

DISRUPTING HARM IN BRAZIL

Evidence on technology-facilitated
child sexual exploitation and abuse



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This report discusses the sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Brazil. It includes accounts of child sexual exploitation and abuse cases as described by professionals in Brazil. Readers are encouraged to monitor their responses to the content and only engage with this report in ways that feel comfortable to them.

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SECURITY

Brazilians of every social class are enthusiastic adopters of technology. They have always readily embraced the idea that internet access offers multiple opportunities for learning, meaningful connection and access to information. In addition, time series data from the national ICT Kids Online survey demonstrates sustained growth in access to the web via mobile devices, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when children and adolescents began to use educational apps, social media and electronic games on a massive scale.

However, the internet did not originally develop with the safety and well-being of this particular audience as a main concern. Social media are often designed to encourage excessive usage or promote consumption, and they often transmit age-inappropriate content. Electronic games can enable interactions with unknown adults, and online chats and communications are increasingly used across different apps without parental controls or functioning age verification mechanisms necessarily being in place.

In our work at the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, we are often asked to provide precise data on the victimization of Brazilian children and adolescents on the internet. Unfortunately, comprehensive figures on this are not yet available, either because the reporting of such crimes is still inconsistent and dispersed, or because there is significant underreporting.

The Disrupting Harm in Brazil research, funded by Safe Online and carried out by the highly respected UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti, ECPAT International and INTERPOL, thus addresses an important gap regarding the assessment of this problem. For example, it shows that one in five teenagers are subject to some form of tech-facilitated sexual abuse or exploitation – an unacceptably high number. The data highlight that children and adolescents are not only abused on the deep and dark web but also on the surface web, through various platforms like social media, instant messaging apps, or electronic games that their families think are safe, thus permitting their use. Even when the perpetrator is not a stranger, but someone who lives with the child or adolescent, technology can facilitate violence, making the victim even more vulnerable. Finally, the research shows that online violence rarely comes to the attention of the authorities, nor is it disclosed within the family. This reveals the lack of official reporting channels as well as the existence of cultural barriers that prevent victims from receiving help and make it difficult to investigate crimes.

The launch of this report will also facilitate international comparative analysis, since the research was implemented in 25 countries. Although this comparative analysis comes with some methodological challenges, the results obtained highlight patterns that reveal similarities and differences between countries, helping to shed light on the issues that are specific to Brazil.

Arguably the study's most important message is that the way the internet currently operates does not meet minimum security requirements for children - one third of its users. It has become clear that the participation and free expression of children and adolescents in the digital public sphere also requires the implementation of active measures to protect them. After all, it was a series of widely reported cases concerning sexual abuse and exploitation, mistreatment of animals, and school violence incited by online radicalization that led Brazilian society to refuse to further tolerate this situation. In June 2025, the Supreme Court ruled that digital service providers have an active duty to protect children and adolescents. Shortly after, in September 2025, Law 15211 on the Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents passed in Congress, represented a cross-party response to the country's identification of child protection as an urgent priority.

The new law includes a series of provisions linked to safety by design, requires age verification for digital services that carry greater risk, stipulates that the social media accounts of children under 16 must be linked to those of a parent or guardian, sets out transparency measures, empowers an independent agency – the National Data Protection Agency (ANPD) – to supervise companies, and includes the legal obligation to report cases of exploitation, abuse, kidnapping and grooming to the authorities.

The Disrupting Harm in Brazil research will enable children's rights organizations, public authorities, the police and private companies to have a more accurate understanding of the phenomenon of victimization and the associated risks. In addition to guiding public policymaking, it will enable the entire child and adolescent rights protection system – the ecosystem to which the ANPD henceforth joins –, as well as companies, to identify the measures they need to prioritize to play their part in eliminating all forms of violence against children and adolescents on the internet.

Ricardo Lins Horta

Director of Digital Security and Risk Prevention

National Digital Rights Secretariat, Ministry of Justice and Public Security

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With funding from Safe Online, partners ECPAT International, INTERPOL and UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti (UNICEF Innocenti) worked together to design and implement the Disrupting Harm research project and methodology. The original project idea and conceptualization were developed by Safe Online, providing the foundation for this collaborative effort.

This unique partnership uses a multidisciplinary approach to enhance our collective understanding of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse and the national response to these forms of violence against children. A combined investment of 15 million USD has allowed the Disrupting Harm research to be conducted in 13 countries across Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia from 2019 to 2022, and in another 12 countries, including Brazil, from 2023 onwards.

In 2024 and 2025, ECPAT International, INTERPOL and UNICEF Innocenti conducted research in Brazil to understand tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse from multiple viewpoints. The data in Brazil was collected through a national household survey with 12-17-year-olds, interviews with justice professionals, frontline workers, survivors of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, and law enforcement, and an analysis of national legislation and policy.

What is technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse?

The Disrupting Harm project uses the term tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse to refer to situations involving digital, internet and communication technologies at some point during the continuum of sexual exploitation or abuse of a child. This type of violence is sometimes referred to as 'online' child sexual exploitation and abuse. However, the term 'technology-facilitated' is now preferred, to convey that this violence against children doesn't only occur in online spaces; it can occur fully online, or through a mix of online and in-person interactions between perpetrators and children.

More information concerning key definitions used in this report can be found [in the annex](#).

Key findings

Nature and scope of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in Brazil

- According to Disrupting Harm survey data, 19 per cent of 12-17-year-old internet-using children in Brazil were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in a period of only one year.
- Exposure to unwanted sexual content was particularly prevalent in Brazil (14 per cent), and was the most common abusive behaviour that the children surveyed were subjected to. This exposure may be used by perpetrators to gradually habituate children to other forms of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse (e.g. sexual talk).
- Older children were more commonly subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse compared to younger children (up to 29 per cent for 17-year-olds vs. 10 per cent for 12-year-olds).
- There was no statistically significant difference in the proportions of children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation by the child's gender, area of residence (urban vs. rural), schooling (in school vs. out of school) or parental education (low/medium/high).
- Interview data showed that perpetrators may take advantage of children in low-income households by offering them money or gifts in exchange for sexual content.

Child sexual exploitation and abuse on social media, online games and other online platforms

- In 52 per cent of cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, the child first met the perpetrator online.
- Most children said the incident happened via a social media or instant messaging app (64 per cent) and/or through an online game (12 per cent).
- Interview data showed that perpetrators may deliberately target new users of Facebook and Instagram or online gaming platforms such as Roblox, Free Fire or Habbo.

- Instagram (59 per cent) and WhatsApp (51 per cent) were by far the most frequent apps where children were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Perpetrators in Brazil may use multiple platforms to sexually exploit and abuse children, often starting with platforms that are more public facing (i.e. Instagram, Facebook and online games) to identify children's profiles and make first contact, and later moving their interactions to more private direct messaging platforms such as WhatsApp to request or share sexual content or abuse children in other ways.

Perpetrator profiles and common tactics

- In 49 per cent of cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse captured in the survey, the perpetrator was someone known to the child. This included friends, family members, boyfriends, girlfriends and crushes.
- In 26 per cent of cases the perpetrator was a stranger, and in a quarter of cases the child did not want to or could not identify the perpetrator.
- Although in 52 per cent of cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse captured in the survey children first met the perpetrator(s) online, in 27 per cent the child met the perpetrator at school, 11 per cent at home, and 2 per cent somewhere where they did sports.
- Interview data point at two profiles of perpetrators: unknown persons who initiate contact mainly through social media and groom children to share sexual content and/or meet in person to abuse them; and family members (e.g. cousin, step/father, uncle, distant relative) or people in positions of power (e.g. coach, teacher) who used technology to exploit and abuse children.
- Based on interview data, perpetrators exploit real or perceived power imbalances, such as adult authority, community standing, or control created through sexual extortion and threats, to manipulate and abuse children. They may take advantage of children's lack of support and fear of parental reprisal, using these vulnerabilities to maintain control and obtain abusive material.

Social and mental health impacts of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse

- Young people described the overwhelming fear they felt when they received sexual content or were threatened or coerced into sharing it.
- Analysis of the survey data shows that children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse are 5.4 times more likely to self-harm, and 5 times more likely to experience suicidal thoughts or attempts than those who were not.
- Based on cases discussed during interviews, exploitation and abuse may create or reinforce children's self-criticism and self-blame, especially in cases where they shared sexual content. Shame may lead to silence about the abuse they were subjected to.
- Professionals highlight how children who are or have recently been subjected to exploitation and/or abuse may withdraw socially, eat and drink irregularly, and in some cases show increased anger or aggression.
- Interviews highlight that when sexual exploitation and abuse occur solely online, it is more likely to be minimized and seen as less serious by family members, teachers and professionals than contact abuse.

Disclosure and reporting of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse

- In 34 per cent of cases of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, children did not tell anyone about what happened to them, mostly because they did not know where to go or who to tell, because they felt embarrassed, or because they did not think anyone would believe them.
- For some children, disclosure and reporting came only as a last resort when the abuse became unbearable.
- According to the survey, reporting to official channels (e.g. helplines or police) is uncommon, with children more likely to turn to friends and/or parents (particularly female caregivers).
- Within families, responses to disclosures are sometimes punitive, with children dismissed, disbelieved or assigned responsibility for the abuse.

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- Professionals describe disclosure as delicate and often gradual, with children sometimes disclosing being subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse only after being referred to them for other concerns (e.g. behavioural issues or physical abuse).
- When asked what stopped children from telling a social worker, helpline or police about the abuse, the most common barrier was not knowing how to make a report, followed by being threatened by the perpetrator, and not knowing such things could be reported.
- Among children subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse on social media, 38 per cent made a report or complaint on the app where it occurred. Those children made reports primarily on Instagram and WhatsApp, reflecting the most common platforms where children said they were targeted.
- In some cases, family members may discourage children from reporting, due to fears that the judicial process may negatively impact their mental health.

Children's experiences with the justice process and social services

- The combination of significant, often undefined responsibility and autonomy of the guardianship councils along with limited training, understaffing, lack of standardization and regulation of their work results in systemic gaps in victim support, referral and follow-up of cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in Brazil.
- Schools are often the first point of disclosure, but interviews reveal inconsistent responses to spontaneous disclosures, ranging from bypassing the Guardianship Council, to responding informally, to taking no action at all.
- Good practices identified by frontline workers included group therapy to help children to connect with others. They also praised the “welcoming” process (*acolhimento*), which provides essential information and offers comfort and reassurance to children accessing services.

- Professionals described an overwhelmed, understaffed care system where high demand and limited resources, burnout, insufficient training in sexual violence and trauma-informed care, low salaries, and inadequate infrastructure lead to discontinued cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in both São Paulo and Manaus, the two metropolitan areas where the qualitative research was conducted.
- Although specialized listening is identified by professionals as a promising practice, interviews revealed confusion about how it should be implemented and by whom; in practice, children often end up recounting the abuse multiple times to different professionals.
- The special deposition process – a single interview in a child-friendly environment conducted by a trained professional who intervenes only when necessary – was recognized by interviewed participants as a good practice for improving access to justice for child victims of crime in Brazil. Challenges include long delays between filing a complaint and the deposition, and infrastructure limitations in large cities like Manaus.

Criminalization of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse

- Brazil already has a strong and extensive legal framework addressing technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, which was further strengthened with the enactment of the Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents in September 2025. However, several existing provisions do not extend protection to children aged 12–17. These legal gaps leave older children less protected, creating loopholes that undermine accountability.
- Provisions on facilitating or inducing a child to access material containing “explicit sex scenes” or “pornography” only apply to children below 12.
- Provisions on enticing, harassing, instigating or coercing children under 12 with the intent of inducing them to expose themselves in a “sexually explicit” manner also do not extend to children aged 12–17.

-
- Brazilian legislation does not include a specific offence addressing technology-facilitated sexual extortion of children, although in practice judges may apply other provisions to prosecute such cases.
 - Mere access to child sexual abuse material without downloading or storing it is not criminalized.
 - Online grooming of children of sexual purposes is only partially addressed. While existing provisions recognize that grooming can serve as a pathway to both in-person and online abuse, they do not cover conduct the targeting of children aged 12–17.

The report ends with a set of data-driven recommendations based on its key findings. They include actions to be taken by key actors across government, law enforcement, justice and social services sectors, by communities, schools and families, and by digital platforms and service providers. These are too detailed to be recounted in this executive summary, but can be found on [page 84](#) of this report.

METHODS

The Disrupting Harm methodology combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a better understanding of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in Brazil. The quantitative data provides an understanding of the scope of this issue among children in Brazil. The analysis of national legislation and policies, together with interviews with survivors, justice professionals, frontline workers, and law enforcement, provide insights into the formal systems and processes intended to support victims, while also offering important context to understand the sexual exploitation and abuse that children face, and how families and communities react to it.

The same research methods were implemented in all 12 countries from the current research cycle, and adapted with local researchers to suit the country context. The research was designed and implemented following strict safeguarding and ethics protocols. In total, six separate but complementary research activities were designed, with the aim of answering the following questions:

1. What characterizes tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse?
2. What factors are associated with victimization and perpetration?
3. How do children protect themselves against, prevent and respond to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse?
4. How do families, friends and social networks prevent and respond to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse?
5. How do organizations (e.g. law enforcement, justice sector, service providers, government, educators) protect, prevent and respond to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse?
6. How does existing policy and legislation protect against, prevent and respond to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse?

A summary of methods used for each of the six research activities is presented below.

Legal and policy analysis

The analysis of national legal and policy frameworks was aimed at identifying legal gaps, assessing compliance with international obligations, and highlighting strengths and gaps in national responses to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. The legal and policy analysis was developed using a detailed checklist consisting of over 140 items, ensuring consistency across countries analysed. This tool, based on international legal standards and best practices, evaluates areas such as legal definitions, criminalization, jurisdiction, child-centric justice, private sector responsibilities and child protection policies.

To conduct the analysis, ECPAT International collected national laws and policy documents in collaboration with local partners, ensuring they reflected current legal frameworks. These were analysed using the checklist to identify legal gaps and enforcement challenges, supported by case law and reports on prosecution where available.

The draft analysis underwent internal and external expert reviews, including review from the national coalition of civil society part of the ECPAT network and the UNICEF country office, to ensure accuracy and real-world relevance.

More information on this research method can be found [here](#).

Household survey of 12–17-year-olds and their caregivers

The purpose of the survey was to hear directly from children and their caregivers about their online experiences, both positive and negative. The questionnaire was divided into modules, most of which were administered by an enumerator. For sensitive questions, including those around sexual violence, respondents input their answers directly in the tablet to ensure that their comfort and confidentiality were protected. The target population for the survey was 12–17-year-old internet users who live in a permanent private household. In addition, one of their parents/guardians was also interviewed, regardless of whether they used the internet. 'Internet users' were defined as those who have used the internet in the three months prior to the survey, in line with the threshold set by the International Telecommunications Unit.¹

1. International Telecommunications Union, *Manual for Measuring ICT Access and Use by Households and Individuals, 2020 edition*, ITU, Geneva, 2020. https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/manual/ITUManualHouseholds2020_E.pdf

To achieve a nationally representative random sample of 12–17-year-old internet users, the survey used random probability sampling with national coverage. In Brazil, the fieldwork coverage was 95 per cent. Areas that were unsafe or inaccessible to enumerators were excluded, accounting for 5 per cent of the total coverage. ‘Coverage’ is defined as the proportion of the total population that had a chance of being selected for the survey sample – meaning that the fieldwork would cover the area where they live if sampled. Data collection took place from November 2024 to March 2025.

The sampling followed a three-stage random probability clustered sample design. The response rate in Brazil was 53 per cent, and the sample achieved included 1,029 children and 1,029 of their parents/guardians.

The age and gender breakdowns of the sample are presented below.

Age and gender distribution of child sample

12–14 years	54%
15–17 years	46%
Girls	50%
Boys	50%

Age and gender distribution of parent sample

Under 40 years	43%
Over 40 years	57%
Women	84%
Men	16%
Other	0%

More information on this research method can be found [here](#).

Interviews with children and young people subjected to technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse while under the age of 18

This research activity aimed to include the voices of children and young people (16–24 years old) who had been subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse when they were below the

age of 18. This study uses the term children and young people to refer to participants in this research activity. Children are defined as anyone under the age of 18 years. While there is no universally agreed age group to describe young people, the study follows the United Nations’ practice of referring to young people as those aged 15–24 years. Children and young people who were engaged in ongoing justice proceedings were not included in the study. Trauma-informed research protocols were designed and adapted in consultation with research and implementation partners in Brazil. Two main engagement strategies were developed to connect children and young people with a research team trained in trauma-informed research practices to share their experiences during an interview.

1. Professional networks: Service providers distributed information sheets and consent forms to individuals between 16 and 24 years-old within their networks. In addition, the research team presented the study at protection network events in Brazil attended by psychologists, social workers and other relevant professionals. Meetings were also held with coordinators of public schools, and with municipal departments of education and health, and letters were sent out asking for their support in sharing information about the research. The direct mobilization of the research team reached more than 210 people, including professionals and young people. This number includes 144 professionals contacted individually by message, 16 young people approached directly, and around 50 participants present at a child protection network meeting.

2. Digital networks: Information about the study was shared with young people aged 18–24 in Brazil via online channels like Instagram, Facebook, UNICEF Brazil’s website and [UNICEF Brazil’s Tamo Junto](#) network. UNICEF Brazil also uploaded to their website information on the research and informed a tech media article.

Trauma-informed interviews were conducted with nine young people between October and December 2024. The interviews were conducted by two qualitative researchers with training in trauma-informed interviewing and with support from a psychologist with research training. One participant was a 16-year-old girl, and eight were aged between 18–24, including seven young women and one young man.

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Throughout the report, attributions to data from this research activity with children and young people will be indicated with (YP) at the end of quotes.

More information on this research method, including safeguarding protocols and limitations, can be found [here](#).

Interviews with frontline workers

This research activity aimed to understand how frontline workers in two Brazilian metropolitan regions, namely São Paulo and Manaus, support children and young people subjected to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, and to identify how systems can better prevent and respond to these forms of violence. It also aimed to explore the experiences of frontline workers handling cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as their perceptions of good practices and challenges.

The population of interest for the study was frontline workers who provide support or essential services directly to individuals subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse when they were under the age of 18. Initially, frontline workers were included in the study if their case/patient load over the last 12 months included at least one child or young person who had been subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse when they were under the age of 18. However, this timeline was extended to five years due to low numbers of eligible frontline workers with this experience. Frontline workers were only invited to participate if they were able to talk to the researchers about a de-identified case.

Three trained researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 frontline workers. The sample included social workers, psychologists, educators such as teachers and principals, doctors, and nurses.

Interviews were conducted between April and November 2024. Among the frontline workers interviewed, 19 were women and 3 were men. All participants were based in either São Paulo

or Manaus metropolitan regions, except for two interviewees linked to nationwide services.

Throughout the report, attributions to data from this research activity with frontline workers will be indicated with (FW) at the end of quotes.

More information on this research method, including safeguarding protocols and limitations, can be found [here](#).

Interviews with justice professionals

This research activity aimed to understand how the justice mechanisms in the two metropolitan regions of São Paulo and Manaus respond to children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse to identify how systems can better prevent and respond. The research also aimed to explore the experiences of justice professionals handling cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as their perceptions of good practices and challenges.

The population of interest for this study was justice professionals in Brazil, such as public prosecutors and judges. Justice professionals were included in the study if they had a direct role working on a case of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in the five years prior to the interview. Justice professionals were only invited to participate if they were able to talk to the researchers about a de-identified case. Ongoing cases were excluded to ensure the integrity of the case in the justice system.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between April and October 2024 with 18 justice professionals, including public prosecutors, judges (including at Childhood and Youth Courts), Guardianship Councillors,² forensic interviewers and psychologists (e.g. in specialized courts). Among professionals interviewed, 16 were women and 2 were men. All participants were based in the metropolitan regions of São Paulo or Manaus.

Throughout the report, attributions to data from this research activity with justice professionals will be indicated with (JP) at the end of quotes.

2. Although guardianship councillors are not formally classified as justice professionals, they were included in this category for the purposes of this research.

More information on this research method, including safeguarding protocols and limitations, can be found [here](#).

Interviews with national law enforcement

INTERPOL's Crimes Against Children Unit conducts field-based assessments in collaboration with each member country's National Central Bureau. INTERPOL's team engaged directly with national law enforcement agencies in São Paulo, Paraná and Pernambuco, as well as with child protection units, and trusted civil society partners and NGOs. The aim was to understand the operational realities of investigating and responding to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. These engagements focus on identifying practical challenges: gaps in resources, limitations in investigative capacity and barriers to international cooperation. The findings inform the targeted support INTERPOL provides, which could include access to specialized training, analytical tools and coordinated operational assistance. While this report includes INTERPOL's aggregated, non-sensitive findings, the full scope of its observations and conclusions (including detailed operational recommendations and tailored capacity-building measures) are shared exclusively with national authorities, ensuring the integrity of ongoing investigations.

More information on this research method can be found [here](#).

Limitations and understanding the data

To fully understand the findings of this report, it is important to consider the limitations of the research activities and their implementation in Brazil.

The **household survey** was conducted in private households with 12–17-year-old internet users. The survey was designed to be nationally representative of this group of children only, as opposed to all children in Brazil. The survey is cross-sectional, not longitudinal, meaning that the data captures a single moment in time in the lives of the 1,031 children surveyed. While the Disrupting Harm data highlight relationships between sexual exploitation and abuse and other factors in children's lives, it is not possible to determine cause and effect based on these survey data alone.

The survey does not intend to measure prevalence or to capture all the possible ways that digital technologies are used to exploit or abuse children. Some forms of abuse and exploitation, like grooming, are particularly difficult to measure, as they can involve complex and continuous interactions between children and perpetrators. Livestreaming of child sexual abuse can also be difficult to measure as children may not be aware that their abuse was filmed, let alone livestreamed.

As with other studies on sexual violence, a high level of underreporting is expected due to several factors, including potential discomfort speaking about a very personal and painful experience, fears around confidentiality and anonymity, and social norms and taboos around discussing sexual violence, among others. This means that the data presented is likely an underestimate. Low sample sizes also limit the kind of statistical analysis that can be conducted on the data.

The **interviews with frontline workers and justice professionals** do not aim to provide a measure of the types or prevalence of violence in Brazil due to the nature of this research methodology. The sample for these research activities was limited to the metropolitan regions of São Paulo and Manaus, and is not intended to provide a national perspective. However, these data can help provide context and meaning for understanding these types of exploitation and abuse and how they happen. It is also important to note that the cases that reach the formal support or justice system only represent a minority of exploitation and abuse cases, and may reflect cases more widely understood as abuse.

Ethical approval

UNICEF Innocenti obtained ethical approval for the Disrupting Harm project from the Health Media Lab, a global institutional review board.

National consultation

During a national consultation in Brasilia in December 2025, representatives across sectors including government, law enforcement authorities, civil society and academia in Brazil were asked to provide input on the Disrupting Harm findings and recommendations to enhance

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their relevance for the Brazilian context. In parallel, an online consultation with 20 members of UNICEF Brazil's Youth Council actively engaged children and young people aged 14–20 in shaping recommendations on the roles of schools, families and online platforms in preventing and responding to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Technology facilitates sexual exploitation and abuse in different ways: in some cases, it remains confined to the digital realm; in others, it extends and intensifies exploitation and abuse that is already taking place in person. And in other instances, abuse begins online and later progresses into physical contact.

INTRODUCTION

Disrupting Harm uses the term ‘technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse’ to refer to *any* form of sexual exploitation and abuse of a child that involves the use of technology. This broad definition allows for recognition of the diverse and evolving ways that digital tools, platforms and content can be used in the sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

Technology in this context includes, but is not limited to, the internet, social media, messaging apps, online gaming platforms, and devices used to create or distribute images, videos or other content. The definition does not depend on who the perpetrator is, how they commit the exploitation and abuse, or the child’s awareness that what is happening is abusive. It also does not depend on the child’s actions before, during or after the sexual exploitation and abuse has taken place.

Each child subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse has a unique story. For some, it may be a single incident; for others, it is part of a broader pattern of violence in their lives. Incidents documented throughout this report could be connected to existing abusive relationships, human trafficking, violence in school, home or the community, or other forms of violence that extend beyond what is captured through this research.

Perpetrators may use digital platforms to manipulate or threaten children they already know, or to seek out new victims. Technology facilitates sexual exploitation and abuse in different ways: in some cases, it remains confined to the digital realm; in others, it extends and intensifies exploitation and abuse that is already taking place in person. And in other instances, abuse begins online and later progresses into physical contact.

Tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse is shaped by a variety of factors and dynamics that are difficult to fully capture. These include but are not limited to power imbalances, disability, social identities, and gender, racial, cultural and religious norms and values. These dynamics are not always directly visible in the data, but are critical to understanding how sexual exploitation and abuse occur and how children are impacted.

Being aware of these nuances is important when reading this report. Without considering the context in which violence occurs, there is a risk of oversimplifying the issue. Looking at individual cases or statistics alone can risk overlooking the societal forces that enable sexual exploitation and abuse, or allow it to continue undisclosed and unreported. What children share in surveys and interviews represents what they felt comfortable with disclosing at that point in time, meaning that the full extent of the problem is likely to be greater than captured in this report.

Nonetheless, the findings presented in this report go a long way towards unpacking tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in Brazil. It adds much-needed nuance and understanding to this issue, grounded in the experiences of children and young people, and the professionals working to support them.

INTERNET USE IN BRAZIL

The Disrupting Harm project collected key indicators on children’s internet use via the household survey to address this gap. This was intended to complement and support existing data on children and adolescents’ internet use in Brazil, available through the ICT Kids Online survey in Brazil.

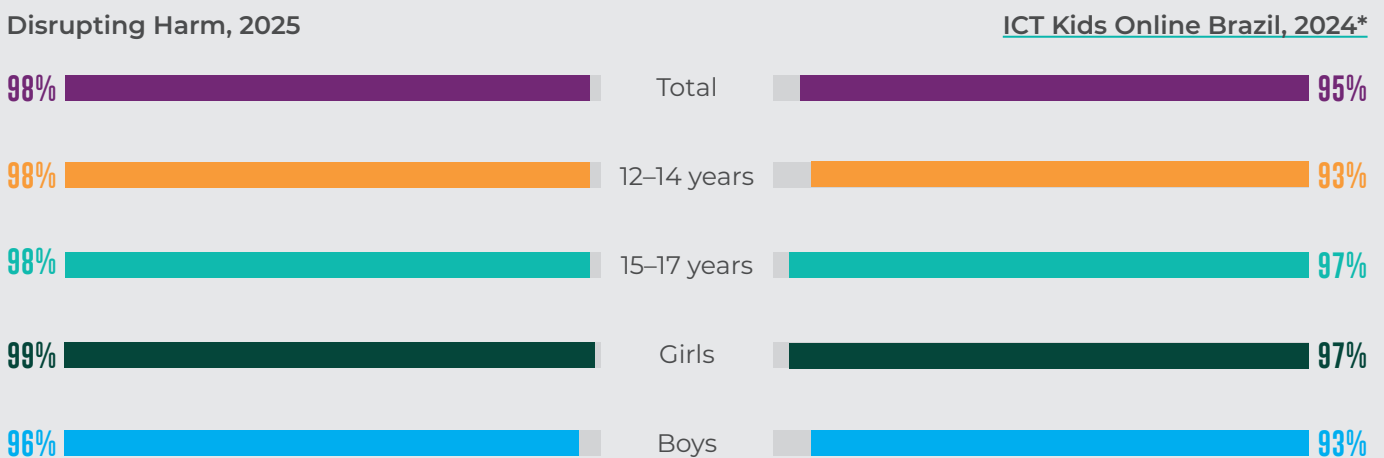
Understanding how children access the internet, whether they go online regularly or not, what they do online, and how parents engage with their internet use, may provide insights into how to create a digital environment that is safer and more enjoyable for children.

