

DISRUPTING HARM IN MEXICO

Evidence on technology-facilitated
child sexual exploitation and abuse




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Content warning:

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

Suggested citation:

ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF. (06/09/26). Disrupting Harm in Mexico: Evidence on technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Safe Online.

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CONTENTS

Message from the Secretary of the National System for the Comprehensive Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents	2	4. Reporting	44
Executive summary	3	4.1 What are the barriers to reporting tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse?	46
Methods	7	5. Access to justice and legal remedies	49
Introduction	13	6. Access to care	60
Internet use in Mexico	14	7. Prevention efforts to safeguard children online	66
1. Technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Mexico	18	7.1 Policy and institutional initiatives	67
1.1 What types of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse are children subjected to?	20	7.2 Shifting the focus to systemic prevention	68
1.2 Who perpetrates tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse?	27	8. Conclusion	72
1.3 Where are children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse?	30	9. Recommendations	74
1.4 Which children are more likely to be subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse?	33	10. Acknowledgements	83
2. The impact on children	34	11. Annex: Definitions of key terms	84
3. Disclosure	38		
3.1 What are the barriers to disclosing technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse?	41		

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY OF THE NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

“Towards a comprehensive policy for the protection of children and adolescents in digital environments in Mexico”

Recent evidence from Mexico shows that a significant proportion of children and adolescents have been subjected to technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in the digital environments they access on a daily basis. Given the magnitude of this phenomenon, it should be addressed as a priority problem without delay to ensure their rights are protected.

The document *“Disrupting Harm in Mexico”* provides a comprehensive examination of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, analysing the main ways it manifests, its prevalence, patterns of victimization, the current legal framework and existing institutional responses. The analysis covers conceptual definitions, empirical findings, a review of the regulatory and policy framework – identifying strengths and gaps – and the methodology used. For the Executive Secretariat of the National System for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (SIPINNA), this work serves as an important evidence base for interinstitutional coordination and decision-making.

The document also highlights the complexity of the phenomenon. It incorporates a multidisciplinary approach that shines a light not only on the quantitative dimension of the problem, but also on the experiences of children and adolescents themselves, perpetrators’ patterns of behaviour and the challenges faced by institutions seeking to prevent abuse and provide care and access to justice in our country. Using a combination of methodological tools, including surveys, interviews and legal analysis, the study provides a solid basis for identifying trends, structural gaps and opportunities in the Mexican Government’s response to this form of violence.

Given this context, the SIPINNA Executive Secretariat proposes a regulatory approach aimed at protecting children and adolescents in digital environments, based on the principle of safety by design and the adoption of structural obligations for digital platforms. This approach recognizes that risks derive not only from content, but from digital architectures that facilitate interactions with multiple people, increase exposure to risky situations and promote intensive use through features such as autoplay, infinite scrolling and persistent notifications.

Within this framework, the SIPINNA Executive Secretariat has worked to strengthen the institutional response to digital violence against children and adolescents, coordinating with authorities, civil society and international organizations to generate an evidence base to improve the regulatory framework and public policies. The findings presented in this document serve to strengthen these efforts and make it possible to more accurately identify the areas in which it is necessary to deepen and consolidate measures to guarantee the best interests of children in digital environments.

Lorena VILLAVICENCIO AYALA

Head of the Executive Secretariat of the National System for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents



Gobernación
Secretaría de Gobernación



SIPINNA
SISTEMA NACIONAL DE PROTECCIÓN
INTEGRAL DE NIÑOS, NIÑOS
Y ADOLESCENTES



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Funded by Safe Online, ECPAT International, INTERPOL and UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti (UNICEF Innocenti) worked in partnership 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 tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse and the national response to these forms of violence against children. A combined investment of US\$15 million 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 Mexico, from 2023 onwards.

Between 2023 and 2024, ECPAT International, INTERPOL and UNICEF Innocenti conducted research in Mexico to understand tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse from multiple viewpoints. The data in Mexico were collected through a national household survey with 12–17-year-olds, interviews with justice professionals, front-line workers, young people subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse before the age of 18, 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 technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse to refer to situations involving digital, internet and communication technologies at some point during the 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 preferred¹ to convey that this violence against children does not 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

Technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Mexico

- According to Disrupting Harm survey data, 13 per cent of internet-using children in Mexico aged 12–17 were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in only a one-year period.² Scaled up to the overall population of 12–17-year-old internet-using children in Mexico, this represents around 1,600,000 children who may have been subjected to any of these harms in the span of a single year.
- According to the survey, the most common form of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse that children were subjected to was unwanted exposure to sexual images (7 per cent).
- Nearly half (47 per cent) of children who were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse were subjected to at least two forms of exploitation and abuse by the same or different perpetrators.
- Survey data show that 14 per cent of girls and 13 per cent of boys in Mexico were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse within a one-year period, with no significant gender differences. Interviews, however, reveal distinct gender dynamics. Gender norms shape coercion, with girls being pressured through compliance and normalized violence, including in the context of intimate relationships. At the same time, boys may draw on dominant masculinities associated with control. The findings also show that sexual exploitation and abuse of boys is more easily overlooked or minimized, and that gender biases can shape adults’ responses, at times leading to victim-blaming and shifting responsibility away from perpetrators.

¹ Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children, [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse: Second Edition](#), ECPAT International, Bangkok, 2025.

² Children were asked if they were subjected to at least one instance of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation or abuse in the year prior to being surveyed. The survey data collection was conducted in 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

- The survey data showed that the top three apps where children in Mexico were subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse are owned by Meta: Facebook (52 per cent) and WhatsApp (45 per cent) were the most common, followed by Instagram (11 per cent) and TikTok (8 per cent). Finally, 3 per cent of incidents occurred on YouTube, and 2 per cent on Snapchat.
- Justice professionals and front-line workers described working on cases where exploitation and abuse were facilitated by video gaming platforms such as Roblox, and video games such as Fortnite and FIFA.
- As confirmed by a law enforcement representative, perpetrators who contact children through online games rarely target just one child. Instead, they may establish contact with multiple children, often located in different countries.
- Under Mexican federal law, online platforms cannot be held liable for child sexual abuse material circulated by users, leaving them with little to no legal incentive to take proactive measures to detect, report or remove such content.
- Mexican law requires internet service providers to keep user data for up to two years on systems that allow law enforcement to access it for investigative purposes. However, these rules do not apply to online platforms such as social media or messaging apps, which can reduce the ability of authorities to investigate unlawful online activities and may contribute to impunity.

Perpetrator profiles and common tactics

- According to the survey data, in most cases (64 per cent) of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, the child already knew the perpetrator. This included friends (29 per cent), intimate partners (19 per cent) or family members (16 per cent). In 15 per cent of cases, the perpetrator was a stranger or “someone the child did not know before” they were sexually exploited or abused.

- The survey data show that in 39 per cent of cases, the child’s first encounter with the perpetrator was at school, while 31 per cent met online, 16 per cent in public spaces, 11 per cent at home and 2 per cent during sports activities.
- The children and young people interviewed described exploitation and abuse that was perpetrated by both adults and peers, and framed or unfolding within romantic relationships, with perpetrators first requesting non-sexual photos before escalating to sexualized images or content, using manipulation or threats to secure compliance with other demands.

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

- Children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse were 15 times more likely to self-harm and 12 times more likely to have suicidal thoughts and behaviours compared with children not subjected to this kind of violence.³ They also had elevated anxiety scores; on average, 11 points higher than children who were not subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse.
- According to front-line workers and justice professionals, children they supported suffered from depression, sleep problems, low self-esteem, drug use problems and/or irregular eating behaviours because of the exploitation and abuse they were subjected to.
- Children and young people who were subjected to exploitation and abuse described feeling afraid because of it: afraid that something similar would happen again, afraid that they would be identified through sexual content being permanently available online or afraid that their friends and relatives would find out about what happened to them.
- Children and young people spoke of a sense of exposure and vulnerability that went beyond the time of exploitation and abuse. Most blamed themselves and felt guilty for the exploitation and abuse they were subjected to.

³ Estimates are based on smaller subgroups and should be interpreted with caution due to wider confidence intervals. Relative risks are reported for self-harm and suicidal thoughts/behaviours, while average differences are reported for anxiety. Anxiety scores range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating more frequent or intense symptoms. All models control for age, gender, parental education and urban residence.

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

- Thirty-two per cent of children who were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in the year prior to being surveyed did not tell anyone about what happened to them.
- According to survey data, children who talked to someone about being subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, most often disclosed to their friends (17 per cent), a female caregiver (16 per cent) or siblings (14 per cent).
- According to survey data, the most common barrier to disclosure was that children felt too embarrassed (21 per cent). Others did not know where to go or whom to tell (16 per cent) or did not think it was serious enough to disclose (14 per cent).
- In interviews, children and young people reported fear of blame or judgment, which often prevented disclosure. These fears were sometimes realized, with negative reactions from family, friends or professionals, including bullying, anger, frustration, victim-blaming or physical punishment.
- Children in Mexico rarely report tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, with less than 1 per cent of incidents in the survey being reported to the police specifically in the year prior to being surveyed. Overall, 2 per cent of incidents were reported to a helpline, the police or a social worker.
- Children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse did not report to formal avenues, mostly because they do not know how to do it (28 per cent), because the perpetrator threatened to harm them if they told anyone about the exploitation or abuse (24 per cent) or because they did not think it was serious enough (21 per cent).
- According to survey data, 14 per cent of the incidents facilitated by social media were reported through the app(s) where children were subjected to exploitation and abuse.

- Although Mexican law allows children to report sexual offences by themselves, in practice – according to the justice professionals, children and young people interviewed – children are often requested to be accompanied by a guardian to file a complaint at the Prosecutor's Office, which may discourage reporting.

Criminalization of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse

- According to the legal and policy analysis conducted in the context of this project, Mexican federal legislation on child sexual exploitation and abuse provides a solid basis for protection, including provisions on online grooming that apply to cases where exploitation and abuse occur entirely online. However, laws could be further strengthened to better reflect evolving online risks, as emerging forms of tech-facilitated exploitation and abuse, such as the sexual extortion of children, are not explicitly criminalized.
- Federal law criminalizes a range of criminal conduct related to child sexual abuse material, including possession without intent to distribute. However, simple access to child sexual abuse material with no intent to distribute and/or share further is not criminalized. This creates a loophole that allows individuals to deliberately seek out and view such content with impunity.
- The definition of child sexual abuse material in Mexico does not expressly extend to material depicting a person who *appears to be a child* engaged in sexually explicit conduct, nor does it cover realistic images of non-existent children or digitally generated content, including content produced using tools powered by artificial intelligence.
- Federal law still uses the term “pornography of persons under 18 years of age” to refer to child sexual abuse material. This outdated terminology can imply that such images or recordings are a form of pornography, thereby failing to reflect their abusive nature.
- Legal provisions on child sexual abuse material only cover livestreamed child sexual abuse where the transmission occurs in the form of “data files”, thereby excluding cases where abuse occurs solely through livestreaming and no material is recorded or stored.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children's experiences with the justice process and social services

- The General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents states that judicial authorities and prosecutors in Mexico must ensure that proceedings involving child victims of crime are conducted in line with their best interests, guaranteeing their comprehensive protection and the full respect of their constitutional and internationally recognized rights.
- Child victims of crime are entitled to free access to legal, psychological and other necessary support services, as well as clear, simple and age-appropriate information about the proceedings and their role within them. Procedures are also in place to safeguard their privacy, including the possibility of closed hearings.
- Criminal procedure rules in Mexico do not include provisions mandating a single interview of a child by a specially trained expert. Such provisions could help prevent revictimization caused by repeated and/or insensitive questioning. In interviews conducted for the Disrupting Harm project, children and young people who were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse when they were under 18 describe traumatic experiences within the justice system (e.g. insensitivity, coercion and victim-blaming) and referred to proceedings as lengthy and exhausting.
- Federal legislation does not currently prevent direct contact between children subjected to sexual violence and the alleged perpetrator in court. Without such protection in place, this risks retraumatization and intimidation.
- Despite the existence of dedicated victim and child protection mechanisms at the federal and state level, according to interviews with professionals, children and young people, children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse continue to face systemic barriers to accessing recovery and reintegration services, reflecting critical gaps in awareness, coordination and resource allocation.
- Some children and young people interviewed said that they faced disapproval, shame and negative attitudes towards mental health when seeking support, compounded by a lack of empathy and harmful interactions with providers. This, according to the children, young people and professionals interviewed, sometimes led to discontinuing care and transitioning between multiple psychologists.
- Front-line workers interviewed described having to space out therapy sessions to provide psychological care, which translates into long waiting lists and referrals to other institutions. In one specific case, a child attended adult support groups due to the absence of child-specific services.
- While federal legislation in Mexico provides mechanisms for financial compensation, the professionals and young people interviewed indicated that the amount provided is insufficient to provide meaningful redress.

This report ends with a set of data-driven recommendations based on its key findings. They include action 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 the executive summary but can be found on [page 74](#) 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 Mexico. The quantitative data provide an understanding of the scope of this issue among children in Mexico. The analysis of national legislation and policies, together with the qualitative interviews conducted, provide insights into the formal systems and processes intended to support children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. It also offers 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 best 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 both strengths and weaknesses 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-centred 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. In Mexico, the analysis focused on laws and policies at federal level, with a targeted review of relevant legal provisions in the states of Nayarit and Morelos, where interviews with professionals and young people were conducted. The scope of the Disrupting Harm project in Mexico did not allow for a comprehensive analysis of the legislation of all 32 states. However, examining the strengths and gaps of federal law on tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse provides a valuable reference point to guide and promote the harmonization of state frameworks.

The draft analysis underwent internal and external expert reviews, including review by the ECPAT member organization and the UNICEF country office to ensure accuracy and real-world relevance.

Note about Mexican legislation

Offences related to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse are primarily covered under the Federal Penal Code, though not all forms and manifestations are expressly or adequately criminalized, leaving potential gaps in protection and enforcement. The specific provisions and their limitations are set out in detail throughout this report. Federal courts oversee federal crimes, as well as offences with cross-border elements.⁴ However, it is important to note that the federal structure of Mexico grants each state its own local penal code and local jurisdiction over offences defined therein. As a result, tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse offences can also be prosecuted at the state level, unless federal authorities decide to assume jurisdiction when they qualify as both federal and state crimes.⁵ Yet, as will be detailed over the course of the report, inconsistencies across state penal codes create significant challenges for effective prosecution, as these offences are often not uniformly defined or adequately addressed.

Household survey of 12–17-year-olds and their parents/guardians

The purpose of the survey was to hear directly from children and their parents/guardians about their online experiences, both positive and negative. The questionnaire was divided into modules, most of which were administered by an enumerator. For personal questions, including 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 private (or individual) 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 had used the internet in the three months prior to the survey, in line with the threshold set by the International Telecommunications Union.⁶

To achieve a nationally representative random sample of 12–17-year-old internet users, the survey used random probability sampling with national coverage. In Mexico, the fieldwork coverage was 95 per cent. Several municipalities in the states of Sinaloa, Sonora and Tamaulipas were excluded from the sampling process, either due to security concerns or because the villages had fewer than 60 inhabited dwellings. 'Coverage' is defined as the proportion of the total population that had a chance of being included in the survey sample – meaning that the fieldwork would cover the area where they live if sampled. Data collection was carried out by IPSOS through IPSOS Mexico on behalf of UNICEF Innocenti. Enumerators encountered security challenges, requiring safety measures such as limited working hours and branded caps for visibility. This was particularly important in areas affected by organized crime. To build trust and awareness, survey information was published on the websites of UNICEF Mexico and the survey agency collecting the data, IPSOS Mexico. Data collection took place between 3 October and 16 December 2024.

The sampling followed a three-stage random probability clustered sample design. The response rate in Mexico was 27 per cent and the sample achieved included 1,027 children and 1,027 of their parents/guardians. The relatively low response rate was primarily due to a large number of households for which eligibility could not be determined.⁷

4 United Mexican States (2014). *National Code of Criminal Procedures* (latest amendments published on 28 November 2025), art. 20.

5 *Ibid.*, art. 20.

6 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.

7 Either refused to take part or give any information, physically or mentally unable to take part, language barrier with target respondent or household, away from home throughout field period, refusal due to survey content (occurred before full screening took place), other non-response or no contact with anyone at the address.

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

Age and gender distribution of child sample:

12–14 years	55%
15–17 years	45%
Girls	51%
Boys	49%

Age and gender distribution of parent sample:

Under 40 years	48%
Over 40 years	52%
Women	83%
Men	17%
Other	0.2%

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

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

This research activity, implemented by the National Institute of Public Health (INSP), aimed to include the voices of children and young people (16–24 years) who were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse during childhood.⁸ Children and young people who were currently 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 Mexico (see ‘Acknowledgements’ section). Two engagement strategies were developed to connect children and young people with two trained trauma-informed researchers to share their experiences during an interview:

1. Professional networks: Information about the study was distributed among front-line workers (e.g. social workers, therapists and legal support organizations) who support children and young people aged 16–24, who then invited potential participants.
2. Community outreach: Study information was shared via the social media accounts of public institutions in Morelos and Nayarit, as well as through INSP networks, with the purpose of identifying potential participants ages 18–24 who were eligible to take part in the research. INSP also held in-person workshops on digital sexual violence in high schools and universities, reaching more than 1,000 students and distributing information about the study.

Interviews were conducted between June and October 2024 and data collection was conducted in the states of Nayarit and Morelos, where INSP had the required networks and operations to implement the study. The final sample consisted of 20 girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 24. Fourteen were from the state of Morelos and six from Nayarit. Despite repeated recruitment attempts, no boys or young men participated in the interviews.

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. While the terms ‘young people’ and ‘young person’ are sometimes used throughout the report for conciseness, it is important to note that some participants interviewed were 16 or 17 years old and therefore children. Their ages – and, when known, the age at which they were subjected to abuse and/or exploitation – are provided alongside their quotes.

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

⁸ This study uses the terms 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.

Interviews with front-line workers

This research activity aimed to understand how front-line workers in Mexico support children subjected to tech-facilitated 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 front-line 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 front-line workers in Mexico – such as social workers, psychotherapists, and police⁹ – who provide support or essential services directly to individuals who were subjected to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Front-line 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 during childhood. Interviews were conducted in the states of Nayarit and Morelos, where the implementing partner, INSP, had the required networks and operations to implement the study.

Front-line workers were only invited to participate if they were able to talk to the researchers about a de-identified case. The National Institute of Public Health, in collaboration with the Women's Institute of Cuernavaca and the Women's Institute of Nayarit, conducted intersectoral meetings with public institutions involved in responding to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse to identify participants.

Two trained researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 front-line workers.

Interviews were conducted between June and September 2024. Among the front-line workers interviewed, 12 were women and 3 were men. Nine front-workers were based in the state of Nayarit and six in the state of Morelos.

Throughout the report, attributions to data from this research activity with front-line 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 justice mechanisms in Mexico respond to children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse to identify how systems can better prevent and respond to these forms of violence. 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. Interviews were conducted in the states of Nayarit and Morelos, where the implementing partner, INSP, had the required networks and operations to implement the study.

The population of interest for this study was justice professionals in Mexico, such as lawyers, judges, magistrates and prosecutors. 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 last five years. 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. The National Institute of Public Health, in collaboration with the Women's Institute of Cuernavaca and the Women's Institute of Nayarit, conducted intersectoral meetings with public institutions involved in responding to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse to identify participants.

A trained researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 justice professionals across public and private entities.

Interviews were conducted between July and September 2024. Among justice professionals interviewed, 13 were women and two were men. Nine participants were based in the state of Morelos and six in Nayarit.

⁹ These were law enforcement officers operating in the states of Nayarit and Morelos; therefore the activity did not overlap with the interviews with law enforcement described further below.

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

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, as well as child protection units, and trusted civil society partners and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The information gathered responds to federal level institutions, drawing from interviews with 30 officers dedicated to this type of investigation from law enforcement and the Prosecutor's Office. 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 Mexico.

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 Mexico. The survey is cross-sectional, not longitudinal, meaning that the data capture a single moment in time in the lives of the 1,027 children surveyed. While the Disrupting Harm data highlight relationships between sexual 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 all the possible ways that digital technologies are used to exploit or abuse children. Some forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, 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 are likely an underestimate. Low sample sizes also limit the kind of statistical analysis that can be conducted on the data.

The interviews with **front-line workers and justice professionals** do not aim to provide a measure of the types or prevalence of violence in Mexico due to the nature of this research method. The sample for these research activities was limited to the states of Morelos and Nayarit and is not intended to provide a national perspective. However, these data can help provide context and meaning for understanding these types of abuse and how they occur. It is also important to note that the cases that reach the formal support or justice system represent only a minority of abuse cases and may disproportionately reflect forms of abuse that are more widely recognized or acknowledged.

Interviewing boys and young men who were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse during their childhood was also a challenge. Despite extensive and sensitive efforts to engage with this population, no boys or young men agreed to participate in the qualitative interviews.

METHODS

Ethical approval

UNICEF Innocenti obtained ethical approval for the Disrupting Harm project from the Health Media Lab, a global institutional review board. There was no applicable national ethics review board in Mexico that could review this study. However, to ensure that the protocols were suitable for the national context, subject-matter experts from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) reviewed UNICEF research protocols and tools.

National consultation

In a national consultation in March 2026, representatives across sectors including government, law enforcement authorities and civil society in Mexico were asked to provide input on the Disrupting Harm recommendations to enhance their relevance for the Mexican context.



