



Down to Zero
Luchando contra la explotación sexual infantil



SUMMARY

Addressing the sexual exploitation
of children in the context of the
Venezuelan migration crisis –
Findings from Colombia, Peru, and
Bolivia

September, 2025



ECPAT International would like to thank all the persons involved in this project.

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The Down to Zero–SUFASEC project is implemented by the Down to Zero Alliance, in which ECPAT International works in collaboration with Defence for Children–ECPAT Netherlands. Among ECPAT's roles within the Alliance is leading the advocacy pillar in Latin America. This role seeks to gather evidence demonstrating that (1) the sexual exploitation of children in emergency situations, including displacement and migration, is systematic; (2) humanitarian responses to these emergencies are inadequate to properly address the sexual exploitation of children; and (3) there are alternative ways to address this issue, and clarity is needed on how it should be approached differently. The evidence collected will inform advocacy actions to encourage governments and donors to support the prevention of and response to the sexual exploitation of girls, boys, and adolescents in emergencies, including contexts of displacement and migration.

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 **Down to Zero**
Fighting sexual exploitation of children



El proyecto Step up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children – Empowering Children and Communities cuenta con el apoyo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores del Reino de los Países Bajos en el marco de su política exterior y desarrollo, a través de Defence for Children-DNI Netherlands (ECPAT Países Bajos).



The political and socioeconomic crisis in Venezuela has led to one of the largest human mobility crises in recent history. By December 2024, nearly 7.9 million Venezuelans had migrated or sought refuge abroad, with Latin America hosting the majority, over 6.7 million individuals.¹ Colombia and Peru have become the main receiving countries, while Bolivia serves as a key transit point.² This mass displacement has disproportionately affected children, exposing them to heightened risks of violence, including sexual exploitation.

In response to these concerns, ECPAT International conducted a study, as part of the Down to Zero – SUFASEC project,³ to assess the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of services aimed at preventing and responding to the sexual exploitation of Venezuelan children on the move in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru. The research was led and implemented at national level by ECPAT member organisations, [Fundación Munasim Kullakita](#) in Bolivia, [Fundación Renacer](#) in Colombia, and [CHS Alternativo](#) in Peru.

The study placed particular emphasis on learning from the experiences of survivors. To this end, conversations were conducted with 34 young Venezuelan survivors (aged 16–25, including one male participant) across the three countries. Using trauma-informed methods and an unstructured, survivor-centric approach, these conversations provided a safe space for survivors to reflect on their experiences receiving support and to share recommendations. Their insights were essential for highlighting the gaps that persist when survivors’ perspectives are excluded from the development of policies, legal frameworks and practices to address the sexual exploitation of children in humanitarian contexts.

The study also gathered the perspectives of frontline professionals to provide a more nuanced understanding of the sexual exploitation of children

on the move. Drawing on their direct experience with such cases, 70 in-depth interviews and 118 survey responses were collected from professionals working in child protection, justice, health, education, and shelter-related sectors.

Methodologies and tools developed for the study were compiled in a comprehensive research protocol, which was reviewed and approved by an *ad hoc* ethics committee composed of three experts in research with children and the Venezuelan migration context. Prior to the start of data collection, a planning and adaptation workshop was conducted to ensure that the methods were appropriately tailored to the characteristics of each context. Data collection took place between August 2024 and February 2025, and the qualitative data analysis was enriched through validation and discussion sessions with both survivors and frontline workers in all three countries.

For more detailed information on the research methodology and tools, please refer to the document: [Methods and Procedures](#).

KEY FINDINGS

Context of the Sexual Exploitation of Children on the Move

When asked how common cases of sexual exploitation of children are among the population on the move that they support, the majority of survey respondents considered it to be either very common (35%, n=41) or common (31%, n=37). Only 11% (n = 13) responded that such cases are rare.

These perceptions are echoed in survivors’ narratives and insights from interviewed professionals, which together show that the sexual exploitation of children is prevalent and occurs throughout the migration route, shaped by multiple and intersecting factors.

¹ Plataforma de Coordinación Interagencial para Refugiados y Migrantes de Venezuela. (2024, diciembre). [Refugiados y migrantes venezolanos en la región. Diciembre 2024](#).