However, prevention of (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse cannot be limited to what children are doing online, and reinforces the need for research projects that examine how tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse fit into children’s wider life contexts.

Disrupting Harm data across countries including Brazil³ consistently show that perpetrators act opportunistically, using coercion and manipulation while taking advantage of existing social and gender inequalities, misogyny, the lack of adequate support networks, and gaps in protection systems to commit exploitation and abuse against children online and/or in person.

Any effort at prevention must therefore look beyond what children are (or ought to be) doing online; not doing so often results in victim-blaming or treating children as complicit in the exploitation and abuse they have been subjected to, as evidenced in this report. Instead, prevention requires a multi-pronged approach that focuses on disrupting pathways to offending, while addressing norms, values and inequalities that enable perpetrators to sexually exploit and abuse children.

INTERNET USE RATES AMONG 12–17-YEAR-OLDS IN BRAZIL



Base: 1,172 households

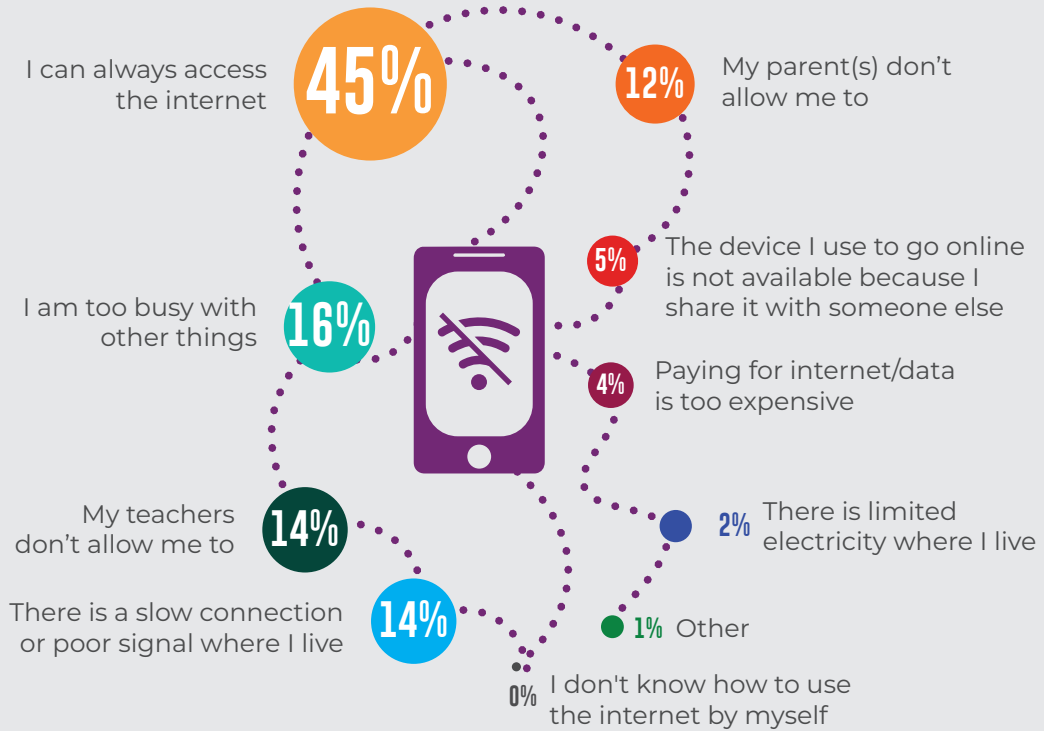
*Analysis provided by CETIC.br

3. For more Disrupting Harm reports, see <https://safeonline.global/disrupting-harm-2/>.

INTERNET USE IN BRAZIL

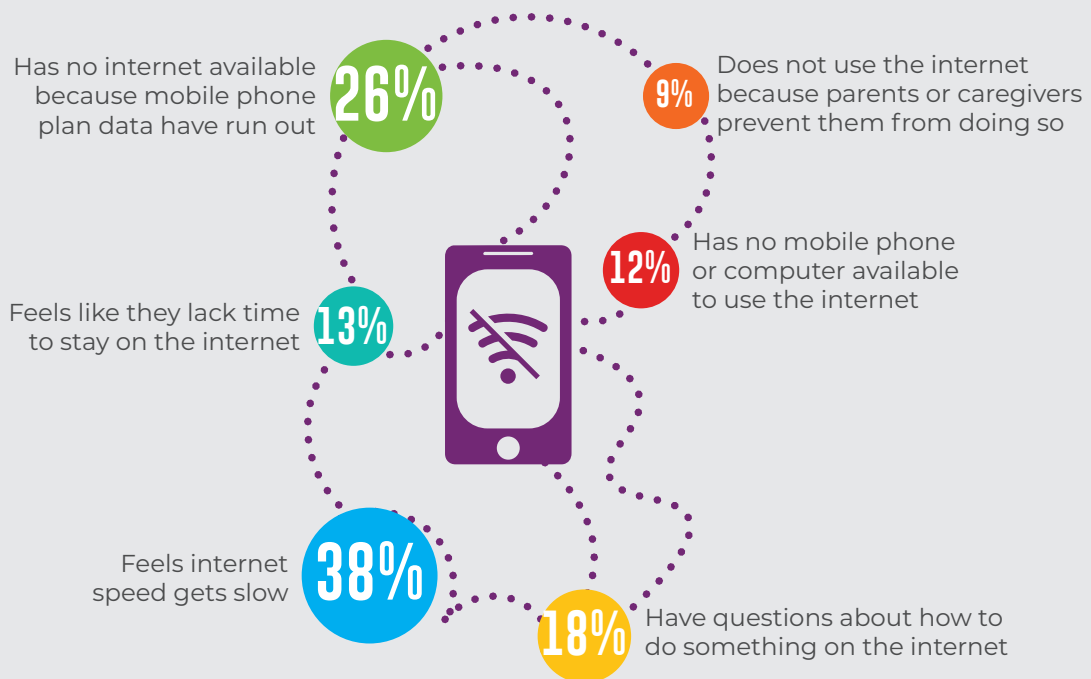
BARRIERS TO INTERNET ACCESS AMONG INTERNET-USING 12–17-YEAR-OLDS

Disrupting Harm, 2025



Base: 1,029 internet-using children

ICT Kids Online Brazil, 2024*



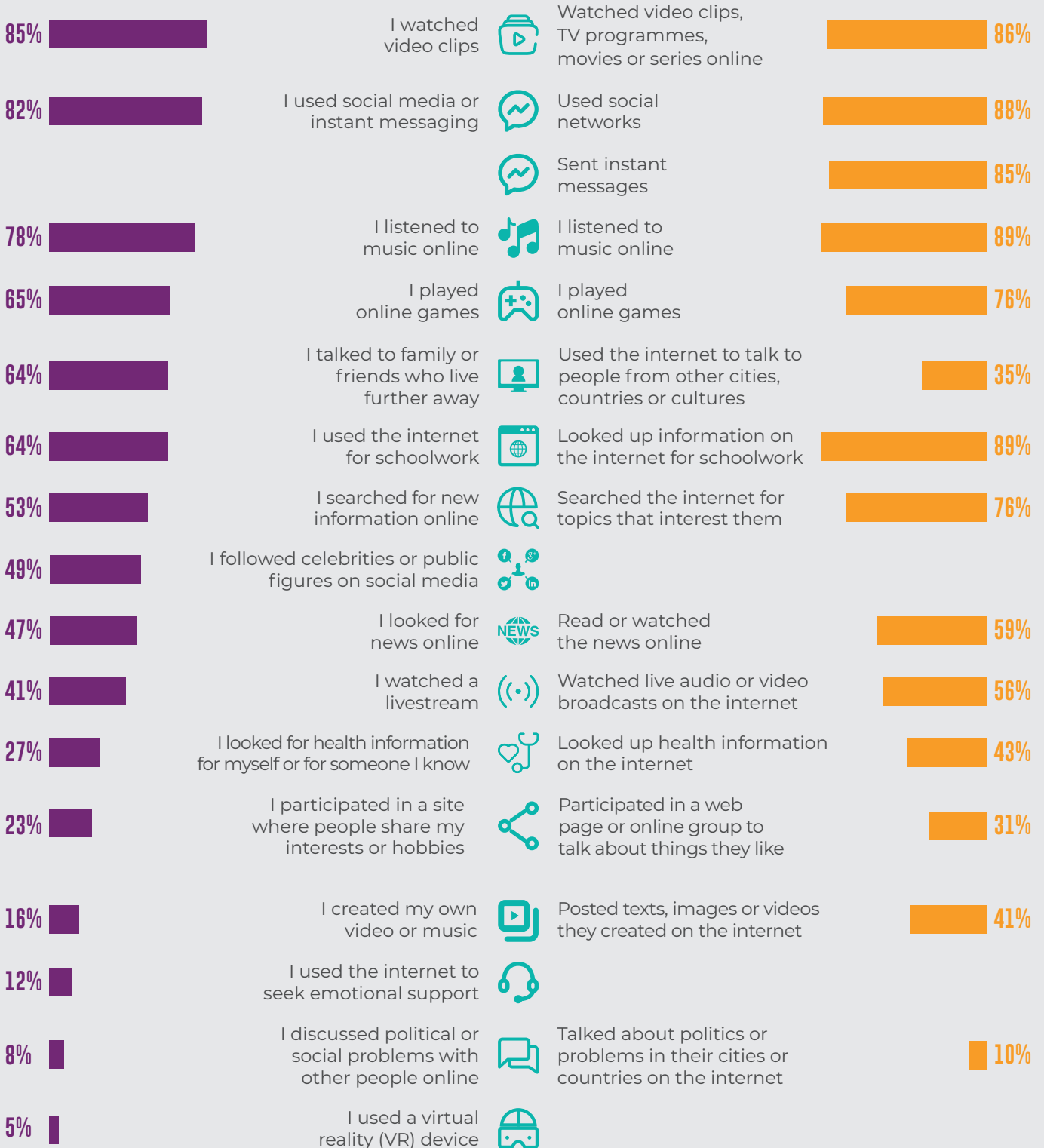
*Analysis provided by CETIC.br

INTERNET USE IN BRAZIL

ACTIVITIES CHILDREN ENGAGE IN ONLINE AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK

Disrupting Harm, 2025

ICT Kids Online Brazil, 2024*

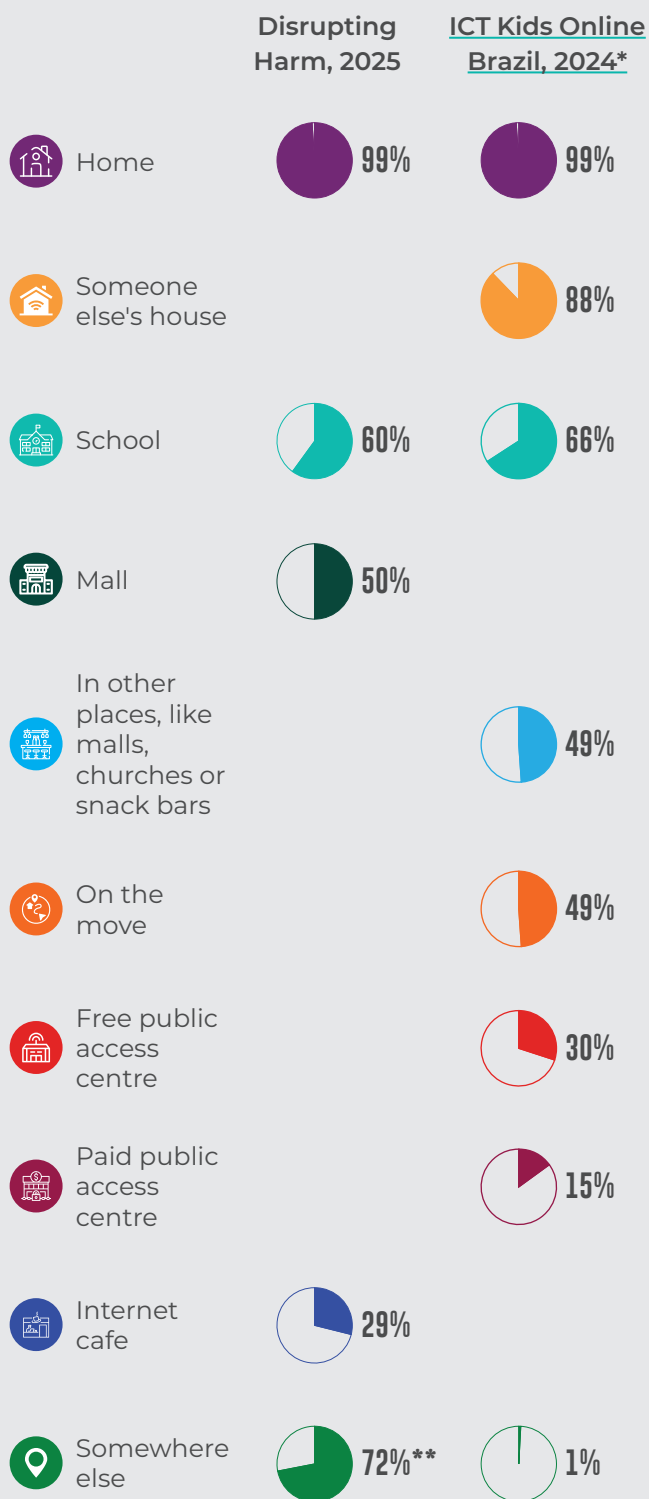


Base: 1,029 internet-using children

*Analysis provided by CETIC.br

INTERNET USE IN BRAZIL

MOST POPULAR PLACES TO ACCESS THE INTERNET AMONG 12–17-YEAR-OLDS

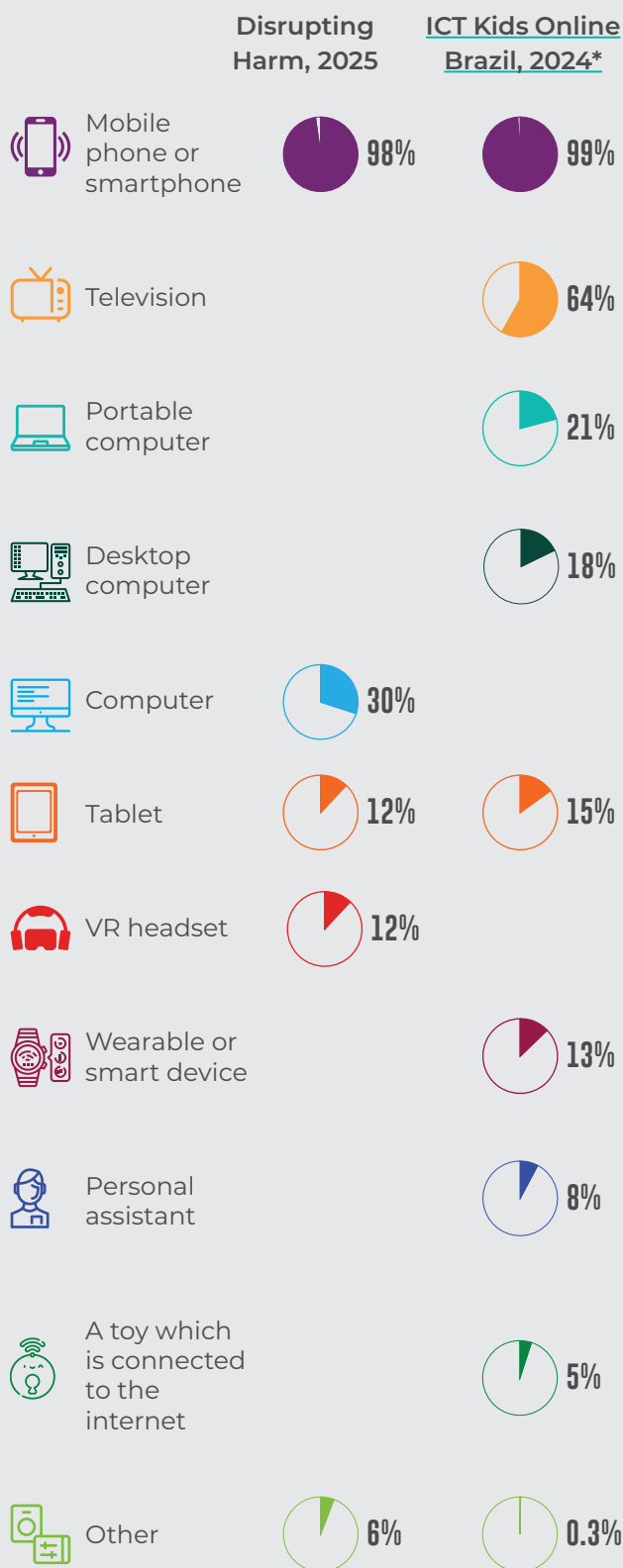


Base: 1,029 internet-using children

*Analysis provided by CETIC.br

** Common responses included going online at a friend or relative's house, a gym, a church, or public areas like squares, beaches, parks, markets and snack bars (*lanchonete* in Portuguese).

MOST POPULAR DEVICES TO ACCESS THE INTERNET AMONG 12–17-YEAR-OLDS



Base: 1,029 internet-using children

*Analysis provided by CETIC.br

INTERNET USE IN BRAZIL

DIGITAL SKILLS AMONG 12–17-YEAR-OLD INTERNET USERS IN BRAZIL

Percentage of children who say it is “mostly” or “very” true that they can do this

Disrupting Harm, 2025

ICT Kids Online Brazil, 2024*

I know how to report harmful content on social media	93%	Knows how to report offensive content related to themselves or people they know	78%
I know when to remove people from my contact lists	83%	Knows how to delete people from their list of contacts or friends	87%
I know more about the internet than my parent/carer/guardian	82%	I know more about the internet than my parent/carer/guardian	67%
I know how to edit existing digital images, music and videos	81%	Knows how to edit photos or videos that other people have posted on the internet	59%
I know how to change my privacy settings (e.g. to control who can see the things I post or who can speak to me online or on social media)	79%	Knows how to adjust privacy settings, such as on social networks	74%
I know how to check whether a website can be trusted	79%	Knows how to check if a website is trustworthy	63%
I know which images of me and my friends to share online	72%	Knows what personal/third-party images can be shared on the internet	80%
I know how to choose the best keywords for online searches	63%	Knows how to choose the best words to search for something on the internet	81%
I know how to block unwanted pop-up messages or ads	30%		

Base: 1,029 internet-using children

*Analysis provided by CETIC.br

INTERNET USE IN BRAZIL

INTERNET USE RATES AMONG THE PARENTS OF 12–17-YEAR-OLD INTERNET USERS

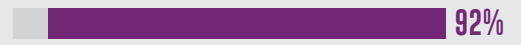


Disrupting Harm, 2025



Total

ICT Kids Online Brazil, 2024*



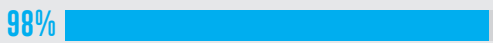
Aged under 40 years old



Aged 40 and over



Women



Men



Rural



Urban



Base: 1,029 parents of internet-using children

*Analysis provided by CETIC.br

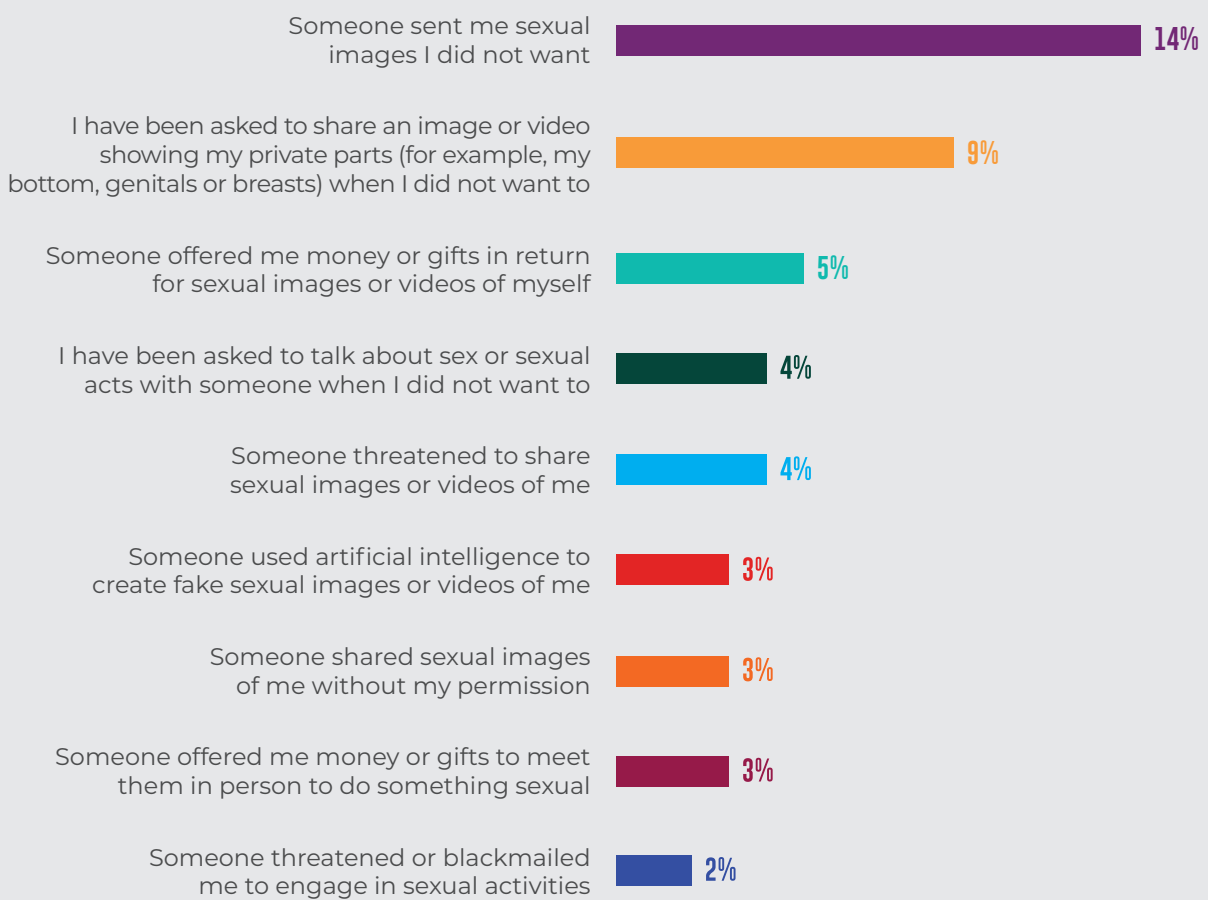
1. TECHNOLOGY- FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN BRAZIL



1. TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN BRAZIL

Based on the household survey, **19 per cent** of internet-using children aged 12–17 in Brazil were subjected to **at least one** of these instances of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in a one-year period. Scaled up to the overall population of 12–17-year-old internet-using children in Brazil, this represents an estimated 3 million children who have been subjected to any of these harms in the span of a single year.

Percentage of children who said that the following things happened to them online in the past year



Base: 993 internet-using children

Understanding the data

A total of 19 per cent of children said they were subjected to at least one of the forms of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse measured in the survey. **This represents 188 children from the sample.** Some of those children (8 per cent) were subjected to **more than one** of the forms of exploitation and abuse above in the past year. This means that, taken together, **these 188 children were subjected to a total 457 instances** of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse measured in the survey. **These 457 instances of exploitation and abuse serve as the basis for much of the survey analysis in this report.**

1.1 WHAT TYPES OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE ARE CHILDREN SUBJECTED TO?

The use of digital technologies to sexually exploit and abuse children is a reality in Brazil. Between 2024 and 2025, 19 per cent of 12–17-year-old internet-using children in Brazil said they were subjected to at least one of the instances of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse measured in the survey. Older children in the sample were more commonly exploited and abused, compared to younger children (up to 29 per cent for 17-year-olds, vs. 10 per cent for 12-year-olds).⁴

However, there was no significant difference in the proportions of children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse measured in the survey by area of residence (urban vs. rural), schooling (in school vs. out of school), parental education (low/medium/high), or the child's gender. The lack of differences by gender does not erase the gendered aspects of exploitation and abuse, since children may be targeted differently and have vastly different experiences because of their gender. But this finding is a reminder that all children need protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, regardless of gender.

Forms of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse that were particularly common in the Disrupting Harm data in Brazil included exposure to unrequested sexual content, unwanted requests of a sexual nature, sexual extortion and non-consensual sharing of sexual content depicting a child. All of these will be discussed in further detail below.

Exposure to sexual content

Exposing children to unwanted sexual content was particularly prevalent in Brazil, and was the most common abusive behaviour that the children surveyed were subjected to (14 per cent).

One young person interviewed described repeatedly being exposed to sexual content via calls, messages and videos when she was 16 years old:

“

He'd already sent several photos. Masturbating, lying down, he sent me a message and wrote: 'I want you to be mine. My little whore, my hottie. I want to be with you.' He sent me a lot of messages. A lot of things happened: I got nervous, I calmed down. I breathed, I cried a little, because what had happened years ago happened again. (YP)

”

Another young person spoke of similar abusive behaviours when she received a call from an unknown number when she also was 16 years old:

“

When I answered, there was a guy, he wasn't showing his face, he was just showing his parts, he was masturbating and asking me to show my chest, that kind of thing. So, I went and hung up. He kept texting me, but when I answered, he kept saying, 'Oh, don't tell your mother. No, no, don't say anything to your mother.' And to this day I don't know who did it, you know? (YP)

”

Under Brazilian law, exposing children to unwanted sexual content may constitute a criminal offence pursuant to the *Statute of the Child and Adolescent*, which prohibits facilitating or inducing a child under 12 to access material containing “explicit sex scenes” or “pornography” with the intent of engaging in unlawful sexual acts (*atos libidinosos*). Prison penalties range from one to three years.⁵ However, **the scope of this provision is limited, as it does not apply to conduct against children aged 12–17**. This limitation stems from the fact that the Statute distinguishes between “children” (under 12) and “adolescents” (12 to 17),⁶ with this offence restricted to the former. As indicated above, according to

4. p-value = 0.02

5. Brazil, *Statute of the Child and Adolescent*, Law no. 8069, 13 July 1990, arts. 241-D, -I [in Portuguese]. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/l8069.htm.

