



We protect children in travel and tourism

CASE STUDY

PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENTS: A MODEL TO PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM

COLOMBIA CASE STUDY AND COSTA RICAN EXPERIENCES



FUNDACIÓN
Renacer
Contra la violencia sexual



This case study has been produced with the financial support of the UBS Optimus Foundation.

ECPAT International acknowledges the general financial support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The opinions expressed in this document belong solely to ECPAT International. Support from these donors does not constitute endorsement of the views expressed.

This publication was developed as documentation of a case study carried out by Adriana Hidalgo, The Private Sector Engagement Manager, with an invaluable collaboration of Fundación Renacer and Fundación Paniamor under the initiative of ECPAT International's Programme on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism and The Code.

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Suggested citation:

ECPAT International. (2023).

Case study:

Protective environments: a model to prevent child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism. Colombia case study and Costa Rican experiences.

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This case study was kindly co-funded by UBS Optimus Foundation.

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WHY THIS CASE STUDY

This case study addresses the experience of the Protective Environments model implemented in Colombia under the leadership of Fundación Renacer, a member of ECPAT International. This model was developed - initially in Cartagena¹ - to prevent child sexual exploitation associated with travel and tourism through cooperation among the public and private sectors, communities, social organizations and the media, with the active participation of children and youth.

The results of the implementation of the Protective Environments model are effective in the modification of attitudes and practices of the different social actors around this problem and greater protection for children. The testimonies gathered in the systematizations elaborated by Fundación Renacer and the interviews conducted for this study are the evidence thereto. This study also highlights the synergy established between the Code of Conduct for companies in the tourism sector - a binding national mechanism in Colombia - and The Code² - ECPAT International's global self-regulation initiative - and the role they played in the development and implementation of the Protective Environments model.

ECPAT International retrieves this experience to make it available to public institutions, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders interested in developing local interventions aimed at preventing this crime. The characteristics of the Protective Environments model are highlighted to facilitate its implementation in other contexts, based on the work carried out in Cartagena de Indias. Insights were taken from both primary sources - interviews with actors who have participated in these experiences - and secondary sources - mainly systematizations carried out by Fundación Renacer.³ To broaden the regional perspective and exemplify ways of working with specific key sectors within the construction of Protective Environments, an innovative experience developed in Costa Rica with the sector of non-formal operators of tourism goods and services has been integrated.



1. The Cartagena experience has been systematized in the document prepared by Barragán, Disney. (2011), referenced at the end of this case study.
2. In Spanish "El Código". This study uses its English name to distinguish it more easily from national codes of conduct.
3. A total of 7 interviews were conducted, including representatives of member companies of The Code. The complete list can be found in the References section.

CONTEXT INFORMATION

FUNDACIÓN RENACER

Fundación Renacer was founded in 1988 in Bogota with the purpose of contributing to ending the sexual exploitation of children through the development of programs of accompaniment and comprehensive care for victims of abuse and sexual exploitation, as well as through research, prevention and advocacy. Its programs are based on a rights-based approach, and through its interventions, it seeks to protect, defend and restore the full exercise of the rights of children; part of this includes legal accompaniment and representation of victims. Fundación Renacer promotes social change through research, design, and implementation of prevention strategies, using communication and training tools, such as “Protective Environments”. It provides technical assistance to local governments in the formulation of action plans and programs against the sexual exploitation of children.

APPROACH TO THE CONCEPT OF *PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT* TO ADDRESS SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

A Protective Environment model of this nature promotes the development of coordinated protection actions by the different social actors present in a space - communities, public institutions, households, and private sector organizations, among others - which aim to transform perceptions and imaginaries, attitudes and practices that tolerate, make visible and justify sexual violence - including sexual exploitation and abuse - through awareness-raising and training strategies for these actors to undertake actions for the defense and protection of children’s rights and to report those responsible for committing acts that violate their rights.

In Protective Environments: risk factors are identified in order to address them adequately; protective behaviors are strengthened and expanded to reach more children; the strategies designed for their shaping and strengthening are adapted to each community context and evaluated to identify opportunities for improvement (Institute for Innovation, Development and Social Impact).



