

2022

# COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Endline study



IJM



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# About International Justice Mission

## Who we are

International Justice Mission is a global organization that protects people in poverty from violence. IJM partners with local authorities in 29 program offices in 17 countries to combat slavery, violence against women and children, and police abuse of power. IJM works to rescue and restore victims, hold perpetrators accountable, and help strengthen public justice systems. IJM's work has been recognized by the U.S. State Department, the World Economic Forum, and leaders around the globe, and has been featured by *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, Reuters, BBC, and CNN, among many others.

IJM has worked in the Dominican Republic since 2014, partnering with government agencies and civil society to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children and sex trafficking.

# Acknowledgments

IJM wishes to thank the Dominican National Police, and especially the Anti-Trafficking Department (*Departamento de Trata y Tráfico*—ATD) led by Colonel Francia Hernández. This study would not have been possible without their collaboration. The results presented in this report reflect the earnest work of the ATD, other government institutions, and civil society organizations.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
Introduction	9
<b>Methods</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Initial mapping exercise</b>	<b>11</b>
Data collected during initial mapping exercise	12
<b>Sampling strategy</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Undercover survey</b>	<b>15</b>
Description of fieldwork	15
Data fields and data collection	16
Quality control	17
Research ethics and staff care	18
Summary of academic literature on covert research ethics	18
Caring for the investigative team	20
Training	20
<b>Limitations</b>	<b>21</b>
Limitations in the scope of the results	21
Characteristics influencing the comparability of baseline and endline results	21
<b>Results</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>General prevalence levels</b>	<b>25</b>
Geography of CSEC	27
Prevalence by type of location	30
Trends by day of the week on which data was collected	30
<b>Observations about the current mode of operation of CSEC</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>General observations about minors and adults in the sex industry</b>	<b>34</b>
Nationality of foreign sex workers	34
Profile of intermediary, pimp, madam, establishment owner/manager	34
Nationality of other people present	36
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>37</b>
Investigating CSEC cases	38
Minors in inappropriate environments	39
The case of Sosúa	39
<b>References and appendices</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>43</b>

# Appendices

Appendix 1: Analysis of the statistical significance of the reduction in prevalence ..... 43

Appendix 2: Data on prevalence rates 2014 / 2022 ..... 44

Appendix 3: Other tables on prevalence of CSEC in 2022 .....52

# Tables

Table 1. Initial universe and sample .....	13
Table 2. Final sample and universe 2014 / 2022.....	14
Table 3. Methodological consistencies between the 2014 baseline study and 2022 endline study .....	21
Table 4. Prevalence of CSEC, by type of location .....	25
Table 5. Number of minors observed in CSE and promised for CSE, by city .....	29
Table 6. Number of minors observed in CSE and promised for CSE, by type of location .....	30
Table 7. Number of locations surveyed and sex workers observed, by day of the week on which data was collected.....	30
Table 8. Signs of exploitation by third parties and vulnerability for minors observed .....	32
Table 9. Nationality of foreign adult sex workers and minors in CSE .....	34
Table 10. Type of intermediary, by type of establishment.....	35
Table 11. Nationality and gender, by type of intermediary.....	35
Table 12. Nationality of other foreigners present .....	36
Table 13. Prevalence of CSEC, by type of location 2014 / 2022 .....	44
Table 14. Confirmation methods for “confirmed” minors 2022 .....	44
Table 15. Number of minors observed in CSE, by type of location 2014 / 2022 .....	45
Table 16. Minors observed in CSE, by city 2014 / 2022.....	46
Table 17. Number of locations surveyed and sex workers observed, by day of the week on which data was collected 2014 / 2022 .....	48
Table 18. Number of minors promised for CSE, by type of location 2014 / 2022.....	49
Table 19. Number of minors promised for CSE, by city 2014 / 2022 .....	50
Table 20. Nationality of foreign adult sex workers and minors in CSE, by type of location .....	52
Table 21. Police presence at surveyed locations .....	53

# Graphs

Graph 1. Reduction in prevalence of minors observed in CSEC, 2014 / 2022 .....26

Graph 2. Percentage of locations where investigators were promised minors for CSE, 2014 / 2022 .....27

# Figures

Figure 1. Change in prevalence of CSEC, by city 2014 / 2022 .....28

# Acronyms

**ATD:** *Departamento de Trata y Tráfico de la Policía Nacional*—Anti-Trafficking Department of the National Police

**CSE:** Commercial sexual exploitation

**CSEC:** Commercial sexual exploitation of children

**DN:** *Distrito Nacional*—National District

**IJM:** International Justice Mission

**IPMBO:** Intermediary, pimp, madam, brothel/establishment owner/manager

**NGO:** Non-governmental organization

**PJS:** Public justice system

**SW:** Sex worker

**TIP:** Trafficking in persons

# Glossary

**Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC):** Act in which a person, company, or institution “uses a minor in sexual activities in exchange for money, in-kind favors, or any other compensation, which constitutes sexual exploitation in the form of prostitution of minors” (Law 136-03, 2003).

**Minors observed in commercial sexual exploitation (minors observed or minors in CSE):** minors whom investigators observed directly and identified as victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

**Minors promised for commercial sexual exploitation (minors promised for CSE):** Minors whom investigators did not directly observe as victims of CSE, but who were referenced by a third party who promised to bring a minor for the purposes of CSE.

**Protection:** The array of benefits that accrue to people in poverty through a transformed justice system. People are protected from violence when the justice system deters perpetrators; is attractive for victims to report crimes and pursue cases; achieves just outcomes in those cases; and has the confidence of key stakeholders such as judges, prosecutors, law enforcement, social workers, and NGOs.

**Trafficking in persons:** “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat, of force, of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power, or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of any form of sexual exploitation, pornography, debt servitude, forced labor or services, servile marriage, irregular adoption, slavery or similar practices, or the removal of organs” (Law 137-03, 2003).

**Victim and survivor:** International Justice Mission uses the term “victim” for persons experiencing violence, and as a legal designation for a victim of a criminal offense. A person no longer experiencing violence is referred to as a “survivor.”

**SECTION 1.0**

# **INTRODUCTION**



# Introduction

This study examines the prevalence of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in 20 priority cities in the Dominican Republic based on an undercover survey that used quantitative and qualitative methods. Investigators with police training conducted the survey in establishments and public spaces where sexual services are consistently sold. This report presents the current prevalence of CSEC in 2022 and compares it to the results obtained in a 2014 baseline study conducted by IJM (IJM, 2015). IJM used the same methodology in the baseline and endline studies.

This report documents a statistically significant reduction in the prevalence of CSEC, which declined from 10.0% in 2014 to 2.2% in 2022. In other words, over the course of eight years, CSEC has become 78.0% less prevalent. Other qualitative data confirm this reduction and suggest it may be due to increased efforts by government authorities. This report also identifies and presents the way in which CSEC currently functions in the Dominican Republic.

Although there are various qualitative studies on the efforts of authorities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs),<sup>1</sup> IJM's 2014 baseline study and the current study are the only reports that use a systematized methodology to document the current prevalence of CSEC in the Dominican Republic. This study therefore offers authorities important information about the current reality of CSEC.

This study is part of a concerted effort by IJM to measure the following indicators of protection: prevalence of the crime; people's reliance on the public justice system (PJS) for protection; performance of the PJS in reported cases; and key stakeholder confidence in the PJS's response. This series of measurements provides evidence of the extent to which the Dominican public justice system has transformed its response to CSEC and sex trafficking throughout the course of IJM's intervention.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores [MIREX], 2021; Participación Ciudadana, 2022; Universidad Iberoamericana [UNIBE], 2022.

## SECTION 2.0

# METHODS

IJM conducted an undercover survey in formal establishments and public spaces in 20 priority cities in the Dominican Republic. The study team took care to replicate the methodology used in the 2014 baseline study.

The Methods section explains the mapping exercise performed prior to the undercover survey. It also describes the sampling strategy, the undercover survey method, and the characteristics that affect the comparability of the 2014 and 2022 results.

## Initial mapping exercise

Prior to the undercover survey, the study team mapped locations that complied with the inclusion criterion of being places where sex is consistently sold. This exercise examined the same 20 cities analyzed in 2014. The team consulted the following four sources to create an initial list of locations:

1. The locations surveyed in the 2014 baseline study.
2. IJM's historical knowledge from working approximately 50 CSEC and sex trafficking cases in the Dominican Republic since 2014.
3. The knowledge of government authorities and other NGOs.
4. Online (public) sources.

From May 22 to June 7, four teams of investigators from the Dominican National Police made field visits to refine the list of locations and confirm whether they met the inclusion criterion. The teams ruled out any location that was permanently closed, as well as any location where there was no evidence of sex being sold.

During these confirmation visits, investigators incorporated new locations based on their own knowledge and information from local informants (taxi drivers, *buscones*,<sup>2</sup> *motoconchos* [motorcycle taxi drivers], pimps, madams, etc.). Investigative teams also checked the “impact area,” or the 0.5-kilometer radius around each confirmed location.<sup>3</sup> When teams identified locations within the impact area that qualified for inclusion, they were added to the study universe.

The aim of these visits was to reach a saturation point at which teams received referrals to locations that had already been mapped. When teams reached this point, they had confidence that the list of locations accurately captured the reality of each city. Because they typically made their visits during the day, investigators were not always able to confirm whether sex was being sold at a location. The study team took a conservative approach to these cases and kept the locations in the universe so that the undercover survey could evaluate whether sex was indeed being sold.

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<sup>2</sup> “*Buscón*” is a Dominican term for individuals, typically men, who do a variety of tasks in an informal street economy, including parking and watching cars, and peddling small goods. They possess a high level of street knowledge and are sometimes able to connect solicitors with sex workers or indicate community members who can. The literal translation of *buscón* is “scout.”

<sup>3</sup> Impact areas, referred to as “catchment areas” in the 2014 report, were a methodological innovation of the baseline study. They attempted to capture the reality of commercial sexual exploitation in the Dominican Republic, which is primarily informal and street-based. The Spanish version of the 2014 report calls them *zonas de impacto* and *áreas de alcance*.

