

# OUT OF THE SHADOWS

## INDEX 2023



LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN REGION



# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Prevention</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 Protective Legislation	11
1.2 Policies and Programmes	16
Protection against poverty and inequality	20
1.3 National Capacity & Commitment	24
National plans and policies	23
Quality and availability of data on CSEA	25
<b>2. Response</b>	<b>26</b>
Response: Regional performance	27
Response: Support services and recovery	28
Response: Justice Process	31
<b>3. Summary and Conclusion</b>	<b>34</b>
Where the region is strong	35
Where are the gaps?	36
Country comparisons	39
What has changed between 2019 and 2022?	43
Conclusion	44

# Executive Summary

The Out of the Shadows Index (OOSI) benchmarks how 60 countries (home to approximately 85% of the global population of children) are preventing and responding to CSEA. It is the first attempt to develop a global assessment of how countries are addressing the issue. Rather than measure the scale of CSEA, the index focuses on how governments are approaching the problem as they seek to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The briefing on Latin America and the Caribbean synthesises data from nine countries: Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela in South America; Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador in Central America; and Jamaica. This regional briefing summarises critical findings across two pillars: **prevention** of child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) and **response**.

**The Latin America and Caribbean region leads in response to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA)**, with an overall score of 61.4% on relevant cumulative indicators and above the global<sup>1</sup> average of 56.2%. In particular, this high regional score is a result of **key regional strengths**:

- From the initial moment of emergency response to long-term care, Latin America and the Caribbean has a **medical care system centred on the child**.
- Three countries in the region have child-friendly court processes in place to avoid the risk of re-traumatisation, contributing to the establishment of a **judicial system adapted to the needs of the child**.
- Most Latin American and Caribbean countries implement **innovative and holistic social protection programmes aimed at children and parents, which tackle key risk factors of CSEA**.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term 'global' here is used to refer to the 60 countries in the Out of the Shadows Index.



**The region is weaker in terms of prevention**, scoring 49% overall and ranking slightly below the global average of 50.2% on this set of indicators.

- A **majority of countries in the region do not have a specific national action plan to address CSEA as of 2022**: developing comprehensive national strategies to prevent CSEA needs to be a regional priority.
- In the region as a whole, there is inconsistency in the **quality and specificity of laws** relating to CSEA, including a lack of clarity on what constitutes a criminal offence.
- At the regional level, **the legislative approach to countering CSEA is not adequately responsive to the child's needs**.
- Across the region, there is a significant gap in interventions for juvenile or adult perpetrators of CSEA. **The absence of such programmes increases the risk of recidivism**.
- There are gaps in the capacity of law enforcement and the wider child protection system to address cybercrime and **online CSEA**.

### Global ranking: how Latin American countries compare

1	United Kingdom
2	France
3	Sweden
4	Canada
5	South Africa
6	South Korea
7	Australia
8	Indonesia
9	Türkiye
10	Germany
<b>11</b>	<b>Brazil</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Mexico</b>
13	United States
14	Albania
15	India
16	Japan
<b>17</b>	<b>Guatemala</b>
18	Romania
<b>19</b>	<b>Colombia</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Jamaica</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>El Salvador</b>
22	Kenya
23	Thailand
24	Philippines
25	Vietnam
26	Serbia
27	Rwanda
28	Malaysia
29	Kazakhstan
30	China

31	Italy
32	Mongolia
33	Tanzania
34	Nigeria
35	Russia
36	Morocco
37	Uganda
38	Cambodia
39	UAE
40	Mozambique
41	Egypt
42	Ghana
43	Bangladesh
44	Angola
45	Nepal
<b>46</b>	<b>Peru</b>
<b>47</b>	<b>Venezuela</b>
48	Sri Lanka
49	Burkina Faso
<b>50</b>	<b>Argentina</b>
51	Pakistan
52	Saudi Arabia
53	Ethiopia
54	Côte d'Ivoire
55	Madagascar
56	Algeria
57	Dem. Rep. of Congo
58	Uzbekistan
59	Niger
60	Cameroon





# Introduction

Every year, over 400 million children around the world are exposed to child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA). The experience can leave children with a lifetime of physical and emotional trauma, thwarting their potential and their ambitions along the way.

Ignite Philanthropy's Out of the Shadows Index (OOSI), developed by Economist Impact, benchmarks the performance of 60 countries, in seven regions, in addressing CSEA.<sup>2</sup> The OOSI report focuses on prevention and response led by the government and supported by civil society and the private sector rather than on the prevalence of CSEA, which has been described elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Of the 60 countries included in the OOSI, nine are from Latin America and the Caribbean: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela and Jamaica. These countries have adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are committed to accelerating action to eliminate violence against children (VAC), creating safe, non-violent and inclusive environments, and significantly reducing all forms of violence and related deaths in the region.

As elsewhere in the world, CSEA in Latin America and the Caribbean is a complex, multifactorial and increasingly transnational phenomenon. Seven of the nine included countries in the region are defined by the World Bank as higher middle-income,<sup>4</sup> but deep economic disparities mark most of Latin America.<sup>5</sup> Social and cultural norms influence CSEA, and children are at risk in the private sphere, in their communities, through national, regional and transnational crime networks. The risk of CSEA has increased in line with a significant rise in migration since 2011, the effect of natural disasters and displacement, and changes in the online exploitation of children.<sup>6</sup> These and other factors intersect and cumulatively increase the risk to children.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Out of the Shadows Index (2022) <https://outoftheshadows.global/>

<sup>3</sup> For a recent report on CSEA in the Latin American region see UNICEF (2021a) Violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean 2015-2021 | UNICEF

<sup>4</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/income-level>.

<sup>5</sup> List of countries by income equality - Wikipedia. Colombia, Brazil and Guatemala rank among the 20 of 168 on the Gini index, which measures income differentials. El Salvador is defined as lower middle income, and Venezuela was unclassified in 2021.

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF (2021a), *ibid*.



However, there has been a move within Latin America, at least since the beginning of the millennium, to develop integrated child protection systems.<sup>7</sup> This approach requires action to protect children and respond to harm when it has occurred through actions by multiple actors, at many levels. The system's individual components – from policy and legislation to services and data collection- need to work in tandem, and each component needs to be strengthened while ensuring coordination among them all.<sup>8</sup>

From the start, the question driving the OOSI framework has been, “what does a *holistic* [and integrated] approach to combating CSEA look like?” And through this lens, the report looks at the governance architecture of every country and how each country addresses the complexity of CSEA.<sup>9</sup> The framework used by the Index (table 1, below) recognises the role played by structural factors: from the education sector to the justice system, CSEA prevention and response is inter-sectoral and requires a broad political and societal effort. The Index is organised around **two governance dimensions: prevention and response**. Each of these dimensions is supported by several pillars. The Prevention dimension encompasses **Protective Legislation, Policy and Programmes, and National Capacity and Commitment** pillars. The Response dimension contains **Support Services and Recovery, and the Justice Process**. A full description of the methodology is accessible online.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF (2021b) The UNICEF Child Protection Systems Strengthening approach. <https://www.unicef.org/media/110876/file/Child%20Protection%20Systems%20Strengthening%20.pdf> See Chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF (2021b), p. 9

<sup>9</sup> If you wish to learn more about the methodology behind the Index, please consult the Out of the Shadows Index 2022 Methodology Paper.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://cdn.outoftheshadows.global/uploads/documents/Out-of-the-Shadows-Index-2022-Global-Methodology-Paper.pdf>

Table 1 – A holistic approach to combating CSEA



Protective Legislation

Assesses the degree to which a country provides children with legal or regulatory protections from sexual exploitation and abuse.



Policies & Programmes

Assesses government-driven initiatives and civil society programmes to address the economic, social and environmental risk factors that could increase children’s susceptibility to sexual exploitation and abuse.



National Capacity & Commitment

Assesses the extent to which the government has committed to understanding the current scope and scale of the problem, to building more effective prevention measures.

RESPONSE PILLAR

Support services & recovery

Takes into account both government-led and civil society support systems outside of the justice system for victims of CSEA, specifically around health, medical support services, mental health and rehabilitation and how to increase child-centred decision-making through the recovery process.



