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|  | Response to the Special Rapporteur on the sale and exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material |
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|  | Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana  Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance  March, 2022 |

Contents

[Introduction 2](#_Toc97960929)

[Question One: Collected data, including updated data on vulnerable groups of children and information pertinent to the reporting examples of vulnerable groups of children under the framework of the SDGs. 2](#_Toc97960930)

[SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls 2](#_Toc97960931)

[Target 5.3 – Eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation 2](#_Toc97960932)

[SDG 8 – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all 5](#_Toc97960933)

[Child labor 5](#_Toc97960934)

[SDG 16 – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels 7](#_Toc97960935)

[Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children 7](#_Toc97960936)

[Question Two: Information on how vulnerable children are at exacerbated threats to sale and sexual exploitation, with links to the situation of deprivation of other SDGs. 11](#_Toc97960937)

[Question Three: The manifestations of sale and sexual exploitation in relation to the specified SDG targets. 11](#_Toc97960938)

[Question Four: Protection needs and contextual challenges amid the efforts to combat sale and sexual exploitation of children 12](#_Toc97960939)

[COVID-19 12](#_Toc97960940)

[Guyana’s geographic span and porous borders 12](#_Toc97960941)

[Political instability 12](#_Toc97960942)

[Question Five: Practical measures taken to address the vulnerabilities in institutional, family, and online settings to ensure no child is left behind with respect to protection against sale and sexual exploitation: 13](#_Toc97960943)

[Child labor 13](#_Toc97960944)

[**Child abuse** 15](#_Toc97960945)

[Trafficking in Persons 17](#_Toc97960946)

[Child marriage 18](#_Toc97960947)

[Conclusions 19](#_Toc97960948)

# **Introduction**

1. The Government of Guyana is pleased to provide the responses contained herein to the Special Rapporteur on the sale and exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography, and other child sexual abuse material.
2. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Government of Guyana remains resolute and continues to take progressive steps towards upholding the rights of all children and preventing every form of exploitation or abuse to which children may be exposed. The “best interest of the child” principle in enshrined in the Guyana Constitution and guides the work of the executive, Courts, law enforcement agencies, and Government Ministries and sub-agencies who work with children, families, and vulnerable groups.
3. Guyana’s population is relatively young, with approximately 41 percent of the population being 19 years or younger. Hence, the protection of children is important for Guyana’s future development.
4. The Rapporteur is advised that, within the meaning of Article 2 of the Optional Protocol, the sale of children is not practiced in Guyana. This report contains the most recent available data on the forms of abuse of children that exist in Guyana. The report is also organized according to the SDG targets specified by the Special Rapporteur, i.e., targets 5.3, 8.7 and 16.2.

# **Question One: Collected data, including updated data on vulnerable groups of children and information pertinent to the reporting examples of vulnerable groups of children under the framework of the SDGs.**

## **SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

### **Target 5.3 – Eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation**

* **Child marriages and forced marriages**

1. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Guyana remains committed to protecting and respecting the rights and interest of every child living in Guyana. Legally, a child is anyone under the age of 18, which is the established age of majority in Guyana[[1]](#footnote-2).
2. Prior to 2004, the age of sexual consent in Guyana was 13. However, in 2002, a Parliamentary Special Select Committee was established to investigate raising the age of consent and promulgate legislative changes to reflect the new age at which a person may legally consent to sexual activity. After wide consultations with numerous individuals

and groups across the country, including formal Hearings held by the Parliamentary Special Select Committee, the **Age of Consent Act (22/2004)** was passed in the National Assembly on November 29, 2004, and assented to on November 30, 2005.

1. The **Age of Consent Act** amended, inter alia, **section 32 of the Marriage Act, Cap 45:01.** The minimum legal age for marriage is set out in the **Marriage Act Cap 45:01, Laws of Guyana,** which specifies the requirements for a marriage to be legally registered in Guyana.
2. Once a person has attained the age of majority, that person may be legally married without requiring the consent of another person[[2]](#footnote-3). However, arising out of the consultations on the Age of Consent Act, the Marriage Act also provides that, where either party to a marriage, not being a widow or widower or a divorced person, is under the age of 18 but above the age of 16, they may still be legally married, provided that the consent of the appropriate persons, i.e., a parent or guardian, has been secured. **Section 32(1)**, however, makes it clear that any marriage involving a person below age 16 is void *ab initio*. Accordingly, no marriage involving a child under the age of 16 can be legally registered in Guyana.
3. Consistent with the provisions of the Marriage Act, the **Sexual Offences Act 2010, Cap 8:03, Law of Guyana,** criminalizes any form of sexual activity with a child below the

age of 16. **Section 10(1)** of the SOA stipulates that a person who engages in sexual penetration of a child under 16 is guilty of statutory rape, which attracts a penalty of imprisonment for life upon conviction. Any other form of sexual activity with a child is also proscribed at section 11(1)(a), and the applicable punishment on summary conviction is imprisonment for five years, while on indictment the accused is liable to imprisonment for 10 years.