6. *Ibid.*, art. 2.

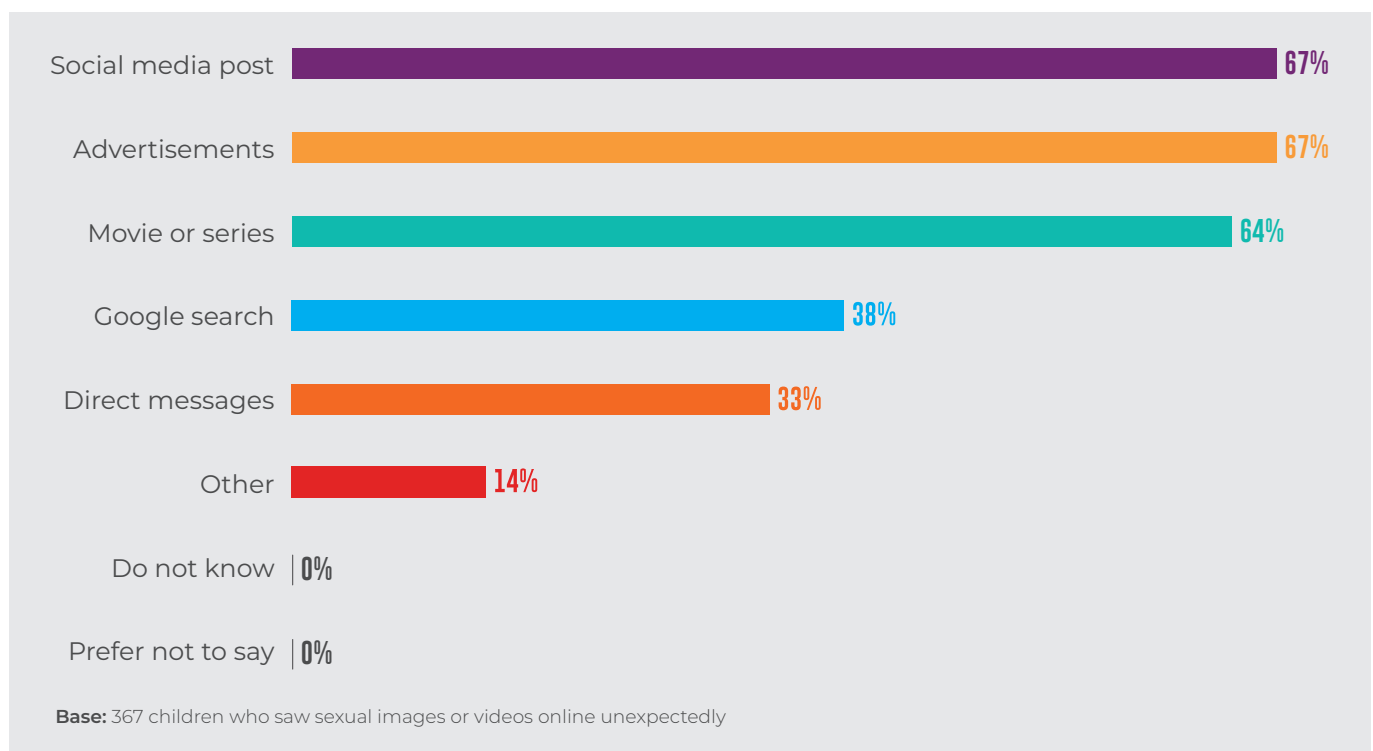
survey data, older children are in fact subjected to technology-facilitated sexual abuse more commonly than younger children. As a result, the provision does not fully reflect the reality of how tech-facilitated sexual abuse and exploitation occurs, and may have the effect of reducing protection for children above 12 years. As further detailed below, similar age-based distinctions appear in other provisions of the Statute.

However, it should be noted that, as confirmed by a law enforcement representative engaged in the context of Disrupting Harm, in cases of grooming and sexual extortion against children aged 12–17, in practice national authorities in Brazil prioritize

protection. To do so, investigations typically rely on other applicable criminal offences, such as the production and distribution of child sexual abuse material. This approach allows authorities to ensure the protection of the children involved and respond to the harm they were subjected to, notwithstanding the age limitations of the specific provision discussed above.

Beyond being sent unwanted sexual content, 37 per cent of children surveyed said they accidentally came across sexual images or videos online. Those children saw this content in advertisements (67 per cent), on social media posts (67 per cent), and in movies or series (64 per cent).

Chart 1: Where children unexpectedly saw sexual content online



Unwanted requests to engage in sexual activities

In addition to receiving unwanted sexual content online, children in Brazil are also receiving *unwanted requests to share sexual content of themselves*, as was the case for 9 per cent of children surveyed.

This form of exploitation and abuse is specifically addressed in the *Statute of the Child and Adolescent*, which criminalizes enticing, harassing, instigating or coercing children under 12 with the intent of inducing them to expose themselves in a “pornographic” or “sexually explicit” manner. Penalties range from one to three years in prison.⁷

7. Ibid., art. 241-D, II.

1.1 WHAT TYPES OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE ARE CHILDREN SUBJECTED TO?

As noted above, this provision is likewise limited to children under 12, again excluding those aged 12–17.

The experience of one young person demonstrates how exposing children to sexual content, and potentially desensitizing them to sexual talk and sexual content, can go hand in hand with requesting children to take and send sexualized images of themselves online:

“

But on other days, he kept going on about it, sending pictures of his member [penis] and saying, ‘Look how I am for you’, I don’t know what else, ‘Send me a picture’, and I would say no, sorry, even if it was just in a bra, I don’t feel comfortable, I’m sorry, but I don’t want to, I’m scared. (YP)

”

Navigating inappropriate and abusive interactions online can be extremely difficult, and it can be scary for children and young people to say no when they are being pressured and coerced by perpetrators. According to children surveyed, the most frequent response among the 9 per cent who received such unwanted requests online was to say no (38 per cent), followed by ignoring it and hoping it would go away by itself (13 per cent). However, in 12 per cent of cases, children did as the person asked, even though the request was unwanted. Regardless of whether children comply with perpetrators’ requests, exposure to unwanted requests or content of a sexual nature constitutes abuse.

Interviews shed light on tactics used by perpetrators to coerce children into sharing sexual content. This included using overt pressure and threats, offering money and gifts, and taking advantage of power dynamics. For example, one frontline worker explained how a perpetrator used overt and consistent psychological pressure to force a 14-year-old girl to comply:

“

He tormented her 24 hours a day, calling and texting her day, night, and into the early hours of the morning. The girl had no peace, she became very emotionally unbalanced, until he made this proposal: ‘So, take this video [of herself having sex with another child] and send it to me, and I’ll give you some peace. But it must be soon, it must be now, it must be right now. (FW)

”

Sometimes, ‘requests’ for sexual content or contact come with **offers of money or gifts to further coerce children**. In only one year, 5 per cent of children surveyed received unwanted offers of money or gifts if they *shared sexual content* of themselves. In the same period, 3 per cent received these unwanted offers of money and gifts for them to *meet in person* and do something sexual, further highlighting how digital technologies can facilitate contact sexual abuse. A professional recounted working on a case where the perpetrator used Facebook to groom boys interested in football. He coerced them into sending sexual content by offering sports equipment and promising opportunities to join a team. The data highlight that perpetrators may also take advantage of children in low-income households, leveraging financial hardship and unmet economic needs to exploit and abuse them. Some children may be led to perceive sharing sexual content as offering a sense of autonomy, not only financially, but also in feeling some control over who receives the images:

“

We're in the outskirts of the city, so they were poor teenagers. So, I think that's also an important component to highlight, right? There was also a question of little access to other resources, to other possibilities, in these cases that come to mind. But in fact, there was an important degree of autonomy for these teenagers in terms of exposure, in terms of handling, in terms of access to those who would consume their images, to those who would consume that resource, who would be the clients of this sexual exploitation. (FW)

”

Yet this perception of autonomy exists because perpetrators exploit children's circumstances and structural inequities, turning them into opportunities for sexual exploitation and abuse.

Non-consensual sharing of sexual images

Once sexual content of a child is obtained or created in an abusive manner – content referred to as child sexual abuse material – there is a real risk of it being circulated online where it has a permanent footprint. Child sexual abuse material can be shared endless times across multiple platforms, from the surface web to the deep and dark web. For children depicted in this material, this can create a sense of loss of control and repeated psychological trauma.

Brazilian law prohibits obtaining, possessing and disseminating such material, thereby covering all conducts related to its non-consensual sharing.⁸ Reported cases related to these offences have increased steadily in recent years, rising from 1,767 in 2020 to 3,158 in 2024.⁹ Yet gaps remain in addressing the ways child sexual abuse material spreads and is viewed, as access with no intent to distribute or use further is not criminalized. As confirmed by a law enforcement representative engaged in the context of Disrupting Harm, **this creates a loophole that allows individuals to intentionally seek out and view non-consensually shared material online without legal consequences, ultimately fuelling its continued circulation and undermining efforts to reduce demand.**

In a period of only one year, 3 per cent of surveyed children said that their sexual images or videos were shared without their permission, an issue that featured in cases discussed during qualitative interviews. For example, one young woman recounted how fake sexual images depicting her were created using a non-sexual photo from Facebook. The images were distributed across classmates at her school. This case illustrates how the availability of technologies like generative artificial intelligence could make it even easier to target and threaten children using fake sexual images and videos. The use of digital technologies to create fake sexual images of children was also evident from the survey data, in which 3 per cent of children said that someone had used artificial intelligence to create sexual content of them.

8. Ibid., arts. 241-A, 241-B.

9. Brazilian Forum on Public Security, Brazilian Public Security Yearbook, Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, São Paulo, 2025 [in Portuguese]. <https://forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/anoario-2025.pdf>.

1.1 WHAT TYPES OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE ARE CHILDREN SUBJECTED TO?

It is positive that **the Statute of the Child and Adolescent criminalizes altering or tampering with visual content to simulate a child in sexual material**, as well as disseminating, acquiring, possessing or storing such material, with penalties ranging from one to three years' imprisonment.¹⁰ While this provision does not explicitly cover content generated by artificial intelligence, a bill seeking to include artificial intelligence content was approved by the Commission on Welfare, Social Assistance, Childhood, Adolescence and Family of the Chamber of Deputies in July 2025.¹¹ As of January 2026, the bill was still pending review by other commissions.¹²

*This development reflects lawmakers' efforts to keep pace with emerging threats, as also shown by the 2024 introduction of dedicated provisions criminalizing the livestreaming of child sexual abuse.*¹³

Sexual extortion

According to professionals, threats including blackmail are another common method used by perpetrators to exert control, especially once they obtain personal information about the child or something that they or the child may consider 'incriminating'. A total of 2 per cent of the children surveyed in Brazil said that in the year prior, they were threatened or blackmailed to engage in sexual activities. In the same period, 4 per cent (or 37 children) said that someone threatened to share sexual content of them. Among those 4 per cent, the survey data provide an indication of perpetrators' demands in sexual extortion cases, which include extorting the child for money, in-

person meetings, etc. However, the most common was extorting children for even more sexual images and videos of them, as shown in chart 2.

Chart 2: Perpetrators' demands (numbers indicate children (n), not %)



One young person described how previous messages between her and the perpetrator were used as leverage to get her to comply with his demands:

10. Brazil, Statute of the Child and Adolescent, art. 241-C.

11. Brasil, Emanuelle and Ana Chalub, "Commission approves increase in the penalty for the crime of digital pornography", Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, 4 July 2025 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/1176405-comissao-aprova-aumento-da-pena-para-o-crime-de-pornografia-digital/> (accessed 27 January 2026).

12. Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, "Procedure file: PL 2506/2024", 20 July 2024 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=2442452> (accessed 27 January 2026).

13. Brazil, Statute of the Child and Adolescent, arts. 240 §1, -II.

“

He said ‘Here’s the deal, if you don’t send me a photo, I’ll go after your parents, I’ll go into your profile, I’ll look for your mother and I’ll send her screenshots of everything you say to me. Do you want that?’ And then I said ‘No, don’t do that, for God’s sake. Don’t do that because if my parents see this, my mother will be much angrier with me, and I’ll be much worse off.’ (YP)

”

The interviews revealed how perpetrators frequently exploit children’s life circumstances, like economic vulnerability or fear of parental reprisal, to obtain sexual abuse material.

This dynamic is particularly concerning, as it often marks the onset of a prolonged cycle of exploitation and abuse. A photo, once obtained, can be leveraged to further manipulate and threaten a child. A justice professional recalled assisting an 11-year-old girl who was contacted on WhatsApp by an adult perpetrator in a position of power in their community, pretending to be another girl. After convincing the girl to send a photo of her body, the perpetrator created multiple fake profiles: one to issue threats using the photo, and another to impersonate a peer encouraging the girl to comply. This manipulation resulted in the child also being sexually abused in person.

Professionals highlighted other cases where perpetrators escalated their demands, pressuring children to meet in person so they could sexually abuse them, once again demonstrating the interconnected nature of ‘online’ and ‘offline’ abuse.)

In other cases, the direction is reversed, where contact sexual abuse is recorded and later used to threaten or blackmail the child online. For instance, a frontline worker described supporting a 16-year-old girl who was groomed and sexually abused by a schoolteacher who took photos of her

without clothes, framing it as part of a ‘romantic’ relationship. The teacher later threatened to share sexual content of the girl across the school unless she complied with his demands:

“

She didn’t want to be with him [the teacher] anymore. She was afraid of him. And that’s when the blackmail began. She said he had started blackmailing her, and told her he was going to tell the whole school what he was doing to her. And then she despaired, panicked. Then came that blackmail phase, and she wasn’t going [meeting with the teacher] because she wanted to, she wasn’t going because she liked it. She was going because she was being threatened. And that’s when she fell into a terrible depression. (FW)

”

There are no specific provisions that explicitly criminalize tech-facilitated sexual extortion of children in Brazilian legislation. However, in practice, judges may apply provisions related to the dissemination of child sexual abuse material, which carry prison penalties ranging from three to six years.¹⁴ Prosecutors may also draw on other offences in the Criminal Code, such as those related to threats and psychological violence against women,¹⁵ where these apply to the coercive aspects of the conduct.¹⁶ While this means cases can be pursued under existing law, recognizing sexual extortion of children as a distinct criminal offence would help to fully capture the specific harm and methods involved. Without dedicated provisions, this form of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse risks being absorbed into broader categories, hindering clear classification and the collection of accurate data on recorded cases, which are both important for the development of effective responses and prevention strategies.

14. Ibid., art. 241-A; Dupret, Cristiane, “Sextortion in Brazilian criminal law”, Instituto Direito Penal Brasileiro, 18 May 2021 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.direitopenalbrasileiro.com.br/sextorcao-no-direito-penal-brasileiro/> (accessed 27 January 2026).

15. Brazil, Penal Code, Law no. 2848, 7 December 1940, arts. 147, 147-B [in Portuguese]. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/decreto-lei/del2848compilado.htm

16. Brazil, Ministry of Justice and Public Safety, “Operation against inducement and sexual self-harm on social media is launched”, 21 July 2023 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.gov.br/mj-pt-br/assuntos/noticias/operacao-contra-inducao-e-automutilacao-sexual-nas-redes-sociais-e-deflagrada> (accessed 27 January 2026).

1.1 WHAT TYPES OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE ARE CHILDREN SUBJECTED TO?

In a welcome development, a bill to criminalize sexual extortion, defined as the threat of disclosure of intimate images to obtain financial, sexual or other undue advantage, was approved by the Chamber of Deputies' Communication Commission in October 2025. The proposed penalties range from five to twelve years of imprisonment, with an increase of one- to two-thirds when the conduct targets individuals under 18.¹⁷ As of January 2026, the bill is pending review by the Constitution, Justice and Citizenship Commission.¹⁸

Grooming

Survey and interview data also show evidence of perpetrators intentionally building relationships with children for the purpose of sexual exploitation or abuse, commonly referred to as 'grooming'. Grooming can be difficult to neatly categorize as the process can be complex, difficult to detect, and can occur over a long period of time through online and in-person interactions. Several of the exploitative and abusive behaviours discussed above may overlap with grooming, including requesting sexual content or acts from a child, exposing them to sexual content, and coercing them using threats and blackmail. Interviews with young people and professionals help to understand some of the subtlety and nuance involved in grooming processes, including common tactics used by perpetrators as summarized below.

Building trust: Aside from establishing contact with children by creating fake profiles, it is common for perpetrators to create attachment and build trust through 'love bombing'¹⁹ and displaying care, attention and understanding, as described by this justice professional: "He first made contact with the child, complimenting her, saying that he thought she was beautiful, that she was very intelligent, that he wanted to be her friend" (JP). In the process of building trust and familiarity with the child, perpetrators do not always turn to sexualized dialogue immediately, and instead rely on creating an emotional connection with the child. This is

summarized by one frontline worker: "He started to offer a shoulder to lean on, he started to offer care, he started to call her to find out if everything was okay, how she was doing with her mother, how she was doing with her grandmother" (FW). Other strategies include offering gifts to the child, or mirroring the child's experiences to appear relatable. For example: "Oh, does your mother fight with you? My mother argues with me too – she's always on my case." (JP).

According to a justice professional, establishing a relationship of trust not only enables coercive control, but also allows the exploitation and abuse to continue over a longer period, compared to using direct and abrupt violence.

Extracting personal information: Through the process of building trust, professionals explain that perpetrators may ask children for personal information that can later be used as leverage to escalate the violence. For example, one frontline worker described how unknown perpetrators used personal (non-sexual) information that an adolescent (14 or 15 years old) shared with them to threaten her and obtain a video of her having sex: "He had a lot of information about this girl's life, her family, everyone, and then he started threatening her in different ways. He wouldn't give her any peace, he would text, call, video call, all the time, day, night, early morning. The girl had no more peace" (FW). The child sexual abuse material was shared across the girl's school. This was followed by the perpetrators constantly harassing the girl, so she would continue to comply with more demands.

17. Nobre, Noéli and Marcelo Oliveira, "Commission approves bill criminalizing sexual extortion", Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, 16 September 2020 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/692259-projeto-estabelece-punicao-para-quem-divulgar-dados-de-crianca-vitima-de-violencia/> (accessed 5 February 2026).

18. Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, "Procedure file: PL 2058/2024", 27 May 2024 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=2436529> (accessed 28 January 2026).

19. 'Love bombing' consists of giving someone excessive compliments, attention or affection, in order to manipulate and control them.

While many of the insights described above involve older children above 12, Brazilian law addresses online grooming only when perpetrated against children below 12. Indeed, the *Statute of the Child and Adolescent* criminalizes soliciting, harassing, instigating or coercing children under 12 by any means of communication, with the intent of engaging in unlawful sexual acts with them, exposing them to sexual content or obtaining child sexual abuse material. Prison penalties range from one to three years.²⁰ While this provision recognizes that grooming can be a pathway to both in-person and online forms of abuse and exploitation, similarly to other provisions, it does not apply to children aged 12–17, despite the clear evidence, outlined above, that these children are also manipulated and coerced through grooming tactics.

As of January 2026, two bills relevant to online grooming were awaiting debate and voting in the Chamber of Deputies.²¹ The first proposes a one-third increase in penalties for grooming conduct committed through internet communication apps.²² The second seeks to introduce the offence of “virtual rape of a vulnerable person,” defined as soliciting, encouraging, or coercing, by any means of communication, a child under 14 to display themselves in a “pornographic” or sexually explicit manner.²³ Yet both bills, even if approved and turned into law, would not address the underlying issue of uneven legal protection against grooming based on the child’s age.

This approach contrasts with the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime, adopted in December 2024, which defines grooming as “the act of intentionally communicating, soliciting, grooming, or making any arrangement through an information and communications technology system for the purpose of committing a sexual offence against a child.”²⁴ *By extending protection to all children regardless of age, this definition more closely reflects the grooming behaviours described by interviewed young people and professionals. As this broader understanding of grooming is emerging as the new international standard, it provides clear guidance for aligning Brazil’s legal framework with evolving international best practices.*

“

It’s something I don’t understand. On Facebook you report the person. You have all the evidence to report the person. But they don’t shut down that person’s account, you know? (YP)

”

20. Brazil, Statute of the Child and Adolescent, art. 241-D.

21. Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, “Procedure file: PL 2857/2019”, 14 May 2019 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=2203142> (accessed 28 January 2026); Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, “Procedure file: PL 1213/2011”, 3 May 2011 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=500200> (accessed 28 January 2026).

22. Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, “Procedure file: PL 2857/2019”.

23. Júnior, Janary and Natalia Doederlein, “Committee approves creation of the crime of virtual rape of a vulnerable person and an increase in penalties”, Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, 21 August 2025 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/1191439-comissao-aprova-criacao-do-crime-de-estupro-virtual-de-vulneravel-e-aumento-de-penas/> (accessed 28 January 2026).

24. United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Convention Against Cybercrime; Strengthening International Cooperation for Combating Certain Crimes Committed by Means of Information and Communications Technology Systems and for the Sharing of Evidence in Electronic Form of Serious Crimes, 24 December 2025, art. 15. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/cybercrime/convention/text/convention-full-text.html> (accessed 28 January 2026).

1.2 WHO PERPETRATES TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE?

Common profiles

The interviews with young people and professionals did not point to consistent patterns regarding the identity or characteristics of perpetrators. The cases discussed included strangers (who initiated contact mainly through social media), family members including siblings, and authority figures like coaches and teachers.

The survey data provide additional insights into common profiles and challenge the assumption that tech-facilitated violence is predominantly an issue of 'stranger danger'.

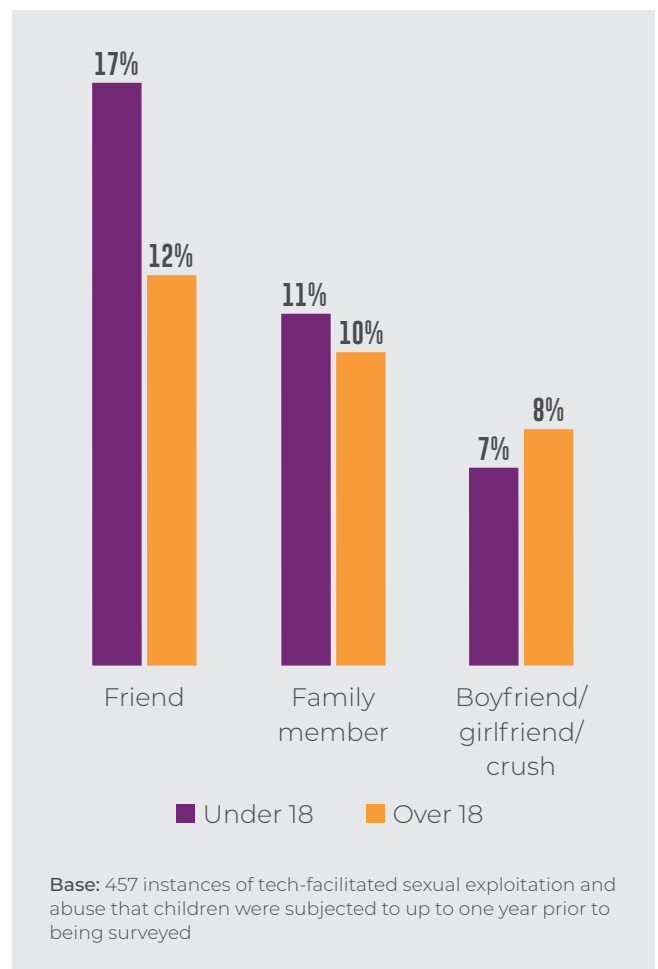
Around half of cases (49 per cent) of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse captured in the survey were committed by someone already in the child's life.

This included friends, family members, boyfriends, girlfriends and crushes, including other children under age 18, as shown in chart 3. In 26 per cent of cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse captured through the survey, the perpetrator was a stranger or "someone the child did not know before" they were sexually exploited or abused. In 25 per cent of cases, children did not answer this question, either because they could not confirm the identity of the perpetrator or because they did not want to share this information.

The survey data in chart 3 indicate that children are involved in the sexual exploitation and/or abuse of other children, and this seems to be particularly common among friends. This highlights the need for guidance to help children to navigate relationships, boundaries and harmful behaviours, both online and in person. From a

legal perspective, Brazil exempts children under 18 from criminal liability,²⁵ prioritizing rehabilitation over punishment. Those aged 12–17 may only face socio-educational, non-custodial measures such as warnings, community service, probation or, in case of serious or repeat offences,²⁶ custodial measures via educational internment for up to three years.²⁷ Children deprived of liberty are entitled to be provided with schooling, vocational training and support for reintegration into society.²⁸ Key safeguards like free legal aid and confidentiality protections also apply during judicial proceedings involving children in conflict with the law.²⁹

Chart 3: Who perpetrates tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, by relationship to the child and age?



25. Brazil, Constitution, 1988, art. 228 [in Portuguese]. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao.htm.

26. Brazil, Statute of the Child and Adolescent, art. 122.

27. Ibid., art. 112.

28. Ibid., art. 124.

29. Ibid., arts. 111, 247.

Common assumptions among professionals about the identity of perpetrators

The interviews also highlighted practical challenges relating to assumptions about the typical perpetrator profile. For example, while most perpetrators described in interviews were men, a professional highlighted challenges when the perpetrator is a woman:

“

The abuser can also be a woman. So, we still have this prejudice, this barrier to break down. When we say that it is a woman who has abused a child, nobody believes us. This is another battle that still needs to be fought, and I think that, of all our difficulties, the main one is the lack of information. (FW)

”

This could result in crimes committed by women going under-investigated, and raises a question on whether victims of crimes committed by women are less likely to be believed or supported. The role of peers was not highlighted by professionals, despite the survey data highlighting their involvement in tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse (see chart 3). This discrepancy may reflect that children are less likely to seek professional support when they are exploited and/or abused by friends or peers. It may also be due to limited professional awareness of how children themselves may be involved in tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Notably, during the qualitative interviews, many professionals referred to perpetrators of child sexual exploitation and abuse as “paedophiles”. This assumption can be problematic, as paedophilic disorder is a clinical diagnosis characterized by a sexual interest in pre-pubertal children,³⁰ a which not all perpetrators meet. Conversely, not all individuals diagnosed with paedophilic disorder engage in abusive behaviours against children. Conflating the diagnosis with criminal acts risks stigmatizing individuals with the disorder and may obscure the diverse motivations and profiles of perpetrators, thereby weakening prevention efforts.

30. World Health Organization, “ICD-11 for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics: 6D32 Pedophilic disorder”, no date. <https://icd.who.int/browse/2025-01/mms/en#517058174> (accessed 28 January 2026).