² Ibid

³ The project “Stepping up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children – Empowering Children and Communities” (SUFASEC), part of the Down to Zero Alliance, is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Dutch development foreign policy with Defence for Children- ECPAT Netherlands. The programme aims for children in all of their diversity to live free of sexual exploitation, and uses a multi-sector and systemic approach, recognising the complexity of sexual exploitation of children and specific contexts in which it takes place. The Down to Zero Alliance (led by Terre des Hommes Netherlands and including Child Rights Coalition Asia, Conexión, Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands, Free A Girl and Plan International) work with civil society organisations in the Philippines, Thailand, Laos, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic. ECPAT International is a technical implementing partner of Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands. The programme aims to reach more than 21,000 children.

- Before migration: perpetrators target children through false relationships or online grooming, offering promises of support or employment abroad, and persuading them to begin the migration journey.
- During transit: children on the move face coercion or deceptive “assistance” that leads to sexual exploitation.
- Upon arrival: the lack of shelter, identity documents, and economic or social support increases the risk of sexual exploitation for children on the move and deepens their dependency on perpetrators when they are already in an exploitative situation.

Across all stages, children are exposed to both opportunistic and organised forms of sexual exploitation, exacerbated by structural vulnerabilities and weak protective systems. The presence of organised crime networks was noted in Peru and Colombia, posing a significant risk to both survivors and frontline workers.

Unaccompanied children on the move were identified in all three countries as being at heightened risk of sexual exploitation. Further, a Venezuelan survivor in Colombia described the challenges of migrating with a young child, noting how the multiple needs she faced during the journey were exploited by perpetrators:

“People saw me as vulnerable and in need. My son was just a few months old, and that’s how I ended up in this situation.”

(Venezuelan survivor in Colombia 03)

In Colombia, children from Indigenous communities, those affected by conflict, and returnee⁴ children were also identified as facing higher risks.

BARRIERS TO DISCLOSURE AND REPORTING

Fear of migration-related repercussions is a significant deterrent to disclosing and reporting cases of sexual exploitation of children on the move. Children on the move may refrain from disclosing their situation of exploitation due to concerns about being placed in shelters, which could prevent them from supporting their families. Frontline workers shared that people on the move, subjected to sexual exploitation during childhood, avoid contact with police, fearing fines or deportation.

Individuals on the move who have been subjected to sexual exploitation during childhood often do not recognise their experiences as such, which prevents them from disclosing their cases. According to frontline workers, individuals on the move tend to internalise blame, suppress their trauma, and view resilience as their only viable option. This is further compounded by the trauma accumulated throughout their migration journey, which can erode their sense of self-worth and the belief that they are entitled to protection.

Disclosure of exploitation tends to occur gradually, as trust is built over time, often not during the first encounter with service providers. Survivors usually seek support for other migration-related needs, such as shelter, documentation, or healthcare. It is within these services, and through sustained engagement, that the sexual exploitation may begin to emerge. A Colombian frontline worker said:

“Usually, they come saying things like: ‘I want to get my documents in order,’ or ‘I’m looking for psychological support.’ But as we talk with them and they begin to trust us, it’s sometimes not until the second or third visit that they open up and say: ‘Actually, I need help because I’m experiencing this problem.’”

(Frontline worker from Colombia, civil society organisation)

⁴ Returnee: This term refers to Colombian nationals who migrated to Venezuela in past decades in search of better opportunities but have since decided to return to Colombia due to the deterioration of conditions in Venezuela in recent years.

The lack of identity documents is a significant barrier to reporting. For example, in Colombia, one survivor shared that her Venezuelan friend was unable to file a complaint because she did not possess the necessary identity documentation. Similarly, in Peru, a frontline worker reported that police were reluctant to register a case of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation due to the complainant's asylum-seeking status.

The police are often the first point of contact for reporting cases of sexual exploitation of children on the move, and survivors shared mixed experiences. While some described respectful treatment and effective referrals to support services, many others reported indifference, corruption, or abuse. In a most severe case, a survivor in Peru recounted an attempted rape by a police officer to whom she reported the situation of exploitation.

Perceptions of the Quality, Accessibility and Usefulness of Services to Prevent and Respond to the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Humanitarian Contexts

Frontline professionals surveyed generally perceived that support services for Venezuelan individuals on the move who were subjected to sexual exploitation during childhood are only moderately available (see Figure 1). However, critical areas, particularly mental health and income generation, were consistently identified as having very poor availability.

