

## Out of the Shadows Index: El Salvador

### 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.

### Context and findings for El Salvador

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 El Salvador. In 2021 there were 2,644 reports of child sexual abuse and exploitation, with the victim being female in 93% of cases, [according](#) to the Childhood and Adolescence Observatory of the Public Prosecutor's Office.

Out of the 60 countries covered by the Out of the Shadows Index, El Salvador ranked 21st globally, scoring 58.8 out of a possible 100. This makes El Salvador the fourth lowest-scoring country covered by the research within Latin America and the Caribbean.

El Salvador is one of only a few countries in the region covered by the Index that have **abolished statutes of limitations** for child sexual exploitation and abuse (the others being Colombia, Peru and Venezuela) - in fact it was one of the first to do so in Latin America.<sup>1</sup> It is also one of the few countries in the region with a **national plan that specifically addresses child sexual exploitation and abuse**, though it barely mentions a funding plan, with the country scoring exceptionally low (56th out of 60 globally) for **child rights-based budgeting**. It performs well in terms of legislation on the issue. For example, in contrast to other Latin American countries, El Salvador prohibits sexual behaviour that does not lead to penetration and it enforces a strict **minimum age of marriage of 18** with no exceptions.

The country is one of only four in the region covered by the Index to have a **specialised police agency** dedicated to child sexual exploitation and abuse, and one of only two (alongside Mexico) to provide **public access to data on arrests, indictments and prosecutions** related to child sexual exploitation and abuse. El Salvador also provides specialised legal aid for child victims and mechanisms for victim compensation.

El Salvador ranks highly globally (8th out of 60) on **support and recovery services**. Like the vast majority of countries in the region, the country performs extremely well in terms of **medical care for abuse victims**. For example, El Salvador has a dedicated decentralised Clinic for Comprehensive Care of Victims of Intra-Family Violence and Sexual Abuse.

However, there are also gaps. For example the lack of an explicit ban on intentionally exposing children to sexual acts. There was little evidence of **guidelines and training** for social workers, and of **rehabilitation programmes for offenders**. There is also no evidence that a **dedicated helpline** exists for people to report cases or concerns about child sexual violence.

#### 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](#).