1. Forced marriages are also clearly prohibited under **section 71** of the Act, which makes it unlawful for anyone, through litigation, to compel the celebration of any marriage by reason of, inter alia, any promise or marriage contract or for any other reason. As part of the required formalities for the solemnization of marriage, each party is further required to give their consent to accepting the other party as their ‘lawfully’ wedded spouse. The giving of consent requires that a person is capable of giving such consent, meaning that they have achieved the required age, and they possess the mental capacity to consent. Consent can be vitiated by duress, fraud, or mistake as to the identity of the other party to the marriage or the nature of the ceremony being conducted.
2. Further, pursuant to **section 55(b) of Cap 45:01,** which provisions also apply to Hindu and Muslim marriages, the marriage must be solemnized by a licensed Marriage Officer in the presence of two or more credible witnesses, in order to be legally recognized in Guyana. Section 4(1) enables the Minister, through the General Register’s Office, which operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs, to appoint eligible persons of either Christian, Hindu or Islamic religions to be licensed as a Marriage Officer for Guyana. Once appointed, Marriage Officers are named in the Official Gazette, which also publishes notices that a marriage officer has either resigned or otherwise ceases to act in that capacity. Only persons duly licensed and named in the Official Gazette are legally permitted to officiate at a marriage ceremony in Guyana. Currently, there are one thousand and eight Marriage Officers licensed by the Ministry of Home Affairs to practice in Guyana. These Officers operate throughout the three counties of Guyana and comprise up of 976 males and 32 females.
3. The Marriage Act further makes it unlawful for a marriage to be solemnized if the parties involved are within the prohibited degrees of relationship. Specifically, marriages are prohibited between parents and children, brothers and sisters, uncles and nieces, aunts and nephews, parents and stepchildren, or a marriage involving a party who is already married.
4. Figure 1 below shows the number of marriages registered in Guyana for the period 2017-2020. The graph depicts that marriages in Guyana have been on a slight decline from 2017-2019, consistent with global trends. In 2020, however, the total number of marriages experienced a major decline, primarily owing of the COVID-19 restrictions, which also limited activities at places of worship and large gatherings, including weddings.

Figure 1: Number of marriages registered in Guyana 2017-2020

1. Despite the amendments to the Marriage Act, Cap 45:01 Laws of Guyana, there have been an isolated case of marriages involving predominantly girls below the age of 16. In 2017, for instance, the Childcare and Protection Agency intervened in a reported case in which a 14 year old girl was married to an older man with her parents’ consent[[3]](#footnote-4). As provided for at section 32(1) of the Marriage Act, any marriage involving a person below age 16 is void *ab initio*. Following an investigation by the CPA, any party, whether a

parent or religious leader, found to be involved in the marriage of an underage child, is subject to prosecution through the Courts.

1. Additionally, the 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)[[4]](#footnote-5) for Guyana found that, among women aged 15-49, 4 percent were married before age 15, and among women aged 20-49, 27 percent were married before age 18 but above the age of 16. The data also showed that in three interior Administrative Regions # 1, #7 and # 8 have the highest proportion of marriages below aged 15 among women aged 15-49 years, with 9 percent of cases respectively. To this end, the Childcare and Protection Agency continues its robust efforts to eliminate all cases of child marriage in Guyana.

