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Goal 16c: Violence Against Children

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

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ABSTRACT: *Despite 20 years of hard campaign work since the First World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 1996, child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism has increased across the globe, out-pacing attempts to stop it. It is still not sure how many children are victims of this hidden crime because most cases are not reported, and only a few of those reported are then prosecuted. But we do know that more children are victimized than ever before and that no country is immune.*

Introduction

“All of the global goals are relevant for children, not only those which specifically refer to children,” says UNICEF (n.d) who also highlight the obvious links between the SDGs and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – e.g. in the areas of health (>> Goal 3), education (>> Goal 4) and overcoming violence (>> Goal 16b). In this light the 2030 Agenda is understood to be a tool highlighting the rights of children and the need for their protection. A child who is five years old in 2017 will attain adulthood by 2030. The distinction between child and adult specific goals is very fluid.

Goal 5, Goal 8 and Goal 16 include strong targets requesting concrete action and measures of UN member states to eliminate all forms of violence against girls (5.2), to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour by 2025 (8.7), and to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children (16.2). These targets are not likely to be achieved. Violence against children will not end by 2030. The indicators to measure progress take that into consideration. Looking at the indicator related to target 16.2 (Indicator 16.2.3: Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18), the proportion will never be zero. But the indicator provides information on the level of achievement, which will help to influence national politics. The SDGs can be an important building block to achieve a more protective world for children.

Where do we stand?

Despite 20 years of hard campaign work since the First World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 1996, child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism has increased across the globe, out-pacing attempts to stop it. It is still not sure how many children are victims of this hidden crime because most cases are not reported, and only a few of those reported are then prosecuted. But we do know that more children are victimized than ever before and that no country is immune (ECPAT International, 2016b).

The sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism is not limited to developing countries or countries with few resources. It is found everywhere, also in the world’s richest countries, as demonstrated by research in North America and Europe. As found by the Global Study published

in 2016 by ECPAT International, “offenders are continually looking for and targeting emerging travel and tourist destinations, such as Moldova, Myanmar and Peru. As countries act to tackle the crime, offenders look for new destinations where the risks of arrest are lower” (ECPAT International, 2016b, p. 107).

There is no typical child victim, all children are specifically vulnerable. But some children are more at risk than others, e.g. children in dysfunctional families, children living in poverty, orphans, members of minorities, children living and working on the street.

And there is no such thing as the typical child sex offender: business travelers, humanitarian aid workers, expatriates, members of a peace mission, retirees or volunteers can all possibly become travelling child sex offenders; both men and women, and many offenders are domestic or regional tourists or travelers.

Dynamics and new trends

Massive expansion of the use of, and access to, the latest information and communications technologies (ICTs) has spurred the proliferation of the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism. Online grooming, live streaming of child sexual abuse and risky online behaviour are increasingly associated with the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, although more research is needed to understand the links.

Regulation and social protection are lagging far behind fast-changing phenomena and new trends, such as online booking sites, peer-to-peer services, voluntourism, orphanage tourism, slum tourism, and eco-tourism. The unregulated development of travel and tourism can disrupt local economies and make children more vulnerable to exploitation.

Pros and cons of tourism

ECPAT International considers the tourism industry and its multiple actors key allies in combating the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism and seeks to promote and support their active involvement in ending these forms of exploitation. ECPAT also encourages national and international cooperation of law enforcement agencies to prosecute sexual crimes against children committed by foreigners abroad through extraterritorial legislation. Thus far, only 44 countries have extraterritorial laws in regard to sexual exploitation of children (ECPAT Netherlands, 2011, p.21).

Even though the tourism sector can be a strong partner in developing a more protective environment for children, travel and tourism can have negative consequences for children of all ages and genders. It is clear that the travel and tourism sectors can – and often do – play a critical role in the prevention of sexual exploitation of children. There is not enough binding regulation. The engagement of the industry is up to their free will. This is not compliant with the General Comment No. 16 (2013) of the United Nations on state obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children’s rights (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013). Experts are asking for stronger regulation of business activities in regard to children rights (Hecht, n.d.).

Offenders on the Move – Latin America

The Global Study “Offenders on the Move” is more than just a report. It also contains an extensive database that reveals an increase of sexual exploitation of children by travelers and tourists. Governments, travel and tourism companies, law enforcement agencies and child rights organisations have to adjust their strategies to adapt to new trends and developments.

