

Commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people in tourism

1

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According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism is the world's fastest growing industry. However, new tourist destinations also produce socio-cultural changes, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). This includes prostitution, sex tourism, sexual violence, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and pornography with minors, i.e. people under 18.

Besides sexual abuse, sexual violence and prostitution, the "rental" of children and young people as "companions" is also widespread in tourism. The majority of those affected are girls and young women, although the number of boys is increasing. However, because of the illegality and covert nature of the crime, no exact data is available.

Sexual exploitation is perpetrated by individuals or by organised groups with various actors (e.g. runners, pimps, hotel owners). Local socio-cultural factors, such as the mistaken belief that sex with 'virgins' is rejuvenating, or prevents or even cures HIV also play a role. The customers, mostly men, come from all over the world. Regional centres of CSEC in tourism are the Mekong region in Asia, the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean, Brazil and southern Africa.

However, the sexual exploitation of minors is no longer limited to long-distance tourism – short weekend trips over local borders (for example from Germany over the Czech border) have made the problem worse. Long-distance, regional and local tourists and business people also use the sex establishments, which in some cases first developed in response to increased tourism. However, children and young people are also sexually exploited on the street. Due to increased demand, the victims are often trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation in the tourist centres, or they head there themselves.

Tourism is not the cause of commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people. However, its structures and services make this possible and facilitate it.

Civil society and the tourist industry – in both the country of origin and the destination country – share responsibility for preventing all forms of sexual exploitation within the structures they create, and for ensuring that the impacts of tourism are socially acceptable.

Cross-border criminal prosecution

In most destination countries, the sexual exploitation of children is a crime. However, the laws, penalties and victim age-limits that determine the punishment of perpetrators vary widely internationally. Pedosexuals in some cases make use of networks and avoid countries with harsher legislation in favour of destinations with less risk of punishment.

For more effective prosecution of sexual offenses against children abroad, Germany has adopted the principle extraterritorial extradition in 1993.

This is incorporated in the German Criminal Code (section 5.8). Accordingly, perpetrators can be prosecuted and punished under German law for criminal acts committed abroad even after their return to the Federal Republic of Germany. While sentencing is done in Germany, evidence must be collected abroad and meet German standards. Unfortunately, corruption and ignorance among the police and judiciary in tourist destinations still often lead to a situation where no charge is made against CSEC, or the evidence is deficient.

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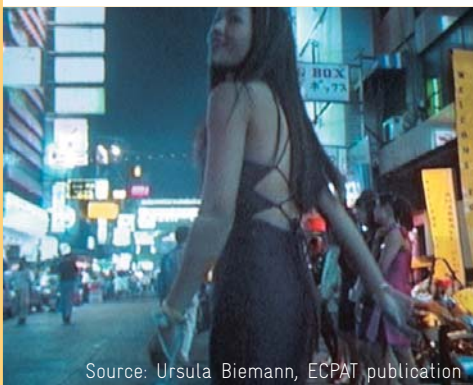


2

Code of Conduct for the tourism industry

Compliance with children's rights and social standards is a key sustainability goal for ethically acceptable tourism.

The international children's rights organisation ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) developed the "Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism" in 1998 together with the Swedish travel industry. This is supported by UNICEF and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). To date, more than 850 travel companies and travel associations from 32 countries have signed the Code.



Source: Ursula Biemann, ECPAT publication

Signatories of the code of conduct undertake to:

- introduce an ethical corporate philosophy directed against sexual exploitation of children,
- train staff in the country of origin and destination country,
- enter into additional agreements with business contacts stating that sexual exploitation of children will not be tolerated,
- providing travellers and local key persons with information about the code and possible options for action, and
- reporting annually.

In 2001, the tourist industry signed the ECPAT international code of conduct through the Deutscher Reiseverband (DRV - German Travel Association). This agreed measures aimed at actively and sustainably combating the sexual exploitation of children and young people in tourism.

Awareness raising, prevention and education of members of the travel industry, travellers and the local population are important for combating CSEC. In addition, good cooperation between government agencies, embassies, the tourist sector and local civil society is also decisive. Due to the complicated and time-consuming nature of international criminal prosecution, awareness raising and further training for police and judiciary in the destination countries is also very important.

The following websites provide information on the commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people in tourism:

www.gtz.de/nochildabuse
www.child-hood.com
www.world-tourism.org
www.thecode.org
www.ecpat.net
www.ecpat.de
www.tourism-watch.de

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www.gtz.de/nochildabuse

The GTZ convention project "Protection of Minors against Sexual Exploitation" is supporting partner countries on behalf of BMZ in implementing the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Further information is available from:

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