Perceptions of service quality mirrored this trend. While services were generally rated as moderate in quality, professionals most frequently identified mental health services, family reintegration support, and income generation initiatives as being of poor quality (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. How would you rate the **availability** of support services for individuals on the move who were subjected to sexual exploitation during their childhood? (N=118)

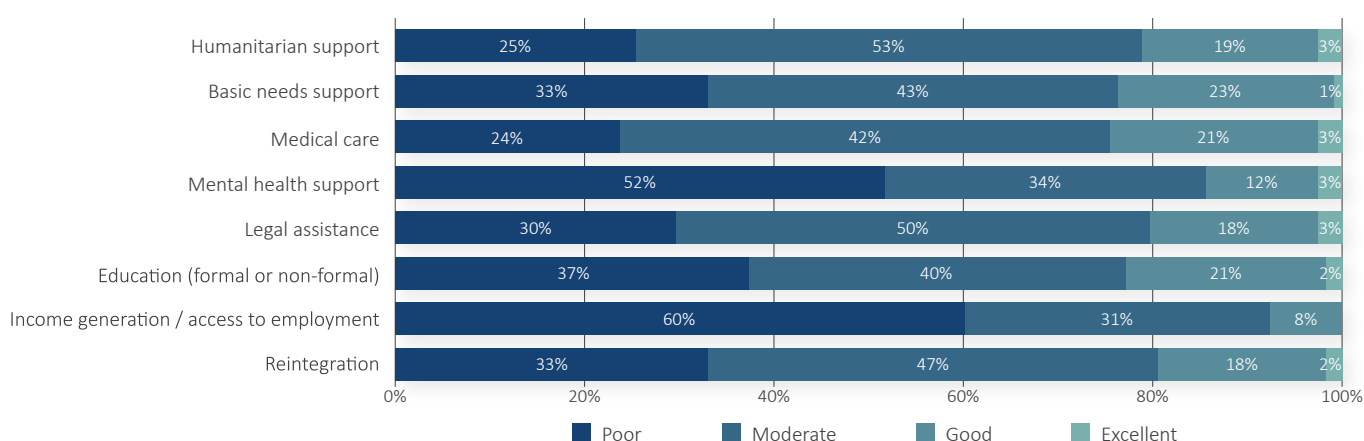
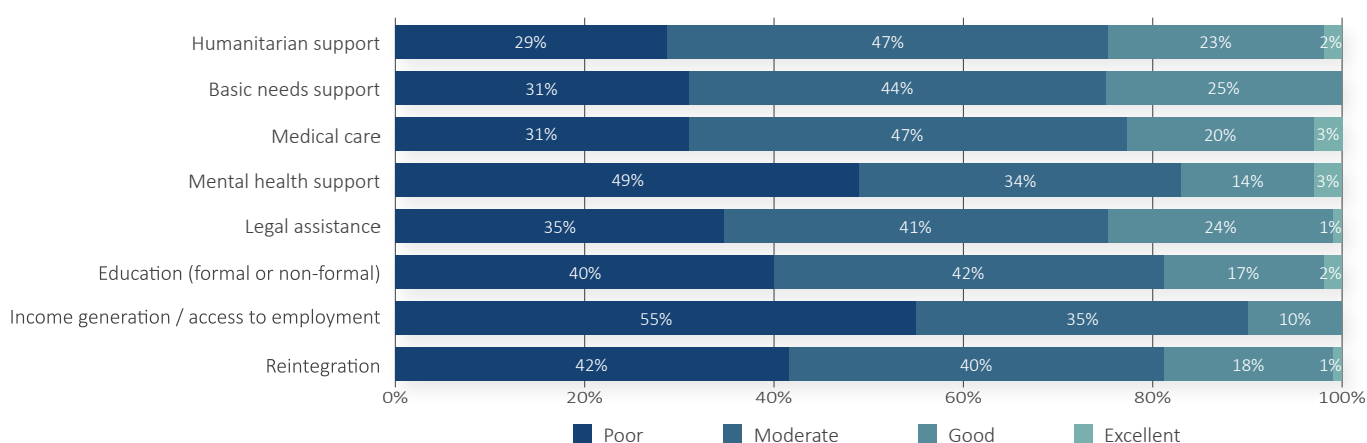


Figure 2. How would you rate the **quality** of support services for individuals on the move who were subjected to sexual exploitation during their childhood? (N =118)



A significant concern across all countries is the limited availability and accessibility of **mental health services**. The insufficient availability of trained professionals to support children on the move, coupled with the lack of sustained and specialised care to address the consequences of sexual exploitation, presents significant barriers to recovery. Nevertheless, survivors who did receive mental health support, particularly those placed in child protection systems, described individual and group therapy as instrumental in their healing processes. Mental health support allowed them not only to reflect on their experiences but also to connect with other people on the move with similar experiences and even recognise the exploitation they had been subjected to.

