



STOP

**SEX TRAFFICKING
OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE**



SEX TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN IN MEXICO

What is child trafficking?

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation.

UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime

A child is anyone under the age of 18 years.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

In Mexico, child trafficking is a crime punished by up to 18 years in prison. According to federal law, child trafficking is described as promoting, soliciting, offering, facilitating, transporting, delivery, or receipt of a person through physical or mental violence, deception or abuse of power to exploit them sexually, in forced labour or servitude, slavery or slavery-like practices, or for the removal of organs or tissue.

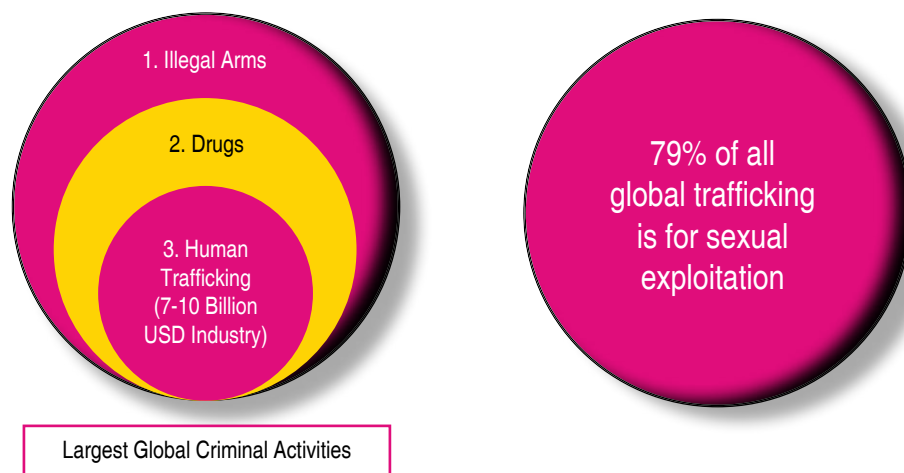
Law to Prevent and Sanction Trafficking in Persons, 2007

What's the problem?

GLOBAL SEX TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is a complex phenomenon fueled by the tremendous growth in the global sex market. Exploitation is driven by poverty, uneven development, official corruption, gender discrimination, harmful traditional and cultural practices, civil unrest, natural disasters and lack of political will to end it.

The number of child victims trafficked worldwide for sexual exploitation or cheap labour on an annual basis is 1.2 million.¹ Human trafficking, the third largest criminal activity in the world, following the international trade in illegal drugs and arms trafficking, is believed to be worth billions of dollars each year. Driving the trade is the demand for commercial sexual exploitation. Seventy-nine percent of all global trafficking is for sexual exploitation.²



CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING IN MEXICO

Countries are considered:

- 'Sending' or 'origin' - from where children are sent;
- 'Transit' - where the children might be moved through and temporarily kept on the way to their final destination; and
- 'Receiving' or 'destination' - where the children finally end up.

Depending on the reason for trafficking, some countries might be only sending, while others might be both sending and transit. Some countries can be all three. Mexico is all three, plus, Mexican children are trafficked within Mexico.

Mexico is in a unique position because of its proximity to the United States, a country many regard as "the land of opportunities". According to UNICEF, along the borders of the United States and Mexico, at least 16,000 children are victims of child trafficking for sexual purposes.³

The southern border with Guatemala is also a key crossing point for the trafficking of child victims. Many traffickers use Mexico as a corridor to bring children illegally into the United States and to Canada.⁴ However, many children end up being exploited in Mexico. Although the children are from different parts of the world, the Government of Mexico states that the vast majority of foreign child victims are from Central America, with 90% from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.⁵

Social and economic disparities within the country lead to rights violations and hamper the protection available to children. Therefore, a significant number of Mexican girls and boys are trafficked within Mexico for sexual exploitation, often lured from poor rural districts to urban, border and tourist areas through false offers of employment.⁶ Some estimates suggest that of 150,000 children living on the streets, 50% are victims of trafficking for sexual purposes.⁷