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 abuse or exploitation, 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 abuse or exploitation that is already taking place in person. And in other instances, abuse or exploitation 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 capture. These include but are not limited to power imbalances, social identities and social, gender, 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 Mexico. 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 MEXICO

National-level data on children’s internet access and use are often scarce. 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 internet use in Mexico, such as the National Survey on Availability and Use of Information Technologies in Households (ENDUTIH).¹⁰

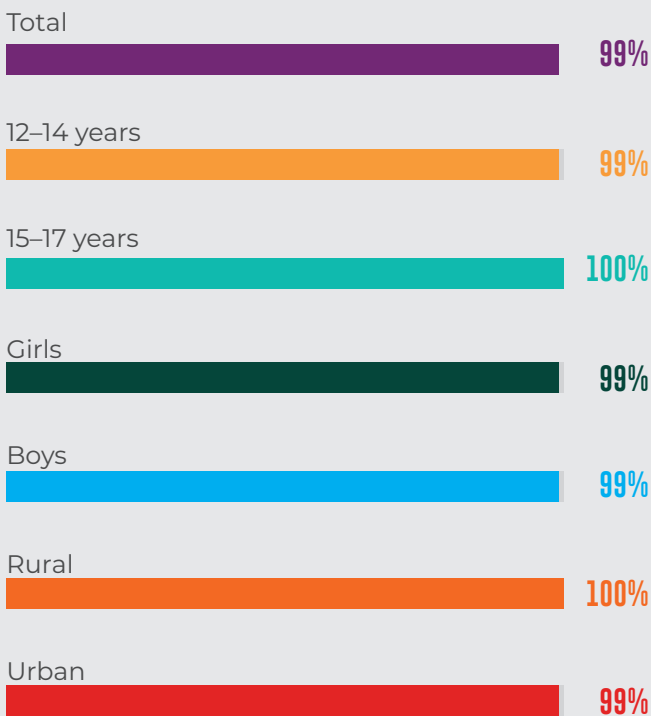
Understanding how children access the internet, whether they go online regularly or not, what they do online and how parents engage with their internet use, may provide insights into how to create a digital environment that is safer and more enjoyable for children. However, prevention of (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse is not primarily about what children are doing online. Disrupting Harm data 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 abuse or exploitation 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 creating barriers to offending, while addressing norms, values and inequalities that enable perpetrators to sexually exploit and abuse children.

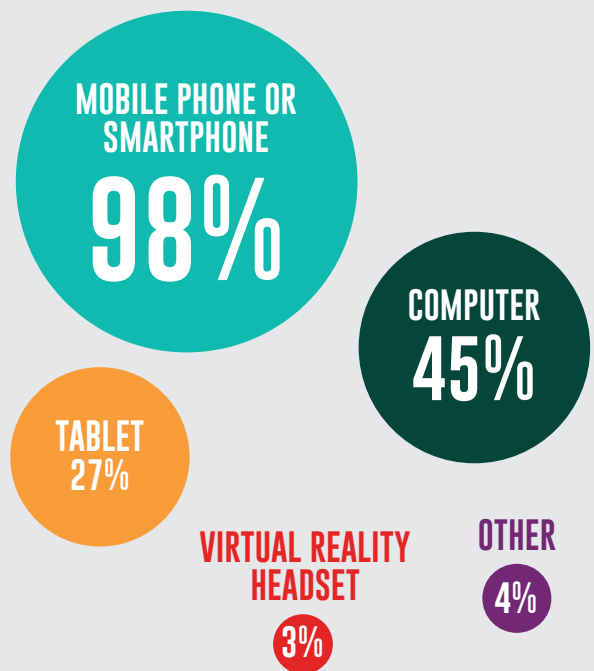
The internet access and usage data presented below are drawn from the Disrupting Harm household survey, which targeted internet-using children aged 12–17 and their parents in Mexico. Internet users were defined as individuals who had accessed the internet within the three months preceding the survey.

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



Base: 1,869 households, Disrupting Harm household survey.

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

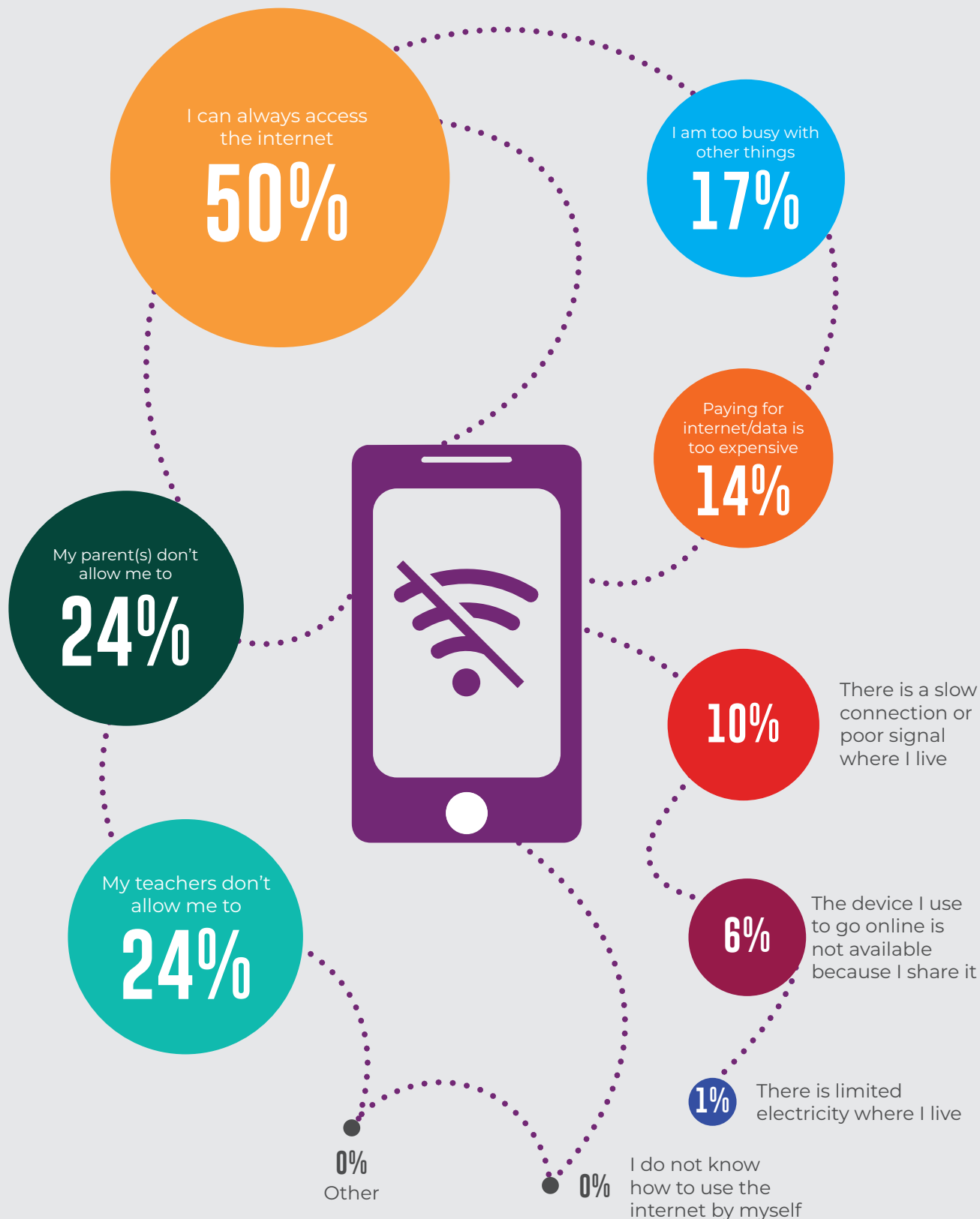


Base: 1,027 internet-using children, Disrupting Harm household survey.

¹⁰ <https://en.www.inegi.org.mx/programas/endutih/2024/>

INTERNET USE IN MEXICO

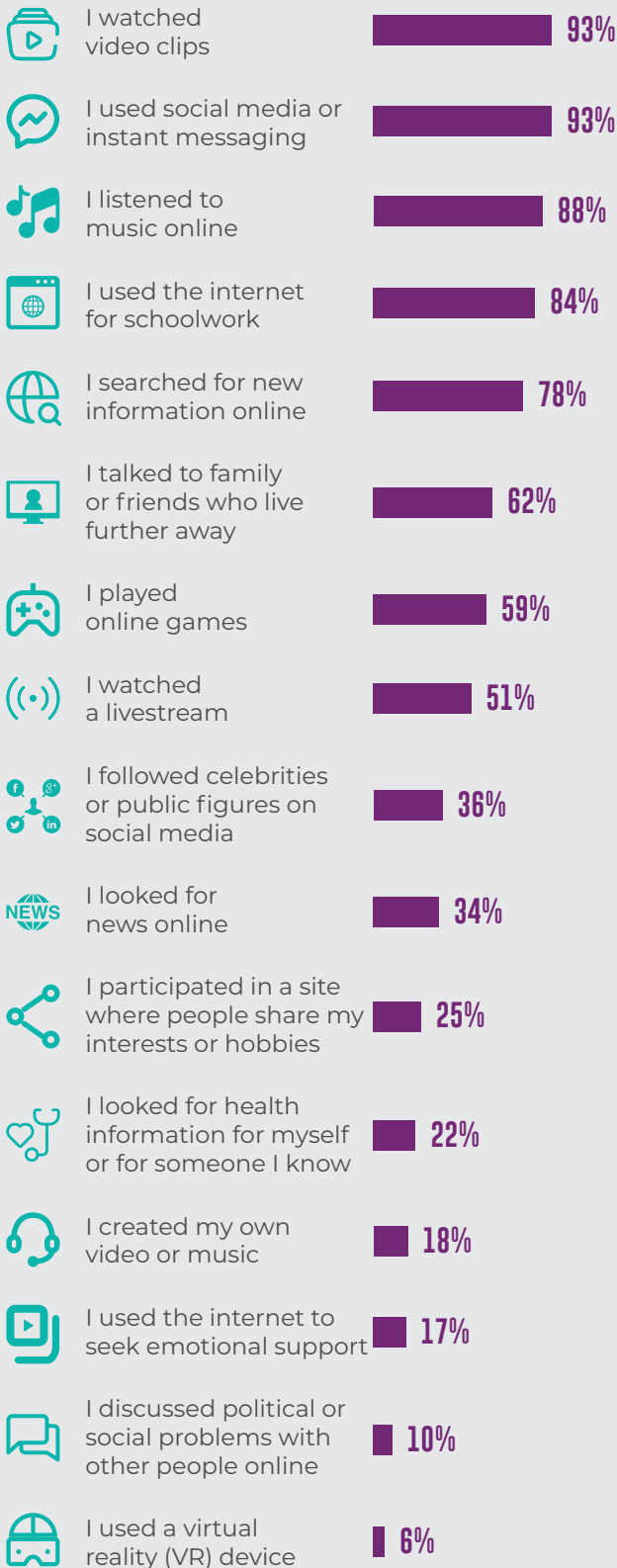
BARRIERS TO INTERNET ACCESS AMONG INTERNET-USING 12-17-YEAR-OLDS



Base: 1,027 internet-using children, Disrupting Harm household survey.

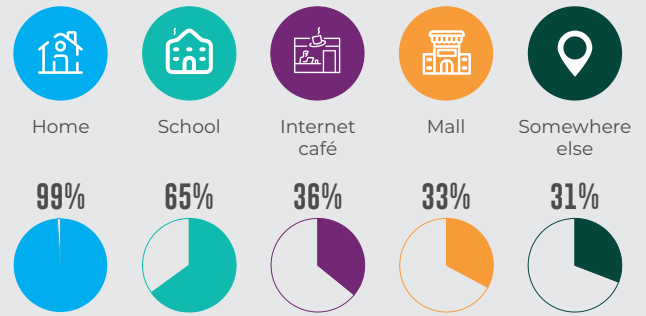
INTERNET USE IN MEXICO

ACTIVITIES CHILDREN ENGAGE IN ONLINE AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK



Base: 1,027 internet-using children, Disrupting Harm household survey.

MOST POPULAR PLACES TO GO ONLINE AMONG INTERNET-USING CHILDREN AGED 12–17*



Base: 1,029 internet-using children.

*Multiple-choice question.

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

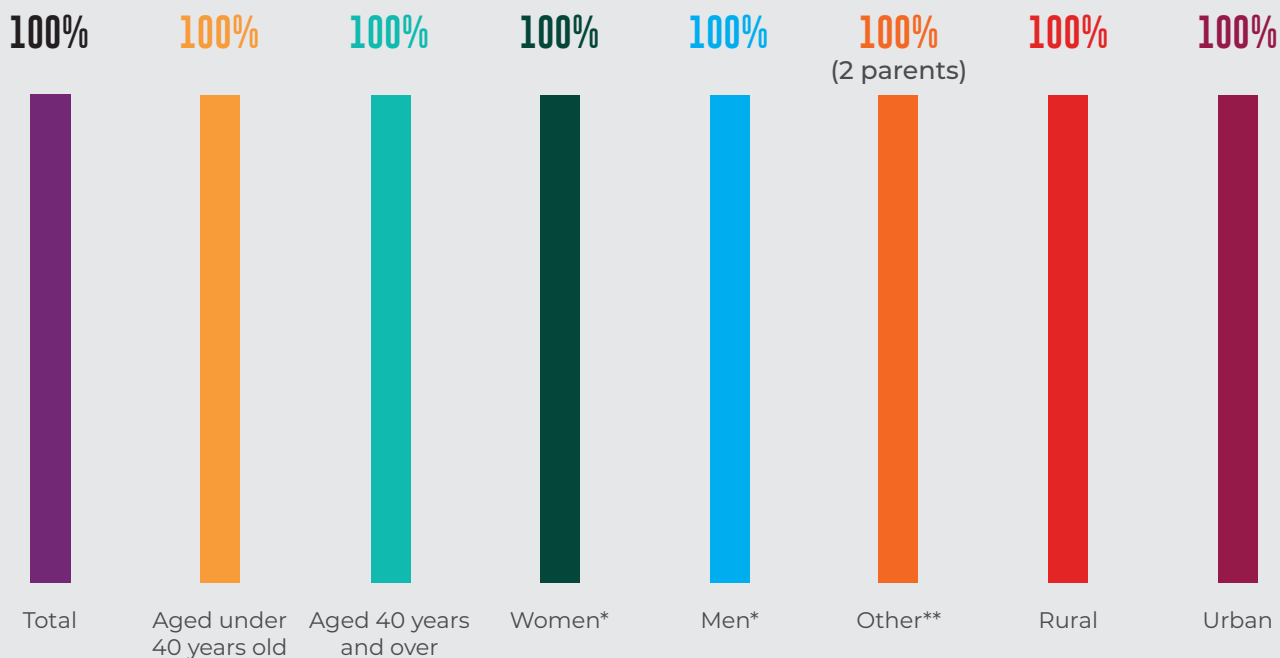


Base: 1,027 internet-using children, Disrupting Harm household survey.

*Percentage of children who say it is 'mostly' or 'very' true that they can do this.

INTERNET USE IN MEXICO

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



Base: 1,027 parents of internet-using 12–17-year-old children, Disrupting Harm household survey.

* The parents' sample had a low proportion of men (18 per cent). These results should be interpreted with caution given this underrepresentation.

** Only two parents in the sample selected "other" when asked to state their gender.

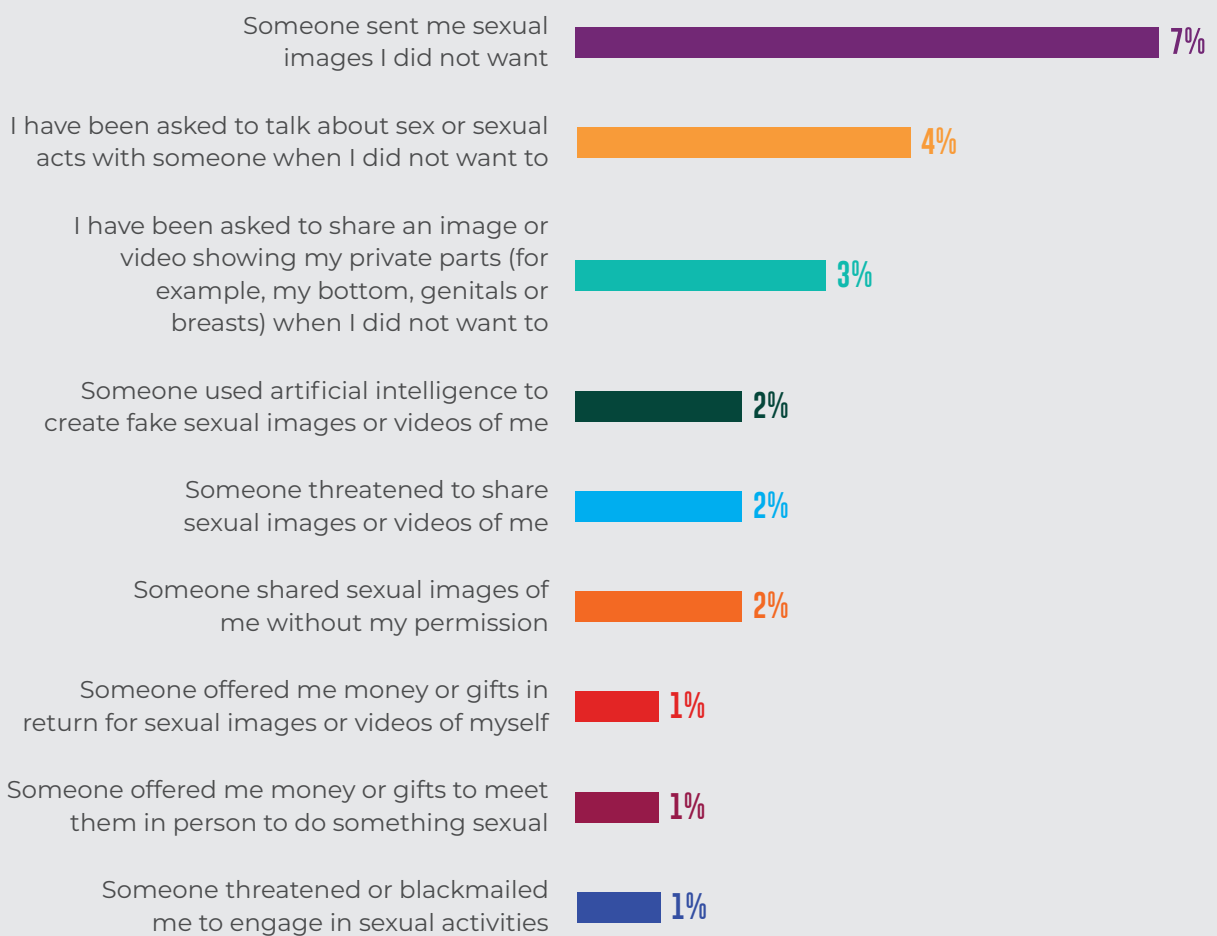
1. TECHNOLOGY- FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN MEXICO



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

Based on the household survey, 13 per cent of internet-using children surveyed in Mexico 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, this represents an estimated 1,600,000 children in Mexico who have been subjected to any of these harms in the span of a single year.

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



Base: 1,027 internet-using children aged 12–17 in Mexico.

Understanding the data

Thirteen 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 124 children from the sample. Nearly half (47 per cent) of these children were subjected to more than one of the forms of exploitation and abuse above in the past year. This means that, taken together, those 124 children were subjected to a total of 232 instances of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse measured in the survey. These 232 instances of exploitation and abuse serve as the basis for much of the survey analysis in this report.

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

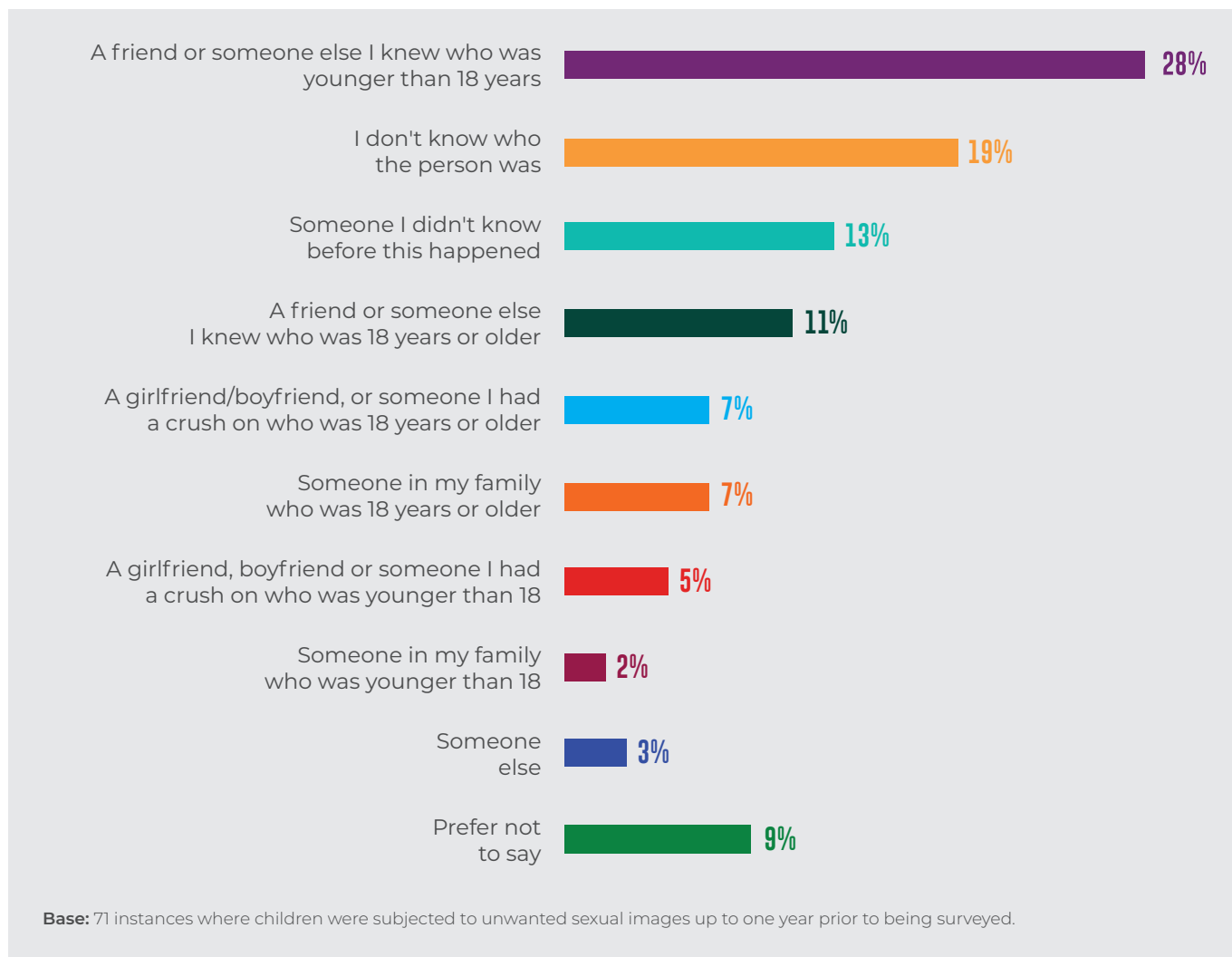
Disrupting Harm survey data shows that children in Mexico can be subjected to multiple forms of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse throughout their childhood. In many cases, these forms of exploitation and abuse are connected. For example, the interview data with children and young people illustrate how children in Mexico have been pressured into sharing sexual content as a gesture of affection or love. This content is later distributed without their permission or used to threaten children with public dissemination if they do not comply with the perpetrator's requests. In other cases, interviews with children and young people show how unwanted sexual conversations may turn into offers of money in exchange for children's sexual content.

