



This briefing paper has been compiled using information included in the Out of the Shadows Index¹ and the ECPAT Country Overview for Turkey²

What is the Out of the Shadows Index?

The **Out of the Shadows Index**, developed by the Economist Intelligence Unit, measures how nations are addressing child sexual exploitation and abuse. Data released for the first 60 countries demonstrate that governments, the private sector and civil society need to do more to protect children from sexual violence and meet the commitments they made to Target 16.2 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

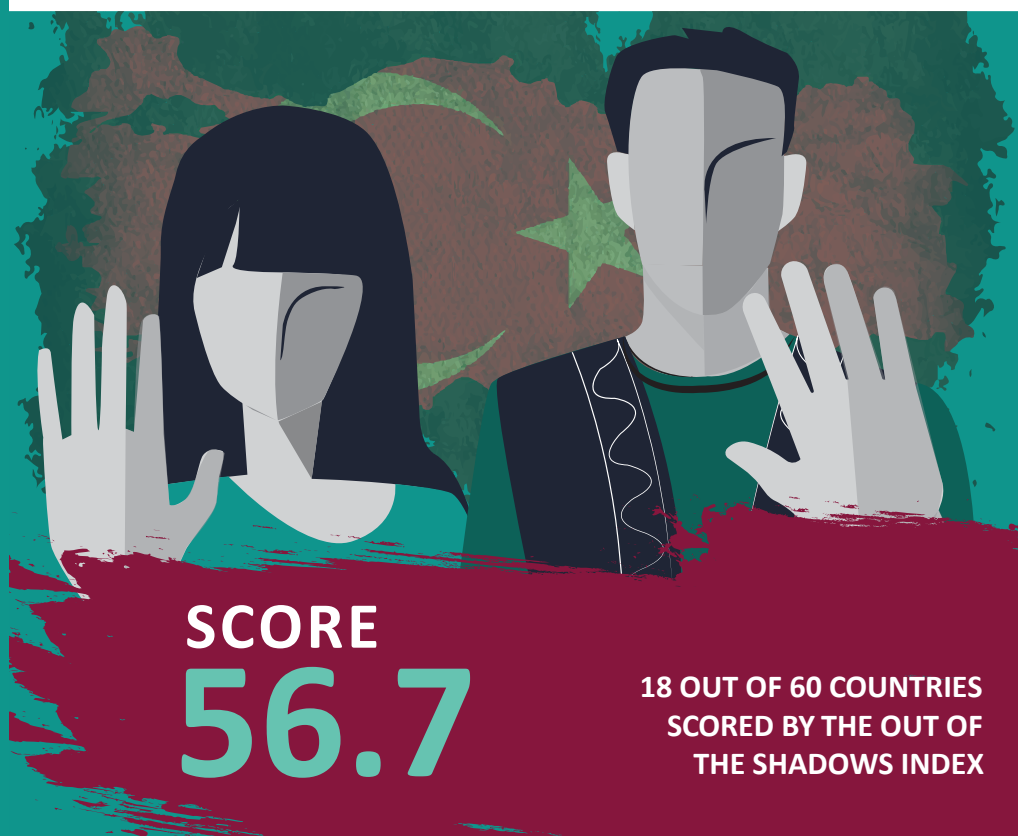
The **Index** was calculated by assessing legislation, policies and responses by national governments. It covers critical issues that underpin child sexual exploitation and abuse, including education, reproductive health, victim support, law enforcement and risks from the online world.

The **Index** also addresses environmental factors such as the safety and stability, social protections, and whether gender and other norms suppress open discussion about sex and sexual abuse. It also measures engagement of tech and travel businesses in fighting child sexual exploitation and abuse. There is an overall country score, as well as numerous sub-category scores using data from as many as 34 indicators and 132 sub-indicators.

WHAT ARE THE ECPAT COUNTRY OVERVIEWS?