Justice process

Measures the capacity of the justice system from the initial moment of response through to resolution of the case, assessing its capacity, responsiveness and effectiveness to assess to what extent it keeps the best interests of the child at its core.



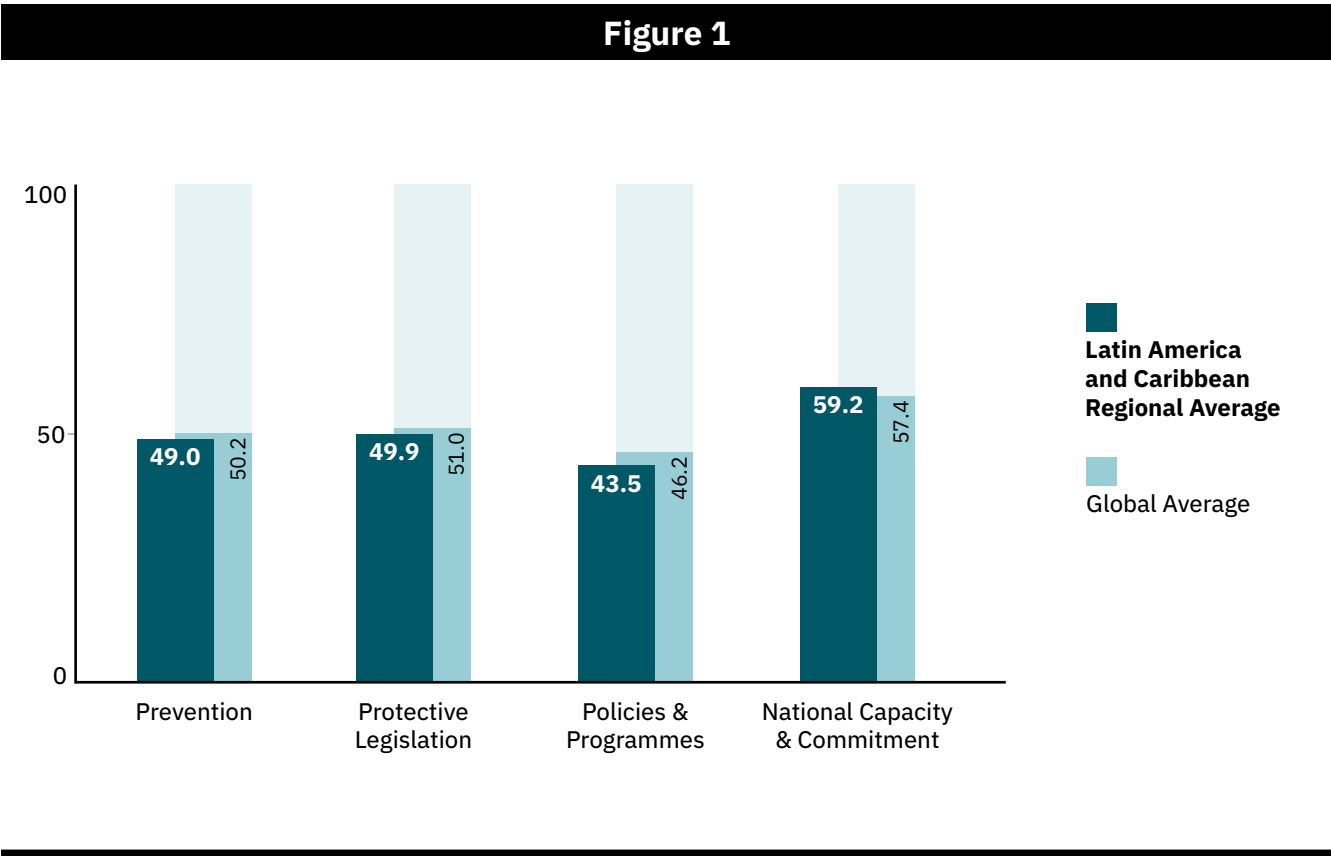
An artistic illustration featuring a large, bright orange duck as the central element. A person with dark hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and light blue trousers, is riding on the duck's back. The background is a soft, textured blue sky with a large, pale yellow sun or moon on the left side. A white circle is positioned in the upper right area of the image, containing the text '1. Prevention'.

# **1. Prevention**



The prevention pillar encompasses **Protective legislation**, which assesses the degree to which a country provides legal or regulatory protections from CSEA; **Policies & programmes**, which looks at government-driven initiatives and civil society programmes to address the economic, social and environmental risk factors that could increase susceptibility to CSEA; and **National capacity & commitment** which measures the extent to which governments have committed to understanding the scope and scale of the problem, building more effective prevention measures, and engaging with advocacy and civil society.

The Latin America and Caribbean region is ranked slightly below the global average in Prevention (figure 1). The region ranks slightly above average on National Capacity and Commitment but lower on Protective Legislation, and Policies and programmes.



# 1.1

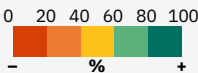
## Protective Legislation

The quality of protective legislation ([Figure 1](#)) was measured by weighing indicators relating to the ratification of international conventions and standards; a rights-based approach; the age of consent; the legal age of marriage; gender equality and gender protection laws; laws against CSEA; laws to support victim-survivors; legislation focused on people who commit offences; jurisdiction-specific legislation (for example, whether laws relating to CSEA apply equally to all states in a federal context). Overall, Colombia scored highest in the region and ranked 13th globally. All other countries scored between 40 and 60 on a scale where 100 represents the most substantial result and 0 is the weakest.



Table 2 – Protective Legislation

Rank	Global Rank among 60 nations	Country	Score
	13	Colombia	60.9
	22	Venezuela	57.6
	=25	Jamaica	55.0
	29	Argentina	54.5
	34	Peru	52.8
	39	Mexico	49.2
	40	El Salvador	49.1
	43	Brazil	47.7
	52	Guatemala	42.2



Note on tables: The score column lists the weighted average of indicators. The Rank column shows the quintile. Thus, for example, Colombia ranks 60.9 on the cumulative score and is, therefore, in the second quintile. All other countries score between 40 and 49% and are in the third quintile.

International and regional instruments

seek to establish a worldwide minimum level of protection for children from sexual exploitation and abuse. When states align national laws with international conventions, they form a shared global framework that will aid the prosecution of such crimes. Peru has the highest score and ties first at the global level.

The low scores of Jamaica and Venezuela reflect delays in submitting country reports to

the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW. No country has yet ratified the UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics.<sup>11</sup> In addition, 56% of countries have ratified the UNCRC Optional Protocol on a Communications Procedure,<sup>12</sup> and only 23% of countries align with the WeProtect Statement of Action by Governments.<sup>13</sup> The latter is particularly important in addressing the growing risk to children of online CSEA, which should be of urgent concern in the region.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unwto.org/ethics-convention>  
<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/optional-protocol-convention-rights-child-communications>  
<sup>13</sup> <https://www.weprotect.org/>



**National law:** The quality of CSEA legislation is measured using multiple indicators, including criminalising sexual activity with minors that apply equally to boys and girls. Across the region, the existence and clarity of these laws vary significantly on the following sub-indicators: the age of consent; the age of marriage/child marriage; gender equality and gender protection; laws against CSEA; laws supporting victim/survivors; legislation focused on people who commit offences; and jurisdiction-specific legislation.

Across the region, there are inconsistencies in the **age of consent**. Jamaica and Venezuela rank high in this respect, as the age of consent is 16. All other countries have inconsistent legislation, as is the case in Mexico where the age of consent differs across federal states, or the age of consent is below 15. In addition, no country has a ‘close age’ exemption.<sup>14</sup> In El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru, the **age of marriage** is 18 while elsewhere, it is 16 or 17 if young people have parental consent.

Laws promoting **gender equality** include equal rights for LGBTQ+ people, the full equality of women’s physical integrity and civil liberties. The Latin American region ranks in the mid-range in terms of legislation that promotes gender equality and indicators relating to the physical integrity and civic participation of women. The level of protection for LGBTQ+ rights varies, with the lowest scores in Guatemala and Jamaica. LGBTQ+ rights are not yet protected by the constitution in Jamaica.