Shelter services, both emergency and long-term, were consistently described as insufficient. Many shelters operate at full capacity and lack specialised staff to support people on the move who were subjected to sexual exploitation during childhood. Survivors highlighted the use of inappropriate placement models, such as housing children with adults or placing survivors alongside other vulnerable populations. Survivors also shared that being placed in shelters far from their support networks, often in a different country, can be emotionally distressing.

“All you want is to be somewhere you feel safe and protected, especially if it’s because of sexual exploitation or when you are locked away. That’s why shelters are essential. You feel safe, and like someone will understand you.”

(Venezuelan survivor in Bolivia 07)

Reintegration, whether familial, community-based, or economic, is one of the most underdeveloped areas of support. Reintegration models often fail to consider the realities of children on the move, and few offer the long-term accompaniment necessary for proper recovery and independence.

Remaining in the host country is often fraught with barriers. Some survivors shared that they faced significant challenges in accessing education and employment, often due to a lack of documentation. These barriers can push them into precarious and

unsafe situations, as described by a Venezuelan young adult survivor of child sexual exploitation, now in Peru:

“To be honest, I’ve had to work at night as a sex worker. When I looked for a job, they asked for documents - foreigner’s ID, a copy of my ID card - and I don’t have any of that. If I don’t work, I don’t eat, so I had no choice.”

(Venezuelan survivor in Peru 05)

Returning to the country of origin is not necessarily a better alternative. One survivor, who had returned to Venezuela from Peru, shared during the validation and discussion session that securing stable employment had been extremely difficult. A frontline professional in Colombia explained the need to rethink care pathways in humanitarian contexts and to ensure sustained follow-up support that helps prevent revictimisation.

“Follow-up support after initial services is essential. We’ve seen repeat victimisation. Once the formal response ends, support is cut off - but it needs to continue, both at the community and individual levels.”

(Frontline professional, Colombia – protection sector)

One notable finding of this study, based on survivors’ perspectives, is the important role of **education** in their recovery journeys. Many described access to education in both formal and informal settings as a key form of support. This insight is especially significant given the multiple barriers faced by the Venezuelan population in host countries to access education, including lack of documentation, limited availability of schools, and discrimination, challenges also reflected in the experiences shared by survivors in this study.

Access to Justice

Access to justice did not emerge as a prominent theme in the survivors’ insights, likely reflecting the perception that the justice system is inaccessible or unlikely to provide meaningful outcomes. However, among those who did engage with justice institutions,

significant procedural and structural barriers were identified across Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru.

Survivors consistently described judicial processes as slow and inefficient. Delays in taking statements or initiating investigations were reported to compromise the chances of building a strong case, especially for children on the move whose exploitation may have occurred across borders or in another country where the report was filed. Survivors also expressed frustration with poor communication and a lack of updates on their legal proceedings, deepening their sense of uncertainty and disempowerment.

"It took several months before they took my statement in the Gesell chamber."

(Venezuelan survivor in Bolivia 01)

"They should begin the investigation or take action as soon as the report is filed... there are prosecutors who say, 'we can't do anything because there's no evidence', and that's very frustrating." (Venezuelan survivor in Bolivia 03)

"I feel it's all very slow; nearly a month has passed, and they still haven't taken any action."

(Venezuelan survivor in Peru 01)

Frontline professionals confirmed these shortcomings, citing understaffed teams and long waiting times for key procedures. These delays not only weaken the legal response but also risk revictimisation and affecting survivors' confidence and trust in protection systems.

Barriers and Enabling Factors for Comprehensive Support and Access to Services for Individuals on the Move Subjected to Sexual Exploitation during Childhood

Significant barriers affect both the availability, quality and effectiveness of support services for individuals subjected to sexual exploitation during childhood. Frontline workers in the three countries highlighted

stigma and discrimination as significant challenges. Assumptions against populations on the move, combined with harmful social norms that minimise or justify the sexual exploitation of children, can distort how frontline professionals perceive children on the move and their needs. As a result, responses may lack the empathy and nuance required for a trauma-informed and survivor-centred approach. Some professionals continue to conflate exploitation with voluntary behaviour or fail to recognise indicators of sexual exploitation. For example, in Peru, a professional explained how perceptions towards Venezuelan victims affect their access to shelters:

"Unfortunately, as I said, there has been a great deal of stigmatisation and stereotyping of Venezuelan victims of trafficking. Many shelters no longer want to offer them accommodation, claiming that these young women are very badly behaved and cause a lot of trouble."