Latin America depends heavily on the money generated by travel and tourism. Sometimes, tourism hotspots are strategically developed near poor communities. Local people are often robbed of their land and forced to accept poorly paid jobs in the tourism sector. This increases children's exposure to sex offenders and intermediaries. Families and children are discouraged from reporting abuses because they are scared of losing their jobs.

Poverty, lack of jobs, internal conflict, and migration weaken families and many children run away from home. High levels of violence, the availability of drugs and guns, and the strong presence of organised crime networks and gangs, who have the means to traffic children to tourist areas, also heighten their risk. Information and communication technologies and the internet are used by offenders and intermediaries to meet children and to create and distribute child sexual abuse materials.

ECPAT International (2016c): All Aboard. Youth version of the Global Study, p. 17

<http://globalstudysectt.org>

Major Challenges

Child protection concepts often do not protect the most vulnerable groups of victims. The measures taken by governments and companies are not sufficient and there is not enough support and guidance for child victims. Prosecution is weak, due to a lack of cooperation among authorities and governments, and the number of convicted offenders is alarmingly low. Research by ECPAT Germany identified main obstacles have been criminal proceedings with cross-border implications, such as: language barriers, long durations between the crime and the testimony in court, residence determination of the victims, different regulations of hearings, lack of awareness among judges and police (ECPAT Germany, 2016).

There is a link between sexual violence and the work of volunteers and development workers who constitute about 20 percent of identified foreign offenders. Most of the offenders do not plan to abuse children, but use opportunities during their travel, thinking they can get away with it (Bread for the World et al, 2014).

Tangible ways forward

The insights of the Global Study by the international child protection network ECPAT (2016b) force us all to rethink the status quo. It requires new and joined measures by governments, agencies, especially in the fields of travel and tourism, and civil society. The awareness raising and political advocacy work by non-governmental organisations such as ECPAT should also be redirected. Prevention campaigns that target classical forms of tourism are not sufficient. They do not reflect the most recent information on profiles of perpetrators and trends. Activities and campaigns need to focus on travelers and tourists who stay in the destinations for longer periods of time. Business travel, development work and voluntourism should no longer be neglected.

Reducing the sexual exploitation of children will also help to achieve other SDGs. Investment in effective protection systems, with a focus on prevention programmes, must be designed and adequately funded to avoid heavy social and economic burdens in the future and to ensure that >> Goal 3 is achieved (healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages). Currently, the magnitude of child sexual exploitation makes it a public health emergency. The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.) demonstrates the dramatic consequences of child sexual abuse on the health of survivors, including depression, alcohol and other substances consumption, and lower life expectancy.

Cross-sector collaboration is essential. Governments could create platforms for the participation of child rights organisations as well as other key actors (particularly the private sector, communities, survivors and children and young people themselves) in the development of indicators as well as in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of national policies on the SDGs.

Companies that take action are uniquely positioned to help achieve the SDG targets aimed at the protection of children. Private companies cannot be passive bystanders, but have to be actively involved in protecting children's rights.

Raising awareness among tourists

In the frame of corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies in travel and tourism, one aspect cannot be underestimated: raising the awareness of travelers. The communication by responsible companies reaches huge numbers of clients and in the context of child protection helps to raise the awareness of travelers for the vulnerability of children. This also has a preventive effect on those who were not aware of the issue and might find themselves in situations where minors are likely to be exploited. Furthermore, some companies incorporate responsible business practices by providing their clients with information on reporting procedures, such as the online reporting platform

www.reportchildsectourism.eu.

Vocational hospitality training for disadvantaged youth in Vietnam

A very positive example of how tourism supports the realisation of the SDGs is the career programme KOTO. Good education and training is a key factor for minimizing risks and vulnerabilities towards all forms of exploitation. KOTO is a non-profit social enterprise that provides vocational hospitality training to at-risk and disadvantaged youth in Vietnam (aged 16–22) with a typical 50-50 gender ratio per training class. KOTO stands for, "Know one, teach one." The training programme is a two-year hospitality programme for either front of house (service) or back of house (kitchen). Psychosocial support, life skills development and English language acquisition are all incorporated into the trainings that KOTO provides. KOTO runs training restaurants to provide training opportunities and to generate much needed revenue, which is used to fund the programme. KOTO graduates receive an internationally recognized accreditation from the Australian Box Hill Institute (Melbourne). Therefore, KOTO as such, is not an on-off project, but an ongoing holistic training programme. www.knowoneteachone.com

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