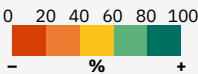
Within the broader legislative framework, each country has **laws specific to CSEA**. OOSI indicators used to assess the quality of this legislation include laws criminalising sexual activity with minors that apply equally to boys and girls; specific protection for vulnerable boys and girls (e.g. children with special needs); corruption of children for sexual purposes; all aspects of production, dissemination and consumption of child pornography; a clear definition of what constitutes child pornography; all aspects of trafficking children for sexual exploitation; laws on online grooming; aggravating sanctions for persons in a position of trust; and finally the perceived efficacy of law enforcement ([table 3](#)). Brazil ranks first at the global level, scoring above all high-income countries on this composite measure. Elsewhere gaps in legislation could be open to exploitation. For example, a lack of clarity in what constitutes CSEA can prevent parents and guardians from understanding and identifying clear harm to a child and hinder prosecutions. Only Brazil, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico and Peru have laws prohibiting sexual behaviour that does not lead to penetrative sex. There are also inconsistencies across the region concerning the corruption of children (intentionally exposing children to witnessing a sexual act). It is not explicitly banned by law in El Salvador, Jamaica and Venezuela and is only banned in public places in Argentina.

---

<sup>14</sup> This permits consensual sexual activity between a girl or boy who is underage as long as their partner is within a specific age range.

Table 3 – Laws against CSEA

	Global Rank	Country	Score
	1	Brazil	92.2
	9	El Salvador	78.7
	19	Argentina	71.9
	27	Colombia	66.2
	28	Guatemala	66.1
	29	Peru	65.8
	33	Mexico	63.9
	48	Venezuela	50.3
	51	Jamaica	47.5



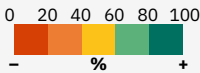
Similarly, a lack of **definition of what constitutes a criminal offence** can hinder the prosecution of those who benefit from CSEA without directly abusing children. For example, in Brazil, Guatemala and Jamaica, the law does not explicitly prohibit offering and/or procuring a child for the purposes of prostitution, although Jamaica does criminalise such acts when they occur in a brothel. In some countries, the law does not refer specifically to the role of intermediaries (including family members) in offering, obtaining, procuring and/or harbouring children for child prostitution. Trafficking often involves a chain of perpetrators, and this gap may make it difficult to prosecute those who attract and recruit children. Argentina criminalises anyone who attracts or recruits a person for any form of exploitation, and penalties are higher when the victim is under 18. Only 56% of countries have a law that prohibits **corruption** of a child - intentionally exposing children to witnessing a sexual act.

A lack of **clarity on what constitutes child pornography** can also hinder prosecution. 45% of countries (Brazil, El Salvador, Jamaica and Mexico) score well in this respect with national law aligning with the Lanzarote Convention<sup>15</sup> by criminalising real and simulated sexual images of children (table 4, below). Definitions that are too narrow can also hamper progress. Venezuelan law does not specifically sanction the production, reproduction, or possession of child pornography or sexually abusive images, although it prohibits dissemination, distribution and sale of such material. Moreover, it is difficult to pinpoint a law in Venezuela that enables the prosecution of dissemination or distribution of child pornography unless linked to cybercrime or organised crime.

15 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/lanzarote-convention>

**Table 4 – Definition of child sexually abusive materials containing a child**

	Global Rank	Country	Score
	=1	Brazil	100.0
	=1	El Salvador	100.0
	=1	Jamaica	100.0
	=1	Mexico	100.0
	=36	Argentina	0.0
	=36	Colombia	0.0
	=36	Guatemala	0.0
	=36	Peru	0.0
	=36	Venezuela	0.0



Across the region, there are also gaps in the **protection extended to particularly vulnerable children**. Examples of good practice include Argentina, which has specific penal codes that prohibit any sexual activity with a minor who has a mental or physical disability; and Brazil where there are more stringent sentences for sexual activity with a disabled child.

There are also weaknesses in **laws to protect child victim-survivors**. For example, 45% of countries (Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru) do not offer protection from prosecution to child victims of trafficking who are engaged in illegal activities, and these countries have not revoked the statute of limitations on reporting CSEA. Revoking

the statute of limitations ensures that victims who were too traumatised to report CSEA when it occurred, have the right to do so at any time. This can help achieve justice for survivors and can also prevent such abuse from re-occurring in future.<sup>16</sup> In addition, abortion is only offered to child victims of CSEA in Argentina and Colombia.

The Latin American region performs reasonably well in terms of **legislation focused on people who commit offences**, but there are considerable differences in the age of criminal responsibility. The UNCRC advises states to set a minimum age of criminal responsibility upwards of 14 years old. However, this is the case in only 45% of countries (Peru, Argentina, Colombia and Venezuela).<sup>17</sup> The age is lower in other countries, such as El Salvador, where legal responsibility for all crimes is from age 12, although El Salvador has a distinct penal system for 12 to 17-year-olds.

In all countries except Colombia and Guatemala, **double criminality** is a precondition to extradition for CSEA offences. Double criminality stipulates that the alleged action for which extradition is being sought must be considered a crime in both the demanding and the requested countries.

<sup>16</sup> McElvaney R. (2013) Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse: Delays, Non-disclosure and Partial Disclosure. What the Research Tells Us and Implications for Practice, <https://www.nationalcac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Disclosure-of-child-sexual-abuse-Delays-non-disclosures-and-partial-disclosures.-What-the-research-tells-us-and-implications-for-practice.pdf>  
<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-24-2019-childrens-rights-child>



# 1.2

## Policies and Programmes

Government-driven initiatives and civil society programmes that address economic, social and environmental risk factors are key components of a child protection system.<sup>18</sup> The quality of policies and programmes (table 5) is assessed by the following: the existence of an overall national plan to combat CSEA, social protection, provision of education and skills, services for people who commit offences; policies to reduce poverty and inequality, strategies to combat harmful norms.

---

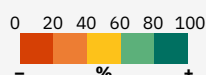
<sup>18</sup> Save the Children (2011) A Focus on Child Protection within Social Protection Systems: Transforming Children's lives, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/5908.pdf/>

**Table 5 – Policies and programme overall**

	Global rank	Country	Score
	18	Mexico	52.2
	20	Jamaica	50.7
	25	Colombia	47.9
	27	Brazil	46.5
	29	El Salvador	46.1
	=31	Guatemala	44.3
	34	Peru	42.0
	50	Venezuela	32.6
	52	Argentina	29.4

**Table 6 – National plan to end CSEA**

	Global rank	Country	Score
	=3	Brazil	75.0
	=3	Mexico	75.0
	=22	El Salvador	25.0
	=22	Guatemala	25.0
	=28	Argentina	0.0
	=28	Colombia	0.0
	=28	Jamaica	0.0
	=28	Peru	0.0
	=28	Venezuela	0.0

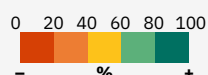


A grave weakness in the region is that only 34% of countries– Brazil, El Salvador and Mexico –have a **national strategy or action plan that specifically addresses CSEA**, even if these plans have gaps. Although they had such national plans in 2019, by 2022 those of Peru, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, and Jamaica had expired ([table 6](#)). Moreover, in creating these and other policies relating to CSEA, the government routinely **engages with civil society networks and organisations**, but this collaboration usually takes the shape of ad-hoc consultations for policy drafting rather than formally constituted forums and panels.

The quality of **social protection** is assessed according to the availability of sexual health services, access to primary and pre-primary education, parenting support, social assistance programmes, universal health coverage, birth registration and the gender gap in educational attainment ([table 7](#)). Peru ranks highest in the region across social protection indicators and ranks in second place globally. Several Latin American and Caribbean countries implement innovative and holistic social protection programmes aimed at children and parents that tackle key risk factors of CSEA. One country, Peru, is in the first quintile and ranks second at global level.