During the initial mapping exercise, investigative teams collected the following information:

1. Name of the location
2. Address
3. GPS coordinates
4. Type of location
  - a. Establishment: bar, pool hall, *cabaña* (hourly motel), car wash, private house, *colmado* (convenience store), disco or club, or hotel
  - b. Public space: street, park, beach
5. Predominant client type: Dominicans, foreigners, mixed
6. Size of location: less than 10 sex workers (SW) = small; 10-20 SW = medium; over 20 SW = large
7. Photo
8. Description of the area and possible risks
9. Source of information

## Sampling strategy

The pre-study mapping exercise identified 211 locations where sex was consistently sold. Of these, 200 were establishments and 11 were public spaces. Using the same methodology as 2014, the team took a stratified random sample based on the type of location (establishment or public space), with a margin of error of 5%. With these requirements, the total sample consisted of 143 locations: 132 establishments and all 11 public spaces. Table 1 shows the initial universe and sample.

The 143 locations in the sample were assigned to investigative teams for the undercover survey. The study team kept the remainder of the locations in reserve to replace any location in the sample that could not be surveyed or that ended up not satisfying the inclusion criterion. During the undercover survey, locations were removed from the universe and sample for the following reasons:

1. The location was permanently closed.
2. Evidence indicated that sex was not consistently sold at the location.

Locations were removed from the sample, but not the universe, when:

1. The location was closed, but not permanently.
2. Investigators could not collect information due to security or other reasons.

TABLE 1. INITIAL UNIVERSE AND SAMPLE

City	INITIAL UNIVERSE			INITIAL SAMPLE		
	Establishments	Public Spaces	Total	Establishments	Public Spaces	Total
Bajos de Haina/Nigua	2	-	2	1	-	1
Bávaro	13	-	13	9	-	9
Boca Chica	3	1	4	2	1	3
Cabarete	7	-	7	4	-	4
Cotuí	3	-	3	2	-	2
Higüey	9	-	9	6	-	6
Jarabacoa	14	-	14	9	-	9
Juan Dolió	2	-	2	1	-	1
La Romana	23	-	23	15	-	15
La Vega	3	-	3	2	-	2
Las Terrenas	-	-	0	-	-	0
Nagua	5	-	5	3	-	3
Puerto Plata	23	-	23	15	-	15
Río San Juan	11	-	11	7	-	7
San Francisco de Macorís	9	-	9	6	-	6
San Pedro de Macorís	16	-	16	11	-	11
Santiago	21	2	23	14	2	16
Santo Domingo Central (D.N.) and East Santo Domingo <sup>4</sup>	13	6	19	9	6	15
Santo Domingo West	4	2	6	3	2	5
Sosúa	19	-	19	13	-	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>143</b>

When investigators conducted the undercover survey, they found that many locations in the universe were permanently closed or did not sell sex. Accordingly, the study team removed these locations from the universe and sample and replaced them with those held in reserve. All 211 locations in the initial universe were ultimately assigned to investigators during the undercover survey, which allowed the study team to further refine the universe. As shown in Table 1, investigators initially mapped few or no locations in some cities.<sup>5</sup> For these cities, plus the *Distrito Nacional*, East Santo Domingo, and West Santo Domingo, the team supplemented new locations by carrying out a second mapping exercise during the undercover survey. In the end, 152 locations met the inclusion criterion and investigators surveyed 132 of these locations. Table 2 shows the final sample and universe, with the 2014 sample and universe included for reference.

<sup>4</sup> In the Dominican Republic, it is not common to refer to the *Distrito Nacional* as “Santo Domingo Central” or to group it with East Santo Domingo. But the terms were left unchanged for the sake of consistency with the 2014 study.

<sup>5</sup> Specifically, Las Terrenas, Nagua, Cotuí and San Francisco de Macorís



**TABLE 2. FINAL SAMPLE AND UNIVERSE 2014 / 2022**

City	FINAL UNIVERSE, 2014			FINAL SAMPLE, 2014			FINAL UNIVERSE, 2022			FINAL SAMPLE, 2022		
	Establishments	Public Spaces	Total	Establishments	Public Spaces	Total	Establishments	Public Spaces	Total	Establishments	Public Spaces	Total
Bajos de Haina/Nigua	1	3	<b>4</b>	4	2	<b>6</b>	4	-	<b>4</b>	4	-	<b>4</b>
Bávaro	5	2	<b>7</b>	9	3	<b>12</b>	8	-	<b>8</b>	7	-	<b>7</b>
Boca Chica	4	3	<b>7</b>	5	3	<b>8</b>	3	1	<b>4</b>	3	1	<b>4</b>
Cabarete	5	-	<b>5</b>	7	4	<b>11</b>	1	-	<b>1</b>	1	-	<b>1</b>
Cotuí	9	1	<b>10</b>	7	1	<b>8</b>	1	-	<b>1</b>	1	-	<b>1</b>
Higüey	11	-	<b>11</b>	7	1	<b>8</b>	10	-	<b>10</b>	9	-	<b>9</b>
Jarabacoa	10	2	<b>12</b>	8	2	<b>10</b>	4	1	<b>5</b>	1	-	<b>1</b>
Juan Dolió	-	2	<b>2</b>	-	2	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
La Romana	12	1	<b>13</b>	13	2	<b>15</b>	13	1	<b>14</b>	11	-	<b>11</b>
La Vega	8	5	<b>13</b>	6	5	<b>11</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Las Terrenas	6	2	<b>8</b>	15	2	<b>17</b>	7	1	<b>8</b>	4	1	<b>5</b>
Nagua	5	2	<b>7</b>	4	2	<b>6</b>	4	1	<b>5</b>	4	1	<b>5</b>
Puerto Plata	7	3	<b>10</b>	3	4	<b>7</b>	11	-	<b>11</b>	8	-	<b>8</b>
Río San Juan	6	3	<b>9</b>	6	2	<b>8</b>	6	-	<b>6</b>	5	-	<b>5</b>
San Francisco de Macorís	8	1	<b>9</b>	6	3	<b>9</b>	6	-	<b>6</b>	6	-	<b>6</b>
San Pedro de Macorís	1	2	<b>3</b>	-	1	<b>1</b>	3	-	<b>3</b>	2	-	<b>2</b>
Santiago	11	3	<b>14</b>	9	3	<b>12</b>	10	2	<b>12</b>	8	2	<b>10</b>
Santo Domingo Central (D.N.) and Santo Domingo East	19	8	<b>27</b>	14	8	<b>22</b>	12	18	<b>30</b>	12	18	<b>30</b>
Santo Domingo West	24	2	<b>26</b>	12	3	<b>15</b>	9	2	<b>11</b>	9	2	<b>11</b>
Sosúa	11	2	<b>13</b>	15	3	<b>18</b>	12	1	<b>13</b>	11	1	<b>12</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>132</b>

# Undercover survey

Investigators conducted the undercover survey between June 16 and July 10, 2022, at the 132 locations included in the final sample. From Tuesdays through Saturdays,<sup>6</sup> three pairs of investigators surveyed the locations in the sample to determine the prevalence of minors being sexually exploited and collect other quantitative and qualitative data.

The investigative team consisted of three foreign investigators from Latin America and three Dominican investigators from the Dominican National Police. Building on IJM's experience in 2014, each team had a Dominican and foreign member. In 2014, the team found that being a foreigner facilitated conversations about minors available for sexual exploitation. On the other hand, being Dominican enhanced security and the quality of information gathered, as Dominican investigators are more familiar with the risks associated with the typical environment and are better able to interpret the appearance of Dominican sex workers. Additionally, this local lens helped prevent potential foreign cultural bias when identifying an individual's age or sex worker status.

IJM required all investigators to be specialists in undercover police detective work and have experience in child protection. Investigators were supported by a coordinating team: a monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning specialist; a logistics assistant; and two members of the National Police to provide security in the event of a risk to investigators' safety.

## DESCRIPTION OF FIELDWORK

Every afternoon, the study team held a meeting in which the monitoring and evaluation specialist assigned locations to each team to survey that night. The assignment included key information collected during the initial mapping exercise to guide the undercover survey. Investigative teams always checked the assigned area before surveying, with the exhaustiveness of that check depending on the operational risks. Between 7 p.m. and 1 a.m., the investigators visited each location assigned to them and gathered data by interacting with those present.

For safety reasons, teams always spent less than an hour in establishments and public spaces. If they were unable to reach a saturation point at that location within the assigned amount of time or were unable to confirm the information they were seeking, investigative teams requested more time from the field coordinator. The investigators always communicated via WhatsApp when they entered or left locations so that others would know where they were if anything went wrong. Over the course of the study, no team stayed in a location longer than anticipated and it was never necessary to involve the National Police for security help.

In addition to determining whether there were minors being sexually exploited, the teams verified whether minors could be brought to the investigators or whether the investigators could be taken to minors for sexual services. They consistently requested "a lot of girls." Teams always documented the number of minors who were promised, observed, and confirmed, but the reported prevalence for this study only includes minors who were directly observed.

To observe as many minors as possible, investigators did not leave their assigned area, even if an intermediary offered to take them to another location with minors. They only followed an intermediary if the

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<sup>6</sup> Investigators conducted a survey on Sunday on two occasions, but they usually worked Tuesday through Saturday.

location was within the mapped area. The investigators had *no* sexual contact with those they were studying; they could only talk to the subjects at the assigned location.

In addition to these procedures, the investigative teams followed several safety guidelines for fieldwork, including a COVID-19 contingency plan, a safety protocol for undercover investigations, and a road safety plan.

## DATA FIELDS AND DATA COLLECTION

Investigators sought the following information during the undercover survey. Questions 1–8 were considered essential and investigators were required to answer them for each location. The other fields were considered complementary, but investigators ultimately filled them out for each location surveyed:

1. Number of young minors (0–14 years old) observed.<sup>7</sup>
2. Number of older minors (15–17 years old) observed.
3. Total number of adult sex workers (18+ years old) observed.
4. Number of young minors (0–14 years old) confirmed.
  - 4.1. How were the young minors (0–14 years old) confirmed?
    - a. Minor stated age; minor stated birth date/year; minor stated date/year of 15-year-old “coming-of-age” party (*quinceañera*); minor stated graduation year; intermediary, pimp, or madam stated age of minor; another person stated their age; other (specify).
5. Number of older minors (15–17 years old) confirmed.
  - 5.1. How were the older minors (0–17 years old) confirmed? *See options in 4.1-i*
6. Were you promised that you would be brought to a minor or that a minor could be brought to you (0–17 years old)?
  - a. I was promised I would be brought to a location with minors; I was promised that a minor would be brought to the location; I was not promised I would be brought or brought to minors.
- 6.1. Number of minors “promised” but not directly observed.
7. Was there evidence of third-party exploitation of minors?
  - a. Presence of an intermediary, for example: pimp, madam, brothel owner, or other third-party; minor works for an establishment that sells sex; someone other than minor handles the payment; someone other than the minor makes decision on minor providing services; a single sex worker speaks for a group of sex workers; evidence of vulnerability; no observable evidence of third-party exploitation of minors when information was collected.
- 7.1. If there is evidence of vulnerability, what type of evidence?
  - a. Evidence of substance or alcohol abuse; testimony from minor about coercion/deception; evidence of fear; presence of disabilities.
- 7.2. Reasons given by minors for engaging in sex work (text-entry field).
8. Were foreign young minors (0–14 years old) observed?
  - 8.1. Number of foreign young minors (0–14 years old) observed.
  - 8.2. Nationality of foreign young minors (0–14 years old) observed.
9. Were foreign older minors (15–17 years old) observed?
  - 9.1. Number of foreign older minors (15–17 years old) observed.

