

PRESS RELEASE - embargoed until 07/03/2023 at 07:01 (Caracas)

Venezuela ranked 47th globally and second lowest in Latin America on child sexual violence prevention and response

[7 March 2023] Venezuela is among the lowest-ranking countries both globally and in Latin America in terms of its performance in preventing and responding to child sexual exploitation and abuse, 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. 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. Venezuela is the second lowest scoring country covered by the research within Latin America and the Caribbean, coming in at 8th place regionally ahead of Argentina.

Other 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), **Argentina** (9th regionally, 50th globally).

Countries were 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.

The [National Briefing for Venezuela](#) summarises the data and findings for Venezuela. The following presents some of the main features:

- Venezuela [eliminated](#) the **statute of limitations for child sexual violence cases** in October 2021. It now joins Colombia, El Salvador and Peru as the only other Latin American countries covered in the Index to have made this move. 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.¹
- Venezuela is 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.
- Venezuela had a **national plan** specifically addressing child sexual exploitation and abuse, but it was allowed to expire, which is a significant obstacle in ensuring a strong national response to the issue. The country sits alongside Argentina, Colombia, Jamaica and Peru in this regard.
- National law does not **specifically prohibit** the production, reproduction or possession of child sexual abuse material, although conversely it does prohibit its dissemination, distribution or sale. The country

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](#).

also does not **explicitly ban** intentionally exposing children to sexual acts. Explicit legislation is key for avoiding ambiguity around what constitutes an offence.

- There are significant gaps in terms of **education on child sexual exploitation and abuse**. Even though Venezuela provides community-based education for parents, 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 considerable gaps in the response to child sexual exploitation and abuse in Venezuela. Regarding the initial response (hotlines and reporting) in particular, Venezuela scored very poorly, coming joint 58th globally alongside Peru. There is no evidence that either country offer a **helpline specific to children or for reporting child sexual abuse**.
- With regard to **training of judges and prosecutors** in child victim trauma or sexual abuse, Venezuela and Peru again rank lowest regionally.
- Venezuela also has no mechanisms to provide **victim compensation**, even though a vast majority of countries in the region do.

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 data on Venezuela, **lawyer and sexual abuse survivor, José Leonardo Araujo Araque**, said: “One cannot deny some excellent policies developed in Venezuela; Articles 4 and 6 of the [Law](#) for the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Abuse against Children represent a Copernican paradigm shift: that child sexual abuse is a violation of human rights, ergo, it should not be bound by limitation periods. The jurisprudence of the Supreme Court of Justice supports this view.² Today a Mexican priest is being persecuted for a crime of this nature committed against a teenager 21 years ago. And there are still factors that fuel the phenomenon of sexual violence towards children and adolescents. In the neighbourhoods of the capital, it is known that girls offer their sexual services, but they do not prostitute themselves; they have been prostituted... Until the adverse circumstances that allow sexual abuse to occur cease, all government efforts will be futile.”

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.”

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² See, for example, [decision n. 91/2017](#), a sentence by the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice which prohibits procedural benefits in cases of sexual abuse and defines these offences as heinous; and [decision n. 868/2022](#) of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice which established that carnal acts with especially vulnerable victims represents a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

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 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