MODEL CHARACTERIZATION

For the development of the model, a **methodological approach** was developed, based on the following:

- the principle of co-responsibility of the state, society and the family in the protection of children;
- the principle of children's participation;
- the principle of responsible business conduct and corporate due diligence on human rights;
- dialogue with people with the capacity to reflect on the problems affecting them;
- training for action;
- the building of alliances between the actors involved in the construction thereof; and
- community self-management and empowerment of citizens to demand their rights.

The model, based on the rights-based approach, considers the following **levels of intervention**:

- **Prevention**, which includes processes aimed at addressing the risk factors making children vulnerable to sexual exploitation and strengthening protective factors.
- **Reporting and restoration of rights**, which implies reporting the commission of the crime and referring to protection institutions and judicial bodies to restore the enjoyment of rights.
- **Comprehensive care**, ranging from psychological support and family intervention to the development of a plan for a life free of exploitation with the full exercise of their rights.



“THE WALL HAS REMAINED FIRM, NOT ONLY FROM THE MAYOR’S OFFICE BUT ALSO FROM THE ACTORS.”

Hotel employee interviewed for the study.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENTS MODEL

EXPERIENCES OF THE FUNDACIÓN RENACER

The first experience was developed in Cartagena, starting in 2008; later in the Bogota-Melgar -Girardot tourist corridor in 2010 and in Barranquilla and La Guajira in 2018. In Santa Marta and in Norte de Santander, interventions were also carried out, although not as comprehensive for now. It arose from the evidence and reflection on the situation of child sexual exploitation in Cartagena, which was normalized and tolerated. This concern was shared by the Corporación Turismo Cartagena de Indias which, in October 2007, promoted the implementation of the Sectoral Technical Standard NTS-001 -which establishes the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability requirements applicable to Colombian tourist destinations - to certify the district of Cartagena as a tourist destination.

To address the problem, Fundación Renacer convened discussion sessions with key stakeholders. As a result, a project proposal was developed and submitted to the Canadian Children's Fund, which was successful and was also technically and financially supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This gave rise to the project "La muralla soy yo" ("The wall is me"), which allowed the development of the first Protective Environment experience in Cartagena.

The Protective Environment being built was reinforced with the approval of two important laws, which came up as the result of political advocacy work undertaken with the review of the legislation by Fundación Renacer and organizations such as UNICEF and Tierra de Hombres, which identified gaps that prevented the prosecution of exploiters. The laws approved, the basis of which were prepared by congressmen committed to the initiative, included:

- **Law 1329 of 2009 (July 17)**⁴ which, among others, introduced the crime of underage pimping and the demand for commercial sexual exploitation of a person under 18 years of age.
- **Law No. 1336 of 2009 (July 21)**⁵, which subjected the authorization for the registration of tourism companies in the National Tourism Registry to the adoption of a code of conduct with specific measures to prevent child sexual exploitation in their activities. Previously, Law 679 of 2001 (August 3)⁶ established a mandate for the Ministry of Economic Development to require tourism service providers to adhere to codes of conduct to protect children from exploitation and sexual abuse by domestic or foreign tourists. This new law reinforces the obligation to have these codes as a requirement to obtain legal permission to operate.

4. The full name is *Law 1329 of 2009 (July 17) whereby Title IV of Law 599 of 2000 is amended and other provisions are issued to counteract the commercial sexual exploitation of children.*

5. The full name is *Law No. 1336 of 2009 (July 21) Whereby Law 679 of 2001, on combating child exploitation, pornography and sexual tourism is added to, and strengthened.*

6. Law 679 of 2001 (August 3), whereby a statute is issued to prevent and counteract child exploitation, pornography and sexual tourism in furtherance of Article 44 of the Constitution.

Subsequently, the **Resolution of the Vice Minister of Tourism No. 3840 of 2009 (December 24)**⁷ was issued, which established the minimum content that the codes of conduct should have. The participation of the tourism sector increased with the establishment of the obligation to adopt a code of conduct in order to operate, and the parallel promotion of The Code - a global initiative of ECPAT International, by Fundación Renacer. The latter is a self-regulatory mechanism whereby companies undertake to adopt and implement the **six criteria** to prevent the sexual exploitation of children in their operations. The companies saw in this initiative an additional tool to position them globally. The National Code, on the other hand, establishes eleven control measures, which are based on the criteria of The Code.