**Table 7 – Social Protection**

	Global rank	Country	Score
	2	Peru	82.7
	11	Brazil	77.7
	15	Colombia	75.5
	19	Guatemala	73.6
	32	El Salvador	65.1
	33	Mexico	63.9
	36	Jamaica	61.8
	55	Argentina	38.4
	57	Venezuela	34.2



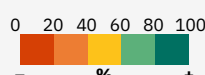
The region performs well in **birth registration**, with all countries in the first quintile. This is critical for children's access to other services, including **access to and continuation in school**.<sup>19</sup> 67% of assessed countries (Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Jamaica, Peru and Guatemala) have a national plan to improve access to pre-primary and primary education (table 8) and strategies to improve the quality of education. A good example is provided by Colombia's National Development Plan 2018 – 2022, which aims to ensure that the initial education system is of good quality and promotes children's holistic development. The plan aims to increase access to pre-primary and primary school, and works on preparing children to transition into primary school. Latin America and the Caribbean score exceptionally well, with all countries in the top quintile in indicators of **gender equality in education**, i.e. access and attainment by boys and girls.

<sup>19</sup> Save the Children (2011) A Focus on Child Protection within Social Protection Systems: Transforming Children's lives, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/5908.pdf/>



**Table 8 – Action plan or strategy to improve access to primary education**

	Global rank	Country	Score
	=1	Brazil	100.0
	=1	Colombia	100.0
	=1	El Salvador	100.0
	=1	Guatemala	100.0
	=1	Mexico	100.0
	=1	Peru	100.0
	=48	Argentina	0.0
	=48	Jamaica	0.0
	=48	Venezuela	0.0



The region performs reasonably well in terms of education on CSEA in schools. 78% of countries ensure that children receive **age-appropriate information about CSEA and safety**. These countries also provide related training for school staff on CSEA. For example, EL Salvador’s Ministry of Health has set up a Network for the Prevention of Sexual Assault, which is tasked with raising awareness in schools and training staff on CSEA, while school staff can access a comprehensive 88-page document on paper and online that provides guidance on dealing with victims and cases of CSEA. In contrast, only 34% of countries – Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela – provide **community-based education for parents** specifically focusing on CSEA, although 67% of countries offer general parenting support in community centres.<sup>20</sup> No country in the region mandates training on CSEA for organisations that work with young people. The provision of education on CSEA for children, without parallel education for parents and the wider community, limits the likelihood of a strong protective environment around the child. Conversely, Venezuela provides community-based CSEA education, but the school curriculum does not help children identify risks or where to find help. [Tables 9](#) and [10](#) indicate a need for alignment in CSEA prevention education.

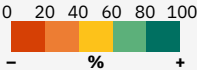
<sup>20</sup> NSPCC, Working with a community to prevent child sexual abuse in the home, 2018, <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2018/community-approach-to-preventing-child-sexual-abuse-in-the-home>

Table 9 – CSEA prevention education

	Global rank	Country	Score
	=1	Brazil	100.0
	=1	Colombia	100.0
	=1	El Salvador	100.0
	=1	Guatemala	100.0
	=1	Jamaica	100.0
	=1	Mexico	100.0
	=1	Peru	100.0
	=51	Argentina	0.0
	=51	Venezuela	0.0

Table 10 – CSEA education parents and community

	Global rank	Country	Score
	=1	Brazil	100.0
	=1	Mexico	100.0
	=1	Venezuela	100.0
	=26	Argentina	0.0
	=26	Colombia	0.0
	=26	El Salvador	0.0
	=26	Guatemala	0.0
	=26	Jamaica	0.0
	=26	Peru	0.0



The region as a whole is in the low to mid-range in terms of **combating harmful cultural norms**. Between 2019 and 2022, only 23% of countries – Brazil and El Salvador – had run national campaigns to promote behavioural change and counter CSEA. Only Colombia and Mexico have national policies to promote the inclusion of ethnic and cultural minorities, and only Argentina, Colombia and El Salvador have specific policies to promote the inclusion of people who are LGBTQ+.

The region performs less well in terms of **access to health care**: 89% of countries fall in the second quintile in terms of children’s access to universal health care (health-related services, medications and vaccines), and Guatemala is in the third quintile.

Protection against poverty and inequality

The region also performs less well in poverty /inequality reduction plans, with only 45% of countries (Jamaica, El Salvador, Venezuela and Colombia) in the second quintile. The quality of **protection against poverty/inequality** is measured using: the poverty elimination plan, the level of poverty, and the Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality. As of 2022, only 56% of

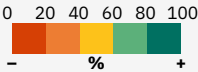
countries in the region (Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico and Venezuela) had a poverty elimination plan. For example, Argentina’s plan to reduce or eliminate poverty is aligned with the 2030 SDGs and targets vulnerable populations through cash transfers, family assistance, and community development. The importance of a **poverty elimination plan** cannot be overstressed in a region of such extreme inequality. A comparison of [tables 11](#) and [12](#) (below) shows that countries with no poverty reduction plan, like Guatemala, Brazil and Peru, also score low on protection.

Table 11 – Poverty reduction plan

	Global rank	Country	Score
	=1	Argentina	100.0
	=1	Colombia	100.0
	=1	El Salvador	100.0
	=1	Jamaica	100.0
	=1	Mexico	100.0
	=1	Venezuela	100.0
	=38	Brazil	0.0
	=38	Guatemala	0.0
	=38	Peru	0.0

Table 12 – Poverty/inequality protections

	Global rank	Country	Score
	10	Jamaica	71.4
	23	El Salvador	65.9
	27	Venezuela	64.3
	29	Colombia	62.5
	=34	Argentina	58.8
	=34	Mexico	58.8
	42	Brazil	35.6
	51	Peru	32.2
	58	Guatemala	18.4



Paradoxically, El Salvador ranks comparatively well at the regional level despite being a middle-income come country, as does Venezuela.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Guatemala, a high/middle-income country, ranks 58th in the world and in the lowest quintile.

<sup>21</sup> Venezuela, previously classified as a an upper-middle income country by the World Bank, was as of 2022 unclassified due to a lack of available data.

# 1.3

## National Capacity & Commitment

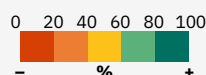
The quality of national capacity and commitment to combat CSEA was measured through national plans and policies, data availability, monitoring capacity (including the effectiveness of budget allocation), civil society support, activism, and oversight. On these combined measures, Mexico and Brazil rank the highest. No country in the region features in the top quintile, and there is a need for improvement in commitment and in some instances, capacity to address CSEA.





**Table 13 – National Capacity and Commitment**

	Global rank	Country	Score
	10	Mexico	74.1
	15	Brazil	70.4
	16	Colombia	69.6
	17	Peru	69.4
	31	El Salvador	58.8
	32	Guatemala	58.1
	44	Jamaica	49.8
	47	Venezuela	47.6
	53	Argentina	35.3

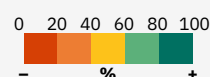


## National plans and policies

This indicator is a composite measure of the following: a national strategic plan to end CSEA, strategies for the participation of children/adolescents, a funding plan to end CSEA; a strategy to prevent CSEA online, a plan to end sexual exploitation in travel and tourism, a national crime prevention strategy that includes CSEA (see [table 14](#)).

**Table 14 – National plans and policies**

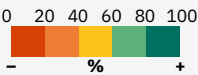
	Global Rank	Country	Score
	=1	Brazil	100.0
	=1	El Salvador	100.0
	=1	Guatemala	100.0
	=1	Mexico	100.0
	=26	Argentina	0.0
	=26	Colombia	0.0
	=26	Jamaica	0.0
	=26	Peru	0.0
	=26	Venezuela	0.0



As of 2022, only 45% of countries in the region - Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico had a **national plan to end CSEA** (table 15), although those of El Salvador and Guatemala did not involve children and adolescents in formulation, do not have an allocated budget and lack a strategy for online CSEA. **Mexico was the only country where adolescents participated in creating the national action plan**, and only Brazil had an identifiable **source of funding for its national plan**.