### **SDG 8 – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**

### **Child labor**

1. SDG target 8.7 aims to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms. SDG indicator 8.7.1 provides the proportion of children aged 15-17 years who are engaged in child labour. The MICS 2019-20 survey captured data on this SDG indicator, where child labour is classified if the age-specific thresholds are exceeded on either, or both, economic activities, or household chores.
2. Guyana’s government is firmly committed to eliminating child labour in all its forms.
3. The 2019-20 UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, revealed a drastic decline in the prevalence of child labour across all regions. The overall percentage of children age 5-17 involved in child labour was reduced from 18 percent to 6.4 percent; with 4.9 percent of children involved in economic activities at or above the age-specific threshold

and 1.8 percent involved in household chores at or above the age-specific threshold. While the rates of occurrence remained highest across the interior regions, the prevalence was reduced across the board in all regions. The proportion of children involved in hazardous work also fell to 8 percent in 2019-20 compared to 13 percent in 2014. Boys were still more likely to be involved in hazardous work than girls, and the incidence remained greater in the interior regions than on the coast.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Child Labor data from MICS 2014 and MICS 2019** | | | | | | |
|  | **2014** | **2019** | **2014** | **2019** | **2014** | **2019** |
|  | **Economic activities at or above the age-specific threshold** | | **Household chores at or above the age-specific threshold** | | **Total Child Labor** | |
| **Total** | 9.7 | 4.9 | 1.8 | 0.5 | 18.3 | 6.4 |
| **Coastal** | 7.5 | 4.2 | 1.7 | 0.5 | 14.2 | 5.7 |
| **Interior** | 19.8 | 9.9 | 2.8 | 0.6 | 37.1 | 12.2 |

*Figure 2: Child labour*

1. Child labour in Guyana is linked to economic status, as both vulnerability to child labor and economic disparities between the coast and hinterland are intrinsically related.
2. Most of the children involved in child labour (15 and over) are working in the agriculture sector (including farming, forestry and fishing) in most cases in family owned or managed businesses, and micro and small business, and services (domestic work, work in bars and restaurants, and street vending), minibus conductors, and street beggars. There has been a noticeable increase in young teenagers working at car wash-bays during the covid-19 pandemic.
3. It should be underlined that before the Covid pandemic although children were involved in child labour, the enrolment and attainment of primary education had reached universal levels and those for secondary education had reached over 80%.
4. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the closure of schools since March 2020, there was a noticeable increase in children in the 14 plus year age group involved in the work environment, particularly vendoring as well as below 14 year olds in street begging.
5. In the sectors named in the para **17,** due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the closure of the operations of many businesses and the slowing down of the productive, industry and entertainment sector, there was also a decline in the number of children working.
6. The re-opening of schools for students preparing for Grade 6 Assessment ( 10-11 years old) and students preparing for CXC examination ( Grades 10- 12) ( 14-16 yar olds ) the risk of children being involvement in child labour in those age groups declined.
7. There were 860 labour inspectorate carried of work sites in 2021 in all 10 Administrative Regions in the agriculture, mining, forestry, construction, farms, and manufacturing, sectors. No child labour was observed during these inspections

## **SDG 16 – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels**

### **Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children**

1. Target 16.2 is intended towards the elimination of all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence against children. In this section we present data on sexual behavior, sexual abuse, and trafficking in persons. It must be stated that Guyana has maintained tier one status for four consecutive years for exemplary work towards eliminating and reducing trafficking in persons.

