while aiding the effective prosecution of crimes through clearly enumerated definitions and standards.¹⁰ The European and Central Asian countries assessed in the OOSI have a very high level of alignment with

¹⁰ Ligiero, D., Hart, C., Fulu, E., Thomas, A., & Radford, L. What works to prevent sexual violence against children: Executive Summary, 2019, <http://clok.uclan.ac.uk/31565/1/Lorraine%20Radford%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

international standards: all countries have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children and the Palermo Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons. Additionally, definitions of CSEA are aligned across the continent: two thirds of the countries in the region define CSAM in accordance with the Lanzarote Convention,¹¹ and all countries criminalise sexual activity involving penetration, as well as the use of force and coercion involving a minor.

→ **Holistic policies and programmes sensitive to the broader social environment**

European and Central Asian countries' programmes to prevent CSEA are characterised by a strong sensitivity to the broader social environment and tackle a broad set of risk factors. All assessed countries have strategies in place to ensure access and improve quality of pre-primary education; 60% of countries having poverty elimination plans; and the vast majority (83%) of assessed countries in the region have drafted gender inclusion plans to empower women and girls economically.

→ **Accessible long-term support services for recovery**

All countries assessed in the region, except Uzbekistan, have set up hotlines to report concerns about CSEA with mobile and online reporting options, as well as crisis centres to provide free examinations, testing and treatment following sexual assault. Support services for victim-survivors of CSEA are provided on a long-term basis to ensure successful recovery, with follow-up medical care and long-term mental health support available across all countries in the region except Uzbekistan.

¹¹ The international standard used in this assessment is the definition of 'child pornography' provided by the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse ("the Lanzarote Convention") Article 20 (2). Although this is a regional convention, at least one non-European country has acceded to it to date. Furthermore, the relative recentness of the Convention informed our decision to use this as a benchmark.

Regional areas for focus

European and Central Asian countries still have gaps that need to be closed. Legislative frameworks to prevent and respond to CSEA must be tailored to the new realities imposed by today's digital landscape; education programmes must be broadened; and key actors in the justice process outside of law enforcement must receive training on how to address CSEA cases.

– **Increasing the specificity of protective legislation**

Despite efforts by multilateral actors in the region—such as the 2022 European Commission proposed law to force digital companies to find, report and remove online CSAM circulating on their platforms¹²—very few countries in the region have legislation specific to combatting online CSEA. Nearly half of the assessed countries in Europe and Central Asia have no legislation specific to online grooming, and even fewer (33%) have legislation criminalising online grooming regardless of the intent to meet the child.

– **Broadening education programmes to wider communities**

CSEA prevention education for children is almost universal in the region: all countries except Italy provide education in schools at either national or subnational level. There is, however, a huge gap in education provision for parents and other adults who have contact with children. Just over half of the countries assessed provide training for parents and only France, Germany and the UK provide training for employees in youth-serving organisations. And, although all countries provide training for school personnel, this training is at the subnational level.