Mexico's internal conflicts have also placed many children in vulnerable situations. Between 1994 and 2002, due to the armed conflict in Chiapas, 40,000 indigenous people were internally displaced, many claiming to have been physically and sexually abused by military personnel.⁸ Statistics indicate that 3000 young girls from Chiapas were trafficked to Mexico City, Cancun, Acapulco, Merida and Tapachula for sexual exploitation in brothels in sex tourism locations.⁹ In some cases, the children were sold by their families, due to increasing poverty, or trafficked on to the United States and Canada.¹⁰

Who gets trafficked?

The demand for sex drives child sex trafficking globally, while poverty, domestic violence and abuse, discrimination and the desire for a better life makes children vulnerable. Children are especially vulnerable to being trafficked because they are often uneducated, easy to overpower and easy to convince that they must do what an adult tells them to do. Children may also be in a position where they believe they must help to support their families and may be sold or sent abroad by family members to do so. Street children, children in refugee camps, children whose family and community life has been disrupted and do not have someone to look out for them are all especially vulnerable to human trafficking. Children may be at greater risk of trafficking from places where they are less protected. This may be because the law is weak or not properly enforced, or because children are less aware of the risks of trafficking and are more easily deceived.

Due to the lack of quantitative research, especially regarding the children that enter Mexico from the border with Guatemala, it is difficult to establish a profile for child victims. Migrant children who travel unaccompanied are at great risk. Some of them travel in search of a better job and education opportunities or because they want to reunite with their relatives in Mexico or the United States. Other children travel to Mexico to escape domestic violence.

Many children from indigenous communities do not have access to the same level of education, healthcare, housing and work opportunities as the rest of the population and are therefore at great risk of exploitation. For example, some Guatemalan girls who end up in prostitution are trafficked to Mexico for domestic labour, mainly because they are thought to be hardworking, innocent and less “pretty”- because of their indigenous features – making it less likely that male members of the Mexican family will engage in relationships with them. These girls are often as young as 10, come from poor and rural communities close to the Mexican border and are easy prey for traffickers, especially those posing as boyfriends.¹¹

Many girls are lured to Mexico with the promise of work, usually in domestic labour or as baby-sitters. In 2000, a group of approximately 400 girls from Honduras aged 10 to 16 were repatriated.¹² They intended to travel to the United States, but because of a lack of money for their travel, they were forced into prostitution. This problem does not only affect girls. Mexico’s General Prosecutor Office stated that boys, aged 12 to 17, are also victims of sexual exploitation.¹³ Traffickers also use the Internet and advertisements in mass media to recruit their victims.¹⁴

Who creates demand?

Traffickers prey on children and young people to meet the sexual demands of paedophiles and people who pay for sex. Any person who patronises the commercial sex market may end up sexually exploiting a child. There is actually no common profile of perpetrators who sexually exploit children – they may be young, old, married, single; they come from all kinds of socio-economic backgrounds and work in all kinds of professions. Mexico is also a destination country for tourists seeking sex with children, traveling to destinations such as Cancun, Acapulco and Mexico City.¹⁵

Who are the traffickers?

In Mexico, there are large trafficking networks as well as small family-based groups that lure victims through different methods, such as false promises of work.¹⁶ Traffickers come from all social and economic backgrounds. They can be boyfriends, husbands, relatives, neighbours, friends, teachers or community leaders. They can also work in small or big crime networks. Some of them are in a position of power, working for the police, the judiciary or other government agencies. Organised crime networks operate with contacts across nations and using a variety of intermediaries such as transporters, pimps, hotel owners, migration officers, etc. They frequently use violence, threats and debts to control their victims.