This chapter draws on data from various research methods to explore the complex nature of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, highlighting common types of exploitation and abuse children face and how one form can lead to another.

Receiving unwanted sexual images

The most common form of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse reported by children surveyed in Mexico was receiving unwanted sexual images; 7 per cent of children surveyed were subjected to this in the year prior to the survey. According to the children concerned, such images were mostly sent by peers (28 per cent) and perpetrators whom they were unable to identify (19 per cent), mostly through social media, and especially on WhatsApp and Facebook.

Chart 1: Who sends unwanted sexual images?



Findings from interviews with children and young people provide more context for these kinds of situations. For some children and young people who were interviewed in the study, unwanted sexual images were sent unexpectedly online and seemingly at random. A 21-year-old young person recounted receiving unwanted sexual images through Facebook Messenger when she was 15 years old, after joining Facebook groups to talk about TV series:

“
There would even be those who would precisely send me the famous ‘dick pics’ that nobody asked them for [makes sounds of disgust]. And thank God by then there was already the button to block them. (YP)

At other times, unwanted sexual images came from people already known to the child. The same young woman described how a boy close to her age had been sexually harassing her at school since she was 11 years old. Later, when she was 14, the boy created different online accounts and sent her unwanted sexual content.

“
Yes, messages at that moment were like ‘Hello, hello, I’m sorry I’m insisting, how are you?’ And suddenly the messages would have photos, disgusting photos, sexual insinuation. He would say I was a bitch, that I probably wanted it and things like that. (YP)

These quotes illustrate how the same child may be subjected to the same form of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, but by different perpetrators, throughout their childhood. However, receiving unwanted sexual images may also be one part of a series of abusive behaviours from the same perpetrator. That was the case of a young person who recounted how, at age 12, an unknown perpetrator first sent her unwanted sexual images through Facebook and then solicited sexual activities from her.

“
Well, at that age you have very little information about types of harassment, types of violence, so I felt very uncomfortable, but at that moment I did not, for example, blocked him and I did not stop replying, right? I kept replying and asking who he was, no? Because I did not know him, we did not have any friends in common. So, after that conversation, well, that was only one day and after he asked me those questions [questions about her sexuality], he sent me a few photos of what we know [sexual content] and I asked him why he was sending me those photos and he said he wanted to pay for my virginity and other things like that. (YP)

This type of behaviour by the perpetrator is not merely inappropriate but constitutes a criminal offence under federal law. In Mexico, exposing children to pornographic content through any means, including technology, is punishable by prison sentences ranging from six months to five years and a fine when the perpetrator is an adult.¹¹

Unwanted requests for sexual content

Household survey data shows that over the course of one year, 4 per cent of children received unwanted requests for sexual images or videos. These unwanted requests came from both adults and peers. For instance, in the quote below, a young person recalled being asked for sexual images by men who were friends with her sister:

“
It was like, I mean I was already in high school, and he would be like ‘Send me a picture of you with your uniform and lift up your skirt’ and I would tell him like ‘Hey I feel very bad, and I feel very alone’ and it was like out of nowhere ‘Why haven’t I seen you naked?’ (YP)

¹¹ United Mexican States (1931). [Federal Penal Code](#) (latest amendment published on 13 March 2026), art. 200.

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

This type of unwanted solicitation of sexual content from children by adults can amount to, or be a component of, online grooming for sexual purposes, which involves building a relationship with a child online to enable sexual abuse or exploitation in person or online. The Federal Penal Code expressly criminalizes this conduct by prohibiting the use of telecommunications or any means of data transmission to contact a child and request images, audio or video of sexual activities, acts of a sexual nature, or to solicit a sexual meeting. This offence carries a prison sentence of four to eight years and a fine.¹² Positively, this legal provision applies to cases where the exploitation and abuse occur entirely online, with no requirement for there to be an in-person meeting between the child and the perpetrator. However, survey data show that these cases are rarely reported to the police.

When describing how the abuse or exploitation started, some young people in the interviews explained how perpetrators would first ask them for seemingly normal, non-sexual photos, then move on to asking for photos of them in their underwear or naked. They remembered feeling manipulated and coerced, as the perpetrators used blackmail or threats to make them comply with their requests. The quote below is from a 20-year-old woman who recalled being threatened by a 20-year-old man who was sexually abusing her when she was 14 years old. The child's sexual content was distributed via WhatsApp and Facebook without her permission.

“

If you don't send me a picture, I'm going to speak to your dad. I want to marry you, I'll leave [name of perpetrator's romantic partner]. He would say, 'I'm going to leave her and marry you'. Well, I was afraid, my parents knew that they [perpetrator and his partner] were together and that she was pregnant, so it was either the picture or that he would say everything to my parents. (YP)

”

This testimony also illustrates how, with support from digital technologies, perpetrators can exploit harmful gender norms to pressure girls into abusive or exploitative situations. They may use promises of stability or a shared future and in doing so take advantage of developmental dynamics during adolescence, when young people may feel compelled to conform to gendered and social expectations.

Pressured or blackmailed to share sexual content

The survey showed that within a one-year period, around 1 per cent of children in Mexico were pressured or blackmailed into sharing sexual images or videos. Interviews with young people revealed several instances where the perpetrator was someone whom they considered a romantic partner. In some cases, perpetrators requested non-sexualized photos of the child, until they turned into requests for sexual photos or videos as proof of love. A young person who was 14 years old when the exploitation and abuse started recalls how requests for sexual content were framed in the context of love or fidelity:

“

After that, he started asking for pictures, things like, 'Send me a photo of your pyjamas' or 'Show me what you're wearing'. Eventually, it escalated to, 'Take off your shirt'. When I said, 'No,' he'd pressure me, saying, 'If you won't do it, it's because you've already sent it to someone else or because you don't love me.' I'd try to reassure him, 'No, I love you' and he'd reply, 'Then send me a photo without your shirt'. Over time, I started sending them. All of this happened through [Facebook] Messenger. (YP)

”

As explained by front-line workers, exchanges of sexual images may also become an expectation and demand in relationships: *"It has to do with the photographs they ask for, but they continue to normalize this as part of romantic love"* (FW). According to the survey data, 4 per cent of the

¹² Ibid., art. 199 septies.

children surveyed said they shared online naked images or videos of themselves with someone else in the year prior to the survey. Such images or videos were most often sent to someone they were romantically involved with, such as a boyfriend or girlfriend. The main reasons for sharing these images or videos included being in love (68 per cent), trusting the recipient (48 per cent), and flirting or having fun (38 per cent). These exchanges between peers or partners are a sensitive and multifaceted issue. On the one hand, it can be a positive experience, a way for young people to explore their sexuality and build relationships. On the other hand, as the young person's testimony above suggests, these dynamics can be abusive, with partners creating conditional affection and jealousy to coerce peers into sharing sexual content. Interviews further indicate how girls are impacted by the normalization of violence and gendered expectations of compliance within relationships; they do not allow for conclusions about the impact of these dynamics on boys.

However, the legal framework does not clearly distinguish such situations from criminal conduct. Federal legislation does not exempt self-generated sexual material from criminal responsibility, even where it is created or shared voluntarily by children. This is particularly concerning given that the minimum age of criminal responsibility is set at 12,¹³ potentially leaving children at risk of prosecution for non-malicious behaviours arising from sexual exploration, trust or peer interaction. However, no direct evidence of such prosecutions emerged from the Disrupting Harm research in Mexico.

At the same time, such exchanges among peers or partners can also be (or become) abusive and exploitative. Sharing sexual content with others becomes problematic when manipulation, pressure or coercion is involved. This includes when there is an imbalance of power, for example, due to age or social position, or when the sexual content is shared further without consent. Depending on children's age and stage of development, they might not always have the necessary cognitive, emotional or social maturity to understand the risks involved in sharing sexual content, to know when an interaction or relationship dynamic is abusive or to know how to take steps to mitigate the risks

involved in producing and sharing sexual content. While children's ability to recognize the potential risks of sharing sexual content may vary with age and experience, responsibility should never be shifted onto them if someone non-consensually shares their private images or videos. In cases where children subject others to exploitation and abuse, responses should prioritize non-punitive, supportive interventions that recognize the developmental needs of the child who caused harm.

In some instances described in the interviews, adult perpetrators and other children who displayed harmful sexual behaviours obtained children's sexual images or videos to use them as a means to threaten the children and obtain more sexual content. A similar pattern was observed in the survey among the 19 children (2 per cent) who reported being threatened with the sharing of their sexual images or videos in the year prior to the survey. Among these children, the most common demand from perpetrators was for additional sexual images or videos. Such conduct reflects patterns commonly referred to as sexual extortion, whereby perpetrators leverage existing sexual content to coerce children into providing further material or complying with additional demands.

A 24-year-old who was interviewed reported that when she was 15, her 17-year-old boyfriend used sexual images that he had of her, to exert control over her day-to-day activities and isolate her:

“

What happened was that I turned 15 and I started Arab dancing, and he was very jealous. Between the dance and the fact that it was a two-piece costume, which showed my abs and some cleavage, he would not let me. He would say that if I didn't quit, if I didn't stop talking, because he forbade me from speaking to my friends, family, cousins and leaving my house. If I were to leave my house I had to justify why and I had to send him a picture of what I was wearing, because if not, he would share my pictures [sexual images]. (YP)

”

¹³ United Mexican States (2016). [National Law of the Criminal Justice System for Adolescents](#) (latest amendment published on 20 December 2022), art. 1.

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

Harmful ideas about masculinities that equate manhood with dominance and control may empower boys to exert coercion while diminishing girls' autonomy and increasing exposure to coercive behaviours. The testimony above also shows how perpetrators and other children who displayed harmful sexual behaviours can use sexual images as a means of manipulation and control within the context of romantic relationships. Indeed, in their interviews, some young people described initially feeling that they were in a trustworthy and comfortable romantic relationship but gradually became confused and insecure about the partner's (or perpetrator's) true motives. Some reported being recorded without their consent during sexual interactions.

Insights on sexual extortion are particularly concerning considering the current legal framework in Mexico, as sexual extortion of children is not explicitly criminalized under federal law. [In November 2022, the Chamber of Deputies approved a bill to include sexual extortion as a form of "digital violence" against women in the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence, but it had yet to be approved by the Senate as of April 2026.](#) While the 2021 amendment to the law marked an important step in recognizing digital violence, framing sexual extortion solely as a form of violence against women and girls raises significant concerns, as it risks excluding offences against all children and may leave boys without adequate legal protection.

Sharing of sexual content without permission

According to survey data, two per cent of children aged 12–17 in Mexico had their sexual images shared online by others without their permission within a one-year period – a violation that can have both immediate and long-term consequences, particularly given the difficulty of removing such content once it has been shared online. This is illustrated below by a 17-year-old interview participant who first sent sexual content to a peer consensually. Her peer later shared her sexual content with other peers via Telegram without her permission:

“

I trusted him a lot, and everything was fine. At one point, he started asking me for pictures, and I trusted him, so I sent them to him. Then, I think the pandemic happened, and by the time I was in my first year of high school, I realized he was resharing the pictures. (YP)

”

Sharing of sexual content without permission can also be used as a form of bullying against children. During the interviews, young people and professionals explained how this form of exploitation and abuse can be trivialized by peers as a harmless game rather than recognized as a form of sexual exploitation and abuse. In the survey with children aged 12–17, 2 per cent shared that they had allowed someone else to take naked pictures or videos of them in the past year. A similar proportion also indicated that they had pressured a peer to send them sexual pictures or videos. A social worker described how sharing sexual content of children without their permission had become increasingly common and normalized in high schools through chat groups, or social media pages created to publicly expose, harass or defame individuals, usually other students or sometimes teachers:

“

There is a form of violence that worries me a lot, because it unfolds in a very natural way. I'll speak about high school, where there are groups known as 'quemados' [burnt, literal translation, could be translated as busted or exposed], there are groups on Instagram called 'quemados'. In each high school group they can hurt, they can be violent towards whoever they want. I can say 'I would like to burn Rocío who is a girl who's dating this person and this other person'. And that's how a series of violent acts get started, it has been normalized, and it is very concerning. Everybody knows it, nobody takes care of it. (FW)

”

Sexual images of children are also being sold online.

A young person who was 16 years old at the time of the abuse narrated how she found out that her sexual images along with images of multiple girls were being advertised via a Facebook group and later sold through Telegram.

“

There were not 10 folders, nor 20, there were around 300, organized alphabetically by name. I mean, depending on the municipality of Morelos, there were files for [mentions municipalities of Morelos]. They would present the images of Facebook and announce the selling of image folders on Facebook, and I think at the time they cost 7.5 pesos. (YP)

”

This incident shows how technology may facilitate the reproduction of patriarchal patterns of exploitation, wherein girls' bodies are commodified.

From a legal standpoint, producing, storing, or disseminating such material for distribution or commercial purposes is punishable by 7 to 12 years' imprisonment and a fine under the Mexican Federal Penal Code.¹⁴ In addition, storing, buying or renting it without such purposes carries a prison penalty of one to five years, a fine and mandatory psychiatric treatment.¹⁵ These provisions explicitly extend to conducts carried out via information and communication technologies.¹⁶

Child sexual abuse material in the Federal Penal Code: Definition, gaps and terminology

Legal provisions on child sexual abuse material in the Federal Penal Code cover depictions of children engaged in real or simulated sexually explicit activities and of their genitals for primarily sexual purposes. They also encompass visual, audio and written content.¹⁷

This definition does not extend to material depicting a person who appears to be a child engaged in sexually explicit conduct, nor does it include realistic images of non-existent children or digitally generated content, including content produced through tools powered by artificial intelligence.

Survey data indicate that for 1 per cent (14 children) of the 12–17-year-olds surveyed in Mexico, someone had used artificial intelligence to create fake sexual images or videos of them. Although the number is small, it highlights an emerging risk and underscores the need for proactive prevention and response measures.

In addition, the federal legislation uses the outdated term “*pornography of persons under 18 years of age*” to refer to child sexual abuse material. Although still present in many legal systems, this terminology is inappropriate and misleading, as it implies that images or recordings of child sexual abuse are a form of pornography. This framing risks diminishing the seriousness of the abuse or exploitation, trivializing harm or implicitly legitimizing acts that constitute sexual exploitation

¹⁴ United Mexican States (1931). [Federal Penal Code](#) (latest amendment published on 13 March 2026), arts. 202 (2), 202 (3).

¹⁵ Ibid., art. 202 bis.

¹⁶ Ibid., art. 202 (1).

¹⁷ Ibid., art. 202.

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

and/or abuse of children. The term child sexual abuse material should therefore be used instead as it more accurately reflects the nature of the harm involved.¹⁸

While possession of child sexual abuse material with no intention to share or sell is criminalized, simple access with no intent to distribute and/or share further is not. This creates a loophole, theoretically allowing individuals to view such material online without legal consequences. In addition, livestreaming of child sexual abuse is only partially covered by legal provisions on child sexual abuse material. While the law criminalizes procuring, coercing, facilitating or inducing a child to engage in real or simulated sexual acts or explicit bodily displays for transmission via electronic or telecommunications systems, it specifically requires this transmission to occur as “data files”.¹⁹ Thus, instances where abuse or exploitation happens solely through livestreaming – without being recorded or stored as a data file – fall outside these provisions. Moreover, merely accessing such broadcasts without paying for or downloading them is not a criminal offence.²⁰

.....

This section outlined the forms of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse identified through the Disrupting Harm data, with particular attention to some of the most common forms – such as exposure to sexual content, receiving unsolicited requests for sexual content, being pressured or blackmailed into sharing sexual content and having sexual content distributed online. The findings from interviews also showed instances in which peers and adults subjected children to abuse and/or exploitation. Building on this, the next section focuses on the demographic characteristics of the individuals who subject children to exploitation and abuse as identified through the household survey and interviews with professionals and young people.

.....

¹⁸ Interagency Working Group on the Sexual Exploitation of Children. (2025). [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse: Second Edition](#), 63. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

¹⁹ United Mexican States (1931). [Federal Penal Code](#) (latest amendment published on 13 March 2026), art. 202 (1).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, art. 202 bis.

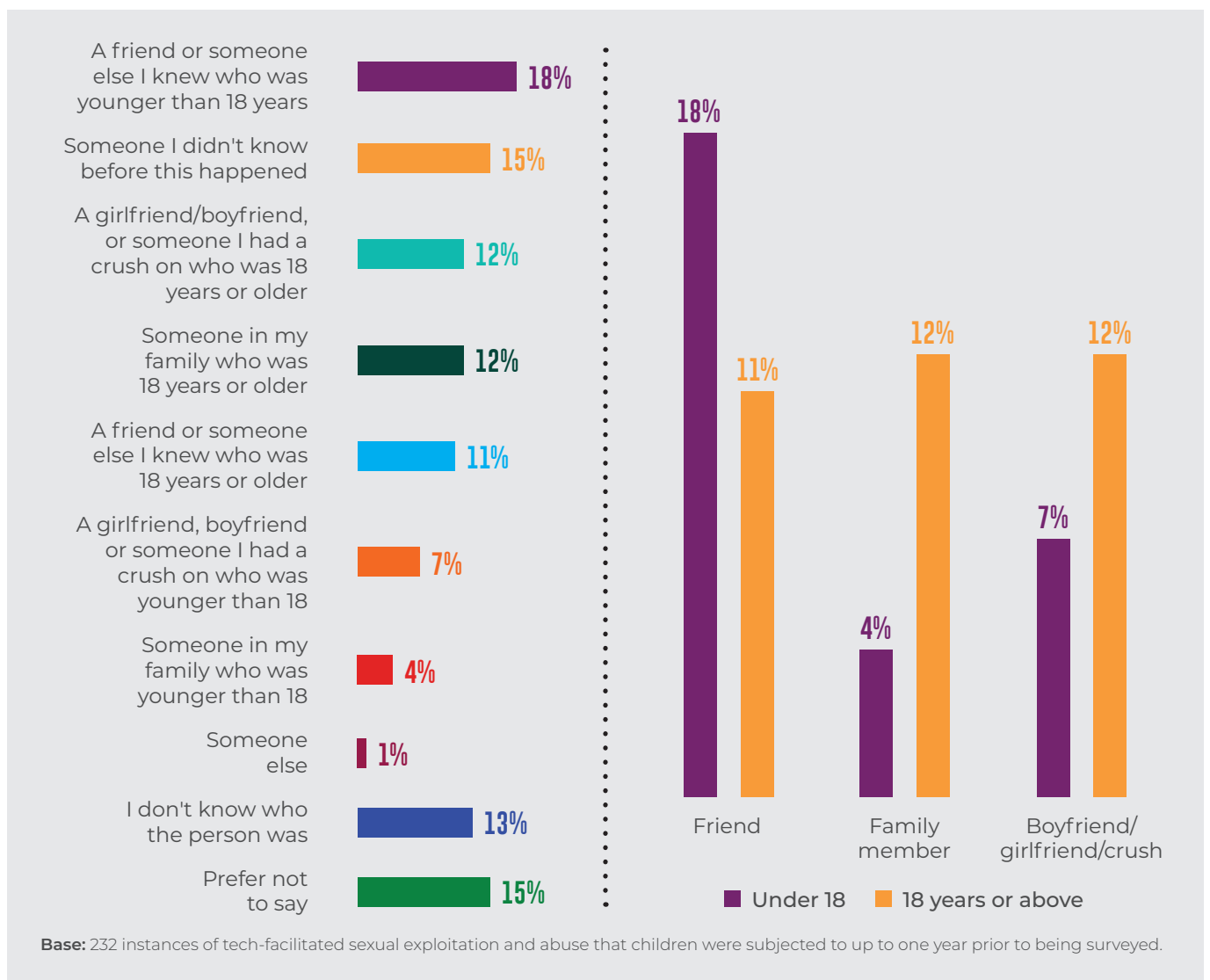
1.2 WHO PERPETRATES TECH-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE?

Survey data show that the perpetrator of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse is most often someone already known to the child (64 per cent of the 232 incidents recorded in the survey), specifically friends (29 per cent), followed by girlfriends/boyfriends/crushes (19 per cent) and/or family members (16 per cent). In around 34 per cent of cases, the perpetrator was aged 18 or over, compared with 29 per cent of cases where the child was exploited or abused by another child. In 15 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 28 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 2 indicate that children are involved in the sexual exploitation and/or abuse of other children, and this seems to be particularly common among friends. Rather than ostracizing or isolating these children, this finding highlights the need for guidance to help children to navigate relationships and to understand healthy boundaries and harmful (sexual) behaviours, both online and in person.

Chart 2: Who perpetrates tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, by relationship to the child and age



1.2 WHO PERPETRATES TECH-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE?

With a number of cases of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by peers, it is relevant to note, as mentioned above, that Mexico sets the age of criminal responsibility at 12.²¹ Judicial proceedings involving adolescents over the age of 12 suspected of criminal offences must be conducted by authorities that are trained, qualified and specialized in juvenile justice.²² Safeguards are also in place to protect adolescents over the age of 12 throughout the process, including enhanced privacy protections,²³ expedited proceedings,²⁴ closed hearings,²⁵ access to free legal representation,²⁶ and the right to be informed, in clear and simple language they can understand, of the rights and legal guarantees to which they are entitled.²⁷

Mexican law states that the purpose of penal sanctions imposed on children over the age of 12 is their social reinsertion and reintegration,²⁸ reflecting a largely non-punitive approach. Judges may impose a range of non-custodial measures, including reprimands, warnings, community service, supervised release or participation in specialized programmes on gender theory for sexual violence cases.²⁹ Custodial measures such as home confinement or partial deprivation of liberty are also possible.³⁰ Full-time placement in custody is considered a last-resort option, to be imposed for the shortest possible period and reserved for serious offences such as rape, aggravated extortion or trafficking. It is limited to children aged 14 and above and must be served in special facilities.³¹

Most people who subject children to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse were already part of the children's existing social spheres. Interviews with young people and professionals show that they are sometimes schoolmates, teachers, friends, acquaintances or relatives.