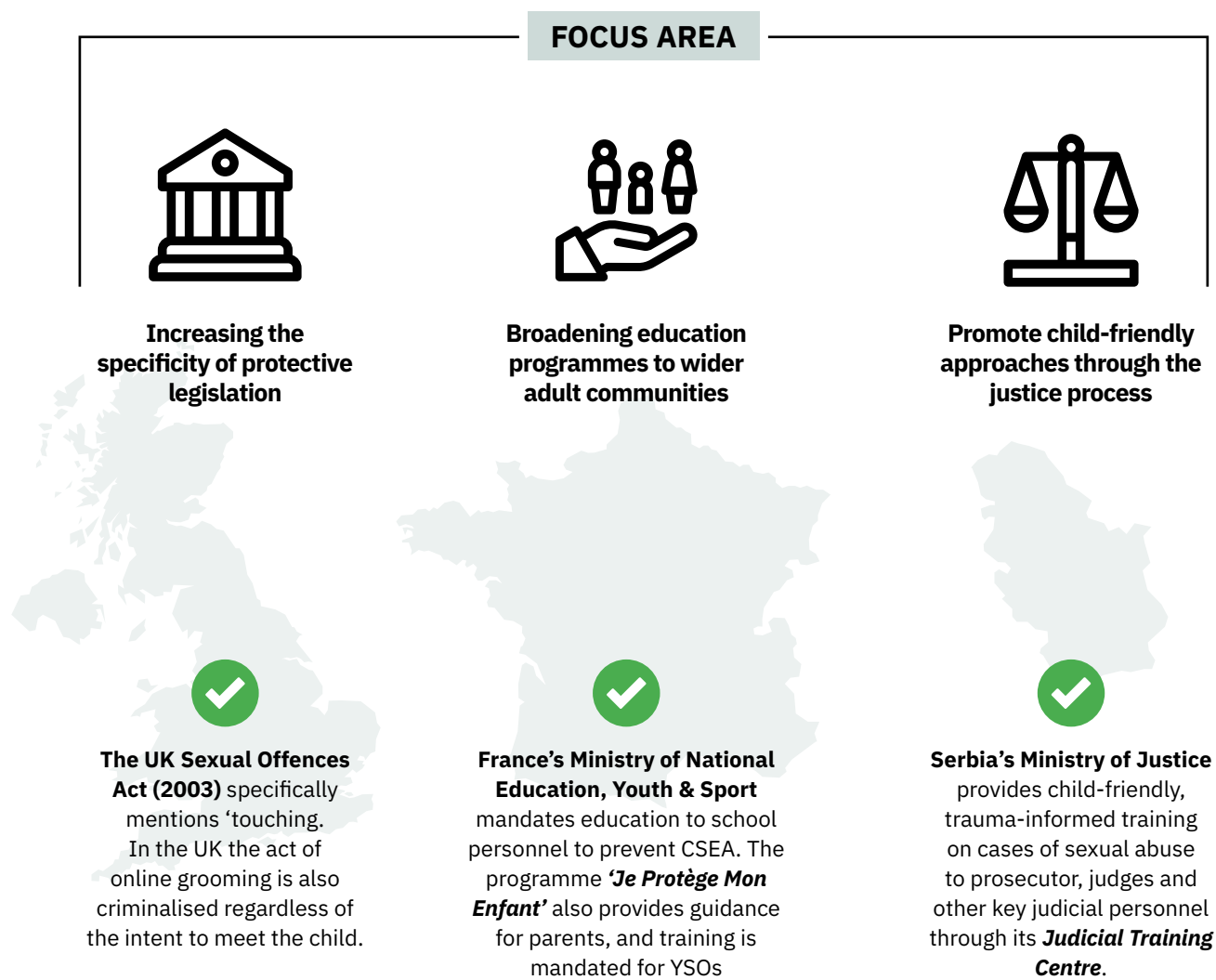
– **Building confidence in the justice process through child-sensitive training**

Regionally, governmental efforts are predominantly focused on specialising law enforcement: 67% of countries have CSEA-dedicated

¹² POLITICO, Commission unveils law to fight child sexual abuse online amid swelling privacy fears, 2022, www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-propose-law-fight-child-sexual-abuse-online/

law enforcement units and 83% of countries facilitate training on child-friendly procedures for law enforcement personnel. The training of other key service providers within the justice process is neglected. Only half of countries require that prosecutors, judges and other key personnel receive child friendly training, and of those, only Albania, Italy, Serbia and the UK ensure that this training is trauma-informed.

Figure 4: Areas of focus: How countries did it



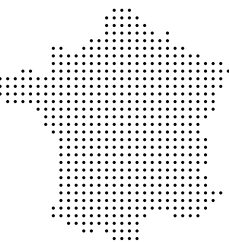
Country comparisons

The UK, France and Sweden top the second iteration of the *Out of the Shadows Index*, and are leading the way across Europe (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2: Top performers overall and in prevention and response across the region		
Overall	Prevention	Response
United Kingdom	France	Sweden
France	United Kingdom	United Kingdom
Sweden	Sweden	Turkey
Turkey	Germany	France
Germany	Albania	Germany



The **UK**’s top five performance across three out of five categories (see [Table 1](#))— Protective Legislation, Policies & programmes, and Justice Process—drives its first place ranking overall and provides a concrete example of a holistic response to CSEA. Of particular note are the UK’s support services for offenders, where it is one of just three countries to offer prevention services for potential perpetrators and rehabilitative services for adult offenders along with programmes to treat youth that show signs of problematic sexual behaviour.



