



Policy Analysis Exercise

Raising grassroots organizations voices against sexual trafficking in women and girls in Latin America

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Prepared for



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Acknowledgements

This PAE is dedicated to my abuelita Esperanza, who was never able to be free when she was young. I am free because of you, for both of us. I now fight for every woman to be as free as I am.

To the women of my life: my sisters, mi gran amor, and my friends, for saving my life and helping me grow into the person I am today. Without your love I would be lost. To my current and former therapists for keeping me alive, for their patience, for helping me understand myself with so much kindness.

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Thank you to Isla, Andrea, Rosi, José Manuel, Ingrid, Reina, Carolina, Rita, Viviana, Ana, Sandra, Norma, Román, Liliana. For trusting me, for your time, for the interviews and for your work, women are safer because of you. Finally, but most importantly, this document is dedicated to the girls and women who have survived trafficking and sexual exploitation. In words of Sandra Perroni, one of the interviewees:

I always like to thank and pay tribute to all those victims who trusted us to learn, develop and generate all the lines of work that we have today, because truly if it had not been for them, for their bravery, for them waking up every day and facing these situations, we would not have been able to advance at all. Thank you to these women for their courage, for their resilience and for their trust to confide in us their story, their voice, so that we can continue working.

NI UNA MENOS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Human trafficking, also referred to as trafficking in persons, occurs globally and constitutes an egregious human rights abuse. Trafficking in persons has been referred to as modern day slavery, and constitutes one of the most pressing humanitarian crisis of the twenty-first century (Bryson & Shone, 2019). When people are trafficked, they are commodified and objectified, while they are used for the benefit and, in many cases, enrichment of someone else (García, 2021).

According to the Palermo protocol, trafficking in persons consists of “**the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion [...] to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation** (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021a)”.

Victims of trafficking in persons are disproportionately female. The 2020 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, in 2018 for every 10 victims detected globally, 5 were adult women and 2 were girls (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021b), while the ILO estimates women comprise 71% of total global victims (International Labour Office, 2017).

Trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a highly profitable activity, as it generates a global average profit of USD \$21,800 per year per victim, which is more than any other form of exploitation. Sexual exploitation produces two thirds of the profits from human trafficking, accounting for US \$99 billion per year, of the total \$150 billion industry. In addition, the ILO estimates 99.4 per cent of victims of sexual exploitation are women and girls (International Labour Organization, 2014).

The client and the research question

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) is an international organization that works against the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls. Although CATW's global headquarters are in New York City, they engage in initiatives to combat trafficking in women around the world.

How can the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women support the fight against sex trafficking in Latin America, according to organizations working with survivors?

1) Understanding the context

What are the current factors affecting the extent of sex trafficking in Latin America?

2) Finding solutions

What do survivors need?

What are organizations doing?

What is currently lacking in the fight against sex trafficking?

Methodology

A total of 13 Latin American non-governmental organizations working against sexual trafficking in women and girls were interviewed, and their contributions make up the central source of empirical information and the focus of this project. The interviews were complemented by literature review drawing from national and international reports on trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation. This literature review served to corroborate the themes and descriptions found in the interviews, as well as to complement them and contextualize them.

Limitations

This research project is affected by time limitations related to the structure of the Master in Public Policy degree, as this research project was executed from November 2021 to April 2022. Another limitation was the inability to travel directly to each organization due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fact that interviews were conducted online. Although this research project aims to find solutions to sexual trafficking from a survivor-informed approach, there are ethical concerns that arise when speaking to sexual trafficking survivors, and the best proxy for this was to talk to staff members working with survivors, some of whom are survivors themselves.

Findings

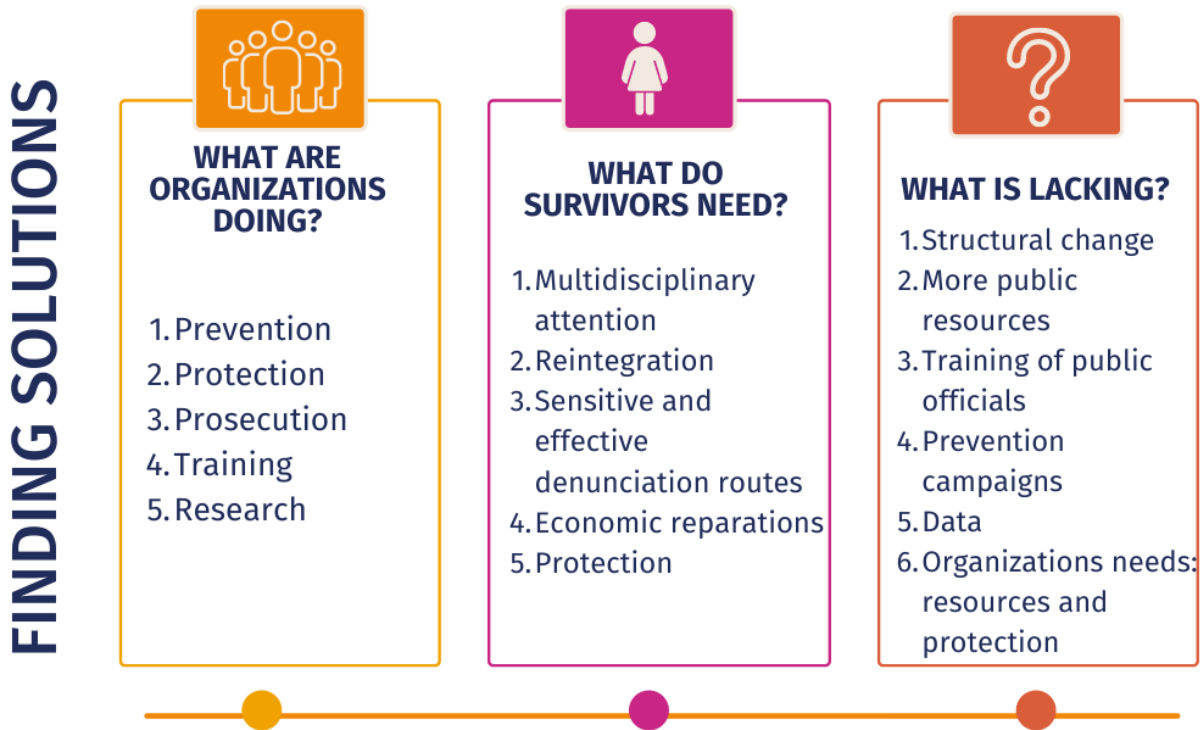
The following diagrams represent a summary of the most important findings of this document:

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE EXTENT OF SEXUAL TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND GIRLS IN LATIN AMERICA?

1. Women and girls are impacted by structural vulnerabilities
2. Weak Rule of Law in the region
3. Low priority for the government
4. Normalization of sexual consumption of women and girls
5. Globalization
 - a. Sexual tourism
 - b. Migration and trafficking
6. Subnational geographical routes
7. Covid-19 pandemic





Recommendations

Based on the findings, the recommendations for the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women are:

- Strengthen relations and cooperation with Latin American organizations
- Raise awareness about the deficiencies of the TIP report, and push for a change in its methodology
- Advocate for resources to be given to Latin American organizations
- Continue to work to rescue victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation from other nationalities in the United States
- Raise awareness about the role that American consumers play in trafficking routes in Latin America
- Continue to raise and echo the voices of grassroots organizations in Latin America, by paying attention to the findings of this project and the documented experiences of organizations

BACKGROUND

Trafficking in women for sexual exploitation

The crime of human trafficking, also referred to as trafficking in persons, occurs globally and constitutes an egregious human rights abuse. Trafficking in persons has been referred to as modern day slavery, and constitutes one of the most pressing humanitarian crisis of the twenty-first century (Bryson & Shone, 2019). When people are trafficked, they are commodified and objectified, while they are used for the benefit and/or enrichment of someone else (García, 2021). Globalization has contributed to the spread and growth of human trafficking and the birth of transnational routes and global supply chains that transport and deliver victims (Corena, 2015).

The most widely ratified international instrument against trafficking in persons is the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. It entered into force in December 2003 and currently has 178 signatory States (UNODC, 2022). It is part of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and is colloquially known as the Palermo protocol or the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol. Article 3 of the protocol defines trafficking in persons as:

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”

Article 3 of the Protocol also establishes that:

“Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021a).

This document will only focus on trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, which is defined as:

“Any actual or attempted abuse of [someone’s] position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another” (United Nations Task Team on SEA, 2017).

It is difficult to measure human trafficking because of its illegal and underground status, and thus no single source can provide reliable data on the extent of this crime. However, in its 2017 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, **the International Labor Organization**

estimated that 40.3 million people were victims of modern slavery in 2016 (International Labor Office, 2017).

Globally, people can be trafficked for many different forms of exploitation, and the exact number of victims for each cannot be quantified due to the difficulties that arise when trying to systematically register cases of trafficking. For example, the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (GLOTiP) 2020 indicates the most common forms of exploitation are sexual exploitation (which accounts for 50% of total victims), forced labor (38%), criminal activity (6%), begging (1.5%) and mixed forms (1%) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021b). However, while the GLOTiP compounds administrative data from 148 countries, it only includes cases that have been officially registered by national authorities, thus surmounting to a total of 48,478 victims in 2018. This number is a fraction of the number of victims estimated globally, and is proof of the deficient capacity to identify, prosecute and register trafficking. By contrast, the International Labor Organization estimates victims of sexual exploitation represent 9% (3.8 million) of total victims of forced labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking. This number was obtained through 54 national probabilistic surveys with more than 71,000 respondents across 48 countries (International Labour Office, 2017).

