



**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION**  
**REGIONAL OFFICE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**  
**International Programme to Eliminate Child Labour – IPEC**

## **IPEC SOUTH AMERICA**



### **Executive Summary**

### **Magnitude, characteristics and environment of sexual exploitation of girls and adolescents in Ecuador**

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October 2002

This investigation was financed by the United States Labor Department

#### **Regional System of Information on Child Labour – SIRTI-**

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## **Areas studied**

The study was carried out in the cities of Guayaquil, Quito and Machala, the Ecuadoran cities with the greatest number of commercial sex establishments and sex workers. They also rank first, second and fourth in the country in population; Guayaquil has a population of 1,952,029; Quito, 1,399,814; Cuenca, 276,964 and Machala 204,123.

Cuenca was not included in the study because it does not have a significant number of commercial sex establishments or sex workers.

## **Study methodology**

### **1. Quantitative research**

Application of 415 field surveys: 75 in Quito, 175 in Guayaquil and 65 in Machala.

There were two types of surveys:

- ♣ One that gathered general information about the exploitative situations in which girls and adolescents work.
- ♣ Another that gathered information about specific conditions of the activity, such as psychosocial risks and risks to health and education.

### **2. Qualitative research**

- ♣ Interviews with responsible functionaries in national and local government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international cooperation agencies, and leaders of organisations of sex workers.
- ♣ In-depth interviews with girls and adolescents who are victims of sexual exploitation, as well as the clients and owners of commercial sex establishments.
- ♣ Interviews with representatives of social service agencies, service regulators and judicial system personnel.
- ♣ Focus groups with adult sex workers who became involved in the activity when they were minors.
- ♣ Bibliographical research on legal aspects, background research on sexual exploitation and review of clinical histories.

- ♣ Map of commercial sex establishments in each city. Information was recorded about *barras-bar*, daytime establishments, neighbourhoods where the establishments were tolerated, nightclubs, massage parlours, and streets and plazas in the cities.

The qualitative research included the general issue of sexual exploitation, institutions, direct actors and others with an impact on the issue. The quantitative component focused on girls and adolescents involved in commercial sexual exploitation.

## Principal findings

- ♣ There are approximately 25,000 adult sex workers in the country and the cities studied.
- ♣ There are an estimated 5,200 girls and adolescents in situations of sexual exploitation.
- ♣ Because the issue is not very visible in Ecuador, it has received little attention from the government, international organisations and some of the NGOs working on issues involving children and adolescents.
- ♣ As a result, there are no policies, plans, programmes or projects aimed at eliminating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, and there is no specific budget allocation for this.
- ♣ The little work being done in this area lacks inter-institutional coordination and synergy.
- ♣ The juridical framework requires reform so that child sexual exploitation and related activities are sanctioned as crimes.
- ♣ The lack of education about such issues as sex and sexuality, domestic violence and sexual abuse are among the main factors encountered that lead girls and adolescents to become involved in sexual exploitation.
- ♣ The lack of economic resources and job training keeps girls and adolescents in situations of sexual exploitation.
- ♣ Girls and adolescents who are sexually exploited do not have access to health care; because of age limits, they are not allowed care in Public Health Ministry facilities.

## **Recommendations for policies and actions**

Based on an analysis of the main problems found during the quantitative and qualitative research, a series of recommendations is proposed to contribute to the elimination of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

- ♣ Campaigns to raise awareness of the problem through mass media and alternative media.
- ♣ Formation of networks for the elimination of sexual exploitation of minors, made up of public agencies, NGOs, international agencies and civil society.
- ♣ Judicial reforms to codify and typify crimes involving sexual exploitation of children and establish harsher sentences.
- ♣ Allocate public funds specifically to address the issue and include it among the priorities of international agencies involved in programmes and projects for children and adolescents.
- ♣ Involve the Ministry of Education in the issue, so that it includes the subjects of sex, sexuality, reproductive health and self-esteem in the school curriculum.
- ♣ Teach schoolteachers, Public Health Ministry personnel and members of the press about the magnitude, causes and consequences of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.
- ♣ Formation of oversight committees to ensure compliance with rights and follow-up of actions for the elimination of child sexual exploitation within the parameters international agreements on the issue ratified by Ecuador.
- ♣ Disseminate the results of the research on the issue, which will provide a valuable basis for planning public and private actions for combating child exploitation in Ecuador.