Table 15 – National plan to end CSEA

	Global Rank	Country	Score
	=3	Brazil	75.0
	=3	Mexico	75.0
	=22	El Salvador	25.0
	=22	Guatemala	25.0
	=28	Argentina	0.0
	=28	Colombia	0.0
	=28	Jamaica	0.0
	=28	Peru	0.0
	=28	Venezuela	0.0



**Child rights-based budgeting** ensures that children are visible and considered in budget-related documentation and throughout the budgeting process.<sup>22</sup> 56% of countries rank high, with Jamaica ranking an impressive third at the global level. However there were exceptionally low scores for El Salvador and Guatemala, which came 56th and 57th out of 60 countries. Moreover, these countries also score very low in **government expenditures** against original budget allocations (i.e. whether designated funds were spent as planned). In this respect, Jamaica, Peru, and Mexico score between 90 and 100% and El Salvador and Guatemala have scores of 5.6 and 0.0 out of 100. Unless children are visible in budgeting and plans and policies are backed by actual expenditure, policies and programmes will not become a reality.

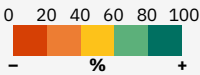
<sup>22</sup> This parameter reflects the perception, by stakeholders, of their country's performance in this respect.

## Quality and availability of data on CSEA

A country’s capacity to produce and disseminate **reliable, relevant and timely statistics** is critical to the prevention and response to CSEA. Only Colombia scored in the top quintile, ranking fourth in the world, because it collected prevalence data, disaggregated the age and sex of both victims and perpetrators, and collected prevalence data between 2019 and 2022. Other countries collect only part of this data.

Table 16 – Quality and availability of data

	Global Rank	Country	Score
	=1	Brazil	100.0
	=1	El Salvador	100.0
	=1	Guatemala	100.0
	=1	Mexico	100.0
	=26	Argentina	0.0
	=26	Colombia	0.0
	=26	Jamaica	0.0
	=26	Peru	0.0
	=26	Venezuela	0.0



It is interesting to note a **high capacity in the region for statistical analysis**. Hence, almost all countries in the region can put a more robust system in place to produce robust data.



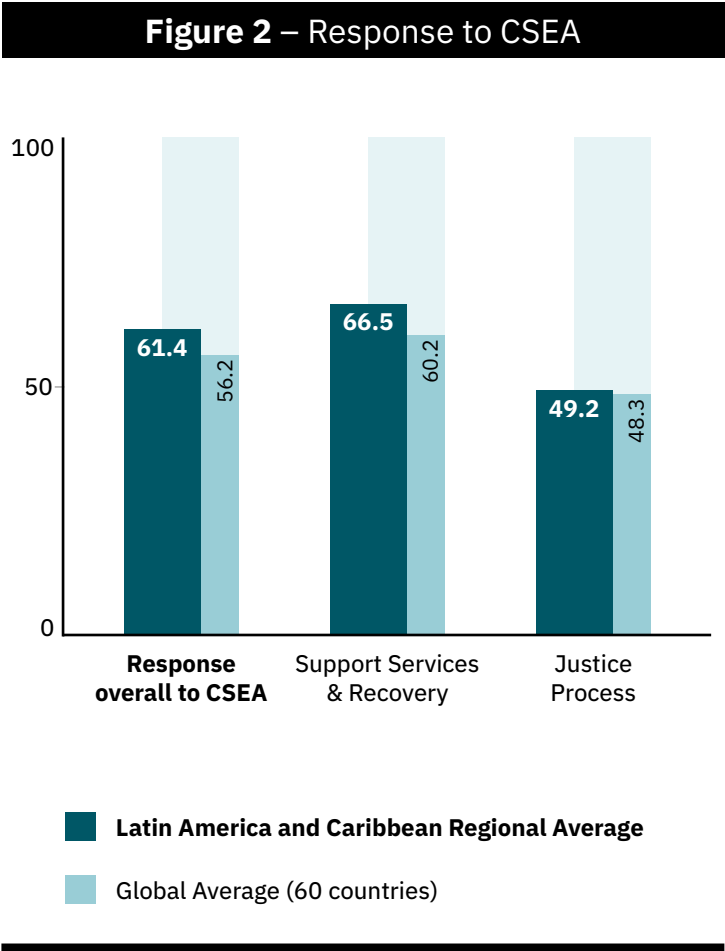
## **2. Response**



The second pillar of the CSEA strategy is **Response**, which consists of **two sub-categories: Support Services and Recovery**, which includes health services, medical support services, mental health and rehabilitation, and how to increase child-centred decision-making through the recovery process. The second sub-category is the **Justice Process**, which measures the capacity of the justice system from the initial moment of response through to the resolution of the case, assessing its capacity, responsiveness, and effectiveness, in order to evaluate the extent to which the best interests of the child feature.

Response: Regional performance

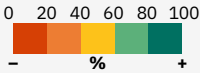
In terms of response overall to CSEA, Latin America and the Caribbean ranks well, **consistently scoring above the global average on all categories within this pillar.**



In [figure 2](#) the Global Average refers to scores among 60 high-, middle-, and low-income countries. The Latin America & the Caribbean region scores above global averages on Response and its constituent categories, Support Services & Recovery, and Justice Process. [Table 17](#) ranks countries in the region on Response. Seven countries (Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, Jamaica, and Colombia) are located in the top half of global rankings.

Table 17 – Response to CSEA

	Global Rank	Country	Score
	5	Brazil	78.5
	8	Guatemala	75.8
	11	Mexico	72.5
	16	El Salvador	67.6
	20	Jamaica	66.7
	24	Colombia	62.8
	=45	Argentina	45.8
	48	Venezuela	44.9
	51	Peru	38.0

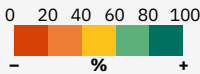


Response: Support services and recovery

Turning to the first sub-category within **Response**, i.e. **Support Services & Recovery**, six countries ranked in the top two quintiles (table 18). At the global level, Brazil ranks third, Guatemala and Mexico sixth, and El Salvador (a lower-middle-income country), ranks eighth. Colombia and Jamaica are also in the top two percentiles. These scores result from two vital regional strengths: a robust and child-centred medical care system in most countries; and a judicial system adapted to the needs of the child. That said, there are considerable gaps in response to CSEA in Argentina, Venezuela and, above all, Peru, which ranks 51 out of 60 countries.

Table 18 – Support services and recovery

	Global Rank	Country	Score
	3	Brazil	84.4
	=6	Guatemala	79.2
	=6	Mexico	79.2
	=8	El Salvador	78.1
	=17	Colombia	74.0
	=17	Jamaica	74.0
	=44	Argentina	52.1
	47	Venezuela	50.0
	51	Peru	37.5



Support Systems and Recovery: Initial response

Brazil and Jamaica are in the first quintile, and Brazil ranks first in the world regarding response, with hotlines that link to law enforcement, hotlines that function on online or mobile platforms, and separate emergency response centres for children alone (table 19). Peru and Venezuela rank poorly on the initial response.

Support Systems and Recovery: Medical Care

The region performs exceptionally well in the availability of medical care and the existence of guidelines for healthcare workers: 89% of countries assessed are in the top quintile, **sharing tied first place in global rankings** (see table 20 below). With the exception of Peru, all countries **provide emergency care** to child victims of CSEA through the state hospital system or specialised centres and other services. For example, although it is a low-middle income country, El Salvador has a dedicated decentralised Clinic for Comprehensive Care of Victims of Intra-Family Violence and Sexual Abuse, specialised in dealing with victims’ medical needs.