1.3 WHERE ARE CHILDREN SUBJECTED TO TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE?

Sexual exploitation and abuse on social media and instant messaging apps

Social media and online platforms have made contacting children and young people far easier for perpetrators than ever before, often allowing them to bypass the usual safeguards offered by parents or schools. **Based on the survey data, in 52 per cent of cases where the child could identify the perpetrator, children said that they first met the perpetrator online. Interviews with young people and professionals also suggest that perpetrators may deliberately target children who are new to platforms like Facebook and Instagram or online gaming platforms such as Roblox, Free Fire or Habbo.**

According to children surveyed, 66 per cent of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse cases happened exclusively online; this consisted of 64 per cent of cases that occurred via social media or instant messaging apps, and 12 per cent of cases that occurred in an online game. **When asked which social media or instant messaging platforms they were targeted on, Instagram (59 per cent) and WhatsApp (51 per cent) were by far the most frequently mentioned apps.** At significantly lower levels, 14 per cent of cases happened on Facebook, 10 per cent of Snapchat and 8 per cent on TikTok; 7 per cent occurred on Twitter and YouTube each. Roblox accounted for 3 per cent, and Flickr and Discord just under 2 per cent each.

The survey findings are further corroborated by interviews with professionals and young people where Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp featured strongly in the cases discussed.

Facebook³¹ and Instagram were often mentioned as platforms where perpetrators first contact and abuse children, including by exposing them to sexual content. These platforms are also where young people interviewed described receiving unwanted requests from unknown men to engage in sexual talk when they were below 18 years old.

One frontline worker supported a young person who was initially contacted by an unknown perpetrator on Facebook. This online interaction eventually escalated into contact sexual abuse.

The receiving of unknown video calls where the child is exposed to sexual content (e.g. a stranger masturbating) were not limited to Facebook and Instagram. For example, one young person received a call from a man masturbating on WhatsApp. In another case, a young person described how her photos and those of her friends were used to create fake sexual images which were later distributed through WhatsApp among her peers.

While there is evidence of abuse starting on WhatsApp, there is also evidence that perpetrators use it as a secondary platform of abuse.

31. The young people interviewed were exploited and/or abused at some point during their childhood. Consequently, some social media platforms or video games that were popular at the time may be less popular now.

A common pattern observed from interviews with both professionals and young people is that initial contact and grooming may start on public-facing platforms like Facebook, Instagram or an online game, where it is easier to search for children's profiles and make first contact. Perpetrators later move to WhatsApp to request sexual content or extort children into sending more sexual content.

The exact reason why perpetrators prefer platforms like WhatsApp was not evident in the data. Given WhatsApp's popularity in Brazil, this may simply signify that communication between the child and perpetrator was becoming more frequent or 'day-to-day'. However, it could also be a preferred platform for perpetrators due to the extra privacy offered by features like end-to-end encryption. This might point to the importance of privacy-centred platforms such as WhatsApp developing more robust child safety features and reporting tools.

Regulating digital services: The Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents

In September 2025, Brazil enacted the *Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents*, a comprehensive digital child protection framework imposing strict obligations on digital services and applications aimed at, or likely to be accessed by, children and adolescents. Providers must take reasonable steps, from design through operation,

to prevent and reduce risks of exposure to harmful content and conduct, including sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment,³² while ensuring age-appropriate digital experiences that respect children's progressive autonomy.³³

The Statute strongly emphasizes safety by design, requiring child protection safeguards to be built in from the outset. **Services must default to the highest possible privacy and data protection settings, providing clear, accessible and age-appropriate information so that users under 18 and their guardians can make informed decisions** if they adjust to less protective settings.³⁴

The Statute requires providers of digital services and applications that make available content, products or services deemed inappropriate, unsuitable or prohibited for individuals under 18 to implement reliable age verification mechanisms for each access attempt. Self-declaration of age is expressly prohibited as a means of verification.³⁵ Data collected for age verification can only be used for that purpose.³⁶

Lastly, providers of internet applications are prohibited from monetizing or amplifying content that sexualizes children or adolescents or place them in adult sexual contexts.³⁷ This reflects an effort to curb the normalization of sexualized depictions of children which may disrupt some drivers of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The Statute also introduces parental control requirements. These include linking accounts of children under 16 to a parent or legal guardian,³⁸ enabling age verification where underage use is suspected, and requiring providers to suspend or disable accounts that clearly breach minimum age rules, subject to a process for guardians to confirm the user's age.³⁹ Providers must also offer parental control tools with default supervision settings,⁴⁰ and inform children, in age-appropriate terms, when such monitoring is in place.⁴¹

32. Brazil, Law no. 15,211, 17 September 2025, art. 6. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2023-2026/2025/lei/L15211.htm (accessed 28 January 2026).

33. *Ibid.*, art. 10.

34. *Ibid.*, art. 7.

35. *Ibid.*, art. 9.

36. *Ibid.*, art. 13.

37. *Ibid.*, art. 23.

38. *Ibid.*, art. 24.

39. *Ibid.*, arts. 24 §3, §4.

40. *Ibid.*, arts. 17, 18.

41. *Ibid.*, art. 18.

1.3 WHERE ARE CHILDREN SUBJECTED TO TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE?

Given the central role that social media platforms play in the exploitation and abuse of children, the Disrupting Harm findings support the urgent need for all online communication platforms to build more effective safeguards to protect children, while still respecting children's rights to information and privacy, and ensuring that their best interests and evolving capacities are considered as they grow up.

In this context, the recent enactment of Brazil's *Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents* provides a crucial framework for action, reinforcing the obligation of digital service providers to design and operate platforms with child safety at their core. Ensuring the effective implementation and enforcement of these measures, however, remains essential to achieving meaningful protection in practice and ensuring that children can benefit from being online.

Sexual exploitation and abuse in online games

Although it featured less strongly than social media apps, gaming platforms were also used by perpetrators to contact and exploit or abuse children. According to the survey, 12 per cent of instances of exploitation and abuse happened in an online game. The survey did not include an exhaustive list of online gaming platforms where exploitation and abuse could take place. However, of the cases where children were targeted on social media and/or online gaming platforms in the past year, 1 per cent happened at least partially on Twitch, 2 per cent on Discord and 3 per cent on Roblox. Findings from **interviews with professionals and young people also draw attention to the use of online gaming platforms to facilitate sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Brazil.** One young person explained

how she met a man posing as another child on an online gaming platform. Over time, the perpetrator groomed her, and eventually coerced her into sharing sexual content. The young person describes the start of their interactions below:

“

There was someone I met on one of the game's maps, who was super cool. 'Oh, wow, you're so cool,' I don't know what. Then I said, 'How old are you?' We have this habit of asking people how old they are, because then if you're close in age. 'Oh, I'm 14.' And then I said, 'Oh, all right then. Ah, let's go to another map' and stuff. Then we went with a group of friends. We kept talking to each other, we added each other as friends in the game, and we talked practically every day. Until one day he said, 'Let's add each other on WhatsApp, because I want to talk to you in private, because I like you so much.' (YP)

”

Recognizing these risks, Brazil has recently taken legislative steps to address the use of gaming platforms for child sexual exploitation and abuse. The *2024 Law Establishing a Legal Framework for the Video Game Industry* requires electronic games aimed at children below 18 that enable user interaction through text, audio, video or content-sharing to implement safeguards to protect children's rights. At a minimum, this includes complaint and reporting mechanisms with timely feedback to users.⁴² Building on this, the *2025 Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents* introduced stricter requirements by requiring interactive game features to be disabled by default, and activated only with the explicit consent of a parent or guardian.⁴³

42. Brazil, Law no. 14,852, 3 May 2024, art. 16. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2023-2026/2024/lei/14852.htm (accessed 28 January 2026).

43. Brazil, Law no. 15,211, 17 September 2025, art. 21. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2023-2026/2025/lei/15211.htm (accessed 28 January 2026).

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Key Takeaway

While online communication channels are a key tool for perpetrators, the manipulation, coercion and abuse that occur in person should not be overlooked. Even though in over half of cases of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse captured in the survey, children first met the perpetrator(s) online, in 27 per cent the child met the perpetrator at school, 11 per cent at home and 2 per cent somewhere where they did sports. Rather than considering tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse as a new form of violence that requires completely new interventions, it is useful to consider digital technologies as *tools* used by perpetrators to harm children online and/or to facilitate in-person sexual exploitation and abuse or extend it into the digital space.

.....



2. THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

This section describes some of the impacts that tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse can have on children's lives. While this section outlines specific impacts, such as feelings of shame, self-blame, fear, behavioural changes and mental health impacts, children often experience these emotions simultaneously. This overlap reflects the complex emotional responses that may result from tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, as discussed by professionals during interviews.

2. THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Fear and distress

When describing the sexual exploitation and abuse they were subjected to as children, young people often described the intense fear they felt. A young person describes how afraid she was when, at 14 years old, an unknown 28-year-old man used threats to coerce her into taking and sharing sexual images of herself:

“
And then I ended up going to the bathroom and shaking a lot. I ended up taking the photo just in my bra, because I thought that was better than showing my whole body. [...] I went to the bathroom and tried to take an intimate photo, but I couldn't. I started shaking a lot. I started shaking a lot. I started crying a lot, wondering what he would do with that photo, because there was a very high wave of photos being leaked, you know? And I was really scared. I'd never done that in my life, and I was forced to. (YP)

Exposure to sexual content may also illicit intense feelings of fear for children, as illustrated by one professional:

“
She simply starts chatting with one of these fake profiles. And at a certain point, this fake profile starts sending her photos of intimate parts, which she believes are of a man, which she says are of a man. And she said she thought it was horrible – she was scared because she hadn't imagined that the conversation would come to this. So that has already triggered it, it has already created other triggers for her. (FW)

A young person also described feeling distressed and violated upon receiving sexual content on Facebook when she was only 12 years old:

“
The first time, I felt like I was being held hostage. Because it was as if he was part of me, as if he was dominating me, because he showed me his whole body, as if we already had this intimacy, as if we already knew each other, and we didn't know each other, we didn't have this intimacy. So, I was a bit scared, like 'My God, what should I do with this? How am I going to react to this?', you know? That's how I felt. (YP)

Anxiety and self-harm

According to the survey data, the anxiety scores of children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse were 13 percentage points higher compared to those not subjected to these forms of violence. They continue to feel afraid or anxious that the sexual content depicting them is being reshared online, sometimes long after the abuse took place. A young person recalls continuously surveilling social media, looking for a sexual image portraying her:

“
I remember that every week I would look on Twitter [...] and Instagram for things that had been leaked, nudes of people. I even looked on Google images to see if there were any of me, but thank God, I didn't find any. I remember I spent, I think, years and years looking, and I never found it, but I also don't know what he did with that photo. I can't imagine he deleted it. (YP)

2. THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

The constant anxiety of not knowing whether one's images have been shared can be long-lasting as demonstrated above. It can also lead to revictimization as children may re-live the violence they endured and constantly worry that others might have seen the child sexual abuse material, as described by one professional:



They look at people on the street, in their family, in their town, and they don't know whether that person has had contact with the content that has been shared, that has been broadcast. So, they have that horrible feeling of looking at someone they know or don't know, a relative or not, a friend, a schoolmate, teachers, and not knowing if that person knows about the situation, watched the video, saw the photo, in short, is aware of the crime. So these are people who are very insecure in social life. (FW)



The survey also points to a strong relationship between tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse and other indicators of mental ill health. For children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual violence, the odds of self-harm⁴⁴ and suicidal behaviours⁴⁵ (from suicidal thoughts to attempted suicide) are greater than for those who have not been subjected to it (5.4 and 5 times greater, respectively). This was the case for both girls and boys.

The accounts described above highlight the profound and lasting harm caused by the dissemination of sexual content, and underscore the need for strong safeguards that ensure its swift removal. Under the *Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents*, providers of digital services and applications accessible from Brazil must remove any content detected on their products or services that appears to involve child

exploitation, sexual abuse or grooming, and report it to the competent authorities.⁴⁶ Despite comprehensively providing for swift removal, the Statute does not explicitly require them to monitor the data they store, transmit or make available to actively seek out illegal content. Likewise, there are no such obligations on internet service providers, who also cannot be held liable for unlawful material circulating or hosted on their networks.⁴⁷ These limitations can have direct consequences for children: without clear legal mandates for proactive detection efforts, child sexual abuse material may circulate unchecked across different platforms until reported.

Nevertheless, the effective implementation of the Statute, particularly through clear regulatory guidance, cooperation protocols with authorities and law enforcement, and robust notice-and-takedown mechanisms, has the potential to mitigate these harms.

If consistently enforced, the obligation to promptly remove detected content and report it to competent authorities can shorten the lifespan of abusive material online, reduce repeated sharing across platforms, and interrupt patterns of revictimization. While such measures cannot undo the psychological harm already suffered, they can limit its ongoing amplification by restricting the circulation and persistence of abusive and/or exploitative content online.

44. For this analysis, the relative risks for self-harm are reported for children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year, and those not subjected to abuse during this period.

45. For this analysis, the relative risks for suicidal ideation and behaviours are reported for children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year, and those not subjected to abuse during this period.

46. Brazil, Law no. 15,211, art. 27.

47. Brazil, Law no. 12,965, 23 April 2014, art. 18 [in Portuguese]. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2014/lei/12965.htm (accessed 28 January 2026).

Changes in behaviour

The interviews point to several changes in children's behaviour during or following the sexual exploitation and abuse. They may isolate themselves from friends and family, eat and drink irregularly, self-harm, and present sleep disorders, as described by a professional who supported a 10-year-old girl: *"She isolated herself in her room and didn't want to do anything, she didn't eat properly. And then her mother and father began to notice her wearing long-sleeved clothes a lot, and they realized that she was hurting herself"* (JP).

In another case, a frontline worker supported an eight-year-old who was threatened by an unknown perpetrator to produce sexual content of herself. The child was losing weight, had sleep problems and was pulling out her hair. In another example, one young person talked about how the abuse changed how he socialized and interacted with his classmates, and how he experienced depression, low self-esteem and negative self-image.

Shame and self-blame

Children often feel ashamed of the exploitation and/or abuse they were subjected to. For example, a justice professional describes the embarrassment felt by a child who was being sexually abused (in person) by a sports coach, and bullied in school. The perpetrator recorded the abuse and distributed the content online throughout the school. Another justice professional recalled a child asking her grandmother for forgiveness after the abuse, evidencing the internalized guilt felt by children. This guilt may be exacerbated in cases where the abuse results in pregnancy:

“

In a way, we notice a very intense suffering, especially when she is already pregnant. Then comes the question of regret, feelings of regret, fear, not wanting to share with anyone, shame. She feels ashamed to share this situation, this story, with someone in her family or with a friend. They don't want to share, they isolate themselves. They keep that secret to themselves out of shame, out of fear. (FW)

”

In the context of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, self-blame is particularly evident when children shared sexual content before or during the exploitation and abuse. This was recounted by a professional:

“

Children and teenagers may say, 'But it was my fault. I was the one who took the clothes off, I was the one who sent the video. So how can I not feel guilty, if I was the one who actually sent this content, and now I'm receiving threats?' (FW)

”

One young person interviewed also recounts perceiving himself as a key participant in the abuse he suffered, and how that guilt weighed on him:

“

It was very difficult to process the fact that it wasn't my fault, considering that at certain times I took active or reactive steps, to seek out this kind of feeling of pleasure, or in the online case, by exposing myself. I took the initiative to do this, and I can't tell you that I didn't realize what I was doing. I can't tell you that it wasn't a risk, in a way. I can't tell you that at some point I didn't... even when I was older, there wasn't some part of me that was complacent in these abuses. [...] In simple terms, it's very difficult to say or convince someone that it's not your fault, when at some point you pulled certain triggers, you know? And it's very difficult to absolve yourself of guilt in the face of other people who were much more at fault. And you take that guilt that you have, that part of you that is an active participant, and you make it something that you carry. (YP)

”

2. THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

According to a justice professional, the shame that children feel can be reinforced by adults in children's social circles who do not make a report. In some cases, families may perceive children as having been somehow complicit in the exploitation and abuse they were subjected to, by engaging in communication with people online. These attitudes are described by justice professionals:

“

What I've also noticed in my years of experience is that these children and adolescents are often judged by their families, saying that they provoked the situation, that they somehow tried to bring a problem to the family [...] but this is something that also causes suffering for the adolescent, because they already felt like a problem, now they're sure they're a problem. There's talk like this in families. (JP)

”

“

Sometimes, they blame the child: 'But why? Didn't I tell you not to talk to strangers? Why did you accept it?' And they start to blame the child. Then they start blaming the child instead of looking for the real culprit. So, there is misinformation that the parents themselves have. (JP)

”

Victim-blaming attitudes in society at large can be complicated to address, especially if the child is convinced that they “pulled certain triggers.” **Such framing fails to account for structural power asymmetries between children and adults, obscures adult accountability, and minimizes the violence to which children are subjected.**

This perspective reframes such acts as something other than crimes and violations of rights, making disclosure feel illegitimate or futile, and reinforcing the perception that such harm is non-reportable. It is important to combat these perceptions at interpersonal, community and system levels to ensure that children can seek help.

3. DISCLOSURE AND REPORTING

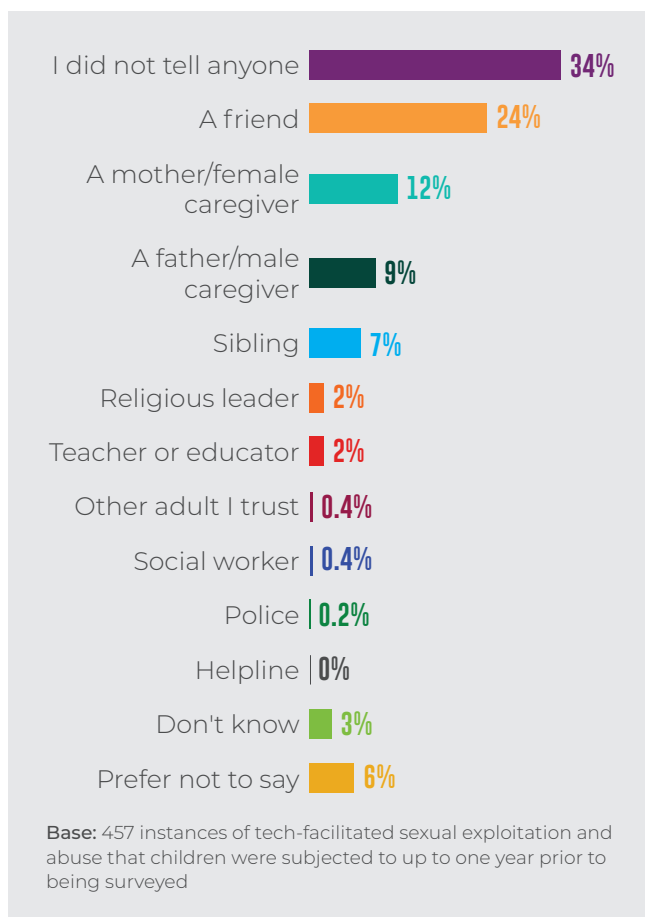
This chapter examines how children disclose and report tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, emphasizing the courage required and the profound impact disclosure can have on their lives. The Disrupting Harm project distinguishes between *disclosure*, the process by which a person conveys that they are or have been sexually exploited or abused in childhood, and *reporting*, which involves formally notifying authorities or designated individuals of suspected or confirmed cases.

3.1 DO CHILDREN DISCLOSE AND REPORT EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE?

According to the survey data, in 58 per cent of cases of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, children told someone about what happened. Reporting exploitation and abuse via official channels, be it police or helplines, was uncommon, as was disclosure to teachers and religious leaders (see chart 4). Among children who disclosed, it was more common to turn to friends and/or parents (particularly female caregivers).

The role of friends was particularly evident in the survey data; in almost a quarter of cases, the child disclosed to a friend. However, the role of peers in receiving disclosures was not explored in depth during interviews. Rather, the cases discussed highlighted the important role that adults like parents and professionals can play in disclosures of exploitation and abuse. The role of peers should be examined in future research in Brazil, while clearly reinforcing the central role and responsibility of adults in providing support to children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse.

Chart 4: Who do children disclose or report to?



The role of parents in disclosure and reporting

Parents – and particularly female caregivers – are also central to children’s disclosure and reporting, a finding that is evident from the interviews with professionals and young people who were subjected to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse and is also seen in the survey data above.

A young person described how helpful it was to speak to her mother:

“*She explained that it was a very bad situation, but that it wasn't the end of the world. And whether you like it or not, it's normal. There are many paedophiles in the world, and these are things that, whether a woman likes it or not, she must get used to, because that's what happens, right? Every day, on the bus, you go through a turnstile, someone touches you; at work, someone touches you, says something bad. So, she did everything to show me that this was a very bad situation. But it was also a very good situation for me to learn from, right? That if it happened again, I'd already be prepared, I'd already know how to deal with it, I'd already know what was going on.* (YP)

Although the young person quoted felt supported and seen when her mother recognized the abuse she endured as “a very bad situation,” this reaction reflects a normalization of sexual violence, framing abuse as an inevitable part of daily life that girls and women must learn to endure. This mindset not only shifts responsibility onto victims but perpetuates systemic impunity, making harmful behaviours seem acceptable and unchangeable.

Responses to disclosure may also be punitive, as recalled by this young person: “And she scolded me because I accepted everything. She'd say ‘See? That's why you want to be on Facebook?’, like saying things I shouldn't do. ‘You're accepting anyone [as a Facebook friend], that's what you get’” (YP). Sometimes children who speak up are not believed. In one example shared by a frontline

worker, the child was abused by the stepfather, and the mother believed the child only when seeing digital proof of the abuse. Similarly, one justice professional spoke of supporting a child being abused by her step-grandfather; since the family would not believe the child or intervene, the child disclosed to her school.

Parents can also be an important support during the *formal reporting* process. **Interviews with professionals and young people consistently highlighted the important role that mothers also play in facilitating formal reporting.** For example, professionals and young people recall cases where maternal figures do not hesitate to report tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse to formal authorities. During the process, they play a critical role in advocating for the child. In some cases, mothers even presented digital evidence to authorities, such as screenshots of conversations and comments left on photos or videos. In one instance, strangers left sexualized comments on the photos of a 16-year-old girl on Facebook, and sent unsolicited nudes on Facebook Messenger. The child contacted Facebook, and they deleted the pictures. However, her mother also supported her to make a formal complaint:

“

I showed my mother again and she went with me to the police station, and we filed a police report. [...] They explained how it worked, how to do it, and said they were going to block the profiles. [...] It was my mother. I have no words to describe my mother, she's really wonderful. (YP)

”

While the involvement of mothers (and parents more generally) can be vital, they still require strong institutional support. Not all mothers may have access to the resources or support needed to navigate such traumatic and complex situations, underscoring the importance of a coordinated and well-resourced response from relevant services.

Disclosing to professionals

Turning directly to professionals like social workers was rare among the children surveyed (see chart 4). However, the interviews highlight that children may disclose for the first time to professionals such as psychologists, social workers and doctors. **In Brazil, these disclosures carry specific professional and legal responsibilities: civil servants and health professionals who learn, in the course of their duties, of offences that can be prosecuted without a formal complaint – including (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse – are required to report them to the competent authorities or face fines.**⁴⁸ To support this obligation, healthcare professionals are provided with a standardized form for reporting suspected or confirmed cases of violence against children and adolescents, which includes a referral guide established by the Ministry of Health.⁴⁹

In most cases discussed by professionals interviewed, the child or young person sought or was referred to support services for other reasons (behavioural problems, physical abuse, etc.), and disclosed tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse during service provision. Professionals described disclosure as a delicate and sometimes gradual process, sometimes requiring several sessions.

48. Brazil, Decree-Law no. 3,688, 3 October 1941, art. 66 [in Portuguese], https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/decreto-lei/del3688.htm. The article states that the fine will be from 300,000 to 3,000,000 réis (former currency).

49. Brazil, Ministry of Health, "Individual notification/investigation form: Domestic, sexual and/or other interpersonal violence", no date [in Portuguese]. https://bvsm.sau.gov.br/bvs/folder/ficha_notificacao_violencia_domestica.pdf.

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Other professionals reflected on the value of disclosures for children:

“

In a lot of these cases, it ends up being a relief for them. They're already fed up with having to go through this violence, and when they manage to verbalize it, they kind of let go. They get out of that world where there's psychological pressure, this violence that they have to go through because of threats, fears, and then they have a reaction of feeling liberated from what's hurting them, which is the case with this teenager. When she verbalized these issues, and when she verbalized the situation of the rape that she had been through and that nobody knew about, it was a relief for her. (JP)

”

“

I think that after she listened to me, she felt relieved, because she realized that, based on my guidance, there was something she could do, because many of them [victims] cannot see a solution. So, they end up thinking that's just the way things are, and that they don't have the strength to deal with it, or they feel like there's no solution. I believe many students end up suffering longer than they should, simply because they think there's no way out. (FW)

”

Finally, young people themselves reflected on the relief they felt when they finally disclosed. One participant talked about disclosing during adulthood, 10 years after the abuse ended: *“It felt like a weight had been lifted off my back, because I talked about what had happened, you*

know, the abuse I suffered that day, and I talked about everything that had happened before. So, wow, a burden was lifted off my back. It was wonderful” (YP)

Reporting to authorities and helplines

Brazilian procedural rules provide several safeguards that make it easier for children to report tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Children can file complaints on their own without the involvement of a parent or guardian.⁵⁰ This may remove a barrier to reporting for some children. Anonymous reports are also accepted, a measure that lowers the threshold for individuals who might be unwilling to identify themselves. However, police must first conduct a preliminary investigation before moving forward.⁵¹ Lastly, crimes against sexual dignity are subject to unconditional public prosecution,⁵² which allows authorities to initiate criminal proceedings even without a formal complaint.⁵³ This ensures that action will automatically be taken whenever suspected cases come to their attention.

Beyond the criminal justice system, children also have access to reporting channels that may offer less intimidating and more accessible entry points. One of the most prominent is Dial 100, an anonymous and free hotline coordinated by the National Ombudsman, an arm of the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship. Initially created to receive reports of child sexual exploitation and abuse, it has since been expanded to cover a broader range of rights violations, with a particular focus on groups deemed vulnerable such as children, elders or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) individuals. Reports are reviewed and forwarded to protection, defence and accountability bodies within 24 hours, while the caller's identity is always kept confidential.⁵⁴ In 2025, Dial 100 received 37,650 reports of sexual violence against children and

50. Brazil, Penal Procedure Code, Decree-Law no. 3,689, 3 October 1941, art. 5. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/decreto-lei/del3689.htm.

51. Marcondes Machado, Leonardo, “Anonymous reports and criminal investigations”, Jus, 11 March 2019 [in Portuguese]. <https://jus.com.br/artigos/72570/denuncia-anonima-e-investigacao-criminal> (accessed 29 January 2026).