Although both men and women can become subjects of trafficking in persons, victims are disproportionately female. According to the 2020 GLOTiP, **in 2018 for every 10 victims detected globally, 5 were adult women and 2 were girls**. In the Americas, **women and girls comprise 72% of victims in North America, 81% of victims in Central America and the Caribbean and 64% of victims in South America**. (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021b). This falls in line with the ILO estimate of women comprising 71% of total global victims (International Labour Office, 2017). The fact that victims of trafficking are mainly women can be explained by global gender inequality, whereby discrimination and violence against women are common (Torres Falcón, 2016).

Several authors highlight the importance of understanding human trafficking as a market system, moved by the forces of supply and demand (Aronowitz & Koning, 2014; Kara, 2010; Koettl, 2009). Only by understanding the drivers of the existence of such market can we begin to understand its prevalence, size, and operating modes (Kara, 2010). From this perspective, victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are treated as commodities to be bought, sold, traded, and used, and their traffickers are motivated by making profit (Aronowitz & Koning, 2014).

The market for trafficked women for sexual exploitation has unique characteristics that differentiate it from other illicit markets and make it a more lucrative operation. In *Sex Trafficking: Inside the business of modern slavery*, Siddarth Kara explains:

“Drug trafficking generates greater dollar revenues, but trafficked women are far more profitable. Unlike a drug, a human female does not have to be grown, cultivated, distilled, or packaged. Unlike a drug, a human female can be used by the customer again and again” (Kara, 2010)

Hence, trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a highly profitable activity, as it generates a **global average profit of USD \$21,800 per year per victim**, which is more than any other form of exploitation¹. Sexual exploitation produces two thirds of the profits from human trafficking, accounting for US \$99 billion per year, of the total \$150 billion industry. In addition, the ILO estimates 99.4 per cent of victims of sexual exploitation are women and girls (International Labour Organization, 2014).

Client description and objective

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) is an international organization that works against the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls; it was created in 1988. Although CATW’s global headquarters are in New York City, they engage in initiatives to combat trafficking in women around the world. The organization has 27 partners around the world, as well as two offices in the Asia-Pacific and Latin American-Caribbean (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 2021c). Their work to fight trafficking and sexual exploitation is guided by three main goals:

Advocating for Strong Laws and Policies: CATW believes that to end gender-based violence, and trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls, governments must enact strong laws and policies against them. For this reason, they engage in advocacy work to call for legal and policy efforts to provide justice for survivors of trafficking, as well as to ensure no more women and girls become victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 2021a).

Raising Public Awareness: CATW’s work includes working to make trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls more visible, and to increase public consciousness about it. They aim to mobilize the public to demand change and action from lawmakers and policymakers, in order to protect the human rights of girls and women (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 2021d).

¹ This number was calculated by the ILO using as a basis the methodology presented by Siddarth Kara on “Sex Trafficking: Inside the business of modern slavery” (2009). The formula multiplies the number of forced labour victims in sexual exploitation (FL) by the monthly amount from sale of sex in the region estimated by Kara, then multiplied by a 0.7 margin of profit, finally multiplied by twelve months. For more information on this formula visit https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_243391.pdf

Supporting Survivor Leadership: CATW recognizes that survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation are the ultimate experts on these intricate issues. Survivors hold deep knowledge based on their lived experience, as they have lived firsthand the violent and harming realities of trafficking and sexual exploitation. Because of this, efforts to fight these problems must have survivors at the center. (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 2021e).

CATW's work incorporates the principles of human rights stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and they believe women are entitled to live in dignity, with bodily integrity and free from violence and discrimination (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 2021b).

METHODOLOGY

Research question

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) believes that survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation must be at the policy-making table, with their voices and recommendations highlighted (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 2021e). However, even as sexual trafficking continues to rise in Latin American countries, there is a gap between the global headquarters of CATW and front-line Latin American activists. Given this context, and the urgency of fighting trafficking of girls and women globally, the research question addressed in this paper is:

How can the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women better support the fight against sex trafficking in Latin America, according to organizations working with survivors?

1) Understanding the context

What are the current factors affecting the extent of sex trafficking in Latin America?

2) Finding solutions

What are organizations doing?

What do survivors need?

What is currently lacking?

Literature Review

The literature review draws from national and international reports on trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation to build an understanding of it. As this document aims to provide a broad regional perspective, sources describing regional and global trends were prioritized, versus those focusing on a more local/national level. This literature review is important to corroborate the themes and descriptions found in the interviews, as well as to complement them and contextualize them.

Interviews

Information from qualitative interviews formed the basis of the findings. A total of 13 interviews were conducted with Latin American non-governmental organizations working with survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation (for the list of questions, see Appendix 1). These organizations provide the central source of empirical information and the focus of this project. Some additional interviews were done with researchers working on trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation. Interviews were conducted over Zoom, in Spanish.

Sampling of interviewees

The interviewees were found mainly through three methods:

- 1) Contact was provided by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (10%): CATW has relations with some Latin American organizations and shared their contact information with me.
- 2) Online research (60%): Extensive online research was conducted to find the main organizations working against trafficking and sexual exploitation in each country of Latin America. This research was conducted through search engines and social media, as well as online websites of international networks against trafficking for sexual exploitation, and organizations were “cold called” through email, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp and Twitter. Every organization that answered and had availability was interviewed.
- 3) Snowball (30%): Contact information for some interviewees was provided by organizations who were previously interviewed.

Data Analysis

The content of the interviews was manually codified using the Nvivo software, resulting in 66 different codes that reflected the content of the interviews. The most relevant and illustrative quotes were translated into English to be included in this document. Some of the quotes include the full name of the interviewee and their title, while others are left anonymous because interviewees requested so (see appendix 6).

Limitations

This research project is affected by time limitations related to the structure of the Master in Public Policy degree, which ran from September 2021 to April 2022. Another limitation was the inability to travel directly to each organization due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fact that the work of setting up interviews was conducted online. Because of this, organizations and activists working against sexual trafficking who do not have an online presence might have been left out.

In addition, while this research project aims to find solutions to sexual trafficking from a survivor-informed approach, there are ethical concerns that arise when speaking to sexual trafficking survivors, because of the possibility of revictimizing them or causing a strong emotional response to any of the questions. In place of speaking to survivors directly, interviews were conducted where possible with frontline staff who work directly with survivors. In some cases, these staff members were survivors themselves, in which case great care was taken to avoid any retraumatizing.

There is also a geographical limitation to this project. Although the initial intention was to cover the whole region of Latin America and the Caribbean, it was too big of a project for the timeline and for the execution to be done by a single individual. Therefore, the scope was limited to Spanish speaking countries in Latin America not located in the Caribbean. However, in the final sample, it was only possible to include organizations from Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Chile (see Appendices 2 and 3). At least one organization from Costa Rica, Peru, Ecuador, El Salvador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Panamá was contacted but they failed to answer to communications.

A thematic limitation of this document is that there was no analysis made on the national legislations related to trafficking for sexual exploitation and sexual commerce due to the complex debate about the legalization of sex work/the abolition of prostitution.

Finally, as the interviewed organizations are in different countries and settings, some findings may be specific to one place, while others can be universal themes that were constantly repeated throughout interviews. Because of the small sample used, findings must be corroborated through further research.

FINDINGS

Understanding the context

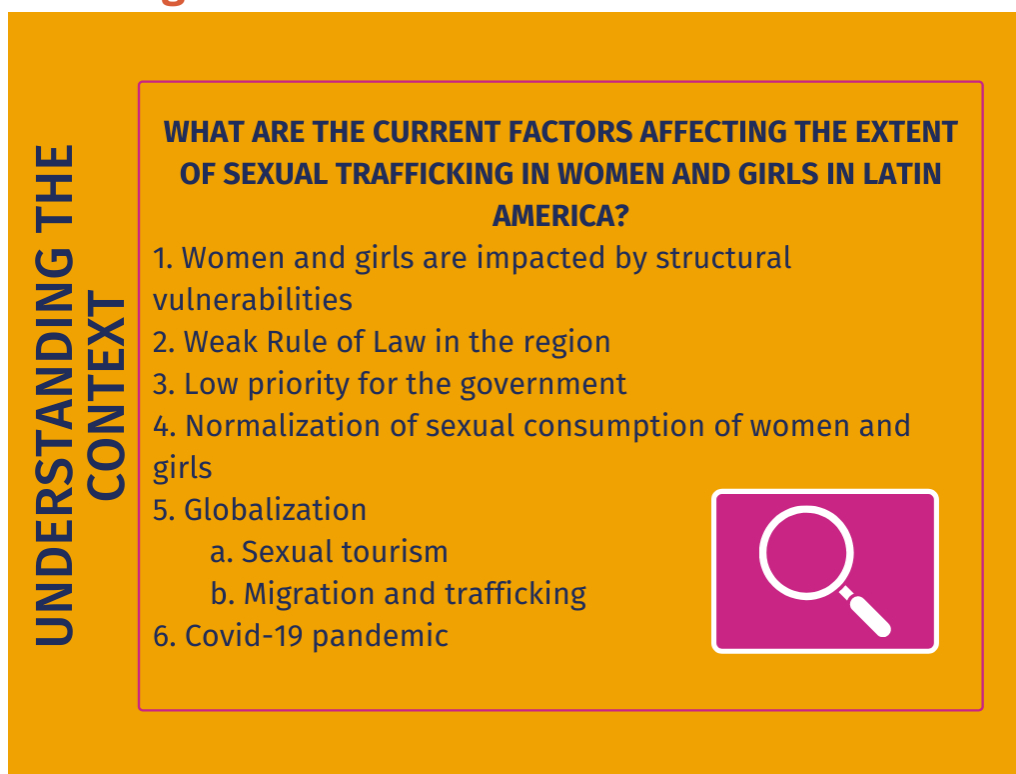


Figure 1. Understanding the Context: Overview.
Source of information: interviews.