MODEL IMPLEMENTATION PHASES

The following phases have been identified to develop a model of this nature based on the experiences developed:

PHASE 1.

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION DYNAMICS IN THE TERRITORIES.

Through a research process, the phenomenon is known, the actors and the modalities of sexual exploitation are identified and evidenced, along with the consequences suffered by children, the institutional response to the problem, the cultural imaginaries, and the interests and needs of the different actors, that are subsequently revisited in the training proposals. A key aspect in the motivation that can be generated to participate in these processes, on the part of the different actors, has to do with the fact that, just as the imaginaries are identified, their educational interests are consulted. Thus, for the informal tourism sector - providers of complementary tourism services - contents related to their productive activity were developed, such as customer service, organizational schemes, and history of the city, among others, in addition to contents related to sexual exploitation of children and adolescents and a prevention plan.

Even if it is a municipality of intervention, the dynamics between one neighborhood and another may vary and these differences must be identified and be part of the systematization and analysis, a process that can take several months to complete. This phase involves, among other methodological strategies: the elaboration of social cartographies, the approach to the sites of exploitation, the search for secondary sources such as studies, statistical data, among others; the knowledge of life stories; surveys and focus groups with providers of complementary tourism services and surveys directed to children who carry

⁷ The full name is *Resolution of the Vice Minister of Tourism No. 3840 of 2009 (December 24)*, whereby the Code of Conduct contemplated in Article 1 of Law 1336 of July 21, 2009 is established and other provisions are issued.

out commercial activities in the tourism sector, to identify perceptions regarding adults, parents, tourists, and authorities. The support of academia is essential for the technical assistance they can provide in the development of research methodologies.

When children are identified in situations of sexual exploitation while investigation actions are being carried out, the investigation team has the ethical commitment to report or accompany these victims to the corresponding authorities so that protection and care mechanisms can be activated.

PHASE 2.

TRAINING AND AWARENESS-RAISING PROCESSES.

These processes go beyond the delivery of conceptual content on sexual exploitation, since the transformation of imaginaries, attitudes and practices is only possible if the training includes a process of collective critical reflection that allows to analyse, question and disarticulate the perceptions and attitudes identified in the research process. These social representations are redefined as “illicit behaviors” that violate human dignity and sexual, physical, and emotional integrity. Gender mainstreaming is essential to ensure that the strategies and interventions designed consider the particular concerns, experiences, and implications for girls and boys, thus achieving the goal of gender equality. ECPAT has drawn attention to the fact that “while the impact of sexual exploitation on girls is somewhat better understood and researched, the available evidence from boys suggests that, in certain contexts, they are affected equally or worse” (ECPAT Strategic Framework 2021-2025), making it a necessary aspect to consider when designing strategies.

The target groups of the awareness and training activities were children, parents, teachers, formal tourism operators, employees of the complementary tourism sector, and institutional authorities, who were identified and invited to participate in the previous phase and with methodologies in line with each group. With children - as part of the preventive actions - we identified those who were vulnerable to sexual exploitation and developed more playful strategies to work therewith, in addition to accompanying their families and referring them to the competent institutions to guarantee the restitution of their rights. Lectures and workshops, courses and diploma courses of up to 120 hours, and seminars of between 6 and 24 hours’ duration were designed for civil servants and workers in the complementary tourism sector. For the diploma courses, certification from a higher education institution was always sought, as was the case of the Universidad de Cartagena and the Universidad de La Guajira.

The contents are elaborated on the basis of the findings (imaginaries, interests, perceptions) identified in the first phase, as pointed out. In each training process, prevention plans, care, and reporting routes were developed, according to the competence of each participating group. The academy is in a key position to contribute to the methodological design and determination of the contents of training processes.

PHASE 3.

PROMOTION OF SELF-MANAGEMENT FOR MOBILIZATION AND REPORTING.