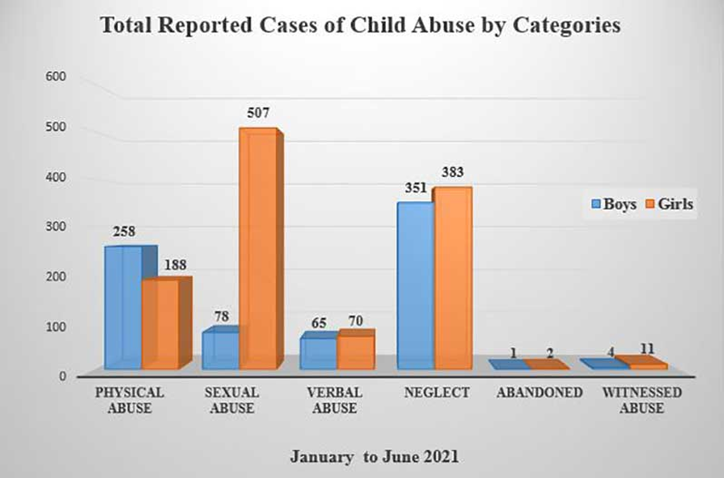
#### Sexual behaviour

1. In the 2019-2020 MICS, an overall total of 5 percent of girls reported having had sex before age 15. However, a disaggregation by geographic area found that among interior regions the total was 10.2 percent compared to 4.6 percent in coastal regions. This occurrence was most pronounced in Administrative Region # 8 where 21 percent of girls reported having sex before age 15 and Administrative Region #7 where the total was 12.3 percent. When examined by education level, it was found that 13.7 percent of girls with only primary education reported having sex before age 15 compared to 5.3 percent among girls with secondary education and 2.1 percent among girls with higher education.
2. The total reported percentage was much higher among young men, with a total of 16.4 percent of young men reporting having had sex before age 15. Here again, a higher percentage was reported in the interior regions, 25.11 percent, compared to 15.7 percent in the coastal regions. The highest proportion of 35.7 percent was again found in Administrative Region # 8, followed by Administrative Regions #7 and #1 with 25.6 percent each. In this instance, there were no significant differences among those with primary and secondary education, with 17.8 and 17.4 percent respectively. Among those with higher education, the proportion was 11.8 percent.

#### Chart, bar chart Description automatically generatedChild abuse

Figure 2: Overall abuse rates by region (January - June, 2021)

1. The Childcare and Protection Agency (CPA), which is operated under the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, has primary responsibility for investigating and prosecuting reported cases of child abuse, including child sexual abuse, and for providing protection and psycho-social support to child victims.
2. Data from the Agency for the first half of 2021 revealed that there have been incidences of child abuse across all ten administrative regions of Guyana. The highest recorded incidence was observed in regions # 1 and # 7, followed by the coastal regions #3 and # 5. Further, disaggregating the data by gender showed that girls accounted for 60.5 percent of the child victims. It was also observed that neglect ranked as the most prevalent form of child abuse facing children in Guyana, with 734 children reportedly being neglected during the first half of 2021. Sexual abuse was the next most common form of child abuse, with 585 children being sexually abused during the same period.
3. Child sexual abuse was most prevalent in region #1 followed by region # 7. Region # 3 recorded the highest percentage of neglect cases, while region # 4 had the highest occurrence of physical violence.



*Figure 4: Total reported cases of child abuse by categories*

1. Comparatively, there were 3,129 cases of child abuse reported in the year 2020. The number of girls sexually molested in 2020 was 688, compared to 127 boys. The chart below shows comparative data on the incidence of the varying forms of child abuse in 2020 and the first half of 2021.

Figure 3: Incidence of the forms of child abuse 2020 and first half of 2021

#### Trafficking in Persons

1. The U.S State Department’s 2021 Report on Trafficking in Persons in Guyana confirms that Guyana fully meets the minimum requirements for the elimination of trafficking in persons, thus maintaining its Tier One status for the fourth consecutive year. The report

notes that despite the documented impact of the pandemic on the government’s anti-trafficking capacity, the government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting year. Those efforts included scaling up investigations, identifying and assisting more victims, creating the first anti-trafficking hotline in Spanish, opening an additional shelter, and creating standard operating procedures for victim identification.

1. Data from the Ministry of Home Affairs, shown in the table below, demonstrates that the victims of trafficking in persons related offences continue to be predominantly female. Over the period 2014 to 2020, female victims represented more than 87 percent of the total number of victims, as shown in the table below.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Figure 6: Reported TIPs Cases by Sex (2014-2020)* | | | | | | | | |
| **SEX OF ALLEGED TIPS VICTIMS** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** | **2019** | **2020** | **TOTAL** |
| Male | 5 | 3 | 13 | 7 | 21 | 2 | 58 | **109** |
| Female | 35 | 56 | 85 | 43 | 224 | 138 | 167 | **748** |
| **TOTAL** | **40** | **59** | **98** | **50** | **245** | **140** | **225** | **857** |
| **Source : Guyana Police Force 2020** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

1. Examining the data by age reveals that more than 85 percent of trafficking victims are 32 years or younger. Child victims, i.e., those 18 years or younger, account for 16 percent of victims, while young people between ages 19 and 25 represent 48 percent (almost half) of the reported cases.
2. The data presented show that child victims of trafficking accounted for 16 percent of cases in the past six years, and less than one percent of cases in 2020.

Figure 7: Reported TIP cases by age 2014-2020

# **Question Two: Information on how vulnerable children are at exacerbated threats to sale and sexual exploitation, with links to the situation of deprivation of other SDGs.**

1. The data available does not indicate that children are at exacerbated risks for sale or exploitation in Guyana. All agencies continue working steadfastly to reduce all forms of abuse or exploitation of children, with the goal of eradicating all such abuses in Guyana.
2. Moreover, based on the available data, it is not possible to link the forms of abuse detailed in the previous section to deprivation of any of the SDGs. Nevertheless, Guyana continues to monitor and track progress on achievement of the SDG targets and is committed to the Voluntary National Review process with the first VNR report being submitted in 2019.