(Frontline professional in Peru, justice sector)

As previously noted, another major barrier across the three countries is the lack of documentation, which restricts children's ability to report exploitation or access support services. A survivor in Bolivia, reflected on how the lack of documentation not only prevents access to services but also reinforces stereotypes and leads to discriminatory treatment:

"(When looking for work) because I didn't have the papers, the boss assumed I was some sort of thief just for being Venezuelan. And the police saw us as thieves, criminals, or sex workers. So I think that when we don't have our national ID or papers with us, people see us as intruders or criminals and just ignore us."

(Venezuelan survivor in Bolivia 06)

Institutional barriers were consistently reported across the three countries, particularly regarding the uneven availability and quality of services, which varied depending on geographic location. Services are often concentrated in major urban centres, leaving border areas and rural municipalities with limited or no access to specialised support. Border regions, for example,

while experiencing high migration flows, often remain underserved and lack a permanent state presence, which impairs both response and prevention efforts.

Professionals and survivors also highlighted a widespread shortage of staff with the appropriate knowledge, skills and sensitivity to address the sexual exploitation of children on the move. Survivors noted the lack of well-equipped personnel capable of providing trauma-informed support that includes empathetic responses and considers their experiences both as survivors of exploitation and as individuals on the move. They also reported receiving unclear or delayed information about their cases, which contributed to confusion and mistrust throughout the support process.

With regards to factors that contribute to effective support for Venezuelan survivors of sexual exploitation in contexts of human mobility, inter-agency coordination was identified as one of the top strategies to improve services by 70% (N=35) of participants in Bolivia, 71% (N=20) in Colombia, 68% (N=27) in Peru. Frontline workers and survivors narrated that inter-agency coordination facilitated access to essential services, including healthcare, education, documentation, and, in some cases, family reunification. Frontline workers emphasised the crucial role of collaboration between state institutions and civil society, particularly humanitarian organisations, in bridging resource gaps and service provision.

Furthermore, the provision of clear, honest, and timely information was identified as essential to building trust and fostering a sense of control. Survivors emphasised the importance of communication being transparent and respectful of their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. In Bolivia, one young woman shared how empowering words from staff gave her strength and helped her begin to believe in herself again:

“She told me, ‘You’re here now and we’re not going to leave you. Everything will be okay.’ That gave me strength (...) I felt like rubbish. Now I’ve been able to move forward, because I didn’t even believe in myself.”

(Venezuelan survivor in Bolivia 05)

Findings from the study underscore that in humanitarian contexts, children’s needs go beyond their experiences of sexual exploitation. Many carry histories of previous violence or vulnerabilities linked to migration, which may take precedence over the immediate impacts of exploitation. Survivors described overlapping challenges, including intimate partner violence, health conditions like HIV, and urgent needs such as shelter, documentation, and support for their children.

Survivors emphasised the critical role of access to accurate information, continuity of support, and recognition of their rights not only as children subjected to sexual exploitation but also as people on the move. However, support systems often fail to differentiate or adapt services for children on the move, assuming that equal access guarantees equitable outcomes. This one-size-fits-all approach risks neglecting the specific needs arising from survivors’ migration journeys. To be effective, services must address both protection from exploitation and the structural barriers linked to mobility, ensuring safety, dignity, and pathways to long-term recovery.

Digital Technology and Children on the Move: Balancing Opportunities and Risks of Sexual Exploitation

Digital technologies play an ambivalent role in the lives of children on the move. They offer vital means of staying in touch with family, accessing useful information, and continuing education, particularly for those travelling unaccompanied. Frontline professionals highlight their value as emotional and logistical support tools for survivors awaiting repatriation or seeking guidance in unfamiliar environments. However, access to these technologies often occurs with a lack of adequate information on safety and limited adult supervision, conditions which are taken advantage of by perpetrators of sexual crimes. Survivors and frontline professionals across the three countries noted that perpetrators may often use social media platforms and online games to initiate contact, typically through false identities and deceptive offers.