What are the factors affecting sexual trafficking in Latin America?

Women and girls are impacted by structural vulnerabilities

Across all the countries and organizations that were interviewed, there is a clear consensus on who the victims of trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation are. As stated before, victims are disproportionately female, but there are also other factors that intersect and might make a woman more prone to become a victim of traffickers:

“The profile of a woman victim of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a woman with very low resources, from remote places, [...] she reaches the big peripheries, she is captured, and besides with low education...”- Andrea Avella, Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, Colombia

Poverty is one of the factors of vulnerability for women to become victims of trafficking. This fact becomes salient when learning that, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, at the end of 2020 118 million of Latin American women were in poverty (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021) (for a comparison of poverty rates for men and women in Latin America, see Appendix 4).

Women in the region are left in a vulnerable economic position because of a combination of gendered poverty, lack of employment opportunities for them, limited control of

financial resources and impeded access to education (ICAT, 2017). However, poverty by itself is not the only factor that makes a segment of women more vulnerable to trafficking:

“Traffickers have been very wise on learning to detect those vulnerabilities, they go from the big cities [...] to the small towns where they will find those high levels of domestic violence, high levels of sexual abuse, high levels of poverty, low education, that put a woman in the perfect place to be deceived.”- Rita Hernandez, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Rescue Freedom

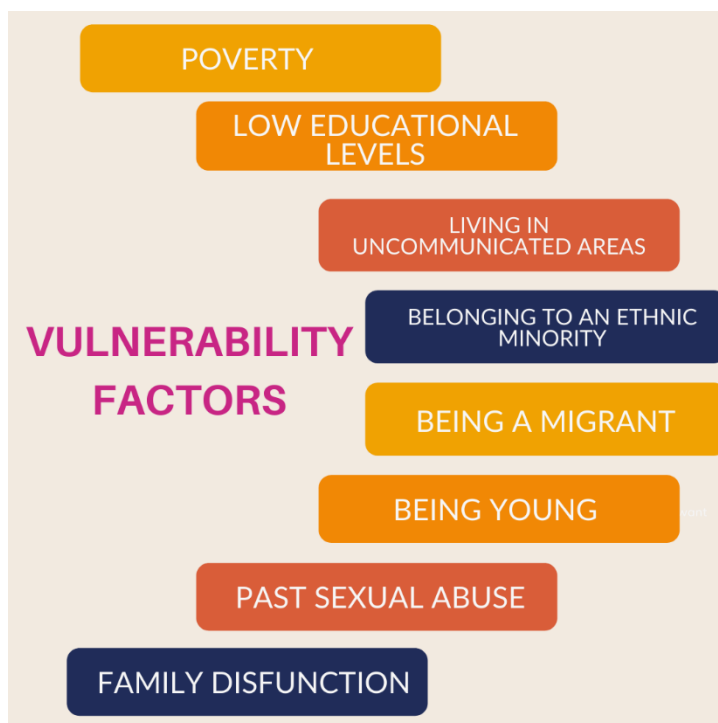


Figure 2. Vulnerability factors.
 Source of information: interviews.

According to interviewees, other factors that add to women’s vulnerability to trafficking are living in uncommunicated areas, low levels of

education, being part of an ethnic minority. All of the forementioned characteristics can be understood as indicators of social exclusion, which refers to the condition in which an individual cannot participate in equal terms in the political, cultural economic and social life of a given State (United Nations, 2016). Social exclusion is a multidimensional process that is driven by unequal power relationships and does not solely refer to financial resources (Popay et al., 2008). Therefore, none of these vulnerability factors can be understood by themselves, as they intersect and are part of a complex marginalization loop that causes for some women to be socially disadvantaged and, consequently, more prone to be trafficked. One factor of vulnerability that was mentioned in repeated occasions and that merits special attention is belonging to an ethnic minority:

“We have two cases right now where women are victims from an indigenous community with high levels of poverty, they were teenagers, they were taken to Mexico City, to Tlaxcala and then taken to New York, that is the route that I have seen a lot”-Director at an NGO

“One of the ethnic groups in (country), they are even more vulnerable due to their poverty, because they are many women, because women have the economic burden, because they have the hope that if they are taken out of [the community] girls will get ahead [...] girls are given to people because they promise to give them education, and they are used to be exploited...”-Director of an NGO

“We have a third of our population of original peoples [...] the maps of poverty and exclusion are always crossed with the maps where Mayan people live or don't live, the original peoples...”-Director of an NGO

“In a lot of indigenous communities, they are not well communicated by the central part of the states, it is very common to see, for example, how they buy and sell women, right? Or their women are exchanged for livestock, it is very common to see that still” -Director at an NGO

There are approximately 826 indigenous groups in Latin America, who come from a diverse ethnical, cultural and linguistic origin (Comisión Económica para América Latina, 2014). According to the Economic Commission for Latin America, the total indigenous population in 2018 was of around 58.1 million people, or 9.8% of the total population of the region. However, for some countries this portion is much higher: in Guatemala, Bolivia and Perú, indigenous people represent 43.6, 41.5 and 26 percent of the population, respectively (Comisión Económica para América Latina, 2020). Indigenous populations across the region continue to suffer deep social exclusion that manifests in high poverty levels and low access to public utilities, education, health and employment (Bocarejo et al., 2021). Inside this panorama, indigenous women are left in highly precarious socioeconomic position that traffickers benefit from.

Trafficking continues to exist because there is a steady supply of people who are trying to get ahead and improve their lives, or those of their children, created by the structural climate of poverty and social exclusion, lack of opportunities, violence against women, among other factors (Aronowitz & Koning, 2014). Gender, generational and ethnic and racial inequalities in Latin America are the root causes of current disparities, as well as neoliberal policies that monopolized public services and failed to extend rights in Latin America (Scandola in Button Aguilar et al., 2017). Another factor of vulnerability for women is being a migrant (migration will be further analyzed in the 'Globalization' subsection):

“Imagine the amount, it is a numerous population, without labor rights because the number of migrants who do not have regularization means they can not work regularly”-Ingrid Almendras, Director of Prevention, Sensibilization and Networks at ONG Raíces, Chile

In addition, certain conditions happening at the familiar or individual level can also make women more vulnerable to sex trafficking, which are past sexual abuse, family disfunction and drug addiction:

“When we talk to victims of sex trafficking, we know that a lot of them were sexually abused as girls and this puts them at a high, high, high level of vulnerability. Why? Because if they have abused me, if either way they have already used my body, if I am dissociated from my body because of continuous abuse, then it is easy one way or the other to take that step to, well, now it is the same thing but earning money, you know, so psychologically it puts girls in a more vulnerable position”- Rita Hernández, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Rescue Freedom, United States

“What happens with kids and teenagers that are trafficked is that, nowhere, no one looks for them, because deep inside they come from situations of deep vulnerability, they are kids that have lived abandoned [...] families with intergenerational damage”- Ingrid Almendras, Director of Prevention, Sensibilization and Networks at ONG Raíces, Chile

“Addictions also lead a person to become a victim of trafficking, right? Because by looking for the drug or because of the drug they end up falling into trafficking networks”- Director of an NGO

Finally, being of young age is another indicator of vulnerability, as girls and teenagers are highly sought by consumers of commercial sex:

“Female teenagers are the highest number of victims of trafficking [...] they are the highest amount and also of missing persons, which is something that seems to have nothing to do with it but it has a lot [to do with it]”- Director of an NGO

In conclusion, a vicious cycle exists where an initial infringement to the human rights of women in Latin America makes them more vulnerable to trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, which brings further and multiple infringements to their rights.

Normalization of sexual consumption of women and girls

There is a normalized vision of women as sex objects that can be consumed, which is caused by the broader patriarchal society. This view of women was mentioned as a significant obstacle for organizations in several interviews:

“Men feel entitled to pay to get access to vulnerable women, girls and boys, even when trafficking is criminalized”-Director of an NGO

“This type of places that sell a woman as an object generate a machista mentality and that allows for women to live this deep inequality that exists between men and women”- Rosi Orozco, Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata, México

“It is very difficult because in communities where sexual exploitation has been naturalized, how to tell a person that it is wrong when, I mean, girls, teenagers, I mean [it is]the ideal [...] to face a society where sexual exploitation is naturalized, that is one of the biggest obstacles”- Director of an NGO

“There is a strong connection between a society that normalizes sexual violence in the bodies of girls with a much easier entry of them, of these young women into trafficking networks”- Director of an NGO

The demand for trafficked women, and the exploitation of women, are heavily influenced by the cultural contexts where the deeply patriarchal power relations sexualize women and objectify them for consumption (Aronowitz & Koning, 2014, Goward in Aronowitz and Koning, 2014). The phenomena of trafficking, forced prostitution, rape and pornography are intertwined and trafficking is a key activity to carry out the other ones (Corena, 2015; García, 2021). It is particularly harmful for sexual exploitation to be so normalized inside a society because victims are not able to identify they are being subjected to trafficking and sexually exploited:

“Not even us the victims knew we were being victims of a crime because in the case of sexual exploitation, the media normalizes it, the institutions normalize it, so it is very difficult for a victim to know that she is living this violence”- Andrea Avella, Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, Colombia

