



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF BOYS



MOROCCO REPORT
November, 2022

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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Violence against children, including sexual exploitation and abuse, is estimated to affect millions of children worldwide and no country or region is 'immune'.¹ Child sexual exploitation and abuse happens to children in all socio-economic groups, of all educational levels, across all ethnic and cultural groups, and in all countries around the world.² In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the gap in the global understanding of how boys are impacted by sexual exploitation.³ While data about sexual exploitation of all children is generally lacking, this is even more so when looking at boys specifically.⁴ Yet, the limited evidence that is available about boys suggests that in certain contexts, boys are just as heavily impacted as girls, and in some contexts, maybe even more.⁵ Boys – regardless of whether they are heterosexual or of diverse sexual orientation – may even face legal consequences when they are victimised by a male offender in countries where homosexuality is criminalised.

Systemic gender norms around masculinity and femininity are important to consider in understanding child sexual exploitation and abuse. These norms typically hold that males are strong and resilient, while females are vulnerable. Such beliefs often hamper equitable and necessary discourse on the sexual exploitation of children of all genders, but especially for boys where the development of policies, practices, advocacy, and research methodologies about the sexual exploitation of children regularly underrepresent or even completely exclude boys. "While many vulnerability factors for

sexual exploitation and abuse are common to all genders, boys access to support is unquestioningly conditioned by gender norms, constraining their help-seeking behaviour and their ability to seek care."⁶

While these circumstances should not detract attention from continued research, advocacy, and support for girls subjected to sexual exploitation, there is a clear need for greater advocacy and a higher quality evidence-base on the sexual exploitation of children of all genders to better inform all work for prevention and response.

A GLOBAL BOYS' INITIATIVE

As the programmatic responses to identify and meet the particular needs of boys are scarce, ECPAT International launched the [Global initiative to explore the sexual exploitation of boys](#) which activates our global network of member organisations in a range of research and response activities focused on boys. To meet the initial challenge of such limited data, in 2020-21, the Global Boys' Initiative embarked on a series of research projects in 10 countries around the world (Belgium, Bolivia, The Gambia, Hungary, India, Morocco, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Thailand), to shed light on understanding sexual exploitation involving boys, how they came into these vulnerable situations and what their needs are in terms of prevention, protection and services. Morocco is an important target country for the study because, whilst it demonstrated

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- 1 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on VAC. (2019, July). [Keeping the Promise: Ending Violence Against Children by 2030](#). New York: United Nations.
 - 2 ECPAT International. (2020, October). [Summary Paper: Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International. 4.
 - 3 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020, December). [Gender, rights and responsibilities: The need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys](#). *Child Abuse and Neglect* 110 (1).
 - 4 The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2022, August) [Out of the Shadows Index Methodology Paper: Shining light on the prevention of and response to child sexual exploitation and abuse – a 60-country benchmark](#), London: The Economist Intelligence Unit. 3.
 - 5 Davis, J. and Miles, G. (2015, September), "They didn't help me: They shamed me." [A Baseline Study on the Vulnerabilities of Street-Involved Boys to Sexual Exploitation in Manila, Philippines](#). Manila: Love 146.
 - 6 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020, December). [Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys](#). *Child Abuse and Neglect* 110 (1).

strong commitment to fight the sexual exploitation of children on an international level, the national legislation on sexual violence has many gaps. There remains room for improvement to ensure boys and girls are equally protected under the law, that prevention strategies focus on both boys and girls and that child victims of sexual violence are quickly identified and cared for.

THIS REPORT

The organisation AMANE has been at the forefront of actions to prevent and respond to gender violence and sexual violence against children, including sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Morocco since 2009. In partnership with the ECPAT International Secretariat, they led this ground-breaking research project into the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys in Morocco during 2021. The study was

based upon primary field research (with frontline social support workers who support sexually exploited boys in Morocco) as well as secondary data (a desk review of Morocco's legal framework that protects children from sexual exploitation and a literature review – with a focus on boys). By identifying core themes emerging from this study, the results captured in this report are intended to inform service improvements to ensure that they are gender-sensitive and accessible for children of all genders. It is hoped that the results may also help to break down the stigma and taboos surrounding boys' experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse in Morocco. Clear and actionable recommendations for improvements, that are driven by the evidence, are also provided.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

11,679,000

children lived in Morocco as of 2020⁷

42% of children in Morocco suffered from moderate poverty and 24% from acute poverty as of 2018^{8,9}

26%

of boys were not enrolled in upper secondary education as of 2020¹⁰

30%

of girls were not enrolled in upper secondary education as of 2020¹¹

247,000

children between the age of 7 and 17 had to work in 2017¹²

7 UNICEF. (2021, October). *State of the World's Children 2021. Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*. New York: UNICEF. 189.

8 UNICEF. (2018). *Child Poverty in the Arab States: Analytical Report of Eleven Countries*.

9 Children affected by acute poverty are a subset of those affected by moderate poverty.

10 Haut-commissariat au Plan. (2018, June). *Communiqué de presse à l'occasion de la Journée mondiale contre le travail des enfants, 2018. Le travail dangereux des enfants âgés de 7 à 17 ans au Maroc*.

11 *ibid*

12 UNICEF. (2021). *State of the World's Children 2021*. 229.

Morocco is located on the northwest corner of Africa, with a population of nearly 37 million people,¹³ 32% of which are under the age of 18.¹⁴ Approximately 26% of boys and 30% of girls are not enrolled in upper secondary education¹⁵ which increases the risks of sexual exploitation.¹⁶ While education is compulsory for Moroccan children of both genders, from the age of seven until the age of thirteen,¹⁷ in rural areas, girls are often forced to stop schooling around the age of 10-11 when they are supposed to begin secondary education.¹⁸ Since most villages do not have their own secondary schools, children wishing to continue their education must spend the week outside the village. As families generally do not allow girls to sleep outside the family home, girls are unable to continue their education.¹⁹

There is a clear lack of research and data available regarding the extent and characteristics of sexual exploitation of children, and particularly of boys, in Morocco. However, the limited information available, as detailed below, suggests that boys are exploited in trafficking for sexual purposes and prostitution, particularly in the context of travel and tourism. In recent decades, the travel and tourism industry has grown at a rapid pace. This growth in tourism also means that sex offenders can now use the infrastructure of this industry to commit their crimes against children.²⁰ In a 2019 report, the Scelles Foundation called “sex tourism” in Morocco a “thriving industry,” noting that it occurred at the expense of children and that the government refused to

acknowledge this phenomenon to preserve the country’s international reputation.²¹ The US State Department, in its 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report on Morocco, states that sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism persisted in major Moroccan cities; and that the sex offenders involved were predominantly from Europe and the Middle East.²² The Moroccan government did not report any efforts to reduce the demand for sexual exploitation of children, in the context of travel and tourism, in 2018,²³ 2019,²⁴ 2020,²⁵ and 2021.²⁶

Since 2018, Morocco was identified by the US Department of State also as a source, transit, and destination country for children victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.²⁷ Migrant children, both documented and undocumented, and particularly unaccompanied children from Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, and Cameroon are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for sexual exploitation in Morocco or when transiting through Morocco to reach Europe.²⁸ In addition, traffickers, including parents and other intermediaries, exploit Moroccan children for sexual purposes within the country and abroad for sexual purposes, primarily in Europe and the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf.²⁹ However, it is difficult to assess the true extent of the phenomenon because of the lack of comprehensive studies on the subject.

The scope of exploitation of children in prostitution is also difficult to assess in Morocco due to the scarcity of official figures and

13 *Ibid.*, 189.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, 229.

16 ECPAT International. (2016, March). [Power, Impunity and Anonymity](#). Understanding the Forces Driving the Demand for Sexual Exploitation of Children. Bangkok: ECPAT International. 39.

17 Kingdom of Morocco. (1963). [Dahir n°1-63-071 du 25 jomada II 1383](#). Article 1.

18 AMANE. (2021). Personal communication.

19 AMANE. (2021). Personal communication.

20 ECPAT International. (2020, October). [Summary Paper on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism](#). 1.

21 Fondation Scelles. (2019). [Extrait du Livre - Système prostitutionnel : Nouveaux défis, nouvelles réponses \(5ème rapport mondial\) - Maroc](#). Paris : Fondation Scelles. 3.

22 US Department of State. (2022). [2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Morocco](#).

23 US Department of State. (2019). [2019 Trafficking in Persons Report: Morocco](#).

24 US Department of State. (2020). [2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Morocco](#).

25 US Department of State. (2021). [2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Morocco](#).

26 US Department of State. (2022). [2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Morocco](#).

27 US Department of State. (2018). [2018 Trafficking in Persons Report: Morocco](#).

28 US Department of State. (2022). [2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Morocco](#).

29 *Ibid.*

studies on the subject.³⁰ The 2015 UN Women report indicates that exploitation of children in prostitution seemed to be particularly present in tourist cities like Marrakech and Agadir. The victims were mostly girls and boys in extremely vulnerable situations.³¹ The offenders were mainly travelling men who were paying in money or drugs.³² More recent reports suggest that street children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation in prostitution, especially in large cities such as Marrakech.³³ Studies showed that boys are involved in prostitution from an earlier age than girls and that in some cases, it appears that girls and boys are being exploited in prostitution by their own families.³⁴ The taboo nature of this phenomenon, as well as the underlying issues of power, money, and corruption, make it difficult to gather more information.³⁵

Lastly, there is very limited information or data available regarding child sexual exploitation facilitated by technology within Morocco. However, with the percentage of the population using the Internet rising from 52% in 2010 to 74% in 2019,³⁶ it is clear that there may be potential for growing new vulnerabilities for children. A 2021 survey exploring behaviours of 1,293 internet-using Moroccan children and young people aged 8 to 28,³⁷ showed that 40% access the Internet whenever they want or need to and 25% access the Internet often.³⁸ The misuse of available technologies provides offenders with many ways to contact, offend, groom and exploit children. In addition, the anonymity of the Internet facilitates the exchange and dissemination of child sexual abuse materials.³⁹

INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL COMMITMENTS

Status of ratification of relevant international and regional instruments	
International Instruments	Date of ratification/accession
Convention on the Rights of the Child - 1989	21 Jun 1993
Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography - 2000	2 Oct 2001
Optional Protocol on a Communication Procedure - 2011	Signed 28 Feb 2012, not ratified
ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour - 1999 (No. 182)	26 Jan 2001
UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and children – 2000 (supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime)	25 April 2011

30 Fondation Scelles. (2019). [Extrait du Livre - Système prostitutionnel : Nouveaux défis, nouvelles réponses \(5ème rapport mondial\) - Maroc](#). 4.

31 Kingdom of Morocco - Ministry of Justice and Civil Liberties & UN Women. (2015, March). [La Traite des femmes et des enfants au Maroc](#). 57.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Fondation Scelles. (2019). [Extrait du Livre - Système prostitutionnel : Nouveaux défis, nouvelles réponses \(5ème rapport mondial\) - Maroc](#). 4.

34 *Ibid.*

35 ECPAT Luxembourg. (n.d.). [Maroc : Projet d'Alliance contre l'exploitation sexuelle des enfants au Maroc, notamment dans le cadre des voyages et du tourisme – Projet PAX](#).

36 ITU. (n.d.). [Individuals using the Internet](#).

37 Seventy-eight of the children and youth surveyed were between 8 to 17 years old.

38 Centre Marocain de Recherches Polytechniques et d'Innovation (2021). [Enfants et jeunes marocains en ligne: Comportements et risques du numérique](#). Kenitra: CMRPI.

39 ECPAT International. (2020, November). [Summary Paper on Online Child Sexual Exploitation](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.