The tradition of placing a child as a domestic worker in the house of an acquaintance or relative that lives in a city or bigger town is a common practice and seen as positive because it is believed that the child will have access to better education, exposure to a higher quality of life and better job opportunities. Traffickers take advantage of this tradition and once they have gained the

trust of the family convince them to let the child travel.¹⁷ Many recruiters are women, because they can present themselves as role models and obtain the families' trust more easily.

Due to increasing difficulties in crossing the Mexico-US border, "coyotes" (smugglers) and "polleros" (traffickers) are sought by children wanting to migrate. However, they frequently ask for large sums of money to be paid, 50% at the place of origin and the rest upon arrival at the destination. These debts often lead to children being forced into prostitution as a means to repay their travel debt.



CASE STUDIES

The Carreto Flores Traffickers

In July 2008, the leader of a family-based child trafficking network, Ms. Consuelo Carreto Flores, pleaded guilty to trafficking girls into the United States for sexual purposes. The trafficked girls came from poor Mexican communities near the United States border. Between 1991 and 2004, more than 10 girls aged 14 to 19 were sexually exploited in Queens, New York and previously in different cities in Mexico (Puebla, Tijuana, Mexico City, Irapuato and Tenancingo). The male members of the network, sons and nephews of Ms. Carreto, used seduction to lure the girls. Some even married and had children with them, in a bid to create an emotional dependency towards the criminals. In other cases, the teenagers were kidnapped and raped. Physical violence and threats were used to control the victims, all of which were forced to work more than 12 hours a day, serving an average of 30 men in inhumane conditions. The money paid by the male abusers seeking sex with the girls was then split between the brothels and the Carreto family, leaving the victims with nothing. Ms. Carreto is awaiting her sentence, which could include up to 14 years of jail.¹⁸

Impunity in Mexico

Despite the reform in 2006 of the Federal Penal Code establishing penalties for sexual exploitation, there have been no prosecutions in Mexico. Penalties for sexually exploiting an underage person is 14 years. According to NGOs working on the ground, abusers pay up to 55,000 Mexican pesos (about US\$3600).¹⁹

Child Trafficking Networks in Mexico

In May 2007, José Nemesio Lugo Felix, Technical Officer of the Inter-Institutional Commission to Prevent and Punish Trafficking in Persons, was shot and killed near his office. He was leading the investigation of 47 networks operating in Mexico that were involved in child pornography, prostitution and trafficking. One of these networks was reported to operate between Mexico (Puebla and Tabasco) and 12 cities in the United States, with an annual income of US\$400,000 for each of the girls they exploited.²⁰

How can we stop the trafficking of children?

LAW AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

- To strengthen the protection of children from trafficking and sexual exploitation, Mexico needs to urgently implement the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography*, and the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*. The Government should ensure that the state laws to protect children from child trafficking are consistently harmonised.
- The Mexican Government should acknowledge the depth and seriousness of the phenomenon of human trafficking, especially when children are involved, and allocate more resources to the detection and prosecution of this crime.
- Border police and law enforcement officials must be given training to identify and provide support to trafficking victims, taking into account the special needs and rights of children trafficked for sexual exploitation.

International Conventions/Laws	Date of Ratification by Mexico	Date of Reports Submitted	UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Recommendations for Mexico
<i>U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>	1990	Initial Report – 1996 Third Periodic Report - 2006	In response to the 2006 report, the UN Committee made the following recommendation in terms of child trafficking: The Committee urges the State party to ensure that the legislative proposals under review both in the Senate and the Congress concerning trafficking and sexual exploitation will provide effective protection for child victims and children at risk. The Committee also recommends that Mexico: (a) Conduct a comprehensive study to assess the causes, nature and extent of trafficking in children for various purposes, including commercial sexual exploitation; (b) Amend the Penal Code to make the sexual exploitation, trafficking and abduction of children criminal offences;