52. Moretzsohn, Fernanda and Patricia Burin, “Criminal action, sexual crimes and the victim's autonomy”, Colsultor Jurídico, 6 May 2022, [in Portuguese]. <https://www.conjur.com.br/2022-mai-06/questao-genero-acao-penal-crimes-sexuais-autonomia-vitima/> (accessed 29 January 2026).

53. Brazil, Penal Procedure Code, art. 5.

54. Brazil, “Report human rights violations (Dial 100)”, Gov.br, 15 December 2025 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.gov.br/pt-br/servicos/denunciar-violacao-de-direitos-humanos> (accessed 29 January 2026).

adolescents, corresponding to 75,225 incidents.⁵⁵ However, the available data is not disaggregated by type or context of abuse, which prevents an assessment of how many of these reports involve tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Civil society also plays an important role in facilitating and handling reports of child sexual abuse material. Safer Net⁵⁶ is a child helpline dedicated to counselling related to tech-facilitated violence against vulnerable groups. It partners with the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office to operate the National Cybercrime Reporting Centre, and is also a member of Child Helpline International. Between 2006 and September 2025, they received and processed 2,153,069 anonymous complaints involving 641,882 different web pages, of which 527,756 have been removed.⁵⁷ Reports submitted through Dial 100 that involve child sexual abuse material are forwarded to SaferNet within 24 hours for analysis, and then passed on to the Federal Police and internet providers to remove the content, preserve evidence, and support criminal investigations.⁵⁸ According to data provided by Child Helpline International, in 2024, SaferNet Brasil also provided 713 counselling sessions to children. Violence was logged as the topic of concern 559 times, accounting for 78 per cent of all counselling sessions. Of those, 187 contacts, a third, concerned tech-facilitated child sexual violence and exploitation; those contacts involved boys and girls in equal proportions.⁵⁹

It is important to note that, in addition to children or families reporting cases directly to authorities and helplines, effective responses depend on international cooperation and information-sharing with and among law enforcement agencies. Equally important is for private sector companies including social media platforms and financial institutions to share reports

of suspected child sexual with law enforcement authorities, to support investigation, prosecution of perpetrators and identification of victims.

Reporting on social media apps

If children are subjected to violence on social media, they may also report this to the service provider as a violation of community guidelines. A total of 38 per cent of children surveyed who were exploited and/or abused on social media made a report or complaint on the app where the violence occurred. Children surveyed mostly reported on Instagram (63 per cent) and WhatsApp (34 per cent), which reflects the most common platforms where children said they were targeted. Within the reports made on Instagram, 26 of 32 reports (83 per cent) received a response that the child found helpful. Within the reports on WhatsApp, 13 of 17 reports (77 per cent) had a helpful response.

Recognizing the critical role of in-app reporting, the newly adopted *Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents* mandates providers of digital services and applications directed at children and adolescents, or likely to be accessed by them, to provide mechanisms for users to report child's rights violations.⁶⁰ They must also notify the competent authorities of any such violations on their services that they become aware of.⁶¹

This framework in principle establishes a robust notice-and-takedown system, since providers are required to remove any content that violates children's rights, including child sexual abuse material, once they are notified by the child depicted, their representatives, the Public Prosecutor's Office or organizations defending children's rights.⁶² Importantly, removal does not require a court order, thereby enabling swift action and reducing the risk of further harm from the

55. Brazil, Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, "2025 National Human Rights Ombudsman data dashboard", 19 January 2024. <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/ondh/painel-de-dados/2025> (accessed 21 January 2026).

56. SaferNet Brasil, "Partnership with SEDH and DPF", no date [in Portuguese]. <https://www.safernet.org.br/site/institucional/parcerias/sedh> (accessed 29 January 2026).

57. SaferNet Brasil, "Indicators from the National Cybercrime Reporting Centre", no date [in Portuguese]. <https://indicadores.safernet.org.br/> (accessed 27 September 2025).

58. SaferNet Brasil, "Partnership with SEDH and DPF".

59. Child Helpline International, "Child Helpline Global Data", 2025 [data dashboard]. <https://childhelplineinternational.org/research-and-child-helpline-data/> (accessed 29 January 2026).

60. Brazil, Law no. 15,211, art. 28.

61. *Ibid.*, art. 28.

62. *Ibid.*, art. 29.

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continued circulation of the material reported. To ensure oversight, online platforms with more than 1 million users under the age of 18 connecting from Brazil must publish semi-annual reports in Portuguese on their websites, detailing the available reporting mechanisms, the number of reports received, and the number of moderated content items or accounts, broken down by type.⁶³ While these measures have the potential to enhance accountability and enable public scrutiny of how companies respond to reported violations of children's rights on their services, the Statute has only recently been adopted. Its practical implementation, enforcement and monitoring mechanisms have yet to take shape, and will need to be closely observed to assess whether these safeguards translate into effective protection in practice.

“

It's about having strength, knowing how to deal with the moment, knowing how to deal with the situation, not being afraid to speak out, not being afraid to express yourself. It's very important to speak out, to report it when it happens. (YP)

”

⁶³. Ibid., art. 31.

3.2 BARRIERS TO DISCLOSURE AND REPORTING

In around one third of cases (34 per cent) of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse captured in the survey, children did not tell anyone about what happened to them.

Interviews with young people and professionals highlighted that, for some children, disclosure is a last resort. A justice professional described supporting an 11-year-old girl who only disclosed when silence was no longer an option:



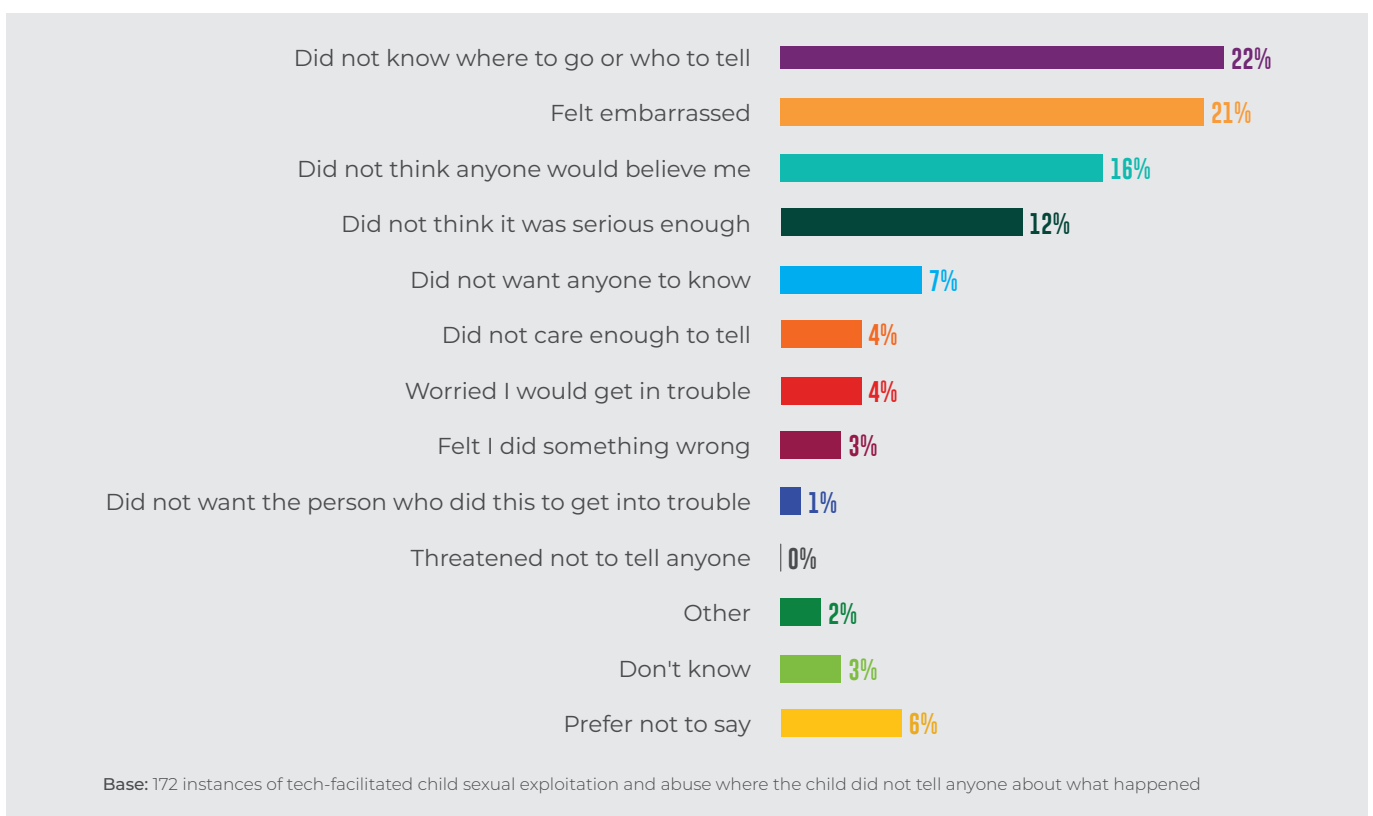
With this rape of a vulnerable person, he [the offender] filmed it, and she ended up getting into that cycle of him repeating it, making it constant, saying that he was going to post it on Instagram, that he was going to show it to her mother, until the child couldn't take it anymore and spoke out. (JP)



Surveyed children identified several barriers to disclosing the exploitation and abuse they experienced, most commonly not knowing where to go or whom to tell. At the same time, awareness among internet-using Brazilian children aged 12–17 is high: 62 per cent reported knowing where to seek help if they or a friend experienced sexual assault or harassment. This suggests that this barrier to disclosure may stem less from a lack of knowledge about support channels, and more from feelings of shame, isolation or fear of not being believed.

While parents play a central role in keeping children safe, they also require support...to know how to react to disclosures with support and maintaining a constructive dialogue with their children.

Chart 5: Barriers to disclosure and reporting



3.2 BARRIERS TO DISCLOSURE AND REPORTING

Feeling embarrassed was the second most common barrier among children surveyed. Feelings of shame and embarrassment may also be reflected in responses from children who did not think anyone would believe them (16 per cent), who did not want anyone to know (7 per cent) and who felt they had done something wrong (3 per cent). **Professionals had the impression that boys specifically may not disclose, due to feelings of shame and stigma linked to sexual abuse and exploitation.** This was exemplified in a case discussed by a justice professional, where a sports coach abused multiple children and recorded the abuse. Despite the police identifying the children, many denied that the abuse ever happened.

In 12 per cent of cases, children did not think the abuse and exploitation was 'serious enough' to tell anyone what happened. This might reflect a normalization of some forms of sexual violence and a lack of understanding that what they were subjected to was violence. One young person reflected on this in her interview:

I think that if I had known that what was happening to me was unfair, it was violence, I would have told other people, right, but since I didn't know and I thought it was wrong, I ended up hiding what happened. (YP)

This lack of recognition may also be linked to the specific characteristics of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, which can blur boundaries between acceptable and harmful behaviour. Sexual violence that occurs primarily online may be perceived as less serious than in-person abuse, including by children themselves. As a result, young people may misinterpret, minimize or dismiss it.

Another barrier was **fear of punishment.** In 4 per cent of incidents where children did not disclose, they said it was due to worries about getting in trouble. Fear of punishment was discussed by

young people in their interviews, specifically in relation to disclosing to caregivers. For example, one young person did not tell her parents because she did not want to be taken off the app she was using:

It took a while for me to tell her [mother], because I knew it was going to happen. She was going to say don't go on the app, and I was still hoping to find someone to talk to on there, so I could meet new people and stuff. So it took, like, two weeks for me to give up. (YP)

When asked what actions they would take if their child experienced something online that bothered or upset them, most parents said they would speak to their child (60 per cent) and seek help from a helpline (42 per cent) or someone they trust (40 per cent). However, 27 per cent of parents said they would restrict their child's internet use, and 9 per cent said they would punish their child. Parents may instinctively react to online harm by restricting internet access to protect their child. However, as the young person quoted above notes, the fear of losing online connection may keep children silent for longer.

The tension between protecting children and not restricting them from benefiting from the online world is difficult to manage. A non-punitive, supportive approach and open dialogue can help children feel safe to disclose sooner, and ensure that their right to protection is balanced with their other rights as children.

Given the challenges to disclosure, it may take years for people to come forward, which can have profound implications for their access to justice. Legal time limits for bringing criminal cases in Brazil typically range from 3 to 20 years (depending on the length of the sentence prescribed for each crime), including for offences related to (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse.⁶⁴ For sexual crimes against children and adolescents, the limitation period does not start until the child turns 18.⁶⁵ However, given the significant obstacles to disclosure and reporting even after childhood, statutes of limitations may inadvertently shield perpetrators if by the time survivors are ready to disclose and report the window for prosecution is closed. To fully protect children's right to justice,

statutes of limitations for all sexual offences against children should be abolished.

Despite the existence of formal reporting mechanisms as detailed above, children who disclose abuse may not be willing to report to the police or seek help through other formal channels. Children surveyed who did not report any instance of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse to a social worker, helpline or police were asked what stopped them from doing so. The most common barrier was not knowing how to make a report (18 per cent), followed closely by being threatened by the perpetrator (17 per cent) and not knowing such things could be reported (15 per cent).

Chart 6: Barriers to disclosure or reporting through formal channels



Normalization of some forms of sexual violence:

As with disclosure, the perception that the incident was 'not serious enough' was also a barrier to reporting among children (10 per cent). This further demonstrates the normalization of violence, difficulty in understanding the various manifestations of abusive and exploitative behaviours, and knowledge of the rights of

children. This was evident from the interviews, where girls who were being sexually exploited and receiving money did not perceive this as violence. In one example, a professional assisted a girl who wanted to receive support for the physical violence she was being subjected to at home and did not necessarily seek support for being sexually exploited: "She maintained her position

64. Brazil, *Penal Code*, art. 109.
65. *Ibid.*, art. 111.

3.2 BARRIERS TO DISCLOSURE AND REPORTING

during that initial period that she really needed care because she had moments of depression. She made demands mainly associated with family relationships. This is a complicated point. [Discussing or receiving support for] sexual exploitation was never a demand for her” (FW).

Concerns over the judicial process: Although this did not feature as a barrier to reporting in the survey data, the interviews revealed that parents can also discourage reporting. For example, in one case a mother advised her 16-year-old daughter against reporting an unknown person who sent her unsolicited sexual context and requested sexualized communication. According to the young person, her mother was concerned about the mental health impact of recounting the abuse and the length of the judicial process. The mother said to her daughter:

“

It’s going to be another one [another case in the long list of cases the police have]. We’re going to do the report, [...] it’s going to take us years and years and years, and it’s going to be something that keeps coming back to your head, coming back to your head, coming back to your head. When you start to think you forgot about it, we’ll have to go to a police station. We’ll have to go to a hearing, and you’ll end up not living well because of it. So, let’s end it here. It started here; we’ll end it here. (YP)

”

This is also illustrated by a justice professional, who explained how parents desire to protect their children can act as a barrier to reporting:

“

Most of the time, the parents chose not to go ahead [with the report]. They took the cell phone away from the child and thought that it was it, that they had solved the issue. They didn’t worry that the abuser who was committing sexual violence against their child, who was taken away from that contact, was going to commit it against someone else, and then against someone else, and then it could come back to their own child in one or two years’ time. So, they thought that by simply taking contact away from their son, they would protect him, and that was that. (JP)

”

This quote highlights that, while parents play a central role in keeping children safe, they also require support to understand how sexual exploitation and abuse can be facilitated by digital technologies, to understand available help-seeking avenues, and know how to react to disclosures with support and maintaining a constructive dialogue with their children. In this regard, institutions have a big role to play in supporting families, facilitating safe disclosures and reporting, and supporting children to access services and seek justice.

In Brazil, over half of the children surveyed who had been subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse told someone, usually turning to friends or female caregivers rather than formal services (see chart 4). Professionals noted that some disclosures only emerged when children sought help for other issues. Despite existing reporting mechanisms, very few children contacted helplines, social workers or law enforcement, reflecting major barriers such as lack of knowledge, fear of perpetrators, uncertainty about reporting and worries about the justice system. **Normalization of abuse and feelings of shame also surfaced repeatedly, underscoring the need for broader societal efforts to affirm that (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse is a rights violation, never something children should feel responsible for.**



Spotlight: Guardianship Councils - A key entry point for service utilization and access to justice

One key actor in facilitating access to the child protection network is the Guardianship Councils for the Rights of Children (*Conselhos Tutelares*), established by the *Statute of the Child and Adolescent*. These permanent and autonomous bodies are elected by popular vote in each municipality to “ensure the fulfilment of the rights of children and adolescents.”⁶⁶ The councils can make requisitions to public services to ensure children’s access. They can also refer cases of administrative or criminal offences against the rights of children and adolescents to the Public Prosecutor’s Office, with the aim of facilitating the provision of assistance to children and adolescents who find themselves in a situation of vulnerability or social risk.⁶⁷

Acting as a first point of contact for the child protection system, Councillors receive, refer and follow up on reports of children’s rights violations. As points of contact within the community, they may be notified of cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse by schools, social assistants, relatives, neighbours, health units, or through anonymous helpline reports among other channels.⁶⁸ Education and healthcare professionals have a specific obligation to notify the councils of any act of violence against a child or adolescent that comes to their knowledge.⁶⁹

Despite their central role, during interviews, professionals strongly voiced recurring concerns about the lack of standardization and regulation of the Guardianship Councils’ work, as explained by a justice professional:

“

We failed to ever regulate what exactly the Guardianship Council does. We brought in rational guidelines and parameters, so that we could standardize and parameterize the work of the Guardianship Council. As we never did this, we never tried to construct any kind of technical guides, resolutions, anything that would provide some kind of guidelines for action. (JP)

”

According to professionals, the absence of clear guidelines for Guardianship Councillors undermines coordination and collaboration across the wider child protection network, as further explained by the same justice professional: “*There are a lot of complaints that they work kind of on their own, without being part of this big machine that was set up beforehand*” (JP). In addition, according to some, certain sectors of the child protection network in Brazil appear to refuse referrals issued by the Guardianship Councils:

“

We have difficulty with the network itself sometimes not wanting our referral, there are still some, some bodies that are resistant to our referral, there is still this impasse. So, my wish as a professional, as a Guardianship Councillor, is that these services would go hand in hand, that we would work together, right, and enforce this right of these children and adolescents, because the network is still fragile. (FW)

”

66. Brazil, *Statute of the Child and Adolescent*, arts. 131–132.

67. *Ibid.*, art. 136.

68. *Ibid.*, arts. 13, 245.

69. Brazil, Decree no. 9,603, 10 December 2018 [in Portuguese], art. 11. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2015-2018/2018/decreto/d9603.htm; Brazil, *Statute of the Child and Adolescent*, arts. 56, 70-B.

3.2 BARRIERS TO DISCLOSURE AND REPORTING

To be elected as a Guardianship Councillor, community members must be at least 21 years old, reside in the municipality, and be of recognized moral integrity.⁷⁰ Municipalities can also introduce additional requirements, such as proven experience in the promotion, protection, or defence of the rights of children and adolescents,⁷¹ as is the case in São Paulo.⁷² However, according to participants, where such a requirement exists, it is not consistently checked.

Professionals described a need for capacity-building among councillors, including trainings on the specialized listening procedure⁷³ and on procedures for hearing children with disabilities: *“The Guardianship Council needs to be trained and receive specific training so that it doesn't go around questioning the child in a completely inappropriate and revictimizing way within the Guardianship Council. The council needs comprehensive training (JP).*

Professionals also highlighted the need for specific training on what tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse is, and what services children who have been subjected to it need. This is explained by a Guardianship Councillor:

“

I haven't had any specific training in this area [of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse]. [...] The Statute of the Child and Adolescent says that the Guardianship Council has to have ongoing training. And it's the municipality, the Municipal Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents, that should provide this training, and we've done a lot of training on, for example, refugee children or various other types of training. But we haven't had any specific training for online crimes, as far as I can remember. (FW)

”

Although the National Plan to Combat Violence Against Children and Adolescents 2022–2025 provided for such training actions for Guardianship Councillors,⁷⁴ these accounts suggest that the corresponding measures may be insufficient or not fully implemented.

The combination of significant, often undefined, responsibilities and autonomy along with limited training, results in gaps in support, referral and follow-up for victims of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. The frustration with these challenges is expressed by a Guardianship Councillor below:

70. Brazil, *Statute of the Child and Adolescent*, art. 133.

71. Brazil, National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents, Resolution 231, 28 December 2022, art. 12 [in Portuguese]. <https://cedecari.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/resoluCAo-n-231-de-28-de-dezembro-de-2022-resoluCAo-n-231-de-28-de-dezembro-de-2022-dou-imprensa-nacional-1.pdf>.

72. Brazil, City of São Paulo, “Public Notice no. 002/CMDCA-SP/2023”, 4 April 2023, art. 8 [in Portuguese]. https://drive.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/cidade/secretarias/upload/direitos_humanos/CMDCA/eleicoes2023/EDITAL_002_CMDCA_%202023_ANEXOS.pdf.

73. A trauma-informed approach that ensures child victims or witnesses of violence are heard safely in extrajudicial contexts, with the aim of avoiding re-traumatization from repeated questioning, and which identifies victims' needs for appropriate referrals.

74. Brazil, *National Plan to Combat Violence against Children and Adolescents – Matrix 02: Sexual exploitation*, Gov.br, 10 February 2022 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.gov.br/participamaisbrasil/planevca-matriz-02-exploracao-sexual>.

“

There's frustration and, if you'll pardon the term, that feeling of wiping ice dry [futile or pointless effort]. I know. Because if you don't get feedback [from care services] and you don't see it [the care being provided] within the families, when you go to do, let's say, accountability. So, you put in there what you've done, the Council, what the Council has done, how many people you've assisted, which agencies and what you've got back. Of course, you won't mention the names of the families, you'll just have the numbers [...]. So, it ends up being frustrating when you don't hear back [from care services] or see that the family you wanted to be taken care of by the protection network isn't protected, it's alone. That's what I think is most cruel about the Guardianship Council. (FW)

”

Although each municipality in Brazil is required to have at least one Guardianship Council (composed of five councillors),⁷⁵ there are no guidelines determining the number of councils based on population size or caseload. In line with this, participants expressed that the number of councils in their municipality was not sufficient to handle the high number of cases of children's rights violations. A Guardianship Councillor reflected on human resource gaps, as well as challenges referring cases to other service providers within the child protection network:

“

I think that, in order for this work to be more effective, and for us to work to ensure that these rights are guaranteed, we need more people, as I said to you, today we are five Councillors, I think that in Manaus today each Council would need at least 10 Councillors. (FW)

”

This is also an issue in São Paulo where, according to a counsellor, there are:

“

10 guardianship councillors for 300,000 families, right? Of course, not all of them do [have cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse], so it's almost impossible to monitor every situation. And we end up monitoring those that we believe to be the most blatant, the height of the violation of rights. (FW)


”

For many Councillors, these conditions often lead to exhaustion and burnout, as they manage complex cases with limited support.

⁷⁵ Brazil, *Statute of the Child and Adolescent*, art. 132.

4. SERVICE USE

Justice professionals and front-line workers reflected on the factors that can influence the use of care services for children subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse. Data from the legal and policy analysis presents the procedures and safeguards available for children as they access services, while interviews with professionals and young people offer important perspectives on the provision and effectiveness of these services, promising practices and challenges faced. While the factors identified in this chapter are not intended to be exhaustive, they point to important strengths and challenges in service provision in Brazil.



4.1 SPECIALIZED LISTENING

Law No. 13,431/2017 establishes a specialized listening procedure (*procedimento de escuta especializada*) for children and adolescents subjected to (sexual) violence. This procedure is conducted by the relevant child protection entities in the fields of education, health, social assistance, public security and human rights to ensure survivors receive the necessary support to overcome the consequences of violence.⁷⁶ It must be carried out by a trained professional in a safe and welcoming environment that guarantees the child's privacy⁷⁷ and be limited to what is strictly necessary to fulfil the purpose of social protection and care provision.⁷⁸ During specialized listening, the child must be informed, in age-appropriate language, about the formal procedures they will undergo and the support services available, considering the specifics of each case.⁷⁹ In May 2023, Childhood Brasil and the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship released a *Specialized Listening Guide* providing methodology and strategies for conducting the procedure, including in cases of sexual violence.⁸⁰

This trauma-informed procedure is transformative in that it aims to reduce revictimization by limiting interaction between the child or adolescent and protection services to what is necessary for care provision. Its objective is to enable appropriate referrals and access to support services, rather than to produce evidence for investigative or judicial purposes. **Because the focus is on protection rather than fact-finding, the specialized listening procedure should, in principle, avoid the need for repeated recounting of the exploitation or abuse once the needs of the child or adolescent have been identified.**

Despite this protective framework, interviews with professionals and young people indicate that, in practice, children sometimes have to recount the exploitation and abuse multiple times to different professionals. Professionals reported having supported children who were asked to do so 6 to 13 times. A judge explained how this had happened in various cases she had supported:

“

In my experience [...] every time I heard a teacher, they would say the same thing to me: 'I didn't know what to do with the information.' So, I would take the child to the principal and she would be forced to repeat it to them. Because the principal was going to take a stand and again didn't know what to do, they would call the guardianship counsellor. The guardianship counsellor would go and listen to the child again. Then the guardianship counsellor in turn wouldn't know what to do and would take the child to their manager, the one who managed the guardianship counsellors, the coordinator. Then the child would go to the police station, repeat their story again, then to the Forensic Medical Institute, and the first thing they would say would be: 'What happened? Tell me what happened, why are you here?' and the child would repeat it once more. In short, the child would face the ordeal of repeating their story 11, 12, 13 times before they reached the courts. That's the experience. And do we need to subject the child to this revictimization? No. We need to train professionals to deal with it better. (JP)

”

This indicates that repetition occurs because professionals, lacking training or case details, are unsure how to respond, leading the child or adolescent to recount the details of their case repeatedly. From the perspective of the child or adolescent, this can have a significant emotional impact, as being asked the same questions over and over again can be traumatic and equated with disbelief:

76. Brazil, Law no. 13,431, 4 April 2017, art. 7 [in Portuguese]. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2015-2018/2017/lei/l13431.htm; Brazil, Decree no. 9,603, art. 19.

77. Brazil, Decree no. 9,603, art. 20; Brazil, Law no. 13,431, art. 10.

78. Brazil, Decree no. 9,603, art. 19 § 4°.

79. *Ibid.*, art. 19 § 1°.

80. Childhood Brasil and Brazil, Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, *Specialized Listening Guide: Ethical and protocol concepts and procedures*, São Paulo and Brasília, 2023 [in Portuguese]. https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/navegue-por-temas/crianca-e-adolescente/acoes-e-programas/GuiaEscutaEspecializada_ConceitoseProcedimentosticoseProtocolares.pdf.

