

Alabama

Estimates of the scale and scope of child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) in the United States (U.S.) are deeply concerning. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least one-in-four girls and one-in-20 boys will experience sexual abuse during childhood.¹ Beyond the human toll, the financial impacts of CSAE are also substantial: the total economic burden of child sexual abuse in the U.S. was estimated to exceed \$9 billion in 2015, including costs related to health care, child welfare services and lost productivity.²

Yet progress is possible. Evidence-based interventions can prevent sexual violence and reduce harm to survivors and their families when it does occur.^{3,4,5} The United States Out of the Shadows Index (the index)—developed by Economist Impact with support from World Childhood Foundation USA—was created to spotlight state action, and inaction, to tackle CSAE. Drawing on more than 170 metrics, the index assesses how effectively states are adopting essential prevention and response measures and where urgent improvements are still needed.

Score	Rank
41.7/100	43/51

Demographics	
Population (m)	5.0
Median household income (\$)	62,212
Poverty rate (% below poverty level)	15.6
Educational attainment, bachelor's degree or higher (%)	28.2
Investment in education per pupil (\$)	11,819

Overview

Alabama has made important strides in addressing sexual violence against children, yet significant gaps remain—especially in bolstering prevention efforts and ensuring all survivors can access trauma-informed, child-centered response systems.

State spotlights

- In 2025, the Alabama Legislature enacted a law requiring each local board of education to provide, before eighth grade, a course on the risks of social media and safe online practices, including how to identify predatory behavior and human trafficking online.⁶
- In 2024, the Alabama Legislature enacted legislation to strengthen the state's capacity to investigate and prosecute offenses involving artificially generated child sexual abuse material.⁷

Priority areas for future focus

Strengthen the legal framework against sexual violence by:

- Raising the minimum legal age of marriage to 18 without exceptions; and
- Adopting a clear statutory definition of sexual consent.

Boost prevention capacity through

- the development of a statewide CSAE prevention plan or strategy, encompassing both in-person and online abuse and exploitation. Actions should include:
- Requiring schools and other youth-serving organizations to adopt clear policies outlining standards and expectations for pre-service screening, interactions with youth, and responses to misconduct; and
 - Mandating regular training on child sexual abuse for employees of youth-serving organizations outside the school setting, to equip them with the skills to recognize and respond to abuse.⁸

Ensure children have access to services of the highest standards by:

- Designating children's advocacy centers (CACs)⁹ and the multidisciplinary team model, by law, as the preferred response to allegations of CSAE; and
- Ensuring adequate funding for CACs to meet service standards and demand.

Support survivors' access to justice and compensation by:

- Eliminating both the criminal statute of limitations and the civil statute of limitations for all CSAE crimes;¹⁰ and
- Reforming the state's eligibility requirements for Crime Victim Compensation to ensure children and survivors of sexual crimes are not excluded or penalized due to age, reporting delays or other barriers.¹¹

Promote a trauma-informed response by:

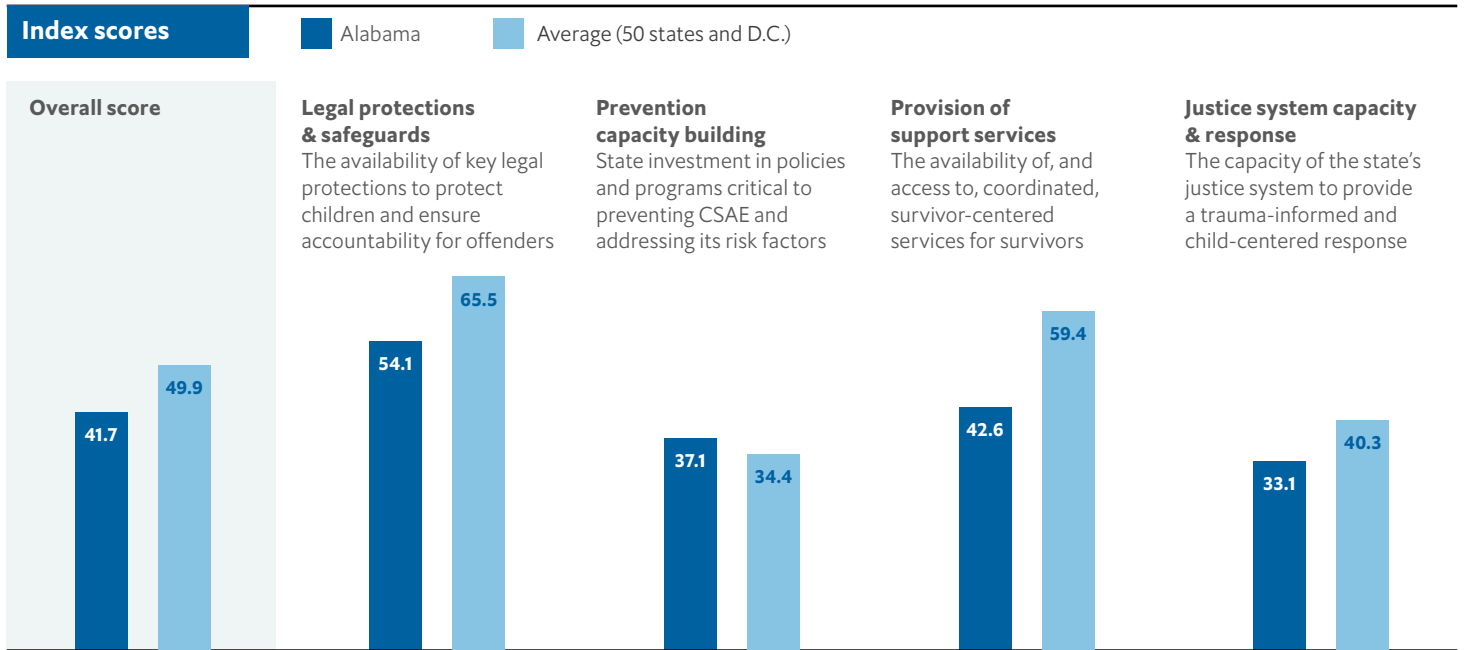
- Mandating recurring training on sexual violence and trauma-informed practice for key responders, including law enforcement and prosecutors; and
- Adopting measures to prevent the retraumatization of victims during legal proceedings, applicable to all children up to the age of 18.¹²

