

## Out of the Shadows Index: Colombia

### The Out of the Shadows Index

Every year, more than 400 million children are exposed to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). The [Out of the Shadows Index](#), developed by [Economist Impact](#), reviews the performance of 60 countries in addressing CSEA, assessing each country's approach to prevention and response. The countries covered by the research are home to 85% of the world's children. The regional report for Latin America and the Caribbean focuses on Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela and Jamaica.

### Trends across Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean ranks above the global average in its response to child sexual exploitation and abuse, which covers elements like the provision of support and recovery services for victims and survivors, and child-friendly justice proceedings. This performance is driven by generally strong judicial systems, social protection and child-friendly medical care systems.

By contrast, the region is weaker with regards to measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse of children, which includes national action plans and effective legislation. There are substantial gaps in the legislation across the majority of countries in the region with regards to the criminalisation of all forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation. The majority of countries also lack rehabilitation programmes for those who commit sexual offences against children to reduce reoffending. No country included in the Index was found to have mandatory rehabilitation programmes for children and young people who have committed sexual offences.

Only four countries have developed a national plan to combat sexual violence against children (Mexico, Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala), though only Brazil had an identifiable source of funding to implement its national plan. National plans developed previously in Argentina, Colombia, Jamaica, Peru and Venezuela had all expired by 2022.

Child-friendly court processes that avoid retraumatising child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse are beginning to be adopted across the region. Brazil, Guatemala and Mexico have introduced programmes to train judges and prosecutors in child-friendly procedures, trauma and sexual abuse, but the research found limited evidence of this approach in other countries. Confidence in justice and law enforcement remained low compared to other regions covered by the Index.

### Findings for Colombia

While the Out of the Shadow Index does not focus on the scale of sexual violence against children, it is worth noting recent statistics on the scale of the issue in Colombia. According

to police figures, between January and October 2022 there were 24,149 [reports](#) of sexual violence against children.

Out of the 60 countries covered by the Out of the Shadows Index, Colombia ranked 19th globally, scoring 59.7 out of a possible 100. This makes Colombia the fourth highest-scoring country covered by the research within Latin America and the Caribbean.

### Prevention of child sexual exploitation and abuse

Colombia scored the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean and 13th globally with regards to its legislation in place to prevent child sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2021, the country **abolished limitation periods in child sexual abuse cases**, to allow survivors of child sexual abuse to bring cases when they feel ready to report.<sup>1</sup> Colombia is one of only two countries within the region included in the Index that **permits abortion in cases where their sexual abuse resulted in pregnancy**. However, national law falls short of prohibiting **child marriage**, by allowing children under the age of 18 to marry with parental consent. Article 116 of the Civil Code sets 18 as the minimum age for marriage, yet 117 makes an exception to this by allowing under-18s to marry if their parents consent. And while the country had a **national action plan** in place to address child sexual exploitation and abuse, it was found to have expired.

### Response to child sexual exploitation and abuse

There were a number of strong elements of Colombia's measures in place to respond to child sexual exploitation and abuse. In particular, the Index cites the obligation on healthcare providers to provide immediate follow-up **medical and mental health services to all victims of child sexual exploitation and abuse** as a positive example of how to support survivors of abuse.

The research found more pronounced gaps in the judicial response to child sexual exploitation and abuse. There is **no specialised law enforcement agency** in the country to respond to abuse, nor is there a specialised law enforcement agency or unit to respond to **online abuse**. Specialised **legal aid** for child victims is also lacking.

### **Further resources:**

- [The Out of the Shadows Index: global ranking and data](#)
- [Regional report on Latin America](#) and [country briefings](#)
- [Methodology used in developing the Index](#)
- [Violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean 2015-2021](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Overall within the region, the countries that have abolished the statute of limitations (SoL) for most child sexual abuse offences are: El Salvador (in 1997), Nicaragua (in 2007), Peru (in 2018), Ecuador (in 2018), Chile (in 2019), Colombia (in 2021), Venezuela (in 2021). Elsewhere, debates have arisen over abolishing the statute of limitations in [Argentina](#), [Mexico](#) and [Paraguay](#).