ECPAT Country Overviews comprehensively present all the existing, publicly available information, and a detailed analysis of the legal framework for sexual exploitation of children (SEC) in a country. They provide an assessment of achievements and challenges in implementation, counteractions to eliminate SEC and they suggest concrete priority actions to advance the national fight against SEC.

TURKEY



Turkey ranked 18th out of 60 countries scored in the **Out of the Shadows Index** on the country's response to child sexual exploitation and abuse, with a score of 56.7. This score is the same as the Philippines and just below Uganda (57.3).

Turkey's position on the **Index** is explained by a robust legal framework for tackling the sexual exploitation of children,³ and some particularly good practices by civil society organisations in combatting specific manifestations of child sexual exploitation such as child, early and forced marriage.⁴

However, much remains to be done to ensure that children in Turkey live free from sexual exploitation and abuse. For example, Turkey needs to continue to take urgent measures addressing the environment and conditions facing child refugees, as well as make data publicly available on all manifestations of child sexual exploitation so tailored and effective responses can be formulated.

DEFINING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

A child is a victim of sexual exploitation when they are involved in a sexual activity in exchange for something that either they or third parties receive. Different forms of sexual exploitation of children (SEC) include exploitation of children in prostitution, online child sexual exploitation, sale and trafficking of children for sexual purposes, sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism and some forms of child, early and forced marriage.⁵

ENVIRONMENT

The **Out of the Shadows Index** reports Turkey as having limitations in the stability of its environment, with a score of 58/100 for the instability indicator.⁶ Over the last six years, Turkey has struggled to cope with the challenge of receiving millions of refugees from neighbouring states. The influx of refugees means that a population now exists in Turkey that are vulnerable to exploitation, including children.^{7, 8} This vulnerability is caused by the extreme poverty and instability refugees face all over Europe,⁹ with children reportedly being subject to early and forced marriage, trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and exploitation in prostitution.^{10, 11, 12} However, child poverty in Turkey is not limited only to Turkey's refugee population, with the relative poverty rate of Turkish households that include children being as high as 22.6% in 2018.¹³

58/100

Refugees

Turkey has the highest number of refugees worldwide, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimating that approximately 4 million refugees resided in Turkey as of November 2019.¹⁴ In July 2019, it was estimated that 1.4 million refugees were under the age of 15 and over 800,000 were between the ages of 18-24.¹⁵ Refugee children in Turkey are particularly vulnerable to two manifestations of sexual exploitation, namely early and forced marriage and exploitation in prostitution.^{16, 17}

Of Turkey's 4 million refugees, 3.6 million have come from Syria.¹⁸ In rural areas of Syria, where most refugees in Turkey are from, child early and forced marriage is prevalent,¹⁹ and this prevalence continues amongst the Syrian refugee population in Turkey.²⁰ Due to the unimaginable circumstances Syrian refugees have faced for the last six years, and very limited economic opportunities, some families see no alternative than early marriage. Some allow their children to marry Turkish nationals in return for payment and a reduced burden on parents to provide basic necessities such as food for their families.²¹

The lack of economic opportunities for those in refugee camps is also exploited by criminal networks, which have been reported to pressure young Syrian women into sex work, and this practice is acknowledged as being especially prevalent among adolescent girls.²²

WAY
FORWARD

Turkey improves social and legal protections for the child refugee population residing in the country

Turkey increases educational opportunities for refugee children, particularly girls, enabling them to gain skills and qualifications to facilitate employment, reducing likelihood of being coerced into situations of sexual exploitation

Turkey has a robust legal framework against child sexual exploitation in prostitution, child rape and child trafficking. Turkey has ratified all major international conventions in the fight against child sexual exploitation, and is party to a number of international and regional cooperation frameworks, such as membership of the Southeast European Law Enforcement Centre.²³

However, limitations still exist in Turkish legislation which does not always comply with international standards. For example, although Article 28 of the Turkish Penal Code regulates “force, violence, intimidation and threats”, there are no specific provisions in Turkish legislation protecting child victims of trafficking, including for the purposes of sexual exploitation, from being prosecuted for involvement in unlawful activities. This is contrary to Article 26 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.²⁴ As well as this, there are serious concerns relating to the legal framework on child, early and forced marriage, both in regards to the current legislative provisions, and through draft bills that have been proposed by the government.

