

PRESS RELEASE - embargoed until 07/03/2023 at 04:01 (Mexico City), 07:01 (Buenos Aires), 10:01 (London)

Latin American countries ranked on child sexual violence prevention and response

[7 March 2023] Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala are Latin America's best-performing countries in preventing and responding to child sexual exploitation and abuse, while Argentina and Venezuela are the lowest ranked, according to a new report released today by Economist Impact which compares the laws and policies of nine countries in the region.

The [Regional Briefing for Latin America and the Caribbean](#) reviews Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. The research is part of the Out of the Shadows Index (OOSI), which is the first global assessment of how countries worldwide are addressing sexual violence against children. It covers 60 countries, home to around 85 percent of the world's children.

Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are ranked as follows: **Brazil** (1st regionally, 11th globally), **Mexico** (2nd regionally, 12th globally), **Guatemala** (3rd regionally, 17th globally), **Colombia** (4th regionally, 19th globally), **Jamaica** (5th regionally, 20th globally), **El Salvador** (6th regionally, 21st globally), **Peru** (7th regionally, 46th globally), **Venezuela** (8th regionally, 47th globally), **Argentina** (9th regionally, 50th globally).

Each country was scored out of 100 and ranked according to indicators that broadly measure whether legislation is in place to protect against sexual violence against children, if prevention policies and programmes exist, governments' capacity and commitment, if support and recovery services are available to abuse victims and survivors, and whether justice processes are adapted to the needs of children who have suffered sexual violence.

Some of the regional report's main findings include:

Legislation

- Latin America as a whole falls below the global average in terms of **having laws that protect and respond to children against sexual violence**. Common failings in national laws related to low or inconsistent ages of sexual consent, minimum ages to marry of below 18 and the failure to criminalise all forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation. Colombia scored the highest in the region overall for its legislation, while Guatemala is ranked lowest.
- A number of Latin American countries covered in the OOSI have **abolished the statute of limitations** for most child sexual abuse offences: Colombia, El Salvador, Peru and Venezuela. are the only two. This reform 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 arisen in Argentina and Mexico, among others.¹
- In Jamaica and Venezuela the **age of sexual consent** is 16, while in federal countries like Mexico it differs across states. Only El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru set the **age of marriage** at 18 in all circumstances; in all other countries included in the OOSI it is 16 or 17 if there is parental consent. Meanwhile only Argentina and Colombia offer **abortion** to girls in cases where their sexual abuse resulted in pregnancy.

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), Nicaragua (in 2027), 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](#).

- Brazil ranks first both regionally and globally in terms of having **legislation that criminalises sexual activity with children**. Venezuela is ranked lowest for a number of weak laws, for example, while it criminalises the distribution or sale of child abuse materials, it but does not prohibit its production or possession. Both Venezuela and El Salvador also do not criminalise intentionally exposing children to witnessing a sexual act.

National policies and capacity

- Mexico and Brazil rank highest regionally in their capacity and commitment to combat child sexual abuse and exploitation, including through policies, monitoring and oversight, and data collection. They are among only four countries, including El Salvador and Guatemala, to have developed a **national plan to combat sexual violence against children**, though only Brazil had an identifiable source of funding to implement its national plan. Those developed previously in Argentina, Colombia, Jamaica, Peru and Venezuela had all expired by 2022.
- Although **data collection** is key to responding to child sexual abuse and exploitation, only Colombia is ranked within the top ten countries globally (4th worldwide) for collecting data on the prevalence of sexual violence against children and disaggregating it by the age and sex of the victims and perpetrators. Other countries collect some, but not all, of this data.
- Most of the countries have **child-friendly court procedures** (e.g. giving evidence via videolink to avoid re-victimisation). However, only judges and prosecutors in Brazil, Guatemala and Mexico were found to receive training in child victim trauma or sexual abuse. By contrast, Peru and Venezuela rank lowest regionally in this regard. Meanwhile all countries except Colombia provide specialised **legal aid for child victims**.
- No country covered in the OOSI was found to make **training on child sexual abuse and exploitation mandatory** for all organisations that work with children. Only Brazil, Guatemala and El Salvador have a **specialised police agency** dedicated to child sexual abuse and exploitation. And only three countries have specialised police units to **combat online sexual abuse**: Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala.

The regional report on Latin America concludes that, “countries [in the region] that rank highly on some indicators, may perform poorly on others. Any area of weakness diminishes the child protective system overall. Latin American and Caribbean countries have great strengths, albeit with wide variations between them. The child protective environment can therefore be further improved.”

Responding to the regional report’s findings, **Sara Oviedo, former Vice-Chair of the United Nations’ Committee on the Rights of the Child** said:

"Some of the data undoubtedly stand out, as do the countries in question, but this is the reality of Latin America, with big contrasts both within a single country and between countries, where we encounter polar opposites with regard to child protection. Meanwhile, sexual violence in all its forms: harassment (unwanted sexual advances), sexual abuse (unwanted sexual touching) and rape (sexual penetration without consent) continue to increase without a clear and definitive decision by States to fund public policies that prevent and combat sexual violence."

Leo Ratledge, Co-Director of the Child Rights International Network (CRIN), which coordinated the launch of the regional report, said:

“The Out of the Shadows Index shows the need to urgently continue the reform that is already underway across the region to prevent sexual violence against children. This will mean updating legislation on the abuse of children and developing support and response services that genuinely meet the needs and demands of survivors of child sexual abuse.”

- ENDS -

Notes to the editor

About how to report on sexual violence against children

There is often confusion surrounding the use of different terminology to describe sexual violence against children. Misuse of terminology can risk stigmatisation, trivialisation and in worst cases be counter-productive in the work to prevent child sexual violence. We encourage you to review the [Luxembourg Guidelines](#) (available in Spanish) to ensure appropriate language is used when reporting on this issue.

About the Out of the Shadows Index

The Out of the Shadows Index (OOSI) is a global review of the laws, policies and services that governments must have in place to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse against children. It covers 60 countries worldwide, home to approximately 85 percent of the world's children. The Index was commissioned by Ignite Philanthropy and developed by Economist Impact, the policy research and analysis division of The Economist Group. outoftheshadows.global

Access the [global ranking and data](#), the [regional reports](#) and the [methodology](#). Also access the [briefings](#) for each country in Latin America.

About Economist Impact

Economist Impact is the policy research and analysis division of The Economist Group. It partners with corporations, foundations, NGOs and governments across themes including sustainability, health and the changing shape of globalisation to catalyse change and enable progress. For 75 years, Economist Impact has shed light on policy choices through benchmarks, economic and social impact analysis, white papers, forecasting and scenario modelling. impact.economist.com

About Ignite Philanthropy

Ignite Philanthropy is a donor collaborative fund that takes advantage of philanthropy's unique role, flexibility, and ability to act quickly to empower partners, allies and grassroots voices to bring an end to violence against children and young people. www.ignitephilanthropy.org

About the Child Rights International Network (CRIN)

CRIN is a human rights organisation with a focus on children's rights. We challenge the status quo because the norms that dictate children and young people's place in society need radical change. We press for rights - not charity - and campaign for a genuine shift in how governments and societies view and treat under-18s. Through using research, policy, advocacy and art, we encourage people to think critically about the world. www.crin.org