France’s strong performance stems from its comprehensive prevention education. It is one of just 10 countries that has guidance for youth-serving organisations on how to prevent cases of child sexual abuse. It is also one of six countries that has some availability of programmes to support potential offenders before they commit an act of CSEA, as

well as monitoring and evaluation of the justice system's response to CSEA cases. These innovative programmes consolidate France's top five ranking across three out of five categories. It lags behind in Protective Legislation and Support Services & Recovery.



Sweden's integrated and innovative prevention system drives Sweden's third place performance. It is one of the only countries in the region, and globally, which has integrated CSEA as part of its broader crime prevention strategies. Alongside the UK, it is one of just three countries that offers prevention services for potential perpetrators and rehabilitative services for adult offenders and programmes to treat youth that show signs of problematic sexual behaviour. Gaps still remain however, especially around Protective Legislation and the responsiveness of its Justice Process. Sweden also underperforms in National Capacity & Commitment, but it is expected to release a new national action plan to end CSEA before the end of 2022.

CALL OUT BOX

While governments' engagement with civil society organisations in agenda-setting and policy-drafting is strong across the region, decision-makers are not engaging with those directly affected by CSEA, particularly victim-survivors.

Across the region, a vast majority of governments (75%) are engaging with civil society organisations. This collaboration can take the shape of ad-hoc consultations for policy drafting – such as Albania leading consultations with CSOs during the drafting of the National Agenda on Children's Rights (2021-2026)¹³ – or to ensure implementation of a national child protection policy. For example, Romania includes CSOs in the implementation of concrete

¹³ Albania's National Agenda on Children's Right (2021-2026), https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/4396/file/NARC%202021-2026_ENG.pdf

activities outlined in their National Strategy for Preventing and Combatting Sexual Violence (SYNERGY 2021-2030).¹⁴ There are also more formalised forms of collaboration: in France, the Independent Commission on Incest and Sexual Violence Against Children has CSOs as permanent members.¹⁵

Yet, governmental involvement with adolescents and children in the agenda-setting and drafting of CSEA policy remains incredibly low. Albania is the only country in the region with an active strategic plan to prevent CSEA that includes child participation.

Some national governments are developing innovative solutions to fill the gap between frontline workers, survivors and decision-makers. Germany's National Council against Sexual Violence Committed against Children and Adolescents, launched in December 2019, is a consultative forum for long-term and interdisciplinary dialogue between frontline workers and decision makers, which encompasses civil society, politicians, medical and welfare practitioners and survivors.¹⁶

¹⁴ Government of Romania, National Strategy for preventing and combatting sexual violence "SYNERGY" 2021-2030, <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/243339>