Household survey data also shows that in 39 per cent of cases of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, children first met the person who exploited or abused them at school.

This aligns with operational findings from INTERPOL, which supported a case involving a single perpetrator who groomed multiple children in educational settings to sexually abuse or exploit them in person, and produce and distribute child sexual abuse material.³² In addition, according to data collected by a group of civil society organizations, there have been multiple grooming cases across Mexico involving school staff, with children reporting that the sexual exploitation and abuse was recorded. Reported cases have steadily increased: 18 in 7 states (2021), 21 in 10 states (2022) and 25 in 11 states (2023). These patterns, documented in 11 states by civil society organizations, suggest possible organized criminal activity.³³

The interviews with professionals and young people suggest that perpetrators are sometimes men and boys, although professionals also discussed cases where women and girls were exploiting and abusing children. A law enforcement representative from INTERPOL described responding to cases in which perpetrators were men from the child's close environment. In addition, based on data from INTERPOL, many perpetrators who contact

21 United Mexican States (2016). [National Law of the Criminal Justice System for Adolescents](#) (latest amendment published on 20 December 2022), art. 1.

22 Ibid., arts. 23, 64.

23 Ibid., arts. 35, 36.

24 Ibid., art. 33.

25 Ibid., art. 32.

26 Ibid., art. 41.

27 Ibid., art. 40.

28 Ibid., art. 153.

29 Ibid., art. 155.

30 Ibid., arts. 163, 167.

31 Ibid., art. 164.

32 <http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldetampico/policiaca/interpol-europol-y-fiscalia-de-tamaulipas-capturan-a-presunto-corrupcion-de-menores-23754062>.

33 <https://dispensariodi.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Es-un-secreto-Actualizacion-2023-12-de-junio-1-2.pdf>.

children online rarely target just one child. In most cases, they establish contact with multiple children, often located in different countries. For example, in March 2025 the arrest was confirmed of a perpetrator in Mexico who – pretending to be a boy – groomed, obtained and shared sexual abuse material of children in at least six countries (Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Spain, Venezuela and United States of America).

In some cases, it is difficult for the child to tell if the other person is a peer or an adult, especially if their interactions occur solely online. Professionals narrated cases they supported where perpetrators interacted with children pretending to be younger or a child themselves, with the intention of requesting sexual content or meeting the child in person.

“

Her son was 11 years old, he was going to middle school, and they started to contact him through Facebook, and they pretended to be a teenage girl. Then, the perpetrator pretended to be a 12-year-old girl, a teenager. Through Facebook he [the boy] gave her a phone number, he started to give her information, and they had been chatting on social networks for about two months. He asks the teenager to meet at a house, when the teenager knocks, an adult comes out and says the name of the girl and that ‘she is not here but come in’. He does not realize anything, enters and is locked in and raped. (JP)

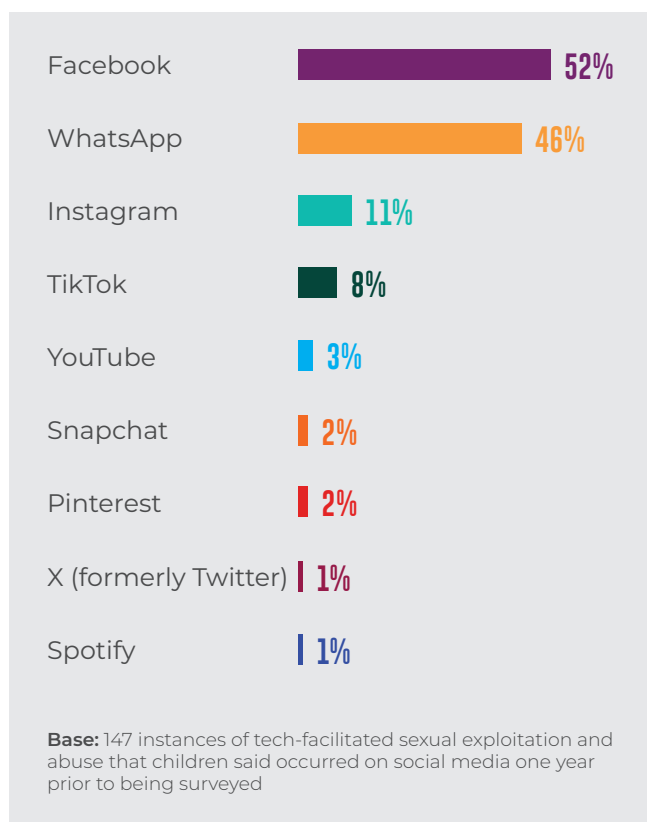
”

This case illustrates how perpetrators may exploit and manipulate children’s developing interest in social connection and relationships as well as gender norms that frame girls as trustworthy or non-threatening to abuse or exploit a boy. It further shows how online platforms – Facebook in this instance – can enable initial contact between a child and a perpetrator, grooming, and in-person sexual exploitation and abuse, all under the veil of anonymity provided to perpetrators online. The following section explores which platforms were found to facilitate sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Mexico and how.

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

According to the children surveyed, 67 per cent of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse cases happened exclusively online; this consisted of 63 per cent of cases that occurred via social media or instant messaging apps, and 4 per cent of cases that occurred in an online game. Among the cases of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse cases that occurred via social media or messaging apps, the most common apps where children in Mexico were subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse are owned by Meta; Facebook (52 per cent) and WhatsApp (46 per cent). Less frequently, children were sexually abused or exploited on another Meta platform, Instagram (11 per cent), while 8 per cent of incidents occurred on TikTok. Only 3 per cent of incidents occurred on YouTube and 2 per cent on Snapchat.

Chart 3: On which platforms are children subjected to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse?



Children under pressure to share sexual content may consider first which platforms to use, relying on which they perceive as safer or as having more controllable features. This was the case of a young

person (18 years old) who was coerced to send sexual content at the age of 14. She reflected on choosing to share this content via Instagram, as the “view-once” function would prevent the perpetrator from capturing or retaining her sexual content: *“So, I thought, ‘Fine, I’ll send you a photo if you want, without anything, but I’ll send it through Instagram’. I believed it was safer because I thought he can’t take a screenshot. It’s only viewable once.”* (YP)

Children’s sexual content may be stored in Google Drive by perpetrators who possess, distribute and commercialize child sexual abuse material by advertising it on buy-and-sell groups on Facebook and Telegram. In some online groups, it is possible to find information on young people classified by municipality, state, age and other characteristics. Notably, peers may act as facilitators by uploading sexual content for these groups. This is described by a young person who recalled the details of one such group:

“It is a Facebook page, there you can sell products and services and all of that, right? It is a very large group, I believe there are many people there, I mean, from all ages, and it is as if it’s just for a particular gender, there are men and people that want to sell any type of item. Well, in there they started selling photos, I mean, blatantly, on a Facebook post for buying/selling [name of municipality] Content folders for sale’. There they would show screenshots of the files [name of municipality and city], there was a part showing which pictures they had of which girls, they would show the name, I mean, organized alphabetically.” (YP)

Professionals described working on cases where abuse or exploitation was facilitated by video gaming platforms such as Roblox and video games such Fortnite and FIFA. Through these spaces, unknown people can directly contact children, gradually gain their trust and contact them in other platforms such as WhatsApp, asking them for personal and sexual content, as described by a justice professional:

“

We're currently handling a case involving a minor who downloaded the Roblox gaming app. Through the app, she interacted with strangers, exchanged phone numbers and was added to group chats. Eventually, individuals in these chats began sending her WhatsApp messages, gaining her trust, and requesting explicit photos and videos. She even engaged in video calls with them. (JP)

”

While survey data indicated that few children (4 per cent) were subjected to exploitation and abuse on online gaming platforms, many (59 per cent) internet-using children in Mexico play online games on a weekly basis. Gaming environments often serve as initial contact points where perpetrators establish trust before moving the interaction to other platforms that are more conducive to sharing texts, images and videos. These transitions make the exploitation or abuse harder to trace and survey-based research methods may not be able to capture this complexity. Indeed, case data from INTERPOL indicate that grooming cases that start in online games frequently involve large numbers of children across multiple platforms and often require international cooperation to identify them.

Online and in-person sexual exploitation and abuse

Complementing the evidence on which technological platforms facilitate child sexual exploitation and abuse, testimonies from professionals and young people indicate how children may be subjected to both online and in-person sexual exploitation and abuse. A young woman recalled various incidents that started when she was 10 years old, where schoolmates would request and send sexual content and asked her to talk about sex when she did not want to. She reflected on her cousin (a 24-year-old young man) abusing her when she was 14, both in person and through online interactions:

“

Then, by the third year of middle school, I don't remember exactly how it happened, how it came about. Because at first, it was in person [in reference to in-person sexual abuse], and then he started sending messages on [Facebook] Messenger. (YP)

”

In the quote below, a young person described how she was first coerced to send sexual photos when she was 14 years old and later raped by the perpetrator (an 18 to 20-year-old). This quote further illustrates how sexual exploitation and abuse that starts online through coercion can also facilitate in-person sexual exploitation and abuse:

“

When I think back on the relationship now that I'm older and can reason through it, I realize he was just one of those people who come into your life to get something out of it, because that's exactly how it happened. First, it was photos, and it didn't take long; we hadn't known each other for very long. He also made comments like, 'Come see me or stay with me,' trying to intimidate me in a sexual way. So, the photos were like the first step of the 'test of love.' After that, it was like, 'Now let's meet up and get intimate.' I remember thinking, 'Well, what could happen?' And I went for it. It happened, I remember it hurt a lot because it was my first time, and I said, 'I don't want to do this, I don't want to', and I was crying, and he was like, 'Oh, come on, don't be ridiculous, it's going to happen, don't worry'. And the sexual assault happened, he finished, and I was crying. Then he said to me, 'Hey, what if at this moment we break up?' I was like, 'What do you mean?' Then he said, 'Well, right now, we're not together anymore'. I was just frozen, I thought, 'What just happened?' because it was something very shocking for me: the fact that I was assaulted, and now the person who was important to me was leaving my life at that moment, right? (YP)

”

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

Household survey data show that children who were subjected to in-person sexual violence had much higher odds (odds ratio=19) of being subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse compared with children not subjected to these forms of in-person violence. This strong association indicates that online and in-person sexual exploitation and abuse are interrelated rather than isolated phenomena. This finding may indicate that perpetrators may exploit children who have previously been subjected to violence.



1.4 WHICH CHILDREN ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE SUBJECTED TO TECH-FACILITATED SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE?

Household survey data show that 14 per cent of girls and 13 per cent of boys in Mexico were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse within a one-year period, with no statistically significant gender differences observed.

Importantly, the lack of differences by gender in this aggregate does not erase the gendered aspects of exploitation and abuse, since children may be targeted differently and have vastly different experiences before, during and after exploitation and abuse, because of their gender. Rather, this finding underscores the need to protect all children from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Professionals, on the other hand, discussed cases when they supported girls, and one briefly mentioned having supported a boy in a case of abuse or exploitation facilitated through the dating app Grindr.³⁴ This contributed to the perception among professionals interviewed that girls are disproportionately impacted by tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. As one psychologist explained: “Usually, it’s more with girls. I mostly get cases involving girls. It’s very, very rare to have cases involving boys in my experience. It’s been mostly girls. They tend to be more vulnerable.” (FW). However, because professionals only supported a few cases involving boys, such perceptions may be skewed. Instead, it may point to how tech-facilitated child sexual abuse or exploitation of boys is overlooked, minimized and silenced. Consistent with this, the study was also unable to identify boys who had been subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse to participate in interviews, which may signal barriers to disclosure, visibility or access to support for boys.

When it comes to age, among the 12–17-year-olds surveyed, older children were subjected to higher rates of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, with 21 per cent of 17-year-olds being subjected to at least one form of abuse or exploitation, compared with 6 per cent of 12-year-olds. There could be several reasons for this. Older children could be more likely to disclose these incidents in the survey because they may have better awareness of what constitutes abuse or exploitation. Importantly, analysis of the survey data shows that frequency of internet use was not associated with being subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. Even though older children tend to spend more time online, this does not seem to be a main reason why they are more likely to be subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse.

The context in which the child lives may also be associated with their likelihood of being subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. Household survey data showed that children who were subjected to in-person sexual violence had higher odds (19 times more) of being subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse compared with children who had not. Similarly, children whose parents said that they witnessed violence at home had higher odds (3 times greater) of being subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse than children whose parents said their child did not witness violence at home. This may be because perpetrators may, deliberately or inadvertently, exploit factors related to the child’s context to abuse them.

In contrast, trust and open communication with caregivers was consistently identified by both children, young people and professionals in the interviews as supportive conditions that may safeguard children against abuse or exploitation. Emotional support and attention by caregivers were linked by young people and professionals to their awareness about relationship boundaries, understanding and knowledge of sexuality and what constitutes violence. Importantly, even when support is in place, children may still be subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, which can have profound and lasting effects, as explored in the following section.

³⁴ A dating and meeting online app predominantly used by gay and bisexual men, and the transgender and queer community.

2. THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN



2. THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

One of the most challenging moments during the interviews with young people was when they shared how the exploitation and abuse made them feel. They talked about feeling afraid: afraid something similar would happen again, afraid that they would be identified through child sexual abuse material being permanently available online, or afraid that their friends and relatives would find out about what happened to them.

In the cases where perpetrators were part of organized crime groups, young people were also afraid that the perpetrator would harm their families as well.

In the interviews, the young people recounted blaming themselves and feeling guilty, as explained by a 20-year-old who was abused by her boyfriend (a peer) online and in person when she was 15:

“

The overwhelming guilt I felt for allowing that man to treat me the way he did and for letting myself get to such a low point. I let myself be manipulated, didn't defend myself, and didn't set any boundaries. Most of my anger was directed at myself, though I was angry at him too. (YP)

”

Young people spoke of missing or changing schools because they were bullied for being subjected to exploitation and abuse. School can

feel unsafe for children especially when they are already blaming themselves for the exploitation and/or abuse they were subjected to. In the quote below, a young woman reflected on the profound distress, shame and feeling of hopelessness she experienced because of the exploitation or abuse:

“

You feel like less [low sense of self-worth], you feel a lot of shame, a lot of emotions and you get to the point where you think 'I don't want to be here anymore, I'm tired' and you just cry. I couldn't even sleep at night. (YP)

”

In addition, young people described family members, friends and institutions reacting negatively towards them when learning about the exploitation and abuse they had been subjected to. Such reactions included bullying, anger, frustration, attributing the sexual violence to the child's behaviour, and physical punishment. Children were punished by family members for losing control over access to images of their bodies. Accountability was placed on the child who had been abused or exploited, who in turn continued to blame themselves, thereby perpetuating a cycle of self-blame, shame and guilt. During an interview, a young woman reflected on how misplaced accountability, put on the child instead of the perpetrator, diverts attention from the abuse or exploitation.

“

I feel there is guilt towards my generation for the fact that 'you decide with whom you share your pictures', no? Thus, it is as if it is our fault for being too dependent or close to social media and technology in general. (YP)

”

Another 20-year-old interviewed remembered being blamed by her parents when perpetrators shared her sexual content when she was 15 years old.

2. THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

“

Well then, they started sending my dad screenshots of the messages, they sent them my intimate photos, my audios, and on top of that they told him that he didn't know me at all, that every weekend I would go out with a different guy and I would go to squares and that I was probably pregnant, they told him many things. And well, my dad got really mad at me, he stopped talking to me, and my mom also didn't talk to me for a while. (YP)

”

Potential victim-blaming attitudes by parents were also observed in the household survey data. Most caregivers surveyed said it was wrong for a person to take naked images or videos of themselves (60 per cent), and that if someone took naked images or videos of themselves it was their fault if they were reshared with other people (57 per cent). Thirty per cent of caregivers indicated that they would restrict use of the internet if their child was subjected to harm online. These perceptions need to be addressed as they may further prevent children from receiving care and support, regardless of their actions before, during or after the sexual exploitation and abuse.

The negative impact of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse can be further inferred from the results of the survey data, which showed a statistically significant association between tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, and mental health. Children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse were 15 times more likely to report self-harm and 12 times more likely to report suicidal thoughts and behaviours compared with children not subjected to this kind of violence. They also had elevated anxiety scores; on average, the anxiety scores of those subjected to exploitation and abuse were 11 percentage points higher than those not subjected to abuse or exploitation.³⁵ This is reflected in the words of a young woman who was sexually abused at 16 years old, which eventually led her to acts of self-harm.

“

At that point, it was not only the [victim-blaming] things they said at the Prosecutor's Office, or the things they told my mom, they were things I would tell myself. I appropriated that discourse 'it is your fault, these things happened because you wanted them', all that violence was not only inside, but it was also inside of me too and I started being violent towards myself. Well, I have had problems with self-harm. (YP)

”

With regard to mental health, front-line workers indicated that in addition to self-harm, anxiety and thoughts of suicide, some of the children and young people they attended to suffered from depression, sleep problems, low self-esteem, drug use problems and irregular eating behaviours because of the tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. This is illustrated in the quote below from a psychologist, who reflected on the harm from these forms of exploitation and abuse and its similarities with in-person exploitation and abuse:

“

I mean, in any case, this violence is so real that it has the same consequences as in-person violence, right? They have depression, they have anxiety, I even believe that the three cases [they had worked on] have had suicidal ideation. That is, it is not a minor thing just because it is not tangible, the damages are completely real. (FW)

”

Several young people reflected on how tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse impacted on their mental health:

³⁵ Estimates are based on smaller subgroups and should be interpreted with caution due to wider confidence intervals. Relative risks are reported for self-harm and suicidal thoughts/behaviours, while average differences are reported for anxiety. Anxiety scores range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating more frequent or intense symptoms. All models control for age, gender, parental education and urban residence.

“

Even though I was wearing a mask [due to the COVID-19 pandemic], I felt that every person that saw me did not see me, they saw my photos, that I was not a person, but a naked body that everyone could see. I felt exposed, I felt afraid and above all, since everything happened, I started doubting everything and everyone. Now I feel that I have worked on it, that little by little I have been able to get it out, but in the moment no. Like I tell you, I could not leave my bed, I could not sleep, I had many sleeping problems. I used to be awake for days, searching for who was the perpetrator. (YP)

”

“

I remember feeling really sad and down after the relationship ended. Besides that, I think part of it was because he had manipulated me during the relationship, making my self-esteem so low that I'd let him do whatever he wanted. (YP)

”

“

There were many [challenges]. Mainly in my social environment, something that worried me a lot was how to relate to society after what happened. I did not know how they would react if I told them what happened to me, I was afraid of facing that. Also, family... that was something... well I took a lot of effort... to tell them so they would understand. Well, the school environment too, it was very hard for me to go to school and [hear] things like 'What happened?' 'What's this?' 'What was that?' It was very difficult... there were many challenges. Mainly it affects my emotional health, it made me feel depression and anxiety. (YP)

”

Young people described a sense of exposure and vulnerability that went beyond the time of abuse or exploitation. They and the professionals interviewed described the recurrence or re-exposure to harm that characterizes tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Specifically, they explained how challenging it is to put an end to this form of violence. In the quote below, a clinical psychologist explained how once sexual content is online, children and young people can be repeatedly impacted psychologically if their sexual content continues to be available and reshared:

“

But that image or video that was shared, we do not know how long, or we cannot say that it is gone forever and at some point, in the future, that child who has become an adult will be affected in some way to see again that his image is going around. (FW)

”

As this section has shown, tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse can have profound and lasting effects on children's lives. Speaking out is often a crucial step towards accessing support. The next section explores *who* children are most likely to disclose tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse to and explores the reasons *why* they choose not to disclose in certain situations.

3. DISCLOSURE

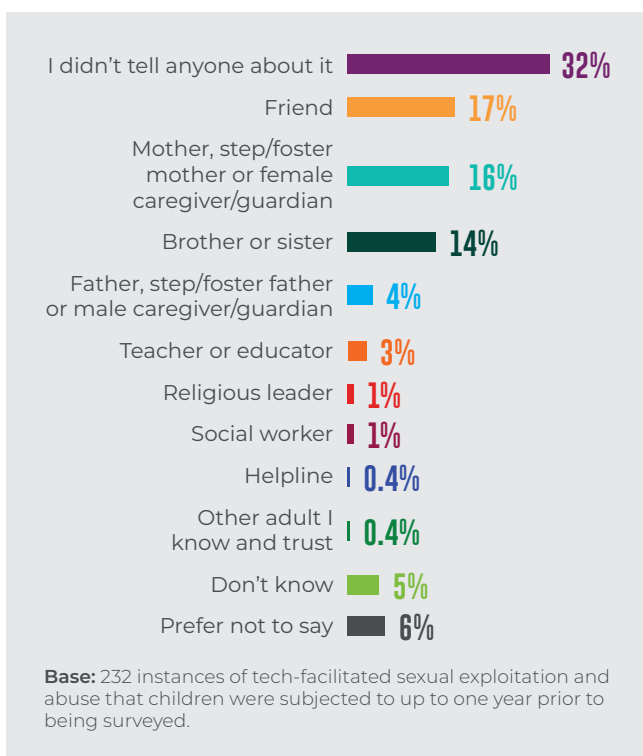


3. DISCLOSURE

In the context of this report, disclosure refers to the process by which a person (child or adult) conveys or attempts to convey that they are being or have been sexually abused or exploited during their childhood. Disclosure can also occur accidentally or incompletely, and it is typically a gradual process instead of a one-off event. This section of the report discusses key characteristics of disclosure identified in Mexico.

According to household survey data, 58 per cent of children who were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in the year prior to participating in the study told someone. In contrast, 32 per cent of children did not disclose exploitation and abuse to anyone at all. Children who talked to someone about being subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse most often disclosed to their friends (17 per cent), their mothers or female caregivers (16 per cent) or siblings (14 per cent). There were some small differences in disclosure patterns between boys and girls: boys most often disclosed to their sibling (15 per cent), followed by friend (14 per cent), while among girls, it was most common to disclose to a female caregiver (19 per cent) or to a friend (19 per cent).

Chart 4: Who do children disclose or report to?