Regional Instruments	Date of ratification/accession
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (African Union, 1990)	Not ratified
Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (African Union, 2014)	Not ratified
Convention on Cybercrime – Budapest Convention (Council of Europe, 2001)	1 Oct 2018
Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse – Lanzarote Convention (Council of Europe, 2007)	Not ratified

NATIONAL COMMITMENTS AND LEGISLATION

Through ratifying the international instruments and agreeing to ensure their effective implementation and enforcement by codifying them in domestic laws, Morocco has made some progress in legislatively addressing sexual exploitation of children. As such, in the past decade, Morocco has adopted and amended criminal provisions and procedural laws that help to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. In particular, the enactment of the of Law No. 27-14 in 2016 which defines and criminalises human trafficking-related offences, in line with the country’s international commitments⁴⁰ and the establishment of a National Commission to coordinate measures to combat and prevent human trafficking in 2018, have been important in prioritising the protection of children.

The Penal Code contains strict provisions criminalising certain offenses related to sexual exploitation of children. However, some gaps persist, such as the fact that the legal definition of prostitution and debauchery does not include the promise of remuneration or other consideration; the lack of provisions explicitly criminalising the offering and distribution of child sexual abuse

material, including for non-for-profit purposes, and the absence of binding regulations in this field for the tourism industry.

At the same time, Moroccan legislation on sexual violence still has many gaps which may have an impact on the protection of boys from sexual exploitation. Although there is no autonomous legal provision on the rape of children, the age of the victim is an aggravating circumstance for the criminalisation of rape.⁴¹ Men and boys are excluded from the scope of the provision on rape, which applies only to offences committed by a man against a woman.

However, the article of the Penal Code on indecent assault with violence allows for the criminalisation of acts of sexual violence and abuse that cannot be classified as rape, regardless of the sex of the victim or perpetrator.⁴² This article applies to offenses committed or attempted,⁴³ and thus allows for the prosecution of rape or other sexual violence against boys (and men). The concept of indecent assault with violence seems to encompass all sexual violence, which makes it particularly difficult to collect information on cases of rape of men and boys. In addition to being discriminatory in nature, the fact that men and boys cannot be recognised as rape victims in the eyes of the law may make

40 Kingdom of Morocco. (2016). [Loi n° 27-14 relative à la lutte contre la traite des êtres humains](#).

41 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). [Code Penal](#). Article 486.

42 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). [Code Penal](#). Article 485; Berre, M., Aboussad, A., Filali, H., & El Kourchi, M. (2003). [L'exploitation sexuelle de l'enfant - Cas de Marrakech](#). 23.

43 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). [Code Penal](#). Article 485.

them ineligible for any protective measures and programmes specifically designed for rape victims. The adoption of gender-neutral rape provisions in line with international standards is therefore necessary in order to provide boys and girls with equal protection against rape.

In addition, the criminalisation⁴⁴ and stigmatization of homosexuality further dilutes the protection afforded to boys, as it may prevent them from reporting sexual offences and result in differential treatment for boy victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

44 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). [Code Penal](#). Article 489.

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the research in Morocco was to build an empirical base for better understanding the sexual exploitation of boys. To generate new primary data, the methodology included a survey of thirty-six frontline support workers, with both quantitative and qualitative components, as well as a documentary analysis of national legislation related to sexual exploitation and abuse of children. The research in Morocco had two main aims:

- *To measure the access to, quality, and effectiveness of support services regarding sexual exploitation and abuse that are available to boys in Morocco.*
- *To identify the legal gaps, barriers, and opportunities in addressing the sexual exploitation of boys using a standardised method to review national legal frameworks.*

FRONTLINE SUPPORT WORKERS' SURVEY

Workforce surveys have increasingly been used as a tool in research to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of social support systems. Most commonly these surveys are used by health⁴⁵ and social work professions⁴⁶ to measure service delivery effectiveness and to examine the efficiency of public spending. Social support to children, who are subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse, is generally provided within the broader context of child protection.

Organisations in Morocco, who provide child protection support services, were identified by AMANE. While the research focuses on boys, very few focused services for boys exist in Morocco, thus the sample includes support workers who work with sexually exploited children of any gender. Once identified, survey administrators

from AMANE contacted management staff of organisations to explain the survey and invite the participation of frontline staff. Participants were included on the basis that they were over 18 years of age, with at least twelve months' experience in service provision and had a current caseload which included children.

An online survey, which consisted of 121 multiple choice and short open-answer questions, was developed in English, in consultation with the Global Boys Initiative Steering Committee. The draft tool was then translated to French and Arabic. ECPAT International and AMANE collaborated to check and contextualise the survey, which was pilot tested with a small number of local social support workers. The cohort was a 'convenience sample', and thus is not representative of the population of frontline support workers in Morocco. The samples were also mostly urban based, as the majority of social support services tend to be concentrated in more populated urban areas. Further to this, different types of support services were included in the sample design.

In total, 36 frontline support workers from Morocco, who currently provide services for child victims of sexual exploitation, were included in the sample. Sixty-seven percent identified as female and 31% identified as male (with 1 worker choosing 'other'). Nearly all (n=35) of the respondents had bachelor or post-graduate degrees. While 39% of respondents spent less than five years in service, over a third of respondents (34%) had spent more than 10 years providing support to children. Half (n=18) worked for non-governmental organisations and 45% for the government. More than half respondents reported providing services such as one-on-one counselling (78%), group psychosocial support (67%), legal support (58%), reintegration support

45 Magadzire, P. M. Et al. (2014, November) [Frontline health workers as brokers: provider perceptions, experiences and mitigating strategies to improve access to essential medicines in South Africa.](#)

46 Sadeghi, T., and Fekjaer, S. (2018, April) [Frontline workers' competency in activation work.](#) International Journal of Social Welfare. 77-88; Netsayi, M. (2019) [Perceptions of frontline social workers on their contributions agenda for social work and social development.](#)

(58%), supporting access to high school (50%) and sexual health advice, information and support (53%).

Self-administered online tools alone (emailing a survey link) have notoriously low participation rates. Thus, the design opted for in-person administration (but using an online tool). Appointments were planned to occur face-to-face, but COVID-19 restrictions meant most were administered by phone call or chat apps. The survey administrators from AMANE explained the project and participation procedure, sought written consent, and provided trouble-shooting and guidance throughout completion of the survey. The personal connection helped motivate participation.

As part of the survey, frontline support workers were given five hypothetical scenarios about sexual exploitation, which reflected unequal power relationships, gender norms and other intersectional vulnerabilities. Questions were interspersed as the scenario unfolded to unpack different attitudes and knowledge. Following each scenario, participants were asked to describe what practical steps they would take if they were supporting the children depicted. Their responses are interspersed throughout this report with the full scenarios and summarised responses presented in Annex 1.

Data collection took place from April until June 2021. Once data collection was completed, open-ended responses were translated to English, and cleaning and analysis was completed by an expert data analyst engaged by ECPAT International. Once completed, the analyst consulted the results with AMANE for further insights and to validate the findings.

ANALYSIS OF LEGISLATION

A comprehensive analysis of the Moroccan legal framework addressing the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, with a focus on boys, was undertaken as a collaboration between AMANE

and ECPAT International. The analysis of the legal framework was conducted utilising a method and tools developed by ECPAT International. In particular, a checklist, including approximately 120 points and sub-points, was created to support the development of the analysis and ensure its comprehensiveness as well as consistency across countries.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Given the inherent vulnerability of children, research on child sexual abuse and exploitation must be designed in ways that abide by strict ethical standards.⁴⁷ For this project, ECPAT International convened a panel of three global experts for an independent third-party review of the proposed methodology. A detailed research protocol that included mitigations for ethical risks, along with draft tools, was developed and shared with the panel. Detailed feedback from the panel was accommodated in two rounds of review before the project commenced.

Sampling support workers - rather than children themselves - has the additional ethical benefit of reducing the need to engage large numbers of children in research who have had potentially traumatising experiences. As such, the experiences of boys have come from those working first hand with them. The lack of survivor participation was a limitation of the current study. Further research is needed in order to gather a more comprehensive picture of the issue.

Before conducting the online survey, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and consent was obtained as an integrated part of the online survey tool. If any participant wished to withdraw from the study, they were free to do so at any time. Participants were also informed that their responses would be used to write a research report and to protect participant anonymity, names would not be requested at any stage of completing the survey. Qualitative data from frontline support workers in this report is identified with codes (e.g. FW 86).

47 ECPAT International. (2019, December). [Guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.

LIMITATIONS

A limitation occurred as a result of the inclusion criteria. During design, the intent was to include frontline support workers who had recent experience of supporting children directly. Thus, inclusion criteria included requirements of recent work with children “within the last 12 months”. As data collection occurred in the first half of 2021, the impact of COVID-19 restricting some service providers from being able to directly work with children became evident. In Morocco, ninety-six participants were disqualified by hurdle questions as they selected ‘no’ to active cases or working directly with children during the last 12 months.

Finally, it should be noted that the data is not statistically representative of the experiences of all frontline social support workers in Morocco. However, the estimates, perceptions and experiences reported here offer valuable insight into an under-researched area and shed light on the access and quality of social supports for boys subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse in Morocco. The findings are presented under emerging thematic issues around boys’ vulnerabilities, abilities to access support services and frontline worker’s ability to provide support to their needs.

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The analysis of the Morocco research findings resulted in an emergence of critical themes which summarised the frontline workers' experiences of the often hidden and complex vulnerabilities of the boys that they came in contact with. Such a thematic framework helps clarify why the sexual exploitation of boys gets such little attention in Morocco, despite frontline workers' awareness that the problem exists. Boys are forced to adapt to exploitative and abusive situations, suppress their feelings of hurt and vulnerability and usually avoid seeking help. All these experiences commonly proceed from the same regressive, harmful cultural and gender norms and expectations. Thus, the framework presented below provides a window into how frontline workers view the sexual exploitation of boys in Morocco and helps laying out learnings for key duty-bearers to provide specific and tailored measures to better prevent and respond to this crime for all children.

BOYS' LIVED EXPERIENCES

Official data clearly shows that boys are not spared from sexual violence in Morocco. As reported by the media, the Moroccan Public Prosecutor's Office recorded 2,800 cases of sexual assault against children in 2018. These included 536 rapes of girls, as well as 1,756 indecent assaults with violence and 523 indecent assaults without violence.⁴⁸ As the rape of boys does not fall within the Penal Code, the offenders are in principle prosecuted under the provisions on indecent assault with violence.

Boys accounted for 19% (334) and 34% (178) of victims of indecent assault (the remaining victims being girls) with and without violence in 2018, respectively.⁴⁹ However, the fact that these two concepts encompass the totality of sexual violence against boys makes it particularly difficult to study the phenomenon and its characteristics as well as lead to the underestimation of the problem. In addition, the discriminatory nature of the criminal provisions prevents a boy from being recognised as a rape victim in the eyes of the law. As one frontline worker mentioned: "sexual violence against boys is considered as sexual assault, while for girls it is considered as rape." (F 103)

In the experiences of the 36 frontline workers surveyed, boy cases constituted more than half of their overall caseloads (54%). Among the cases of the surveyed workers, boys aged 6-10 years old were subjected to sexual exploitation more often (40%) than boys in other age groups (see Figure 1). This is a higher percentage than found with girls of that age (23%). Previous research has found that boys in the Middle East and North Africa region are more likely to be sent to work outside the homes than girls, which can result in increasing their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.⁵⁰ Boys aged 11-15 years were the next largest group (32%).

48 Le 360. (2020). [Pédophilie: 2.800 agressions sexuelles par an contre les enfants au Maroc](#).

49 *Ibid.*

50 ECPAT International. (2020). [Regional Overview: Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Middle East and North Africa](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.

Figure 1: Age of children - supported by frontline workers - who experienced sexual exploitation.