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<sup>7</sup> The age categories of young minors (0–14 years old), older minors (15–17 years old), and adults (18+) are carried over from the 2014 study, which set age 15 as the threshold for being considered an older minor. The reasoning behind this choice can be found on page 31 of the 2014 report.

- 9.2. Nationality of foreign older minors (15–17 years old) observed.
10. Were foreign adult commercial sex workers (18+) observed?
  - 10.1. Number of foreign adult sex workers (18+) observed.
  - 10.2. Nationality of foreign adult commercial sex workers observed.
11. Type of intermediary.
  - a. Commercial sex worker (who spoke or negotiated for the group), security guard or bouncer, owner, manager, madam, pimp, taxi or motorcycle taxi driver, unknown, no intermediary involvement was observed.
- 11.1. Approximate age, in years, of the intermediary, pimp, madam, brothel/establishment owner/manager (IPMBO):
  - a. <19; 20–29; 30–39; 40–49; 50+
- 11.2. Gender of intermediary, pimp, madam, brothel/establishment owner/manager.
- 11.3. Nationality of intermediary, pimp, madam, brothel/establishment owner/manager.
- 11.4. Other notable characteristics of intermediary, pimp, madam, brothel/establishment owner/manager.
12. Were other foreigners present?
  - 12.1. Number of other foreigners present.
  - 12.2. Nationality of the foreigners.
13. Number of police present.
14. Number of security guards or bouncers present.
15. Purpose of payment.
  - a. For sexual services, to take the sex worker out or leave the premises with them.
16. Additional remarks (text-entry field).

In 2014, teams relayed the information they collected to a third party by phone. For the 2022 survey, teams entered the information directly into a secure online survey platform. When they got into their vehicle after each location the investigator in the passenger's seat filled out the form, checking the information with their colleague, to send it as soon as possible after observation.

#### QUALITY CONTROL

To ensure the quality of the collected information, the study used a cross-checking strategy: two different teams surveyed the same location at two different times, one shortly after the other. There was a minimum number of cross-checks assigned each day. The study team assigned more cross-checks in the first days of the survey to proactively identify initial errors and make sure that at least 15% of all surveys were audited. Teams could also request a cross-check when they were not entirely confident about the information they gathered. The teams conducted a cross-check at 29 locations, but they confirmed no commercial sexual activity at nine of them. In other words, they cross-checked 20 locations from the final sample of 132, or 15.2% (20/132).

The following day, the team would discuss any discrepancies found in the previous night's cross-check. Their discussions focused on the key indicators of young minors observed, older minors observed, and adult sex workers observed. If the discrepancy was within +/- 15%, the study used the original numbers. If it was greater than 15%, the investigators discussed what they saw to determine the reason for the discrepancy. If the reason was the time of the visit, the study team used the survey with the highest numbers, giving preference to peak times. Discrepancies were usually the result of the time of the visit.

To further ensure data quality, teams did a practical age identification exercise during training week. IJM recruited 52 people aged 12 to 30: fourteen males and 38 females. Each participant gave written informed consent (parents gave consent for minors). Each participant received a 1,000-peso voucher for La Sirena stores.

IJM held the activity in an event space. The investigators sat on one side, and participants entered one by one; they walked in front of the investigators, greeted them, and left. The investigators wrote down their guess for each person's age. Their actual age was not revealed until the end. The investigative team was able to successfully differentiate between adults and minors 79% of the time. They correctly categorized participants as young minors (0–14 years old), older minors (15–17 years old), or adults (18+ years old) 72% of the time.

#### RESEARCH ETHICS AND STAFF CARE

For this study, IJM used an ethical protocol which was reviewed and approved by the Public Administration Institute of Central America (ICAP). However, covert research methods involve several complex ethical issues. This section addresses these considerations and describes the measures taken to adequately care for investigators, given the nature of the study's subject matter.

#### SUMMARY OF ACADEMIC LITERATURE ON COVERT RESEARCH ETHICS

Covert research inherently lacks informed consent from research subjects. As a general rule, IJM prioritizes the autonomy of research participants and requires informed consent in all of its studies. However, in this study, research subjects had reduced autonomy due to the nature of the phenomenon being studied. In this environment, requesting informed consent would create greater risks for both researchers and research subjects, which would undermine ethical principles like reducing the risk of harm and maximizing benefits. Therefore, a covert approach was the most prudent way to safeguard the wellbeing of the research subjects. In opting for a covert approach, IJM drew on a strong body of academic literature that is briefly summarized in this section.

Covert methods have been instrumental in the disciplines of sociology and criminology. They have especially contributed to knowledge about hidden and vulnerable groups and are sometimes the only way to study those groups (Calvey 2008, 2017, 2019; Roulet, 2017). However, because covert methods depend on a lack of informed consent, they should only be used as a last resort (Roulet et al., 2017; Van Deventer, 2007). In other words, if a different research method would accomplish a study's aims with the same effectiveness, that method should be used. The primary aim of the 2022 study was to reliably compare the prevalence of CSEC reported in 2014 with that found in 2022. To achieve comparability, it was necessary to replicate the 2014 methodology, which meant using the covert method.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Regardless of comparability with the 2014 study, IJM believes the covert method to be the one best suited to the study's aim of measuring the prevalence of CSEC at a large scale and across a varied geographical area in the Dominican Republic. For example, a method used to measure CSEC in other contexts is respondent-driven sampling, in which "seeds," or initial members of the group being studied (in this case, sex workers) answer a survey and then provide information about other people who can also respond. This method works well in places with highly centralized and interconnected sex industries where the "seed" can refer researchers to people in other networks. But the sex industry in the Dominican Republic is more scattered and informal. A respondent-driven approach would quickly lead to dead ends, and the volume of seeds needed would become unmanageable.



The main ethical concern with covert methods is a lack of informed consent. However, many social science researchers have argued that all social research has both overt and covert aspects, and informed consent alone does not guarantee protection for research subjects (Calvey, 2019; Gengler & Ezzell, 2018, p. 814; Roulet et al., 2017; Herrera, 1999). What's most important is protecting research subjects.

In the absence of informed consent, researchers need to demonstrate that the benefits of a study are greater than the possible risks to which subjects would be exposed. With regard to potential risks, the methodology of this study is minimally invasive. By acting as clients, the investigators do not pose any risks beyond those inherent to the phenomenon being studied. As Spicker asserts, this is a sign of successful covert research, in which "subjects of research are doing exactly what they did before, and they are exposed to no risk from the research process beyond the risk already associated with the activity" (2011, p. 127). IJM's experience in the undercover survey confirms this assertion. At the 132 locations surveyed, none of the investigators were identified as such. Several benefits of this study justify a covert approach. The study:

- a) Provides key data about where (generally and anonymously) and how commercial sexual exploitation of children takes place. This allows authorities to respond based on concrete and high-quality information.
- b) Helps prevent the abuse being studied.
- c) Contributes to the development of methods for measuring hidden and vulnerable groups, an important topic for NGOs and academics (see The Prevalence Reduction Innovation Forum at the University of Georgia, USA, and the US State Department).

With strong reasons for using a covert method, IJM instituted the following safeguards, as recommended by the academic literature:

- a) IJM developed "specific observational parameters" (Herrera, 2000, p.3). Specifically:
  - a. There was a two-hour time limit for investigators' interactions with a single person.
  - b. Investigators only collected data about the variables in question (see "Data fields and data collection" above).
  - c. Investigators did not drink alcohol during the research process. In situations where not drinking alcohol would pose a risk, investigators were advised to take sips and drink no more than one alcoholic drink per day. This procedure was instituted to make sure investigators would be alert to risks and effectively pursue the desired information, and to protect their health from excessive alcohol consumption during the surveying phase.
  - d. Investigators had no sexual contact with any person, nor were they alone in places and situations where such contact would be expected.
- b) The anonymity of participants was preserved throughout the research and publication process (Roulet, 2017).
- c) Investigators did not participate in illegal activities.
- d) Investigators visited typical locations as part of their training so they would be familiar with common risks (Roulet, 2017, p. 497). Additionally, they performed daily inspections of each location before beginning the undercover survey.

- e) Investigators practiced with undercover identities as part of their training (Roulet, 2017).
- f) IJM made a plan to protect investigators who observed violence (Calvey, 2019).

#### CARING FOR THE INVESTIGATIVE TEAM

Due to the nature of CSEC, IJM took several measures to ensure staff care. During training week, a psychologist facilitated a session on investigator self-care. She offered practical strategies for processing what was witnessed during the study. Additionally, a counselor led two group sessions with the investigators and was also available for individual sessions during the study.

The first group session took place after the first week of the undercover survey phase to process any initial issues. The second was held at the end of the study to help investigators process what they had seen, achieve effective closure, and successfully resume daily life.

This second session took place at a two-day retreat designed to promote physical, emotional, and spiritual rest. There were also voluntary daily spiritual group times in which team members could process what they had seen the day before.

#### TRAINING

To prepare for the undercover survey, the investigative team had four days of training: one online day on June 9, and three in-person days from June 13 to 15. The training covered:

- Operational safety, with an emphasis on safety in undercover investigations.
- General methodology, quality control process, and the data collection instrument.
- Ethical protocol.
- Investigator self-care.
- Context about CSEC and TIP for sexual exploitation in the Dominican Republic.
- Data collection techniques.
- Pilot tests in real locations.
- Techniques for identifying people's age. A Dominican forensic psychologist with more than a decade of experience working with victims of sexual crimes gave an intensive training on how to identify a person's relative age based on their physical, visual, or behavioral attributes. This training aimed to enhance investigators' perceptions when they were unable to confirm the person's age during their interactions.
- Practical age identification exercise. After the training on techniques for identifying a person's age, investigators did the practical exercise with 52 people described in the Quality control section.

# Limitations

This study’s limitations can be divided into those affecting the scope of the results and those affecting comparability between the baseline and endline studies.

