

## Key info on Child Protection

- Latin America and the Caribbean is ranking among the most **violent regions in the world**. While the Caribbean ranks at the first place when it comes to murder rates in the world (at 30 per 100,000 population annually), South America ranks at third (with a murder rate at 26 per 100,000 population annually) and Central America ranks at fifth (with a murder rate at 22 per 100,000 population annually).<sup>1</sup>
- Around 28,7% of the homicide victims in Latin America are children and adolescents between 10-19 years old.<sup>2</sup> Data from the World Report on Violence against Children shows that Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest rates of homicides among 15-17 years old, with an average 22.3 homicides (37.7 boys and 6.5 girls) per 100,000 inhabitants. In Latin America, the highest homicide rates of any group across the population occur among 15-19 years old.<sup>3</sup>
- 6 million children in Latin America and the Caribbean suffer severe abuse, including abandonment, and that 80,000 children under 18 years die each year of parental abuse.<sup>4</sup> Corporal punishment is still a common disciplinary practice in homes and schools in many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>5</sup> A study from the English-speaking Caribbean countries showed that one sixth of school-going adolescents had been physically abused, mainly by an adult at home.<sup>6</sup> Chile, Uruguay and Venezuela have prohibited corporal punishment in all settings, i.e. family, schools and institutions.
- Studies show that between 70-80% of the children victims are girls, and that in 50% the perpetrators live with the victims, and that in 75% they have a direct relationship with the victim.<sup>7</sup> An adolescent health survey from the English-speaking Caribbean countries showed that the first sexual experience of young girls is frequently forced: for 42.8% of girls younger than 12 who had had sex, the first sexual experience was by force.<sup>8</sup>
- Marriage before 18 years of age is still a common practice, especially among adolescent from indigenous and rural populations. It is estimated that around 29% of Latin American and Caribbean women aged 15-24 were married before the age of 18.<sup>9</sup>
- In Latin America, it is estimated that more than 2 million children and adolescents are exploited sexually each year.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Crime, Violence and Development: Trends, Costs and Policy Options in the Caribbean, the United Nations Office in Drugs and Crime and the Latin American and Caribbean Region of the World Bank, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> ECLAC, UNICEF, and SECIB, *Building equity from the beginning: The Children and Adolescents of Ibero-America*, September 2001.

<sup>3</sup> World Report on Violence against Children, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean, A Framework for Action, Technical Study Sustainable Development Department, Inter-American Development Bank, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Caribbean Youth Development: Issues and Policy Directions, Caribbean Country Management Unit Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unit, Latin America and the Caribbean Regional, February 4, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Caribbean Youth Development: Issues and Policy Directions, Caribbean Country Management Unit Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unit, Latin America and the Caribbean Regional, February 4, 2003. The countries studied included Antigua, Bahamas, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica and Saint Lucia.

<sup>7</sup> ECLAC, UNICEF, and SECIB, *Building equity from the beginning: The Children and Adolescents of Ibero-America*, September 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Adolescent health survey in nine Caribbean countries, PAHO, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Early Marriage: A harmful traditional practice, UNICEF, New York, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Boletín del IIN, OEA, 1998.

- Around 5,7 million children between 5 and 14 years old are economically active, which is equivalent to 5% of the children in the region.<sup>11</sup>
- The lack of family support is a contributing factor making children and adolescents vulnerable and less protected from violence, abuse and exploitation. Thousands of children and adolescents are **abandoned** in the region being orphans because of violence or diseases such as HIV, because of economic situations of their parents and/or left behind when their parents migrate to another city, region or country in search for better opportunities and jobs. Of the estimated 190 million international migrants in the world, approximately 25 million (13%) are from Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>12</sup> Migration not only affects those who are left behind, but many children and adolescents themselves migrate either together with their parents or alone in search for better opportunities. In this process they are extremely vulnerable to different forms of violence and exploitation and when migrating to another country they are many times denied their right to education, health and nationality.
- Millions of children and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean grow up in institutions and/or spend substantial part of their childhood/adolescence in institutions either in orphanages, attention centers or detention centers. According to UNICEF estimates, the number of children living in institutions or in detention centers in Chile and Colombia is believed to be as high as 20,000-30,000. In Argentina, in the province of Buenos Aires alone, more than 10,000 children are institutionalized for the reason of protection. In Bolivia the number of institutionalized children amounts to more than 15,000.<sup>13</sup>
- There is a worrying trend in the region to blame adolescents for the increase in societal violence. However, official data from various countries, for example, Honduras, El Salvador and Panama, shows that the percentage of crimes committed by children and adolescents is comparably low, only between 5-10%, and many times these crimes are minor crimes.<sup>14</sup>
- According to the most recent estimates of UNICEF from 2005, 11% of the children under five years old are not registered in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> La eliminación de trabajo infantil: Un objetivo a nuestro alcance, OIT, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> CELADE/ECLAC, Migración Internacional de Latinoamericanos y Caribeños en Iberoamérica: características, retos y oportunidades, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Information from UNICEF Country Offices of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Colombia, March 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Regional fact sheet – UN Study on Violence against Children, the UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> The State of the World's Children 2007, UNICEF.