Boys	AVE %	Girls	AVE %
0-5 years (average estimated %)	16%	0-5 years (average estimated %)	13%
6-10 years (average estimated %)	40%	6-10 years (average estimated %)	23%
11-15 years (average estimated %)	32%	11-15 years (average estimated %)	32%
16-17 years (average estimated %)	21%	16-17 years (average estimated %)	46%

Base: Frontline social support workers. n = 36

Types of sexual exploitation observed

The frontline workers were asked to think separately about the boys and girls they supported and indicate if they encountered five different forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. The results are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Types of cases encountered by frontline workers.

For boy clients:	For girl clients:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 (11%) had direct experience with boys exploited in the production of child sexual abuse material 4 (11%) had direct experience with boys who had been groomed for sexual purposes 2 (6%) had direct experience with boys who have been exploited through live-streaming of child sexual abuse 7 (19%) had experience of boys that had self-created and shared sexual images or videos of themselves 6 (17%) had experience of boys that had been trafficked for sexual purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 (11%) had direct experience with girls exploited in the production of child sexual abuse material 4 (11%) had direct experience with girls who had been groomed for sexual purposes 1 (3%) had direct experience with girls who have been exploited through live-streaming of child sexual abuse 5 (14%) had experience of girls that had self-created and shared sexual images or videos of themselves 9 (25%) had experience of girls that had been trafficked for sexual purposes

Base: Frontline social support workers. n = 36

Cases of self-generated sexual material and trafficking for sexual purposes were most common from the provided list. Nineteen percent of the 36 workers surveyed indicated they worked on cases where boys had self-generated and shared sexual images or videos of themselves (compared to 14% worked on such cases involving girls). Additionally, 17% of workers have worked on cases of boys being trafficked for sexual

purposes (25% worked on such cases involving girls).

While the official statistics, on the number of cases of trafficking of children for sexual purposes, could not be found, the US State Department's annual report on trafficking in persons indicated that, in 2021, the government of Morocco identified 169 cases of trafficking,

nearly half of which included children (79 cases).⁵¹ No disaggregation by age or gender was provided.

When asked about the most common exchange made with boys and girls for sex in Morocco, frontline workers perceived money as the main factor, both in the case of girls (47%) and boys

(47%) (see Figure 3). In case of boys, this was followed by providing security (safety, protection) (15%), goods (15%) and shelter (6%). Sex with girls was perceived as being exchanged for shelter (15%) by more frontline workers than sex for security (12%) and goods (9%).

Figure 3: What is the most common exchange made with children for sex in Morocco as reported by frontline workers?

Boys	Count	%	Girls	Count	%
Money	16	47%	Money	13	47%
Other	6	18%	Other	8	24%
Security	5	15%	Shelter	5	15%
Goods	5	15%	Security	4	12%
Shelter	2	6%	Goods	3	9%

Base: Frontline social support workers. n = 34

Base: Frontline social support workers. n = 33

Offenders

Although the vast majority of offenders of sexual exploitation of boys are male, evidence gathered from research globally shows that women account for a small proportion of offenders.⁵² Offenders may include both people committing abuse as well as those who facilitate the abuse. The frontline workers in Morocco confirmed this by indicating that 67% of the cases that they supported involving boys had male offenders, however workers did report that 33% of cases with boys involved female offenders. This was similar to the girls they worked with where

70% of cases involved male offenders and 30% involved female offenders - see Figure 4 below. The apparent high rate of female offenders exposes the global tendency to downplay the fact that women can and do offend.⁵³ Participants also estimated that the majority of offenders were nationals (63% in the case of boy victims and 70% in the case of girls). Whether in cases of boys that have experienced sexual exploitation, there were adults involved who did not perpetrate themselves, but rather facilitated the offence, participants shared that such cases involved taking pictures of the abuse.

Figure 4: Gender and nationality of offenders of child sexual exploitation and abuse as reported by frontline workers.

Cases involving boy victims		Cases involving girl victims	
Estimated % of female offenders	33%	Estimated % of female offenders	30%
Estimated % of male offenders	67%	Estimated % of male offenders	70%
Estimated % of foreign offenders	37%	Estimated % of foreign offenders	30%
Estimated % of national offenders	63%	Estimated % of national offenders	70%

51 U.S. Department of State. (2022). [Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

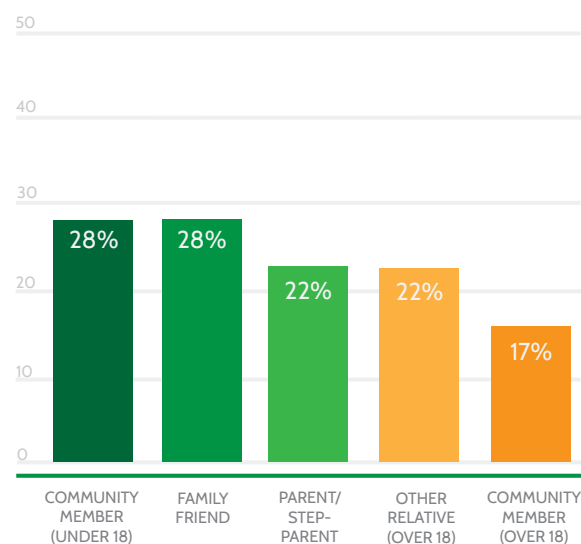
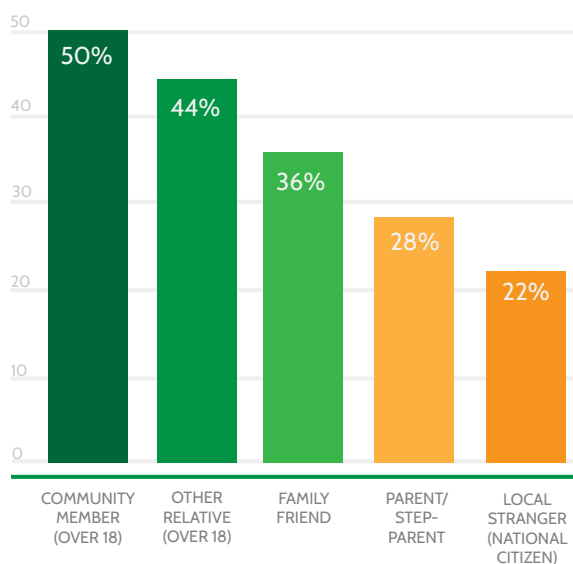
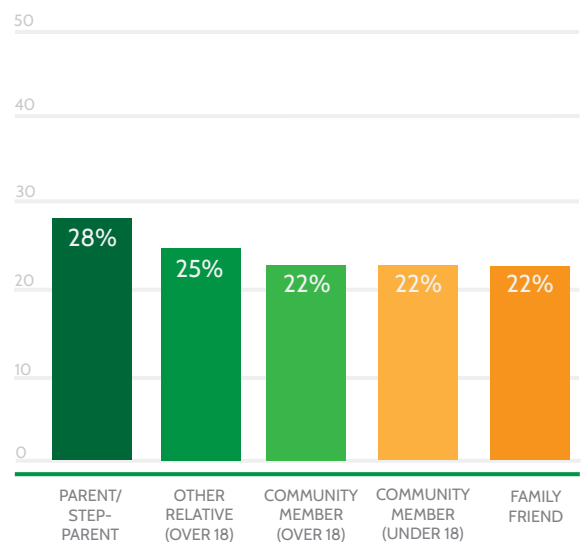
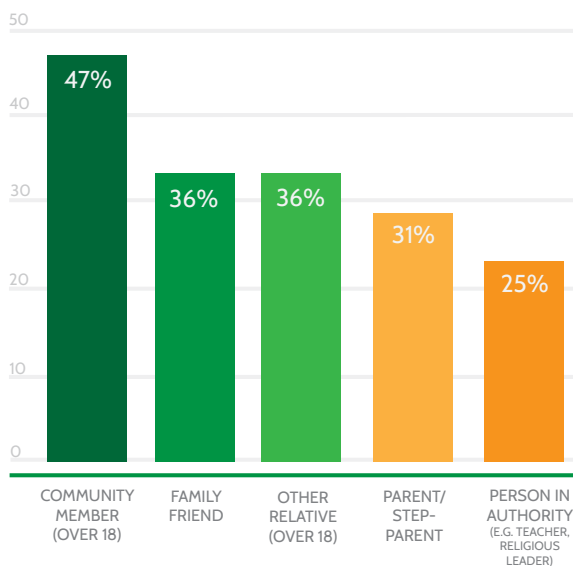
52 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020, December). [Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys](#). *Child Abuse and Neglect* 110 (1).

53 Tozdan, S., Briken, P. & Dekker, A. (2019, March). [Uncovering Female Child Sex Offenders – Needs and Challenges for Practice and Research](#). Hamburg: *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 8(3), 401.

The frontline workers in Morocco were also asked about the common relationships between victims and offenders in the cases they supported (Figure 5). Community members over 18 topped the list for both male (47%) and female offenders (22%) of boys. Parents/stepparents, other relatives over 18 and family friends also scored high for both boy and girl victims, confirming that most sexual exploitation against children is perpetrated by someone that children know. For male offenders, additionally people in authority (e.g. teachers, religious leaders) were also among the top five offenders of boys. That was not the case for girls nor cases involving female offenders of boys or girls. Frontline workers believed that when girls

are abused by female offenders, it is most often a community member under 18 (28%), a family friend (28%), followed by a mother/step-mother (22%) and other relative over 18 (22%). When girls are abused by male offenders, frontline workers shared it is most often, as in case of boy victims, a community member over 18 (50%), followed by other relative over 18 (44%), family friend (36%), father/step-father (28%) and a national local stranger (22%). Peer-to-peer exploitation was mentioned most commonly to be perpetrated by community members below 18 (depending on the gender of victim and abuser: 24%-28%), other relatives below 18 (11%-17%) and less commonly by a sibling below 18 (8%-14%).

Figure 5: Top five most common offenders in the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Morocco, as reported by frontline workers.



The outcomes of sexual exploitation of boys

Research globally has shown that key outcomes of sexual exploitation of boys include a range of mental health concerns, substance misuse, and sexually transmitted infections.⁵⁴ Studies have indicated that sexually abused boys and girls have significantly more emotional problems, behavioural problems, and suicidal thoughts and attempts than their non-abused counterparts.⁵⁵ These, and other outcomes, as identified also by frontline workers in Morocco, may lead to feelings of fear, shame, isolation, dropping out of school, legal consequences, and suicidal thoughts. When asked, frontline workers shared that boys who experience sexual abuse face discrimination and stigmatisation from their environment and peers, have sexual diseases and sometimes develop psychological, physical and cognitive disorders. Frontline workers also shared that some boy victims feel threatened, not understood, have difficulties trusting anyone or are abandoned by their parents. One frontline worker shared: “[They are not able] to integrate normally within the society. Their families treat them with inferiority. [They are unable] to continue their education due to what they have been subjected to.” (F116)

HIDDEN AND NEGLECTED VULNERABILITIES

Frontline workers were provided with lists of socioeconomic (Figure 6) and traditional and cultural factors (Figure 7) that could potentially impact boys’ vulnerability to sexual exploitation and asked to identify those that have, in their view, the greatest impact in Morocco. The selection of factors on this list was based on findings from research and practice in a diverse range of settings – taking into account both high- and low-income country contexts of the 10 target countries of the Global Boys Initiative.

