

administrative officers who ask for "protection money"; prostitution of boys also occurs but boys are more likely to engage in sex in exchange for food, drugs or a place to sleep than for money; it is difficult to investigate what is actually happening because boys are not willing to talk about their experiences, either out of fear or embarrassment; in the La Merced area, a number of associations of adult commercial sex workers exist with many of them fighting against each other, often resulting in violence and threats, increasing the vulnerability of children in the streets and making it virtually impossible for them to get out of such circumstances; and the spread of HIV/AIDS is an increasing risk associated with the increase in child prostitution, in part because clients are often averse to using condoms and increasingly prefer sex with younger children.

The report notes that the prohibition and punishment of commercial sexual exploitation of children is covered in laws related to the corruption of minors. The sale, trafficking and prostitution of minors are also covered, either directly or indirectly, by various provisions in the Constitution, the Penal Code and the Federal Labour Law.

The section of the report providing a comparative analysis of commercial sexual exploitation of children in Mexico notes, *inter alia*: the underlying causes which push children into commercial sexual exploitation in the metropolitan, tourist and border areas are generally very similar, viz. poverty, the continuously increasing rural to urban migration, disintegration of the family and of social and moral values and intra-familial violence; the most common and visible form of commercial sexual exploitation of children in Mexico is prostitution, which includes employment as table and striptease dancers; the use of children in pornography is reported also to be prevalent, but facts and data are much more difficult to establish because of the secrecy typical in this kind of exploitation; children in border states are perhaps more vulnerable to becoming victims of such use given that the production of child pornography often takes place in these areas because of the ease of transport to the United States; drug addiction appears to be one of the main causes for children getting caught up in the sex trade. This was reported to be the case during a study of the city of Tijuana.

The report also notes: recruitment methods do not vary much from one state to another and, with the exception of street children, there are loosely organized networks and "standard" recruitment methods involving the systematic luring of children from rural areas and from their home environment under false pretences to cities where they are left to the mercy of middlemen; the participation of law enforcement authorities in the creation of a climate of impunity which encourages the more organized networks to operate; despite the fact that Mexico is a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there is a great divergence of laws in the different states, and, in many cases, these laws do not conform to relevant international standards; in general, the government is well aware of the urgent need for action on commercial sexual exploitation of children but there do not appear to

be systematic, concrete and nationwide strategies in place yet; response mechanisms are largely dependent on the interest and dedication of people in positions of responsibility; a defensive and closed attitude is shown by most of the tourism, immigration and customs officials, who appear to be still in the stage of denial of the existence of the problem; there is a need to give serious attention to sensitization of the law enforcement authorities; the alleged involvement of some law enforcers in abuses against children either by themselves or in collusion with others requires urgent measures; and the lack of reported cases specifically on commercial sexual exploitation of children may be attributable to the lack of awareness on the part of both the police and the general public.

The report includes recommendations to the federal and state governments as well as to non-governmental organizations.

The report recommends that the federal government, *inter alia*:

- ♦ mainstream crimes against children among the primary concerns of law enforcement;
- ♦ develop advocacy and awareness-raising programmes geared towards enhancing the reporting mechanisms for instances of child abuse;
- ♦ provide training of all parties in the criminal justice system, from entry to exit points of the child victim, in order to avoid revictimization of the child; implement a multi-sectoral response mechanism whenever feasible to a child seeking assistance;
- ♦ ensure the prosecution and punishment of child abusers, including law enforcement officers and other public officials, and give wide publicity to these cases;
- ♦ undertake a review of both federal and state laws affecting children with the goal of harmonizing these laws with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly on the definition of a child as a person below 18 years of age; and undertake a review of both federal and state legislation on abuses against children with a view to criminalizing such abuses, specifying elements constituting abuse and the penalties for such abuse;
- ♦ ensure the constant monitoring and supervision of places where children are at risk and implement programmes for their rescue and protection;
- ♦ enhance the role of the National System for the Integral Development of the Family (DIF) in the protection of children through institutionalized and uniform programmes addressing and eradicating the main causes for the existence of the phenomenon, especially intra-familial violence and sexual abuse;
- ♦ give urgent attention to the issue of drug and substance abuse among children and enforce and/or implement compulsory education for children, whether formal or informal; and