International Conventions/Laws	Date of Ratification by Mexico	Date of Reports Submitted	UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Recommendations for Mexico
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (c) Strengthen measures and adopt multidisciplinary and multisectoral approaches to prevent and combat trafficking in children and the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents; (d) Undertake awareness-raising campaigns, particularly for parents and children; (e) Ensure that trafficked children and children who have been subjected to sexual and economic exploitation are treated as victims and that perpetrators are prosecuted; (f) Provide adequate programmes of assistance and social reintegration for sexually exploited and/or trafficked children in accordance with the Declaration and Agenda for Action and the Global Commitment adopted at the 1996 and 2001 World Congresses against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children; (h) Collaborate with NGOs working on these issues and seek technical assistance.
<i>U.N. Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography</i>	2002	Due in 2006, and has not yet been submitted.	N/A
<i>U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress & Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women & Children</i>	2003	N/A	N/A
<i>ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour</i>	2000	N/A	N/A

PREVENTION OF CHILD TRAFFICKING AND VICTIM PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE

- The current process for returning unaccompanied children to Mexico is neither standardised nor consistently safe. Children are returned with and without consulate services or legal assistance. Children may be deported instead of returned. Some Mexican children are returned to the nearest port of entry rather than directly to their home communities, which increases their risk of being trafficked again. Therefore, the Government should focus efforts on strengthening coordination with the United States and its migration management structures both on enforcement and services, and on improving return procedures of victims of child trafficking.
- Safe shelters for victims, residence permits, rehabilitation support and financial assistance must be provided to all child victims of trafficking in Mexico and for Mexicans living in the United States. All institutions involved (Mexican Consulate, Border Police, social services, NGOs, etc.) should ensure children receive adequate services. Resources should be specifically allocated for this purpose.
- Measures should be put in place to improve the protection for separated children, namely their identification, age assessment, registration, family tracing, guardianship, best interests' determination, treatment and care. In this framework, it would be necessary to develop and implement codes of conduct establishing minimum standards for care staff to ensure that children under the care of social services receive adequate assistance and are not exposed to the risk of being trafficked.
- Mexico should promote any effort that avoids the deportation or detainment of children suspected of being victims of trafficking - both in Mexico and Mexican children in the United States - and that verifies their identity and any unlawful acts committed against them as a result of being trafficked.
- It is necessary to generate social awareness about child trafficking, to prevent children from being trapped and for communities to be able to identify trafficking victims without provoking social reproach towards them. This could be done in collaboration with the mass media and should include information on safe migration for children.
- There is a need for more information about the phenomenon of trafficking in Mexico and to monitor trends and developments through systematic and disaggregated data collection.
- A helpline for trafficking victims, including children, and an awareness campaign directed at victims to encourage them to seek assistance, must be developed.

TO REPORT A SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD TRAFFICKING, CONTACT:

24-hr Trafficking Emergency Hotline (619) 666-2757

The BSCC Trafficking Hotline is a direct link to the BSCC Trafficking Emergency Response Team. The Trafficking Hotline is bilingual and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to assist victims, service providers, and law enforcement.

Trafficking victims can call to ask for help to: find shelter, food, and clothing; receive counseling and medical assistance; contact or help their family; and prosecute their abusers. Concerned citizens can call to report a missing or exploited child; request victim support services; report the location of a trafficking operation; or help victims and their families in the United States and/or Mexico.

MORE INFORMATION

- ECPAT Mexico: www.ecpatmexico.org.mx
- ECPAT International: www.ecpat.net
- The Body Shop and ECPAT Stop Trafficking of Children and Young People Campaign : www.thebodyshop.com/stop

Endnotes

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- ¹⁰ Ibid.
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- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Beresford, Leticia Puentes. *Consuelo Carreto se declaró culpable de trata en comercio sexual*. 24 July 2008. Accessed from: <http://www.cimacnoticias.com/site/08072407-Consuelo-Carreto-se.34086.0.html>
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- ²⁰ "Lugo Félix rastreaba a una poderosa organización de trata de extranjeras". *Diario la Jornada*. 15 May 2007. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/05/15/index.php?section=politica&article=005n1pol>



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