While every child might be vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, it is important to note that each child that is affected will go through their own, individually unique experience with it. As one frontline worker put it, in order to understand the case and provide adequate support: “It is important to identify the different aspects of risk that may cause children to be exploited.” (F241)

Socio-economic vulnerabilities impacting boys

Any boy, regardless of socio-economic background can be subjected to sexual exploitation. However, the factor that workers identified as most commonly placing boys at higher risk in Morocco was identified as ‘extreme poverty’ (58% of the 36 workers surveyed). Despite substantial progress throughout the 2000s in reducing absolute poverty in the country (national poverty declined from 8.9% in 2007 to 4.8% in 2013⁵⁶), this remains a problem in Morocco. UNICEF’s 2018 report estimated that some 41.8% children in Morocco suffer from moderate poverty and nearly 23.8% of all children experience acute poverty.⁵⁷ This is an issue that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – The National Statistics Institute, based on a panel collected, following the new Households Budget Survey suggest that in 2020 poor households have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, and that the most vulnerable operate in the urban, informal sector.⁵⁸

Poverty and growing inequalities might push boys and their caregivers into migration, predominantly seeking work. Seventeen percent of the 36 frontline workers identified migration of boys and 28% of migration or their families for work as risk factors for sexual exploitation. Previous research has proven that due to their status, children involved in child labour become vulnerable to exploitation and violations. This is because of their financial needs and illegal setup

54 ECPAT International (2021, September). *A Global Review of Existing Literature on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

55 *Ibid.*

56 The World Bank. (2022, October). *Poverty and Equity Brief: Morocco*.

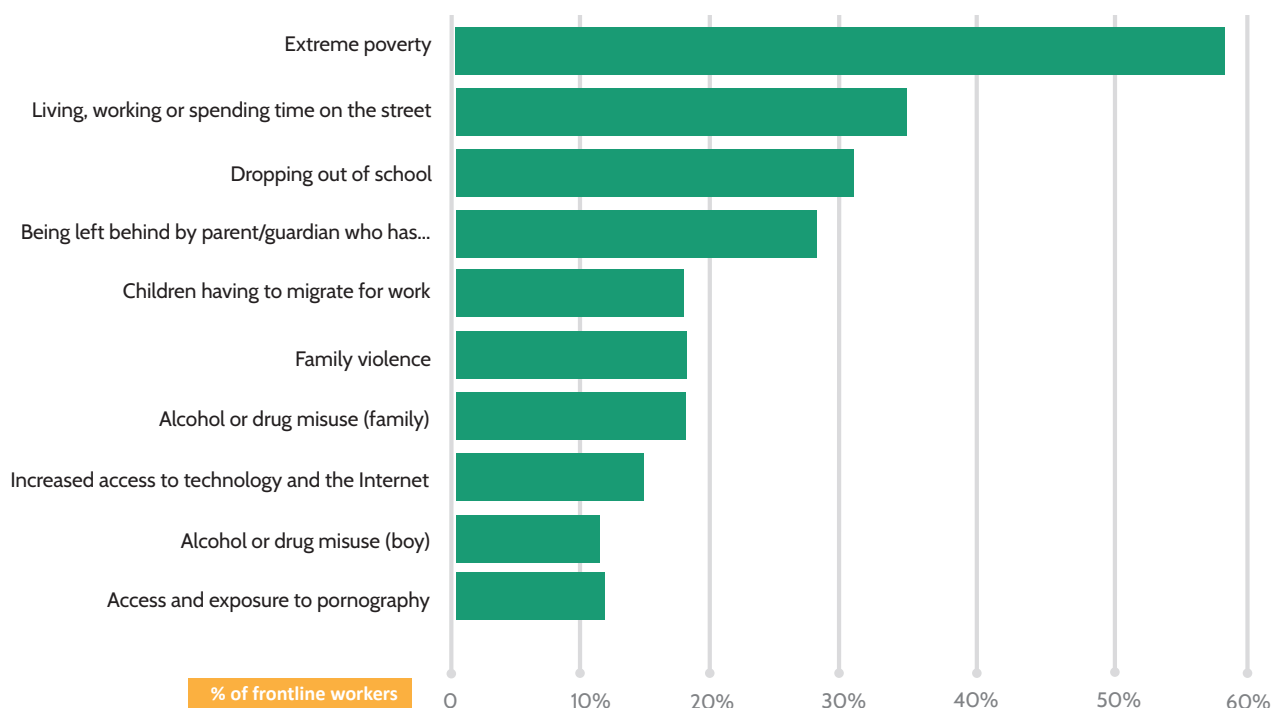
57 UNICEF (2018). *Child Poverty in the Arab States: Analytical Report of Eleven Countries*. New York: UNICEF.

58 The World Bank. (2022, October). *Poverty and Equity Brief: Morocco*.

of their engagement in the work.⁵⁹ As of 2017, 247,000 children between the age of 7 and 17 were involved in child labour in Morocco. Of these, 81.4% dropped out of school and 8% never attended school.⁶⁰

Furthermore, poverty might lead to dropping out of school and/or living, working or spending time on the streets with 31% and 36% of the 36 frontline workers identifying these as a main risk factor for sexual exploitation, respectively. The latter can easily result in boys becoming involved in street-based prostitution or at public places such as beaches, parks and entertainment areas.⁶¹

Figure 6: Most common social and economic vulnerability factors identified by frontline workers.



Base: Frontline social support workers. n = 36

Family violence (17%) and alcohol or drug misuse in the family (17%) were also identified as risk factors for boys to sexual exploitation and can be seen as having important independent psychological consequences. The global literature indicates that family dysfunction has also been

found to be a consistent correlate with boys' sexual exploitation, particularly as boys may be at higher risk than girls when boys are more likely to run away from home or end up living on the streets.⁶²

59 ECPAT International. (2013, October). *Unseen Vulnerabilities: The Links between Child Labour and Sexual Exploitation of Children*. Bangkok: ECPAT International's Journal Series.

60 Haut-commissariat au Plan. (2018, June 12). *Communiqué de presse à l'occasion de la Journée mondiale contre le travail des enfants, 2018. Le travail dangereux des enfants âgés de 7 à 17 ans au Maroc*.

61 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020, December). *Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys*.

62 ECPAT International. (2021, September). *A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

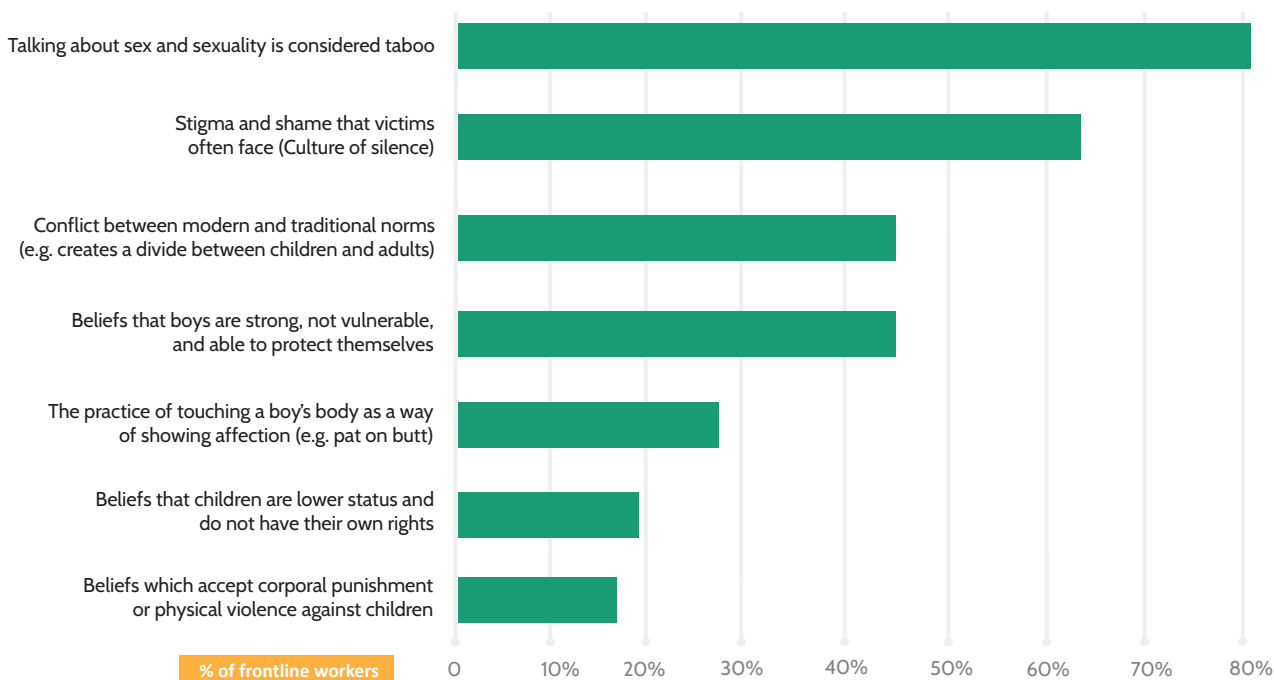
Beliefs and practices impacting vulnerability of boys

The context that makes both boys and girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation is tied to stereotypical social norms about gender, which in the case of boys, often views them as invulnerable to sexual exploitation.⁶³ As one respondent put it: “in our society we think it only happens to girls.” (F267) When frontline workers were asked to summarise what “boys tell you are the most serious problems they faced” nearly half of the respondents (44%) identified “beliefs that boys are strong, not vulnerable, and able to protect themselves” (Figure 7). This assumption of male invulnerability means that boys’ involvement in sexual exploitation continues to go largely undetected and unaddressed which can result in a lack of protection, delays in them disclosing exploitation. This can lead to negative effects on their physical, sexual, and mental

health.⁶⁴ The more hidden vulnerabilities of boys can be masked by what is often viewed by helping professionals as apparent agency and willingness towards the sexual exploitation, they are subjected to, by adult offenders.⁶⁵

Eighty-one percent of workers thought that sex and sexuality being taboo in Morocco influences boys’ vulnerability to sexual exploitation and 64% believed that it is the stigma and shame that victims face that has an influence (Figure 7). This discomfort can also be aggravated by different social and religious influences and by tensions between modern and traditional norms. One frontline worker reflected: “*The law does not discriminate between genders but some customs and traditions prevalent in certain areas can encourage that.*” (F 200) Another one added: “*Girls are given higher priority because they represent the honour of the family, the community and society in general. Gender equality is not culturally accepted.*” (F 176)

Figure 7: Most common beliefs and practices which influence boys’ vulnerability to sexual exploitation.



Base: Frontline social support workers. n = 36

63 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020, December). *Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys*. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 110 (1).

64 ECPAT International. (2021, September). *A global review of existing literature on the sexual exploitation of boys*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

65 Petersson, C. and Plantin, L. (2019, December). *Breaking with Norms of Masculinity: Men Making Sense of Their Experience of Sexual Assault*. *Clinical Social Work Journal* 47. Springer. 372-383.

The research in Morocco has shown that boys are likely to be especially vulnerable from a range of potentially interlocking vulnerabilities as they experience poverty, living/working on the street, and sex being taboo within the community. These findings suggest a need for further research that will gather boys' perspective about specific vulnerabilities, as well as a need for targeted training for social support workers that includes guidance on identification of the abuse of boys.

A number of frontline workers pointed to the importance of *"listening and [providing] emotional support (...)"* (F 69), *trying to "understand the situation and its explanation"* (F 119) as well as giving boys *"guidance"* (F 257) and *"support while not caring for social perception"* (F 95) in order to address the factors influencing their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

BOYS' DISCLOSURE OF ABUSE INFLUENCED BY GENDER NORMS ABOUT MASCULINITY

Gender norms and the associated concepts of patriarchy, masculinity and gender-based violence, are normally associated with the sexual violence of women and girls - the largest proportion of victims of sexual violence globally.⁶⁶ However, these norms establish and maintain hierarchies of power and patriarchy both between

and within genders.⁶⁷ Whilst male perpetration may be seen as interpreting male identities, especially in societies where machoism is a dominant feature, its flip side is that gender norms around masculinity and victimisation make boys particularly reluctant to disclose sexual violence for fear of them being seen as weak.⁶⁸ Studies have also shown that the same gender norms reinforce the tendency for male victims of sexual abuse to blame themselves for the abuse, resulting in no disclosure.⁶⁹ These gendered aspects of sexual exploitation and abuse of boys are important as they often reflect gendered biases, both from society and that boys have internalised themselves.