The awareness achieved and the new knowledge acquired by the people trained should lead to the building of alliances, with commitments translated into advocacy actions in terms of public policy and social mobilization actions.

In this phase, articulated work is strengthened through existing inter-institutional and intersectoral spaces (local committees for children, territorial committees for the fight against human trafficking) to incorporate new actors (community leaders, youth, parents) and develop joint work agendas. Networks of children, parents, and other social actors such as formal operators and complementary service providers, social mobilization activities such as marches and different public events are promoted and/or strengthened.

COMMUNITY AND YOUTH NETWORKS ARE STILL ALIVE, EVEN THOUGH TIME GOES BY. THEY FORM SEEDBEDS, AND THERE IS A GENERATIONAL CHANGE

Mayerlin Vergara, M. (2023).
Regional Coordinator in La Guajira,
Fundación Renacer.

A communication strategy is developed collectively by the different stakeholders as a result of the dialogue and awareness-raising processes. In Cartagena, the process was given an identity, by calling it “The wall is me”, alluding to the environment that protects children by all stakeholders. *The wall* constitutes the graphic vision that captures the sense of a “protective city”. This type of communication strategy favors social cohesion, mutual recognition among diverse social actors, and the mobilization of citizenship.

Awareness-raising and training processes are also carried out for communicators to incorporate a rights perspective in the handling of information about children and to avoid stigmatizing victims and naturalising crimes.



WHICH ELEMENTS WERE KEY TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MODEL?

IN THE FIRST PHASE:

- Participation of academia in the design of the research methodology.
- Reporting when a child sexual exploitation crime is suspected, and the activation of referral mechanisms to the competent public institutions to provide immediate protection and care.

IN THE SECOND PHASE:

- The provision of information on how to report and where to do so, as well as the channels to activate the child protection system.
- The transformation of imaginaries and the development of a critical attitude on the part of the social actors and the subsequent reflection on the role that corresponds to each actor within the Protective Environment based on their competencies and duties, which is carried out in the training and awareness-raising sessions.

IN THE THIRD PHASE:

- Participation of children.
- Alliances with formal-sector tour operators reinforced by the national Code of Conduct and the global initiative "The Code".
- Network integration of parents and caregivers.
- The constitution and participation of a network of informal tourism servers.
- Participatory construction of a communication strategy.

WHO WERE THE ACTORS?

THE FOLLOWING STAKEHOLDERS WERE IDENTIFIED:

- Teachers
- Academia
- Local, national and departmental authorities
- Civil society organizations
- International cooperation organizations
- Chambers of Tourism
- Companies in the tourism sector
- Associations (COTELCO, ANATO, ACODRES)
- Media

COMMUNITY SECTOR:

- Families;
- Children and youth;
- Community leaders;
- Tourism complementary sector.


RESULTS, LESSONS LEARNED AND SUSTAINABILITY

It is clear from the consultations that the awareness-raising processes succeeded in transforming the attitudes and practices of the different social actors (indifference, naturalization, stigmatization, unconscious complicity, exploitation) into actions for the prevention of child sexual exploitation, reporting and protection (identification of victims and referral to state protection services, for example). This is mainly due to the process of reflection that takes place in these sessions where the imaginaries⁸ are reviewed and deconstructed and the duties of protection that correspond to each participant are precisely identified. A key factor in obtaining these results is that people have equally participated and have been able to understand their role within the Protective Environment. The clarity of the routes for reporting and access to protection institutions further stimulates the commitment evidenced in the effective filing of complaints and reporting to institutions and in the implementation of social mobilization activities.

AS LESSONS LEARNED WE HIGHLIGHT THAT:

- The implementation of this model is strengthened by the existence of a **regulatory framework** that punishes sexual exploitation of children, guarantees their protection, and establishes specific obligations for the tourism sector.
- **The effective participation of all social actors**, their recognition as citizens with rights and obligations in all processes: knowledge management, identification of problems, needs and interests; the selection of training content; the construction of the communication strategy, which are key to ensure the appropriation of responsibility for the protection of children and the sustainability of the processes.
- The technical rigor in the development of contents and in the definition of methodological strategies of the **training processes**, must be above time limitations or other circumstances: these are essential for the transformation of imaginaries. In this regard, schedules were negotiated, but the duration of the training was maintained. The awarding of certificates endorsed by prestigious universities is an important incentive to participate and complete these training sessions.
- Interventions aimed at children should be conceived as a means to **empower them** as rights-holders.
- **The combination of a mandatory code such as the National Code of Conduct and a self-regulatory one such as The Code**, reinforces the commitment of the tourism sector within the Protective Environment, not only by complying with its legal obligations but also by going beyond its commitments as part of the principle of due diligence and corporate social responsibility.