“The complex thing about trafficking in persons and exploitation is that victims do not think of themselves as victims, it is very complicated for a victim to step into their victimized situation and for them to go and denounce a crime”-Director of an NGO

“Trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation is so aberrant and so harmful because it sows in women a feeling of guilt and responsibility, as if they are responsible for what is happening to them, and they aren't, that is the psychological side that networks use for women not to denounce” Ingrid Almendras, Director of Prevention, Sensibilization and Networks at ONG Raíces, Chile

“You do a raid with victims that have been manipulated by their victimizers and they tell you ‘I am here because I want to’ and there is no crime in that, but then you insist, they start telling you the truth, the promotion of prostitution, facilitation of prostitution and sexual exploitation are crimes even with the consent of the victim, no matter how much they say they have consented, it is a crime, just like slavery, it is a crime”- Director of an NGO

But not all women are affected in the same way by the normalization of their consumption, as there are specific groups of women that have been exoticized and hypersexualized:

“There are journalistic investigations into Trinidad y Tobago, it is mostly with the purpose of sexual exploitation, and it is the trafficking of Venezuelan women, and this is a consequence of the hyper sexualization that exists, that sexual stereotype of Venezuelan women, that objectification, it has consequences at the sexual trafficking level”-Director of an NGO

Weak Rule of Law in the region

Corruption plays a fundamental part in trafficking in persons in Latin America and, more broadly, the world, as complicity from government officials is required for trafficking to take place (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2019). Transparency International defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”(Transparency International, 2022b). Most of the interviewees mentioned corruption as a fundamental part of trafficking in women:

“Inside the government there is a very broad complicity network because the business of trafficking in persons and exploitation is highly profitable, so it is not in their best interest to start dismantling certain [trafficking] networks that have close ties with organized crime”
Director at an NGO

“The illegal side of society rests upon the legal side of society, while the legal side of society rests upon the illegal side of society” José Manuel Grima, President of ObservaLATrata

“What horrified me from Tijuana is how organized everything is, and how colluded the authorities are, how everyone tolerates it” Rosi Orozco, Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata, México

“Openly and calmly, virtual and in person prostitution happen with the tolerance of State officials. Moreover, not only tolerance but facilitation”-Director of an NGO

When considering trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation from a market perspective, corruption is the enabling agent that allows for it to continue to be a high profit-low risk venture for traffickers (Transparency International, 2011). This section will discuss some of the corruption patterns that were mentioned across the interviews, while remaining aware that corruption is a challenging topic to analyze due to its hidden nature.

- **Types of acts**

Bribery is defined as “the explicit exchange of money, gifts in kind, or favors for rule breaking or as a payment for benefits that should legally be costless or be allocated on terms other than willingness to pay” (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Bribes were mentioned as one of the corrupt practices facilitating trafficking in women and girls. They can be used to operate the exploitation of women and girls:

“There is always complicity and I discovered that when I used to do raids, I interviewed the girls, local police are always, there have been cases of mayors or councilors or political people, in politics, they also get benefited, right, because these owners pay them money to be able to work, it is forbidden, they work illegally, they pay”- Director of an NGO

Or to avoid being prosecuted for their crimes:

“So that is the first obstacle, that complicity, that corruption, here in the neighborhood, here where I live everyone knows that they sold three big properties, that they had, to pay, because I was being informed. They were selling three properties, how to value them, let's say [325 thousand USD]. It is a big among that they distributed to be free.”-Director of an NGO

A further way in which corruption manifests is through money laundering, which refers to “the process of disguising the proceeds of crime in an attempt to legitimize their illicit origin” (FATF, 2018):

“What is the goal of trafficking for sexual exploitation? The money, but if that money is not laundered, if it is not introduced into the formal circuit it is useless [...] it comes from the illegal side, and for it to be part of the legal side, to be laundered, legal institutions, a whole institutionality [sic] that integrates the legal side of society has to act, the bank itself, the financial structure itself [...] it is the bank itself the one laundering the drug trafficking and trafficking in persons money”- José Manuel Grima, President of ObservaLATrata

Money laundering turns out to be a key element of trafficking because the monetary proceedings obtained from the sexual exploitation of women and girls enable criminals to continue to exert influence on public officials, for example, through bribes (United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, 2008).

Abuse of functions is “the performance of or failure to perform an act, in violation of laws, by a public official in the discharge of his or her functions, for the purpose of obtaining an undue advantage for himself or herself or for another person or entity”(Transparency International, 2022a). This occurs in the cases where authorities abuse trafficked women and girls or direct the trafficking networks themselves, and thus directly violate the law:

“There are these big complicity networks, as a matter-of-fact Mexico City and several states, public officials, have covered huge exploitation and trafficking networks, one of them is the case of a former director of a very important political party in Mexico City who operated in his offices a prostitution network, where besides from him, his friends and close political colleagues were benefited” Director of an NGO

“We have had cases where the traffickers are associated to people from the governments or they are public officers [...] we have had governments such as the last one where it was the President [of the country] himself who had two specific places where young women were taken, the youngest of the government offices, and if they refused they lost their jobs, and he was indicted...” - Director of an NGO

Trafficking networks operated directly by high-level officials are particularly alarming situations because a high degree of institutional collusion is required, as an intricate web of illicit acts and corrupted officials is needed for them to exist (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2019).

It is also worth mentioning that, while bribes consist of a distinctly monetary benefit, public officials can also get benefited through the direct sexual abuse of victims:

“How do you corrupt when a new governor arrives, a new mayor, and the giros negros² exist, this is how, they take the mayor, the police officers, the public ministries, they sit a girl in their legs, they take a picture and they corrupt them, or they make them addicted to this type of violence against women” Rosi Orozco, Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata, México

An additional example of how public officials can incur in corrupt acts that facilitate trafficking in women is through the obstruction of justice, which refers to instances where authorities “interfere with a justice or law enforcement official in their duties” (Transparency International, 2022a):

“Once we were called because of a closed house in a very crowded area here in the capital, we denounced it to the Prosecutor’s office and when they went, obviously there were very high profile, expensive cars, with bodyguards, and there were trafficked girls, but at the second ocular inspection the house had been closed and everything was moved [...] corruption does not only have to do with trafficking happening, and even with public figures being the clients or the traffickers, but also with the impunity generated around certain cases because they are all connected”-Director of an NGO

Although there is a need to attempt to classify corrupt acts to better understand how to prevent trafficking in women, in real-life scenarios this is not so crystal-clear. A more

² “Giros negros” is a colloquial expression used to refer to businesses that are known to incur in illegal activities, such as consumption and trafficking of drugs and prostitution.

realistic perspective is that many of these acts overlap, and public actors usually commit several types of corrupt acts when involved with trafficking networks.

Finally, while most of the examples shown so far are cases of corruption involving high-level public officials, it is noteworthy to mention that in several of the interviews policemen were said to be complicit:

“In Tijuana there is a horrendous tolerance, you see policemen taking care of the pimp’s businesses”-Rosi Orozco, Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata, México

“We have a federal division of trafficking in persons of the Federal police that aims to have a division that is not linked to the Local police, who is complicit, because in all of the cases it is complicit”- Director of an NGO

“I think also the police, of course they contribute with their silence, with not seeing”- Ingrid Almendras, Director of Prevention, Sensibilization and Networks at ONG Raíces, Chile

Street-level policemen playing an important role in trafficking has also been mentioned by several authors, thus they should be looked at as significant actors for potential solutions (Bonnier, 2020; Button Aguilar et al., 2017; Kara, 2010).

- **Consequences of corruption**

Besides from directly permitting trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation to happen, corruption allows for it to be left impune³:

“Very large networks have been dismantled, even translational ones, right, I have seen cases like that, right, where the networks used to operate from other countries, taking advantage of the fact that in Mexico there is a climate of impunity, meaning they are not going to do anything against your business”- Director of an NGO

“[from the Judiciary] these crimes of trafficking in persons for sexual purposes are hidden by disguising them or not accusing them correctly, and when they are correctly accused, the judges do not convict properly, if they are convicted properly the second instance might not ratify the conviction, and even if the second instance convicts, the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation has overthrown very well-made judgments”- Director of an NGO

The fact that corrupted public officials are colluded with trafficking networks undermines trust in the rule of law and in the judicial system (Procuraduría de Investigaciones

³ Statistics around impunity of the crime of trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation are not provided because any estimation would be misleading due to the intersection of a) the lack of registers on the true numbers of trafficking, b) the low rate of denounces and c) the low conviction of these crimes.

Administrativas, 2021). The lack of punitive action against traffickers can leave victims in a defenseless and vulnerable position, where they even question if it is worth to denounce the crime committed against them:

“It is so normalized that pimps always win the judicial fights, pimps always have the support of authorities [...] My case got to court 12 years ago and today there is not a single detainee for my case [...] we don’t have the authority as a foundation, as the director, as a survivor, to give a light of hope to a victim that a detention will happen, because not even fully identifying the aggressor there is a guarantee that in Colombia the right to reparation and justice for a victim of trafficking will be respected”-Andrea Avella, Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, Colombia

“So women that’s what they say to me, we will give you information but we don’t see that there are changes, it always remains the same, it is always increasing”- Director of an NGO

Low priority for the government

It is important to differentiate between this subsection and the previous one, as both deal with governmental actions/inactions around trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation. However, while corrupted public officials actively choose to facilitate trafficking in women and girls, non-corrupted public officials and, more broadly, governments can also contribute to it through their inactions. According to interviewees, combatting trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation and attending survivors has not been a priority for governments across Latin America⁴, and a lack of political will is perceived:

“The efforts that the government has made to give attention to victims of trafficking are quite null, an ineffective route, a totally obsolete route”- Andrea Avella, Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, Colombia

“The principal obstacle in Latin America is a lack of political will”- Director of an NGO

“We have a general [national] law that is equally applied, that every state in the republic could apply if they wanted to, but there is no will to do so” Rosi Orozco, Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata, México

To begin with, the lack of importance given to fighting trafficking in women with the purpose of sexual exploitation causes very few resources to be allocated to it, and this affects a broad range of aspects:

⁴ Except for the case of Argentina, as interviewees expressed combatting trafficking remains a governmental priority, thanks in big part to the efforts of the feminist movements.