4.1 SPECIALIZED LISTENING

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But I've already said that, why do I have to repeat it? They're doubting what I say.' That is the child's impression: 'They didn't believe what I said, and that's why I have to repeat it. How many times do I have to say the same thing? If I must repeat it, it is because there's some doubt about what I am saying.' (JP)

”

In connection with this, the professionals interviewed emphasized the importance of monitoring the implementation of the specialized listening procedure to ensure that the various government bodies involved are adequately trained to carry it out in practice. School staff, in particular, required such training, with a particular focus on how to avoid repeated requests for children or adolescents to recount the exploitation and/or abuse. The need for standardized procedures for documenting initial disclosures and transferring information between institutions, so that action can be taken without involving the victim of violence any further, was also highlighted:

“

The child arrived and went to talk to the [school] manager. If she went to complain to that manager, it was because she chose that person to talk to, that was her choice, and so it was very wrong for the manager to take it, not document it, and call a male Guardianship Councilor so that the child to repeat it in front of everyone. Because if the child chooses that person [the school manager], it's because they want to tell them. So, what do I say? Get a piece of paper, create a protocol for producing a report. On that day, the child, so-and-so, seven years old, came in, [...] said that the perpetrator was so-and-so, gave the address and the family's full details, and called the Guardianship Council. The Guardianship Council doesn't have to ask anything else about the child. They can just take the file, right? If they arrive at the police station with this form, the investigator who is there to produce the Incident Report (IR) [used to record the crime at the police station] doesn't have to ask anything about the child at that point either. They just need to produce the IR and schedule the special statement [special deposition]. That's what would happen in an ideal world. But that's not what happens in practice.' (JP)

”

According to those interviewed, professionals conducting specialized listening, such as social workers or psychologists, should also be trained to address a common misconception that children frequently lie about exploitation and abuse. Research consistently shows that false disclosures are rare and that children are more likely to underreport abuse than to fabricate it.⁸¹

81. O'Donohue, William, Caroline Cummings and Brendan Willis, "The frequency of false allegations of child sexual abuse: A critical review", *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 27(5), 2018, pp. 459–475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2018.1477224>.

Gaps in training are also reflected in professionals' confusion over the terms 'special deposition', 'protective listening' and 'specialized listening', as well as uncertainty about who is responsible for conducting each procedure and what purpose they serve.

According to the relevant regulations, professionals conducting the specialized listening procedure are instructed to avoid questions that go beyond what is necessary for social protection and care provision.⁸² However, interviews suggest that some law enforcement officials perceive the narrow scope of specialized listening as a challenge, since it does not allow for the direct questioning needed to gather information for their investigations. According to a police officer specializing in crimes against children, this has made it difficult to investigate cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly when it comes to obtaining key details such as which social media platform was used:

How is it done here? The child will be heard at the referral centre, the psychologist will produce their report, there are no direct questions because they don't ask about the crime. They ask questions that are much more focused on mental health than on gathering [investigative evidence]. So, often, I need to know exactly, ah, but where did it happen, what day was the approach, was it via WhatsApp, was it this, was it that, I don't know. Because I don't get that feedback. And this is forwarded within the police investigation to the court, and the judge will call the parents, who also often don't know, and will also ask the parents some questions, the mother or the father, and that's it. (JP)

As a result, they explain that the police might collect evidence through parents who in turn might end up asking the child, which may have detrimental consequences both for the victim and their caregivers.

So, look, I think that most of the delegates hold hearings through the parents [...]. They ask the parents, the parents talk to the child, the child talks to the parents, and then we put it down on paper. So that's it. And then we put the father, the mother, and it's sent to the court, and that's how it stays. That's why I said that this law has introduced some obstacles that are difficult to deal with in a way that really benefits the process, right? Because we need evidence to be able to convict. (JP)

These accounts suggest that some police officers expect specialized listening to generate evidence, despite the law establishing a separate special deposition procedure for that purpose. When it does not, they may turn to potentially harmful alternatives that risk revictimizing the child and their family, such as channelling questions through parents. This points to the possibility that, at least in some areas, the special deposition is not being systematically conducted or even considered during investigations. Whether this reflects gaps in training, limited resources or broader implementation challenges is unclear, but it raises important questions about the extent to which existing procedures are being effectively implemented in practice.

82. Brazil, Decree no. 9,603, arts. 19 § 3º, 19 § 4º.

4.2 PROMISING PRACTICES

Brazilian legislation provides that hospitals under the Unified Health System are required to provide individuals subjected to sexual violence with free emergency, comprehensive and multidisciplinary care, to address its physical and psychological impacts. They must also refer the victims to social assistance services if necessary.⁸³ In cases involving children and adolescents, hospitals must conduct a medical examination and provide prophylactic measures against sexually transmitted infections, as well as emergency contraception.⁸⁴

The Specialized Social Assistance Referral Centres (CREAS, in the Portuguese acronym) are tasked with helping the recovery and reintegration of children subjected to violence, in conjunction with the Unified Social Assistance System.⁸⁵ As of December 2025, there were 3,001 municipal CREAS covering 3,037 of Brazil's 5,569 municipalities, as well as 36 regional CREAS managed by state authorities.⁸⁶ The Centres are staffed by a multidisciplinary team and offer a *Specialized Protection and Assistance Service for Families and Individuals* that provides *acolhimento* (in Portuguese, the act of reception or welcoming someone into a service), qualified listening, psychosocial care, individual monitoring, and activities that promote the construction of personal and social projects aimed at overcoming the situation of violence.⁸⁷ This service is provided free of charge and the absence of legal documentation does not prevent potential beneficiaries from accessing it.⁸⁸

In their interviews, **professionals described *acolhimento* as a fundamental component in the care of children subjected to sexual violence, including tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse.** They explained how this first interaction plays a critical role in establishing trust and safety and outlined several practices that contribute to a supportive reception. Part of the welcoming process consists of explaining to children and their families *why* they are there, what the service is about and *how* it can support them. As illustrated in the quote below, during the *acolhimento*, professionals (e.g. psychologists, social workers, nurses and doctors) should offer reassurance, which contributes to strengthening the resilience of both the child and the family: “*Look, reception is extremely important, right? So, she [the child] must be sure that the professionals understand her problem, that they have dealt with several other cases, that she wasn't the only one, right?*” (FW).

In line with this, a young person described how useful these explanations can be: “*So what you need to do is look for someone who is not just a person you can trust, but a professional who will literally explain it to you*” (YP).

During *acolhimento*, professionals advise on the importance of clearly establishing that the child is not to blame or is in any way responsible for the exploitation and/or abuse they were subjected to. In addition to providing information and reassurance, reception can be a source of comfort for the child and their family:

83. Brazil, Law no. 12.845, 1 August 2013, arts. 1, 3 [in Portuguese]. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2013/lei/112845.htm.

84. Brazil, Decree no. 9,603, art. 10.

85. Childhood Brasil and Brazil, Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, *Special Hearing Guide: Ethical and protocol concepts and procedures*, São Paulo and Brasília, 2023, art. 12 § 2º [in Portuguese]. https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/navegue-por-temas/crianca-e-adolescente/acoes-e-programas/GuiaEscutaEspecializada_ConceitoseProcedimentosticoseProtocolares.pdf.

86. Brazil, Secretariat for Evaluation, Information Management and the Single Registry, “Vis Data 3: Municipalities with CREAS coverage”, no date [data dashboard, in Portuguese]. <https://aplicacoes.cidadania.gov.br/vis/data3/v.php?q%5b%5d=oNOhIMHqWJOsuqSe9Wt9h7Ne09Oc5qqY0PfJsLi4> (accessed 22 January 2026).

87. Brazil, Public Prosecutor's Office of Paraná, PAFI: *Specialized Protection and Assistance Service for Families and Individuals* [in Portuguese].

<https://www.sigas.pe.gov.br/files/0625202114830-caderno.cursista.curso.06.pse.61.100.pdf>; Brazil, Ministry of Development and Social Assistance, Family and Fight against Hunger, *Specialized Social Assistance Reference Centres – Creas*, 2019 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.gov.br/mds/pt-br/acoes-e-programas/suas/unidades-de-atendimento/centro-de-referencia-especializado-de-assistencia-social-creas>.

88. Brazil, *Ministry of Development and Social Assistance, Family and Fight against Hunger, Specialized Social Assistance Reference Centres – Creas*.

“

And comfort, right? The comfort of being able to make this victim and her family emotionally stronger so that they can deal with the situation. And time also helps. Time eases the situation a little. There's always that terror, that fear, that panic that the images will circulate again. But we reinforce and advise that disseminating images is considered a crime, as is producing them. So, we provide this comfort. And knowing that the victim is not alone, that there is a whole team, that this team talks to the Guardianship Council, to the police station, to the judiciary, often all for the benefit of the victim, that gives a certain comfort, a certain relief. (FW)

”

Professionals reflected on other promising practices that could be adapted and implemented on a larger scale. Group therapy, for example, is considered by some front-line workers as a valuable approach, particularly as a method to assist children who have been isolated from their social and home environments. In line with this, a young man reflected on how powerful it can be to connect with others who have been through similar experiences: *“Often, professionals, authorities and others speak in a way that is difficult to connect with, because they don't understand the feeling. And victims' stories connect with other victims”* (YP).

In addition, child-friendly spaces contribute to children feeling comfortable and to the effectiveness of psychological support:

“

A little house like those that the boys like, the girls like, they all like it and play with it and stuff. We even have a bicycle there, which they ride, sometimes they come into the room riding the bicycle. Oh, I think it's great, I love it when they come into the room on their bikes, you know? (FW)

”

Psychological support for children subjected to technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse

Following the reception, or ‘welcoming’ children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse may be offered psychological support. As described in the quote below, therapy or counselling can play a vital role in helping children gradually shift feelings of blame and guilt away from themselves. This process can empower them to rebuild trust and reconnect with people and institutions from which they had become isolated due to the exploitation and abuse.

“

This made it possible for that teenager to start talking to her parents again, because she had been carrying guilt that was not hers. She felt guilty – that she was the one at fault, that she was the one who had been nosy, that she was the one who had led him on. She felt bad about herself. [...] But we had to work together – I remember, particularly on the educational side – because she had also started to become isolated, she didn't want to go to school, her school attendance had dropped. So we called in some institutions we identified as being able to help change the situation, so that the teenager could see herself as a subject of rights. This is the first point: that she understands she was not at fault, she was not guilty, she was a victim. And then, how to work with the parents, to help them understand this whole process. (FW)

”

During therapy, professionals may support the child to gradually recognize their need for protection, particularly in cases where the child does not perceive their situation as abusive or exploitative:

4.2 PROMISING PRACTICES

“

She didn't want to leave her family. She understands that she was caught up in a situation, that she didn't want to have been discovered in this state and she doesn't even dream about it, I mean, I think she even knows a little, that the project was involved in protecting her, but she didn't understand it as protection. And that's what's really bothered us, how much solidarity there is in the exploitation network. There's even a researcher who is a colleague of mine here, who criticizes me a lot when I use the expression solidarity, bond of solidarity, but I say, but there's a bond that you don't have, nor do I have. Understand? And she gets very angry; the girls get very angry when we interfere in this bond. (FW)

”

Young people described how fundamental therapy was in their recovery. Not only did it help them reconnect with others, but in some cases, it was life-saving and enabled them to understand how the exploitation and abuse they were subjected to impacts them and fits into the broader narrative of their lives.

“

It's very important to talk. Because you end up mapping yourself, mapping what it meant to you, how it hurt you and how you can start trying to heal from it. It's very important because it exposes us to the mechanisms by which this kind of thing keeps happening, and how we can collectively stop it in the future. (YP)

”

“

I remember talking to the psychologist and she said, 'I'm glad you're here,' because she didn't understand how I could be alive, because I'd already tried suicide and had never succeeded. And then she said how good it is that you're here because you need to talk about it, you need to get it off your chest. And I acted as if it was normal, it never hit me, you know? But I was having panic attacks, I couldn't go out in the street, so I started seeing a psychologist. (YP)

”

Some front-line workers also emphasized the importance of offering long-term psychological support to children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. **For children and young people who have been socially isolated, recovery is marked by a gradual process of reintegration into society, a process that can be challenging and long-term.** A young person described the lengthy and challenging process of coming to terms with the impact the abuse had on him: “I had to go through a whole process of talking about it a few times, until I was able to map the effects it had on me and map the effects it continues to have on me. And even to treat it. I got help early on.” (YP)

Certain factors may signal a child's recovery from exploitation and abuse after therapy. In younger children, recovery from exploitation and abuse may be evidenced by the interruption of trauma responses. For instance, in a case described by a front-line worker, the child stopped engaging in maladaptive coping behaviours,⁸⁹ such as hair-pulling, and her sleep patterns improved. Equally important in her case was re-engaging in developmentally appropriate activities such as spontaneous play: “she was able to go and play, to live her life as a child” (FW).

89. Maladaptive behaviours are described as ineffective methods of coping with stress or difficult emotions. While these coping mechanisms may temporarily ease the stress, they can be harmful in the long term.

Another key indicator of recovery is the child's recognition that the exploitation and/or abuse was unjustified, that they do not bear any responsibility for it and that if faced with similar circumstances in the future, they have the right to report it and seek support. This realization may happen gradually, with victims beginning to trust, then to describe the exploitation and abuse they were subjected to and express and describe any feelings of shame or guilt. For one young person, recovery entailed realizing that the abuse was not their fault and that it does not define who they are:

“

Well, I would say that this person should talk to someone they trust. And that they're not guilty of anything. And I'd support them by saying what I think is good about them, everything that's good about them. I think that the potential of what has happened in terms of sexual violence, whether on the internet or in person, doesn't define them, that it's not just about that and that they have a lot of power. (YP)

”

Psychological support for families

Although some professionals discussed cases where support for families was provided by CREAS or sexual violence prevention centres, they emphasized that provision of psychological care to families should be mandatory and that it is fundamental to the recovery of children and adolescents subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse. Front-line workers supporting children consistently emphasize that recovery is not solely an individual journey for the child, but a collective process involving the family.

“

A big problem, where we have a lot of difficulty, is when the family is not on the victim's side. So, when there is no family support, psychological counselling becomes very difficult.

Unfortunately, we have situations where the family – mother, father, brother, whoever – instead of understanding that the person acted that way because they were lured, seduced or threatened, that their emotions were involved... So, if we don't have the support of the family, then everything becomes much more difficult, much more difficult. Because when we have a problem, we want support, we don't want criticism, we don't want fingers pointed at us, we want people who help resolve the situation and support us. So, the big problem is when we don't have the help of the family. Often, we have... The mother is more supportive, but sometimes the father doesn't accept it, doesn't understand, and it's very complicated. So, that's a difficult point. (FW)

”

Psychologists and social workers underscore the importance of helping families understand the trauma their children have endured. This includes dismantling harmful dynamics such as blame. In cases where family relationships are fractured, such as divorced parents who do not communicate, strengthening family bonds becomes a therapeutic priority. The goal is to foster an environment where the child is welcomed, not judged, and where support and guidance replace guilt.

4.2 PROMISING PRACTICES

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So, we worked to strengthen that family's bonds, understanding that the teenager was a victim and that, at that moment, it is not up to the parents to question or point anything out. They need to welcome the teenager who was a victim. She needs to be welcomed, she needs guidance that she may never have had, because she was brought up in such a closed context of information that she felt guilty about everything. (FW)

”

This support becomes even more complex and necessary when caregivers themselves are survivors of exploitation or abuse. Professionals emphasized that intergenerational care is essential to avoid revictimization and encourage a caring home environment:

“

Often, as I said, we start to do the interview, and you find out that the mother has also suffered abuse and hasn't been treated. And then she can't protect her child. And so, you also need to accompany and treat this mother so that she is able to protect and continue to protect, in fact. Because I say that when I get here, it's already happened. The idea is that it doesn't happen again. And that these victims can be multipliers so that they can prevent it from happening to other people. (FW)

”

The justice process can add to the emotional distress experienced by families. Families with limited financial resources may fear legal settings, which can deter them from seeking justice for their child. Professionals emphasize the importance of providing psychological and logistical support to help families navigate these systems:

“

You must take care of that family, give support to that family. Because when I talk about giving support to the family, I see a lot of families, especially low-income ones, or not even low income, but they don't have a [university] diploma. So you go to the courts [and they say] 'Oh my God, I'm afraid of losing my son or daughter.' It happens, you know? So, I think there would have to be support for this family to go ahead and make this complaint, make this referral, so that the authorities can get to where it's happening. (FW)

”

Moreover, relocation due to the perpetrator's proximity can disrupt a child's education and social life as well as that of their families. In these cases, the professionals interviewed highlighted the fact that social workers play a vital role in coordinating with schools and public services to ensure continuity and access to services. This includes securing basic needs such as food and education and supporting families if they need to find new employment, if necessary, all of which are fundamental to the child's well-being and recovery.

“

Then we start this follow-up, we make appointments, we check if the family needs an occasional benefit, which we say is the basic food basket. It's well assessed. If the family isn't getting access, because in some situations, for example, the child or teenager has to change schools because they need to move neighbourhoods, because of the aggressor... and then we need to make this possible, because often our users don't get this by going to school, especially when it's in the middle of the year. So, we also do this work, going to the Department of Education, going to the school and ensuring that this person has access to this right. So, we make this network connection together with the family. (FW)

”

4.3 CHALLENGES

Through the interviews, professionals identified key challenges they and their institutions face when delivering the level of care required by children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, and by their families.

Professionals described an overwhelmed and understaffed system, where high demand and limited resources lead to discontinued cases and burnout:

“

Most of our cases that drop out, we end up not being able to recover. So, I think that's very bad. Because of the quantity, the demand is great. It seems like there are many of us professionals, but there aren't. We don't stop here, it's all day, you see, I was talking to you, we have three more here, and today the doctor is here. And then a case comes in, and there's one person on duty to deal with it. (FW)

”

A key challenge is to identify professionals with the necessary skills and profile to work on cases involving sexual violence. As a result, there is a widespread need for specialized training across the child protection network. The lack of qualified staff is presented by professionals as a major systemic challenge, as summarized by one front-line worker.

“

Trained professionals. It's very difficult to get professionals involved who have the minimum skills to work with issues of violence. And when that violence is sexual violence, and when it's against children and adolescents, it's more difficult to go. And if the person doesn't have the capacity for this type of care, they won't be able to provide good care. So, what I see as a major challenge is finding qualified professionals, both in health and in any other sector. The police stations must be trained to deal with victims; the Guardianship Council has to be well trained and so does the whole network. I think the biggest challenge is finding trained professionals who have this profile. It's not easy, it's very difficult. (FW)

”

Interviews show that training is also needed to ensure that providers can respond without judgment or blame when supporting children and to assist them in identifying tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. As explained by one front-line worker: *“For this type of violence, which is still in its infancy, perhaps I myself as a professional, at another time not so long ago, wouldn't have been able to read this case in this way, identify it, I think it's a very peculiar issue that we're experiencing”* (FW). Professionals may be aware of this lack of specialized training and feel ill at ease when dealing with sensitive cases where revictimization is a major concern.

Another critical training gap identified by participants in Manaus was a lack of trauma-informed care at the Forensic Medical Institute.⁹⁰ This need creates a bottleneck in the care pathway, preventing children from accessing essential psychological support or medical care through the health system.

90. The Forensic Medical Institute is a health unit – usually in hospitals or integrated centres – that among its wider mandate, performs medical examinations in cases of contact sexual abuse, offers contraception, performs tests for sexually transmitted infections, refers patients to other services within the protection networks and prepares forensic examination reports.

4.3 CHALLENGES

“

The Forensic Medical Institute is a bottleneck. They're very unprepared to deal with human beings. I think they're only prepared to deal with corpses. Human beings are zero, right? It's zero. So, sometimes, the patient is seen there, and they seem to think that, because her hymen is intact, she doesn't need to go to the [sexual violence health centre]. So that's a bottleneck, because when they block her from going to the health centre, they block health, because then there's no medical care, no psychological care, none of that. (FW)

”

Human resource capacity issues may be further worsened by low staff salaries and inadequate infrastructure, which can negatively impact the quality of services provided at CREAS centres.

“

Professionals can't do a good job if they don't have good working conditions. So, I see today that those who work at CREAS work because they have to, but also because they love the cause. Many of the professionals I meet along the way identify with the cause and enjoy working there. [...] And not just restitution, but a guarantee of rights. Accessibility, rights. If we could have professionals inside CREAS, if we could have the number of CREAS in line with what is recommended in the country, we would have super-powered facilities... (FW)

”

The repercussions of not building professionals' capacity are detrimental to victims, as illustrated in the case of this young person who felt blamed and unsafe while receiving psychological care:

“

Maybe if the psychologist had also talked to me better, instead of just blaming me, I would have felt a bit better too, because I would have had support. There I wasn't afraid of her telling my mother. And this psychologist, when I started to talk about some of my problems, simply brought my mother into the room, because I was under age, and she let my mother hear everything. So, I couldn't open up about what I needed to talk about. (YP)

”

Professionals working with individuals subjected to (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse often face complex ethical dilemmas and require appropriate support to navigate them effectively. An example of this was presented by a psychologist who supported a child whose independent income depended on selling sexual content online. Faced with the potential consequences of mandatory reporting, such as removal from her home and placement in a shelter, the psychologist chose to prioritize therapy over reporting.

“

So, we monitor the issue of sexual exploitation and link it, welcoming her, talking about other things, taking care of her, effectively intervening in other demands she has. But it's a very difficult exercise. Because that's the thing, we were seeing a context of exploitation before our eyes, but even so, she was being what she thought was her golden goose [a good or continuous source of money and financial benefit], and that was exerting an important influence. (FW)

”

This ethical dilemma is also raised by a young person who advocates for public policies that allow adolescents to access psychological support and services, such as testing for sexually transmitted infections, without being required to initiate a formal legal process. This approach prioritizes recovery and autonomy and recognizes that mandatory reporting can sometimes deter young people from seeking help.

“

Because reporting is a legal process, it's a public process, it's a process that needs exposure. And mental help, help for people who have been abused, this recovery, as I'm a person in the family and I can't be public about it, for sure, public policies that allow young people to take care of themselves without having to, obviously this is a complicated legal issue, but public policies that allow young people to have treatment, to have access to, for example, easier STI tests. Psychological care without them necessarily having to report it seems extremely interesting to me. (YP)

”

Interviewees also described gaps in infrastructure. A professional from the state of São Paulo described ending group therapy sessions due to the lack of physical space, and the need to reduce the frequency of individual sessions for severe cases due to capacity issues: *“The issue of physical space, today we don't have a space, we don't have a large group room. So, we can no longer hold these family groups, which used to be very productive”* (FW). She also explains having to space out sessions due to capacity issues: *“At the moment, the biggest difficulty is being able to attend to the more serious cases more frequently”* (FW).

The issue of limited human resources was highlighted by another professional providing services in Manaus. Although a psychologist is available, the high volume of cases prevents consistent care, leading to referrals to the broader mental health network, which involves delays. To address these gaps, partnerships have been formed with university psychology departments,

allowing students to offer therapeutic support. Additional referrals are made to free services, such as those provided by the archdiocese, to ensure children and adolescents affected by technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse can access psychological care.

Transportation plays a critical role in facilitating access to care, especially for families living in remote and low-income areas of Brazil. As one professional notes, many families cannot afford transportation and live far from service centres, making it difficult to maintain continuity in psychological support. While home visits are sometimes used to bridge this gap, relying solely on fixed location services like CREAS is insufficient in a country like Brazil, where rural distances pose significant barriers. Expanding transportation support and decentralizing services are essential to ensure equitable access to care. In other settings and contexts, technology-enabled service delivery, such as remote legal, mental health and social services, has been used to address access barriers, although such approaches were not identified within the scope of this research. Where implemented, these modalities require careful design and monitoring to ensure they are safe, appropriate and responsive to the needs and circumstances of individual children.

Improvements in infrastructure and human resources should also provide some flexibility for scheduling visits after work hours. One young person explained the challenges attending appointments during working hours:

“

No, I tried through the government, through the SUS [Sistema Único de Saúde / Unified Health System –Brazil's public healthcare system], but unfortunately, they scheduled my appointment right when I was working and I spoke to my boss and he said that if I kept disappearing like that, I wouldn't be able to keep my job. So I lost my appointment slot. I can't do it now. I don't have the money to pay for private help, and the free slot I lost because of work. But I hope to manage it. (YP)

”

4.3 CHALLENGES

Lastly, professionals emphasize the importance of integrated, multidisciplinary care for victims of sexual violence, recognizing that effective support requires coordination across health, social services and legal professionals. However, they also point to persistent challenges in facilitating referrals, sharing case information and maintaining communication between institutions, issues that are often exacerbated by heavy workloads. These gaps are especially problematic when children seek care in one region but reside in another, leading to missed follow-ups and fragmented support, as in the example below.

“

The child lives in [neighbourhood in the north-west region of the city of São Paulo], so the service must be [in that same area]. And we end up not getting the feedback. That's a complicating factor. How do you do it? You make the referral, but you don't get the feedback. Today, I think around 80 per cent, 70 to 80 per cent of the children seen here come from another region. (FW)

”

The lack of a strongly connected network contributes to the challenges described in this chapter, where responsibilities are unclear and victims may have to recount their experiences repeatedly. This increases the risk of retraumatization and jeopardizes effective implementation of the protected listening law.

Invisibility of online exploitation and abuse

Although the Disrupting Harm data in Brazil demonstrate the negative impact that tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse can have on children, the interviews indicated that cases that do not involve any in-person component may be overlooked, misunderstood and perceived as less severe than those where contact sexual abuse occurs.

Professionals interviewed spoke mainly about tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse that involved contact sexual abuse. This may reflect low disclosure of cases occurring solely online, or a lack of recognition and guidance among parents, teachers and other adults close to children. Many parents, for example, struggle to grasp the seriousness of online-only abuse and often turn to front-line workers for support and guidance. As a result, children may miss out on essential psychological and social services.

“

So, I'm left wondering how often this must happen and it just doesn't come to light. So, I think this is very important, the identification of these cases, and I think this involves [a child's caregivers]. Who does this child tell, who does this teenager tell that an image of him is circulating online? Who is this trustworthy person? (FW)

”

Professionals also emphasized a widespread lack of understanding across the child protection network about what tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse is and how it impacts children.

“

Look, I think that, in fact, we need to understand the violence and the seriousness of the cases we receive and the damage that is caused and the emotional impact it has on children and adolescents, especially when we think of images of abuse and sexual exploitation of children. (FW)

”

This lack of understanding is also reflected in the challenges that professionals face when identifying appropriate pathways to care for victims.

“

Then, when these online situations happen, which I have observed to this day, when I have provided assistance to the network, it doesn't identify that the child has to go to, for example, a specialized health service, the network doesn't identify that sometimes the child has to go to the Forensic Medical Institute because the case is online. But does the fact that it is online or that there has been no physical contact rule out sexual violence? No. (FW)

”

A professional described supporting a child who did not get adequate support and attention because the professionals themselves did not understand the severity of the abuse and how this led to more long-term consequences for the child (e.g. mental health problems, dropping out of school and drug use).