The young people interviewed talked about disclosing to friends, intimate partners or family members such as brothers, sisters or aunts, with whom they felt more trusting than their parents or immediate caregivers. In the quote below, a young woman reflected on how valuable her older brother's support was after her sexual content was shared online, and how this made it easier for her to disclose the abuse or exploitation to their mother:

I told my brother, 'Hey, you know what? Pick me up, I want to tell you something' and my brother and his girlfriend came for me, I told them what had happened and they told me, 'If you want us to help you tell your mom, we will help you, there is no problem'. Thank God they never left me alone, I told my mom, that same day in the afternoon, I left high school early, I told her. My mother got angry, of course, I accepted my mistakes, which was wrong, and I told her, I told her everything that had happened. (YP)

Although the specific factors that enable disclosure are not yet well understood and may differ from child to child, for some young people interviewed in Mexico, participation in feminist organization activities served as a catalyst for disclosure:

I think the whole feminist movement that emerged and spread widely on social media, this message of 'this is violence, what happened to you is wrong' and the creation of tools like the Olimpia Law, all of that helped me a lot. My friend, who had been through something similar, also helped me face the situation and was there for me. (YP)

During their interviews, some young people described how events in which women call out perpetrators publicly – whether in physical spaces (e.g. at school or in the street) or via social media – gave visibility to these forms of violence, and helped young people understand that such behaviours are harmful and wrong.

3. DISCLOSURE

From activism to law: Ley Olimpia

The feminist movement's role in denouncing tech-facilitated violence in Mexico has empowered individuals to recognize and disclose such harms and has contributed to important legal reforms. One example is the set of legal reforms known as the *Ley Olimpia* (Olimpia Law), named after activist Olimpia Coral Melo. After her sexual content was non-consensually shared online, she dedicated herself to promoting laws that regulate such forms of exploitation and abuse.³⁶ Her efforts culminated in significant reforms at the federal level in 2021, when the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence was amended to introduce the concept of "digital violence", defined as fraudulent acts carried out through information and communication technologies: a) by which materials depicting a person's intimate sexual content are shared, exhibited or commercialized without their consent, causing psychological harm or affecting any aspect of their private life or personal image; and b) that cause harm to the intimacy, privacy and/or dignity of women.³⁷

As part of this process, and in the same year, the offence of "violation of sexual privacy" was introduced in the Federal Penal Code to criminalize the dissemination of sexual material depicting adults without their consent.³⁸ Similar provisions also feature in the penal codes of Morelos and Nayarit, both of which go beyond the federal law by encompassing conduct targeting children: Nayarit does so directly, while Morelos addresses such acts by expressly classifying them as dissemination of child sexual abuse material.³⁹ By formally acknowledging digital violence and establishing legal consequences, these reforms contributed to creating an environment in which individuals that have been subjected to these forms of exploitation and abuse feel supported and recognized.

36 United Mexican States, Federal Consumer Protection Agency (2021). [La "Ley Olimpia" y el combate a la violencia digital](#).

37 United Mexican States (2007). [General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence](#) (latest amendment published on 15 January 2026), art. 20 quater.

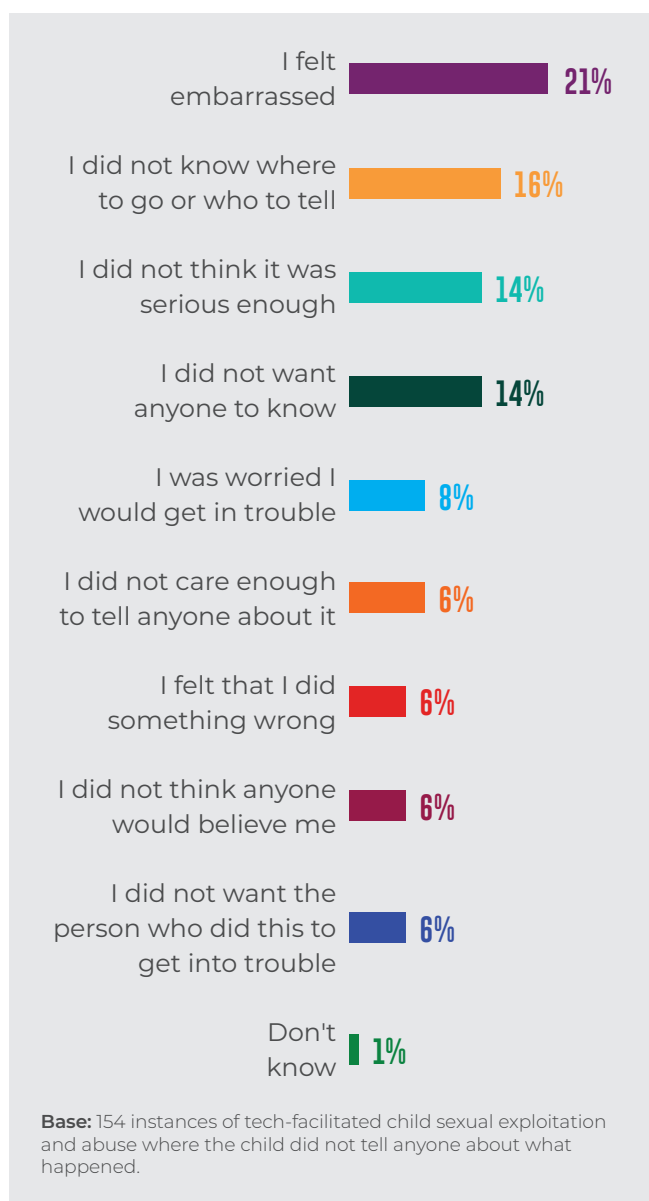
38 United Mexican States (1931). [Federal Penal Code](#) (latest amendment published on 13 March 2026), art. 199 octies.

39 United Mexican States, State of Nayarit (2014). [Criminal Code for the State of Nayarit](#) (latest amendment published on 6 March 2026), art. 297 quater; United Mexican States, State of Morelos (1996). [Criminal Code for the State of Morelos](#) (latest amendment published on 1 February 2023), arts. 150 bis, 212.

3.1 WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO DISCLOSING TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE?

While most children surveyed in Mexico who were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in the year prior to being surveyed disclosed what happened, almost one third of the incidents (32 per cent) were never disclosed to anyone. Among those 32 per cent of cases that were not disclosed, 42 per cent of incidents involved boys and 47 per cent involved girls. The most common reason why those children did not disclose was because they were embarrassed or did not know where to go or whom to tell, or did not think the abuse and/or exploitation were serious enough to disclose.

Chart 5: Barriers to disclosure of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse



In line with findings from the household survey, young people interviewed expressed fear of being blamed or judged, which prevented them from disclosing the abuse or exploitation, as expressed in the following quote:

I think it was shame, and also the fear of being judged, of people saying, 'Oh, it's because you were naive, because you were foolish. It's obvious, right? You shouldn't have done that'. So, I thought, 'Oh no'. At that moment, you feel so bad about yourself that you want to tell someone in search of some support, but instead of getting support, you fear judgment. I think my mind just closed off in that moment, and I felt like, 'No, don't tell anyone, it's over, just leave it'. (YP)

In some cases, these fears were confirmed, as some of them recalled the negative repercussions of disclosure, such as being blamed for abuse or exploitation. A young person shared how after telling her mother she blamed her for the abuse or exploitation: “No, I only told my mom that I felt like he was harassing me through his messages, but she made me feel like it was my fault for letting him in” (YP). In another case, a young person’s father not only blamed her but also defended the perpetrator: “My dad, especially, accepted it. He said, ‘The boy wasn’t to blame, you’re the one at fault’. They always blamed me, saying I was the one at fault for sending those pictures” (YP). Deeply embedded gender beliefs and biases may shape parents’ responses, suggesting that a child’s appearance or behaviour contributed to the abuse or exploitation and thereby shifting responsibility away from the perpetrator onto the child. Living in challenging home environments and lack of trust or open communication between children and their caregivers may also hinder disclosure. In their interviews, young people who were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse when they were children recounted living with absent or emotionally distant caregivers. Some young people described how in such challenging settings, disclosure happened because abuse or exploitation had become so unbearable. In the quote below, two young people explained why they did not tell their parents about the abuse and/or exploitation:

3. DISCLOSURE

“

Well, my dad is very explosive. I don't know, I feel like if I told him about it, I don't know how he'd react. And my dad isn't here right now; he's in the United States and has been there for almost two years. (YP)

”

“

Precisely, since my parents were present and absent at the same time, I used to deal with my problems for the most part, so I've always thought such as 'I can handle it by myself'. (YP)

”

Some children in the survey (16 per cent) did not disclose exploitation and abuse because they did not know where to go or whom to tell. Interviews with young people also support this, as one interviewee explained that she disclosed only partially about a classmate sending her unwanted sexual images and sexually abusing her in person:

“

I didn't tell anyone, not really. I might have mentioned it to some classmates, but it was more like, 'Just tell him to go to hell' or something like that. I mean, what could I say to someone my age? What kind of advice could they even give me? (YP)

”

Uncertainty about where to seek help or whom to tell can delay disclosure and allow the exploitation and abuse to continue. A clinical psychologist described a case in which a perpetrator pretending to be a child would continuously contact the child he/she was supporting: *"I had a case where the person began to, he wanted the minor as a partner, and the minor detected it, and refused, refused, but it was two years of insistence without the parents noticing, the minor never said anything."* (FW).

Some children and young people chose not to disclose exploitation and abuse because they did not think it was serious enough to tell someone about it. Survey data show that 14 per cent of the children who were subjected to exploitation and abuse in the year prior to the survey and did not disclose it cited this as the reason. Interview data revealed that harmful behaviours are sometimes perceived as acceptable or normalized to the point where they become integrated into a young person's sexual or school life. This is illustrated by a young woman who explained why she did not talk about the exploitation and abuse facilitated by Omegle⁴⁰ when she was 14 years old from a 19-year-old perpetrator: *"I believe, at this point, I saw it as part of my sex life, no? I knew it was not safe to exchange content or do this type of video chat. Therefore, well, no, I just kept it private."* (YP).

In Mexico, statutes of limitation – the period after which legal action can no longer be initiated for a criminal offence – were abolished for sexual crimes against children in 2023.⁴¹ This represents an important and positive development, as it helps ensure that individuals who have been subject to sexual exploitation and/or abuse during childhood are able to pursue justice when they are ready to do so, regardless of the time that has passed. However, this protection does not extend to all forms of exploitation and abuse. In particular, online grooming remains outside the scope of the abolition, potentially limiting access to justice for those who have been subjected to this type of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse during childhood.

⁴⁰ Omegle was a free, online platform for anonymous text and video chats with strangers. It allowed users to connect with one another without registration, pairing them randomly or based on shared interests. At the time of its closure, Omegle faced lawsuits from a victim of child sexual exploitation and abuse.

⁴¹ United Mexican States (1931). [Federal Penal Code](#) (latest amendment published on 13 March 2026), arts. 107 bis, 205 bis.

This section has shown how although most children surveyed disclosed tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse that had occurred within the year prior to the survey, disclosure was far from universal. Some children feared judgment or blame – fears that were sometimes confirmed by negative reactions from caregivers. Others delayed disclosure because they were unsure whom to trust or doubted that anyone could help. For some, the behaviour had become normalized. Delayed disclosure may also significantly postpone formal reporting, with serious implications for children’s access to justice. These barriers contribute to children’s silence and may limit opportunities for intervention and support.



4. REPORTING



4. REPORTING

Reporting refers to the act of notifying authorities about suspected or confirmed cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Approaching an institution to file a formal complaint can be a crucial step on the road to seeking justice and legal remediation. Mexico has dedicated mechanisms and legal protections in place to support children who have been subjected to criminal offences, and which encourage reporting. A 24/7 national hotline (800 5533 000) launched by the Commission United Against Trafficking, the Citizen Council of Mexico City and the National Citizen Observatory provides a dedicated channel for reporting a wide range of crimes linked to human trafficking, including tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse.⁴² In addition, the online portal *Te Protejo México*, part of the global INHOPE network, allows individuals, including children, to report suspected child sexual abuse material, risks of sexual exploitation and related situations such as grooming or sexual extortion. It is staffed by a multidisciplinary team that reviews and processes the reports.⁴³ Lastly, the nationwide 089 and 911 hotlines allow for reporting of criminal activity and/or emergencies, though it is a general-purpose channel, with 089 accepting anonymous reporting.⁴⁴ In addition, the 088 number offers confidential, though not anonymous, support for victims of online crime.⁴⁵

As well as reporting from the children and their families, national authorities receive information sent to international cooperation channels, such as National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) reports, State-to-State collaboration via INTERPOL channels and embassies allowing data-sharing that could result in the identification of children and perpetrators.

Despite these resources, the survey data indicate that children in Mexico rarely report tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse to the authorities, at least in the short term. According to the survey data, less than 1 per cent of incidents that occurred in the year prior to data collection were reported to the police. Similarly, among the 81 children in the survey whose exploitation and abuse occurred via social media, 14 per cent reported the incident through the platforms where it took place. For incidents on social media that were reported, reports were mostly made on Facebook (70 per cent) and WhatsApp (46 per cent), which is also where most children were subjected to child sexual exploitation or abuse. Data from the household survey and from interviews provides context as to *why* children do not report to the authorities as well as the challenges they face when they do.

42 United Mexican States, National Institute of Social Development (2020). [Denuncia la Trata de Personas](#).

43 *Te Protejo México*. (accessed on 29 August 2025). [Nosotros](#).

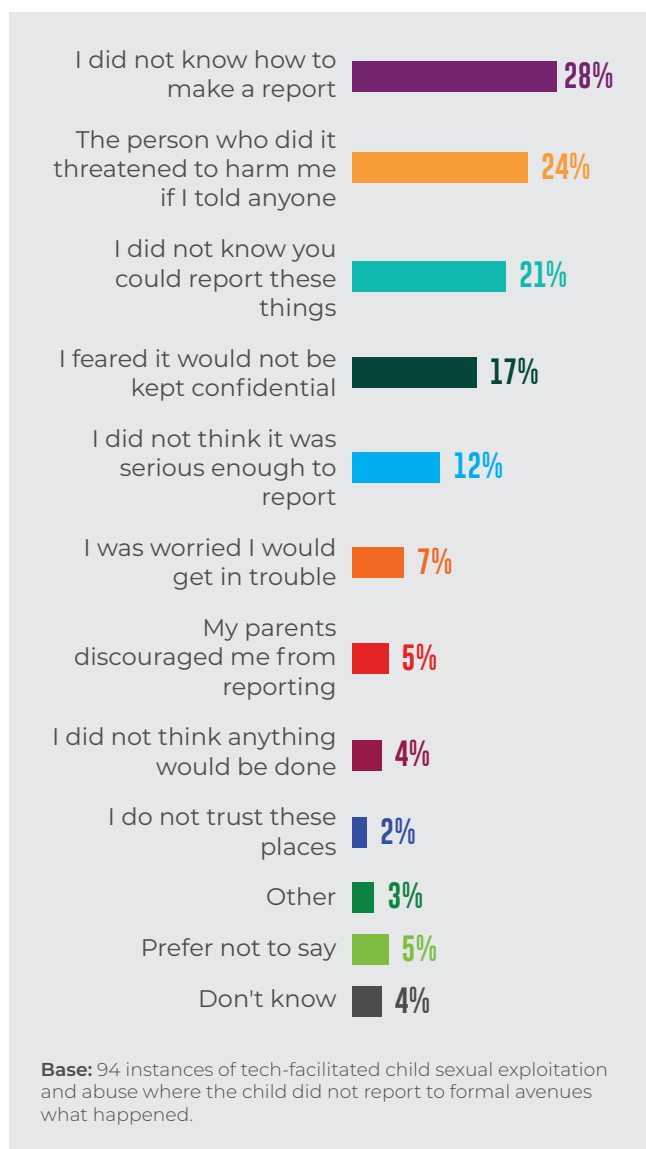
44 United Mexican States (2021). [¿Sabes cuál es la diferencia entre los números 088, 089 y 911?](#)

45 [Guardia Nacional CERT-MX | Gobierno | gob.mx](#) (accessed on 24 April 2026).

4.1 WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO REPORTING TECH-FACILITATED CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE?

Ninety-four children who were surveyed and who were subjected to one or more forms of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year did not speak to a helpline, social worker or police about what happened. Those children were asked why they did not report or seek help via formal channels. As shown in chart 6, some of the most common reasons children gave were related to lack of knowledge, such as not knowing how to make a report or not realizing that these forms of exploitation and abuse could be reported. Notably, in 24 per cent of cases, perpetrators themselves deterred children from reporting by threatening to harm them if they told anyone.

Chart 6: Barriers to reporting of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse



Of the 94 children in the survey who did not report or seek help through formal channels, 28 per cent said it was because they did not know how to do it and 21 per cent said it was because they did not know that they could report the kind of exploitation and abuse they were subjected to. Limited awareness of formal reporting and support channels was evident elsewhere, with only 33 per cent of children surveyed indicating that they knew where to seek help if they or a friend were subjected to sexual abuse or exploitation. Similarly, interview data showed that participants did not know of institutions to which they could turn for legal assistance after being subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. This pattern was also evident in conversations with justice professionals, who emphasized the importance of making themselves and their roles known:

“
There's room for improvement, particularly in raising awareness. Children and adolescents need to be informed about the institutions and services available to support them. It's crucial not only to teach them how to seek help but also to guide them on where to go for assistance. Increased awareness campaigns focusing on available resources and rights would be beneficial. (JP)
 ”

Lack of trust in the justice system was another reason why some children did not approach formal services or report to the authorities. Indeed, among 94 children who were subjected to exploitation and abuse one year prior to the survey and did not make any formal reports, 11 per cent did not report because they did not think anything would be done, while 10 per cent feared it would not be kept confidential and 4 per cent had no trust in the formal reporting channels. Young people interviewed also mentioned distrust of authorities, bureaucracy and mistreatment as reasons why they avoided or discontinued the formal reporting process. They referred to negative experiences of friends with the justice system and one young person reflected on the challenges she faced during a previous report of abuse:

“

I wish that the police or these support centres would provide faster services or that it wouldn't be so complicated, because once I reported physical violence and they told me that, 'Your report can't proceed due to lack of evidence, file another one, or go to the Prosecutor's Office'. And I thought, it's like they're waiting for someone to practically be dead before they help. (YP)

”

This lack of trust is also evident in the discourse of the justice professionals interviewed, who highlighted the fact that a lack of credibility may discourage reporting.

Though not a formal requirement, another factor that may discourage reporting is the perception that children must be accompanied by an adult responsible for their care to file a report with the Prosecutor's Office. This constitutes a substantial barrier, especially considering the previously presented finding about the difficulties children face in disclosing exploitation and abuse to their caregivers. The quotes below describe this issue in more detail:

“

I mean, if you tell a 12, 13, 14-year-old girl who is being harassed on Instagram to go and file a complaint. To begin with, she needs an adult, a person of legal age, she needs to overcome fear, she needs to understand what a complaint is, she needs to know what a Security or Prosecutor's Office is and going implies money, time, someone willing to accompany her, and so, accessible ways are needed for all people, so they can carry out a process like this. (JP)

”

“

For example, at the Prosecutor's Office, when the victim is a minor, they often require the presence of a parent or guardian unless there is a conflict of interest. But sometimes the parent doesn't want to or can't be there, which delays the process. (JP)

”

“

Yes, in this case, the legal guardian of the minor must file the report, because victims who are under age can't file the report themselves. A minor must be accompanied by their guardian or, in some cases, the attorney general. (JP)

”

These accounts by some justice professionals about children needing to be accompanied by caregivers to file a complaint appear inconsistent with the legal framework and may stem from institutional practices, misinterpretation of procedural rules or a perceived need for additional legal safeguards when children are involved. Indeed, procedure rules in principle allow children to report sexual offences themselves without the need for a legal guardian. The Federal Penal Code does not expressly require a complaint (*'querrela'* in Spanish) by the victim of the crime to prosecute sexual violence against children, including tech-facilitated offences.⁴⁶ Investigations can therefore be initiated based on communication from any person informing the relevant authority of facts that may constitute a crime.⁴⁷ Anonymous reports are also allowed, but police must first verify the accuracy of the information provided before initiating the investigation.⁴⁸ In addition, offences related to child sexual harassment, child sexual abuse material and the production, acquisition,

46 United Mexican States (1931). [Federal Penal Code](#) (latest amendment published on 13 March 2026), arts. 199 septies, 202.

47 United Mexican States (2014). [National Code of Criminal Procedures](#) (latest amendment published on 28 November 2025), art. 221.

48 Ibid. art. 221.

4.1 WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO REPORTING TECH-FACILITATED CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE?

and dissemination of sexual material without the consent of the person depicted (so called “*violation of sexual privacy*”) do not require a complaint by the victim of the crime to initiate prosecution in either Nayarit or Morelos.⁴⁹

Insights from the justice professionals interviewed also revealed gaps in their understanding of how the child protection system in Mexico is organized and operates, particularly regarding the existence and role of specialized Child Protection Authorities (*Procuradurías de Protección de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes* – PFPNNA). These agencies were specifically established to support any child whose rights have been violated, including violence, neglect, abuse or exploitation, yet their mandate and availability remain insufficiently known among justice sector professionals.

To summarize, Disrupting Harm data in Mexico highlight several factors that may contribute to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse being underreported. Many children are unaware of where to report tech-facilitated sexual abuse or exploitation, while others are deterred by threats from perpetrators. A lack of trust in the justice system discourages children from viewing authorities as safe or supportive sources of help. In addition to the barriers identified for reporting, those who go through a justice process also face challenges, as examined in the next section.

⁴⁹ United Mexican States, State of Nayarit (2014). [Criminal Code for the State of Nayarit](#) (latest amendment published on 6 March 2026), arts. 46 (XXII), 238 bis, 297 quinquies; United Mexican States, State of Morelos (1996). [Criminal Code for the State of Morelos](#) (latest amendment published on 1 February 2023), arts. 158 (5), 150 bis, 212.

5. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND LEGAL REMEDIES



5. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND LEGAL REMEDIES

Of the seven young people interviewed and who formally reported tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, two completed the justice process with a resolution in their favour. The other five young people had yet to access and obtain justice at the time of the interviews, either because they decided or were forced to withdraw their complaint or did not know about the status of their claim. Notably, none of them were accompanied by the Child Protection Authorities in the process of reporting or seeking justice.

