

Policy brief

Institutionalizing national survivor councils

Advancing survivor leadership,
co-governance, and accountability in
ending violence against children

June 2026



POLICY BRIEF

INSTITUTIONALIZING NATIONAL SURVIVOR COUNCILS

June 2026

Advancing Survivor Leadership, Co-Governance, and Accountability in Ending Violence Against Children

Target Audience: Governments, Diplomatic Missions, Intergovernmental Bodies, National Human Rights Institutions, Development Partners, and Civil Society Networks

Scope: Survivor Leadership, Participatory Governance, and Institutional Accountability Systems

CONTEXT

Across global efforts to end violence against children, survivor participation is increasingly recognized as essential to effective prevention, response, and accountability systems. However, despite growing commitments to “survivor-centered” approaches, survivor engagement remains inconsistent, under-resourced, and largely consultative rather than institutionalized.

Findings from the Out of the Shadows Index (OOSI) and national pledge mapping reveal significant gaps in formal survivor participation within national child protection governance systems. While survivors are frequently invited to share lived experiences during advocacy events and public consultations, few countries have established formal mechanisms enabling survivors to participate meaningfully in policy design, implementation, monitoring, and accountability processes.

Survivors possess critical lived expertise regarding the strengths, failures, and gaps within child protection, justice, health, education, and support systems. Effective governance therefore requires survivor participation not as symbolic representation, but as recognized institutional expertise.

This brief aligns with:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Sustainable Development Goals 5, 10, 16, and 17
- INSPIRE Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children
- Principles of Survivor-Centered and Trauma-Informed Practice

- Global commitments on meaningful child and survivor participation
- Human rights-based approaches to participatory governance and accountability
- Emerging global principles on co-governance and inclusive public decision-making

KEY FINDINGS

The Out of the Shadows Index and national consultations reveal major global gaps in survivor participation and accountability systems:

- Only 2 out of 60 benchmarked countries have formally established National Survivor Councils (Australia and Germany) while 2 others (the UK and France) have committed to doing so
- The Index global average score for governance and accountability (42/100) and prevention (43/100) are lower than Healing (57/100) and Justice (59/100)
- The UK scored lower for Healing (65/100) and Governance and Accountability (75/100) than for Prevention (80/100) and Justice (82/100)
- 96% of state pledges lack independent survivor-led accountability tracking mechanisms
- Survivor participation remains largely consultative rather than embedded within governance structures
- Limited financing exists for survivor-led monitoring, advocacy, and accountability initiatives
- Survivors remain underrepresented within national decision-making, budgeting, and oversight systems

These findings highlight a persistent disconnect between public commitments to survivor-centered approaches and the institutional realities of governance and accountability systems

THE CHALLENGE

Despite growing international recognition of survivor leadership, most child protection systems continue operating through top-down governance structures that exclude survivors from formal decision-making and accountability processes.

Survivor engagement is frequently limited to symbolic consultation processes, public storytelling opportunities, or short-term advisory roles, while institutional authority over policy development, financing, implementation, and oversight remains concentrated within governments and external actors.

Participation without power risks becoming performative rather than transformative.

Without formal governance structures, survivor participation often lacks continuity, legal recognition, protection mechanisms, financing, and influence over state accountability systems. As a result, policies and interventions designed without survivor participation may unintentionally reproduce institutional barriers, retraumatization, and gaps in accountability.

Key structural barriers continue to undermine meaningful survivor participation:

1. Lack of Legal Recognition

Few countries have formally codified National Survivor Councils within legislation or public governance systems.

2. Limited Decision-Making Power

Survivors are rarely granted permanent voting roles within ministerial task forces, policy committees, national coordination mechanisms, or public accountability structures.

3. Insufficient Survivor-Led Financing

Survivor-led organizations and coalitions continue facing major barriers accessing sustainable, flexible, and independent funding.

4. Weak Survivor-Led Accountability Mechanisms

Most national commitments lack survivor-led monitoring systems capable of independently tracking implementation progress and government accountability.

5. Limited Institutional Integration

Trauma-informed and survivor-designed approaches remain inconsistently integrated across justice, health, education, and child protection systems.

6. Extractive Participation Practices

Many survivor engagement processes rely on unpaid emotional labor while failing to provide safeguarding protections, psychosocial support, accessibility measures, or fair compensation for lived-experience expertise.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

For Governments and Intergovernmental Bodies

1. Legally establish National Survivor Councils through formal statutory and policy frameworks.
2. Ensure survivor councils hold permanent and meaningful representation within national child protection coordination systems, ministerial task forces, and accountability structures.
3. Institutionalize survivor participation across policy design, implementation, budgeting, monitoring, and evaluation processes.
4. Develop national safeguarding and protection protocols supporting ethical, trauma-informed, and survivor-centered participation.
5. Integrate survivor-led accountability indicators within national child protection monitoring frameworks and ministerial reporting systems.

For Development Partners and Donors

6. Increase direct, flexible, and sustainable financing for survivor-led organizations, coalitions, and accountability initiatives.
7. Support survivor-led monitoring systems, independent accountability tools, and participatory governance mechanisms.

8. Invest in long-term leadership development, wellbeing support, digital safety, and trauma-informed capacity strengthening for survivor advocates.
9. Simplify funding access requirements for grassroots and survivor-led organizations.

For Justice, Health, Education, and Child Protection Systems

10. Institutionalize survivor-designed and trauma-informed training curricula for judges, law enforcement personnel, healthcare workers, educators, and child protection professionals.
11. Embed survivor-informed approaches across prevention, reporting, referral, and response systems.
12. Ensure survivor participation frameworks include safeguarding protections, accessibility measures, psychosocial support, and fair compensation for lived-experience expertise.
13. Strengthen institutional accountability systems that enable survivors to participate in oversight, implementation tracking, and policy evaluation processes.

THE MOMENT TO ACT

As governments prepare commitments ahead of the 2nd Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children, institutionalizing survivor leadership must become a global accountability priority.

Key priorities for immediate action include:

- Survivor participation must move beyond symbolic consultation toward co-governance and shared accountability.
- National Survivor Councils should become a baseline governance standard within child protection systems.
- Governments must invest in survivor-led monitoring and accountability mechanisms.
- Survivor expertise should be integrated across justice, health, education, and protection systems.
- Ethical, trauma-informed, and adequately resourced survivor participation frameworks are essential for sustainable reform.

- National pledges should include measurable commitments on survivor leadership and institutional participation.
- Meaningful inclusion must extend beyond representation toward shared decision-making power.

Survivors should not only be invited to speak about systems after harm occurs. They should support shaping the systems designed to prevent harm in the first place.

Lived experience should not only inform systems. It should help govern them.

**Participation without power is not inclusion.
Representation without accountability is not co-governance.**

Nothing about survivors should be decided without survivors.

Survivor leadership is not optional participation. It is a cornerstone of effective governance, accountability, justice, and prevention.

Source: Out of the Shadows Index (OOSI), National Pledge Mapping, Survivor Consultations, and EVAC Ministerial Preparatory Processes (2026)