⁸ Some imaginaries are related to the crime itself -the practices of "prostitution are not related to effects on children, nor to the tourism activity-; as to children -the invisibility of sexual exploitation in this population, especially among boys, added to the fact that they are considered as "criminals"-; as to tourism workers - who turn these practices invisible and tolerate them, and consider them foreign to their daily activity-; and as to the authorities -image linked to the lack of commitment in the protection of victims of commercial sexual exploitation-.



WHEN GUESTS ASK ABOUT THE PLATE AT THE FRONT DESK, THEY ASK WHAT THE CODE IS. THE STAFF IS VERY RESPONSIVE

Person interviewed for the study.

The model continues to operate where it has been implemented. Its permanence is mainly due to the existence of a robust national legal framework,^{9,10} the involvement of institutions with clear competencies and obligations, the incorporation of the Institute of Tourism in the existing interdisciplinary articulation tables in the different regions where it is implemented, the solid alliance with the Cartagena de Indias Tourism Corporation, the commitment of the Tourism Police and the systematic support to community and youth networks. In this sense, it is a city strategy with broad community participation. Fundación Renacer is present in the intervention communities and provides support to the actors and institutions to the extent that its resources allow, and provides care to victims of sexual exploitation identified.

The revision of imaginaries and the evaluation and adaptation of the model to the new realities are also key aspects for the sustainability of this model: changes in imaginaries and in the dynamics of sexual exploitation may occur and will be captured in new research processes. This, in turn, will generate changes in the interventions.

9. See: ECPAT International (2021). [Legal checklist: key legal interventions in the protection of children from sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism](#); and ECPAT International (2016). [Global study on child sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism](#).

10. Based on Fundación Renacer's systematization documents.



A COSTA RICAN EXPERIENCE IN ADDRESSING THE INFORMAL SECTOR OF TOURISM PRODUCTS AND SERVICES AS PART OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Actions developed by the Fundación Paniamor and the International Children's Rights Office, within the framework of the Project "Prevention of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism in Costa Rica", March 2012 - February 2014.

The objective of this project was to reduce the number of cases of child sexual exploitation associated with travel and tourism in Costa Rica by implementing preventive and awareness-raising activities.

It focused on the sector of **informal operators of tourism products and services** in the provinces of Guanacaste, Canton of Santa Cruz and Puntarenas, Canton Quepos. The sector included: massage therapists, tour guides, handicraft and surfboard vendors, surf lesson providers, and cab drivers.

The development of innovative and flexible strategies to facilitate the approach to the sector in order to raise awareness and turn them into agents for the prevention of this crime, which included, among others, the following:

- Participation of young people with leadership skills to carry out the sensitisation work, who were previously trained on the problem of commercial sexual exploitation.
- “Face-to-face” approach in the workplace, mainly with cab drivers, due to the difficulty of being absent from work. Key - verbal and printed - information was provided, and how to contribute to the prevention and reporting of this crime.
- Informative talks on the prevention and reporting of child sexual exploitation, including relevant content related to their work, such as marketing, production techniques, and customer service, among others.
- Signing of a commitment act by each actor to support the prevention and reporting of this crime, which was a voluntary act.
- Recreational activities such as sports festivals and handicraft fairs that combine the sale of their products with awareness-raising through the placement of information booths and short talks, among others. Mobilization activities such as a caravan of cab drivers were also carried out.
- Participation of emblematic figures to facilitate the approach to people working in the sector, for example, a national surf champion.
- Preparation of a *Resources and Activities Manual for non-formal operators of tourism goods and services as CSEC prevention agents*. The manual contains recommendations for awareness-raising activities for this sector to eradicate social tolerance towards the crime of child sexual exploitation and to motivate them to become reporting and social change agents.