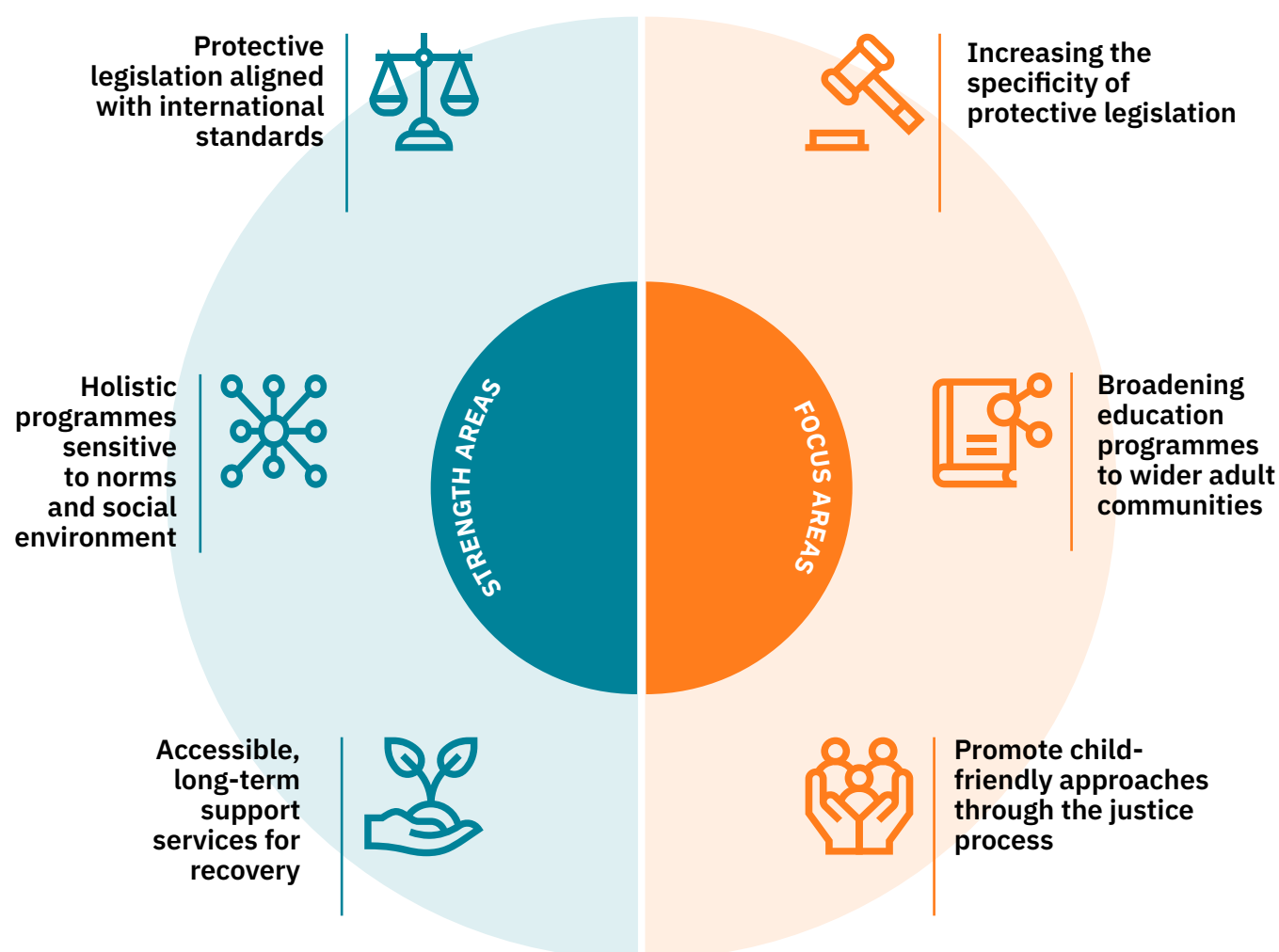
¹⁵ France's Independent Commission on Incest and Sexual Violence Against Children, 2022, <https://europe-cities.com/2022/06/14/a-meeting-of-the-independent-commission-on-incest-and-sexual-violence-against-children/>

¹⁶ Germany's National Council against Sexual Violence Committed against Children and Adolescents: <https://beauftragte-missbrauch.de/en/ueber-uns/national-council>

Conclusion: key areas of strength and focus for Europe & Central Asia

The OOSI framework is designed to identify the best possible holistic approach to address CSEA. [Figure 5](#) reiterates where the region is forging ahead and where it is falling behind.

Figure 5



Europe and Central Asia is a leading region in the prevention of and response to CSEA thanks to its comprehensive legal framework aligned with international standards, the region's policies and programmes which are sensitive to the broader social environment, and national governments' capacity to provide long-term support services to ensure victim/survivors' recovery.

Despite these strengths, many crucial gaps remain Regionally, few countries have legislation that specifically addresses online CSEA. Education programmes need to be widened to include not only schools and law enforcement officers, but parents and other adults. And crucially, the justice process must include more training for key service providers and must at all times, keep the welfare of the child, at the centre of the process.

CSEA can be solved. Leading regions, such as Europe and Central Asia, need to draw on regional learnings to create a holistic prevention and response system that supports existing efforts to eliminate sexual violence against children and adolescents.

Governments across the region are already pioneering approaches and paving the way for these gaps to be filled. For example,

- **To increase the specificity of protective legislation**, the United Kingdom's Sexual Offences Act (2003) specifically mentions 'touching', and in the UK, the act of online grooming is also criminalised regardless of the intent to meet the child.
- France is successfully **broadening education programmes to prevent CSEA to wider adult communities** through its national programme 'Je Protège Mon Enfant' which provides guidance for parents, and the Ministry of National Education, Youth & Sport mandates training for YSOs and school personnel across the country.
- To **promote child-friendly approaches throughout the justice process**, Serbia's Ministry of Justice provides child-friendly, trauma-informed training on cases of sexual abuse to prosecutor, judges and other key judicial personnel through its Judicial Training Centre.