# Question Three: The manifestations of sale and sexual exploitation in relation to the specified SDG targets.

1. The manifestations of abuse of children in Guyana are presented in the first section of this report, where the data has been disaggregated to the extent possible. There is no known data available of internally displaced children, refugees or asylum-seekers in Guyana. There is, however, a growing number of migrants from Venezuela including children that has been growing annually from 2018. It is estimated to be conservatively 20,000 migrants, including Guyanese and their descendants returning home after living for a long time in Venezuela,

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# **Question Four: Protection needs and contextual challenges amid the efforts to combat sale and sexual exploitation of children**

## **COVID-19**

1. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has prevailed over the past two years, has had unavoidable impacts on investigation and service delivery in all of the areas outlined above. Measures instituted to contain the spread of the virus, including lockdowns and restrictions on internal travel to hinterland communities in 2020, initially affected surveillance activities for TIPs, child labor, and child abuse. Nonetheless, operational adjustments were made to ensure continued progress in these areas. The TIP hotline remained operational and was publicized through increased use of digital and social media. More resources were provided to the Guyana Police Force TIP and Intelligence Unit to facilitate the execution of intelligence-driven investigations.
2. Special attention was given to the health and safety of frontline officers, suspected victims and other supporting personnel involved at all stages with PPEs, testing and later vaccinations starting in March 2021.
3. Importantly, the courts adopted the use of virtual hearings to facilitate the timely dispensation of all matters, including TIPs, sexual offences, and family court hearings. Family courts are also now established in all three counties, and are equipped with the capacity for remote hearing, which increases the efficiency of hearing matters from remote locations.

## Guyana’s geographic span and porous borders

1. The extensive borders and diverse topographical layout of Guyana makes traveling to interior locations and managing the growing number of illegal crossings a major challenge for law enforcement and regulatory agencies. To combat these challenges, the Government of Guyana continues to increase budgetary allocations to air, water and land transport for agencies such as the Guyana Police Force, the Counter TIP Unit, and the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security.
2. The Government has adopted a humanitarian approach to migrants from Venezuela who are offered access to the same services as Guyanese particularly in accessing health and education services, covid relief food hampers, and testing and vaccinations.

## Political instability

1. The uncertainty and tensions which followed the March 2, 2020, General and Regional Elections and the long delay of five months in declaring the results had a major impact on, and hindered government efforts in all sectors. It is also of significance that, during this time, the members of the Guyana Police Force remained ‘in line’ from February to mid-August 2020, which stretched both their human and financial resources.

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# **Question Five: Practical measures taken to address the vulnerabilities in institutional, family, and online settings to ensure no child is left behind with respect to protection against sale and sexual exploitation:**