## LIMITATIONS IN THE SCOPE OF THE RESULTS

The scope of the results of both the baseline and endline studies are limited by:

- 1. **The study’s geography:** the 2014 and 2022 studies are not fully representative at a national level because they exclude the country’s border region.<sup>9</sup> However, the 20 cities included in the study still paint a geographically robust picture of CSEC in the Dominican Republic.
- 2. **Capturing peak population:** since survey data was collected on some days not considered peak times for sex work (for example, Tuesday and Wednesday), the data may not reflect the largest potential population of people involved in sex work. However, this likely had little impact on the reported prevalence since investigators observed minors in CSE on peak and non-peak days.

## CHARACTERISTICS INFLUENCING THE COMPARABILITY OF BASELINE AND ENDLINE RESULTS

Most of the results presented in this study compare the endline findings to those in the baseline. Several methodological consistencies and differences affect the comparability of the results. Table 3 details aspects of the methodology that the study team kept the same to make the results more comparable.

TABLE 3. METHODOLOGICAL CONSISTENCIES BETWEEN THE 2014 BASELINE STUDY AND 2022 ENDLINE STUDY

Consistency	Description	Significance
Timing of the undercover survey	IJM conducted the 2014 undercover survey between June 19 (a Thursday and the Corpus Christi holiday) and July 8. It conducted the 2022 undercover survey between June 16 (a Thursday and the Corpus Christi holiday) and July 10. Both studies collected data primarily from Tuesday to Saturday, although a few locations were surveyed on Sunday. Both studies were also conducted during the same hours (between 7 p.m. and 1 a.m.).	The dates and hours of the 2014 and 2022 surveys match, so they are comparable in this respect.
Data collection strategy	Both the 2014 and 2022 studies used an undercover survey strategy. Investigators sought information about the same variables using the same investigative techniques and spent the same amount of time at each location.	The data collection strategies of the 2014 and 2022 surveys match, so they are comparable in this respect.
Accurately identifying people’s age	Investigators participated in a practical exercise for identifying people’s age as part of the training for both studies. In 2022, the investigative team achieved 79% accuracy in distinguishing between adults and minors. In 2014, the team’s rate was 76%.	Investigator accuracy in identifying age in the 2014 and 2022 surveys match, so they are comparable in this respect.
Number of interactions confirmed by cross-checking	In 2022, the team cross-checked 15.2% of the locations in the final sample. In 2014, the team cross-checked 15.6% of the locations in the final sample.	The percentages of locations audited by cross-checking in the 2014 and 2022 surveys match, so they are comparable in this respect.

<sup>9</sup> The reasons for the study’s specific geography are explained on pages 27–28 of the English version of the baseline report, and 29–30 of the Spanish version (IJM, 2015).

Two methodological differences could influence the comparability of results:

1. **Composition of the investigative team:** in 2014, there were three foreign investigators from Latin America, two from the United States, and one Dominican. In 2022, each pair had a Dominican and a foreigner from Latin America. In both cases, the investigators had vast investigative police experience.
  - a. IJM does not expect the results to be any less comparable because of differences in the composition of the investigative team, since (1) both teams identified age with similar accuracy during training (76% in 2014 and 79% in 2022) and (2) the teams cross-checked each other to confirm 15.6% of counts in 2014 and 15.2% in 2022. The changes in the teams' makeup in 2022 simply allowed for greater efficiency and safety, taking advantage of IJM's program experience and the knowledge of experts in the National Police's Anti-Trafficking Department (ATD).
2. **Sampling framework:** the main difference between the two studies is the universe and sample sizes. The baseline study had an "actual universe" of 210 locations (163 establishments and 47 public spaces) and a "final sample" of 206 locations (150 establishments and 56 public spaces).<sup>10</sup> The endline study had a final universe of 152 locations (124 establishments and 28 public spaces), and the final sample had 132 locations (106 establishments and 26 public spaces). In other words, the 2022 sample size was 62.9% of the 2014 one. However, IJM believes that the 2022 universe of 152 locations captures the current reality for several reasons:
  - a. **Proactiveness of authorities in prosecuting CSEC and TIP:** IJM relied heavily on the knowledge of government authorities to determine the universe of both studies. In 2014, authorities' knowledge was accompanied by a lack of prosecution, while in 2022, their knowledge was tied to locations where they had prosecuted cases. In 2014, the Dominican government had just created specialized anti-trafficking units within the Office of the Attorney General (*Ministerio Público*) and the National Police and did not frequently prosecute CSEC. An exhaustive review of ATD records and the case files of 22 offices of the Attorney General found that the ATD had no record of any cases of CSEC or sex trafficking prior to 2014, and the Office of the Attorney General only recorded eight cases from 2010 to 2013 (IJM, 2022). But from 2014 to 2021, the ATD recorded 130 cases and the Office of the Attorney General 90. Convictions followed the same trend. There were two cases that resulted in a conviction for sex trafficking or CSEC from 2010 to 2013. In the following four-year period (2014–2017), there were 18 convictions, or nine times more than the previous period. This intensified prosecution naturally reduces the number of locations that can be studied. Qualitative data from this endline study supports this interpretation. For example, in the initial mapping exercise, investigators evaluated and ultimately excluded nine locations that had been closed by the Office of the Attorney General.
  - b. **Saturation:** the initial universe for the 2022 study contained several inadvertently duplicated locations that were removed when the study team refined the list. These locations were referenced by different sources, showing that the team achieved saturation.

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<sup>10</sup> The final sample included additional locations identified in the catchment area of the 141 locations in the "actual sample" assigned to investigators. The final universe is therefore understood to contain 275 locations (210 in the actual universe plus the 65 added from the "final sample"). But this figure was not confirmed by the 2014 report, so IJM focuses on the "actual universe" of 210.

- c. **Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sex industry in the Dominican Republic:** determining whether the COVID-19 pandemic caused the overall sex industry to shrink is beyond the scope of this study. However, commercial sex typically occurs in crowded social spaces like bars, discos, clubs, car washes, etc. These are the types of businesses that would have been impacted by mandatory government closures at the beginning of the pandemic, as well as by an economic recession. It is therefore possible that there are simply fewer establishments with commercial sex in 2022 than in 2014.

Ultimately, IJM does not consider the differences in the makeup of the investigative team or the size of the final universe and sample to have had a significant impact on the comparability of the 2014 and 2022 results. IJM considers the 2022 study to reflect the current reality of CSEC in the Dominican Republic.



## SECTION 3.0

# RESULTS

CSEC is 78% less prevalent than in 2014.

## Key findings

- The overall prevalence of CSEC has declined significantly, from 10.0% in 2014 to 2.2% in 2022. In the eight years since the baseline study, the prevalence of CSEC has fallen by 78.0%.
  - In 2014, one of every 10 people involved in commercial sex was a minor being sexually exploited. In 2022, one out of every 45 people involved in commercial sex is a minor being sexually exploited.
- In 2022, investigators were promised minors for commercial sexual exploitation in 2.3% of surveyed locations, compared to 25.2% of the locations studied in 2014.
- Commercial sexual exploitation of children is no longer geographically widespread. In 2014, investigators observed minors in CSE or were promised children for CSE in 95% of cities (19/20), compared to 25% (5/20) in 2022.

# General prevalence levels

In 2022, the rate of sexual exploitation of minors in the Dominican sex industry is 2.2% (27/1203). In other words, one out of every 45 people involved in commercial sex is a minor being sexually exploited. This rate is lower in establishments (1.7%), such as bars and discos, and higher in public spaces (3.4%), like streets, parks, and beaches. The 27 adolescents observed in CSE were at six locations, or 4.5% (6/123) of the locations studied.

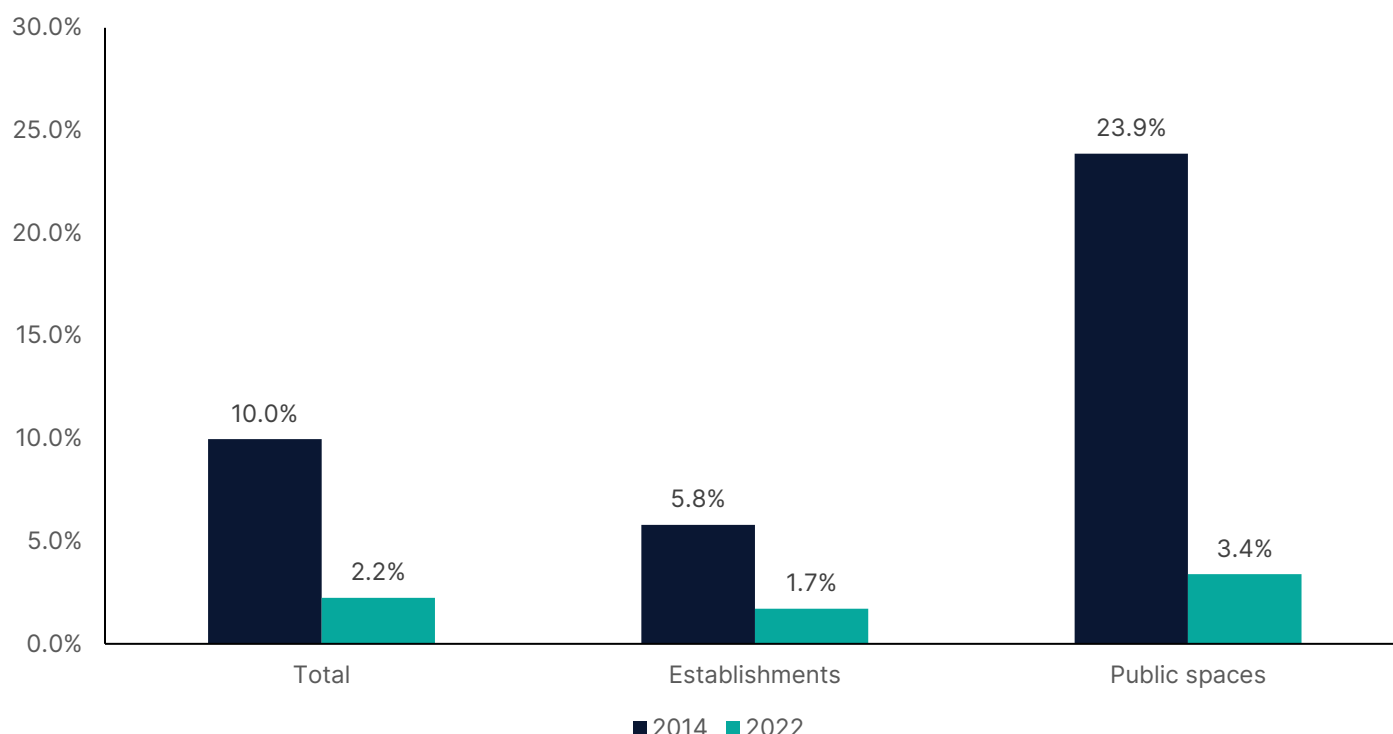
**TABLE 4. PREVALENCE OF CSEC, BY TYPE OF LOCATION**

Type of location	Total number of people observed in commercial sex work (minors and adults)	Minors (0–17 years old) observed in CSE	Minors observed in CSE as a percentage of the total population of sex workers	Young minors (0–14 years old) observed in CSE	Young minors observed in CSE as a percentage of the total population
Establishment	820	14	1.7%	0	0.0%
Public space	383	13	3.4%	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.0%</b>

As shown in Graph 1, the overall prevalence of minors in commercial sexual exploitation has declined significantly, from 10.0% in 2014 to 2.2% in 2022. Over the eight years since the baseline study, the prevalence of CSEC has fallen by 78.0%. In formal establishments, prevalence declined from 5.8% in 2014 to 1.7% in 2022 (a relative reduction of 70.7%). In public spaces, prevalence declined from 23.9% in 2014 to 3.4% in 2022 (a relative reduction of 85.8%). In 2022, investigators did not identify anyone under age 15, in contrast to 2014, when they found 10 minors, or 0.6% (10/1816) of the total population.