Frontline support workers in Morocco were asked to identify their top three barriers to boys' disclosures from a list developed from the research literature. Figure 8 below shows that many responses were focused on taboos surrounding sex and sexuality, social and gender norms, and stigmatisation related to victimisation of sexual violence. One respondent elaborated that it is the *"fear of the future especially shame accusations. How the other perceives the victim"* (FW 137) that influences boys' decision of disclosure. Fifty-three percent of the 36 frontline workers surveyed identified 'talking about sex and sexuality being considered taboo' a top barrier that keeps boys silent about their experiences of sexual exploitation and abuse and 33% pointed to the 'sensitive and upsetting nature of talking about the experience'.

66 Dalby, J., Hart, R. and Russell, W. (2017, November). [Childhood sexual abuse of boys as gender-based violence](#). Academic Letters.

67 Connell, R.W. (2005) *Masculinities* (second edition). University of California Press.

68 ECPAT International. (2020). [Regional Overview: Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Middle East and North Africa](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.

69 Easton, S. D., Saltzman, L. Y., Willis, D. G. (2014, January). ["Would you tell under circumstances like that?": Barriers to disclosure of child sexual abuse for men](#). Conference Paper in *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 15, 460–469.

Figure 8: Top 5 barriers for boys to disclose sexual exploitation in Morocco, as reported by frontline workers.

	Count	%
Talking about sex and sexuality is considered taboo	19	53%
The sensitive and upsetting nature of talking about the experience	12	33%
Fears about how others will respond to disclosure? (e.g. blaming, punishing, not believing, mocking)	9	25%
Beliefs related to masculinity (e.g. seeking help is a sign of 'weakness')	7	19%
Boy identifies as heterosexual but fears others may think he is gay	6	17%
Fear of repercussions or further harm from the perpetrator	6	17%

A quarter of frontline workers also thought that it is the 'fear about how others will respond to the disclosure' that affects boys speaking up. A systematic review of 33 studies, looking at facilitators and barriers of child sexual abuse disclosures, showed that boys are less likely to disclose than girls and that this is often in interaction with other factors in the environment such as societal attitudes that promote hypermasculinity as desirable, perpetuate negative views of boys and men who are victims, and homophobic attitudes.⁷⁰ Previous studies have also shown that boys often waited until adulthood to disclose their abuse, with negative stereotypes contributing to their delayed disclosures.⁷¹ At the same time, early disclosure was found to be associated with improving long-term mental health for male survivors.⁷²

Gendered assumptions about offenders were also found to lead to lesser reporting when females offend and males are victimised.⁷³

When asked to comment on boys' disclosure of abuse, one frontline worker shared:

"All of these factors impact the children's ability to speak up. Reporting should not be related to shame or guilt, on the contrary, it is a duty to limit sexual exploitation. It is also of equal importance to encourage males to report and to negate the notion that only girls are victims of such crimes. This does not emasculate them in any way." (F 261)

70 Alaggia, R., Collin-Vézina, D., Lateef, R. (2017, March). *Facilitators and Barriers to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Disclosures: A Research Update (2000–2016)*. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*; 20(2):260-283.

71 Gagnier, C., Collin-Vézina D. (2016, March), *The Disclosure Experiences of Male Child Sexual Abuse Survivors*. *Journal of Child Sex Abuse*. 25(2): 221-41.

72 Easton, S. (2019, May). *Childhood Disclosure of Sexual Abuse and Mental Health Outcomes in Adulthood: Assessing Merits of Early Disclosure and Discussion*. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 93, 208-214.

73 Tozdan, S., Briken, P. & Dekker, A. (2019, March). *Uncovering Female Child Sex Offenders – Needs and Challenges for Practice and Research*. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 8(3): 401.

THE LACK OF SPECIFIC AND TAILORED MEASURES TO EQUALLY PREVENT AND PROTECT CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Although all children may be affected by sexual exploitation, research has tended to focus heavily on girls, due to the perception that girls tend to be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.⁷⁴ However, from this study, it is clear that boy victims of sexual exploitation are prevalent in Morocco. Such abuse can have many harmful and specific psychological effects. As boys can struggle to acknowledge and disclose the exploitation they are experiencing, they also struggle to find appropriate services that can help them. It is with these barriers in mind that this section also looks at how boys (and girls) are afforded protection within the legal system of Morocco.

Whilst legislators and law enforcement are in agreement regarding the need for a robust legal framework to tackle the problem of sexual exploitation of children, the power of the legal framework can easily become lost within loopholes or the understanding and consciousness of those tasked with protecting children.

Gaps in legal framework

Children over 15 are not equally protected from violence and abuse

The legislative provisions protecting children from violence and abuse exclude children aged 15 and over from their scope of application, thus creating

a de facto inequality between children and resulting in lack of a protection framework. Article 408 of the Penal Code criminalises intentionally injuring, beating, or depriving a child only under the age of 15 of food or care to the point of endangering their health.⁷⁵ The fact that it allows for “light violence,” an undefined concept, makes it inconsistent with the country’s obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁷⁶

Unequal protection in case of rape

Although there is no autonomous legal provision on the rape of minors, the age of the victim is an aggravating circumstance. Article 486 of the Penal Code defines rape as “the act by which a man has sexual relations with a woman against her will.”⁷⁷ Moroccan law is therefore particularly restrictive, as it considers rape to be an offence committed only by a man against a woman. Furthermore, it should be noted that rape is considered an attack on morals and not an offence against persons in the Penal Code.⁷⁸ However, Article 485 of the Penal Code on indecent assault with violence allows for the criminalisation of acts of sexual violence and abuse that cannot be classified as rape, regardless of the sex of the victim or offender.⁷⁹ This article applies to offences committed or attempted,⁸⁰ and thus allows for the prosecution of rape or other sexual violence against boys. Rape and indecent assault with violence are punishable by the same penalties: five to ten years’ imprisonment, or ten to twenty years if the victim is a child.⁸¹ It should be noted that sexual offences against children are not excluded from the bail system.⁸²

Homosexuality is criminalised

Consensual sexual relations between people of the same sex are prohibited by Article 489 of

74 Greenbaum, J., Crawford-Jakubiak, J. E., & Committee on Child Abuse & Neglect. (2015, March). “Child Sex Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Health Care Needs of Victims.” *Pediatrics*, 135(3), 566–574.

75 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). *Penal Code*. Article 408.

76 Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2006). *General Comment No. 8 (2006) - The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (arts. 19; 28, para. 2; and 37, inter alia)*.

77 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). *Code Penal*. Article 486.

78 Ayoubi Idrissi, H. (2014, December). *Étude sur la violence sexuelle à l’encontre des enfants au Maroc*. 71.

79 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). *Code Penal*. Article 485; Berre, M., Aboussad, A., Filali, H., & El Kourchi, M. (2003). *L’exploitation sexuelle de l’enfant - Cas de Marrakech*. 23.

80 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). *Code Penal*. Article 485.

81 *Ibid.* Articles 486 & 485.

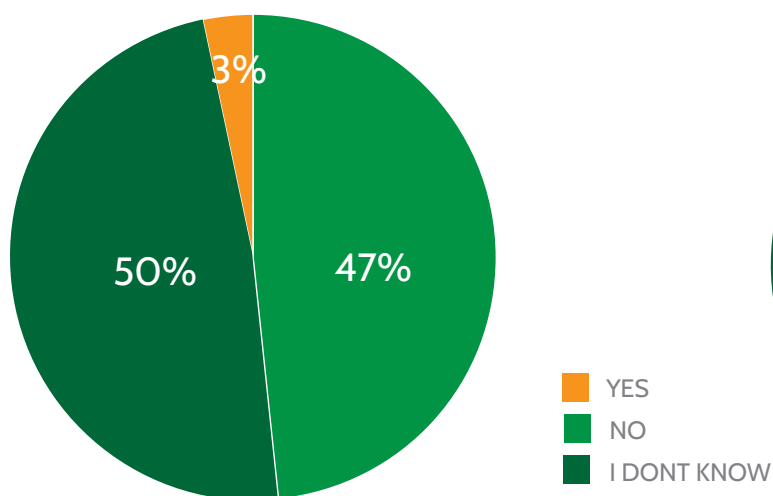
82 AMANE. (2021). Personal communication ; Medias 24. (2020, February). *Accusé d’agression sexuelle sur mineure et libéré sous caution: ce que l’on sait*.

the Penal Code.⁸³ This article states that “any indecent or unnatural act with a person of the same sex” is punishable by a prison sentence of six months to three years and a fine of 200 to 1,000 dirhams - a higher penalty than that for sexual relations outside of marriage.⁸⁴ Arguably, this article continues to legitimise the stigma surrounding homosexuality, a stigma that may prevent boys from reporting sexual offences against them.⁸⁵ This inherent legal bias may also result in differential treatment of boys who are victims of rape or other sexually exploitative offenses, in terms of access to support services. Eleven percent of frontline workers surveyed believed that identifying as gay or transgender could potentially increase boys’ vulnerability to sexual exploitation in Morocco.

No close-in-age exemption and no definition of age of sexual consent

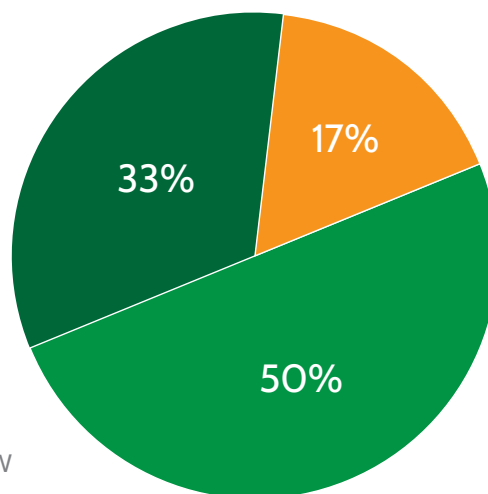
Sexual relations outside marriage, between individuals of different sexes, are punishable by imprisonment of one month to one year under Article 490 of the Penal Code.⁸⁶ The age of consent to sexual relation coincides with the authorised minimum age for marriage⁸⁷ and is 18 years old, except for judicial exceptions for minors. Consensual sexual relations between peers under 18 years old are illegal outside matrimonial ties. The existence of such criminalisation runs counter to the very concept of age of sexual consent. The latter does not really seem to exist in Morocco as a concept, since a person must be married to be allowed to have sexual relations. As shown in Figures 9 and 10, only around half of frontline workers in Morocco were aware of those legislative gaps.

Figure 9: Does legislation establish a close-in-age exemption to avoid criminalisation of peer-to-peer consensual sexual relationships?



Base: Frontline social support workers. n = 36

Figure 10: Does Morocco establish an age of sexual consent (statutory rape) for boys below 18?



Base: Frontline social support workers. n = 36

83 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). *Code Penal*. Article 489.

84 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). *Code Penal*. Article 489.

85 Josenhans, V., Kavenagh, M., Smith, S., & Wekerle, C. (2020, December). *Gender, rights and responsibilities: the need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys*.

86 *Ibid.* Article 490.

87 Kingdom of Morocco. (2004). *Code de la Famille*. Article 19.

Child marriage is permitted under certain circumstances

While child, early and forced marriage is a problem that disproportionately affects girls, it is important to note that boys are also affected. It has been estimated that, in 2019, 115 million boys and men worldwide were married before the age of 18, including 23 million before the age of 15.⁸⁸ Although boys are not as likely as girls to face risks of sexual violence in a marital setting, those who marry early face increased social pressure to take on the role of provider and household responsibilities, ultimately ending their childhoods prematurely.⁸⁹

Although the minimum age of marriage is eighteen for both boys and girls,⁹⁰ child marriage is still permitted under certain circumstances.⁹¹ Article 20 of the Family Code provides that a family judge in charge of marriage may authorise the marriage of a child through a “motivated decision specifying the interest and the reasons justifying this marriage.”⁹² As these interests and grounds are not precisely defined, judges have a wide discretionary power of interpretation and application.

