

Sexual Exploitation of Children in Tourism

Concept Note

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CONCEPT

Demand and Supply

Child sex tourism was the issue that first mobilized the worldwide campaigns against the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents (CSEC). Mass tourism as a powerful economic force in the world was accompanied by a demand for sex. In becoming part of the market that supplied that demand, children and adolescents were transformed into commodities to be bought and sold by visiting tourists and travelers. The paper will examine the origins of the concerns and campaigns that fought against the commercialization of children.

In the context of the important revenue source that tourism is for many developing countries, there were conflicting priorities when it came to the protection of children against this violation of their fundamental rights. How governmental policies have shifted towards child protection and the prosecution of child sex tourism as a serious crime is the result of many factors, including legal, economic, cultural, and environmental interests and concerns.

However, poverty and economic disparities remain real barriers to safeguarding future generations from sexual exploitation. We will look at the ‘demand’ side of the problem, and at the conditions of vulnerability of certain populations which lead towards the supply of that demand. The convergence of crimes of abuse against children and adolescents and their commercial sexual exploitation in tourism will also be explored.

The changing face of tourism

Since the 1990s, when the campaigns against child sex tourism were developed, the face of tourism has changed considerably. The paper will look at the new forms of tourist travel and means of communication that are not being addressed by existing actions. There are also new destinations, and a growth in the long-stay foreign visitors in destination countries.

Environmental concerns are also having an impact on tourism, and may redefine the markets in the future in various ways, one of which - the promotion of sustainable and responsible tourism as an added value to the industry - represents an opportunity to catalyze the participation of the tourism sector in the reduction/eradication of commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents linked to their field of operation.

The relevance of inter-sector collaboration in combating child sex tourism

The struggle against CSEC linked to travel and tourism has seen the emergence of vibrant and dynamic cross-sector partnerships involving governments, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and the private sector. We will give examples from around the world of these partnerships and their achievements, which include prevention actions, education and training, awareness-raising, highlighting the obligations across sectors for commitment and responsibility in implementing the CRC, and the reporting and prosecution of cases.

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How effective are those actions? While there are difficulties of measurement, there are some indicators against which effectiveness can be assessed.

What are the main difficulties in sustaining and mainstreaming the positive collaborative actions?

The role of the State and national tourism authorities

The paper will look at the relevance of national tourism authorities and their role as the organs of state responsible for the promotion of inward-bound tourism. As organs of state, and therefore representative of civil society, what are the responsibilities of national tourism authorities in relation to the protection of children and adolescents from exploitation?

What leadership should we expect from national tourism authorities in relation to the State's implementation of the CRC and ensuring respect for the rights of children and adolescents?

Challenges in terms of the level of commitment – from society, as much as from tourism authorities and companies – to protect children, and in enforcement of current laws and regulations impacting on exploitation of children in tourism will be analysed, as will their implications on the debate revolving around private and state responsibility.

The private sector and Corporate Social Responsibility

Private sector endorsement of the drive to combat CSEC in tourism has had a profound influence in mainstreaming the notion of 'sustainable and responsible tourism' including tourism that does not exploit children.

The role of the World Tourism Organization has been significant because of the extent of its remit and the inclusiveness of its membership across the private sector, mainly by the adoption of the World Code of Ethics in Tourism which has promoted the development of Codes of Conduct. The role of UNICEF and the NGO sector in encouraging actions that demonstrate corporate social responsibility has effectively brought the CRC onto the corporate agenda. We will provide examples, of which the Code of Conduct is a significant achievement. The Code has helped to promote a culture of sustainable and responsible tourism, and to encourage a dialogue between the public and private sectors.

Problems remain in the fact that the tourist industry is made up in large part of small traders and suppliers, such as taxi drivers. How can these traders be made amenable to the codes that big hotel chains and tour operators are prepared to accept?

The private sector responses are, however, voluntary. Are these sustainable? Furthermore, are there obligations on the private sector, to prioritize the best interests of children and the realization of children and adolescents' rights, which overreach the voluntary nature of the current responses? Is the answer in legislating for corporate responsibility for the actions of employees in the tourism business (or the failure on the part of employees to act)? What is the best level of interplay needed between legislation/public policy and corporate voluntary initiative that would anchor social responsibility and guide the action of tourism companies and employees in countering commercial sexual exploitation of children in the long term.

The role of legislation and law enforcement

The paper will examine the responses of governments to the problem of the exploitation of children in tourism through legislation and law enforcement, as well as the development of the use of extraterritorial jurisdiction to deal with offenders, and the targeting of clients. Examples of various country responses will be considered, from both the sending and receiving perspectives. In legislating to protect children from exploitation of children in tourism, are national governments effectively implementing their obligations under the CRC? We will seek to provide a comparison of adopted models.

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How effective can laws be? The dilemma of enforcement will be examined in the context of vulnerable young victims as witnesses, the need for specialist police and specialist training, and cross-border procedural complications. Examples of how some countries have eased the procedures in the interests of children will be explored. We will examine the lack of coherence in ensuring that registered sex offenders' travel is monitored, and suggest improvements that might be made at governmental and international level to end these incoherencies.

The role of regional and international bodies

A number of international bodies have played a significant role in combating CSEC in tourism, notably the World Tourism Organisation and its regional partners. Interpol is also a significant contributor, through its leadership in tracking offenders and providing assistance at the national level. International political/economic groupings in Europe and Asia have also played a significant role in both leadership and in funding of initiatives. We will look at the impact of the role played by international bodies.

This support is not so obvious in Africa and in the Americas, and the question will be asked whether regional organizations in Africa and the Americas could do more to support efforts to prevent this form of CSEC.

The impact at national level of ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour in combating child sex tourism will be considered, including some models of good practice already achieved.

The challenges of combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in travel and tourism

The demand/supply problem will remain a challenge as long as poverty and economic disparities fuel the market for sex tourism. The issue of combating child sex tourism therefore has to remain high on the international agenda.

New problems have emerged that were mentioned in the earlier part of the paper, and new ways to combat them need to be explored and proposed.

Maintaining momentum in the actions already undertaken is a challenge. Not only is it difficult to finance on-going actions, but there is a problem of fatigue on the part of donors, NGOs, tourism personnel and even tourists. Individuals are reluctant to intervene and report abuse or suspected abuse unless it affects them directly. The same problem exists in local communities which are dependant on tourist revenue; reporting CSEC affects the economic status quo of that community. This is the same issue as was raised earlier about capturing the small trader in the prevention loop.

The challenge of mainstreaming training of tourism personnel and police will be raised as an area for continuing work and international cooperation.

The challenge for governments to continue to put child rights protection at the forefront of economic development remains. Countries which are just opening up to tourism, or where the face of the tourism industry is changing, will be able to study best practices from other countries and learn from the mistakes of the past.

Proposals for changes to combat the challenges raised should include implementation monitoring indicators to analyze their effectiveness. How should the effectiveness of public policies be measured? What mechanisms could be used to control tourist activities and to ensure the imposition of criminal liability for sexual crimes against children and adolescents?