

Out of the Shadows Index: Mexico

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 Mexico

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 Mexico. Between 2020 and 2021, child sexual abuse complaints increased by 496%, in 72% of cases the abuse occurs in the child's

home, and in 90% of cases the victim is female. And only 10% of abuse complaints are thought to reach a courtroom.

Out of the 60 countries covered by the Out of the Shadows Index, Mexico ranked 12th globally, scoring 64.7 out of a possible 100. This makes Mexico the second highest-scoring country in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Prevention of child sexual exploitation and abuse

Significant gaps remain in Mexico's protective legislation with regards to child sexual exploitation and abuse. There is **no comprehensive legislation on online grooming of children** in the country and there is no legal protection against prosecution for trafficked children who then engage in illegal activities. **Limitation periods also remain in place for sexual offences committed against children**, which represents one of the biggest barriers child sexual abuse survivors face in their pursuit of justice.¹ In practice, this restriction means that it is not possible to prosecute perpetrators of sexual offences against children if it takes the survivor many years to come to terms with the abuse they have experienced and make a report to law enforcement authorities.

Mexico is, however, one of only a few countries to have developed a **national action plan to address child sexual exploitation and abuse**, and was the only country in the region included in the Index to directly involve children in developing this plan. Community-based education is also in place for parents to address abuse.

Response to child sexual exploitation and abuse

Mexico performed strongly on providing support and recovery services to children who have experienced sexual exploitation and abuse, placing 6th globally on these indicators. Multidisciplinary and interagency mechanisms are required by law to share information relevant to abuse, which is a key means of ensuring that the different professionals necessary to respond to abuse are able to work together. **Guidelines and training** is in place for social workers working on this issue and Mexico was one of a minority of countries in the region to provide **training on trauma and child-friendly procedures for judges and prosecutors**.

However, the Index identified several weaknesses in Mexico's response to child sexual exploitation and abuse. For example, there is **no specialised police agency** dedicated to the issue, though there are **specialised police units for online child sexual exploitation and abuse**.

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](#)

¹ 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](#).