Other indicators confirm this reduction in prevalence from 2014 to 2022. At each location surveyed, investigators inquired whether they could be taken to a location with minors or have minors brought to them for sexual services. IJM included this question because CSEC is a crime that perpetrators try to keep hidden. Establishments often do not have minors available on site, but they maintain contact with minors who can be brought in on request.

GRAPH 1. REDUCTION IN PREVALENCE OF MINORS OBSERVED IN CSEC, 2014 / 2022



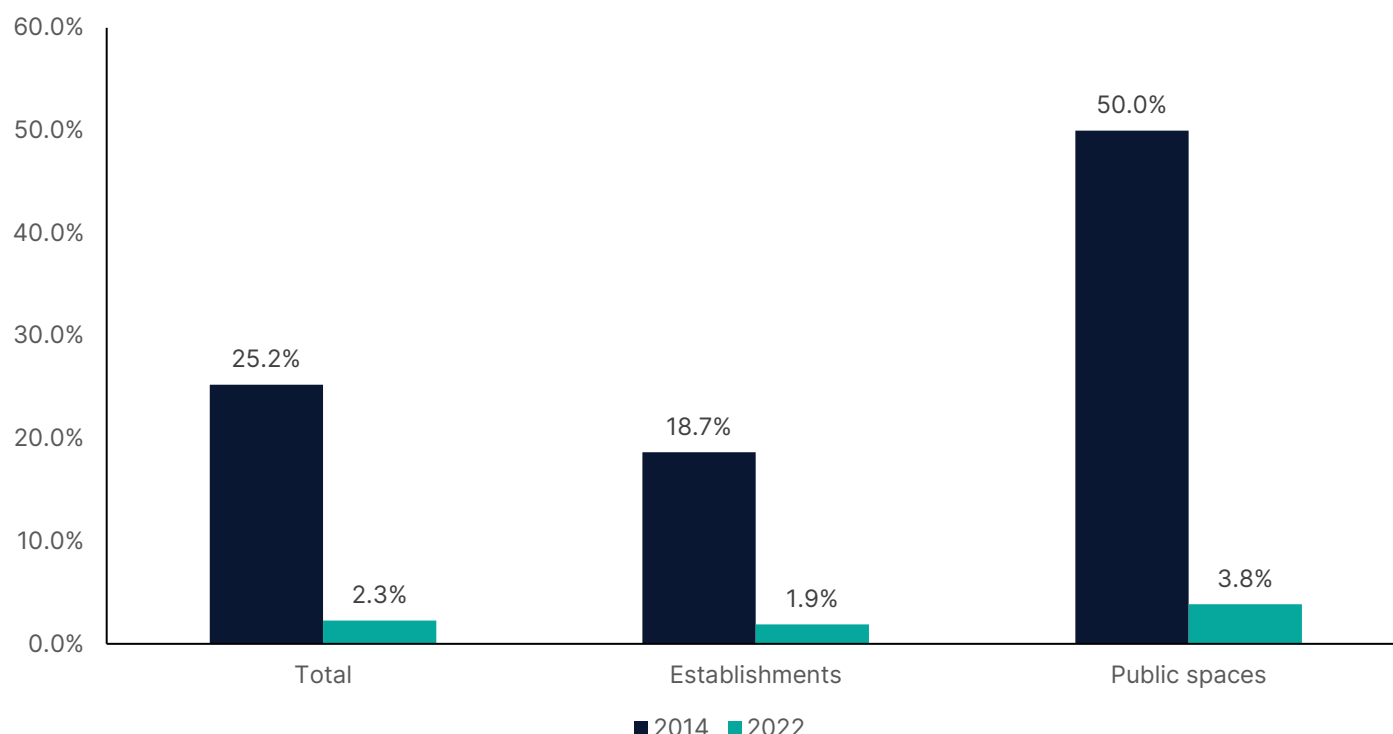
In 2014, investigators were promised minors for sexual exploitation in 25.2% of locations surveyed (52/206).<sup>11</sup> In 2022, investigators were only promised minors at 2.3% of locations (3/132).<sup>12</sup> In other words, in 2014, investigators were promised minors for sexual exploitation at one out of every four locations, in contrast with one out of every 44 locations in 2022. This represents a 91.0% relative reduction in the rate per location of minors offered for sexual exploitation. Graph 2 shows the overall reduction, as well as the reductions for establishments and for public spaces.

In all three interactions in 2022, subjects promised to bring minors to the investigators rather than take investigators to the minors. The three locations where investigators were promised minors were distinct from the six locations where they directly observed minors being sexually exploited. Therefore, there were nine locations, or 6.8% of all locations (9/132), where investigators directly observed or were promised minors for sexual exploitation.

<sup>11</sup> The 2014 study gives two different figures for the number of interactions where investigators were promised minors. Table 10 in the baseline study reports 49 interactions, while Tables 11 and 12 indicate 56 interactions. Table 10 excludes 7 interactions where investigators were promised minors but were not given a precise number. Table 12 also has a note clarifying, "In Santo Domingo Central East, the 8 interactions were across only 5 locations. In Sosúa, the 2 interactions both occurred in the same location." In other words, the 56 interactions occurred across 52 unique locations. IJM confirmed in the 2014 database that these interactions in Sosúa and in the *Distrito Nacional* took place on the street (public spaces). In 2022, the number of interactions is the same as the number of locations where investigators were promised minors. To compare frequency, IJM used the number of locations (instead of interactions) where minors were promised.

<sup>12</sup> Investigators did not directly observe the minors they were promised.

GRAPH 2. PERCENTAGE OF LOCATIONS WHERE INVESTIGATORS WERE PROMISED MINORS FOR CSE, 2014 / 2022



The qualitative data collected during the undercover survey confirm the reduction in prevalence and sometimes associate it with government proactivity. One investigator reported: “We interviewed three women ... I asked for a 17-year-old. One replied, “That’s not allowed. The police will arrest you.” At another location, a different investigator asked “about young people” and the woman said “it can’t be done there.” Investigators reported posted signs discouraging the presence of minors in at least five locations.

#### GEOGRAPHY OF CSEC

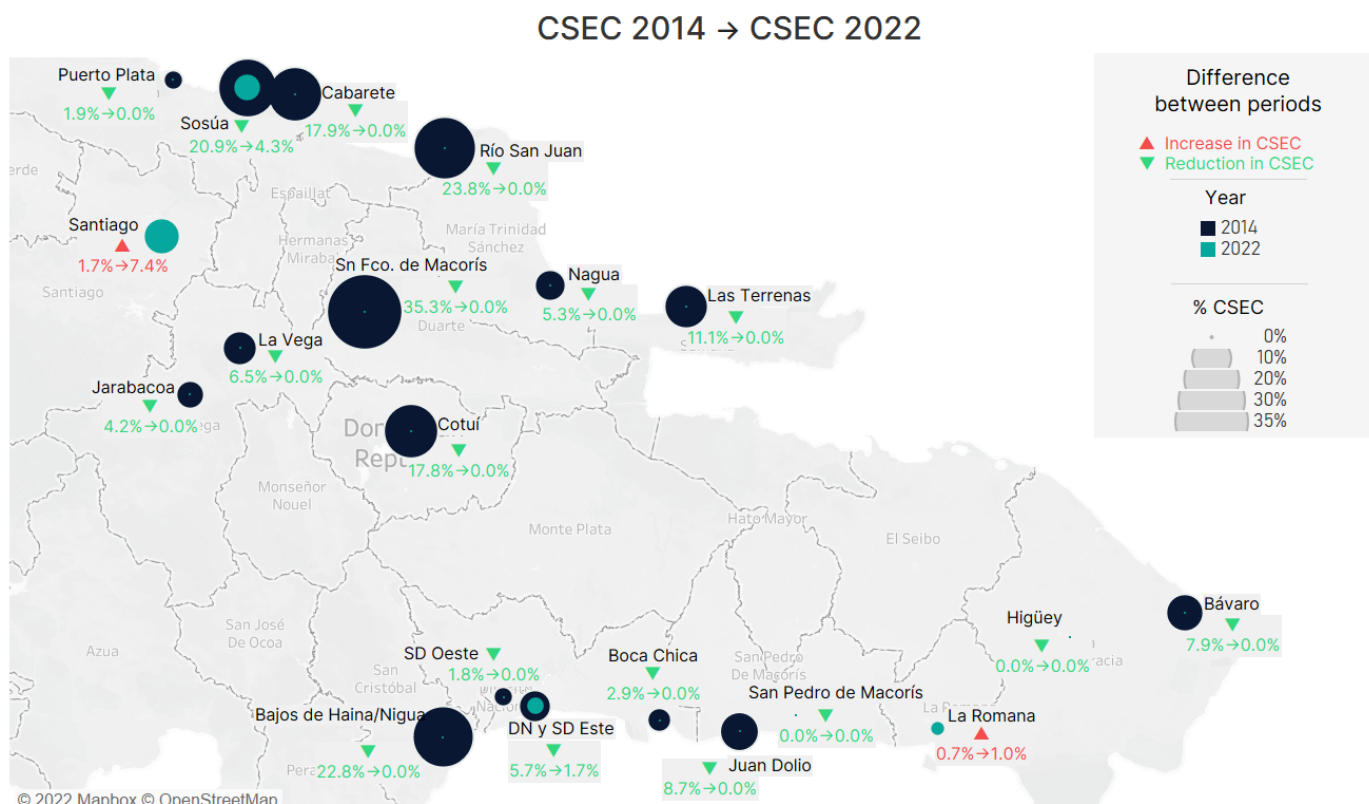
As shown in Table 5, investigators observed minors in CSE in four cities: La Romana, Santiago, Santo Domingo Central (D.N.) and Santo Domingo East, and Sosúa. Of these cities, prevalence was highest in Santiago, 7.4% (7/94), and Sosúa, 4.3% (16/369). Of the six locations where investigators observed minors, three were in Sosúa and the rest were in La Romana, Santiago, and Santo Domingo Central (D.N.) and Santo Domingo East. La Romana and Santiago were also two of the three cities where investigators were promised minors for sexual exploitation. The third was Puerto Plata. Authorities should therefore focus their efforts on Sosúa, La Romana, Santiago, Puerto Plata, and Greater Santo Domingo, with special emphasis on La Romana, Santiago, and Sosúa, which each have more than one location where investigators observed or were promised minors.