Online “funa”: a public accusation against a person

Two young people shared a “funa” online – a public repudiation or accusation against a person – due to challenges in the formal system or with the purpose of alerting others about the perpetrator or the type of abuse or exploitation. While online platforms provide individuals with a space to speak out against tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse they were subjected to, these public accusations can also have harmful consequences, especially when directed at children who displayed harmful sexual behaviours and who may benefit from supportive, restorative approaches as opposed to punitive ones.

When seeking justice, the young people interviewed, most of whom were under 18 when the justice process started, spoke of being subjected to secondary victimization, long and tedious legal processes, and feeling impacted by a lack of sufficient criminalization of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. This section recounts children and young people’s experiences with the justice system, including the legal and procedural standards and rules that shape how their cases are or should be handled.

Secondary victimization

The General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents states that authorities must take the necessary measures to prevent the revictimization of child victims of criminal offences.⁵⁰ Judges must ensure that these measures are guided by the principles of maximum benefit and of minimum intervention and consider the child’s needs, the context and the nature of the crime suffered.⁵¹ In addition, judicial authorities and prosecutors must uphold the principles of the best interests of the child, their comprehensive protection and their rights as enshrined in the Mexican Constitution and international treaties when conducting proceedings.⁵²

Despite these legal safeguards, the young people interviewed spoke about the trauma they experienced in the justice system. In one instance, a prosecutor insisted on seeing the online child sexual abuse material even though the victim had asked for a woman from his office to look at it instead:

“

The Prosecutor [a man] was very persistent and began to tell me in a creepy way that to proceed with the complaint, he needed to see the content, or he could not help me. I told him: ‘OK, then, I mean, it is not possible for a woman come and I can show it to her, and she could verify it is me’ and he insisted, in very persistent way. [He said] ‘Well, I am not going to submit a complaint if you do not show me those pictures and the video’. And it was more about the video, when I mentioned that it was about an intimate part of my body, he was very insistent on watching the video. (YP)

”

50 United Mexican States (2014). [General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents](#) (latest amendment published on 15 January 2026), art. 86 (VI).

51 Ibid., arts. 4 (XVIII), 6 (XVI).

52 United Mexican States (2014). [National Code of Criminal Procedures](#) (latest amendment published on 28 November 2025), art. 109.

This incident highlights how harmful gender power dynamics can manifest in judicial processes, with professionals potentially reproducing them even as the young person seeks support and protection. In other instances, the same young woman's claim was discredited and diminished:

“

I do not know, they were treating me well, let us say, since the reception and when I got in with the prosecutor, it was a change, a radical one. He was discrediting my case in every way. 'Well, why do you send pictures? I mean, I cannot do anything if they already have your pictures, it is the internet, I cannot do anything, I cannot delete them, you know that what gets uploaded is always on there'. (YP)

”

“

I think that you need to have clarity about what you lived through. Sometimes, in general, it is easy to confuse yourself and for others to confuse you, for example the institutions, they are trying to confuse you about what you went through and make it seem smaller, invalidate it and make you feel as if it did not happen in that way. They asked you: 'And do you think it was not really his intention?' That is hurtful. You need to be firm, trust in yourself, that you know what really happened and how you feel, because it can hurt profoundly. (YP)

”

Another young person had to re-listen to her statement in front of the perpetrators and recalls being pressured not to cry in court so the judge would not discredit her case.

“

I recall being, I mean, I let myself loose in the chair, and when the prosecutor saw that, she told me 'You do not even dare to cry tomorrow, eh? No, you are not crying, I do not want to see you crying, don't you dare. Because if the judge sees you crying, she is going to suspend the hearing and that is a good thing for him. If the trial gets suspended, all your process is going to take longer, or maybe they will deny the sentence. He will be declared innocent, or something else'. (YP)

”

In another instance, a young person's mother tried to prepare her for the victimization she would face and later during the interview she recounted how she felt blamed, invalidated and ridiculed:

“

She [young person's mother] said 'Prepare yourself, because they are not going to make you feel good about it'. At some point they are going to blame you for what is happening, and she told me, this is not going to be like on TV, this is not CSI and all of those shows, we are in Mexico and here you are guilty of everything that is going on'. As I see it, she made me get into a role of strength to so that everything they would tell me in that moment would not hurt that much, but it does not work like that. (YP)

”

“

After this, I closed myself off, I did not want to know anything about the complaint because, I swear, every time I set a foot in the Prosecutor's Office, I felt the stares, I felt them judging me and I heard the whisperings and giggles of 'I do not know why is she here, everything that happened is her fault'. (YP)

”

5. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND LEGAL REMEDIES

Certain measures can be put in place by the judicial authorities to protect children during judicial processes. For example:

The judicial authority may, at the request of the parties, order that the process be conducted with the support of family members or specialized experts. In such cases, appropriate audiovisual techniques must be employed to prevent direct confrontation with the accused.⁵³ However, these protective measures are not mandatory, leaving children subjected to sexual exploitation or abuse without automatic safeguards.

Furthermore, the law lacks provisions mandating a single recorded interview by a specially trained expert, which could help prevent revictimization caused by repeated and/or insensitive questioning.

At the same time, it is important to note that the practice of recording forensic interviews has not yet been sufficiently tested from a trauma-informed perspective for children subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse involving digital technologies, including but not limited to cameras. While the use of recording is well intentioned, children subjected to these forms of exploitation and abuse may have heightened sensitivity to being recorded or to the presence of cameras operated by adults. For some, this may trigger feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment or fear of further exposure, although this will not be the case for all children. More research is therefore needed to ensure that mandatory video recording aligns with trauma-informed principles, balancing the

need for reliable evidence with the psychological needs and preference of each child on a case-by-case basis.

In addition, legislation fails to explicitly require measures to prevent direct contact between children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse and the perpetrator in the courtroom, exposing them to the risk of retraumatization and intimidation during proceedings.

This gap in protection is evident in the testimony of one young person, who in her interview, reflected on the lack of psychological support and how she had to narrate the incident to multiple people, at different times:

“

The Public Ministry, I feel they don't take anything seriously, really, they would see me cry, and cry, and cry and they didn't care. And there were, I mean, they were around 10 people who I had to tell the same story to, about how it happened, and this and that, to see how we could proceed, that is a lot, really a lot, of people I had to tell. (YP)

”

The same participant, who was subjected to sexual abuse online and in person, narrated another victimizing incident that was part of the justice process:

“

I think that [the forensic gynaecological exam] was the worst of the worst, because it embarrassed [me] so much, it was horrible, no? After all you lived, after feeling so much, after feeling disgust towards myself and then comes this exam. I remember he put on gloves, but he did not put on lubricant, so he hurt me a lot. And I don't know what these exams consist of. (YP)

”

⁵³ Ibid., art. 366 (2).

These experiences highlight a serious gap between the legal safeguards available and the realities of judicial practice.

The insensitivity, coercion and victim-blaming attitudes described by young people point to a lack of trauma-informed, gender-sensitive and child-centred approaches, highlighting the need for comprehensive training for judicial authorities and prosecutors to ensure empathy and protection from revictimization of children in legal proceedings.

Long and complex process

Expanding on findings on secondary victimization, young people interviewed in this study described the justice process as lengthy, exhausting and filled with obstacles. While the Mexican Constitution mandates the prompt administration of justice,⁵⁴ and the General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents establishes that violations of children's rights must be addressed as a priority by all authorities,⁵⁵ the legislation falls short of creating expedited procedures specifically for cases involving child victims of crime.

As one young person reflected, her legal process lasted two years and eight months, a delay that affected various parts of her life:

“

I lost many friendships, or earned those voids, I do not know how to explain it yet. However, I do feel it was exhausting, for example, I mean, I attended high school while the procedure was ongoing. I got into university; I studied my first year of university still during the complaint process. I missed classes to go to the Prosecutor's Office. (YP)

”

Both young people and professionals identified lengthy legal processes as another barrier to reporting. According to justice professionals, it can take between one and two years to reach an agreement or a criminal summary proceeding, as described in the following quote: “Two years, which obviously for the victims is a lot, is one of the constant complaints we have in all institutions from society, ‘everything takes time’, there is no prompt or expedited justice.” (JP)

In one case, a young person filed two complaints, one for tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse and a second for sexual violence as an adult. At the time of the interview, neither complaint had been resolved. On a separate occasion, she accompanied another young person who had also been subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse by the same perpetrator to the Prosecutor's Office, demanding a status update on the case.

54 United Mexican States (1917). [Political Constitution of the United Mexican States](#) (latest amendment published on 3 March 2026), art. 17.

55 United Mexican States (2014). [General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents](#) (latest amendment published on 15 January 2026), art. 116 (XXIII).

5. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND LEGAL REMEDIES

“

We went together to the Prosecutor's Office to figure out what was going on. At first, they were going to dismiss our case, claiming it wasn't him. But the other girl said, 'How can it not be him?' I'm giving you his numbers, and if I call him now, he'll answer. How can you tell me it's not him?' They replied: 'Let us check, we'll send it to the Cyber Police for confirmation'. But they had told us outright 'We were about to close the case because it did not seem it was him'. (YP)

”

Some of the young people interviewed were still waiting for news on their cases at the time of the interviews, while others withdrew because their claim was undermined or their well-being and integrity were compromised. At times, taking care of their own well-being and mental health ended up being more important to them than pursuing the complaint and legal process. This point came out in the testimony of a young person who chose to protect her mental health and stability over getting access to justice:

“

I, let us say, I accept there is not going to be justice, and what I need the most right now is to do well and be stable. If I go back to the process and ask for justice, I know I am going to relapse because they will do the impossible to stop me, so I assume, I am not going to have the justice I once wished for and I am OK with that, I prefer to be healthy rather than involve myself in all that. (YP)

”

Positively, some of the young people who went through the justice process were accompanied by members of civil society organizations or a representative of the National Commission of

Human Rights,⁵⁶ which is independent from the government. Accompaniment and the support of advocates were appreciated by young people who got access to it. In some cases, it helped to counteract or prevent secondary victimization, as illustrated in the quote from a young person who was subjected to institutional mistreatment after reporting a series of incidents of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse:

“

Human Rights [Commission] did the part of proving there was institutional violence after the complaint, no? Overall, also [to prove] the Prosecutors Office's role and mainly with the University's [in this violence]. Because it was chaotic, they made me talk to the Dean, and they told me they could not do anything. The help from Human Rights is good, you should have it for sure, at least for now, I hope one day we do not face institutional violence. (YP)

”

“

We have to intervene when the secondary victimization or revictimization occurs, to make sure that the person who was digitally harassed, so to speak, or to focus on your topic, is not harassed by a public servant, because when filing a complaint or requesting help, authorities do not respond as they should. (JP)

”

The implementation of an expedited, trauma-informed legal process is essential for all children who have been subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse, including those who have been subjected to tech-facilitated abuse or exploitation. Most importantly, priority should be given to strengthening prosecutors, judges and other judicial officials to deliver gender-sensitive and child-centred justice services.

⁵⁶ The National Commission on Human Rights examines cases where actions by a federal administrative authority or federal public official lead to violations of individual human rights.

Overlooking digital evidence

A distinct aspect of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse is that children subjected to it often have access to digital evidence that could potentially incriminate perpetrators. However, interviews with young people showed that some reporting processes were not completed because photos and screenshots of messages were not accepted as evidence of abuse or exploitation. In this quote, a young person interviewed for the study described how she tried reporting tech-facilitated sexual abuse by a romantic partner (who was 17 years old) who was sexually abusing her both in person and online when she was 15:

“

We had spoken to him [peer who displayed harmful sexual behaviour], we had informed the school about the issue, and we had also talked to his parents. The thing is, if he found out I was starting to see another guy, he would go and threaten him, saying he was going to hurt him. So, we tried to talk to a lot of people, but no one could help, which is why I decided to go directly to the Prosecutor's Office. But at the Prosecutor's Office, they told me that since I had no evidence, no witnesses, even though I sent them messages and screenshots they told me it wasn't valid, so legally, nothing could be done. (YP)

”

A young woman who was sexually abused in high school explained how the online evidence was downplayed during the reporting process.

“

It is something I demand from the system. I would like the messages and conversations that I had with him to be treated as valid [evidence]. They did not have the same impact that they had in my life. (YP)

”

In this context, it is important to note that digital evidence is in fact legally admissible in criminal proceedings, as Mexican law recognizes that any fact may be proven by any means.⁵⁷ In addition, specific rules ensure that the party presenting the digital evidence can facilitate its reproduction when judicial authorities lack the technical means to do so.⁵⁸ Digital evidence follows the standard chain of custody rules: authorities who handle it in their official duties, such as investigators, forensic experts, prosecutors or other judicial officials, must ensure it is preserved and not altered so it remains valid to prove the facts.⁵⁹

Accordingly, the rejection of such material likely did not stem from a legal barrier, but rather from a determination by the authorities that it was not sufficiently compelling or serious to justify legal action. This points to broader issues, including limited understanding of the dynamics of sexual exploitation and abuse in digital contexts or potentially to victim-blaming attitudes. The dismissal appears to reflect systemic shortcomings in how such evidence and allegations are evaluated and addressed, rather than deficiencies in the legal framework itself.

⁵⁷ United Mexican States (2014). [National Code of Criminal Procedures](#) (latest amendment published on 28 November 2025), art. 228.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, art. 381.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, art. 259.

5. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND LEGAL REMEDIES

Inadequate protection

Mexican federal law provides several protections to uphold the rights of children involved in legal proceedings. The right to privacy of any person involved must be respected, including information relating to their private life and personal data,⁶⁰ and judges can order criminal hearings to be partially or entirely closed to protect the best interests of the children involved.⁶¹ Authorities must guarantee child victims or witnesses of crime free access to legal, psychological and any other necessary assistance, based on the circumstances of their case,⁶² as well as free interpretation if needed.⁶³ They must also provide clear, simple, age-appropriate and understandable information to children about the judicial or administrative proceedings they are involved in, ensuring they understand the process and their role.⁶⁴

In addition, the Public Prosecutor or the relevant authority are required by law to take the necessary measures to provide adequate protection to all those involved in legal proceedings both before and after giving their statements.⁶⁵ However, interviews with children and young people indicate that weak enforcement of children's protections has allowed perpetrators to intimidate and pressure them, ultimately deterring their participation in legal proceedings. For example, two young people said they withdrew from the process because they were intimidated by the perpetrator or by his relatives, as recollected in the quote below:

“

He [the perpetrator] would say 'Why did you file the report?'. He told me, 'The day you come back, or the day you return, you won't get away with it'. He'd reminded me, 'You know what I'm capable of. You left your family behind, and you don't know what I could do to them'. (YP)

”

Another young woman recalled a friend of the perpetrator looking at her threateningly in the courtroom and she had to ask for him to be removed, and she was also worried for her family and herself after the trial ended.

“

My aggressor brought a friend or someone he knew I don't know. All the time he was looking at me in a horrible way during the trial. Then, at first, I thought, what do I do? Do I turn, do I smile at him, so he knows it is not affecting me? After a while I thought, no, why do I have to tolerate this? I told the Ministry [of Human Rights]. The Ministry tells her [the judge] and she is like okay, and they take him out. After that he, the friend of his was outside like waiting. When my family would go out and that put me a little bit on alert. (YP)

”

These accounts reveal that, in seeking justice for tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, children and young people may be exposed to further violence and coercion. This calls for decisive action to ensure they are protected from retaliation, harassment and intimidation.

Insufficient compensation

The General Law on Victims establishes the right of victims of serious criminal offences to receive compensation for damage incurred, including lost income and opportunities, medical expenses, and moral and physical harm.⁶⁶ This can take the form of judicially ordered compensation, as the National Code of Criminal Procedures requires that trial courts order convicted perpetrators to compensate victims.⁶⁷ When the evidence presented does not allow for the precise

60 Ibid. art. 15.

61 Ibid. art. 64 (V).

62 United Mexican States (2014). [General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys, and Adolescents](#) (latest amendment published on 15 January 2026), art. 86 (V).

63 United Mexican States (2014). [National Code of Criminal Procedures](#) (latest amendment published on 28 November 2025), art. 109 (XI).

64 United Mexican States (2014). [General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents](#) (latest amendment published on 15 January 2026), art. 83 (III).

65 United Mexican States (2014). [National Code of Criminal Procedures](#) (latest amendment published on 28 November 2025), art. 367 (2).

66 United Mexican States (2013). [General Law on Victims](#) (latest amendment published on 1 April 2024), arts. 64, 68.

67 United Mexican States (2014). [National Code of Criminal Procedures](#) (latest amendment published on 28 November 2025), art. 406 (4).

determination of the compensation amount, the court can issue a general reparation order and mandate that it be determined later.⁶⁸ If the perpetrator lacks the resources to pay, their seized assets may be liquidated to cover the amount due.⁶⁹

The General Law on Victims also establishes a state-funded subsidiary compensation mechanism for victims of serious crimes.⁷⁰ To benefit from it, victims of crime must apply to the Executive Commission for Victim Assistance or State Victims' Commissions, providing official documentation proving that criminal prosecution is not possible or that obtaining compensation from the perpetrator is unfeasible.⁷¹ Subsidiary compensation is capped at 500 monthly units of measurement (\$1,783,110 Mexican pesos as of February 2026) and determined based on the severity of the harm incurred.⁷² Receiving it does not preclude the victim of the crime from pursuing other forms of reparation.⁷³ If authorities are unable to fully or partially enforce a compensation order, whether established by judicial mandate or by agreement of the Executive Commission, they must take sufficient measures to recover its value and ensure the full reparation of the victim.⁷⁴

While the law provides mechanisms for financial compensation, interviews with professionals and young people suggest that the way these are implemented can sometimes deepen feelings of injustice rather than providing meaningful redress. For instance, a young person who received some financial compensation from the perpetrator expressed that it was symbolic and insufficient and could not cover costs for legal and psychological support her family incurred through the entire process. This, coupled with secondary victimization, translated into feelings of injustice and disappointment:

“

Indeed, they gave me \$15,000 Mexican pesos [US\$860 on 26 April 2026] for all the expenses of the psychologist and psychiatrist. Besides the fact that it was horrible when they made me count it in the Prosecutor's Office. I mean, I felt like 'What is this?' no? I mean, even though they were my mom and grandma's expenses, because they paid for everything, they were like 'No, you save that money and use it as you feel it is appropriate', I have not found how to use it. I mean, I do not think all the money in the world can repair this. Knowing the money comes from him, it is not something I'd like to use. Sometimes, for real, I think, 'What if I throw it away?' I have never seen that much money in my life before, and still, I do not want it. (YP)

”

This view was also reflected by a justice professional who supported children who received a small sum of money at the conclusion of their trial.

“

The reparation plan is a very symbolic economic issue, nothing more, for example, if the girl was receiving psychological support, then at least the payment of her therapy. In this case five thousand pesos [US\$287 on 26 April 2026] were given, which is very symbolic, right? (JP)

”

A young person reflected how much she would have instead valued a formal apology, and this was echoed by others who sought social justice and asked the perpetrator not to re-offend, as in the example presented by a justice professional below:

68 Ibid. art. 406 (5).

69 United Mexican States (2013). [General Law on Victims](#) (latest amendment published on 1 April 2024), art. 66.

70 Ibid., arts. 67, 68.

71 Ibid., arts. 67, 69.

72 United Mexican States (2013). [General Law on Victims](#) (latest amendment published on 1 April 2024), art. 67.

73 Ibid., art. 72.

74 Ibid. art. 151.

5. ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND LEGAL REMEDIES

“

Well, something important is that when the conditional suspension of the process was established, the teenager told the young man [the perpetrator] not to do it again. (JP)

”

Further research is needed in Mexico to understand *why* children who were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse received limited compensation and what children and young people perceive as meaningful compensation and remediation (monetary or otherwise). It is important to explore whether misconceptions – such as the belief that tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse cause less harm – are influencing compensation decisions. Equally important is the need to establish a child-centred justice system, where children and young people have a meaningful role in defining what compensation should entail.

Gaps in criminalization and prosecution of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse

One of the greatest challenges to accessing justice that currently exists in Mexico in relation to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse is that not all its manifestations are criminalized in federal legislation or in state criminal codes. This challenge is notably exemplified by the legal frameworks of Morelos and Nayarit – where interviews with professionals, children and young people were conducted – both of which contain significant gaps.

Both Nayarit and Morelos have criminal provisions on child sexual abuse material that extend to conduct carried out via technology.⁷⁵ The same applies to the offence of “*violation of sexual*

privacy,” which criminalizes the production, acquisition and dissemination of sexual material without the consent of the person depicted – a provision that, unlike federal legislation, applies to conduct committed against children in both jurisdictions.⁷⁶ While Morelos criminalizes online grooming of children for sexual purposes under the same terms as federal legislation,⁷⁷ Nayarit has not established it as a criminal offence. There are no specific provisions on the sexual extortion of children in the legislation of either of two states, a shortcoming also observed in federal law.

Interviews indicate that the lack of clear legal definitions has led justice professionals in those states to prosecute tech-facilitated offences using analogous criminal provisions that do not fully reflect the digital nature of the conduct.

“

For example, even if the initial contact was through a video game, WhatsApp or any other social media, if after that, the crime was kidnapping, rape and others, the one typified is that one. Therefore, sometimes we do not acknowledge or establish it as such. (FW)

”

“

Not as a separate category. Online sexual offences often fall under existing categories, such as violations of sexual privacy or corruption of minors. For instance, if a minor shares explicit images or is coerced into meeting someone through social media and is subsequently assaulted, we may classify it under corruption of minors or other applicable offences. (JP)

”

⁷⁵ United Mexican States, State of Nayarit (2014). [Criminal Code for the State of Nayarit](#) (latest amendment published on 6 March 2026), art. 238 bis; United Mexican States, State of Morelos (1996). [Criminal Code for the State of Morelos](#) (latest amendment published on 1 February 2023), art. 212.

⁷⁶ United Mexican States, State of Nayarit (2014). [Criminal Code for the State of Nayarit](#) (latest amendment published on 6 March 2026); United Mexican States, State of Morelos (1996). [Criminal Code for the State of Morelos](#) (latest amendment published on 1 February 2023), art. 150 bis.

⁷⁷ United Mexican States, State of Morelos (1996). [Criminal Code for the State of Morelos](#) (latest amendment published on 1 February 2023), art. 158 bis.