The informal operators themselves suggested the activities that interested and motivated them, which were considered for the definition of those that would finally be carried out.

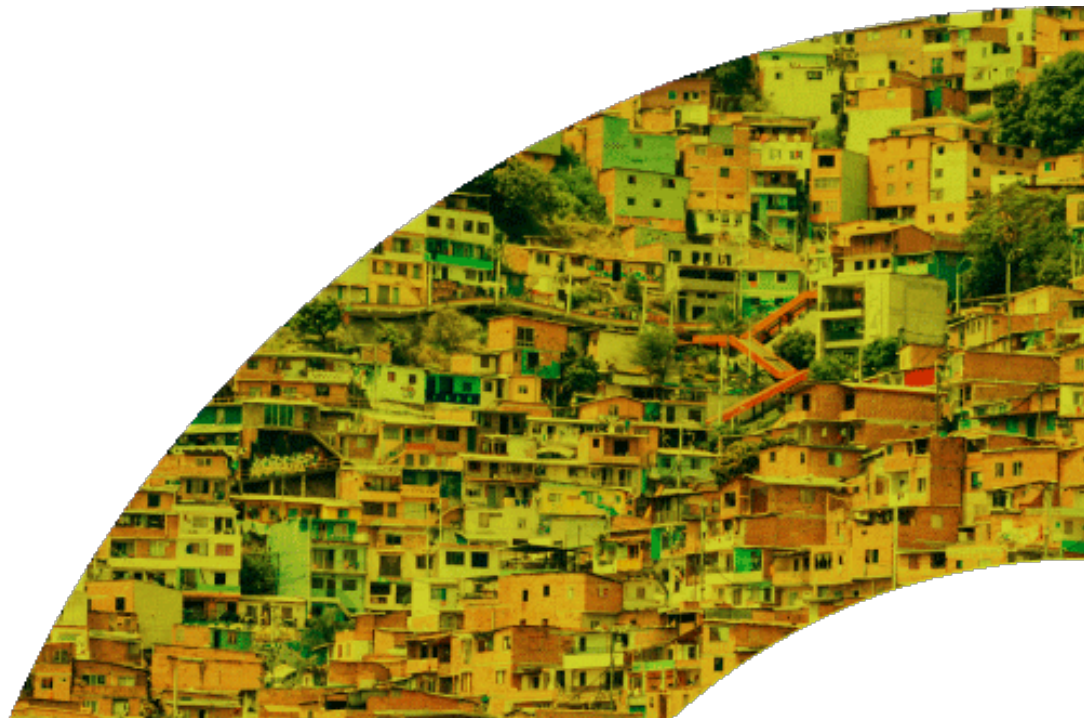
SOURCE

Source: Sotelo, M. (n/d). [Prevention of commercial sexual exploitation associated with travel and tourism in Costa Rica: systematization of the bilateral experience](#). Fundación PANIAMOR -International Bureau for the Rights of the Child.

ECPAT INTERNATIONAL'S CALL TO ACTION

Based on the experiences of Colombia and Costa Rica, it is recommended that governments and society:

- **Value the development and implementation of the Protective Environment model** in a post-pandemic context that has left many families - including children - in a situation of poverty and social and economic vulnerability, which has increased the risk of child abuse and sexual exploitation.
- **Link compliance with mandatory codes of conduct and the adoption of voluntary codes** to the construction of protective environments, in order to strengthen their development and make visible the contribution and importance of the tourism sector therein.
- Ensure that **awareness-raising processes** are carried out systematically, in order to involve new stakeholders through a public-private partnership.
- **Develop innovative strategies to involve tourism workers** who work in the informal sector in community efforts to prevent and denounce the sexual exploitation of children, giving them a space for equal participation with other sectors.
- **Consider as a core aspect within the development of this model, the technical rigor in carrying out the training processes**, in order to achieve an effective transformation of attitudes and practices aimed at protecting the rights of children.
- **Reform the institutional response** so that complaints and reports from child victims are effectively addressed.



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