A geographic comparison of prevalence in 2014 and 2022 shows that CSEC is no longer geographically widespread. In 2014, minors were offered for sexual services in 90% of the cities studied, while in 2022, **no minors were promised** in 85% of the cities. A similar trend applies for minors observed in CSE. In 2014, investigators observed minors in 95% (19/20) of the cities, while in 2020, they only observed them in 20% (4/20).

Figure 1 shows this geographical decline in the prevalence of minors observed from 2014 to 2022. The dark blue circles represent the prevalence of CSEC in 2014, and the teal circles show prevalence in 2022. For each city, the value to the left is the prevalence in 2014, and the value to the right is the prevalence in 2022. When these values are green, it means prevalence declined. When they are red, prevalence increased.

A range of factors influenced what investigators observed in each city,<sup>13</sup> so the 2014 and 2022 geographic data should not be directly compared. However, Figure 1 reflects general, nationwide patterns. For example, it shows significant declines in several cities and lower prevalence in all cities except Santiago and La Romana. These general trends highlight that CSEC is no longer easily found throughout the country.

FIGURE 1. CHANGE IN PREVALENCE OF CSEC, BY CITY 2014 / 2022



<sup>13</sup> For example, investigators might have collected data on a different day of the week in 2022 than in 2014, and they may have surveyed a different number of locations in each city. Despite numerous attempts, investigators were unable to find locations with sex workers in Juan Dolio and La Vega in 2022, so a direct comparison cannot be made.



**TABLE 5. NUMBER OF MINORS OBSERVED IN CSE AND PROMISED FOR CSE, BY CITY**

City	Total number of people observed in commercial sex work (minors and adults)	Minors (0–17 years old) observed in CSE	Interactions in which investigators were promised minors for CSE	Minors promised for CSE	Day(s) of the week on which data was collected
Bajos de Haina/Nigua	16	-	-	-	Thursday, Sunday
Bávaro	74	-	-	-	Saturday, Sunday
Boca Chica	43	-	-	-	Wednesday, Sunday
Cabarete	7	-	-	-	Saturday
Cotuí	5	-	-	-	Thursday
Higüey	62	-	-	-	Saturday, Sunday
Jarabacoa	3	-	-	-	Thursday
Juan Dolio	-	-	-	-	Wednesday, Sunday
La Romana	100	1	1	1	Friday, Saturday
La Vega	-	-	-	-	Thursday
Las Terrenas	27	-	-	-	Tuesday
Nagua	17	-	-	-	Tuesday
Puerto Plata	60	-	1	1	Thursday, Friday, Saturday
Río San Juan	18	-	-	-	Thursday
San Pedro de Macorís	55	-	-	-	Friday
San Francisco de Macorís	9	-	-	-	Friday
Santiago	94	7	1	1	Wednesday, Thursday
Santo Domingo Central (D.N.) and Santo Domingo East	177	3	-	-	Monday, Thursday, Friday, Sunday
Santo Domingo West	67	-	-	-	Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday
Sosúa	369	16	-	-	Friday, Saturday
<b>Total</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	

## PREVALENCE BY TYPE OF LOCATION

As Table 6 shows, investigators primarily observed CSEC in bars and on streets/*malecones*. This is consistent with 2014 data. Of the three locations where investigators were promised minors for sexual services, two were pool halls and the other was a park.

**TABLE 6. NUMBER OF MINORS OBSERVED IN CSE AND PROMISED FOR CSE, BY TYPE OF LOCATION**

Type of location	Total population observed in commercial sex work (minors and adults)	Minors (0–17 years old) observed in CSE	Interactions in which investigators were promised minors for CSE	Minors promised for CSE
Bar	449	13	-	-
Street / malecón	360	13	-	-
<i>Colmado</i> (convenience store)	42	1	-	-
Pool hall ( <i>billar</i> )	9	-	2	2
<i>Cabaña</i> (hourly motel)	-	-	-	-
Car wash	102	-	-	-
Private house	6	-	-	-
Disco or club	173	-	-	-
Hotel	36	-	-	-
Park	23	-	1	1
Beach	-	-	-	-
Other	3	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

## TRENDS BY DAY OF THE WEEK ON WHICH DATA WAS COLLECTED

As shown in Table 7, investigators observed CSEC on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Since investigators rarely found CSEC, it is not possible to draw conclusions about which days of the week CSEC is most common.

**TABLE 7. NUMBER OF LOCATIONS SURVEYED AND SEX WORKERS OBSERVED, BY DAY OF THE WEEK ON WHICH DATA WAS COLLECTED**

Day of the week on which data was collected	Locations surveyed	Total number of people observed in commercial sex work (minors and adults)	Minors (0–17 years old) observed in CSE
Sunday	12	69	-
Tuesday	10	44	-
Wednesday	24	195	10
Thursday	20	89	-
Friday	33	506	11
Saturday	33	300	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>27</b>

The most productive days for data collection were usually Friday and Saturday, on which 50% (66/132) of the locations were surveyed. The study was not intentionally designed to survey half the locations on those days; Friday and Saturday simply turned out to be the days on which most locations were open and active.

Table 7 shows that investigators had difficulty finding locations that were open on low-activity days, especially Tuesday. As explained in the Methods section, IJM decided to conduct surveys on the same days of the week as 2014 to enhance the comparability of results between the baseline and endline studies. However, based on its experience in 2022, IJM recommends that future studies prioritize data collection between Wednesday and Sunday to increase productivity and observe as many sex workers as possible.

# Observations about the current mode of operation of CSEC

Having presented the study's findings about the prevalence of CSEC, this section describes the current form CSEC takes to inform government efforts in prosecution. As shown in Table 8, investigators witnessed an intermediary benefitting from CSE for only one of the 27 minors observed (a rate of 3.7%). For eight of the minors observed (29.6%), there was no evidence at all of a third party benefitting from their exploitation. Three of these eight minors were surveyed on a street where investigators observed no intermediary involvement. The other five were surveyed in a bar where the intermediary was a female sex worker who negotiated for the group. The investigative team stated that "women came and went constantly." In other words, the bar benefited from the presence of CSEC, but it was not directly involved in selling sex. The same is true of the other three establishments where investigators observed minors in CSE.

Investigators noted evidence of vulnerability in 18 of the 27 minors observed (66.7%). For all 18, the observed vulnerability was substance or alcohol abuse. Minors reported reasons for their exploitation in two of the six cases in which minors were observed. In both cases, the minors reported economic hardship.

**TABLE 8. SIGNS OF EXPLOITATION BY THIRD PARTIES AND VULNERABILITY FOR MINORS OBSERVED**

Evidence of third party exploitation	Minors with signs of third-party exploitation and vulnerability (N = 27)	Percentage of minors with signs of third-party exploitation and vulnerability (N = 27)
Presence of intermediary, pimp, madam, brothel/establishment owner/manager (IPMBO)	1	3.7%
Minor works for an establishment where sex is sold	-	-
Someone other than minor handles the payment	-	-
Someone other than the minor makes decision on minor providing services.	-	-
A single sex worker speaks for the group of sex workers	-	-
Evidence of vulnerability*	18	66.7%
There was no clear presence of third parties exploiting minors when the information was collected	8	29.6%
<b>*Evidence of vulnerability</b>	<b>Minors with signs of vulnerability</b>	<b>Percentage of minors with signs of vulnerability</b>
Evidence of substance or alcohol abuse	18	100.0%
Testimony from the minor about coercion or deception	-	-
Evidence of fear	-	-
Presence of disabilities	-	-

Qualitative data shows that CSEC cases are often subtle and require patience and time for investigators to build trust and be able to collect relevant information. A description from the investigative team for a case in Santiago illustrates this point:

The establishment does not look like a place where sex is sold, but when you go in, you see the minors all sitting around a table. When you offer to buy them a drink, they accept, and they talk to you. At first, they don't offer any information, but when they get comfortable, they talk about leaving the location with you. They negotiate a price of 1000 to 2000 pesos.<sup>14</sup> This is apart from the 1000 pesos you have to pay to the establishment for leaving before the end of business hours. One of the minors has a notebook where she documents each outing.

Investigators had a similar experience in a case in which they were promised a minor for CSE. After saying that they wanted a place with more women, the investigators reported that:

The Venezuelan who owned the establishment told us he had women of all ages: foreigners, Venezuelans, Dominicans, and [he showed a catalog] on his cell phone [with] lots of women. When we asked him for minors, he said he could get us whatever we wanted. We exchanged cell phone numbers.

The three cases where investigators observed minors in CSE in Sosúa followed a loose pattern. In each case, a female sex worker negotiated for the group. Sosúa was also the only city in which CSEC was identified with foreign clients present. In one location, the investigative team recorded “around 20 *gringo* men, mostly African Americans.” Sosúa was also the only city where investigators identified a foreign minor (Haitian).

As for the presence of police authorities, a street in Sosúa was the only location where investigators observed a minor in CSE with police in the vicinity. Four police officers were patrolling the area. At another location, investigators were promised a minor for CSE in a park in Santiago where 10 police officers were present. The investigative team noted that “it is common to see police patrols interacting with sex workers at this location.”

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<sup>14</sup> As of October 2022, 1000 Dominican pesos is worth roughly \$18.50.