## **Child labour**

1. The government of Guyana has proactively committed to eliminating child labor by 2025 by developing the country’s first Child Labor Policy, launched in 2019. Guyana has also ratified all of the key international conventions concerning Child Labor; specifically:
2. ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age of work;
3. ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor;
4. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC);
5. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – Optional Protocol on children in Armed Conflict;
6. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography; and
7. Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.
8. These instruments have been integrated within the laws of Guyana. The **Employment of Young Persons and Children Act Cap 99:01** specifies at section 3(1) that no child shall be admitted into employment in any occupation. For the purposes of that provision, a child means below the age of 15. Subsection 2 further prohibits the employment of any young person at nights in any industrial operation; except in accordance with the **Convention Concerning the Night Work of Young Persons Employed in Industry.** Anyone who employs young persons is required to maintain a register of those persons, including their age and date of birth and the period for which they were employed. A young person means a person below the age of 16. The Act further specifies the minimum age for hazardous work as 18 years, consistent with the Convention, and specifies the list of occupations deemed to be hazardous. Several offences are created under section 5 the Act for contravention of the above provisions. Employment of a child in contravention of the act is a summary offence punishable by a fine of GY$10,000 for the first offence and GY$15,000 for a subsequent offence. Where the employment of a child is done by an agent or employee of the establishment, that person shall be liable as if he/she were the employer. Failure to maintain a register of young persons as stipulated above, also creates a summary offence, punishable by a fine of GY$21,000. Moreover, a parent who knowingly or neglectfully allows a child to be taken into employment is also guilty of an offence and will also be liable to the same punishment as the employer.
9. Enforcement of Child Labour legislation is managed by several agencies with specific responsibilities:-
10. The Ministry of Labour takes the lead in investigating reports of child labor and conducts routine labour inspections and refer children identified during labour inspections to the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security Counter-Trafficking in Persons Unit and the Childcare and Protection Agency.
11. (ii) The Counter-Trafficking in Persons Unit, under the direction of the Director of Public Prosecutions prosecutes Trafficking in Persons cases and promotes public messaging on child labour.
12. The Guyana Police Force enforces the criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labour, including human trafficking, commercial sex exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities, in close consultation with the Director of Public Prosecution and the line Ministries.
13. Beyond the legislative and regulatory framework outlined above, the Government of Guyana has instituted a plethora of social programmes aimed at eliminating and preventing child labour.
14. The 2019-2025 National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labour is reflective of the resolve of the GoG to eliminate all forms of child labour by 2025. The plan is aimed at, inter alia, enhancing public awareness, promoting civic engagement and advocacy, and children participation in the fight against child labour, widening access to education and technical and vocational training, strengthening legislative protection and enforcement in combating child labour, and ensuring the provision of physical and psychological rehabilitation of children removed from child labour. This Plan is premised on a compendium of statutes for the protection of the rights and safety of children. These include the Protection of Children Act, the Childcare and Protection Act, the Adoption Act, the Children Development and Services Act, the Education Act, the Sexual Offences Act, the Cybercrime Act, and several labour laws.
15. Two temporary shelters are available to female victims of domestic violence and their dependents; one which is fully owned and operated by the GoG and the other is operated by a non-governmental organization[[5]](#footnote-6) and fully subsidized by the Government. The shelters also accommodate teenage girls under age 16 who are placed there at the request of the Childcare and Protection Agency.
16. The GoG also designed and implemented various programmes aimed at increasing school attendance and performance. One such program is theHinterland Community-based School Feeding Program, which was started in 2006 and is aimed at raising community participation, student attendance, academic performance, and the nutrition of primary

school children. The programme started in one interior Administrative Region # 9, but was later extended to the other three interior Administrative Regions # 1, 7, and 8.

1. An impact evaluation of the programme was conducted by the World Bank over the period 2007-2019 involving 20 intervention schools and 44 control schools[[6]](#footnote-7). The evaluation provided conclusive evidence that the programme was successful in achieving the stated objectives. Over the evaluation period, it was observed that stunting fell by 3

percent in the intervention group but rose by the same amount in schools that were not part of the programme. The Programme also increased attendance by 4.3 percent, and participation in learning activities improved in intervention schools but declined in the

control schools. Children in intervention schools performed better in national academic assessment tests. Moreover, the Programme conferred the greatest benefit on children who had the poorest nutritional status at baseline. Parents participated fully in food production and meal delivery activities. At the community level, households benefited through increased employment and a more varied food supply.The Programme contributed to preserving food security through a period of food price volatility; it has a low cost per child relative to other programmes and has reduced dependence on imports. The programme was neglected between the period 2016-2020 but has been recommenced in 2021with a new government and as schools began to open partially.

1. In 2020, the current Government also restored the “Because We Care” and school uniform cash grants for all children of school age from nursery to sixteen years of age.This is a programme which provides cash grants for each child that is enrolled in a school. In 2021 each parent received GY$19,000 per child enrolled in school. The programme originally only provided these direct cash transfers to children in publicly-funded schools, however, in 2021 this was expanded to include children enrolled in private schools. In 2021, a total of $3.6 Billion dollars was expended through these direct cash transfers, which benefitted 192,000 children enrolled in schools throughout the country.
2. These programs collectively contribute to reducing child labour by removing the primary obstacles to children remaining in schools.

## Child abuse

1. Through the Childcare and Protection Agency (CPA), children in dire need of protection, are taken to a safe place so that they can receive help for recovery and rehabilitation. Notwithstanding this, much work is being done to build the capacity of parents to lessen the need for alternative care for children.
2. The Agency also provides psycho-social support and other assistance to the children and families at risk. The support consisted of counselling, education, training, financial assistance, and empowerment for alleviation of poverty and prevention of child abuse and unnecessary separation of children from their parents.
3. Importantly, the CPA has responsibility for conducting regular inspections of all children’s homes & orphanages and offering technical assistance to those that need to achieve the desired standards. There are currently 23 homes and orphanages across the country to house and care for vulnerable children who have suffered or are at risk of suffering some form of abuse or violence. In addition to these homes and orphanages,

there are also three (3) Government Care Centres (Safe houses) for children in extremely vulnerable situations which are managed and operated by the Childcare and Protection Agency.