“

We also have extortion, where the extortion is based on erotic or sexual content of the victims, and they demand an amount in exchange for not disseminating those images. We have been handling several cases in this regard. However, within the courts, they reclassify the crime to a crime of violation of personal privacy, they do not consider it extortion, but a violation of personal privacy, due to very technical and legal issues that they consider that it fits in this type of crime and not in that one. (JP)

”

Similarly, the cases of the two young people who completed the formal justice process were prosecuted as rape and human trafficking. In the case of a young person who was sexually abused and exploited online and in person and whose sexual content was distributed by the partner of the perpetrator, the complaint presented was rape. This resulted in the perpetrator of the in-person sexual abuse being the only one accused and their partner enjoying impunity for the dissemination of child sexual abuse material.

In certain instances, for example when online contact leads to in-person sexual abuse or exploitation, the role of technology may be incidental, and the correct primary charge would indeed be rape or a similar offence. However, even in such cases, the digital component of the crime – such as online grooming leading to abuse or exploitation – may not be explicitly criminalized or formally recognized in prosecution. When the harmful conduct itself is fully carried out through technology – such as online grooming for the production of sexual content and sexual extortion – as these acts are not explicitly criminalized, cases are seemingly reclassified under charges such as rape, violation of sexual privacy or corruption of children, however requiring that all the constitutive elements of those offences be met. While this approach ensures that perpetrators can still be prosecuted – often under offences carrying relatively severe penalties – it risks obscuring both the scale and the specifically digital nature of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Another possible explanation for the practice of reclassification is that the existing definitions of

crimes of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse could be difficult to prove in practice, making it procedurally easier for prosecutors to pursue charges that are more straightforward to substantiate or that carry higher penalties.

This practice of reclassifying tech-facilitated offences under broader or more traditional criminal categories prioritizes legal outcomes, but it can also lead to underrecognition of how technology is shaping exploitation and abuse, undermining the ability to gather accurate prevalence data.

Without reliable data that distinguish the digital dimension of these crimes, it becomes difficult to assess their true scale, identify emerging patterns and design targeted prevention strategies.

It also limits the capacity of institutions to tailor support services and justice procedures to the specific needs of children who have been subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, ultimately leaving critical protection gaps unaddressed. Thus, it is essential to criminalize all forms of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse at both the local and federal level. Establishing comprehensive federal provisions would also help drive the harmonization of state laws, ensuring that tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse are addressed comprehensively nationwide.

To conclude, this section has highlighted key gaps in criminalization and regulation at both state (in Nayarit and Morelos) and federal levels. Importantly, testimonies revealed that for some of the young people interviewed, the path to seeking justice sometimes led to further victimization. They spoke of how the abuse or exploitation they were subjected to was frequently dismissed or minimized, and they faced long, complex legal proceedings that disrupted their daily lives. The next section will explore their experiences accessing mental health care after being subjected to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse.

6. ACCESS TO CARE



6. ACCESS TO CARE

The General Law on Victims states that victims have the right to timely, full and differentiated reparation for the harm they have suffered as a result of criminal offences or human rights violations.⁷⁸ Victims of crimes are entitled to a wide range of rehabilitation measures, including specialized medical, psychological and psychiatric care, social services and advice aimed at facilitating the full enjoyment of their rights, as well as education, job training programmes or any other measure aimed at achieving their full reintegration into their communities and the wider society.⁷⁹

The Law establishes an Executive Commission for Victim Assistance at the federal level, as well as Victims' Commissions at the state level, responsible for granting provisional aid, assistance, care and rehabilitation measures that victims require to ensure they overcome conditions of need directly related to the offence.⁸⁰ The main objective is to ensure the fulfilment of essential needs, including food, personal hygiene, emergency medical and psychological care, and transitional accommodation in dignified and safe conditions. These measures must always be implemented with a transversal gender perspective and a differential approach to address the specific needs of each victim.⁸¹

The Executive Commission is specifically responsible for ensuring access to the multidisciplinary and specialized services provided by public agencies to victims.⁸² It is also tasked with developing a Comprehensive Victim Care Programme on an annual basis to create, reorient, direct, plan, coordinate, execute and supervise public policies related to victim care.⁸³

In cases involving child and adolescent victims of crime, Victims' Commissions should work in close coordination with the Child Protection Authorities.⁸⁴ These authorities, established at federal and state level, are responsible for preparing individual rights restoration plans where violations are identified. They also coordinate

the implementation and follow-up of the corresponding protection and support measures to ensure the full restoration of rights and timely, coordinated action by the institutions involved.⁸⁵ However, it is noteworthy that, as mentioned above in reference to reporting and access to justice, these mechanisms were not mentioned during interviews with children and young people, or professionals. This may indicate limited awareness, accessibility or effective application of these frameworks in cases involving tech-facilitated forms of sexual exploitation and abuse against children.

Young people who sought psychological support following exploitation and abuse faced multiple challenges in accessing and continuing therapy. Some reflected on the positive impact of mental health care once they were able to access it, while others discontinued therapy because they were offered medication they did not want, were blamed for the exploitation and abuse they had been subjected to or lacked financial resources, or due to academic workload.

For some young people who accessed care, this support was fundamental for their health and well-being, as described by the participant below, who explained how her psychiatrist supported her in continuing care:

“

I continued my process with the same psychiatrist, who is great and helps me a lot. On top of that, he works in the Women's Institute. Hence, after I had attempted suicide, he reached out to me and he assisted me once in public [public healthcare system], next time in private, another time public, and another one in private, and that helped us greatly economically. (YP)

”

78 United Mexican States (2013). [General Law on Victims](#) (latest amendment published on 1 April 2024), art. 26.

79 Ibid., art. 62.

80 Ibid., art. 8(6).

81 Ibid., art. 8(1).

82 Ibid., art. 88(II).

83 Ibid., art. 88(III).

84 United Mexican States (2014). [General Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents](#) (latest amendment published on 15 January 2026), art. 121.

85 Ibid., arts. 122(III), 123.

6. ACCESS TO CARE

Another young woman reflected on how valuable it would have been to receive psychological care, which she needed before the exploitation and abuse, and how early access to care would have mitigated the impact or severity of the abuse or exploitation:

“

If I had had confidence in myself, if I had received psychological support from the moment I started needing it, I would not have suffered so much like I did during adolescence, because adolescence for me was full of suffering in so many ways. If my parents had said 'Let's take you to see a psychologist', maybe this would not have happened. Because I would have been aware of what I was experiencing, of my emotions, and that I did not want that for me. But the lack of love for myself and the dependence I had for him that was what made me need him. (YP)

”

However, for many participants the road to accessing support was characterized by disapproval and shame due to negative attitudes towards mental health. The excerpts below illustrate how young people's help seeking was downplayed and invalidated, and how they sought alternatives when access to care was denied:

“

I felt horrible. I was already feeling very down before, because there was a time when I even stopped eating, even during the relationship. I remember telling my parents, 'I want to go to therapy', I had never been to therapy before. And I told them, 'I want to go to therapy because I feel really bad', and that was when I wasn't eating. And my parents were like, 'No, how could you think that?' And I said, 'Well, what else?' And my dad said, 'No, no, no'. So later, I didn't really blame them, but I did say to them, 'Why did it have to get to this point?' Because after that, they did take me to therapy because I asked. 'But why did we have to get to this point for you to decide I should go?' 'Why didn't you listen to me earlier?'. (YP)

”

“

No, I wanted to go to therapy, but my mom said, 'You don't need therapy, it hasn't affected you that much'. So, I didn't go, and the only thing that helped me deal with it was learning to bake. Whenever I baked, the anxiety and depression would go away, it made me feel alive again, so that's how I managed. (YP)

”

“

My dad is very closed-minded, like, 'I'm not going to pay for therapy'. He would say, 'I'm not paying for that because you're not crazy'. (YP)

”

Accessing therapy allows children who were subjected to abuse or exploitation to understand what happened to them, especially when a strong bond has been established with the perpetrator. This can be understood from the reflections of the lawyer in charge of a case of trafficking as well as in the testimony of a young woman who needed support to understand what she was subjected to as abuse or exploitation:

“

The girl understood that she was not in love and that what they were doing to her was not normal. Then, evidently, she understood with the psychological help, with the therapies, with everything she did, that she was a victim of a crime. She understood. For me it is very important that people understand when they are victims, because sometimes they don't know it. They don't know that they are victims of a crime, they don't know that they are being raped. (JP)

”

“

Now, after thinking about it, and after almost 4 years, I am conscious about he raped me, but I was not in that moment, I loved him, and I told my father 'He did not rape me, he did not'. (YP)

”

For others, however, what was meant to be a caring experience was characterized by a lack of empathy and attention that led them to discontinue seeking care services:

“

But what I didn't like was that the psychologist was kind of harsh, like 'Just leave that relationship. If these things are happening to you, it's because you allow it'. That was tough to hear. It's not like you just allow things to happen and think, 'Oh, it's fine' right? So, that wasn't helpful. (YP)

”

“

As soon as I arrived there, I overheard things like 'We cannot do anything for her, if she wants to be there, she likes to get beat up'. I mean, all of the six women [front-line workers], I think all of them were women, were making chauvinist, misogynist and revictimizing comments towards the women they just attended to. (YP)

”

A participant described transitioning between multiple psychologists due to negligence and harm, and discussed having to attend a support group for adult women because there were no groups for adolescents of a similar age:

“

Yes, I went with a group. First, I went to see a psychologist, she was a school psychologist. She said I had caused everything that had happened, she said something about me acting like a hero [unclear in reference to what] and that there had been consequences to my actions. Then, at that moment, instead of helping me, it affected me. I was feeling guilty before and I felt it even more afterwards.

Then I went with another psychologist, who told me I should go see a psychiatrist, I went to a psychiatrist who gave me medication. He gave me medication but would never allow me to explain my symptoms or the reasons, he just medicated me. After that, I managed to find a psychologist, she was a humanist, and with her I started therapy. With her I talked about that boyfriend, and she sent me to a group of women who have been maltreated. There, they told me that the group for young women was for prevention, and since I had already had the experience, I could not go to that one, so I went to the adult women's group. (YP)

”

Professionals discussed lacking resources to support children and having to space out therapy sessions to provide care to all. This translated into long waitlists and frequent referrals to other institutions:

“

We cover all the agencies, all the crimes. In order to succeed with treatment, you should see a person every eight days, if necessary two times a week, no? That is what psychologists used to recommend. However, to cover all the patients we have, we meet up with them every fifteen days. (FW)

”

6. ACCESS TO CARE

“

While the university has a medical centre and psychology research centres that provide services to the general community, the waiting time can be three to four months, right? Or sometimes there's only one psychologist for a population of nearly 40,000 students, so it becomes impossible. (FW)

”

Professionals discussed lacking appropriate physical spaces to provide attention to children, which could lead to secondary victimization if testimonies were overheard in public spaces. In addition, a psychologist reflected on how a child discontinued care because the therapy room was at the same location as the legal proceedings: *“They would say ‘I do not want to come, because I just arrived at the parking lot, and I felt an anxiety attack. I can't, I remember and do not like it!’” (FW)*

Front-line workers reported feeling unprepared in areas such as gender sensitivity and tech-facilitated violence. Although two had received training on working with children, they acknowledged that it was insufficient, leaving them reliant largely on experience gained through day-to-day practice rather than specialized capacity.

“

We have many workshops in general related to what the Prosecutor's Office requires, maybe on human rights, inclusive language, no? General courses we need as institutions, as public servants, but maybe something specific related to violence, psychological treatment, psychological intervention is needed. We are more limited in those. (FW)

”

Professionals also discussed the impact of this work and workload on their own mental health. Sometimes they did not have support from the institutions where they worked and needed to seek mental health care independently, as described by a psychologist from the Prosecutor's Office:

“

Facilitator: “Do you have any support in that regard?”

Psychologist: “No, we lack that, we need that kind of support.”

Facilitator: “Yes, of course, to help cope with these situations.”

Psychologist: “Exactly, to cope. Sometimes I joke around with my colleagues, saying, ‘Oh, my brain is so tired’. Earlier, I said, ‘My brain is exhausted’, but it's just a joke. But yes, we definitely need support. (FW)

”

Evidence from Disrupting Harm underscores the importance of evaluating *how* the General Law on Victims is being implemented for children who have been subjected to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in Mexico. The Government's National Development Plan 2025–2030 acknowledges the need to strengthen the coordination, coverage and quality of services of the National System for Victim Assistance, as well as to promote the professionalization of its personnel, research on victims and the modernization of planning and evaluation processes for victim assistance policies.⁸⁶ It also aims to guarantee full access to justice, truth and reparation for victims of crime and human rights violations, through comprehensive, gender-responsive care and effective coordination across all levels of government.⁸⁷ In implementing

⁸⁶ United Mexican States (2025). [National Development Plan 2025–2030](#), 38.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

actions towards that goal, particular attention should be paid to addressing current gaps in evidence on how effectively existing victim assistance and child protection systems support the recovery of children subjected to (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse, in order to develop effective support and coordination mechanisms tailored to their needs and aimed at ensuring the full restoration of their rights.

At the same time, testimonies from the young people interviewed point to significant shortcomings in the provision of mental health care. Addressing these issues requires a systematic assessment of the capacity of mental health professionals who support children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly in delivering trauma-informed care. Such an assessment could guide efforts to enhance professional training, as well as inform the adaptation of university curricula to incorporate standardized trauma-informed approaches and specialized preparation for psychologists.



7. PREVENTION EFFORTS TO SAFEGUARD CHILDREN ONLINE



7.1 POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES

The misuse of digital platforms to perpetrate or facilitate child sexual exploitation and abuse underscores the need for a strong, coordinated response. Recognizing these risks, the Mexican federal government has launched several initiatives aimed at prevention, awareness-raising and improving digital safety for children. These efforts are focused on creating safer online environments, educating families and communities about online risks and strengthening detection and response mechanisms.

In the context of the National System for the Comprehensive Protection of Children, the federal government established a **Commission on Information Technologies and Audiovisual Content for Children and Adolescents** during the 2018–2024 administration to guarantee a safe and enriching digital environment for young people. Its primary objectives focus on understanding the challenges and opportunities that children face in the digital world, analysing potential risks and proposing measures to mitigate them. It also aims to promote the development of age-appropriate, awareness-raising content that can be distributed through various technological platforms, and to foster effective collaboration between the public and private sectors to create and disseminate this content.⁸⁸

In addition, the proposed **National Programme for the Protection of Children and Adolescents 2026-2030** places a particular focus on prevention, with a dedicated set of actions to be implemented by the member institutions of the Commission on Information Technologies and Audiovisual Content for Children and Adolescents. These include the dissemination and implementation of protocols and guidelines on preventing and addressing violence against children in online environments, as well as the promotion of safe practices through positive digital parenting initiatives in community settings. They also involve raising awareness of existing reporting mechanisms through public campaigns and strengthening data generation for the prevention of and response to such violence, including by enhancing the technical capacity of justice institutions in information management.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ United Mexican States (2018). Commission on Information Technologies and Audiovisual Content aimed at Girls, Boys and Adolescents ([Comisión Tecnológicas de la Información y Contenidos Audiovisuales dirigidos a Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes](#)).

⁸⁹ United Mexican States (2025). [National Programme for the Protection of Children and Adolescents 2025–2030](#), 95, 96.

7.2 SHIFTING THE FOCUS TO SYSTEMIC PREVENTION

Efforts to prevent tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse have traditionally concentrated on children as the main point of intervention. While building children's knowledge and preparedness (e.g. about sexuality, reporting mechanisms and forms of violence) is important, a model that focuses disproportionately on children overlooks the wider social conditions that allow abuse or exploitation to occur in the first place. Drawing on the findings of this study, this subsection highlights approaches that shift prevention upstream, towards challenging harmful norms and strengthening the environments where children live, learn and seek support.

A central insight from the data is the interconnection between online and in-person forms of sexual exploitation and abuse in Mexico. In most cases, perpetrators are known to the child and first establish contact in familiar, everyday settings, such as schools, households, during sports activities and in community spaces, before moving interactions into private digital environments where harm can start or escalate. This challenges traditional notions of "stranger danger", which often frame risk online as originating from unknown individuals. Instead, the findings highlight that in the context of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in Mexico as well, harm frequently emerges from existing relationships and trusted environments. This pattern underscores the need for community-wide prevention measures that address the circumstances that enable exploitation and abuse and the ways in which technology is used to sustain it.

Strengthening safeguarding in schools: With 39 per cent of cases in the survey indicating that children's first encounter with the perpetrator occurred in school settings, schools and educational settings are critical environments for primary prevention, and are legally mandated to adopt the necessary guidelines to prevent and respond to any form of violence occurring in the school, family or community environment.⁹⁰ Strengthening safeguarding measures can reduce opportunities for adults to initiate harmful interactions with children across in-person and

digital contexts. This includes adopting and enforcing policies that limit private, unsupervised (digital) communication between school staff and students and ensuring that all personnel are accountable for upholding child protection standards through, for example, criminal background checks, mandatory safeguarding training and anonymous reporting boxes in schools. Prevention also requires assessing and improving the effectiveness of existing school-based violence prevention programmes to ensure they address and contribute to prevent tech-facilitated forms of sexual violence.

Addressing harmful social norms: Prevention must also extend beyond institutions into the broader community by challenging the social norms that enable control, silence and unequal power dynamics between adults and children, including harmful gender norms. While tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse affect children of all genders, professionals may not always recognize or respond to disclosures equally. Gendered expectations can shape disclosure, with boys and children of diverse gender identities or sexual orientations potentially less likely to disclose exploitation or abuse, and their disclosures less likely to be recognized or acted upon. In digital contexts, as shown by interview data, these norms can manifest in the normalization of harassment and abuse, pressure to share sexual content or victim-blaming when images are disseminated. Effective prevention requires sustained, behaviour-focused initiatives that address both attitudes and behaviours, including strengthening professional awareness and skills to recognize and respond to diverse victim experiences, shifting how children are perceived: not as passive subjects to be controlled, but as rights holders entitled to protection, accountability from adults, safety and respect across digital and physical spaces.

Creating conditions for safe and open communication: Survey data show that children often disclose tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse to peers, while interviews with professionals emphasize that effective prevention depends on children having safe and trusting communication with caregivers and responsible

⁹⁰ United Mexican States (2019). [General Law on Education](#) (latest amendment published on 15 January 2026), art. 74.

adults. Trust and connection are central to prevention because they create conditions in which children feel able to ask questions, express doubts, share early warning signs and seek help before harm escalates. As one school psychologist explained:

“

I think that the main tool in this situation is connection; it is the trust they have. In prevention, we cannot be effective if we do not have this link of connection. ‘Something is happening, I feel bad, look what happened, they sent me this, I don’t know what to do’. I strongly believe in that dimension of connection. If this prior link of trust is missing, whether with parents, teachers, tutors or psycho-pedagogical counsellors, then we cannot truly carry out prevention, because young people would always feel judged. (FW)

”

Strengthening prevention therefore requires putting an end to shame, victim-blaming attitudes and social stigma surrounding sexual violence against children. For this, communities need clear, accessible language and practical skills to respond to children’s disclosure with empathy, support and care, rather than fear, judgment or punishment. This is particularly important in situations where children may feel a sense of responsibility or guilt, for example, when images were produced by them under coercion or later shared without their consent. Adults must be ready to address difficult issues and create relationships and environments for children to feel safe asking for help.

Comprehensive sexuality and relationships education: Age-appropriate, rights-based and contextually relevant comprehensive sexuality and relationships education for children can play an important role in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. It supports prevention by helping children understand their boundaries and rights, recognize inappropriate behaviour, feel more able to disclose concerns and seek help, and by reducing stigma and secrecy within families and communities. Survey data indicate that a majority

(75 per cent) of children reported receiving some form of sex education, primarily from schoolteachers and mothers or female guardians. However, the quality and content of this education remain unclear. Comprehensive sexuality and relationships education must be carefully designed to be age-appropriate and culturally sensitive, as poorly implemented programmes may face resistance or be misunderstood. In addition, it is not a substitute for broader child protection systems, including effective law enforcement, safe school environments and responsive social services.

Expanding accessible reporting pathways:

Hotlines such as *Te Protejo México*, supported through the INTERPOL-INHOPE partnership, are a critical component of prevention. By offering an anonymous, safe avenue for reporting harmful online content, these mechanisms enable authorities to identify risks early, intervene and prevent further harm. Their preventive value extends beyond incident response as they empower the public to act, foster collaboration between law enforcement and private platforms, and reduce opportunities for harm before it happens. However, given the study’s findings that many children often do not disclose tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse because they do not know where to seek help, it is crucial to strengthen both the visibility and the accessibility of safe pathways for disclosure and reporting, such as hotlines and helplines.

The role and accountability of platforms to prevent tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse

Justice professionals highlight the importance of accessing data held by online platforms to facilitate investigations. This is particularly relevant in light of international reporting mechanisms, such as data from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), which receives and shares large volumes of CyberTipline reports related to tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in Mexico. In 2024, Mexico was among the highest-reporting countries globally, with over 750,000 CyberTipline reports originating from the country, reflecting its continued prominence in global reporting flows and the sustained rise of cases

7.2 SHIFTING THE FOCUS TO SYSTEMIC PREVENTION

involving online enticement and sexual extortion.⁹¹ While these data represent a critical source of intelligence for identifying children subjected to these crimes and perpetrators, challenges remain in accessing, processing and acting on such information effectively at the national level. This is explained by a justice professional from the Prosecutor's Office: *"I think we need more tools and better training on how to request information from foreign countries that control these platforms. We need to find ways to access the data necessary to identify perpetrators."* (JP)

At the same time, online platforms and internet service providers play a central role in shaping children's online environments and, therefore, in preventing tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Through the design of safety features, accessible reporting tools and systems for the rapid detection and removal of harmful material, platforms can help prevent the circulation of abusive content, reduce children's exposure to online harm and limit opportunities for perpetrators to exploit digital spaces. However, Mexican federal legislation does not adequately reflect this role or address the operational needs identified by justice professionals. The Law on Telecommunications and Broadcasting mandates that telecommunications providers store communications metadata for 12 months on systems that allow law enforcement to access and retrieve it electronically in real time, in accordance with existing legal procedures. After this period, providers must retain the data for another 12 months and, upon request, deliver it to authorities within 48 hours.⁹² These provisions do not apply to online platforms or other electronic service providers, leaving a critical loophole.