Child marriage

*Child marriage has been established as both a channel to, and form of, child sexual exploitation. For example it may enable the sexual availability of a child, hide sexual violence within the union, or create impossible power dynamics for the child to exercise autonomy.²⁵ Turkey received a score of 0/100 for the **Out of the Shadows Index's** child marriage indicator,²⁶ which can be attributed to the fact that Turkish legislation still allows for child marriage to occur in some instances.*

The prevalence of child, early and forced marriage was highlighted in the 2018 Turkish Demographic and Health Survey which reported that 2% of Turkish women aged between 20-24 were married by 15 years old, and 1.1% of girls aged between 15-19 reported they were also married by the age of 15.²⁷ Research was also conducted in the same year on the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage among Turkey's Syrian migrant population, with 9.2% of Syrian women between the ages of 20-24 being married by 15, and 13.4% of Syrian women aged between 15-19 being married by the age of 15.²⁸

While the legal age of marriage is 18 years for both men and women, exceptions are permitted, with Article 124 of the Civil Code stating that a boy or girl can marry at 17 with parental consent. Anecdotal evidence suggests however that the condition of parental consent is often overlooked in practice,²⁹ making the de facto accepted age 17. Additionally, Article 124 allows judges to allow marriages of children aged 16 in exceptional circumstances – however such circumstances are not defined and thus at the full discretion of the judges.³⁰

In October 2017, a new law was adopted which awards government-endorsed clerics and muftis the same powers to perform marriages as civil authorities.³¹ Concerns have been raised as to the risk this represents for child marriage, given that some conservative muftis have “turned a blind eye to brides under the age of 17”.^{32,33,34}

In 2016, the government introduced a bill to parliament that envisaged postponing the sentences of convicted child abusers if they married their victims,³⁵ however this was subsequently withdrawn due to widespread opposition and public pressure.³⁶ Despite the opposition that the 2016 bill faced, in January 2020, it was announced that a similar bill was being brought forward to the Turkish parliament.³⁷ This bill would not only legitimise child marriage and statutory rape, it significantly increases impunity of perpetrators and wrong perceptions that exploiting and abusing a child can be somehow excused.

Turkey does not have any national action plan addressing child sexual exploitation specifically, though the issue is addressed in policy and plans to reduce violence against women and human trafficking. Publically available data on sexual exploitation of children is extremely limited.

National action plans, policies and institutions

The 2016-2020 National Action Plan on Violence Against Women covers sexual violence against children, and encouragingly has the specific goal of combatting child, early and forced marriage.³⁸ The plan aims to provide specialist therapy and treatment for children who are exposed to violence,³⁹ and encouragingly, in accordance with the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (also known as "Istanbul Convention"), establish special service models for victims of sexual violence.⁴⁰ A 2018 monitoring report outlined positive developments that had been achieved, such as the establishment of district coordination committees in areas that are particularly vulnerable to child, early and forced marriage.⁴¹ It was also announced that a specific action plan on the issue of child, early and forced marriage, for the period of 2019-2023, coordinated by the General Directorate on the Status of Women, had been prepared, which would build on activities implemented in the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women 2016-2020.⁴² However, as of February 2020, this plan was not publically available, nor was a mechanism for how progress would be measured seen. This partially explains the score of 50/100 for the national plans and policies **Index** indicator.⁴³

Public disaggregation and dissemination of data

The lack of collected and publicly available data relating to child sexual exploitation in Turkey hinders the country's response, and this is illustrated by Turkey's score of 0/100 for the indicator on data collection in the **Index**.⁴⁴ There is no publicly available data at all about rates of child sexual exploitation in prostitution, online child sexual exploitation or sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism. There is limited data disseminated on child victims of trafficking, however the data that is publicly available does not disaggregate whether these children are trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation or other forms of exploitation. In regards to child, early and forced marriage, the Turkish Statistical Institute has released figures since 2002 on the number of children who are married annually.⁴⁵ It is not clear whether these figures include Turkey's refugee population, a demographic that is known to be particularly vulnerable to child, early and forced marriage.