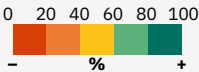
All the assessed countries, except Peru, provide **longer-term treatment** either through universal healthcare provision – such as Argentina – or through specific legislation for child victims of CSEA. **Most Latin America & Caribbean countries share first position globally in terms of medical care and CSEA.**

Table 19 – Initial Response

	Global Rank	Country	Score
	=1	Brazil	100.0
	=13	Jamaica	83.3
	=25	Guatemala	66.7
	=27	Colombia	58.3
	=35	El Salvador	50.0
	=46	Mexico	41.7
	=49	Argentina	33.3
	=58	Peru	0.0
	=58	Venezuela	0.0

Table 20 – Medical Care

	Global Rank	Country	Score
	=1	Argentina	100.0
	=1	Brazil	100.0
	=1	Colombia	100.0
	=1	El Salvador	100.0
	=1	Guatemala	100.0
	=1	Jamaica	100.0
	=1	Mexico	100.0
	=1	Venezuela	100.0
	=34	Peru	50.0



The provision of **mental health services** is stipulated in law in seven countries, with exceptions in Argentina and Peru. However, the offer of mental health services does not necessarily guarantee quality or that coverage of such services is sufficient to meet actual needs. In at least one case – El Salvador – which guarantees mental health services, it was difficult to pinpoint the organisations that provide it. A positive example of legislation for child victims is Colombia’s Resolution 459 (2012), which requires healthcare providers to provide immediate and follow-up medical and mental health services to all victims of CSEA.<sup>23</sup>

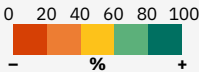
In all countries in the region, **health workers are provided with guidelines** on the clinical evaluation of sexual abuse victims, including female and male children and adolescents. There are some variations country by country. In some countries, guidelines are specific to healthcare, and in others, such as Peru, guidelines are also designed for workers in education, justice and other professions that work on social projects with victims of CSEA.

Support Systems and Recovery: Social and Judicial Services

The quality of **social and judicial services**, and the coordination between the two, are measured on the following indicators: interagency coordination, guidelines and training for social workers, specialist legal aid providers, and mechanisms for victim compensation. Across the region, seven countries perform well on this indicator. Guatemala, Mexico and Brazil are in the first quintile because of the **quality of coordination** between social and judicial services on CSEA.

Table 21 – Social and Judicial Services

	Global Rank	Country	Score
	=1	Guatemala	100.0
	=1	Mexico	100.0
	=8	Brazil	87.5
	=17	Peru	75.0
	=26	El Salvador	62.5
	=26	Jamaica	62.5
	=26	Venezuela	62.5
	=42	Argentina	50.0
	=53	Colombia	37.5



23 Colombia, Resolution 459, 2019, [https://www.suin-juriscol.gov.co/derechos/Resolucion\\_459\\_2012.pdf](https://www.suin-juriscol.gov.co/derechos/Resolucion_459_2012.pdf)



The laws of Mexico and Guatemala require multidisciplinary, interagency working groups/committees to be established to share information relevant to child sexual abuse and exploitation. Although not required by law elsewhere, there is evidence that interagency groups exist in all countries other than Peru and Argentina. **Guidelines and training for social workers** have been developed in 67% of countries (Brazil, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela) but not yet in Argentina, Colombia, or El Salvador. All countries other than Colombia provide specialised **legal aid for child victims**. 78% of countries have mechanisms to provide victim compensation, but these do not exist in Venezuela and Jamaica.

Regarding **rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators**, across the region, there is an almost universal absence of therapeutic or psycho-educative services for people who commit offences. As noted earlier, there are no mandated treatment programmes for juveniles at risk of or who have already perpetrated sexual offending. This is a major weakness, as it does not prevent recidivism.

## Response: Justice Process

The Justice Process is the second sub-category of response to CSEA. Indicators of the quality of the justice process include levels of corruption in the system, building confidence in law enforcement, gender representation in the police force, public confidence in police/law enforcement, and public confidence in the justice system. There are worrying gaps across all these indicators, especially around the **perceived corruption of public officials**, which was deemed highly pervasive in Guatemala and Venezuela, and high to moderate elsewhere. Respondents in Colombia, Argentina and Jamaica indicated ‘moderate’ levels of perceived corruption.

However, indicators do show a positive trend regarding **confidence in the police and the justice system**: trust in both is essential for people to report offences without fear of further traumatising. Across the region, the percentage of respondents who expressed confidence in the justice system is moderate to high in all countries except Venezuela. Trust in the police is lower than in the judiciary; it is higher than average in Guatemala and El Salvador, low in Venezuela, and in the lower to median range elsewhere.

### Justice Process: Police Capacity

The overall quality of police capacity is based on the following indicators: the existence of dedicated units responsible for CSEA law enforcement, units designated to law enforcement for online CSEA, training on child-friendly investigations, and the number of police personnel per 100,000 persons.

The region scores well in police training on child-friendly investigations, including interviewing techniques and child and adolescent-friendly tools and standards. Across the region, there is a need to develop specialised CSEA units and to work with international law enforcement to investigate transnational cases. Only four countries (Brazil, Guatemala, Jamaica and El Salvador) have a specialised police agency dedicated to CSEA, and in Brazil – the largest and most diverse federal state in the region – specialised CSEA police units are part of the National Police of each State. An indicator which should be of concern is that only three countries – Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala – have police units that specialised in online CSEA and which are supported by forensic teams. Only Brazil and Mexico work routinely with Interpol on transnational cases.

Brazil, El Salvador, Jamaica, and Mexico have developed strategies to improve public confidence in the police. For example, El Salvador's "El Salvador Seguro" plan ('A Safe El Salvador') includes strategies and reforms to increase confidence in both justice and law enforcement. The fact that public confidence in both institutions is comparatively high in El Salvador suggests the value of such plans. No country in the region has policies to promote gender equality or diversity in the workforce. If an investigation of CSEA crimes requires women police officers, this lack of diversity is problematic. Finally, it is important to note that, in the region, confidence in the justice system ranks lower than in other parts of the world.

### Justice Process: Capacity of the Judicial system

One of the positive achievements across the region is the existence of child-friendly court procedures (e.g. video links) in 89% of countries, and all countries provide young people who commit offences with access to legal aid. However, there is a clear need to increase the quality and consistency of training for prosecutors and judges across the region. Only in Brazil, Guatemala and Mexico are judges and prosecutors trained in child-friendly procedures, trauma, or sexual abuse. On this indicator, Brazil scores first place at the global level, and Guatemala and Mexico are in 11th place.

### Justice Process: Monitoring and Evaluation of the Justice System

Across the region, there are serious challenges in accessing data on arrests, indictments, and convictions in CSEA cases, making it difficult to monitor the justice system. Only in El Salvador and Mexico can the public access data on arrests, indictments, and prosecutions. In Guatemala, data can only be accessed on arrests and indictments. Within the region, only Guatemala (in 2018) evaluated its justice system response to CSEA.

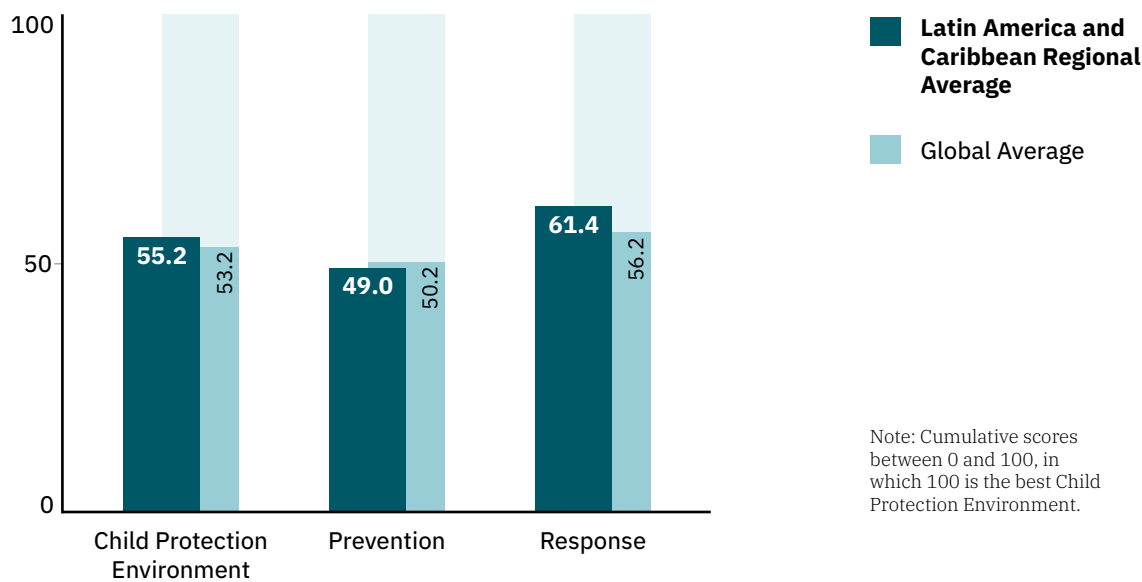


### **3. Summary and Conclusion**



Despite being a predominantly middle-income region with high levels of social inequality, Latin America ranks slightly above the global average in the Child Protection Environment (figure 3, below). **Latin America and the Caribbean score above global averages in Response to CSEA but under-performs in Prevention.**

Figure 3 – Overall Child Protection Environment



Where the region is strong

→ **Latin America and the Caribbean rank well with regard to response to CSEA**, consistently scoring above the global OOSI average across categories (see figure 2 – table 21). This strong performance is driven by a robust, child-friendly medical care system, a judicial system adapted to the needs of the child, and the implementation of holistic social protection programmes.