This loophole extends beyond data retention, since a general collaboration with internet service providers and online platforms is essential to address tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. However, the absence of clear legal obligations mandating their proactive involvement in response efforts results in significant protection gaps.

Indeed, Mexican legislation does not clearly define the responsibilities of internet service providers regarding illegal content, including child sexual abuse material.

While no provision in the Law on Telecommunications and Broadcasting clearly states that providers can be held liable for the presence of child sexual abuse material on their services, one exception to this rule exists: if a user specifically requests that certain content be blocked, the provider must comply or face potential fines.⁹³ However, the law does not require providers to establish clear and accessible mechanisms for reporting content.

It also fails to specify what types of content may be blocked or who is entitled to make such requests.

Because this legal framework does not extend to online platforms or other electronic service providers, social media and content sharing or hosting services cannot be held responsible for third-party content or forced to remove harmful material at the request of users. In cases of non-consensual sharing of sexual content, online platforms must comply with orders from prosecutors or judges to remove, block or delete it to protect the integrity of the person depicted.⁹⁴ While these provisions may be applied in some cases involving child sexual abuse material, they were not specifically designed with this purpose in mind.

⁹¹ National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (2024). *CyberTipline 2024 report: Annual reporting trends*. <https://www.missingkids.org>.

⁹² United Mexican States (2025). [Law on Telecommunications and Broadcasting](#), art. 183(II).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, arts. 191, 282.

⁹⁴ United Mexican States (2007). [General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence](#) (latest amendment published on 15 January 2026), art. 20 sexies.

Comprehensive regulation is required to ensure proactive obligations for detecting, reporting and swiftly removing child sexual abuse material. In doing so, it should operationalize platform accountability and shift from reactive safeguards to systemic child protection online. Current laws place little to no responsibility on internet service providers and online platforms or other electronic service providers requiring action primarily in response to individual user requests or court orders, which are reactive, limited in scope and difficult to enforce at scale. A dedicated legal framework should instead embed safety-by-design requirements, ensuring that child protection safeguards are integrated at the system level and applied by default across services, independent of user intervention. This includes implementing platform-integrated child protection measures within product design, such as human and algorithmic moderation, detection tools and default privacy settings for children. It should also require regular child-rights impact assessments, transparency reporting and independent audits of child protection practices to ensure continuous improvement and accountability. Without such measures, the burden will continue to fall on children and authorities, while the systems enabling the spread of child sexual abuse material remain largely unregulated.

Overall, the list of prevention efforts presented in this section is not exhaustive; rather, it highlights the importance of examining and addressing the underlying conditions that enable tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. The next sections conclude the report and present the recommendations, which are grounded in the prevention principles outlined above. Developed in collaboration with national stakeholders, these recommendations provide a practical road map for strengthening both prevention and response efforts against tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in Mexico.

8. CONCLUSION



8. CONCLUSION

To offer a nuanced understanding of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in Mexico, this report presented multiple viewpoints including those of children and young people, parents, front-line workers, justice professionals and law enforcement.

The findings reveal a concerning reality: children in Mexico are being subjected to multiple forms of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse – often by individuals within their social circles and sometimes by the same or multiple perpetrators. While many children disclose exploitation and abuse to friends or family, some remain silent. Those who do speak out are not always met with support; instead, they may encounter blame or inadequate responses from those they turn to, including professionals. In most cases analysed, exploitation and abuse went unreported, at least in the short term, which leaves children without access to essential psychological care and support. Children who seek justice sometimes face revictimization through judicial processes that are lengthy, exhausting and filled with obstacles, including intimidation from perpetrators.

Despite these challenges, Mexico has taken important steps towards addressing tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. Initiatives such as the proposed National Programme for the Protection of Children and Adolescents 2026–2030 reflect a growing commitment to creating a safer online environment for children.

Building on both the progress made and the gaps identified, this report concludes with a set of evidence-based recommendations. These were reviewed and validated through consultations with national experts and stakeholders in Mexico during a national consultation held in March 2026 convened by the National System for the Comprehensive Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents (SIPINNA) and UNICEF Mexico.



9. RECOMMENDATIONS



9. 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 Mexico 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.

INSIGHT 1

According to the survey, 13 per cent of internet-using children in Mexico aged 12–17 were subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in only a one-year period. Children need proper support, tools and knowledge to recognize harmful relationship dynamics and sexual behaviours, both in person and online, and adults must create supportive, stigma-free environments where children can feel safe discussing relationships or disclosing harm. While most children surveyed reported receiving sex education, the quality and content are unknown.

Relevant for: Public Education Ministry, SIPINNA, National Council for Education Development (CONAFE), National Population Council (CONAPO), National Centre for Child and Adolescent Health (CENSIA), National Centre for Gender Equality and Reproductive Health (CNEGSR), Secretariat for Women (SEMUJERES) and the Ministry of Health.

1.1 Review existing comprehensive sexuality and relationships education curricula⁹⁵ for children and consider an updated approach that includes adopting and piloting rights-based, comprehensive education on sexuality, relationships and consent across all schools and age groups, including informal settings. Such programmes should be age-appropriate, informed by children's perspectives and regularly updated to reflect new research and trends. They should cover sexuality, healthy relationships, bodily autonomy, boundaries, consent and how these apply in digital environments. Such education should make it clear that exploitation and abuse can be perpetrated by anyone, not just strangers, but also peers and trusted adults, highlighting the risks of grooming, manipulation and betrayal of trust.

⁹⁵ While children should not shoulder the burden of preventing tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, helping children to understand these relationship dynamics may support them to navigate the risks of online and in-person social relationships more confidently, whether they occur in the context of exploitation and abuse or not.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.2 Develop consistent, adaptable messaging and communication strategies for children, parents, teachers and communities. These messages should be informed by safe, ethical consultations with children, families and duty bearers, and reflect the diverse realities of the various communities in Mexico. Dissemination should use multiple channels – national awareness and social and behavioural change campaigns, school programmes, comprehensive sexuality education and social media. These efforts should take into account and leverage the work of the Safe Schools programme.⁹⁶

Key objectives could include:

- a) Building awareness around the many manifestations of (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse, including on which children are subjected to it and how.
- b) Children's rights in the digital environment, including the right to navigate safely.
- c) Explaining common tactics used by perpetrators in Mexico, including that perpetrators tend to be known to the child.
- d) Challenging existing perceptions that 'online-only' exploitation and abuse are not as harmful as violence that occurs in person.
- e) Challenging stigma towards seeking access to mental health care.
- f) Recognizing that children can also perpetrate exploitation and abuse.
- g) Emphasizing that it is never a child's fault, regardless of their actions before or during the abuse or exploitation (especially relevant in cases of image-based abuse).
- h) Highlighting that community stigma and fear of parents' reactions is being weaponized by perpetrators to coerce and trap children in a cycle of violence.

1.3 Develop parenting programmes and seminars based on the above messages, emphasizing how to receive disclosures and respond non-judgmentally and supportively.

This fosters an environment where children feel comfortable discussing relationships and sexuality, or seeking advice from adults. While children should not be forced to engage in discussions that they do not feel comfortable with, adults should create safe spaces that encourage them to seek help and advice, including if they are being sexually exploited or abused.

⁹⁶ The National Safe School Programme is an initiative led by the Ministry of Public Education (Secretariat of Public Education) aimed at improving school safety by preventing violence, promoting peaceful coexistence and ensuring the well-being of students and staff.

INSIGHT 2

Many children who have been sexually exploited or abused remain silent due to shame, uncertainty around who they can speak to, minimization of the harm or fear of exposure. Those who do disclose tend to confide in friends, mothers or female caregivers, or siblings, while formal channels such as police or helplines are rarely used, largely due to lack of awareness.

Relevant for: National Guard, Secretariat of Security and Civilian Protection (SSPC), Executive Committee for Victims (CEAV), National Commission on Human Rights (CNDH), Attorney General's Office (FGR), Supreme Court of Justice (SCJN), National Commission of Higher Courts of Justice (CONATRIIB), PFPNNA, SIPINNA

2.1 Tackle the key barriers to disclosure and reporting.

- a) Feeling embarrassed and not thinking it serious enough: Destigmatizing tech-facilitated exploitation and abuse and reframing it as a grave violation of children's rights, particularly through raising awareness, social behavioural change campaigns and parenting programmes (see [recommendations 1.2](#) and [1.3](#) above).

- b) Not knowing where to go: Investing 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 and accessible to children and families, and that front-line workers receive continuous training in child-friendly and trauma-informed methods to receive disclosures. When designing campaigns, it is important to draw on and integrate the materials and infographics already produced by the Prosecutor's Office, which outline the reporting channels available to children and families.

2.2 Empower children to receive disclosures, support one another and seek help.

This can be advanced through peer-education and peer-support initiatives in schools and youth organizations. However, these efforts must be reinforced by adults who create safe, trusting environments for disclosure and ensure that children have access to reliable and child-friendly support from adults and formal reporting channels. Crucially, all initiatives should be adapted to the characteristics of the local context – such as rural or urban settings, and cultural backgrounds – and to the specific needs of different age groups.

INSIGHT 3

Based on survey data, most incidents of tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse occurred on social media. However, the current legal framework in Mexico provides limited accountability for internet service providers and for online platforms, leaving major gaps in prevention, detection and reporting of harmful content. Platforms and internet service providers are key partners and stakeholders in shaping children's online environments, including the design of safety features, reporting tools and the rapid detection and removal of harmful material.

To translate these principles into meaningful protection, Mexico will need not only stronger legal frameworks but also sustained collaboration with digital providers as partners in child safety.

Relevant for: Senate and the Chamber of Representatives, online platforms and internet service providers, SIPINNA, Digital Transformation Agency and the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission, the Secretariat of Infrastructure, Communications and Transport, state governments and local legislatures.

- 3.1** Introduce legal provisions requiring social media platforms operating in Mexico to strengthen content moderation and privacy controls, as well as to proactively detect and remove harmful content. To support implementation, develop standardized legal guidelines for adoption by states, leveraging SIPINNA's national, state and municipal structure to promote and facilitate their uptake.
- 3.2** Internet service providers and social media platforms should be required to implement safety-by-design safeguards, such as privacy-by-default settings for all child users and child-friendly design that makes reporting tools, safety settings and support services easy

to find, simple to use (e.g. fewer clicks), and understandable for children. Safety features must be visible, accessible and confidential, with clear explanations of how reports are handled and where to get help. These features should be created through safe, ethical consultations with children and proper testing.

- 3.3** Legally require internet service providers and online platforms to offer clear, accessible and user-friendly notice-and-takedown systems for reporting illegal content, including child sexual abuse material. These should be supported by a clear framework on intermediary liability to encourage proactive detection and blocking. To implement this recommendation, internet service providers and social media platforms should be legally required to maintain highly trained teams dedicated to the proactive detection of harmful content. Establish meaningful sanctions for non-compliance to ensure companies have real incentives to act.
- 3.4** Extend the applicability of the existing legal framework on data retention onto social media platforms operating in Mexico, with necessary privacy safeguards in place, to ensure that user data essential for investigating child sexual exploitation and abuse offences are preserved.
- 3.5** Strengthen cooperation with the justice system by establishing collaboration protocols between platforms, cyber police, prosecutors and courts.

Relevant for: Ministry of the Interior, SIPINNA, PFPNNA, CEAV, CNDH

- 3.6** Establish structured collaboration with platforms as child protection partners: given the central role of social media in reporting exploitation and abuse, Mexico should institutionalize regular engagement with digital platforms rather than rely on ad hoc cooperation. This should include:
 - Formal mechanisms for ongoing dialogue between government, regulators, law enforcement and major platforms operating in Mexico.
 - Regular information-sharing on patterns of exploitation and abuse, emerging trends and platform-specific risks, including exploitation and abuse by peers.

-
- Joint development of response protocols for urgent cases involving child sexual abuse material.
 - Partnerships that include civil society and child protection actors to ensure that collaboration prioritizes children's rights rather than corporate interests.

INSIGHT 4

Children who have been subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse are more likely to experience self-harm, suicidal thoughts and anxiety than children not subjected to these forms of sexual violence. Front-line workers also reported supporting children who have experienced depression, sleep issues, low self-esteem and substance use. Yet challenges persist in providing accessible, appropriate and high-quality care, underscoring the need for comprehensive and specialized care to support recovery.

Relevant for: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, National Council on Mental Health (CONASAMA)

4.1 Strengthen education and training of mental health professionals and social workers by integrating trauma-informed care for children subjected to (tech-facilitated) sexual exploitation and abuse into tertiary curricula. Evaluate existing curricula and training initiatives through newly practising professionals. Provide continuous professional development on trauma-informed approaches and strategies to address feelings of shame and guilt among children and young people.

Relevant for: Ministry of Health, CONASAMA, National Welfare System, PFPNNA, CEAV

4.2 Enhance access to specialized care, improving coordination and ensuring timely access to specialized mental health and psychosocial support for children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. Expand investment in specialized mental health and psychosocial services to strengthen workforce capacity and service delivery. This should include allocating sufficient resources, including therapeutic (physical and virtual) spaces and qualified personnel, to deliver comprehensive care and ensure access to mental health care for professionals as well.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.3 Ensure sustained recovery support: Recognize the long-term impacts of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse by providing ongoing, flexible follow-up care that adapts to children's evolving needs and is delivered through a range of services as needed.

INSIGHT 5

Children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in Mexico face significant barriers to accessing justice, including victim-blaming attitudes and inadequate responses from front-line workers and justice professionals. Although not required by law, some are reportedly asked to attend with a caregiver to file a complaint, and compensation is sometimes insufficient. Legal gaps also expose children to retraumatization, with limited safeguards to prevent contact with perpetrators or to ensure interviews are conducted by trained specialists with minimal repetition.

Relevant for: SCJN, CONATrib, CEAV, PFPNNA, Institute of Federal Public Defence (IFDP), FGR

5.1 Minimize retraumatization during justice proceedings and safeguard children's well-being. Amend procedural rules to avoid repeated questioning in line with the principle of *minimum necessary intervention* in judicial and administrative proceedings when needed and monitor their implementation at federal and state levels. Limit forensic interviews to one session, with questions filtered through a qualified and officially registered intermediary (e.g. psychologist, psychiatrist or other trained professional). Only allow additional interviews in exceptional circumstances and always with the informed consent of the child. Introduce and implement legal provisions that avoid any direct contact between the child and the defendant in court.

5.2 Develop a specialized, well-trained and well-coordinated group of child protection and justice professionals. To achieve this, ensure that their training uses standardized terminology and is regularly updated to reflect new research and emerging trends. Address resource constraints and ensure continuous, specialized training for child protection authorities to support them in their role

of advocating for and supporting children throughout legal proceedings and upholding their right to be heard and protected. Provide trauma-informed training for prosecutors and justice professionals in contact with children subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse. To promote sensitive and equitable justice practices, training should address self-awareness of bias, harmful gender norms and victim-blaming attitudes. Improve coordination across child protection, gender-based violence, victim assistance and judicial systems to ensure holistic and timely responses to the needs of children.

5.3 Introduce clear and comprehensive rules for the collection, preservation, and admissibility of digital evidence in criminal proceedings, ensuring it can be effectively used in investigation and prosecution. These rules should consider the specific nature of digital evidence, including its volatility, replicability and susceptibility to alteration, and provide clear standards and procedures for authentication, chain of custody and integrity verification. Existing scientific police protocols can serve as a foundation but must be further strengthened, formalized and disseminated nationally so that practices are consistent across jurisdictions.

5.4 Enforce victim protection measures (e.g. cautionary, urgent) by requiring Public Prosecutors to proactively prevent and respond to intimidation, harassment and retaliation by perpetrators. Institutionalize mandatory risk assessments and introduce clear standard operating procedures, protective protocols and monitoring mechanisms to protect the safety of children and their families.

Relevant for: Universities and research institutes

- 5.5** Research is needed to identify reasons for inadequate compensation despite existing legal provisions, including analysis of current payment practices by the State and by perpetrators, and the potential impact of misconceptions on tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse.
- 5.6** Research is recommended to assess the trauma-informed implications of routinely recording forensic interviews with children who have been subjected to tech-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, in order to ensure that these practices do not inadvertently exacerbate harm.

Relevant for: CEAV, Senate and the Chamber of Representatives

- 5.7 Ensure fair and accessible compensation by developing clear, transparent and victim-centred criteria and mechanisms for awarding compensation in cases of (tech-facilitated) child sexual exploitation and abuse.** Compensation should reflect the gravity and long-term impact of the harm caused, be timely and accessible, and be embedded in broader care frameworks that include psychosocial support. Ensure that all compensation processes are guided by trained professionals with expertise in trauma and children's rights.

INSIGHT 6

Gaps remain in how tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse are criminalized in Mexico. Key offences, such as livestreamed abuse and online sexual extortion, are not explicitly defined, forcing authorities to rely on inadequate legal provisions. The definition of child sexual abuse material also excludes digitally generated content, including content produced through tools powered by artificial intelligence. These legal gaps, combined with limited understanding of tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, and victim-blaming attitudes among justice professionals, can hinder effective prosecution and protection for children.

Relevant for: PFPNNA, SCJN, Senate and Chamber of Representatives

6.1 Amend legislation to ensure tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse can be prosecuted effectively. This could also support prevention by strengthening deterrence and signalling that all forms of exploitation and abuse are serious crimes. A package of legislative reforms to align with international standards could include:

- Amendment of the Federal Penal Code's definition of child sexual abuse material to explicitly include materials depicting persons appearing to be children, as well as realistic depictions of non-existent children, including material that is digitally generated through artificial intelligence or other tools. This amendment would ensure legal clarity and recognize the harm caused by such content, including its role in normalizing or fuelling demand for the sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

- Ensure that the term “child pornography” is replaced by the term “child sexual abuse material” across federal and state legislation to ensure the use of language that accurately reflects the abusive nature of such material, in alignment with the [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#).
- Amend existing provisions on child sexual abuse material to criminalize deliberate access with no intent to distribute and/or share further.
- Adopt legal provisions for the explicit criminalization of (tech-facilitated) sexual extortion of children with a definition that reflects its unique dynamics, including the coercive use of self-generated sexual material to extort money or sexual acts from a child.
- Explicitly criminalize the livestreaming of child sexual abuse, either through a stand-alone provision or by amending existing provisions on child sexual abuse material so that they also apply to cases where the abuse is livestreamed online and materials are not downloaded or stored. Ensure that the offence covers both the use of children for such purposes and access to livestreamed abuse.
- Ensure that these reforms are accompanied by guidance and coordination led by institutions such as SIPINNA to support their effective application across federal and state systems.

6.2 Align sanctions and harmonize state-level laws and policies with federal legislation addressing tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. This will help ensure consistent prevention, protection, investigation and victim support measures across all states in Mexico, strengthening national efforts to combat these crimes and close legal and enforcement gaps. Harmonization should leverage existing government tools, such as the Secretariat of the Interior's georeferenced legislative mapping, and extend to the standardization of sanctions, as well as public dissemination and awarenessraising on relevant legal provisions.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Disrupting Harm in Mexico report was written by Camila Perera Aladro, Rogers Twesigye, Tiago Afonso, Andrea Varrella and Gabriela Chamorro Concha.

ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti have appreciated the unique opportunity to work together to gather evidence around tech-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse. This report is the result of a three-year collaborative effort to gather and generate this evidence.

This research would not have been successful without the engagement by so many individuals and partners, especially those in Mexico. Our thanks and appreciation go to our colleagues in Mexico, including UNICEF Mexico, ECPAT Mexico and INTERPOL's National Central Bureau Mexico. The project partners also wish to thank the National System for the Protection of Children and Adolescents in Mexico for its support for this research, as well as all representatives of government and civil society organizations who participated in the national consultation for their invaluable inputs.

The authors would like to thank our research partners in Mexico for their expertise and collaboration in collecting the data:

- **EDIAC/ECPAT Mexico:** Review of national legislation and policies.
- **National Institute of Public Health (INSP):** Interviews with justice professionals, front-line workers, and children and young people
- **Ipsos Mexico:** Implementation of the household survey

The authors are also grateful to the following experts for their review and feedback to the research protocols in Mexico:

Alejandra Rios Cazares (INEGI), Beatriz Carolina Hernandez Roman (INEGI), Etna Alejandra Villalba Solis (INEGI), Eva Lopez Dominguez (INEGI), Eva Prado (UNICEF Mexico), Daniela Calvillo (Te Protejo Mexico), Diana Alejandra Castañeda Perez (INEGI), Diana Josefina Sepulveda Lozada (INEGI), Jose Antonio Ruiz Hernandez (UNICEF Mexico), Martin Alvarez (UNICEF Mexico), María Del Pilar Garcia Velazquez (INEGI), Maria Lorena Aguilar Castillejo (INEGI), Lina Eugenia Cuevas Ramirez (INEGI), Sara Ixshel Antillon Esparza (UNICEF Mexico), Sofia Valdivia Oseguera (INEGI) and Tom Farrell (Child Rescue Coalition).

The authors would like to thank the following peer reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions:

Angela Davis (UNICEF Innocenti), Daniel Kardefelt Winther (UNICEF Innocenti), Eva Prado (UNICEF Mexico), Jorun Arndt (UNICEF Innocenti), Jose Antonio Ruiz Hernandez (UNICEF Mexico), Marium Saeed (UNICEF Innocenti), Martin Alvarez (UNICEF Mexico), Sara Ixshel Antillon Esparza (UNICEF Mexico), Sendrine Constant (ECPAT International) and Serena Tommasino (Safe Online).

Finally, the findings and insights presented in this report would not have been possible without research participants taking the time to speak to the researchers. Our sincerest gratitude goes to all children, young people, parents, front-line workers, justice professionals, law enforcement and other professionals who participated in this study.

11. ANNEX: DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS



11. ANNEX: DEFINITIONS 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.⁹⁷

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.⁹⁸

Child sexual abuse material, including AI-generated child sexual abuse material: 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.⁹⁹

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 or exploitation in exchange

for payment or other material benefits is physically in a different location from the child(ren) and the facilitators of the abuse.¹⁰⁰

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.¹⁰¹

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.¹⁰²

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.¹⁰³

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.¹⁰⁴

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

⁹⁷ 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.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 39–44.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 97–98.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 36–38.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 160.