The age of sexual majority does not seem to apply to married couples consisting of one or two children, since marital sexual relations do not have the “immoral” dimension that characterises indecent assault. Moreover, the medical certificate required to conclude the marriage of a girl must attest that she is fit to undergo sexual relations (and that she has therefore reached puberty).⁹³ The legislation does not provide criteria for determining whether consent to sexual activity between married peers under the age of 18 is voluntary, informed, and mutual.

Although the marriage of children constitutes an exception under the Family Code, in practice the propensity of judges to authorise it raises concerns that this type of marriage is the norm. In fact, between 2011 and 2018, 85% of the 330,362 applications for child marriage in Morocco resulted in judicial authorisation, according to a report by the NGO Droit et Justice dated 2020.⁹⁴ In 2018, the number of marriages involving children represented 9.5% of the total number of marriages (25,514 out of 268,569).⁹⁵ Girls are the most affected by this phenomenon (more than 99% of married children),⁹⁶ which seems particularly prevalent in rural areas.⁹⁷ Boys represented only 0.54% of married children in 2016, 1.34% in 2017, and 0.54% in 2018, respectively.⁹⁸

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse legislation is incomplete

The legal provisions relating to child sexual abuse and exploitation material are included in Article 503-2 of the Penal Code. The article punishes, with imprisonment of one to five years and a fine of ten thousand to one million dirhams, anyone who “produces, disseminates, publishes, imports, exports, exhibits, sells, or possesses” “pornographic materials.”⁹⁹ In theory, it does not explicitly criminalise offering and distributing, including for non-profit purposes, or knowingly accessing such material. The mere possession of child sexual abuse material, however, is a criminal offence.¹⁰⁰ The wording of the article indicates that its provisions are applicable to behaviours taking place online/through information and communication technologies, although this is not directly stated.

88 UN News. (2019, June 7). [Around 23 million boys have married before reaching 15; ‘we can end this violation’ says UNICEF chief.](#)

89 ECPAT International. (2020). [Summary Paper on Child, Early and Forced Marriages as a Form of, or Pathway to Sexual Exploitation of Children.](#) Bangkok: ECPAT International.

90 Kingdom of Morocco. (2004). *Code de la Famille*. Article 19.

91 *Ibid.* Article 20.

92 *Ibid.* Article 20.

93 Droit et Justice. (2021). [L'étude nationale sur le mariage des mineures au Maroc.](#) 17.

94 Droit et Justice. (2021). [L'étude nationale sur le mariage des mineures au Maroc.](#) 20.

95 *Ibid.* 25.

96 *Ibid.* 26.

97 AMANE. (n.d.). [Les violences sur les enfants : un fléau qui se propage sous le silence.](#)

98 Droit et Justice. (2021). [L'étude nationale sur le mariage des mineures au Maroc.](#) 26.

99 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). *Code Penal*. Article 503-2.

100 *Ibid.*

In the early 2000s, the crime of online child sexual exploitation was primarily limited to the production, possession, and distribution of child sexual abuse material. However, this manifestation of child sexual exploitation has evolved to include a variety of offenses such as online and live broadcasting of child sexual abuse, child online grooming for sexual purposes, and sexual blackmail of children.¹⁰¹ In other words, the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies has provided offenders with more sophisticated ways to exploit children. Although the Penal Code's provisions on child sexual abuse material appear to encompass online and live broadcasting of child sexual abuse, there is no article that explicitly criminalises the new phenomena discussed in this paragraph.

Indeed, child online grooming for sexual purposes is still not an offence under the Penal Code, although the adoption of provisions criminalising this phenomenon is provided for in the Integrated Public Policy for Child Protection 2015-2025.¹⁰² Similarly, as the crime of sexual extortion of children is not explicitly provided for in the Penal Code, Article 538 on blackmail should be applied in principle. The latter punishes, with a prison sentence of one to five years and a fine of 200 to 2,000 dirhams, anyone who extorts the delivery of funds or valuables by means of a written or verbal threat, of revelations or defamatory imputations.¹⁰³ It does not therefore provide for the extortion of sexual favours or other benefits, nor does it consider the victim's age as an aggravating circumstance. Furthermore, it does not contain any specific provisions relating to online offences.

Article 503-2 punishes anyone who causes, incites, or facilitates the exploitation of children in pornography.¹⁰⁴ The definition of "pornography" ("any representation, by any means") seems to be broad enough to include "pornographic performances" involving children. However, the vagueness of the acts mentioned makes it necessary to adopt specific provisions to clearly criminalise the recruitment or coercion

of a child to participate in such "performances." As the legislation currently stands, these acts are explicitly criminalised only in the context of trafficking.¹⁰⁵ It is not a criminal offence to knowingly attend "pornographic performances" involving children or to watch live online broadcasts of child sexual abuse.

Lastly, the legislation does not contain a specific provision that explicitly excludes the criminal responsibility of a child involved in the consensual production and sharing of self-generated sexual content.

No specific provisions on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism

Apart from a vague prohibition on encouraging "sex tourism" for anyone who owns, manages, operates, runs, funds, or participates in the funding of any establishment that is open to the public or usually frequented by the public,¹⁰⁶ Moroccan law does not contain specific provisions on sexual exploitation in travel and tourism. However, their adoption is one of the objectives of the Integrated Public Policy for Child Protection 2015-2025.¹⁰⁷ At present, the organisation of travel and tourism arrangements with the explicit or implicit purpose of involving one or more children in sexual activities is not directly criminalised, although it could theoretically fall under the relevant provisions on sexual exploitation of children in prostitution.

Furthermore, the legislation does not regulate the use of international volunteers working in direct contact with children (voluntourism); nor does it explicitly prohibit convicted child sex offenders from engaging in occupations that may bring them into contact with children. In addition, there are no legal provisions to deny entry or exit to persons convicted of offences related to the sexual exploitation of children or to establish strict conditions for their travel. Although Article 4 of Law No. 02-03 on the Entry and Stay of Foreigners in the Kingdom of Morocco and on Irregular Emigration and Immigration provides

101 ECPAT International. (2020, November). *Summary Paper on Online Child Sexual Exploitation*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

102 Kingdom of Morocco. (2015). *Politique Publique Intégrée de Protection de l'Enfance au Maroc*. 32.

103 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). *Code Penal*. Article 538.

104 *Ibid.* Article 503-2.

105 *Ibid.* Article 448.1.

106 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). *Code Penal*. Article 501.

107 Kingdom of Morocco. (2015). *Politique Publique Intégrée de Protection de l'Enfance au Maroc*. 32.

that access to Moroccan territory may be denied to any foreigner whose presence would constitute a threat to public order,¹⁰⁸ there is no evidence that this provision is used for this purpose.

No legislative provision requires companies operating in the travel and tourism industry to adhere to specific national codes for the protection of children. In addition, tour operators are not required to include a warning against the illegality of behaviours related to sexual exploitation in travel and tourism in their information, marketing, and promotional materials. It should be noted that the goal of the Integrated Public Policy for Child Protection 2015-2025 is to have the tourism sector adopt a Code for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation, presumably by 2025 as part of the involvement of the private sector in preventive child protection policies.¹⁰⁹

Procedural gaps

There are also many procedural gaps. National legislation does not establish extraterritorial jurisdiction for offences committed by persons who have their habitual residence in Morocco, despite the obligation to do so in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In addition, the principle of double criminality, which requires for the act on which the request is based is not considered a crime or an offence under Moroccan law remains applicable to extradition. This is likely to be a major obstacle to the protection of victims' rights and the effective prosecution of crimes.¹¹⁰ In addition, there is no specific procedure or provision regarding the right to compensation for victims of child sexual exploitation, nor is there a dedicated state-run compensation fund that allows victims to receive financial compensation before the end of the judicial process.

Capacity building around awareness of the different laws in Morocco that can protect boys from sexual exploitation is essential to empower

frontline workers: *“training in the field of law and legislation [is needed] for child rights and protection [workers].”* (F 104) Another worker commented that: *“when working on a case of sexual exploitation, frontline workers must be able to ‘explain [children] their rights and duties.’”* (F 104) Issues regarding legal protection and legal assistance were mentioned by respondents as the most significant problems that boys face, apart from the lack of psychological and emotional support.

RESPONSE TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF BOYS: ACCESSING SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Existing response mechanisms

Morocco has taken numerous measures to detect child victims of neglect, violence, abuse, and exploitation. In 2000, the National Observatory for the Rights of the Child launched a national toll-free number followed by an online platform for victims and others to report child sexual abuse.¹¹¹

Obligation to report

Moroccan law imposes a specific reporting obligation on public sector professionals with respect to certain criminal offences. Article 299 of the Penal Code punishes with imprisonment of two months to four years and/or a fine of 400 to 2,000 dirhams, any person who, having knowledge of a crime already attempted or committed against a child, does not immediately notify the authorities.¹¹²

108 Kingdom of Morocco. (2003). *Dahir n° 1-03-196 du 16 ramadan 1424 (11 novembre 2003) portant promulgation de la loi n° 02-03 relative à l'entrée et au séjour des étrangers au Royaume du Maroc, à l'émigration et l'immigration irrégulières*. Article 4.

109 Kingdom of Morocco. (2015). *Politique Publique Intégrée de Protection de l'Enfance au Maroc*. 35.

110 ECPAT International. (2022). *Extraterritorial Jurisdiction And Extradition Legislation As Tools To Fight The Sexual Exploitation Of Children*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

111 ECPAT International. (2014). *Rapport Global de Suivi de la mise en œuvre des actions de lutte contre l'exploitation sexuelle des enfants à des fins commerciales - Maroc*. 36.

112 Kingdom of Morocco. (1962). *Code Penal*. Article 299.

The Moroccan police have also set up reception units for women and children who are victims of violence in five pilot cities starting in 2002, before extending this system to all regions starting in 2007. However, these units often do not have a specifically designated space within police stations.¹¹³ Integrated care units for women and children, who are victims of violence, have also been set up in Morocco's hospitals since 2008.¹¹⁴

In 2001, the Moroccan government established a Central Service for Combating Crimes Related to Information and Communication Technologies,¹¹⁵ which also includes the sexual exploitation of children online. As of 30 December, 2018, the police had six forensic laboratories as well as 29 specialised cybercrime brigades spread geographically across the country.¹¹⁶ According to a report by the Council of Europe, as part of the CyberSouth project, Morocco "presents a comprehensive cybercrime strategy, within which the challenges in addressing this emerging criminality are fully identified."¹¹⁷ On February 2, 2021, the Internet Watch Foundation, in cooperation with the Moroccan Center for Polytechnic Research and the Council of Europe, launched a portal for Moroccan citizens to securely and anonymously report child sexual abuse material posted on the Internet. Reported content is analysed by experts from the Internet Watch Foundation and made available to local authorities for legal action.¹¹⁸

However, the above measures have shown their limitations due to several factors. These include a slow, little-known and unclear reporting procedure; reluctance to report due to cultural considerations or fear of reprisals; human resources that are poorly qualified to

detect direct and indirect signs of violence and abuse against children; poor coordination between actors; and the absence of a national identification and referral mechanism.¹¹⁹ The plans of the Integrated Public Policy for Child Protection 2015-2025 to correct this last shortcoming include the establishment, by 2025, of integrated territorial child protection mechanisms to improve the detection and handling of child victims through a better reporting system, mobile teams, a toll-free number, and counselling units.¹²⁰ In 2020, integrated territorial child protection mechanisms were created in eight pilot provinces: Rabat, Salé, Casablanca-Anfa, Tanger, Meknes, Marrakech, Agadir and Laâyoune. Their objective is to optimise regional monitoring mechanisms by providing a contact person to receive calls and correspondence from public stakeholders involved in the monitoring of children at risk. After evaluating the pilots, the government plans to extend them to other regions.¹²¹

Access to recovery and reintegration

As of 2022, Moroccan law does not provide for specific support and reintegration programmes for child victims of sexual exploitation, nor does it explicitly recognise their right to recovery and rehabilitation. However, Law 27-14 on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings stipulates that the state shall provide temporary accommodation for victims of trafficking and facilitate their integration into social life or their voluntary return to their country of origin or residence.¹²² This provision is however not specific to children.