1. The Child Protection officers and caregivers in children residential Centres were exposed to several specialized training sessions by external facilitators. Social workers from NGO partner Agencies were also targeted as well as Probation Officers and the Police.
2. Additionally, various other initiatives have been completed under the GoG/UN/EU funded SPOTLIGHT Initiative, including institutional strengthening of Civil Society Organizations, capacity building and strengthening of the health system, establishment of 2 Child Advocacy Centres in Administrative Regions # 1 and # 6 to provide psycho-social support to children and their families affected by sexual violence, and community advocacy campaigns using age-appropriate and disability-inclusive communication materials for raising awareness around GBV and family violence.
3. A Family Court Division was established within the High Court of Guyana to provide greater privacy and a safer and less traumatic environment for victims of domestic and sexual violence, family disputes and divorce, including the use of giving evidence via video conferencing, especially for children. This continues to function throughout the COVID pandemic through virtual court rooms. Sexual Offences Courts are also fully operational in the three (3) Counties of Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice, with the capability for facilitating remote hearings for persons in other parts of the country, including hinterland communities, and allow for sexual offences cases to be dispensed with greater expedience.
4. The Sexual Offences Act (2010) and the Civil Procedure Rules (2016) provides for the procedure of paper committals and specialised courts for sexual offences. These steps were affected to expedite the process of criminal trials of persons accused of sexual violence, minimise, or eliminate the re-victimisation of victims, and encourage reporting. These initiatives serve to increase access to justice and reduce the backlog of such cases.

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## Trafficking in Persons

1. The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security conducts yearly outreach and sensitization programmes to remote and targeted regions where community leaders, democratic organs, enforcement officers, students and members of the community are informed about the dangers of trafficking in persons.
2. The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security conducted various training and awareness programmes across the ten administrative regions of Guyana. Training and awareness sessions were done with Toshaos (Captains) and other indigenous(Amerindian) village leaders.
3. Capacity building in the form of training led or supported by the Ministerial Task Force on Trafficking in Persons began in the last quarter of 2016 with the Major Crimes Investigations Unit of the Guyana Police Force and Frontline Officials from multiple regions being trained.
4. In 2017, Focal Points selected from eight (8) Indigenous communities and schools across the eight Administrative Regions were also exposed to various training by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. In addition, staff of the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Unit, received training in general investigative skills and reporting writing.
5. Media Officials, Police Prosecutors, Police Officers and other stakeholders in Region 1, Immigration Officers, Village Councillors and Toshaos were trained, whilst the International Organization for Migration in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Services, also conducted a Training of Trainers Course for multiple stakeholders including Task Force Members and another course for Medical Practitioners. In 2018 training courses were conducted for Mines Officers and the Corps of Wardens, Diplomats/Foreign Service Officials, Interpreters, Community Policing Groups, Immigration and Citizenship and Police Intelligence Officers by the Ministerial Task Force of Trafficking in Person.
6. From 2016–2018, three (3) Police Investigators, two (2) Immigration Officers and three (3) Police Prosecutors also underwent a series of trafficking in persons regional training courses conducted by INTERPOL.
7. In 2019, the Ministry of Human Services held a Training Course for Labour Officials and Occupational Health and Safety Officers. All courses included persons from various administrative regions, including those in Guyana’s remote areas, being trained in victim identification and referral amongst other key aspects of Trafficking in Persons. Training courses were also conducted with medical practitioners, teachers and civil society members in Essequibo, Region No. 2.
8. The Guyana Geology and Mines Commission has also established a Trafficking in Persons Unit, further exemplifying the commitment to stamping out the crime of trafficking in persons in the mining sector.
9. The Government through the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security made significant strides with regard to care facility services by establishing one (1) safe house located in Georgetown and two (2) transitional facilities located outside the capital, whilst providing progressively increasing subventions for the Non-Governmental Organizations tasked with the management of all shelters.
10. The Ministry also conducted a Training Course for Shelter Managers in 2019 since the Ministry saw the importance of training and equipping service providers with the necessary skills needed to help persons who have various challenges while being in protective care.
11. Victims of Trafficking in Persons are provided with healthcare, psychosocial and other support services by the Ministry of Human Services. Long term accommodation, rehabilitation and reintegration services are provided to victims of trafficking from the hinterland areas.
12. Moreover, the **Combatting Trafficking in Persons Act (2005)** provides for convicted offenders to pay restitution to victims. In this regard, over the period 2016-2020, convicted offenders have been ordered by the court to pay GY$7,757,940 to identified victims of Trafficking in Persons offences, including the illegal withholding of identity documents.