# General observations about minors and adults in the sex industry

## NATIONALITY OF FOREIGN SEX WORKERS

TABLE 9. NATIONALITY OF FOREIGN ADULT SEX WORKERS AND MINORS IN CSE

Nationality	Adult sex workers (18+ years old)	Minors (0–17 years old)	Total
Venezuelan	36	-	36
Colombian	13	-	13
Haitian	13	1	14
Total	62	1	63

As shown in Table 9, investigators identified 63 foreign sex workers, or 5.2% (63/1203) of the entire population of sex workers. They only observed one foreign minor in CSE, which means 96.3% (26/27) of the minors that were observed in this study are Dominican. Venezuelans make up the largest group of foreigners, followed by Colombians and Haitians. There were four locations with Haitian sex workers, four with Colombians, and 12 with Venezuelans. Since some locations had foreigners from multiple countries, there were 16 unique locations with foreign sex workers, for a total of 12.1% of the locations surveyed (16/132).

## PROFILE OF INTERMEDIARY, PIMP, MADAM, ESTABLISHMENT OWNER/MANAGER

As detailed in Table 10, the most typical intermediary is a fellow sex worker who negotiates for the group. The second most typical scenario is that there is no intermediary involved. When there is an intermediary who is not a fellow sex worker, they are usually the owner or manager of the establishment where sex is sold. The absence of third-party involvement suggests a certain autonomy for sex workers in the country. However, the absence of an observed intermediary for this study does not necessarily mean that no third party directly or indirectly benefits, especially in establishments. For example, a sex worker may negotiate for a group of sex workers at a bar where the owner collects no money until the end of the night. Investigators would not have observed this practice in the undercover survey because they did not stay in the same location the whole night.

TABLE 10. TYPE OF INTERMEDIARY, BY TYPE OF ESTABLISHMENT

Type of location	Sex worker who negotiated for the group	Unknown	Owner	Manager	Madam	No observed intermediary involvement	Pimp	Total
Bar	20	-	9	6	2	19	-	56
Pool hall	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	3
Street/waterfront	6	-	1	-	1	15	-	23
Car wash	5	-	3	1	-	1	-	10
Private house	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
<i>Colmado</i> (convenience store)	7	-	-	-	-	1	-	8
Disco or club	13	-	2	2	-	6	-	23
Hotel	3	-	-	-	-	1	-	4
Other	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Park	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>132</b>

In this study, 93.2% (82/88) of the intermediaries observed were Dominican, as shown in Table 11. Investigators recorded the gender of 84 of the intermediaries. Sixty-six, or 78.6% (66/84) were women, while 21.4% (18/84) were men.

This study only documented the presence of intermediaries; it did not state whether they benefited financially. Certainly, some intermediaries benefitted from their role. Owners of a bar where sex is sold, for example, receive direct or indirect benefits from their role as an intermediary. But this is not always true in other cases, especially for sex workers who negotiate for a group of workers. Of the group of intermediaries who definitely benefited economically (pimp, madam, brothel/establishment owner/manager), 86.2% are Dominican (25/29), 60.7% (17/28<sup>15</sup>) are men, and 39.3% (11/28) are women.

TABLE 11. NATIONALITY AND GENDER, BY TYPE OF INTERMEDIARY

Nationality	Sex worker who negotiated for the group	Unknown	Establishment owner	Establishment manager	Madam	Pimp	Total
Dominican	55	2	14	8	3	-	82
American	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Haitian	1	-	-	1	-	-	2
Other Caribbean	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Venezuelan	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Unknown	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>88</b>
Female	54	1	5	4	2	-	66
Male	-	1	11	5	-	1	18
Not recorded	3	-	-	-	1	-	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>88</b>

<sup>15</sup> The denominator is 28 because the investigators did not record the gender of one of the 29 intermediaries.



## NATIONALITY OF OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT

Apart from the information gathered about sex workers and intermediaries, investigators also collected data on the presence of other foreigners. “Other foreigner” typically refers to clients, but the data collection form used in 2014 and 2022 did not ask investigators to state why the person was there. Foreigners were present at 17 of the locations surveyed (12.9%). The most common nationality was American, at 84.1% of all foreigners present.

**TABLE 12. NATIONALITY OF OTHER FOREIGNERS PRESENT**

Nationality	Number observed	Location where they were observed
White—unknown nationality	2	1
American	58	14
European	2	1
Haitian	7	3
Total	69	19

## SECTION 4.0

# RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's results indicate that the prevalence of CSEC has declined significantly from 2014 to 2022. However, IJM makes the following recommendations to ensure prevalence levels remain low and to enable continued improvement in the public justice system's response to CSEC.

#### INVESTIGATING CSEC CASES

The qualitative and quantitative data reveal the following needs in order to conduct effective criminal investigations of CSEC.

1. **Time and resources:** Government authorities need to make sure that the specialized units of the National Police and Office of the Attorney General have permanent funding. The most direct and sustainable path to achieving this funding is by amending Law 137-03.

The CSEC cases identified in this study demonstrated a pattern: investigators had to invest time and resources to proactively investigate multiple cities and locations to determine whether CSEC was occurring. These efforts require vehicles, funds, and personnel for undercover investigations. Without permanent and sufficient funding for proactive investigations, it will be difficult to sustain the reduction in the prevalence of CSEC observed in this study.

- a. **Technology:** When allocating resources, the Office of the Attorney General and National Police should make sure that specialized units have the basic technological equipment they need for effective investigations. As explained in the Results section, investigators sometimes need cell phones to collect evidence. Without basic technologies like cell phones and computers, it is difficult to gather evidence and build a strong case. In addition to aiding specific investigations, technological equipment can help develop data that can inform the public justice system's response. The Office of the Attorney General and the National Police need to have sufficient personnel trained in advanced investigative techniques like telecommunications surveillance.
  - b. **Access to databases:** In addition to leveraging its own data, the Office of the Attorney General and the National Police should make sure they have access to other databases from international institutions like Interpol that can aid investigations. Although the large majority of intermediaries and victims were Dominican, the presence of some foreigners involved with CSEC highlights the need for good integration with these international databases.
2. **Investigative capacity and identifying crimes:** As the Results section states, CSEC is often subtle and requires a trained eye to detect. The Police Education Institute and the Academy of the Office of the Attorney General should continue their efforts to provide advanced training for sex trafficking and CSEC investigations. Successful investigations hinge on having highly trained investigators.
  3. **Geographically targeted approach.** This study confirmed the presence of minors in the *Distrito Nacional*, Santiago, La Romana, and Sosúa, and one minor was promised for commercial sexual exploitation in Puerto Plata. As explained in the Results section, there may be CSEC in other cities covered by the study, but the National Police and Office of the Attorney General should focus their efforts on at least the five cities where investigators found minors in CSE or were promised minors for CSE.
  4. **Vulnerable populations.** This study found Venezuelan, Haitian, and Colombian sex workers. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Directorate of Migration, and the Ministry of Labor should

ensure that these especially vulnerable migrant populations have the protections and opportunities they need to live healthy lives in the Dominican Republic.

#### MINORS IN INAPPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS

In various locations where sex is sold, the undercover survey identified minors who were not themselves in commercial sexual exploitation but were working other jobs. These environments jeopardize minors' development and can be a gateway to CSE, given the economic hardship that can lead many young women to work in these locations in the first place. To improve this situation:

1. The National Police and the Office of the Attorney General can more strictly enforce Article 23 of Law 136-03, which prohibits "minors from entering locations where alcohol is consumed."
2. NGOs and government agencies that focus on economic empowerment should continue programs for underprivileged minors, giving them job opportunities in alternative environments.

#### THE CASE OF SOSÚA

The survey found particularly acute conditions for sex workers in Sosúa. In one public space, sex workers gave concerning accounts of harassment by non-specialized police officers.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, IJM investigators noted that the environment was unusually crowded and chaotic; they counted around 200 sex workers, some of whom were minors in CSE, within a small area. IJM has the following recommendations:

1. The National Police should internally evaluate the accounts of police harassment.
  - a. As part of the solution, IJM recommends that the National Police assign more staff to the Anti-Trafficking Department and allow the ATD to focus on this area in Sosúa as a specialized unit.
  - b. Additionally, the National Police should train its non-specialized officers in Sosúa on basic techniques to avoid stigmatizing and help protect sex workers.
2. The National Police, the Office of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Women, and other institutions should evaluate how to make the situation in Sosúa safer for everyone.

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<sup>16</sup> The sex worker said that unless they are with a foreign client in the street, the police arrest them and make them pay a fine to be released. One investigator said: "As we talked in the street, all the women started to run. I asked what was going on. She said it was a National Police patrol ... I asked, 'Why didn't you run?' She said she was with me and the National Police don't bother them in that case."

## SECTION 5.0

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# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1: ANALYSIS OF THE STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REDUCTION IN PREVALENCE

To test the statistical significance of the change in prevalence, IJM posed the following hypotheses:

- Null hypothesis: The prevalence of CSEC in 2022 is the same as the prevalence of CSEC in 2014.
- Alternative hypothesis: The prevalence of CSEC in 2022 is less than the prevalence of CSEC in 2014.

To test these hypotheses, IJM conducted a chi-squared analysis to determine whether the reduction is statistically significant enough to reject the null hypothesis. The chi-squared test yielded the following values:

- Pearson's chi-squared test:  $X^2 = 67.274$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 2.363e-16$

When the p-value is less than 0.05, there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. In this case the p-value is  $2.363e-16$ , so there is enough statistical significance to conclude that CSEC is less prevalent in 2022 than in 2014.

## APPENDIX 2: DATA ON PREVALENCE RATES 2014 / 2022

TABLE 13. PREVALENCE OF CSEC, BY TYPE OF LOCATION 2014 / 2022

	Type of location	Total number of people observed in commercial sex work (minors and adults)	Minors (0–17 years old) observed in CSE	Minors observed in CSE as a percentage of the total population of sex workers	Young minors (0–14 years old) observed in CSE	Young minors observed in CSE as a percentage of the total population
2014	Establishment	1397	81	5.8%	0	0.0%
	Public space	419	100	23.9%	10	2.4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1816</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>10.0%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0.6%</b>
2022	Establishment	820	14	1.7%	0	0.0%
	Public space	383	13	3.4%	0	0.0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.0%</b>

TABLE 14. CONFIRMATION METHODS FOR “CONFIRMED” MINORS<sup>17</sup> 2022

Confirmation method	Minors confirmed using this method	Percentage of minors confirmed using this method (N=5)
Minor stated age	3	60.0%
Minor stated birth date/year	-	-
Minor stated date/year of 15-year-old “coming-of-age” party ( <i>quinceañera</i> )	-	-
Minor stated graduation year	-	-
Intermediary, pimp, or madam stated age of minor	-	-
Another person stated their age	-	-
Other	2	40.0%

<sup>17</sup> As part of the study methodology, investigators recorded instances when they were able to confirm a person’s age using a method that did not depend on the investigator’s perception. All confirmed minors were observed in formal establishments.