SUPPORTED BY

CHILDHOOD

WORLD CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION
FOUNDED BY H.M. QUEEN SILVIA OF SWEDEN

The United States Out of the Shadows Index: Alabama



Issue spotlights

No Partially Yes

Legal protections & safeguards		Provision of support services	
Statutory definition of sexual consent*	<input type="radio"/>	Survivors' right to know about the status of their rape kit [†]	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Minimum legal age for marriage set at 18 without exception**	<input type="radio"/>	Survivors' right to an advocate during medical examinations [†]	<input type="radio"/>
No marital exception or defense permitted under statutory rape laws	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Minors' authority to consent to medical care following sexual violence [†]	<input type="radio"/>
Anti-grooming legislation describes a pattern of behavior to facilitate child sexual abuse [‡]	<input type="radio"/>	Statute designating CACs as the preferred response to allegations of CSA [†]	<input type="radio"/>
Online grooming of a child for sexual abuse is criminalized	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	State funding for CACs	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Computer- and/or AI-generated child sexual abuse material criminalized	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Extended period for CSA survivors to apply for Crime Victim Compensation ^{†,§}	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Building prevention capacity		Alternatives to police report to access Crime Victim Compensation ^{†,##}	<input type="radio"/>
Statewide child sexual abuse prevention plan	<input type="radio"/>	Justice system capacity & response	
Sex education or HIV/STI instruction required to cover consent (if provided) ^{§§}	<input type="radio"/>	Mandated training for law enforcement: sexual assault [†]	<input type="radio"/>
Mandated child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention and awareness education (students) [†]	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Mandated training for law enforcement: trauma-informed practice [†]	<input type="radio"/>
Mandated education on online CSA and/or the risks of sharing explicit self-generated content (students) [†]	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Mandated training for prosecutors: sexual assault [†]	<input type="radio"/>
Mandated training on recognizing and responding to CSA (school employees) [†]	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Mandated training for prosecutors: trauma-informed practice [†]	<input type="radio"/>
Mandated training on recognizing and responding to CSA (youth organization employees) [†]	<input type="radio"/>	Criminal statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA crimes [†]	<input type="radio"/>
Required screening of school employees to prevent educator sexual misconduct [¶]	<input type="radio"/>	Civil statute of limitations: full elimination for all CSA claims against all defendants [†]	<input type="radio"/>
Educator code of conduct with clear teacher/student boundaries outlined	<input type="radio"/>	Permanently opened revival window for all claims against all types of perpetrators [†]	<input type="radio"/>
		Minors up to age 18 permitted to testify via alternative means (e.g., CCTV) in criminal proceedings involving CSA [†]	<input type="radio"/>

The findings reflect the most recent available data at the time the research was conducted. Research for the pilot states was completed in 2022/23, for the second iteration states in 2023/24, and for the remaining states and the District of Columbia in 2024/25. For more details, see the methodology report.

The Issue Spotlights figure features a limited sample of the data included in the index. For the full set of indicators and a detailed explanation of the scoring, sources and weightings, please see the project's methodology report and interactive model.