“

And I even remember discussing this as a team and, without passing judgment on my colleagues, I remember us collectively, in this effort to understand this situation, because it was something very new, I suddenly looked at that team and had a really generalized difficulty, like, what kind of violence is this, what kind of violence is it, is it exploitation? Isn't it? How this platform works, many people didn't even know it existed... (FW)

”

Professionals often overlook the impact of 'online-only' abuse when receiving referrals, which usually focus on physical harm. Through ongoing care, they may discover the child also experienced online sexual exploitation or abuse, highlighting the need for time and attention to understand its effects. For some experts the lack of awareness or prioritization of 'online-only' cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse indicates a broader culture of impunity, where perpetrators of non-physical abuse frequently escape accountability due to the perceived lesser severity of their actions. Instead, a young person explained, when a child is subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse, the responsibility is put on the child to block the perpetrator without follow-up actions from the private company on making sure the perpetrator does not create new accounts: *"It's something I don't understand. On Facebook you report the person. You have all the evidence to report the person. But they don't shut down that person's account, you know?" (YP).*

The limited understanding and attention to cases of 'online-only' sexual exploitation and abuse and insufficient action from online platforms contributes to a culture of impunity, where perpetrators face little accountability and children are left without adequate protection. When considering possible courses of action, professionals discussed the need to better understand child sexual exploitation and abuse that only occurs via online channels, as well as the support required by those victims. In addition, a front-line worker underscored the importance of including questions about tech-facilitated abuse into access to care protocols, while others highlighted the role that therapeutic spaces play, especially when they are safe environments where children can openly discuss the exploitation and abuse that they suffered and the impact it has had on them.

5. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND LEGAL REMEDIES



5.1 LEGAL SAFEGUARDS

Brazilian legislation provides several safeguards for those children under 18 involved in legal proceedings. The law guarantees the right of children and adolescents subjected to sexual violence to receive specialized psychosocial assistance that facilitates their participation and protects them from inappropriate behaviour by any person involved in the judicial process.⁹¹ They are also entitled to receive age-appropriate information about their rights, available services, legal representation, protection measures, reparation of damages and any procedures they are involved in, as well as to provide statements in a language other than Portuguese, if needed.⁹² Furthermore, the *Statute of the Child and Adolescent* guarantees all individuals under 18 access to the Public Defender's Office and states that free legal aid must be provided to any child in need.⁹³

Judges must also take the necessary measures to preserve the privacy, private life, honour and image of any victim of violence.⁹⁴ It is worth noting that a bill has been introduced to criminalize the unauthorized disclosure of the name or image of a child or adolescent victim or witness of violence, as well as the publication of police, administrative or judicial documents pertaining to the case. The penalty envisaged is six months to two years in prison.⁹⁵ As of January 2026, the bill was awaiting scheduling for discussion and voting in the Welfare, Social Assistance, Children, Adolescents and Family Commission of the Chamber of Deputies.⁹⁶

In cases where there is a risk to the life or physical integrity of a child or adolescent victim or witness of violence, the judge must adopt appropriate protective measures.⁹⁷ If the police determine that the victim or witness is at risk, they should also request such measures from the competent judicial authority. These may include the preventive detention of the suspect, access to support services for the victim and their family or admission of the child or adolescent into a protection programme for threatened victims or witnesses.⁹⁸

The safeguards outlined in this section establish a strong framework to protect the rights and best interests of children and adolescents during legal proceedings. The ongoing legislative initiative mentioned above also points to continued efforts to build on and further strengthen existing safeguards. **The following section examines the special deposition process in Brazil as an example of good practice and addresses key challenges identified by professionals.**

91. Brazil, Law no. 13,431, art. 4-5.

92. Ibid.

93. Brazil, *Statute of the Child and Adolescent*, art. 153.

94. Brazil, *Penal Code*, art. 201, § 6º.

95. Nobre, Noéli and Marcelo Oliveira, "Bill establishes punishment for those who disclose data about child victims of violence", Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, 16 September 2020 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/692259-projeto-estabelece-punicao-para-quem-divulgar-dados-de-crianca-vitima-de-violencia/> (accessed 30 January 2026).

96. Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, Procedure file: PL 2141/2015", 30 June 2015 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao/?idProposicao=1548554> (accessed 30 January 2026).

97. Brazil, Law no. 13,431, art. 12, § 4º.

98. Ibid., art. 21.

5.2 SPECIAL DEPOSITION

Brazilian legislation establishes a special deposition (“*depoimento especial*”) procedure to conduct forensic interviews with child or adolescent victims or witnesses of violence, including sexual violence, before police or judicial authorities.⁹⁹ Special depositions are subject to the rules of judicial secrecy, and measures are in place to protect the child or adolescent from any contact with the alleged perpetrator or with any other person who poses a risk of threat, coercion or discomfort during the process.¹⁰⁰

Special depositions must be conducted by trained professionals, who will explain the process to the child and inform them about their rights.¹⁰¹ In November 2019, a resolution by the National Justice Council established that state and federal courts must train professionals who take depositions from children to use the *Brazilian Protocol for Forensic Interviews with Child and Adolescent Victims or Witnesses of Violence*.¹⁰² This resource contains a semi-structured interview method that is flexible and adaptable to the various developmental stages of children and adolescents.¹⁰³ The National Justice Council offers an online training course on the Protocol, while in-person courses on special depositions are delivered by state Schools of the Magistracy.¹⁰⁴

Before the deposition, the interviewer assesses the child’s emotional state, willingness to speak and memory of the abuse. This step also helps determine their developmental stage and build trust. If the child agrees to proceed, the interviewer explains the process in detail, as described by a justice professional:

“

And then I explain, you know, the hearing works like this. I bring them here into the room to show them when it starts. Here, here, here’s the computer. This is the camera; this is the microphone. You’re going to sit here. The door will be closed, who will stay, who won’t. Who will see? Will so-and-so see? No, he won’t. All the questions, like that. (JP)

”

By law, special depositions must be audio- and video-recorded,¹⁰⁵ and take place in an appropriate and welcoming setting that guarantees the privacy of the child or adolescent.¹⁰⁶ They are also livestreamed to the hearing room,¹⁰⁷ with safeguards in place allowing judges to restrict such broadcasting where necessary to ensure the safety of the victim or witness of violence.¹⁰⁸ A justice professional below describes the room where the deposition takes place.

99. Brazil, Law no. 13,431, art. 8.

100. Ibid., art. 9.

101. Ibid., art. 12, II.

102. Brazil, National Justice Council, Resolution no. 299, 5 November 2019, art. 14 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.tjes.jus.br/wp-content/uploads/RES-299-19-CNJ.pdf>

103. Childhood Brasil, National Justice Council, UNICEF and National Children’s Advocacy Center, *Protocol for Forensic Interviews with Child and Adolescent Victims or Witnesses of Violence*, Brasília, 2020 [in Portuguese]. https://www.tjpb.jus.br/sites/default/files/anexos/2020/07/protocolo_brasileiro_de_entrevista_forense_com_crianças_e_adolescentes_vitimas_ou_testemunhas_de_violencia.pdf.

104. Brazil, National Justice Council, “Childhood and youth: Classes and capacity-building”, no date [in Portuguese]. <https://www.cnj.jus.br/programas-e-acoas/infancia-e-juventude/cursos-e-capacitacoes/> (accessed 27 September 2025).

105. Brazil, Law no. 13,431, art. 12, VI.

106. Ibid., art. 10.

107. Ibid., art. 12, III.

108. Ibid., art. 12 § 4°.

“

When a child or adolescent suffers some kind of crime and they are summoned, their representative is summoned to appear in court with the child so that they can give their testimony; the child doesn't go to a normal courtroom, as if they were an adult, to answer the judge, the prosecutor and the lawyers. They are sent to the centre, where we have special rooms, in a playful way, and in these rooms we have a room that is different from the one where the testimony is taken, which is a room where there is a camera, where this camera films us and sends our image, in this case, the interviewer, the psychologist, the social worker, whoever is qualified to do it, to take the testimony, and send this image of the two of them to a courtroom. (JP)

”

It is important to note that the practice of live streaming or recording forensic interviews has not yet been tested from a trauma-informed perspective for children and adolescents subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse that involved the use of digital technologies, including but not limited to cameras. While this is well intentioned, children and adolescents subjected to these types of abuse may have heightened sensitivity to being recorded or to the use of cameras by an adult. For some, the presence of a camera may trigger feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment or fear of further exposure. However, this may not be the case for any or all children and adolescents. More research is needed to ensure that mandatory video recording aligns with trauma-informed principles, balancing the need for reliable evidence with the psychological needs of victims and survivors of these types of abuse on a case-by-case basis.

A justice professional explains how often children and young people blame themselves for the exploitation and abuse they have been subjected to or justify it. The participant went on to explain how an important part of the deposition is that it repositions them as victims of a crime. Other professionals explain that the process has been intentionally designed to empower children, allowing them to take active control and ownership of the deposition.

The law guarantees that, during special depositions, the child or adolescent can freely recount the abuse, with the trained professional intervening only when necessary to clarify the facts.¹⁰⁹ In principle, the process starts with the open account or free report of what happened, given by the individual being heard. This initial step must be carried out without external interruption,¹¹⁰ while respecting extended pauses, silences and any time the child or adolescent may require.¹¹¹ According to another justice professional, part of the value of this procedure is that the victim or witness of violence gets to participate in judicial proceedings in a way that protects them. Their story is not simplified by an adult because it is transmitted directly to the court.

Questions from participants in the proceedings are deferred until the initial free account has concluded.¹¹² As part of the process, the interviewer goes to the courtroom to determine if there are any questions. Part of the interviewer's role is to determine which questions are important and go back to put them to the child or adolescent in a child-friendly and trauma-informed way: “So, our job in the courtroom is also to mediate these questions. Which questions are important? Which ones are just a bit, I don't know, sensationalist or moralist?” (JP). Another psychologist trained in the special deposition emphasizes the role of the interviewer in deciding which questions to ask:

109. Ibid., art. 12, II.

110. Brazil, Decree no. 9,603, art. 26, § 1º, III.

111. Ibid., art. 26, § 1º, VI.

112. Ibid., art. 26, § 1º, IV.

5.2 SPECIAL DEPOSITION

“

At some stage the victims want to talk and they can't give all the information at once. They can't. They need to talk. And then you imagine, the victim comes to you and says, 'Ah, but I didn't say something that was very important,' because she was blocked that day and couldn't speak. Or because she was embarrassed and couldn't say it. Or because she was threatened and couldn't complete it. (JP)

”

Whenever possible, special depositions should be carried out only once. The process cannot be repeated, unless the competent authority deems it essential and the child or adolescent victim of violence or their legal representative agrees to it.¹¹³ According to one justice professional, a second interview might be conducted at the child's request.

“

If there are questions, for example, the judge will open it up to the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Public Prosecutor's Office has questions, the interviewer takes notes of the questions, modifies the questions if necessary, the interviewer is also not obliged to ask all the questions, they can even answer some questions if they believe the child has already answered them, they can refuse to ask some questions that they consider inappropriate or that could lead to some kind of revictimization or violence towards the child, so they have the option of not asking the question. (JP)

”

Despite active efforts to reduce revictimization, a professional acknowledges that there is always going to be a level of revictimization if a second deposition takes place, since the child is being asked to tell the story again. This underscores the importance of ensuring that a second special deposition is only used in truly exceptional circumstances and is preceded by careful assessment of its necessity and the potential impact on the child.

A challenge identified by professionals is the long period of time that can elapse (years, in some cases) between the filing of a complaint and the special deposition. This delay points to a gap between the spirit of the normative framework and its implementation, as in cases of sexual violence the law requires the special deposition to follow the precautionary procedure for the advance production of evidence.¹¹⁴ The legal logic is to ensure that the child's testimony is taken at an early stage in the proceedings, rather than being deferred to later phases. When this logic is not reflected in practice and the special deposition is significantly delayed, its intended protective purpose is significantly weakened. Indeed, for children who have not talked about the sexual exploitation and abuse since the first disclosure, this process may feel like a new disclosure and something they are not psychologically ready for or willing to do.

Another challenge identified by professionals is the system's capacity to implement special depositions in a large state such as Amazonas, which does not have rooms or staff to conduct special depositions in all municipalities. This implies that some depositions are conducted online, which places a limitation on the child-centric approach of this process.

¹¹³. Brazil, Law no. 13,431, art. 11, § 2°.

¹¹⁴. Ibid., art. 11, § 1°.

“

And we're managing to serve Manaus, even though we're a small team. But what happens? The cities far from the capital also have high demand. Not least because our state has a very high rate of violence, especially sexual crimes. But what happens is that our region doesn't have the staff or even the structure to take these statements in this special way, with an interviewer, in a special room. What happens is that these victims are often not heard or, sometimes, they ask us, from the centre, to hear them. And that creates a very big problem, which is that we often have to take a statement online. You see, if it's not that pleasant to do an interview like this online [referring to the research interview underway], imagine collecting a statement of this nature. (JP)

”

As of July 2023, Brazil had 1,557 special interview rooms to take special depositions throughout the country.¹¹⁵ While this figure is encouraging, the account above suggests an uneven distribution of infrastructure and resources, particularly in rural and remote areas. In May 2023, the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship announced an initial investment of R\$2.5 million to set up integrated centres for protected listening (“centros integrados de escuta protegida”) in every region.¹¹⁶ At the time, a media outlet noted that the budget could prove insufficient, given that in Ceará alone, state authorities had invested R\$1.4 million in such centres.¹¹⁷ Greater and more equitable investment is therefore needed to ensure that all regions have sufficient centres to carry out special depositions and specialized listening hearings in a child-centric manner.

Overall, the special deposition procedure embodies a rights-centred approach, enabling children and adolescents subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse to participate in judicial proceedings in a safe setting, with the support of trained professionals, and safeguards in place to minimize revictimization and undue exposure. However, the effectiveness of this normative framework ultimately depends on its implementation. The timely conduct of special depositions, supported by adequate and equitably distributed infrastructure and trained personnel in remote areas, is therefore critical to ensuring that this procedural safeguard operates as intended.

115. Daltoé Cezar, José Antônio “20 years of special depositions in Brazil”, Instituto Brasileiro de Direito de Família, 27 July 2023 [in Portuguese]. <https://ibdfam.org.br/artigos/2013/20+anos+do+depoimento+especial+no+Brasil> (accessed 30 January 2026).

116. Brazil, “Learn about the 12 new government actions to combat the abuse and exploitation of children and adolescents”, Gov.br, 18 May 2023 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2023/maio/conheca-as-12-novas-acoes-do-governo-pelo-enfrentamento-ao-abuso-e-exploracao-de-criancas-e-adolescentes> (accessed 30 January 2026).

117. Lovisi, Pedro and Marcel Rizzo, “Integrated centres aim to address the lack of coordination among child protection agencies”, *Folha de S.Paulo*, 18 May 2023 [in Portuguese]. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/seminariosfolha/2023/05/centros-integrados-podem-resolver-falta-de-conexao-entre-orgaos-de-protecao-a-crianca.shtml> (accessed 30 January 2026).

5.3 ACCESS TO COMPENSATION

Access to compensation is an essential element of the right to justice for survivors, providing both recognition of and material redress for the harm they have suffered. Brazilian law guarantees that children and adolescents subjected to sexual violence have the right to reparations¹¹⁸ and that convicted offenders must compensate victims of crime.¹¹⁹ The judge typically sets a minimum amount when issuing the ruling,¹²⁰ provided that the prosecutor or the victim formally requested it.¹²¹ The victim may, after the final verdict, seek enforcement of the compensation in a civil court,¹²² where the amount can be reviewed.¹²³ Victims of crime can also file a civil suit against the perpetrator during or within three years of the criminal proceedings.¹²⁴ In December 2023, the Chamber of Deputies approved a bill to extend this limit to 20 years for sexual crimes against children and adolescents, starting from the date they turn 18.¹²⁵ As of January 2026, approval of the bill was pending before the Senate.¹²⁶

Although no direct questions were asked about compensation during the interviews, professionals and young people did not discuss cases in which financial compensation had been pursued or awarded through the formal justice system, despite the existence of a legal framework that would allow children subjected to technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse to pursue such remedies.

Access to compensation is an essential element of the right to justice for survivors, providing both recognition of and material redress for the harm they have suffered.

118. Brazil, Law no. 13,431, art. 5, XII.

119. Brazil, *Penal Code*, art. 91.

120. Brazil, *Penal Procedure Code*, art. 387.

121. Brazil, Public Prosecutor's Office of Paraná, "Newsletter 350 | Reparation of damages in criminal sentences", 13 September 2016 [in Portuguese]. <https://site.mppr.mp.br/criminal/Pagina/Informativo-350-Reparacao-de-Danos-na-Sentenca-Penal-Condinatoria> (accessed 21 January 2026).

122. Brazil, *Penal Procedure Code*, art. 63.

123. Galvão, Danyelle, "Notes on civil reparation in criminal sentences", Instituto Brasileiro de Direito Penal Econômico, 3 November 2020 [in Portuguese]. <https://ibdpe.com.br/reparacao-nas-sentencas-penais/> (accessed 30 January 2026).

124. Brazil, *Penal Procedure Code*, art. 64; Brazil, Civil Code, Law no. 10,406, 10 January 2002, art. 206, § 3º, V [in Portuguese]. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/2002/10406compilada.htm.

125. Souza, Murilo and Roberto Seabra, "Bill extends deadline for children and adolescents to seek civil redress for sexual abuse", Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, 25 February 2022 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/854075-projeto-amplia-prazo-para-que-criancas-e-adolescentes-busquem-reparacao-civil-por-abuso-sexual/> (accessed 30 January 2026).

126. Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, "Procedure file: PL 5705/2016", 29 June 2016 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=2089686&fichaAmigavel=nao> (accessed 3 February 2026).

6. PREVENTION EFFORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The previous chapters of this report shed light on the broader societal and systemic factors that enable violence against children. A strong understanding of these underlying factors is crucial for effective prevention. This chapter outlines some existing initiatives in Brazil, as well as key considerations for existing and new prevention efforts based on the data in this report.

6.1 POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES

The *National Plan to Combat Violence Against Children and Adolescents 2022–2025* includes actions addressing tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, focusing on training Guardianship Councillors, engaging both public and private organizations in response efforts¹²⁷ and stimulating the exchange of knowledge to develop protection strategies.¹²⁸ However, the plan was criticized for being underfunded and for lacking comprehensive strategies to prevent child sexual exploitation.¹²⁹ As the plan has expired, the new plan under development as of January 2026 should place greater emphasis on tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, supported by adequate resources and comprehensive prevention strategies.

In addition to the plan, Brazil has spearheaded various initiatives to prevent tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, demonstrating consistent commitment to strengthening child protection efforts in a digitalized world:

- **January 2023:** Brazil adopted a *National Digital Education Policy* to incorporate digital education in schools, covering both the promotion of safe online practices and the protection of children's and adolescents' privacy.¹³⁰
- **October 2023:** The Presidency presented a *Brazilian Media Education Strategy*, aimed at disseminating educational content to promote the safe use of digital media by children, both inside and outside the school environment.¹³¹
- **October 2023:** The Ministry of Justice and Public Security launched *De Boa na Rede*, an online information portal to help caregivers protect their children in digital environments and monitor the content they access online.¹³² However, this was offline as of December 2025.¹³³
- **October 2023:** the Ministry of Justice and Public Security created a Digital Rights Secretariat responsible for proposing and evaluating measures to make cyberspace safer for users, including children and adolescents, and for formulating and implementing actions to protect rights in the digital environment, as well as policies to support victims of cybercrime.¹³⁴
- **November 2024:** The Brazilian Government committed to developing solutions to improve the age verification system in digital environments by December 2026, to limit children's and adolescents' access to content that is inappropriate for their age, while guaranteeing the right to data protection of these individuals.¹³⁵
- **March 2025:** The government launched *Children, Adolescents and Screens – Guide to the Use of Digital Devices*, an educational resource that includes practical tools for families. It recommends parental supervision, age-appropriate access to devices and stronger safety measures to prevent children's exposure to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, while also providing clear guidance on how to report cases.¹³⁶

127. Brazil, *National Plan to Combat Violence against Children and Adolescents – Matrix 02: Sexual exploitation*.

128. Brazil, Decree no. 10,701, 17 May 2021, art. 3 [in Portuguese]. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2019-2022/2021/Decreto/D10701impresao.htm

129. Brazil, Federal Senate, Senate Agency, "Brazil needs to fight child sexual abuse with more commitment, says debate", 24 June 2022 [in Portuguese]. <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/06/24/brasil-precisa-combater-abuso-sexual-na-infancia-com-mais-empenho-aponta-debate> (accessed 30 January 2026); Brazilian Coalition to End Violence against Children and Adolescents, *Technical Analysis: National Plan to Combat Violence against Children and Adolescents*, Brasília, 2022 [in Portuguese].

130. Brazil, Law no. 14,533, 11 January 2023, art. 3 [in Portuguese]. https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_Ato2023-2026/2023/Lei/L14533.htm (accessed 30 January 2026).

131. Brazil, Presidency of the Republic, Secretariat for Social Communication, "Brazilian Media Education Strategy presents public policies aimed at the population", 31 October 2023 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.gov.br/secom/pt-br/acompanhe-a-secom/noticias/2023/10/estrategia-brasileira-de-educacao-midiatica-apresenta-as-politicas-publicas-voltadas-para-a-populacao> (accessed 30 January 2026).

132. Brazil, Ministry of Justice and Public Security, "MJSP launches website with guidelines for protecting children and adolescents in virtual environments", 16 October 2023 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.gov.br/mj/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/mjsp-lanca-site-com-orientacoes-para-a-protecao-de-criancas-e-adolescentes-em-ambientes-virtuais> (accessed 30 January 2026).

133. See *De Boa na Rede* at <https://www.gov.br/deboanarede>.

134. Brazil, Ministry of Justice and Public Security, "MJSP creates Digital Rights Secretariat", 31 October 2023 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.gov.br/mj/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/mjsp-cria-a-secretaria-de-direitos-digitais> (accessed 30 January 2026).

135. Brazil, "Government pledge", First Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children, 7 November 2024. <https://endviolenceagainstchildrenconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Brazil-pledge.pdf>

136. Brazil, *Children, Adolescents and Screens: Guide on the use of digital devices*, Brasília, 2025 [in Portuguese]. https://www.gov.br/secom/pt-br/assuntos/uso-de-telas-por-criancas-e-adolescentes/guia/guia-de-telas_sobre-usos-de-dispositivos-digitais-versaoweb.pdf

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- **July 2025:** Brazil established an Intersectoral Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents in the Digital Environment. The committee brings together federal government agencies, civil society representatives, experts and law enforcement authorities to develop integrated and sustainable policies for the protection of children online.¹³⁷
 - **October 2025:** The Chamber of Deputies adopted a bill to establish a *National Policy for the Protection of Early Childhood in the Digital Environment*. The bill designates the protection of children up to 6 years old in the digital environment as a priority policy area and grants the federal government authority to adopt related initiatives, such as national awareness and prevention campaigns on the risks and impacts of early, prolonged and inappropriate use of digital technologies.¹³⁸ As of January 2026, it was pending review by the Senate.¹³⁹

These initiatives show the breadth of actions taken at the policy and awareness level. Their effectiveness ultimately depends on how they are implemented on the ground. Front-line workers and justice professionals, who work directly with children, families and communities, reflected on the prevention efforts they see in practice.

137. Brazil, Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, Joint Ordinance no. 1, 14 July 2025 [in Portuguese]. https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/navegue-por-temas/crianca-e-adolescente/publicacoes/entregas-da-campanha-35-anos-do-eca-justica-social-e-ambiental/SEI_5014839_Portaria_Conjunta_1_1_.pdf

138. Tiago Miranda, Eduardo Piovesan e and Pierre Triboli, “Chamber approves measures to protect early childhood in the digital environment”, Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, 15 October 2025 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/noticias/1212427-camara-aprova-medidas-de-protecao-a-primeira-infancia-no-ambiente-digital/> (accessed 30 January 2026).

139. Brazil, Chamber of Deputies, “Procedure file: 1971/2025”, 29 April 2025 [in Portuguese]. <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=2502882> (accessed 30 January 2026).

6.2 PREVENTION EFFORTS AS SEEN BY PROFESSIONALS

Professionals described some prevention efforts they are aware of, mostly reflecting on delivering talks on online safety or online violence, typically conducted in schools or youth centres or in some cases, parents' awareness meetings:



We need to go and talk to the students, talk about sexual violence, talk about internet crimes, talk about bullying, cyberbullying, cyberpaedophilia, all of which are crimes, and that's not good for anyone. [...] So, guidance for students, parents and education professionals is one of our goals now, for the next few weeks, to be going there and talking. This must be done. (FW)



Based on discussions with professionals, schools emerged as critical spaces for intervention not only through education but also as environments that can facilitate disclosures. According to professionals, creative engagement strategies such as storytelling and conversation circles are key to this process: *"Storytelling, theatre, conversation circles, conversation circles with children, conversation circles with fathers and mothers. And this made a big difference, because we realized that the more we were able to dedicate ourselves to prevention, to the scope of prevention, the more spontaneous disclosures increased."* (FW)

According to professionals, the effectiveness of school campaigns also depends on the ability to reach wider areas and to strategically prioritize regions with higher rates of violence: *"So we began to map out where the most violence was occurring, using the system for notifying health problems and all the cases referred by the network. And we began to develop strategies to talk to children about violence."* (FW)

Analysis of relevant policy in Brazil indicates that the emphasis on the role of schools has been accompanied by institutional training initiatives aimed at strengthening professionals' capacity to respond to online harm. The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, alongside various municipal and state education departments, has implemented initiatives to raise students' awareness of online safety and protection, with particular attention paid to teacher training.¹⁴⁰ In September 2022, SaferNet Brasil launched a curriculum designed to equip teachers to guide secondary school students in developing practical online safety skills, such as configuring privacy settings, reporting abuse and accessing support services. The material also covers topics such as sexual extortion, sexting and the protection of sexual dignity in the digital world.¹⁴¹

While not discussed by professionals in relation to prevention, data from this report highlight two important points that should inform prevention efforts. First is the finding that **in many cases, the perpetrator is someone known to the child.** Being exploited or abused by someone in the child's immediate environment might make it more difficult for children to recognize the violence they are being subjected to. If children are emotionally or financially dependent on the perpetrator, this might make disclosures more difficult. **The second finding is that children are also sexually exploiting or abusing other children, albeit in a much smaller proportion compared with adults.** This could point to a lack of awareness among children who have displayed harmful behaviours about how this conduct is harmful and may point to a need for these topics to be integrated into comprehensive sexuality and relationship education.