“At the budgetary level this topic has not been a priority. If you do not have a budget you do not have personnel, you cannot generate good public policies, you cannot have a robust system of attention to victims, you cannot have a system of social prevention of crime”- Director of an NGO

“Those of us who do prevention are civil society organizations, as the government does not tag resources to do so”- Director of an NGO

The issue of a lack of resources for implementing public policy against sexual trafficking in women and girls in Latin America has also been mentioned by several regional reports (Brendel, 2003; Button Aguilar et al., 2017). The low priority given to sexual trafficking in women and girls does not only affect the resources dedicated to it, but also how knowledgeable and sensitive public officials are:

“They do not know, for example the judges, they are unaware of the use of all the international regulations on trafficking. They also do not know how to apply a gender approach to judge”- Director of an NGO

“If you do not have personnel specialized in trafficking and its forms of exploitation that are such complex crimes and need a very delicate investigation, because they can maybe be confused with other criminal types [...] I think this is one of the worst things we have in Mexico and that really stall this process of access to justice, that there are no authorities investigating this as it should be” -Director of an NGO

“The specialized [police] is the one that knows the best, but the specialized [police] are I don't know how many officials, the rest of the policemen who wear uniforms are not specialized”- José Manuel Grima, President of ObservaLATrata

It is not clear whether a low prioritization of the issue causes a lack of sensitivity and knowledge to the problem of sexual trafficking in women and girls or the other way around, but one could argue that it is a two-way path. If a higher priority was given to fighting sexual trafficking in women, more resources would be dedicated to it, and more money could be spent on training and awareness. On the other hand, if more public officials were sensitive to the issue, more resources would be allocated.

Globalization

Siddarth Kara considers sex trafficking to be one of the worst phenomena caused by modern global capitalism and the many disparities brought by economic globalization: the widespread of rural poverty, an increased economic marginalization of the poor, the mining of wealth and resources from poor economies into richer ones, and the loss of

human freedoms across the developing world (Kara, 2010). The sexual commerce of trafficked women and girls is a transnational market that transcends national borders:

“We [Latin America] are the objective of this renewed neoliberalism that has us women as merchandise for global businesses from which they benefit in the [global] North. While in the global South we put female bodies, they are putting the money”- Director of an NGO

“We need to understand that the world is globalized, what happens in Mexico affects the whole world, what can happen in Colombia [...] we end up with many girls from Venezuela, from other countries where they have to flee because of the situation but end up being enslaved, it's very serious”- Rosi Orozco, Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata, México

In this transnational panorama, trafficked women are seen as commodities and their exploitation follows a market logic that aims to maximize the utility they provide to their traffickers (Corena, 2015). Traffickers follow a rational choice to increase profit by moving victims from developing countries to industrialized countries (Aronowitz, 2017). This is the reason why many victims end up out of their home countries and are exploited in the Global North:

“20% of the victims with a profile that is requested in other countries are exploited for a while in Colombia and then they are taken out of the country, one of the places where a lot of Colombian women are taken to is Spain”- Andrea Avella, Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, Colombia

The countries that act as receivers of victims are characterized for being more prosperous than countries of origin (Montoya et al., 2013). A very well-documented example of how victims from Latin America are taken to the Global North is the trafficking route that goes from Tenancingo, Tlaxcala in Mexico to New York (Michel, 2014).

- **Sex tourism**

Sexual tourism can be understood as a transnational industry where, instead of exporting women's and girls' bodies, foreign consumers are attracted to touristic places in Latin America, where they can fulfill their sexual needs (Corena, 2015).

“In the beaches and ports of this country you can see a lot of sexual exploitation of children and teenagers, people from other countries come here to break the laws”- Director of an NGO

“The touristic areas of these countries of ours that are so beautiful, geographically gorgeous, they call foreign attention and so traffickers make sure that they have centers to fulfill that need for sexual tourism, although it is against the law” Rita Hernández, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Rescue Freedom, United States

“In Colombia the touristic areas, resorts, beaches, seas, touristic areas in Cartagena, Medellin, oil areas, regions during the harvest seasons, concentrate more sexual exploitation”-Andrea Avella, Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, Colombia

“[In Mexico] we have 21 detected points of sexual tourism places, I think for me the worst one is Tijuana”- Rosi Orozco, Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata, México

The fetishization and exoticization of some populations that makes them more desirable to sex buyers (Button Aguilar et al., 2017) also contributes to the existence of sexual tourism, as do the lower prices at which sex is sold when its nature is exploitative and takes place in low-income countries (Aronowitz & Koning, 2014).

- **Migration and trafficking**

Globalization has brought a context of human mobility where large groups of people choose to leave their home countries to look for better opportunities elsewhere, driven by the economic disparities between regions and countries ((Button Aguilar et al., 2017). In addition, globalization itself has created the “push” factors that cause marginalization and vulnerability to certain populations and thus lead them to participate in risky irregular migration (Aronowitz & Koning, 2014). Migration was said to have a tight connection with sexual trafficking:

“in Mexico the phenomenon of migration is closely related to sex trafficking, in fact many migrant women from Central American countries [...] we know that this has a very strong impact on the phenomenon of trafficking, many women are captured violently or via extortion to be sexually exploited by coyotes and traffickers” - José Manuel Grima, President of ObservaLATrata

“Definitely all of the migratory routes are breeding ground for trafficking, I mean it is there where you will find your victims very easily, there are many many female minors who travel alone or who travel with people who supposedly are taking care of them” Rita Hernández, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Rescue Freedom, United States

Irregular and undocumented migrants can be perceived as ideal victims for traffickers because of their uniquely vulnerable status: irregular legal situation, lack of familiarity with the country, poverty, discrimination in the destination country. Traffickers abuse these vulnerabilities to make trafficking occur, and a common threat is to report the person’s illegal migration status to authorities (Aronowitz, 2017). The feminization of migration also adds up to this dire situation, as the migration of unaccompanied girls, young single women and women with familiar responsibilities in migratory streams is growing (Brendel, 2003).

The case of Venezuela deserves special attention, as interviewees from that country expressed that the humanitarian crisis has caused an exodus of its population, leaving

more Venezuelan women vulnerable to trafficking. The recent arrival of Venezuelan women, who are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, was mentioned by interviewees from different countries.

COVID-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic deeply impacted sex trafficking. Firstly, the increase in poverty and unemployment left women more vulnerable than ever to becoming victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation:

“There has been growth [in trafficking] because poverty has increased, both in our country and in the world, it is being reactivated but today there are many people without a job [...]”- Director of an NGO

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has estimated that the economic contraction in the region caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will disproportionately affect women and will represent a recoil of over ten years in their participation in the labor market. This has also deepened gender inequality in the region and has undermined women’s autonomy (Comisión Económica para América Latina, 2021). Women have been left in a more precarious situation than before, which increases their vulnerability to become victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

In addition, restrained mobility and closure of public spaces changed the operating activities of trafficking. According to José Manuel Grima, there were two important changes due to the pandemic: the first one was related to enticement, which transferred to online platforms and social media. The second has to do with where victims are sexually exploited, because as public spaces where sexual exploitation commonly occurs were closed, activities moved to private places:

“They have moved towards more private spaces, where attention is more personalized and sometimes it is the pimp’s own home” José Manuel Grima, President of ObservaLATrata

“I think COVID hasn’t helped as these mafias have migrated to social networks”- Rosi Orozco, Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata, México

“You would find victims locked and with higher violence from their victimizer because, well, the lack of clients, the lack of an income caused for there to be a retaliation against victims, then transportation, as clients were not allowed to enter the apartments because it would have been visible or they would have been denounced, there was a transfer from sexual exploitation places to the clients’ houses”- Director of an NGO

Covid-19 has also decreased the available resources to combat sex trafficking:

“Now that we are in a pandemic, we consider that [trafficking] has increased, as there are not enough resources to carry out the raids and to do the necessary prevention campaigns [...] the number of rescued victims has decreased considerably, you can see in the statistics how it has been decreasing”- Director of an NGO

“It”s because of the pandemic, because truth is before the pandemic there was more prevention, there have to exist broad prevention campaigns”- Director of an NGO

Finding solutions



Figure 3. Finding solutions, overview. Source of information: interviews.

What are organizations doing?

When looking for solutions to trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation in Latin America, it is necessary to look at what is already been done by organizations that are working with survivors in the region. This subsection will present a categorization of the type of work they are doing and some examples of the specific activities they carry out that were mentioned inside the interviews.



*Figure 4. Interviewed organizations doing prevention.
Source of information: interviews.*

Prevention, according to the Palermo protocol, refers to those measures, policies and programs to inhibit trafficking in persons from happening. It includes addressing the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty, discrimination and inequality, but also entails educational and informational programs and campaigns targeting potential victims (UNODC, 2008). Some examples of how the interviewed organizations are doing prevention are:

- Direct community work with women to educate them on trafficking and gender-based violence.
- Education to the general public, social organizations and State institutions about the prevention of trafficking.
- Community counselors in border states that work to detect if there is trafficking in the community.
- Educational workshops oriented to migrants for their increased vulnerability to trafficking.
- Promotion and diffusion of the content of the national laws against trafficking and the Palermo protocol.
- Media appearances to raise awareness about trafficking.
- National and international prevention campaigns.
- Prevention of trafficking through intercultural female monitors.