The provision of care to ensure the psychosocial recovery and social reintegration of child victims

113 NGO Aida. (2017, October). *Ligne de base - Projet « Renforcement du système marocain de protection intégral de l'enfance dans sa réponse juridique et social face à la violence sexuelle »*. 26.

114 Kingdom of Morocco - Ministry of Health. (2017). *Programme National de la Santé Pour la Prise en charge des Femmes et Enfants Victimes de Violence - Document de cadrage*. 8.

115 ECPAT International. (2014). *Rapport Global de Suivi de la mise en œuvre des actions de lutte contre l'exploitation sexuelle des enfants à des fins commerciales - Maroc*. Bangkok: ECPAT International. 36.

116 CyberSud Project. (2018, December). *Rapport de situation initiale sur les capacités des unités de lutte contre la cybercriminalité et des laboratoires scientifiques au Maroc*. 10.

117 *Ibid.* 11.

118 Council of Europe. (2020, February 3). *Protéger les enfants contre les abus et l'exploitation en ligne : lancement d'un portail de signalement au Maroc*.

119 Kingdom of Morocco. (2015). *Politique Publique Intégrée de Protection de l'Enfance au Maroc*. 21-22.

120 *Ibid.* 34.

121 Kingdom of Morocco - Ministry of Solidarity, Social Development, Equality and Family. (n.d.). *Dispositif territorial intégré de protection de l'enfance*.

122 Kingdom of Morocco. (2016, December). *Loi n° 27-14 relative à la lutte contre la traite des êtres humains*. Article 4.

of sexual exploitation is in principle managed by decentralised social services structures and civil society organisations, although the latter remain the main relevant entities in this area. However, their services are generally not designed to meet the specific needs of child victims of sexual exploitation.¹²³ Despite the fact that associations play a leading role in this area, limited access to funding makes their interventions precarious and unsustainable. This lack of resources means that there is still an unmet need for shelters, care and reintegration support.¹²⁴

The recovery and rehabilitation of child victims of sexual exploitation have historically not been considered as a priority component of the institutional care system for child victims, which is generally focused on the objective of punishing the offender.¹²⁵ However, the plans of the Integrated Public Policy for Child Protection 2015-2025 to establish, by 2025, a codified circuit that sets out the steps for the reintegration of child victims and the monitoring of their situation within the framework of future integrated territorial child protection systems.¹²⁶

When frontline workers were asked to assess the quality of support services for boys in Morocco, as shown in Figure 11, psychological and reintegration services were rated by 67% respondents as poor. Thirty-three percent of workers rated psychological services as fair, and 28% reintegration services as fair.

Urgent need for psychological support for children subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse

Psychological services were not rated as 'good' by any of the 36 workers surveyed. The issue of the lack of psychological support for children (and boys in particular) very much stood out in frontline workers comments on services throughout the survey. This is also confirmed by 2018 data from the Ministry of Health,¹²⁷ and a 2019 UNICEF's situation analysis.¹²⁸

One frontline worker suggested opportunities for psychologists to be involved in the recovery process of a child, *"In the integrated care unit for child victims of violence where I work, a psychologist would be welcome and could support the children psychologically, especially as a doctor dedicated to this area would facilitate our care management."*

Another worker summarised, *"The issue of child sexual abuse is a serious scourge for society, and children often fear the abuser, as they face child personal isolation, especially with the emergence of technology. Therefore, I hope that our institutions, our society or all of us, will pay attention to the great role of the psychological and social specialists (...)"*

123 AMANE. (2022). Personal communication.

124 NGO Aida. (2017, October). *Ligne de base - Projet « Renforcement du système marocain de protection intégral de l'enfance dans sa réponse juridique et social face à la violence sexuelle »*. 28.

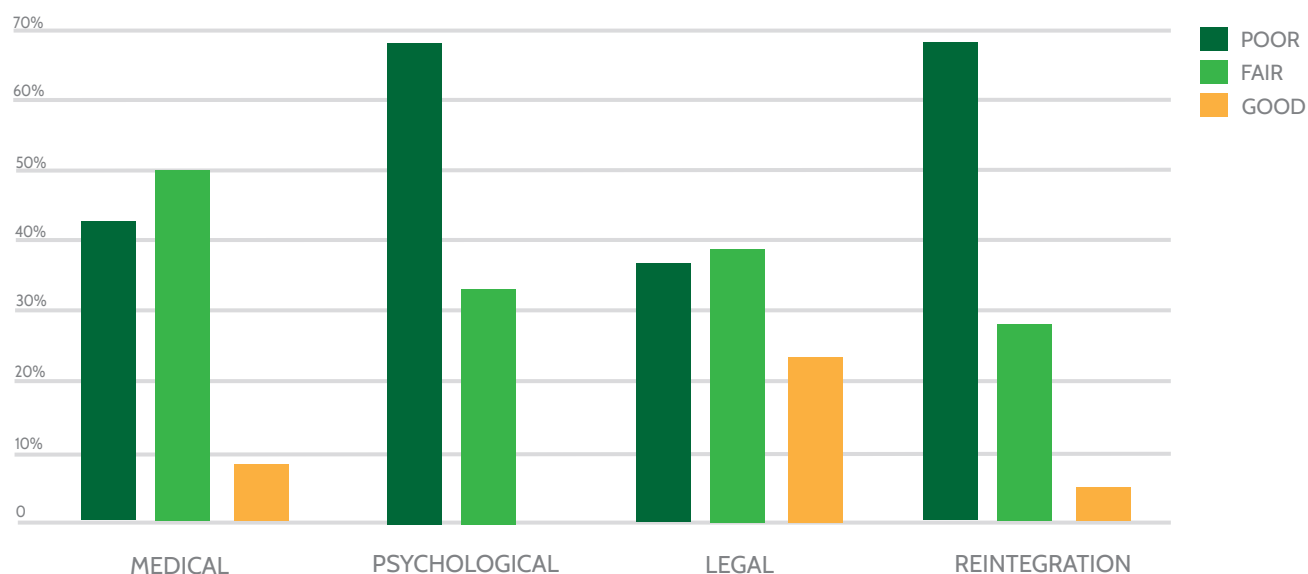
125 AMANE. (2021). Personal communication.

126 Kingdom of Morocco. (2015). *Politique Publique Intégrée de Protection de l'Enfance au Maroc*. 34.

127 Ministry of Health. (2018). *Situation de l'offre de soins de santé*.

128 Unicef Morocco. (2019, November). *Situation des enfants au Maroc*. Rabat: Unicef. 66.

Figure 11: Frontline workers' perceptions of Quality of Services for Boys



Base: Frontline social support workers. n = 36

When frontline workers were asked to reflect on why the quality of services for boys was considered so low in Morocco it was most commonly, lack of resources and infrastructures, and insufficient legislation/policies and budget that were cited. Lack of awareness and lack of training/skills were also concerns often mentioned. One frontline worker summarised: *“The various services are not implemented in all regions of Morocco, so they do not cover the whole country. The public medical and legal services are not very effective in Morocco in all areas, not just for violence against children. The psychology services are almost non-existent in public hospitals and courts, and it is more likely that the associations/NGO will take care of this aspect. For this reason, the people who take care of children who have been victims of violence need to be trained regarding that matter.”* (F260) Importantly, another worker shared that the quality of services for boys is influenced by: *“The notion that sexual exploitation is only relevant to females.”* (F 119)

Suggested responses for overcoming these accessibility and quality constraints largely focused on improving the infrastructure, by creating special units to support child sexual

exploitation victims, increasing the human resources and coordination between those providing support, creating psychological and medical centres, raising awareness among children and caregivers (*“awareness raising for families, schools and associations/NGOs”* (F 209); *“It is mandatory to increase training workshops that target families and children to help raise awareness about the topic, and make them understand how serious and important it is, as well as protecting their children before they are victimized”* (F261), *“encourage everyone to fight against this phenomenon”* (F 250) and providing training for professionals (F 220, F235, F267).

Challenges that boys face when accessing services

While a number of frontline workers shared that: *“girls and boys are the same in Morocco”* (F250) and that they receive *“the same support”* (F85, F128, F188) as girls, some pointed to specific factors when asked about the challenges that boys face when accessing support services: *“When it comes to the challenges that male victims face upon being abused: 1- fear of facing the society especially his interpersonal networks.*

2- *Difficulty reintegrating in normal life.* 3- *Dropping out of school.* 4- *Speaking up openly about what happened.*" (F116) Another worker shared that there was *"a small concern related to the larger number of structures working with girls."* (F 241) Lastly, again some workers shared that it is the *"Beliefs and mentalities [that] are an obstacle in the protection and care of these children."* (F260) and that that an obstacle to boys and their caregivers seeking help is that *"there is still reluctance to speak up about males being victims as well."* (F 261)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to build an empirical base for better understanding of the sexual exploitation of boys. Through a survey of frontline support workers, as well as a literature review of secondary data and legal analysis, a picture has emerged of the lived experiences of boys subjected to sexual exploitation in Morocco. The frontline workers survey explored professional attitudes and perspectives of the sexual exploitation of boys, their views on identifying the factors that lead to child sexual

exploitation and abuse; the perceived needs of boy victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and challenges that boys might face when accessing existing services in Morocco. The respondents' assessment, interpretation and suggested responses to situations of boys abuse or exploitation provided in the survey also allowed to unfold and unpack different attitudes and knowledge of professionals on the issue. While this study represents a contribution to the limited knowledge of sexual exploitation of boys in Morocco, the emerging evidence base remains underdeveloped and complex.

It is evident that more needs to be done to consider the gendered and social norms that affects boys' protection from, or vulnerability to, sexual exploitation. More in-depth primary research, particularly with boys themselves, is needed to recognise these issues and to better identify the care, treatment and support needs of these boys. This research highlights the needs for all duty-bearers in Morocco to consider how stereotypes around masculinities and gender norms have affected the targeting of resources and services when it comes to strategies to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation of boys.

RECOMMENDATIONS

LEARNING 1:

Critical gaps in data and knowledge about the scale and scope of abuse and sexual exploitation of boys in Morocco.

- Data collection and monitoring for child protection should be significantly improved. This includes the development and implementation of systematic, disaggregated national data collection, including databases, baseline studies and progress indicators.
- Prioritise research and gathering both quantitative and qualitative, gender-inclusive research. It may be especially helpful within this context to explore primary data that highlights the experiences and perspectives of boys involved in sexual exploitation (lived experiences, help-seeking process, expressed needs and type of services and support should be available.
- Research needs specifically identified from this study include, but are not limited to:
 - Exploring how social and gender norms are experienced by boys including construction of masculinities and male sexuality;
 - Understanding help-seeking behaviours of boys and their psychosocial, mental, and physical health needs;
 - Examining of particular contexts where boys are vulnerable (e.g. labour, internal migration, migrating through the country unaccompanied or separated, street living, travel and tourism, residential institutions);
 - Identifying emerging manifestations of online sexual exploitation of boys and the role of technologies in facilitating the sexual exploitation of boys;
 - Analysing types of offenders of sexual exploitation of boys including female offenders and male offenders;
 - Further exploring access to justice for boys victims and how the legal protection frameworks fail or not to restore justice for victims

Among others, the evidence resulting from such research would help inform existing targeted and community-based prevention and awareness-raising efforts and programmes as well as build new ones; tailor and expand services for boys who experienced sexual abuse or exploitation as well as influence policy and legislation to better protect children and improve the justice-seeking process.