In Colombia and Peru, some frontline workers described situations in which perpetrators used digital channels to request child sexual abuse material from

children on the move, under the guise of modelling or casting calls, sometimes as a precursor to facilitating travel and, subsequently, in-person sexual exploitation. Messaging apps were also used to control children on the move, sharing logistical instructions, client names, and prices. Frontline workers also stated that technology itself, such as mobile phones, was sometimes used as a means to lure them.

Survey data revealed that sexual extortion, grooming, and the possession or distribution of child sexual abuse material were the most common forms of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse that frontline workers have come across within their work. However, frontline workers reported limited preparedness: only 35% (N=40) felt ready to support children on the move's safe use of digital technology, and 33% (N=37) felt unprepared to address exploitation facilitated by technology. Insights from the interviews underscore the need for tailored training, decentralised digital response units, and updated legislation, especially in, where current laws do not yet fully reflect technology-facilitated violence.

Sexual Exploitation of Boys and Children with Diverse Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities who are on the Move

"(...) These cases also occur among boys (...) Perhaps it's not as well known, but they do happen."

(Frontline professional in Peru, protection sector)

This quote from a frontline worker in Peru reflects a broader reality across all three countries: the sexual exploitation of boys on the move remains largely invisible. While professionals and survivors acknowledge that these cases do occur, they often go unnoticed due to gender stereotypes, stigma, and a lack of information. Harmful social norms that put pressure on boys to appear strong or remain

silent in the face of abuse, along with the absence of specialised services, hinder their identification and access to support. As one survivor in Bolivia explained:

"It's not only women who experience violence or even struggle to access support, because sometimes people think, 'he's a man, so it's impossible for him to be raped or exploited' - and that's not true. Men are just as vulnerable to sexual violence as women. I've heard cases involving boys who've said the same thing. Sometimes it's the parents who tell them, 'don't say anything because no one will believe you'."

(Venezuelan survivor in Bolivia 03)

Although discussed less frequently, some professionals also highlighted that children with diverse gender identities and sexualities are similarly invisible within existing support systems. Perpetrators take advantage of their dual status as both a minority and a migrant.

This lack of recognition has tangible consequences. In all three countries, frontline professionals noted that services are not adequately equipped to respond to the needs of boys. When asked about the gender breakdown of people on the move they support, most reported working predominantly with women. As one professional in Peru noted: "For boys, there's almost nothing. There are no shelters. Everything is designed for girls. And unfortunately, because the vulnerable population is so large, the shelters just aren't enough."

(Frontline professional in Peru, protection sector).

The difficulties in identifying male survivors to participate in this study, just one out of 34 participants, reflects not only a likely underreporting but also the urgent need to develop targeted strategies.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy and Legislation

- **Systematically involve children on the move in the design of policies and interventions for both the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation.**

A survivor in Colombia highlighted the effectiveness of peer-led prevention strategies, stating:

“Awareness-raising led by young people for young people has a big impact.”

(Venezuelan survivor, Colombia 16)

A frontline professional in Peru echoed this view:

“In these spaces, we also need to give a voice to girls and adolescents, because they are not being heard. (...) Can you imagine how powerful it would be if they were the ones telling us what they need, how they have experienced being victims of hypersexualisation, of harassment by teachers and others? Because it’s not me telling you this, it’s them, the girls themselves, saying they were beaten coming out of school and so on.”

(Frontline professional, Peru, justice sector)

- **Align national efforts with international commitments to ensure comprehensive protection for children on the move.**
- **Promote legal frameworks and policies that ensure the protection of children is not tied to migration status.**

It is essential to establish laws and policies that guarantee protection for children regardless of their migration status. The study reveals that a lack of legal documentation frequently restricts access to justice and protection. Children must be able to report sexual exploitation without fear of detention, deportation, or criminalisation.

- **Develop clear guidelines and regulatory frameworks to ensure dignified shelter conditions, based on a participatory and wellbeing-centred approach.**

Several survivors in Peru described shelter environments as overly controlled and restrictive, limiting their autonomy, decision-making, and freedom of expression, with adverse effects on their emotional well-being. They recommended incorporating recreational spaces that meet their needs and promoting a model based on individual responsibility in managing conflicts or incidents.