Figure 5. Interviewed organizations doing protection.

Source of information: interviews.

The Palermo protocol defines protection as those activities that cater to the physical, social and psychological recovery of victims of trafficking in persons, as well as their safety (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021a). A few of the activities that were mentioned by interviewees that aim for the protection of survivors are:

- Provision of specialized shelters, including food, clothing, education and recreational and cultural activities, to protect survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation and their children.
- Residential and ambulatory attention for girls, boys and teenagers that have been victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation.
- Protection and integral attention to children, teenagers, child and teen mothers and their children who are in a migratory condition.
- Multidisciplinary attention from psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors, gynecologists, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers.
- Assistance and accompaniment for survivors to build a life project.
- PTSD-oriented therapies tailored to the needs of survivors of sexual exploitation.
- Promotion of laws to reinsert survivors into the workforce.
- Direct employment of survivors inside a textile factory owned by Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista.
- Employment of survivors inside the organization.



*Figure 6. Interviewed organizations doing prosecution.
Source of information: interviews and organization's webpages.*

Prosecution, according to the Palermo Protocol, refers to legislative and other measures to establish the criminalization of all forms of human trafficking, as defined by the article 3 (see Background), as well as the enforcement of such laws, including the punishment of traffickers (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021a). A few examples of how organizations work for the prosecution of trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation are:

- National and international strategic litigation of emblematic cases to ask for broader access to justice for survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation.
- National and international legal representation for survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation.
- National legal initiatives to create laws against trafficking.
- Reforms to the national laws against trafficking.
- Legal advice to survivors through partnerships with universities.
- Advocacy and lobbying for the approval of legal reforms and laws related to trafficking.



Figure 7. Interviewed organizations doing training.

Source of information: interviews and organizations' websites.

Training refers to the activities related to strengthening institutional capabilities to prevent, protect and combat trafficking (Ayuso, 2021). This is an essential activity to improve the dissemination of knowledge around trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, but also to improve the attention to survivors. Some different ways in which organizations mentioned carrying out training are:

- Training to public officials, community leaders, community organizations, educational communities, police forces, health personnel.
- Medium-term courses about assistance to victims of exploitation, directed to public officials working with survivors.
- Medium and long-term certifications on trafficking, directed to researchers, professors, students and anyone interested in the topic.



*Figure 8. Interviewed organizations doing research.
Source of information: interviews and organizations' webpages.*

The non-profit organizations that were interviewed for this document also conduct research activities to advance the understanding of trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation. Several ways in which they contribute to the creation of knowledge around sexual trafficking in women and girls are:

- Social and participatory research, systematizing and documenting the experiences of survivors.
- Local diagnostics to find out the origin of most victims and trafficking routes.
- Investigative field work in brothels, fields, textile workshops about sexual and labor exploitation.
- International conferences about trafficking, with the participation of experts coming from across Latin America.
- Presentation of regional reports to international organizations about trafficking.
- International networks with presence all over Latin America to stimulate the exchange of research around trafficking.

What do survivors need?

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women places emphasis on the necessity to put survivors at the center, as many of the interviewed organizations do. It is by listening to survivors and learning from their experiences that policymakers and researchers can propose effective solutions to trafficking. In addition, whether one chooses to call women who have gone through trafficking for sexual exploitation survivors or victims, it is imperative to not forget that they have agency in their healing journey and the creation of solutions. Several of the interviewed organizations said that survivors are now working for them as staff members or are women who decided to open their own organization to help other survivors, as is the case of Andrea Avella, from Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, and Alika Kinan, from Fundación Alika Kinan, who was unable to do an interview.

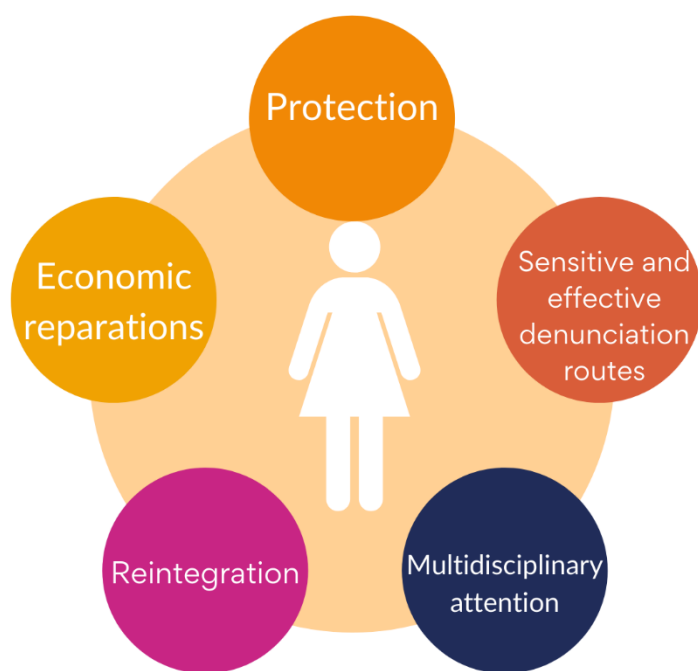


Figure 9. What do survivors need?
Source of information: interviews

Multidisciplinary attention

Because of the deep affectations to their physical, psycho-social, and economic well-beings, as well as the interruption caused to their lifepath and personal goals, survivors of sexual trafficking need multidisciplinary attention:

“A victim of trafficking has basically lost their lives at the hands of traffickers. A victim of sexual exploitation ends up with a damaged reproductive system, because they mess with their menstruation, if she gets pregnant they make her abort, she gets sexually transmitted diseases. Women that have been induced into drugs, they need help to leave their addictions, they need therapists, they need gynecologists, nurses [...] they need

every type of therapist, really, they need a psychologist, a social worker to look for any family or community ties, they need an occupational therapist to teach them to do different things to be busy at the shelter, they need a lawyer to defend them”-Director of an NGO

“I have seen many victims of different crimes but the victims of sexual exploitation or forced prostitution have special characteristics [...] they have been subjected to a large amount of violence episodes, sexual violence, patrimonial violence, physical violence, psychological, that generates deep damage and impacts in the emotional and psychological aspects, the damage is very deep, very, very deep”- Director of an NGO

“From an integral approach, what do we mean? We have psychology, social work, legal, why are so many teams needed? [...] it is not a necessity it is an obligation because when a victim, if you apply an intersectional approach, the victims generally come from extreme poverty conditions, they come from violent backgrounds, so we need to work with them in many ways”- Director of an NGO

A fact that was mentioned across different interviews is the link between drug addiction and trafficking. While addictions can be a vulnerability factor that makes a woman more prone to be trafficked, many trafficked women become addicted to drugs. These women need support to rehabilitate from their addictions:

“The younger they are, the more traffickers associate them to drugs, alcohol, and then then they are left completely dispossessed from their ability to decide”- Director of an NGO

“they induce you to consumption, because many of the women, 95% of the women who are initiated into sexual exploitation did not use to consume any type of drugs, hallucinogenic drugs, alcohol, and she is induced on the first day because that is the only way to survive continuous sexual exploitation”- Andrea Avella, Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, Colombia

“They need to pay the drugs because they end up being addicted, right? A bunch of issues and they end up still poor and with a lot of psychological and physical damages”- Director of an NGO

Reintegration

An important part of escaping trafficking for sexual exploitation is the reintegration in society. A critical piece of integration is the reinsertion into the labor force, as trafficking and sexual exploitation harm their abilities to get an income:

“Where do I go? I have no education, where am I going to get another job, I have been told for the past 5 years that the only thing I know how to do is to open my legs [...] of course I can win the same amount and now keep it myself, right? And that looks interesting I am going to become rich, they start rationalizing why they should stay, right?”- Rita Hernández, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Rescue Freedom, United States

“When they come back and do not have reparations, because they know all the processes, they can become traffickers. If they do not have a means to survive, they might go back or become traffickers”- Director of an NGO

“In the labor area and in the training area, to establish specific lines of intervention for these people, because that is what is going to let us really interrupt the trafficking situation and for survivors to visualize themselves inside a life project”- Sandra Perroni, El Paso

Reinsertion, however, does not exclusively refer to helping them rejoin the workforce, but also to the social reinsertion to society. Some organizations referred to the importance of looking for family and community ties of survivors (see past subsection), but they also mentioned the obstacles that arise in this process:

“In a recent case that we are attending, the contact is the husband of one of the victims, so for him it has not been easy to understand that his wife is being a victim of a crime, that she did not go to prostitute herself, right? So you can also see the issue of stigmatization”- Director of an NGO

When looking for families and communities left behind, the stigmatization surrounding sexual trafficking is an obstacle for them to reintegrate. Victims might not be welcome and they can be met with shame and judgment because of things they did not have control over -their sexual exploitation- (Marburger & Pickover, 2020).