LEARNING 2:

Social norms and mentalities contribute to the vulnerability of boys and inhibit them from disclosing abuse and being perceived as victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

- Critically reflect on gender norms (such as masculinities, patriarchy and chauvinism). In case of boys vulnerable to or victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, the boys themselves, parents and carers should have access to adequate protection and support without blame, provided in a non-judgemental way.
- Dismantle discomfort around discussions on sex, sexuality and social norms that may be harmful amongst caregivers, support workers and other adults who come into contact with children (such as teachers at schools to better allow discussions and to facilitate disclosures).
- Ensure knowledge reaches all children including information about sex, sexuality, consent, personal boundaries, what adults and others around them can and cannot do.
- Develop targeted awareness campaigns that challenge harmful norms toxic masculinities and reframes the notion that boys seeking help and support is a sign of weakness. Such campaigns should be framed within larger prevention strategies, including community-based activities.
- Develop parenting programmes to create awareness of child sexual exploitation and abuse and boys' vulnerability. Provide support to parents in order to be able to discuss with their children without shame or apprehension.

LEARNING 3:

Lack of appropriate child protection and prevention responses that are male sensitive and inclusive.

- Provide training and orientation materials to social support workers to build up their comfort and confidence to recognise the signs of child sexual exploitation and abuse, to be able to discuss sexual exploitation with boys and on how to support them appropriately.
- Needs assessments and capacity building of frontline workers (social, community workers, medical, legal professionals etc.) along with evaluation of existing services for boys are required and should be prioritised (e.g. psychological support services), to contribute to the development of inclusive, gender- and trauma- informed skills for practitioners.
- Establish a child protection community of practice (locally and nationally), to share experience, knowledge and develop guidance, strategy, learning, and practice related to the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys across the workforce of child protection practitioners.
- Create specific support and reintegration programmes for sexually exploited children. Care arrangements have so far focused on punishing the offender.
- Engage children as participants of research, programming, policy and legislation development and amendments. It is crucial that children's voices, experiences and ideas are valued and used to shape recommendations for future work on the prevention and response to sexual abuse and exploitation.

LEARNING 4:

Gaps in the legislation prevent equal protection of children from sexual exploitation and abuse.

- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure and the Council of Europe’s Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention).
- Ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child adopted in 1990 and the African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection adopted in 2014.
- Adopt a uniform legal definition of the term ‘child’ in line with international standards¹²⁹ that is consistently used across different laws.
- Include children between the ages of 15 and 18 in the legislative provisions protecting children from violence and abuse exclude children. This includes amending Article 408 of the Penal Code and criminalise acts of intentionally injuring, beating, or depriving a child also over the age of 15 of food or care to the point of endangering their health.
- Establish a procedure or provision regarding the right to compensation for victims of child sexual exploitation. This could be done by dedicating a State-run compensation fund that allows victims to receive financial compensation before the end of the judicial process.
- Amend Article 487 of the Penal Code to ensure that perpetrators face legal consequences if they commit an offense that results in the loss of the victim’s virginity, regardless of the victim’s gender.
- Include boys in the scope of Article 486 of the Penal Code on rape. Focusing on the victim status (not on the victim gender), in line with international standards is necessary in order to provide boys and girls with equal protection against rape.
- Amend the legislation to specifically exclude the criminal responsibility of a child for consensually having sexual relation (prostitution and debauchery), producing and sharing self-generated sexual content.
- Adopt a legal definition of prostitution and debauchery to ensure that it covers the promise of remuneration or other consideration; as well as provisions explicitly criminalizing offenders ‘clients’ who have sexual relations with children.
- Explicitly criminalise the offering and distribution of child sexual abuse material, including for non-profit purposes, or knowingly accessing such material.
- Explicitly criminalise specific online and through digital technologies child sexual exploitation and abuse crimes, such as:
 - live-streaming of child sexual abuse (i.e. child sexual abuse perpetrated and viewed simultaneously in real-time via video conferencing tools, chat applications).
 - child online grooming for sexual purposes, understood as engagement with a child via technology with the intent of sexually abusing or exploiting the child. While international legal instruments¹³⁰ criminalising

129 In line with the majority of international legal instruments and with international practice, the participating organisations advise that the term “child” be understood as including any person who is under the age of 18 years. ([Terminology Guidelines](#), 6).

130 The only two legally binding international instruments containing an obligation to criminalise the grooming of children for sexual purposes are: Council of Europe. (2007). [Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#). Council of Europe Treaty Series – No. 201. Article 23; and European Parliament and Council. (2011). [Directive 2011/92/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography and replacing Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA](#). Article 6.

grooming indicate that this must take place with intent to meet the child in person, it has become increasingly common for offenders to sexually abuse children by, for example, manipulating them into self-generating and sharing child sexual abuse material through digital technologies, without necessarily having the intention of meeting them and abusing them in person.

- sexual extortion of children, understood as the use of blackmail or threats to extract sexual content or other benefits (e.g. money) from the child, often using sexual content of the child that has previously been obtained as leverage.

- Introduce regulations for the tourism industry that would allow to hold the private sector accountable for crimes related to sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism.
- Regulating the entry and exit of convicted sex offenders from Moroccan territory.
- Explicitly prohibit convicted perpetrators of sexual offenses against children from engaging in professions that may bring them into contact with children.

ANNEX 1: SCENARIOS

Support workers were given five hypothetical scenarios about sexual exploitation, which reflected unequal power relationships, gender norms and other intersectional vulnerabilities. Questions were interspersed as the scenario unfolded to unpack different attitudes and knowledge. Following each scenario, participants were asked to describe what practical steps they would take if they were supporting the children depicted. Below is a summary of responses:

“Adam”

19-year-old Peti pays a 17-year-old cousin, Adam, to undress while filming. Adam agrees to do it without concerns.

Thirty-four out of 36 of participants (94%) agreed that Adam had been sexually exploited, 2 respondents (6%) were uncertain.

“Peti later posts this video to his online social media accounts that are publicly visible (no payment is needed to access them).”

With this additional revelation, 30 respondents (84%) were clear that Peti had committed sexual exploitation, 3 disagreed (8%) and 3 (8%) were uncertain.

“Zoli, who does not know Peti or Adam, finds and watches the video online from home elsewhere in the country.”

Given this information, only 18 (50%) participants responded that viewing of child sexual abuse material by Zoli was sexual exploitation. Sixteen (44%) disagreed and two respondents were unsure.

The practical steps or immediate responses suggested by support workers were mostly centred with reporting the crime/filing a complaint with authorities (F51, F61, F95, F142, F209), providing psychological support to the victim (F69, F109, F188) and raising awareness about sexual exploitation (F85).

“Abel”

Abel is a 7-year-old boy whose mother struggles to make ends meet in their rural village. His uncle, Gergo, has a good government job and has always given money to help the family out. Recently, during a visit to Abel’s family home, the uncle asked Abel to sit on his lap and touches him.

Sixteen (44%) respondents agreed that Abel had been exploited, yet also 16 (44%) said that he had not been exploited, and 4 participants (11%) were uncertain.

“While Abel was sitting on the uncle’s lap, the uncle began to touch his private parts. Abel’s mother then walks into the room and realises that something is happening. The uncle reminds Abel’s mother of how happy he is to be able to visit them today and provides her with some money.

The majority of participants (32;89%) believed that the uncle had committed sexual exploitation, two (6%) held that he had not committed sexual exploitation, and two (6%) were uncertain.

“Abel’s mother nodded, closed the door and went out of the house”

The majority of support workers (24;67%) believed that Abel’s mother was responsible for facilitating sexual exploitation, but 8 (22%) disagreed. Four (11%) remained uncertain.

Support worker’s practical responses to this scenario focused on providing psychological support to the child, the mother as well as raising awareness about the crime: *“pursuing the perpetrator and clarifying for the mother that what the uncle is doing is a crime. Also trying to find her a way to earn a living independently from the uncle who is helping her.”* (F 137)

“Dani”

Dani is a 16-year-old boy who prides himself on being a hard worker. When his adult neighbour, Sandor, asked if he could help work on her farm for payment, he was happy to help. While Dani was working around the farm, Sandor invited Dani into the house for lunch. Sandor sat very close to Dani and touched his arm often while chatting. Dani felt very uncomfortable with this.

Twenty-one (58%) of participants said that Dani had experienced sexual exploitation.

A third (11;31%) of participants think that the act of touching an arm while chatting may not constitute sexual exploitation. Four participants (11%) were uncertain about the situation.

“The next time Dani helped at the farm; the same thing happened at lunch. This time, Sandor touched Dani’s thigh. This also made Dani very uncomfortable.”

In this situation, more support workers (28;78%) believed that Dani had been exploited though, one respondent disagreed and seven (19%) were uncertain.

The practical steps mentioned by frontline workers in such a case focused offering psychological support (F109, F188) and education and awareness to Dani on the issue of sexual exploitation (F220, F69, F128). One frontline worker commented that response should focus on: *“Calming him down and explaining that his body is private and that it belongs to him, that he should not allow anyone to touch him, that he needs to leave and refuse being in any place that makes him feel uncomfortable, and teaching him how to differentiate between an innocent touch and an indecent touch so that it does not happen to him again.”* (F261) Additionally, some frontline workers recommended that Dani moves out of the farm (F241, F261) and leaves his community: *“I advise him to leave this farm immediately.”* (F250)

“Jani”

Jani is 15 years old, although he looks older. He self-identifies as gay. On the weekends, Jani meets men, who he describes as his ‘boyfriends’. He has sex with them and accepts money and gifts. When asked about these encounters, Jani says that it is his choice, and that other people should mind their own business.

Twenty-seven (75%) workers correctly identified Jani as a victim of sexual exploitation, although seven (19%) did not and two (6%) were uncertain. Considering “the men” that Jani meets on the weekends, thirty-one (86%) participants correctly identified the men as exploiters, three (8%) did not, and two were uncertain.

Supporting the fact that Jani is exploited, most participants recommend counselling, medical and legal interventions (F51, F85, F188, F109, F200, F261). Workers also spoke about the importance

of informing the child that he is a victim of sexual exploitation (F 128, F 200, F250, F260, F142) and “showing him that there are things he should not do, primarily for his health and for his own good.” (F209).

“The law protects the minor no matter his orientation because at his age, he is incapable of taking any decision and be held legally accountable for; therefore, it is the social worker’s responsibility to educate him about his rights, take legal action against the perpetrators, reporting the case to the public prosecution, and trying to integrate the minor in any professional training with which he could support himself in the future.” (F 137).

Thirty-two (89%) of participants correctly identified Marci as a victim of sexual exploitation, two (6%) held that Marci had not been exploited and two (6%) is uncertain.

“On one occasion, Marci was arrested for prostitution and intends to plead guilty. “

Thirty-five (97%) participants correctly identified that the men and women that Marci met for sex had committed sexual exploitation, none disagreed and one was uncertain.

The practical responses mostly emphasised on helping the child with medical, psychological and social support services (F51, F162, F200, F260, F188, F275, F95). One respondent commented: “Attempt to support him emotionally and socially, as well as find him a shelter and social support for the purpose of social inclusion and human empowerment.” (F69). One worker stated that in such case, it would be important to “trying to get the minor a reduced sentence on the grounds of sexual exploitation for financial want”, while another spoke about the necessity of “assur[ing] him that he is supported.” (F250).

“Marci”

Marci is 17 years old and identifies as a transgender person. Marci used to live in the countryside but faced discrimination from family and neighbours. Marci moved to the city but could not find a place to stay. Marci has not been able to find work and is homeless. Marci needs to pay for food, so quite often meets men and sometimes women, and has sex with them for money. Marci accepts that this life is tough but only temporary.

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