The lack of publicly available disaggregated data makes it extremely difficult to accurately estimate the prevalence of different types of child sexual exploitation. Better data could be used to understand prevalence and how different populations are vulnerable. The current lack of publicly available data makes it very difficult for civil society organisations as well as authorities to plan and implement targeted prevention programmes, or to develop tailored responses to children affected.⁴⁶ Publicly available data would also be useful in assisting stakeholders to collaborate and coordinate to make the best of limited resources.

The efforts of civil society organisations in Turkey are praiseworthy, however, challenges still remain. For example, Turkey scored 75/100 on the **Index's** indicator on frontline support workers, which relates to the availability of professional support and guidance to support welfare workers, but only 30/100 on civil society engagement,⁴⁷ which relates to the provision of services from NGOs, foundations, non-profit organisations and community associations. The discrepancies in these scores highlight that good practice does exist, but there are still limitations in the breadth of operations. Likewise, with private sector engagement, some industries are far more engaged with issues relating to child sexual exploitation than others.

61 / 100

Civil society engagement

Particularly good practice can be highlighted with the work of the Turkish Red Crescent Society, which has run prevention information sessions with adults and children on the dangers of child, early and forced marriage, reaching 64,788 children in 15 different provinces in Turkey between March 2017 and June 2019.⁴⁸ Additionally, the NGO, International Children's Centre, launched the 'Child Friendly Tourism Project' in 2017, raising awareness of child sexual exploitation in the travel and tourism sector,⁴⁹ and carrying out training sessions to those working in the hospitality and travel industry.⁵⁰

While these are positive developments, the circumstances that civil society organisations face in Turkey have at times been challenging, with those focused on human rights, including some working to fight child sexual exploitation, finding their activities curtailed. For example, NGOs have trouble self-financing and they do not have adequate capacity to conduct their activities. NGOs should be supported adequately and their participation in decision-making mechanisms should be ensured.

Private sector engagement

Engagement of the private sector in Turkey to fight sexual exploitation includes somewhat limited actions from the travel and tourism sector and the technology industry. However, media awareness of child sexual exploitation is encouraging, with the Turkish Journalists' Association even providing guidelines for reporting on cases involving sexual violence against children as part of its "Code of Conduct for Journalists".⁵¹ Turkey received a score of 100/100 for media industry engagement in the **Index**.

Barring a 'safer Internet service' plugin offered by Internet Service Providers, there is limited evidence of companies engaging in child sexual exploitation awareness raising or prevention activities, despite 71% of the Turkish population using the Internet,⁵² and 97.3 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people in 2018.⁵³ This goes some way to explain why Turkey only scored 33/100 for the engagement of the technology industry in the **Index**.⁵⁴

Despite the size of Turkey's travel and tourism industry, only two Turkish companies have committed to the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism (The Code),⁵⁵ a global initiative which trains workers in the tourism industry to recognise and respond to sexual abuse and exploitation of children.⁵⁶ For example, 51,747,199 tourists arrived in Turkey in 2019, a 12.22% increase compared to 2018,⁵⁷ and there are as many as 3,934 registered travel agencies across the country.⁵⁸ The opportunities for improving the sector's commitment to addressing SEC are extensive.

Turkey's government increases its engagement with civil society organisations, and enables specialist NGOs to participate in aiding the recovery process of victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation

Turkish travel and tourism companies commit to The Code. National associations could introduce a requirement for gaining registration to include a commitment to The Code

Endnotes

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