Economic reparations

Since victims of sexual exploitation were used to generate profits for their traffickers, economic reparations must be given after their escape. However, this has not been the case:

“The problem is also the reparation of damage, out of every 10 sentences only one meets the standard required by the law against trafficking, then you realize that in 72% of the cases the judges are not condemning the reparation of damage, and if they do they do it with fines with very, very low penalties” - Rosi Orozco, Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata, México

“In Honduras, to this day, no woman or victim of trafficking, survivor, has received a reparation of damage, none of them, in the files there is none”- Director of an NGO

To highlight the importance of economic reparations we can look at the estimated amount of money that was generated through the sexual exploitation of victims:

“A woman was captured in Puebla, she was taken to work to the tolerance zone of Reynosa and then she was taken to New York [...] we hold that she must be given back all of the money that she generated for her traffickers, because in the end it was profit that was made with her body, and for that she would be entitled as part of the integral reparation of damage to have Access to these resources. We made estimations and she generated her traffickers almost one million dollars” Director of an NGO

Argentina provides an example of how this could look like in real life:

“One of the interesting things that have been made recently was the Fiduciary Fund for the Assistance of Victims of Trafficking, which is generated by the confiscation of assets of traffickers, when there is a sentence economic assets are confiscated, but until there is not a

firm judiciary sentence you cannot touch that”- Viviana Caminos, Coordinator of Red Alto al Tráfico, la Trata y la Explotación Sexual, Argentina

Sensitive and effective denunciation routes

Interviewees said it was common for survivors to be revictimized when they decided to denounce their traffickers. Judicial authorities regularly make prejudicious comments that reflect a lack of gender perspective and a lack of sensitivity to trafficking and sexual exploitation:

“When someone tries to file a complaint, it becomes an ordeal because they say “oh we don’t know what you did, look you have a tattoo, look you did such thing, you might have consented” so from there we start with a gear that makes for the entire system to become stuck”- Director of an NGO

“Judges that say ‘but you liked to be there, why didn’t you leave’ so that lack of sensitivity and a lack of gender perspective is a big obstacle”- Director of an NGO

“many victims feel they are treated like criminals because there is no reception, no, they are not viewed as victims, or ‘well she liked it’ [...] we have a lot of prejudices around sex trafficking, when we see a person exercising sexual commerce, you think it is because they want it, no one thinks about the possibility that she might be a victim, there have been advances but we still have justice operators who revictimize” Ingrid Almendras, Director of Prevention, Sensibilization and Networks at ONG Raíces, Chile

“And when you have the courage to denounce, when you have the courage to access a route, the attention is totally null, revictimizing, it is totally ineffective”- Andrea Avella, Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, Colombia

Therefore, taking an effort to denounce can bring more harm to the victim than the desired effects of justice. This brings further impunity to the crime of trafficking and sexual exploitation and leaves victims feeling hopeless about getting justice.

Protection

Survivors need to be protected after they escape their traffickers, but most importantly when they choose to press charges against them. If survivors are not given adequate protection, they can be at physical risk due to potential retaliations against them:

“There is no guarantee that when [the survivor] goes back to their origin country they are not going to suffer reprisals, this has happened, so it is important to guarantee the physical integrity of a victim of trafficking from the moment of rescue until they return to their country of origin”- Director of an NGO

In addition, interviewees mentioned sometimes authorities want survivors to denounce their traffickers and testify against them, but fail to provide them with any type of protections:

“She denounced, she was useful, I mean, they are using the victims, survivors, just as a means of proof, they do not view them as subjects with rights. She denounced, they captured a large network of sexual exploitation that worked from the United States [...] and the measures of protection did not work for her. The new Penal Code left the traffickers free. I mean, they were only in jail for three years and she hadn’t yet recovered emotionally, and when they knew they were out, the first thing they did was look for her”- Director of an NGO

Many interviewees mentioned that sometimes victims choose to stay abroad, or are forced to leave the country, due to them not being safe from traffickers:

“Most of them choose not to come back to the country, right, because of all of these issues primarily about safety, because there are many people that are part of the trafficking network that are still here”- Director of an NGO

A lack of protection was said to have a negative impact on survivor’s willingness to press charges against their traffickers or take any type of legal action against them, which contributes to the impunity of this crime.

What is lacking?

Structural reforms

Several interviewees referred to the fact that trafficking in women for sexual exploitation is caused by root inequalities, and that it can only be solved through structural reforms and an increased exercise of rights:

“Reducing the vulnerability factors, especially in areas where you know that Women and girls and teenagers are very vulnerable of being recruited and deceived by these trafficking and exploitation networks” -Director of an NGO

“What States must do to eradicate sexual exploitation is to guarantee the access of women [...] to the full exercise of economic, social, and cultural rights, a person that is exercising their full rights, especially economic and cultural rights, it is very difficult that they are in a vulnerable position to be trafficked”-José Manuel Grima, President of ObservaLATrata

The cases of Colombia and Venezuela must be analyzed as exceptional situations, because they have gone through unique phenomenon where trafficking in women for sexual exploitation have differentiated root causes:

“Sexual exploitation in Colombia is the result of an initial infringement of rights brought by the armed conflict in Colombia, and that must be known in scenarios outside of Colombia” - Andrea Avella, Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, Colombia

“Here as we are in the middle of a humanitarian context, organizations have placed emphasis on the means of living to be able to avoid and prevent trafficking, it is fundamental to have means of living for teenagers [...] an ethical job that allows them to sustain their family, that’s how you prevent trafficking” - Director of an NGO

More public resources

An imperative need that was mentioned in several of the interviews is the increase of public resources to combat trafficking in women:

“To elaborate public policies, but with a budget, because it is useless for public policies to be approved if they are not given a budget” - Director of an NGO

“To allocate more economic resources, to stop waiting for a final sentence to seize the assets of traffickers [...] many times they do things for politics, to be on the picture, ‘yes I did this’, and then it is never executed, so we need to know what budget is allocated in every state at the national level specifically for the issue of trafficking” - Director of an NGO

The lack of allocated budgets to fight trafficking was said to have effects on all aspects of the fight against trafficking in women:

“The government has not given neither the attention nor the specialization or the budget to these city-level and regional-level diagnostics to identify trafficking routes” - Director of an NGO

“Since there is no identification of the problem, there is no budget for attention. Then there is even less identification, I mean it becomes a vicious cycle where when there is a victim at any state there are no resources to provide attention for the victim or to restore their rights” - Director of an NGO

Training of public officials

Different interviewees mentioned training of public officials as a pressing issue in their countries, given their key role in the prevention and prosecution of trafficking, as well as the attention to victims:

“More training, we need a national program to combat trafficking in persons, we need committed public officials.” - Rosi Orozco, Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata, México

“Training to public officials, who are the actors of change who are the first contact with victims so that they do not press charges, firstly, because the guidelines are already set” -Andrea

Avella, Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista, Colombia

Interviewees also reflected not only on the necessity of training related to trafficking in women and girls, but also on broader gender issues:

“From the Judicial Branch, to train, to sensitize the judges, in topics related to the international framework, how to put it into practice, how to judge with gender perspective, but above all to eliminate the existing machismo” - Director of an NGO

“Sensitization is fundamental because of the existing normalization of trafficking and sexual exploitation” - Director of an NGO

Prevention Campaigns

An additional need that was expressed is prevention campaigns, with content specific to the different types of women that are affected by trafficking:

“The principal action for me is to design a permanent campaign against trafficking. But also with interculturality because it is not the same for them to do a campaign for us than for ethnic groups, the lencas, the mayas or the garífunas. It must be differentiated.” -Director of an NGO

“Prevention work, especially in vulnerable communities, a lot of work because the best story is the one that does not need to be told” Rita Hernández, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Rescue Freedom, United States

An interviewee mentioned that prevention has been impacted by COVID-19 (for further analysis, see the subsection ‘Covid-19 Pandemic’):

“It is because of the pandemic because truth is, before there used to be more prevention, broad prevention campaigns are needed” -Director of an NGO

Data

In Latin America, trafficking has not been registered in a systemic and comparable way in every country in the region. Every country has one or two registrars that partially keep account of the trafficking data (Button Aguilar et al., 2017). However, there are problems in terms of:

“One of the big obstacles is the lack of data [...] there is no clearly documented data from Government sources or official sources that give us a panorama of how trafficking in persons is happening, when by law it should exist” - Director of an NGO

Some interviewees mentioned that this data can be misleading when used for international reports:

"The national statistics are, as in every country, the formal statistics of people who have denounced, the judicialized cases [...] supposedly according to the Department of State, it considers that Chile is the one that has one of the best conditions for combatting trafficking, but there are situations that prove that we have a lot to do, for example, how did we not find any sex trafficking victims in 2020? That's how we can see that we are not doing so well" Ingrid Almendras, Director of Prevention, Sensibilization and Networks at ONG Raíces, Chile

"The government of the United States makes this classification in Tier 1, Tier 2 and because of political relations, that [country] has always been an ally to the United States, it has given [country] Tier 1, despite the fact that the year where more victims have been identified the maximum has been 114 victims in one year [...] the government is very proud of keeping numbers low because what works here is a denial model"- Director of an NGO

Organization needs: protection and resources

One of the most fundamental needs for organizations and activists is protection, as they are constantly in danger of being targets for traffickers:

"I live in the same neighborhood where the network is located and everyone knows me because I am a public person, I give information all the time, so traffickers know it is me. I had to take my son out of the country, my son is now out of [country]. Me, because this is my life, to be constantly threatened"-Director of an NGO

"Since it is a very delicate security topic, we do not publish what we do [...] I am located in [city], in [region] so I am in a very dangerous location, so since we have trafficking networks in here we cannot fully share what we do or don't do"- Director of an NGO

"I have had two murder attempts for this"-Director of an NGO

"When you get involved with these issues, you impact structures, those of us who are in charge, we know there are risks for lawyers and for those who legally represent victims, we know that the risk is very high, you are dealing with structures that do not only have trafficking and human smuggling, but also weapons and drugs"- Director of an NGO

Lastly, some interviewees expressed a necessity to receive more resources to be able to continue their activities for survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation:

"With humanitarian contexts, funding tends to be reduced over the years, the more it is reduced the less possibilities there are to help and strengthen people's capacities to get out through resilience"- Director of an NGO

"Everything that is done is because it was first thought by civic society, but you don't earn one peso, we are not given any money, the other day I was asked by a human rights defender, they

told me, you Assist victims, who finances you? Nobody, the State assists victims up to a point [...] [what the State doesn't attend] you must attend it yourself"- Director of an NGO

Although not included in quotes, some of them expressed even using their personal resources to aid survivors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the interviewed organizations are already doing valuable and sensitive grassroots work with survivors and at the governmental level across Latin America, recommendations for the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women must complement and support this work, to avoid duplicating efforts and instead aiming to build synergies with Latin American organizations. In addition, any supporting activities and efforts must be planned leveraging the role of the Coalition as an international actor, based in the Global North, with greater access to resources and key international stakeholders.

