

Out of the Shadows Index: Venezuela

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 Venezuela

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 Venezuela. According to

the Public Prosecutor's Office, 1,024 [reports](#) of child sexual violence were recorded in the first ten months of 2022. And between 2017 and 2020, the [figure](#) was 8,966.

Out of the 60 countries covered by the Out of the Shadows Index, Venezuela ranked 47th globally, scoring 43.8 out of a possible 100. This makes Venezuela the **second lowest scoring country** covered by the research within Latin America and the Caribbean.

Venezuela has allowed its **national action plan** against child sexual exploitation and abuse to expire. The country has significant gaps in the legislation protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse. For example, Venezuelan law does not specifically sanction the production, reproduction or possession of child sexual abuse material, although it prohibits its dissemination, distribution or sale. It also does not explicitly ban intentionally exposing children to sexual acts. **Explicit legislation** is key for avoiding ambiguity around what constitutes an offence.

With regard to **training of judges and prosecutors** in child victim trauma or sexual abuse, Venezuela and Peru rank lowest regionally. And Venezuela also lacks compensation mechanisms for victims, which is a serious weakness. In terms of **education on child sexual exploitation and abuse**, there is no evidence that it is adequately addressed in the school curriculum, which leaves children ill-equipped to identify risks or seek help.

There are two areas where Venezuela stands out in a positive way. First, for being one of only two Latin American countries covered in the Index to set the **age of sexual consent** at 16 years old. All other countries set it lower. And second, for being one of only a few countries from the region covered in in the Index to have [eliminated the statute of limitations for child sexual violence cases](#) - the others being Colombia, El Salvador and Peru.¹ In Venezuela this happened in October 2021 through the Law for the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Abuse Against Boys, Girls and Adolescent. This reform now allows victims and survivors - many of whom can take decades to disclose their abuse because of trauma - to report their case whenever they are ready to do so. Calls to abolish the statute of limitations have also arisen in Argentina and Mexico, among others.

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 for most child sexual abuse offences are: El Salvador (in 1997), 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](#).