- **From the initial response to long-term care, a robust child-friendly medical care system:** emergency response is widely available to all victims of CSEA across the region. Free examinations, treatment and testing are offered to children across all assessed countries,, except Peru. As well as being widely available, care is also sensitive to the child's needs. All assessed countries have published specific guidelines for healthcare workers on the clinical evaluation of children and adolescents.
- **A judicial system adapted to the needs of the child:** the region's score regarding the 'Capacity of the Judicial system' is 72/100, which is ten points higher than the global average of 62/100. This high performance is primarily because 89% of countries in the region have child-friendly court processes.
- **Holistic social protection programmes to reduce the risk of CSEA:** the performance of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean is mixed regarding social protections, but 56% of countries score within the global top 20 on this indicator. For example, 67% of assessed countries implement national strategies to improve access to, and quality of, pre-primary and primary education.<sup>24</sup>
- **The region scored high in terms of the active involvement of civil society in implementing national plans and strategies.** The good response has often been led by civil society organisations, often with support of international cooperation, which fill the gap where state capacity is limited.

## Where are the gaps?

### Prevention Dimension

**Latin America and the Caribbean fall slightly below the global average in Protective Legislation, and Policies and Programmes.** While there have been advances in aligning laws with international standards and creating policies and programmes to meet the SGDs, there are many gaps and inconsistencies in the legal framework and judiciary system and variance in the quality of policies and programmes designed to protect children.

---

<sup>24</sup> Save the Children, A Focus on Child Protection within Social Protection Systems: Transforming Children's lives, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/5908.pdf/>

- **There is an urgent need for all countries to have a national strategy to end CSEA**, but by 2022, those of Peru, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia and Jamaica had expired. While this is likely to have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, creating national strategies is an urgent priority.
- **There is also a pressing need to improve legislation relating to CSEA.** There are gaps in the legislative framework of several included countries, which could be addressed if the law were aligned with the Lanzarote Convention,<sup>25</sup> essential for a coherent international response to CSEA. Although it is clear that advances have been made across the region, there is a lack of specificity in definitions of CSEA, which may hinder prosecutions for such offences. Given the complexity of CSEA, it is essential to ensure precision in law and for laws to be updated to capture new and emerging risks.
- **There is a need for dedicated CSEA response units within the police and the urgent need to ensure that every country has police units specialised in online abuse**, which can conduct forensic investigations, and coordinate work with agencies in other countries, given the rapidly evolving and transnational nature of online CSEA.
- **Adapting protective legislation to the needs of the child:** the region's approach to countering CSEA needs to become more responsive to the child's specific needs and sensitive to the particular needs of victim-survivors of CSEA.
- **Eliminating the statute of limitations** on CSEA cases can ensure that victims who were too traumatised to report CSEA that occurred many years or even decades ago can do so at any time. This not only helps achieve justice for survivors but can also prevent such abuse from reoccurring in future.<sup>26</sup>
- There is a need to ensure that **child victims of trafficking are not subjected to criminal procedures or sanctions**. The absence of such laws leaves substantive gaps in the provision of legal guarantees for victim-survivors of trafficking and may act as a deterrent to the disclosure of situations of exploitation and/or abuse.

<sup>25</sup> See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/lanzarote-convention>

<sup>26</sup> McElvaney R. (2013) Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse: Delays, Non-disclosure and Partial Disclosure. What the Research Tells Us and Implications for Practice, 2013, <https://www.nationalcac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Disclosure-of-child-sexual-abuse-Delays-non-disclosures-and-partial-disclosures.-What-the-research-tells-us-and-implications-for-practice.pdf>

## Response Component

A majority (55%) of countries in the region still **do not have a specific national action plan to address CSEA**, and do not embed CSEA within their broader national crime prevention strategies. Notably, 78% of countries in the region do not have **a plan related to online CSEA**.

Further, even countries with a CSEA strategy and action plan do not consistently **consult children and youth** as required under Article 13 of the UNCRC. Brazil is the only country that ring fences **funding sources** for implementing its national plan.

- Across Latin America and the Caribbean, there is no indication of evidence-based prevention programmes for people troubled by sexual thoughts about children or youth with problematic sexual behaviour. Only two countries in the region have treatment programmes for adult sex offenders, and no prevention or rehabilitation is offered to young people who have perpetrated abuse. **Therefore, there is an urgent need for evidence-based, age-appropriate early intervention and rehabilitation to lower the risk of recidivism.**
- **There is a need for public policy to promote routine community-based training and information on CSEA for parents and community leaders**, an essential part of a preventive strategy.<sup>27</sup>
- **Better data collection:** Although the majority of countries keep a record of recorded cases of CSEA and the sex of the victim, there is a need for consistently reported detail, at the very least, on other characteristics of the victim, such as their age, relationship with the perpetrator, and the age and gender of the perpetrator of CSEA.
- **Expenditure on child protection:** One of the problematic areas, particularly in Central America, is the gap between budget allocation and actual expenditure on child protection. **Without funds, the most impressively designed services will not have the capacity to function.**

---

<sup>27</sup> UNICEF (2021) [Violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean 2015-2021](#) | UNICEF

→ **Ensuring full participation of CSOs:** Although most countries scored high in routine participation of civil society in the formulation of law and policy, this was usually on an ad hoc, case-by-case basis. More formally constituted CSO forums or consultative groups could hold governments accountable, monitoring performance and ensuring that the budget for child protection is spent as planned.

### Country comparisons

Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala top the second iteration of the *Out of the Shadows Index* for the Latin America and Caribbean region and score in the top quintile of the Index overall (see [table 22](#))

Table 22 – Top performers across the Latin America and Caribbean region for Overall Child Protection Environment, Prevention and Response		
Overall	Prevention	Response
Brazil	Mexico	Brazil
Mexico	Colombia	Guatemala
Guatemala	Brazil	Mexico
Colombia	Jamaica	El Salvador
Jamaica	Peru	Jamaica



**Brazil’s** top quintile performance across all response categories drives its first-place regional ranking. The country owes its performance to its long-term comprehensive support and recovery system, which ranks third across all 60 countries in the OOSI. In addition, Brazil’s strong performance in the Justice Process category results from the holistic guidelines and training.

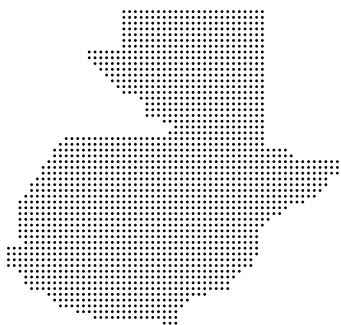


Brazil is the only country in the region that requires judges, prosecutors and all related judicial systems personnel to have special training on child-friendly interventions, cases of sexual abuse, and trauma-informed approaches. However, Brazil fails to rank in the top 10 overall, due to its weak protective legislation framework. Its statute of limitations, low age of consent, and lack of close-in-age exemptions, alongside weak laws to protect victim-survivors of exploitation, are the driving factors behind this gap in performance.