Endnotes

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “About Child Sexual Abuse,” accessed July 24, 2025, <https://www.cdc.gov/child-abuse-neglect/about/about-child-sexual-abuse.html>
2. Elizabeth J. Letourneau et al., “The Economic Burden of Child Sexual Abuse in the United States,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 79 (May 2018): 413–22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.02.020>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and Programmatic Activities*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/CAN-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Preventing Sexual Violence: A Technical Package of Policies, Programs, and Practices*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf.
5. Together for Girls. *What Works to Prevent Sexual Violence Against Children: Evidence Review*. Together for Girls, 2021. <https://www.togetherforgirls.org/en/resources/what-works-to-prevent-sexual-violence-against-children-evidence-review>.
6. Alabama Legislature. 2025 Regular Session, HB 166. <https://alison.legislature.state.al.us/files/pdf/SearchableInstruments/2025RS/HB166-enr.pdf>.
7. Alabama Office of the Attorney General. 2024. *Attorney General Marshall Welcomes Alabama Senate’s Unanimous Adoption of the Alabama Child Protection Act (HB 168)*. Press release. Accessed August 1, 2025. <https://www.alabamaag.gov/attorney-general-marshall-welcomes-alabama-senates-unanimous-adoption-of-alabama-child-protection-act/>.
8. By law, all K–12 public schools in Alabama must implement a child sexual abuse prevention instructional program, which includes training for administrators, teachers, and other school personnel (Ala. Code § 16-40-9). However, no similar training requirements are in place for employees of other youth-serving organizations outside the school system.
9. Children’s Advocacy Centers (CACs) are organizations located throughout the US that help facilitate a multidisciplinary and child-centered response to CSAE. These centers bring together several of the key actors—law enforcement, child protective services investigators, medical and mental health professionals, forensic interviewers, victim advocates, and more—under one roof, helping to minimize the number of times a child has to be interviewed and offering critical therapeutic and other support to children and their families.
10. It should be noted that Alabama has eliminated the SOL for felony or misdemeanor sex offenses. Similarly, no SOL applies to trafficking or CSAM offenses involving victims under the age of 16. However, for victims aged 16 or 17, the SOL for trafficking and CSAM offenses extends until age 24. The civil SOL for CSA, trafficking, and CSAM claims against all defendants is age 25 when the victim is under age 19 (Data source: CHILD USA)
11. Key barriers to accessing victim compensation include short timeframes for when an application can be filed and/or requiring a police report as a condition for eligibility.
12. Testimonial aids are designed to protect children who have experienced sexual abuse from further trauma during judicial proceedings. These measures may include allowing child survivors to provide testimony through alternative means—such as closed-circuit television or prerecorded statements—instead of live, in-court testimony. Additionally, many jurisdictions recognize a child sexual abuse–specific hearsay exception, which permits the admission of non-testimonial out-of-court statements, provided the statements meet established standards of reliability and admissibility under applicable evidentiary rules.

Symbols

- † This reflects whether the state has a statute explicitly mandating this requirement.
- ‡ This data, which is integrated into the index, was sourced from CHILD USA.
- * This reflects whether the state has established a clear statutory definition of “sexual consent” that includes reference to consent being “freely” or “voluntarily” given.
- ** This reflects whether the state has established a statutory minimum legal age for marriage of 18, without exceptions such as parental consent, judicial approval, or pregnancy-related allowances.
- § This reflects whether the state has an anti-grooming law that explicitly defines or describes grooming (or a similar term) as a pattern of behaviors intended to build trust with a child to facilitate sexual abuse. Laws that solely address isolated acts such as luring or enticing a minor—without recognizing the broader behavioral pattern—were not considered. To meet the criterion, laws must explicitly cover in-person grooming, not just online interactions.
- §§ This reflects whether sex education is required by law or through state standards that have the force of law. This data, which is integrated into the index, was sourced from SIECUS.
- ¶ This data, which is integrated into the index, was sourced from Enough Abuse and is current as of October 2024.
- # “No” refers to states whose statutes establishing eligibility criteria for Crime Victim Compensation impose a strict deadline to apply, based solely on the date of the crime or its report to law enforcement, with no explicit exceptions for children or victims of sexual abuse. “Partially” applies to states with vague or discretionary exceptions (e.g., “good cause”) or that allow minor victims a fixed time beyond age 18 to apply (e.g., until 21 or 25). “Fully” applies to states that impose no time limit on applications from victims who were minors at the time of the crime and/or were victims of sexual abuse.
- ## “No” refers to states whose statutes establishing eligibility criteria for Crime Victim Compensation require victims to report the crime to law enforcement, with no exceptions for children or victims of sexual assault. “Partially” applies to states that allow some exemptions to the law enforcement reporting requirement for minors or victims of sexual assault, but those exemptions are time-bound, narrow, or vaguely defined (e.g., based on “good cause” without clear standards). “Fully” applies to states that provide various, clearly defined alternatives to reporting to law enforcement — or impose no reporting requirement at all — for minors or victims of sexual assault.

For further information, please contact:
Laura Avery lauraavery@economist.com

Economist Impact bears sole responsibility for the content of this report. The findings and views expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the views of the sponsors, the experts, or others who kindly gave their time to advise us.