Based on these criteria, the recommendations are:

Strengthen relations and cooperation with Latin American organizations

- This document suggests that many of the problems related to trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation in Latin America are shared across different countries and organizations. Therefore, collective action and mutual support might be effective tools to advocate for the governmental changes that are suggested in this paper (see 'What is lacking'). Because of this, it is recommended that the Coalition strengthens its relationships with Latin American organizations through its office in Mexico City. An initial step to implement this recommendation is to organize a meeting with the organizations that participated in this project, share the results with them, and come up with some initial collective actions.

Raise awareness about the deficiencies of the TIP report, and push for a change in its methodology

- Some interviewees raised concerns about the methodology of the TIP report, arguing that it does not reflect the reality at the grassroots level and the Tier 1 status might create incentives for governments to avoid doing an effective effort to combat trafficking. These concerns should be addressed, as the Trafficking in Persons report by the Department of State is one of the most widely recognized sources of information on trafficking trends.

Advocate for resources to be given to Latin American organizations

- Solutions to combat trafficking in Latin America should not come from the Global North, but resources should. Just like globalization and transnational markets are pushing for victims to be trafficked to the Global North, organizations like the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women should push for more support to be given to activists in the Global South from the US government and other global stakeholders. As demonstrated by their work and the profound understanding they

demonstrated in the interviews, they do not need technical inputs, but they do need financial support to continue their activities.

Continue to work to rescue victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation from other nationalities in the United States

- Although the Coalition can not directly help in the aid of victims of trafficking in Latin America, it can continue to push for effective prevention, protection and prosecution in the United States. This will directly benefit Latin American women who have been trafficked and are sexually exploited, as many of them are in the United States (see 'Globalization').

Tentative: Raise awareness about the role that American consumers play in trafficking routes in Latin America

- It is unclear whether the general public in the United States, are aware of the role that foreigners play in the chain of trafficking and sexual exploitation in Latin America (see 'Globalization'), so more research is needed to determine current level of awareness. If there is a lack of knowledge, a recommendation is to do an awareness campaign to diminish the consumption of sex from exploited women in locations that experience sexual tourism and in hotspots where Latin American women are usually trafficked to.

However, the most important recommendation is to pay attention to the findings of this document and the many quotes that were obtained from the interviews and refer to them when the Coalition is discussing trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation in Latin America or participating in the creation of strategies around it. Echo their voices and pay tribute to their expertise in the region, and advocate for their needs when you get the opportunity to do so.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions

Initial questions

1. Can you introduce yourself and talk about the work (organization)?
2. Does (organization) work with sex-trafficking survivors?
3. What is the current panorama of trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation in (country)?
4. How do trafficking in women and girls geographic routes look like in (country)?
5. What are the principal obstacles to combat trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation?
6. Who is benefited by trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation in (country)?
7. What are the main political actors that need to be influenced upon to end trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation? (question was dropped later on, see subsection on Weak Rule of Law)
8. What are urgent actions needed to combat trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation in (country)

Pivot questions

9. What are the main needs you have as an organization?
10. Are the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation from (country) taken elsewhere?
11. Can you describe the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation?
12. What is the role of the government in all of this?

Appendix 2. List of interviewees

Non profit organizations

Name/Title/Organization	Country
Isla Gabriela Chávez <i>Director of the Clinic of Criminal Litigation against Severe Violations to Human Rights, ITAM</i>	Mexico
Rosi Orozco <i>Director at Comisión Unidos vs la Trata</i>	Mexico
Rita María Hernández <i>Director of Policy and Advocacy at Rescue Freedom⁵</i>	United States/Mexico
Ana Cruz Alemán <i>Director at Asociación Calidad de Vida</i>	Honduras
Viviana Caminos <i>Coordinator of Red Alto al Tráfico, la Trata y la Explotación Sexual</i>	Argentina
Liliana Forero <i>Coordinator at Iniciativa ProEquidad</i>	Colombia
Andrea Avella <i>Director of Fundación Dignidad Abolicionista</i>	Colombia
Reina Baiz Villafranca <i>Executive Director at Éxodo, A.C.</i>	Venezuela
Carolina Sarti <i>National Director of La Alianza</i>	Guatemala
Ingrid Almendras <i>Director of Prevention, Sensibilization and Networks at ONG Raíces</i>	Chile
Sandra Perroni <i>Coordinator of Attention services for Women in situation of trafficking for sexual exploitation</i>	Uruguay

Researchers

Name	Country
José Manuel Grima President of ObservaLATrata	Argentina
Norma Ferrera Coordinator of Level Anticorruption Assistance at Transparencia Venezuela, Venezuela	Venezuela

⁵ Although Rescue Freedom is located in the United States, Rita María Hernández is an expert in trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation in Tijuana. This is the reason why she was interviewed and why Rescue Freedom was located in Tijuana in the following regional map.

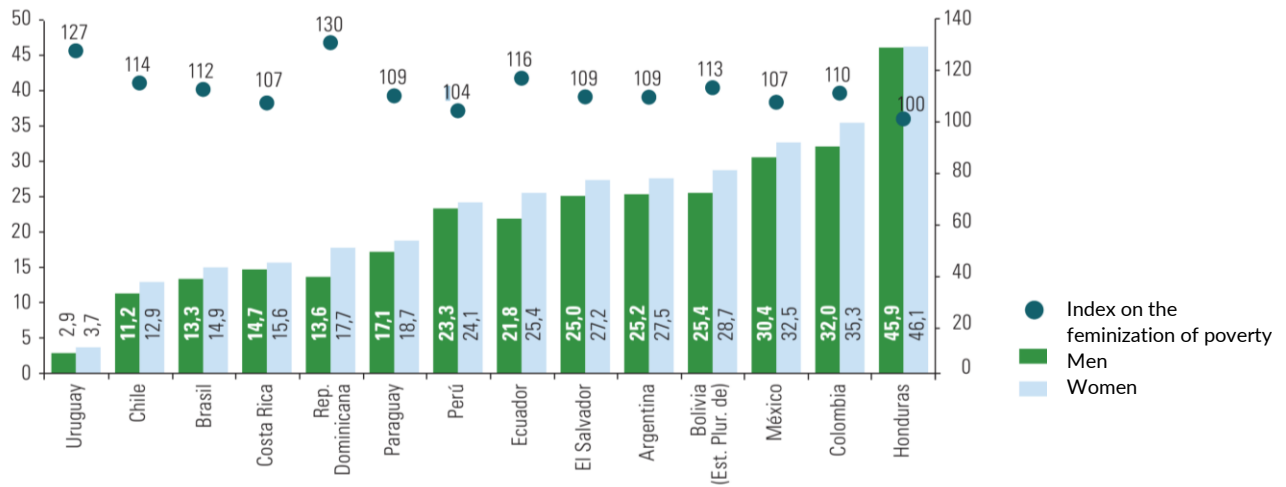
Appendix 3. Geographical location of interviewees



Appendix 4. Poverty rates by sex and Feminization of Poverty Index

Latin America (14 countries): poverty rates by sex and feminization of poverty index, population between the ages of 20 and 59, 2020

Expressed in percentages and value of the feminization of poverty index



Source: Comisión Económica para América Latina (2022). *Panorama Social de América Latina 2021*, https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/47718/1/S2100655_es.pdf

Appendix 5. Ethics statement

All research was implemented in accordance with ethical standards. Interviews were all conducted via Zoom.

For the interviewees, there was a consent process before each interview. We informed the interviewee of the following:

1. The identity of the interviewer (Denisse de la Peña) and her condition of master's student at the Harvard Kennedy School
2. The scope of the project and the purpose of the interviewee
3. The name of the client
4. The potential use of quotes inside the final document
5. They could choose to stop the interview at any point, or share anything off the record
6. The interview would be recorded, and the recording could be stopped at any point.
7. Asked for verbal consent to record the interview for transcription and data collection purposes

Identification of interviewees

After the most relevant quotes were extracted from each interview, a document was sent to each interviewee containing the quotes that were of interest to be used in the document. Then they were given two options:

- Include credits with name: Jane Doe, Director of XXXX Organization, Country
- Anonymous: Director at an NGO o Coordinator at an NGO

The names of those interviewees who agreed to be identified are included in the document. Anonymous titles were given to quotes where interviewees asked for it, or for those who did not provide an answer.

Funding Sources

The research was generously supported by the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard Kennedy School, who provided \$2500. This allowed for the remote field research, including interview transcription and necessary software.

No compensation from the client was received.