140. g1, "Schools train professors to teach students about the dangers of the internet", *Bom Dia Brasil*, 28 August 2015 [in Portuguese]. <https://g1.globo.com/bom-dia-brasil/noticia/2015/08/escolas-treinam-professores-para-ensinar-alunos-sobre-perigos-da-web.html> (accessed 30 January 2026).

141. SaferNet and United Kingdom, "Hello, professor, we have an invitation!", no date [in Portuguese]. https://www.safernet.org.br/site/sites/default/files/Caderno_Eletiva_Cidadania_Digital_DAP22.pdf; SaferNet, "Cyber education in schools boosted with launch of new curriculum", no date [in Portuguese]. <https://new.safernet.org.br/content/educacao-cibernetica-nas-escolas-e-impulsionada-com-lancamento-de-nova-eletiva#> (accessed 30 January 2026).

While educating children about online safety can be one part of addressing tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, a prevention approach that focuses primarily on children's behaviours can risk overlooking the broader social and systemic drivers that enable perpetrators to commit crimes against children. It also fails to account for the increasing overlap between online and in-person violence.

In addition, as demonstrated throughout this report, perpetrators often act opportunistically. They take advantage of any perceived vulnerability in a child's circumstances, as well as gaps in protection systems and the protective mechanisms of online platforms to harm children.

This raises important considerations about both the fairness and effectiveness of prevention efforts that place heavy emphasis on children's knowledge and actions. Prevention efforts that focus heavily on children's internet use and actions online tend to prioritize individual behaviour and put the onus on children to protect themselves, which may divert attention from community, policy and structural-level interventions that address the root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly the motivations and actions of perpetrators.

“

Storytelling, theatre, conversation circles, conversation circles with children, conversation circles with fathers and mothers. And this made a big difference, because we realized that the more we were able to dedicate ourselves to prevention, to the scope of prevention, the more spontaneous disclosures increased. (FW)

”

6.3 SHIFTING THE FOCUS FROM CHILDREN TO PERPETRATORS

The data presented throughout this report reveal several patterns in how perpetrators operate. Even though perpetrators' tactics may change over time, these findings remain an important starting point to identify areas for prevention.

Unwanted contact online: Children and professionals often spoke of children receiving sexualized content from an unknown perpetrator, or unwanted messages requesting sexual talk or sexual acts. This could be a one-off abusive interaction or part of the perpetrator's ongoing efforts to desensitize the child to sexual content, or it may be evidence of ongoing sexual exploitation and abuse. This points to safety gaps on social media, instant messaging and online gaming platforms where perpetrators can easily contact children via their accounts. While prevention efforts often focus on teaching children to block the perpetrator or report them to the platform, these steps come after exploitation or abuse have already occurred and do not stop perpetrators from creating new accounts. It also raises the question of why the responsibility is placed on the child, rather than on creating obstacles to prevent perpetrators from contacting children in the first place. A young person reflected on how ineffective this approach can be: *"They also tell you to block that account and any other accounts that person creates, but that didn't happen, you know? He always sent from another account. WhatsApp was the same, another number, Instagram, another account."* (YP)

Creating fake profiles: Perpetrators consistently take advantage of the anonymity provided by the internet to reach out to children, gain their trust and build a relationship with them. While children should be made aware of this risk, the progress of digital technologies, including generative artificial intelligence, will only make it more challenging for children (and adults) to verify people's identities online. A justice professional reflected on a case where:

“

A girl started talking to another girl, she made friends with this girl, but behind this girl was a man, who just happened to be the community leader. And then she made friends with this girl, and they became very close, telling each other everything, until one day the adult, always more perceptive, always more of a swindler, said he wanted to see his classmate's body, because her body was different, that kind of thing, and the girl sent him. (JP)

”

Alternative prevention mechanisms are therefore needed at a system level that allow children to identify fake identities and profiles.

Taking advantage of power dynamics or economic vulnerability: Perpetrators exploit any leverage they have over children, including power imbalances, money or gifts, deception and threats. Economic vulnerability increases children's risk, as financial hardship may lead families to view exchanging sexual content for money as a way out of poverty – often reinforced by the false belief that online exploitation is less harmful than in-person abuse. While these forms of violence can impact children across socioeconomic strata, addressing root causes of economic vulnerability can contribute to protecting all children.

Taking advantage of lack of community support: Perpetrators often take advantage of social norms, stigma and taboos to force children to comply with their sexual demands. Examples include threatening to tell parents about the child's interactions with the perpetrator, especially if the child shared sexual content with the perpetrator online. Even when children are coerced into situations that may involve socially unacceptable behaviour and perpetrators threaten to expose them, it is vital that children can be confident that they will be met with support and protection, rather than blame or punishment for their perceived role in the exploitation and abuse. Fostering safe and supportive relationships between children and trusted adults is therefore crucial to safeguard against these threats.

Non-consensual sharing of sexual content:

Threats to share a child's sexual images are a common coercive tactic, now intensified by easily accessible generative artificial intelligence tools that enable the creation of increasingly realistic sexual images of children.

Further, these developments highlight the need for platforms to prevent the creation and spread of such content through strong detection and takedown mechanisms. It also highlights the role of justice authorities in ensuring consistent, timely and child-centred responses to both real and artificial intelligence-generated child sexual abuse material.

Debates around non-consensual sharing of children's sexual images that focus on the self-generated nature of this content are increasingly outdated and risk shifting blame onto children. They overemphasize who created the photos rather than the context in which they were produced, including power dynamics, coercion and the role of the perpetrator. This undermines effective safeguarding and accountability.

7. CONCLUSION



7. CONCLUSION

In just one year, 19 per cent of internet-using children aged 12–17 in Brazil were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, with no significant differences by gender, area of residency, schooling status or level of parental education. While enabled by digital technologies, this violence occurs across online and in-person spaces and has serious, lifelong impacts, including increased risks of anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal ideation. Disrupting Harm data in Brazil show the central role of digital platforms and artificial intelligence in enabling perpetrators to identify, contact, and abuse and exploit children, underscoring the obligation incumbent on tech companies – backed by the country’s Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents – to ensure child-safe services.

Although Brazil has a strong legal framework, protections for adolescents are weaker than for younger children, despite evidence that adolescents are more frequently exposed to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse online. Professionals emphasize that, when it comes to access to care, gaps lie less in legislation than in implementation, citing challenges such as limited resources, unclear roles among child protection actors, and insufficient multisectoral coordination. At the same time, promising practices – such as specialized listening, child-centred special depositions and supportive care services – are already in place.

A persistent barrier remains the silence surrounding sexual violence against children.

Stigma, self-blame and normalization continue to hinder disclosure, even where services exist.

Addressing this requires a societal shift towards recognizing tech-facilitated sexual violence as a serious violation of children’s rights. This report concludes with evidence-based recommendations, developed and validated with national stakeholders and UNICEF Brazil’s Youth Council, to address these challenges.

A non-punitive, supportive approach and open dialogue can help children feel safe to disclose sooner, and ensure that their right to protection is balanced with their other rights as children.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Disrupting the harm caused by tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse against children requires comprehensive and sustained action from all stakeholders – families, communities, government representatives, law enforcement agencies, justice and social support service professionals, and the national and international technology and communications industry.

While children are part of the solution, the harm caused by these forms of sexual violence obliges adults to act to protect them; care must be taken not to put the onus on children to protect themselves from harm without support. The following detailed recommendations for action in Brazil are clustered under six key insights from the Disrupting Harm data and are signposted for different stakeholder groups. However, all these recommended actions are interlinked and are most effective if implemented in coordination.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

INSIGHT 1

Nineteen per cent of internet-using children aged 12–17 in Brazil were subjected to at least one instance of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in a one-year period, with older children being most affected. Brazil already has a strong and extensive legal framework addressing these forms of violence, yet certain forms are not fully criminalized and several provisions do not cover 12–17-year-olds.

Relevant for: Ministry of Justice and Public Security (MJSP) and National Congress

1. Enhance Brazil's already comprehensive legislation by **addressing remaining gaps related to tech-facilitated child sexual abuse and aligning the framework with international standards** to support effective investigation and prosecution.
 - a) Amend the *Statute of the Child and Adolescent* to eliminate age-based protection gaps, ensuring that all those under 18 years old are equally safeguarded from abuse and exploitation, including grooming for sexual purposes. Amendments should make clear that conduct such as enticing, harassing, instigating or coercing a child for sexual purposes, including facilitating access to pornographic material with the intent of engaging in unlawful sexual acts or inducing them to display themselves sexually, is prohibited regardless of the child's or adolescent's age.
 - b) Adopt legal provisions for the explicit criminalization of tech-facilitated sexual extortion of children. While existing laws may be applied, a dedicated provision, supported by a clear definition, would better capture the unique dynamics of this type of abuse and exploitation, including the coercive use of self-generated sexual material to extort money or sexual acts from a child.
 - c) Amend existing provisions on child sexual abuse material to criminalize deliberate access, even when the material is neither purchased nor rented.

INSIGHT 2

Perpetrators are using social media, gaming platforms and other digital technologies to identify, contact and harm children. They take advantage of public-facing apps to locate children before moving to more private messaging apps. They use child sexual abuse material – real or digitally generated – to blackmail and control children, while the anonymous and interactive nature of online platforms allows them to pose as peers and bypass detection. In this context, the *Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents* is a promising step in establishing tech companies as part of the solution and keeping them accountable for failures to safeguard children using their services. However, this does not only require legal obligations but also structured collaboration with companies as partners in child protection.

Relevant for: National Data Protection Agency (ANPD)

2. Ensure **robust implementation** of the *Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents* through clear and specific regulations. These regulations should be **built on existing evidence** and **enhanced through consultation** with relevant actors and rights holders. Effective implementation should be **regularly evaluated**.

Relevant for: ANPD

3. **Online services operating in Brazil** should be **mandated to coordinate using available tools and to securely share data** (e.g. signals such as hashes or URLs) between themselves **about cases of exploitation and abuse detected on their services**.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

4. To support in further coordination between online platforms, internet service providers and law enforcement, consider implementing INTERPOL's Worst of List of domains (IWOL).¹⁴²
5. In Brazil, Meta-owned platforms Instagram and **WhatsApp were the most common platforms** where exploitation and abuse took place, pointing to a need for more robust child safety features and reporting tools on their services.

Relevant for: National Congress, MJSP and Ministry of Education (MEC)

6. The *Statute of the Child and Adolescent* already criminalizes manipulating visual content to simulate a child in sexual material. **A 2025 bill seeking to explicitly criminalize generating such material through artificial intelligence** was pending review as of January 2026. **Supporting and advancing this or similar legislative efforts** would help ensure legislation keeps pace with emerging threats posed by new technologies and prevent the creation and dissemination of artificial intelligence-generated child sexual abuse material.
7. Although the role of Edtech platforms in enabling tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse has not been highlighted in the data, consultations with actors in Brazil reveal the need for further research on this topic to understand gaps in protection measures on these services and how perpetrators are using these platforms to harm children.

Relevant for: Government, private sector, tech companies and civil society

8. Encourage sustained, structured collaboration between public authorities, civil society and the private sector, including tech companies, recognizing platforms as key child protection stakeholders. This should include regular dialogue and information-sharing on emerging risks, patterns of harm, and effective prevention and response practices related to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Platforms themselves should proactively engage in these mechanisms, share relevant insights derived from their services and align their policies, design choices and enforcement practices with child protection standards.

INSIGHT 3

Perpetrators take advantage of real or perceived protection gaps in a child's life circumstances to exploit and abuse them. Particularly prevalent in Brazil were perpetrators taking advantage of situations where children lack community support, including when they speak out about the exploitation and abuse. There were also cases discussed during interviews where perpetrators took advantage of children and families living in economically fragile situations to sexually exploit them. The data also revealed cases of children sexually exploiting or abusing other children.

Relevant for: Federal Government of Brazil and National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (CONANDA)

9. Develop **consistent messaging and communications strategies** that can be adapted for children, families, schools and communities to **challenge victim-blaming and violence-supportive attitudes, including harmful gender norms, and promote positive behavioural change**. These messages should also take into consideration children's evolving capacities as they grow up and balance their autonomy and need for protection. **Messaging should be developed through safe, ethical consultations with children, families and duty bearers across the regions of Brazil**, taking into account the experiences and **needs of different groups, including Indigenous, Quilombola and Ribeirinho communities**.

Based on the findings of this report, key objectives of these campaigns and programmes in Brazil could focus on:

- Building awareness around the **many manifestations of (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse**, including the various ways that technologies are being used to harm children.

¹⁴². See <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Crimes-against-children/Blocking-and-categorizing-content>.

- Explaining **common tactics used by perpetrators** in Brazil, including the fact that perpetrators tend to be known to the child.
- **Challenging existing perceptions** that 'online-only' exploitation and abuse is not as harmful.
- Emphasizing that it is **never a child's fault**, regardless of their actions before or during the abuse (especially relevant in cases of image-based abuse).
- Highlighting that **community stigma and fear of parents' reactions is being weaponized by perpetrators** to coerce and trap children in a cycle of violence.
- **Building knowledge** among schools, families and children **around children's rights and existing legal protections** for children in Brazil (including what is criminalized in the law).

Relevant for: Ministry of Education and CONANDA

10. Educational initiatives for children, young people and families – whether new or existing – should comprehensively cover sexuality, how to build positive and healthy relationships, bodily autonomy and integrity, and consent. These initiatives should recognize that peers in Brazil are engaging in harmful sexual behaviour and that this may stem from a lack of understanding around why and how these behaviours harm children and violate their rights. They should also acknowledge that children are the most common confidant for disclosures and establish how to handle a disclosure safely and where to seek support. These initiatives should also transfer core concepts of bodily autonomy and consent to the digital world and online interactions.

Relevant for: Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship (MDHC) and Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger (MDS)

11. Develop **parenting programmes and seminars using the messages above**, but also with a focus on **how families can receive disclosures and how to react in a manner that is non-judgmental and supportive**. This can help to **foster an environment in which children are comfortable having conversations about relationships, sexuality or asking adults (including teachers) for advice**. Feelings of discomfort, shame or embarrassment can make children reluctant to discuss when things go wrong. While children should not be forced to engage in conversations that they are not comfortable with, adults should strive to create an environment in which children feel safe enough to report and seek help when experiencing sexual exploitation or abuse.

Relevant for: MDHC and MDS

12. Recognizing that sexual exploitation can affect children across all socioeconomic strata, **long-term prevention efforts in Brazil should nonetheless pay particular attention to addressing underlying factors such as economic vulnerability to protect all children effectively**, including those living in low-income settings and who may be exploited by perpetrators. In the short- and medium-term, social assistance programmes can be leveraged to reach children and families who may be at risk, including by raising awareness of exploitation as a rights violation.

INSIGHT 4

Many children in Brazil do not speak at all about the sexual exploitation and abuse they have endured. However, if they do, friends and parents (especially female caregivers) play a central role in providing support. Professionals noted that those receiving disclosures also need support to manage the trauma this can bring and to enable them to provide better support. In addition, it was rare for children surveyed to disclose the exploitation and abuse they had endured through formal services. Several barriers to reporting and disclosure were identified, including normalization of violence against girls and women, fear of not being believed and fear of punishment or restrictions, alongside parents' fears about the impact of reporting on their children. According to the survey, the most common barrier to reporting or seeking help via formal channels was not knowing how to make a report.

Relevant for: MJSP, MDHC, ANPD and CONANDA

13. Take steps to tackle the key barriers to disclosure and reporting among children, families, schools and communities:

- a) **Not knowing where to go:** Invest in nationwide campaigns that clearly signpost hotline and helpline numbers and that make the process of reporting or seeking professional help clear and accessible to children and families. A prerequisite to this is ensuring that dedicated helplines and hotlines are well resourced, free of charge and accessible to children and families, and that front-line workers receive continuous training in child-friendly and trauma-informed methods for receiving disclosures.

- b) **Not knowing who to tell and fearing they would not be believed:** Foster environments where children can talk about their relationships, fears and any harm they are facing to trusted adults. ([see Recommendation #11](#))
- c) **Feeling embarrassed and not wanting anyone to know:** Destigmatize exploitation and abuse and reframe it as a grave violation of children's rights, particularly through awareness-raising, education at school, training for teachers, social behavioural change strategies and parenting programmes ([see Recommendations #9 – 11](#)). In addition, provide anonymous reporting tools for individuals who may wish to report a case or seek help without immediately identifying themselves.
- d) **Not thinking it is serious enough:** Address the normalization of sexual violence by spreading consistent messaging around the various manifestations of exploitation and abuse and how they harm children, families and communities ([see Recommendation #9](#)).

Relevant for: MDHC and Ministry of Health (MS)

- 14. Make psychological care for families a mandatory part of the service provision** process. Provide families with counselling and support of their own as they process the harm done to their child and its aftermath, to manage any harmful reactions from families, reassure them against fears of punishment or removal of custody, but also to guide them through next steps so they understand their options and how their child will be supported at every step. To achieve this recommendation, **front-line services need to be well resourced, with enough trained professionals to provide these services to families consistently** ([see Recommendations #20 and #26](#)).
- 15. Strengthen and expand existing initiatives that ensure that transportation (free or at a reduced fee) is provided to families nationwide, but especially for those living in remote areas.** Financial support should also be offered to families who require it to access the relevant services and engage in the formal justice process.

Relevant for: MEC

- 16. Consult children and adolescents on how to best create safe listening spaces at schools and foster school environments** where children can understand and discuss sexual rights, consent, gender norms, relationships and different forms of violence, and speak about how they expect to be supported. These spaces should also enable them to participate actively in decisions that affect their online lives.
- 17.**As recommended by research participants, **strengthen the capacity of schools in prevention, detection and general awareness-raising** around tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. To do this, **ensure that tertiary curricula for anyone training to be a teacher or school administrator includes mandatory courses on children's rights, violence against children, safe disclosures and how to implement specialized listening. Complement this education with ongoing, practice-oriented training courses and seminars** on identifying signs of (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse and making appropriate referrals, in accordance with Law 13,431/2017 (*Lei da Escuta Protegida*). Actively involve and consult teachers in the design of training materials to ensure that the content is not disconnected from their realities.

INSIGHT 5

Challenges in recognizing and caring for cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse were noted by research participants. Interviewees spoke of a lack of understanding of what tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation was, who perpetrates it and cases that only had an online component being missed.

Relevant for: MDHC, MDS, and State Schools of Councils (Escolas de Conselhos)

- 18. Develop (or revise) training courses for any professional working with children and young people** on the various harms they may be subjected to, including but not limited to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. **Use the evidence available through this study and similar research to sensitize professionals to the harm that this kind of violence can do to children**, whether it occurs fully online or not. Training should address any misconceptions about who perpetrates these forms of violence and how to detect them. This training should be monitored, evaluated and continuously updated based on learnings and the latest evidence available. It should be provided to relevant professionals during their initial training, but also continuously during their service to ensure all professionals are up to date on child-friendly approaches and are aware of evolving trends in this type of crime.

Relevant for: MJSP, MDHC, MEC, MDS and MS

- 19.** To support case identification, **include questions about tech-facilitated abuse in access to referral pathways and care protocols**, within in the framework of Law 13,431/2017 (*Lei da Escuta Protegida*), and in forensic procedures, as suggested by front-line workers interviewed.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Relevant for: Various government ministries including Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management (MPO), MS, MEC and CONDNADA

20. Underlying all these recommendations is a **need to increase public funding for front-line service provision to address issues around low staff salaries, inadequate infrastructure and challenges with human resource capacity**. The issue of (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse should therefore be included in the disbursement agendas of relevant ministries. Otherwise, a lack of resourcing results in lower quality of specialized care and gaps in service provision for children and their families.

INSIGHT 6

Professionals working in the child protection network mentioned many promising practices across access to care and justice, including Law 13,431/2017 (also known as *Lei da Escuta Protegida*) that establishes the specialized listening and special deposition procedures; the availability of group therapies and child-friendly spaces; and trauma-informed practices during service provision. They also presented several challenges, including a lack of clear guidelines – particularly for the Guardianship Councils, challenges in cooperation between various child protection actors, a need for further training on specific laws and protocols, and human resource constraints.

Relevant for: MDS, MEC, MS, MDHC, MJSP, National Council of Justice (CNJ) and National Council of the Public Ministry (CNMP)

21. **Include tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in national protocols related to the specialized listening of children subjected to violence** and at the review process of the National Plan to Eliminate Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Relevant for: MDHC, MJSP, CONANDA and State Schools of Councils

22. **Require specialized, continuous training for all personnel handling cases involving children, including through a standardized national curriculum for Guardianship Councils and school personnel.** This training, aimed at all actors in the child protection system, including school personnel, should be integrated into existing child protection and justice for children programmes and systems. It should go beyond general awareness and be skills-based, with a focus on:

- Law 13,431/2017, clarifying the aims of specialized listening and special depositions, when they should be implemented and by whom.
- Child-centric interview techniques for protective listening (*escuta especializada e depoimento especial*) and trauma-informed approaches, including when working with children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse (e.g. mental and social impacts even when the violence occurs exclusively online, impacts of image-based abuse on victims, sensitivity that some children may have to being video-recorded, etc.).
- Practical sessions on how to register, refer and manage tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse cases through e Child Protection Information Management Systems (CPIMS) such as SIPIA.

These programmes should be consistently evaluated and updated to reflect the most recent developments in digital technology and patterns of offending.

Relevant for: MDHC, CONANDA and CNMP

23. As called for by research participants and in accordance with the National Council of the Public Prosecutor's Office (CNMP) recommendation 119 (24 June 2025), **ensure that there are standardized procedures around the role, responsibilities and ethical conduct of Guardianship Councils, including for tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse cases to support with a consistent and specialized response.** This should include protocols for ensuring continuity of care and effective follow up for children who reside in one region but received support in another region of the country. It should also determine in more detail the requirements for candidates serving on Guardianship Councils, including clarifying the requirement of having experience working with children. More broadly, it is important to clarify within normative frameworks the mandates, authority, coordination functions and resourcing of Guardianship Councils in relation to other child protection actors. Such clarity is a prerequisite for effective operationalization, training and inter-institutional coordination.

Relevant for: MDHC

24. Establish ongoing workshops for Guardianship Councillors and other child protection professionals to agree on ways for future collaboration, how to deliver child-friendly care and how to support effective access to justice. This should include how to facilitate referrals (aligned with Law 13,431/2017 – *Lei da Escuta Protegida*), share information and maintain communication between institutions through CPIMS SIPIA (information management systems).

Relevant for: Various government ministries

25. Provide psychosocial and professional support for frontline workers including time off to recuperate and allowing for a diversity of work.

Relevant for: MDHC and Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management (MPO)

26. Invest in the front-line workforce. Determine which Guardianship Councils are experiencing high demand and **provide adequate financial and human resourcing to ensure that children get specialized support and to avoid burnout** and high staff turnover ([see Recommendation #20](#)).

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

INSIGHT 7

In accessing justice and care, professionals described challenges in limiting the number of times that a child must recount the exploitation or abuse. Many participants expressed challenges in how Law 13,431/2017, particularly the provisions on specialized listening, is implemented. In general, special depositions were viewed positively by participants, however one challenge noted was the amount of time between when a complaint is filed and the special deposition.

Relevant for: Various government ministries, CNJ and CNMP

27. In addition to continuous training on specialized listening (see [Recommendation #22](#)), **monitor the implementation of specialized listening** to identify gaps in local implementation and in parallel, identify promising practices that can be standardized.

28. To support this monitoring effort, **create a working group with external stakeholders to agree on the information that must be collected** to adequately monitor implementation of specialized listening and develop a standardized form to be used across all municipalities and states. Ensure that the various government bodies involved are adequately trained to carry out the process and fill out the form

Relevant for: MEC

29. School staff require training to properly conduct specialized listening and refer cases to competent authorities (see [Recommendation #18](#)).

Relevant for: CNJ

30. **Monitor more closely the implementation of the Special Deposition procedure** across the country, including by generating data on the number of specialized facilities to conduct it, number of trained personnel, number of proceedings involving children in contact with the law, the time they usually take to be concluded, the types of violence addressed by the proceedings, etc. In addition, **factors behind the delay in scheduling special depositions require further study to address the root causes of these delays.**

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10. ANNEX: DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS



10. ANNEX: DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Child sexual abuse: What defines an abusive act can be difficult to capture or to definitively categorize. The term ‘abuse’ is often referred to as treating another person in a cruel or violent way. The term often focuses on both the act (e.g. violent, non-consensual), as well as the effect of the act (e.g. causing bodily injury, pain – physical or emotional -, distress, etc.)

Child sexual abuse more specifically, refers to various sexual activities perpetrated on children (persons under 18), regardless of whether the children are aware that what is happening to them is neither normal nor acceptable. It can be committed by adults or peers and usually involves an individual or group taking advantage of an imbalance of power. It can be committed without explicit force, with perpetrators frequently using authority, power, manipulation, or deception.¹⁴³

Child sexual exploitation: Involves the same abusive actions mentioned above. However, an additional element of a threat or of exchange for something (e.g., money, shelter, material goods, or non-material components such as protection, a relationship, or even the mere promise of such) from a third party and/or the perpetrator must also be present.¹⁴⁴

Child sexual abuse material (CSAM), including AI-CSAM: Photos, videos, audios or other recordings, or any other representation of real or digitally generated (including generated through/by artificial intelligence) child sexual abuse or sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes.¹⁴⁵

Livestreaming of child sexual abuse: Child sexual abuse that is perpetrated and viewed simultaneously in real-time via communication tools, video conferencing tools and/or chat applications. In most cases, the perpetrator requesting the abuse in exchange for payment or other material benefits, is physically in a different location from the child(ren) and the facilitators of the abuse.¹⁴⁶

Online grooming of children for sexual purposes/ solicitation of children for sexual purposes: Building a relationship with a child via technology with the intent of sexually abusing or exploiting the child.¹⁴⁷

Sexual extortion of children: The blackmailing of a person with the help of self-generated images of that person in order to extort sexual favours, money, or other benefits under the threat of sharing the material beyond the consent of the depicted person (e.g. posting images on social media). Often, the influence and manipulation, typical of perpetrators of grooming over longer periods of time (sometimes several months), turns into a rapid escalation of threats, intimidation, and coercion once the person has been persuaded to send the first sexual images of themselves.¹⁴⁸

Sexual harassment: “Any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment,” as defined by the Istanbul Convention (art. 40), the only international legal definition of the term.¹⁴⁹

Children who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour: This term refers to sexual behaviour or developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people which is harmful or abusive.¹⁵⁰

For further guidance on terminology and key considerations, refer to the [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#).

143. Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children, Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse: Second edition, ECPAT, Bangkok, 2025, pp. 31–34. <https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Second-Edition-Terminology-Guidelines-final.pdf>

144. Ibid., pp. 39–44.

145. Ibid., p. 63.

146. Ibid., p. 86.

147. Ibid., p. 95.

148. Ibid., pp. 97–98.

149. Ibid., pp. 36–38.

150. Ibid., p. 160.