## Child marriage

1. The Childcare & Protection Agency’s (CPA) Communication 4 Development Programme and Teen Pregnancy Prevention & Empowerment Programmeinclude awareness sessions on the disadvantages of early marriages to the development of the child.
2. The CPA is working to bridge the gap that exists between culture and law in some indigenous communities; specifically, where it pertains to Child Protection laws. Consequently, the plan to bridge this gap is education and re-education of the public, through: (a) The Communication 4 Development Programme that addresses the social norms that put children at risk. Much emphasis is placed on protecting children from child abuse, particularly sexual abuse, under age sexual activity, and early marriages: (b) The Teen Pregnancy Prevention & Empowerment Programme specifically targets both the adolescent girl and boy is a skills-based risk reduction programme for the prevention of early and unwanted pregnancies in adolescents and teenagers by directly imparting knowledge of reproductive health and wellness, and developing skills for self-development and making right choices such as staying in school and getting an education; (c) The Special Parenting Programme, that is culturally tailored to meet the needs of diverse groups, educate on child development among other topics. Further, in

the communities where there is a likelihood of child marriages much emphasis is placed on the disadvantages for children and the family when children marry early against being given the opportunity to have an education, positive growth and development and realization of their full potential.

1. Through the Multi-Media Awareness Campaign- "Communication 4 Development", ads and other programmes are broadcast via radio and television across the country including remote locations in indigenous communities and are presented in two main indigenous languages, Macushi and Wapishan. The programme utilises unorthodox methods to spread child protection messages to reach underprivileged families that have none or limited access to television, radio, or internet. These initiatives are intended to modify attitudes and behaviours or social norms that put children at risk.
2. These Programmes are conducted in all the Regions.  However, in regions and communities that are remote (including Regions 1, 2, 8 and 9) it is done in special arranged open air group meetings involving a collaborative approach with the District Child Protection Officers, Education Representatives, Faith Leaders, and other community leaders.
3. Partnership development is an ongoing programme of the CPA.Collaboration with key stakeholders and the forging of essential partnerships, particularly at the community level has been initiated with the aim of facilitating effective responses to vulnerable children and their families.
4. The CPA’s work plan includes partnering with existing Community-Based and Faith-Based Organisations for the establishment of Community Action Groups to provide social network support for vulnerable children and families. The CPA currently has 27 Community Action Groups across the regions conducting parenting training and afternoon support programmes for children at the community level.
5. The Support and Heal Network initiative was officially established in January 2021. The aim of the partnership between Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and faith-based leaders is to address social issues among vulnerable groups and communities across Guyana. The network comprises of over 30 persons from several religious organizations in Guyana.
6. As the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security advances steps to strengthen collaboration with the Guyana Police Force (GPF) to curb child abuse, a cross training exercise was conducted recently with approximately 60 officers on safeguarding the rights of children.

# **Conclusions**

1. The Government of Guyana continues to take progressive steps towards advancing the rights and status of children in our society and to removing all barriers to achieving the SDG targets 5.3, 8.7 and 16.2.
2. In this regard, the GoG has utilized a combination of legislative and policy measures, alongside tangible, projects, and programmes to bolster children’s access to education and reduce vulnerabilities to abuse and other forms of exploitation. These measures are informed by available data on child labor, trafficking, and child abuse. Government agencies continue to work progressively and in an increasingly coordinated manner to eradicate all forms of abuse towards children.
3. The totality of these measures, combined with ongoing education and awareness to remove negative attitudes and practices will bring Guyana closer to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

1. Section 2(1) Representation of the People (Adaptation and Modification of Laws) Act, Cap 1:09, Laws of Guyana. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Section 31(2) Marriage Act [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2017/03/07/underage-marriages-a-worrying-scenario/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. UNICEF (2014) Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey: https://statisticsguyana.gov.gy/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MICS5\_Final\_Report.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Several other centers managed by NGOs are also assisted by the GoG. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. The World Bank (2012) Guyana’s Hinterland Community-Based School Feeding Program: Impact Evaluation (2007-2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)