Governance and Coordination

- **Strengthen cross-border coordination mechanisms to ensure timely and sensitive responses to cases of sexual exploitation involving children on the move.**

Both survivors and frontline professionals recognised the need to improve coordination between countries, particularly about police investigations and the regularisation of legal documents. Efforts must be intensified to advance bilateral and regional agreements that facilitate cross-border referrals, the harmonisation of child protection protocols, and other mechanisms that take into account the specific risks faced by children in mobility contexts.

- **Reinforce strategic partnerships between institutions providing support to children on the move subjected to sexual exploitation, and specialised service providers.**

This includes public and private mental health services, as well as agencies responsible for migration procedures and humanitarian response, to ensure comprehensive, timely, and tailored support based on the specific needs of each case.

Human and Financial Resources

- **Develop educational activities to strengthen both technical and soft skills among frontline professionals, ensuring effective, trauma-sensitive support for children on the move.**

Survivors and frontline professionals across all three countries emphasised the importance of having well-trained staff. As a returning survivor in Colombia noted:

“I believe it shouldn’t be just any police officer. It should be someone from the child and adolescent protection unit. Officers who are trained and understand what a child goes through when faced with something as awful as sexual exploitation.”

(Returned survivor, Colombia 10)

Particular emphasis was placed on the need to integrate a trauma-informed approach that is sensitive to gender, age, and migration status, while also equipping professionals with practical tools for support. One survivor in Bolivia highlighted the importance of being treated with empathy, underlining not only the experience of exploitation, but also the emotional impact of being far from family, in a different country, and facing unfamiliar laws:

“They should put themselves in your shoes, that’s the first thing. They should be committed to following up on your case, so that it progresses and you can return to your family sooner. Because one, you’re in a country that’s very different from yours; two, the laws are completely different; and three, you’re someone who has been sexually abused.”

(Venezuelan survivor, Bolivia 05)

Frontline professionals also highlighted this need:

“I believe the support provided should be warm and centred on the victim. The girl, boy or adolescent must feel that we’re not revictimising them. That’s essential — that we put ourselves in their shoes and act accordingly.”

(Frontline professional, Colombia, protection sector)

- **Include training components aimed at strengthening the capacity of service providers to identify and address the sexual exploitation risks faced by boys and children with diverse gender and sexual identities.**

This includes challenging gender stereotypes that contribute to the invisibility of sexual exploitation among boys and children with diverse gender and sexual identities and hinder their ability to seek help and access appropriate support.

Continuum of Services

- **Address the lack of specialised services for children on the move subjected to sexual exploitation, with particular focus on strengthening access to mental health and psychosocial support, shelter, and socio-economic reintegration.**

There is an urgent need to improve the accessibility, relevance, and quality of existing services, ensuring that staff are properly trained to provide integrated care that is trauma- and gender-sensitive. This is particularly important for supporting boys and children with diverse gender identities and sexualities.

“What I would say is that they should support people who truly want it (...) They should offer that help, regardless of nationality or country of origin. Whether it’s a woman or a man, because it’s not only women who are raped, men are too. Women are not the only ones who suffer psychological or verbal abuse; men go through it as well. Just as women are supported, men should be too. That’s what I would like.”

(Venezuelan survivor, Peru 05)

- **Mainstream mechanisms for the identification, prevention, and response to the sexual exploitation of children across humanitarian assistance frameworks.**

This includes ensuring that all frontline humanitarian services, especially in key transit points along migration routes, integrate risk assessments, referral pathways, and safeguarding protocols that address the specific vulnerabilities of children on the move. Survivors highlighted the need for proper guidance at borders to warn them of danger zones and potential risks along the journey:

“At the border, they should give guidance like: ‘Look, you might go through this or that’, about the areas and the dangers. So much happens when you’re walking, and people need to be aware of it.”

(Venezuelan survivor, Peru 06)

“I’d recommend they really stay alert — like I said, about the documents, the borders, the cars. Even if they don’t see it, they [minors] go through anywhere. Even through legal routes. And they’re underage. That’s where more attention is needed.”

(Venezuelan survivor, Bolivia 04)

- **Introduce emergency cash transfers or income support programmes for survivors, particularly when they carry family responsibilities.**

The study showed that economic pressure is one of the main reasons why children on the move are exposed to or return to situations of sexual exploitation. Temporary financial support can alleviate these pressures, facilitate recovery, and mitigate the risk of re-victimisation.