Alongside a robust Support Services and Recovery system, **Mexico's** top performance in National Capacity & Commitment and its innovative Policies & Programmes place it in 12th position globally and second place regionally. Mexico is notably the only country in the region that involved children

and adolescents in drafting its national plan to end CSEA (*The Protocol for the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Girls, Boys and Adolescents*). The Ministry of Public Education also implements holistic education programmes involving children and provides guidance for parents and school personnel to prevent child sexual abuse. Despite these strengths, Mexico still has significant gaps, particularly in protective legislation. It notably lacks a national age of consent and comprehensive legislation against online grooming - and lacks a dedicated CSEA law enforcement unit and monitoring processes for the justice system.



**Guatemala's** Support Services & Recovery system, alongside its child-friendly justice process, drive its third-place performance regionally. Of particular note is Guatemala's inter-institutional *Agreement of Action for Violence Prevention*, which includes procedures and standards for all investigators of CSEA cases, hospitals collecting evidence and providing care, and social assistance professionals.

Guatemala is the only country in the region to have assessed its justice system since 2019.

In 2019, Guatemala inaugurated the *Coordinated Model of Care for Children and Adolescents* (MAINA). A children's court, the offices of the police, public prosecutor, victim support services, and forensic services are based in the same new centre in the capital city, in order to streamline the protection

of children and adolescents, as well as the prosecution of offences. MAINA aims to provide a timely and coordinated response (within 24 hours) to the investigation, as well as providing care to victims so as to avoid victimisation and secondary victimisation.

MAINA is tasked with responding to all forms of child maltreatment and neglect, violence against women, and sexual violence. The centre also addresses offences relating to the trafficking or sequestration of children, such as inducement to children to abandon their homes, substituting one child for another, and hiding or providing misleading information about child marriage.

Crucial gaps remain regarding prevention, especially around Protective Legislation, where the country scores in the bottom 10 of the 60 countries. Guatemala also needs to improve in National Capacity & Commitment and Policies & Programmes. As noted above, the indicator of greatest concern is the gap between what has been allocated to child rights and protection in the budget and the government's actual expenditure. Lack of investment in policies and programmes, including Support and Recovery services, puts their viability at risk.



**Colombia** scores highly in several areas and ranks highly within the region and globally in terms of medical care for children who have been victims of CSEA. The Ministry of Health requires healthcare providers to provide immediate and follow-up medical and mental health services to victims of CSEA. Data on the number of children and young people who have experienced sexual violence and have sought and received medical and other care over the past 12 months is captured in the national Violence Against Children Study (VACS). The government of Colombia led the VACS surveys with support from the U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of the Together for Girls partnership.

Colombia is also building robust interagency networks to combat CSEA. The first VACS study, conducted in 2019, reported that 41% of girls and 42% of boys in Colombia had experienced some type of violence in childhood. In response, Colombia took several measures to prioritise ending violence against children. The government launched the National Alliance to End Violence Against Children, a multi-sectoral platform linking various

government agencies. The Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF) was appointed the focal point to lead the development of an evidence-based and costed national action plan that would reduce violence towards children by 14.3 % by 2022.

Some aspects of the child protection system need to be strengthened. For example, Colombia does not have a law enforcement agency or unit to respond to CSEA, although the National Police has a unit that has received special training on human rights and laws pertaining to children and adolescents. This police unit, called the Child and Adolescence Unit, has general responsibilities for children. Like several other countries in the region, Colombia does not have a law enforcement agency or unit to respond to online CSEA.



Countries which score lower on the overall child protective environment may perform well in certain areas. For example, **Argentina** has the best-integrated response to online CSEA. Prosecutors from the nationwide Point of Contact Network against Child Pornography on the Internet pursued cases of internet child pornography. The City of Buenos Aires Public Ministry's Judicial Investigative Bureau is the primary point of contact for information on child pornography. It liaises with the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, prosecutors, and police forces across the country. This means that cumulatively, there is a great deal of positive experience and strong practice across the region which could be more widely disseminated, shared, and tested.

## What has changed between 2019 and 2022?

The first iteration of the *Out of the Shadows Index*, released in 2019, focused on responses to CSEA and looked across government, civil society and private sector initiatives to understand how countries were developing laws, programmes and interventions to support victim-survivors and people who commit offences. This second iteration takes the assessment a step further: it looks across efforts to both prevent and respond to CSEA, building the framework for a holistic, government-led approach that is supported by civil society and the private sector. Although the first and second iterations of the OOSI are not directly comparable, Economist Impact has highlighted where prevention of and response to CSEA has gained momentum over the past three years and where progress has slowed.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, countries' **median scores have risen** between the first and second iterations of the Index in Latin America and the Caribbean (from 54/100 in 2019 to 59 in 2022). Additionally, the **gap between the highest-performing and lowest-performing countries has significantly narrowed**. While in 2019, 34 points separated Colombia - the highest performing country - and Venezuela – the lowest performing country - only 25 points separated the highest and lowest performing countries (Brazil and Argentina, respectively) in 2022.

The changes in the OOSI framework and findings result from attempts to provide a more holistic understanding of how countries address CSEA and hold governments to a higher standard. The second iteration has integrated a more nuanced assessment of prevention, especially around the comprehensiveness of protective legislation and the provision of education to prevent CSEA.<sup>29</sup> These additions have spotlighted **evident gaps in countries' prevention systems** and the need to focus on a holistic approach that targets both response and prevention.

A few indicators are directly comparable between the first and second iterations of the Index. There has been significant improvement in data collection efforts. For example, the number of countries collecting **prevalence data on CSEA** has risen by 30% since the 2019 OOSI. **Most strikingly, the number of countries collecting data on reported cases has increased by 60%.**

---

<sup>28</sup> As Guatemala was a new addition to the second iteration of the Index, this historical data does not take into account Guatemala and its performance in the Out of the Shadows Index.

<sup>29</sup> CDC, Prevention Technical Package, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/sv-prevention-technical-package.pdf>

Conversely, and as noted throughout this paper, there has been a reduction in active national plans to combat CSEA. This may be due, in part, to the limitations of the COVID-19 lockdowns, but could also reflect the fact that prevention and response to CSEA is not given the priority it demands. And there are indications that some countries are in the process of developing new action plans/strategies.

There have been no changes between 2019 and 2022 in key areas, such as how **Civil Society Organisations** work with the government when policy is planned, as consultation is mainly on an ad-hoc, case-by-case basis. A key area of concern is the **quality and precision of legislation** and the very limited **interventions for people at risk** of perpetrating, or who have perpetrated, CSEA.

## Conclusion

Latin America and the Caribbean is a leading region in response to CSEA. The region boasts a robust, child-friendly medical care system from initial response to long-term care, and a judicial system adapted to the needs of the child. Implementing holistic social protection programmes also contributes to the region's high performance. Despite these strengths, gaps and inconsistencies exist and need to be addressed.

The region is weaker in prevention, scoring slightly below the global OOSI average across categories in this pillar.

The OOSI framework is designed to identify the best possible holistic approach to address CSEA. There is great variance in the strengths and weaknesses of individual countries. A holistic, systemic approach requires that each individual component of the child protection system (e.g. education, judiciary, social care, civil society, community-level organisations) works well and that there is coordination among all components.<sup>30</sup>

In Latin America and the Caribbean, as elsewhere, countries that rank highly on some indicators, such as the quality of medical care and social

---

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF (2021), p. 9.



work response, may perform poorly on others, such as precision of laws, training for judges and prosecutors, and perhaps most pressing of all, budget allocation. Any area of weakness diminishes the child protective system overall. Therefore, however well a country performs on certain indicators, it is important to work simultaneously on strengthening all parts of the system to ensure prevention and response to CSEA. However, there is evidence that many governments across the region are already focusing on gaps in the system and paving the way for these gaps to be filled.

Latin America and Caribbean countries have great strengths, albeit with wide variations between them. The child protective environment can therefore be further improved by countries within the region pooling and sharing strengths and experience to create a holistic prevention and response system that supports the existing efforts to eliminate sexual abuse and exploitation of children and adolescents.

Researched and  
developed by

**ECONOMIST  
IMPACT**