**TABLE 15. NUMBER OF MINORS OBSERVED IN CSE, BY TYPE OF LOCATION 2014 / 2022<sup>18</sup>**

	Type of location	Total number of people observed in commercial sex work (minors and adults)	Minors (0–17 years old) observed in CSE	Young minors (0–14 years old) observed in CSE
2014	Street	332	81	3
	Bar	509	36	-
	Brothel	378	16	-
	Disco or club	273	16	-
	Beach	30	14	6
	Car wash	184	8	-
	Park	56	4	1
	Private house	26	4	-
	<i>Colmado</i> (convenience store)	12	1	-
	Waterfront area	1	1	-
	Beauty salon	3	-	-
	Restaurant	12	-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1816</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>10</b>
2022	Bar	449	13	-
	Street or waterfront	360	13	-
	<i>Colmado</i> (convenience store)	42	1	-
	Pool hall	9	-	2
	<i>Cabaña</i> (hourly motel)	-	-	-
	Car wash	102	-	-
	Private house	6	-	-
	Disco or club	173	-	-
	Hotel	36	-	-
	Park	23	-	1
	Beach	-	-	-
	Other	3	-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>

<sup>18</sup> There are a few differences in how locations are categorized between the 2014 and 2022 studies. For example, the 2022 study does not use the term “brothel.” Investigators ultimately surveyed the same type of locations, but the team simply made a few minor adjustments to how they were categorized.

**TABLE 16. MINORS OBSERVED IN CSE, BY CITY 2014 / 2022**

	City	Population	Total number of people observed in commercial sex work (minors and adults)	Minors (0–17 years old) observed in CSE	Young minors (0–14 years old) observed in CSE	Day(s) of the week on which data was collected
2014	Bávaro	43,982	151	12	0	Wednesday
	Boca Chica	78,882	69	2	1	Saturday
	Bajos de Haina and Nigua	Haina: 83,582 Nigua: 30,268	79	18	6	Thursday, Friday
	Cabarete	14,606	56	10	0	Wednesday
	Cotuí	64,133	45	8	0	Friday
	Higüey	168,501	94	0	0	Wednesday
	Jarabacoa	40,556	48	2	0	Saturday, Sunday
	Juan Dolio	2,488	23	2	0	Saturday
	La Romana	130,426	138	1	0	Tuesday
	Las Terrenas	18,829	126	14	0	Saturday, Sunday
	La Vega	202,864	46	3	0	Friday
	Nagua	40,611	19	1	1	Saturday
	Puerto Plata	128,240	54	1	0	Tuesday
	Río San Juan	15,168	21	5	0	Wednesday
	Santiago	591,985	181	3	1	Thursday
	Santo Domingo Central (D.N.) and Santo Domingo East	965,040	141	8	0	Friday
	Santo Domingo West		110	2	0	Thursday
	San Francisco de Macorís	149,508	17	6	0	Thursday
	Sosúa	29,653	398	83	1	Tuesday, Wednesday
	San Pedro de Macorís	195,307	0	0	0	Tuesday
	Total	<b>2,994,629</b>	<b>1816</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>10</b>	
2022	Bajos de Haina/Nigua		16	-	-	Thursday, Sunday
	Bávaro		74	-	-	Saturday, Sunday
	Boca Chica		43	-	-	Wednesday, Sunday
	Cabarete		7	-	-	Saturday
	Cotuí		5	-	-	Thursday
	Higüey		62	-	-	Saturday, Sunday

Jarabacoa		3	-	-	Thursday
Juan Dolio		-	-	-	Wednesday, Sunday
La Romana		100	1	-	Friday, Saturday
La Vega		-	-	-	Thursday
Las Terrenas		27	-	-	Tuesday
Nagua		17	-	-	Tuesday
Puerto Plata		60	-	-	Thursday, Friday, Saturday
Río San Juan		18	-	-	Thursday
San Pedro de Macorís		55	-	-	Friday
San Francisco de Macorís		9	-	-	Friday
Santiago		94	7	-	Wednesday, Thursday
Santo Domingo Central (D.N.) and Santo Domingo East		177	3	-	Monday, Thursday, Friday, Sunday
Santo Domingo West		67	-	-	Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday
Sosúa		369	16	-	Friday, Saturday
<b>Total</b>		<b>1203</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>-</b>	

2014 population data is from the 2010 National Census.

**TABLE 17. NUMBER OF LOCATIONS SURVEYED AND SEX WORKERS OBSERVED, BY DAY OF THE WEEK ON WHICH DATA WAS COLLECTED 2014 / 2022**

	Day of the week on which data was collected	Locations surveyed	Total number of people observed in commercial sex work (minors and adults)	Minors (0–17 years old) observed in CSE	Young minors (0–14 years old) observed in CSE
2014	Sunday	5	19	-	-
	Tuesday	35	349	43	1
	Wednesday	45	563	69	-
	Thursday	43	416	29	7
	Friday	41	219	19	-
	Saturday	37	250	21	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>1816</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>10</b>
2022	Sunday	12	69	-	-
	Tuesday	10	44	-	-
	Wednesday	24	195	10	-
	Thursday	20	89	-	-
	Friday	33	506	11	-
	Saturday	33	300	6	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>1203</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>-</b>

**TABLE 18. NUMBER OF MINORS PROMISED FOR CSE, BY TYPE OF LOCATION 2014 / 2022**

	Type of location	Interactions in which investigators were promised minors for CSE	Minors promised for CSE
2014	Bar	13	24
	Beach	1	2
	Brothel	4	4
	Car wash	2	8
	<i>Colmado</i> (convenience store)	2	10
	Disco or Night Club	5	6
	Beauty salon	1	4
	Waterfront area	1	4
	Park	3	8
	Restaurant	1	1
	Street	23	48
	<b>Total<sup>19</sup></b>	<b>56</b>	<b>119</b>
2022	Bar	-	-
	Street or waterfront	-	-
	<i>Colmado</i> (convenience store)	-	-
	Pool hall	2	2
	<i>Cabaña</i> (hourly motel)	-	-
	Car wash	-	-
	Private house	-	-
	Disco or club	-	-
	Hotel	-	-
	Park	1	1
	Beach	-	-
	Other	-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

<sup>19</sup> In 2014, the total of 56 interactions took place across 52 unique locations. In 2022, the three interactions occurred at three different locations. See footnote 11 for more information.



**TABLE 19. NUMBER OF MINORS PROMISED FOR CSE, BY CITY 2014 / 2022<sup>20</sup>**

	Type of location	Interactions in which investigators were promised minors for CSE	Minors promised for CSE
2014	Bajos de Haina/Nigua	5	11
	Bávaro	2	4
	Boca Chica	4	13
	Cabarete	2	3
	Cotuí	2	3
	Higüey	3	6
	Jarabacoa	2	6
	Juan Dolio	2	4
	La Romana	2	2
	La Vega	5	10
	Las Terrenas	5	10
	Nagua	1	6
	Puerto Plata	3	8
	Río San Juan	0	0
	San Pedro de Macorís	3	6
	San Francisco de Macorís	8	12
	Santiago	2	4
	Santo Domingo Central (D.N.) and Santo Domingo East	3	8
	Santo Domingo West	0	0
	Sosúa	2	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>119</b>
2022	Bajos de Haina/Nigua	-	-
	Bávaro	-	-
	Boca Chica	-	-
	Cabarete	-	-
	Cotuí	-	-
	Higüey	-	-
	Jarabacoa	-	-
	Juan Dolio	-	-
	La Romana	1	1
	La Vega	-	-
	Las Terrenas	-	-
	Nagua	-	-
	Puerto Plata	1	1

<sup>20</sup> In 2014, the total of 56 interactions took place across 52 unique locations. In 2022, the three interactions occurred at three different locations. See footnote 11 for more information.

Río San Juan	-	-
San Pedro de Macorís	-	-
San Francisco de Macorís	-	-
Santiago	1	1
Santo Domingo Central (D.N.) and Santo Domingo East	-	-
Santo Domingo West	-	-
Sosúa	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

### APPENDIX 3: OTHER TABLES ON PREVALENCE OF CSEC IN 2022

**TABLE 20. NATIONALITY OF FOREIGN ADULT SEX WORKERS AND MINORS IN CSE, BY TYPE OF LOCATION<sup>21</sup>**

Establishment	Nationality	Type of location	Adult SW (18+)	Minors (0–17 years old)	Number of locations
Public space	Haitian	Street or waterfront	6	-	2
Establishment	Colombian	Bar	7	-	2
		Disco or club	6	-	2
	Haitian	Bar	5	1	1
		Hotel	2	-	1
	Venezuelan	Bar	18	-	6
		Pool hall	1	-	1
		Car wash	1	-	1
		Disco or club	16	-	4
Total			62	1	20

<sup>21</sup> Of the total of 20 locations, there were 16 unique locations, since there were several nationalities in a single location in some cases.

**TABLE 21. POLICE PRESENCE AT SURVEYED LOCATIONS**

As explained in the Observations about the current mode of operation of CSEC section, there was only one location where investigators observed both police presence and minors in CSE.

City	Establishments			Public spaces		
	Number of locations surveyed	Number of locations with police presence	Number of police present	Number of locations surveyed	Number of locations with police presence	Number of police present
Bajos de Haina, Nigua	4	-	-	-	-	-
Bávaro	7	1	4	-	-	-
Boca Chica	3	-	-	1	1	5
Cabarete	1	-	-	-	-	-
Cotuí	1	-	-	-	-	-
Higüey	9	1	2	-	-	-
Jarabacoa	1	-	-	-	-	-
La Romana	11	-	-	-	-	-
Las Terrenas	4	-	-	1	0	0
Nagua	4	-	-	1	0	0
Puerto Plata	8	1	2	-	-	-
Río San Juan	5	-	-	-	-	-
San Francisco de Macorís	6	-	-	-	-	-
San Pedro de Macorís	2	-	-	-	-	-
Santiago	8	-	-	2	2	14
Santo Domingo Central (D.N.) and Santo Domingo East	12	2	16	18	2	6
Santo Domingo West	9	-	-	2	-	-
Sosúa	11	2	8	1	1	4
Total	106	7	32	26	6	29