- **Ensure that services for children on the move provide clear, reliable, and accessible information about their rights, protection pathways, and legal, migration, and shelter processes, as a key part of prevention, protection, and recovery.**

Many children on the move make migration decisions based on information obtained online or from acquaintances, which is sometimes misleading and increases their risk of exploitation. It is recommended to partner with community and migrant-led organisations to share accurate information at key transit and border points, and to promote the use of safe digital platforms and social media channels to inform children about risks, rights, and available services.

Survivors also expressed the need for clear and up-to-date information about their legal, migration, and shelter processes, particularly regarding the duration of procedures and their stay in shelters. They emphasised the importance of transparency, as some felt misled or excluded from information about their own cases:

“They should explain things in detail, or at least help you feel at ease. They should call and say: Look, your process will be like this. What they say is that you have no right to know anything because you’re underage. But you have to wait until you’re 18 to know what’s happening with your case. That doesn’t seem right to me. I didn’t have anyone here, no family.”

(Venezuelan survivor, Peru 01)

“Sometimes the police told me things I didn’t understand, so I would ask again or request something, and they didn’t understand me, and I didn’t understand them either.”

(Venezuelan survivor, Bolivia 07)

Child and Community Participation

- **Ensure that interventions respect the autonomy and pace of recovery of child survivors, promoting their informed and safe participation.**

The study revealed that some survivors felt their decisions were not considered, or that they were pressured into services without fully understanding what they entailed. In some cases, survivors described feeling betrayed when protection procedures were activated without their clear consent. It is essential that child protection responses are participatory, allowing children to make informed decisions with appropriate guidance, without coercion or forced transitions.

- **Design and implement interventions that strengthen the capacity of families and communities to identify risks, prevent sexual exploitation, and provide effective support to children on the move.**

Survivors and frontline professionals underscored the protective role of families and communities. Survivors recommended strengthening communication and parental involvement, particularly regarding social and digital environments:

“Parents should pay more attention to their children and not trust everyone. Don’t give them too much freedom, because it also relates to social media - or meeting someone at school or somewhere, and then treating them like a lifelong friend and bringing them home, or sharing personal details about their life too easily.”

(Venezuelan survivor, Peru 03)

"I'd say: more communication, more workshops so that people can learn about the consequences, how things can happen, how an offender might present themselves - that would be really useful. In schools, even in hospitals, wherever there could be workshops, so people say, 'I didn't know this - now I'll be more careful.'"

(Venezuelan survivor, Bolivia 05)

"Parents should talk more to their children about trafficking and sexual exploitation. Many think it's wrong to talk about it, but it's worse not to."

(Venezuelan survivor, Colombia 17)

Frontline professionals echoed this view:

"One of the community self-protection factors we have is the presence of community leaders in settlements and neighbourhoods. Local community councils can also serve as protective structures."

(Frontline professional in Colombia, civil society)

"As I said, ideally, we should create community support networks and also spread information. That's really important, because even if networks exist, if information doesn't reach the right people, they won't be useful. I think networks and access to information are both essential."

(Frontline professional in Bolivia, health sector)

- **Strengthen processes for community and family reintegration, including education, engagement with families and access to stable livelihoods.**

Some survivors recommended engaging their families and communities in Venezuela to support proper reintegration. For example, three participants in Peru said involving their families in their country of origin would help them better understand trafficking and sexual exploitation and offer support without judgment or pity. In Colombia, several survivors highlighted the need not only for access to basic education, but also to technical and professional training programmes to support migrant youth's social and economic integration.

- **Expand and adapt shelter and alternative care options to meet the diverse needs of children subjected to sexual exploitation.**

Survivors' experiences revealed that current shelter models do not always provide safe or suitable environments. It is recommended to strengthen and implement alternative care options, such as family-based care or semi-independent living with psychosocial support, to offer responses tailored to each child's gender, age, level of autonomy, and past experiences, ensuring a protective and restorative environment.

- **Promote participatory spaces for training and dialogue at the community level, aimed at children and their communities — both those on the move and host communities — to help identify and challenge harmful gender norms, stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes.**

Data and Evidence

- **Strengthen data collection and management systems to make visible the sexual exploitation of children on the move, using a gender-sensitive and intersectional approach.**

A significant lack of disaggregated official data on the sexual exploitation of children was identified, particularly in the case of Bolivia. Robust and sustainable information systems that incorporate variables such as gender, age, migration status, and type of exploitation are essential for developing more relevant policies and responses tailored to the diverse profiles and experiences of affected children.





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