

# **What experts think on combating child sex tourism**

Findings of interviews with selected experts

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This research is part of the European project 'Offenders Beware' with ECPAT Germany, ECPAT the Netherlands, ECPAT Italy, ECPAT Austria and ECPAT Estonia. The aim of the project is to raise awareness, capacity and motivation for the protection of children from commercial sexual exploitation in tourism. The project is financed by the European Commission. In the Netherlands the project is financially supported by Plan the Netherlands.

## Summary

One of the most sensitive issues that the tourism industry faces refers to the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The travel and tourism industry make efforts towards preventing and reducing the commercial sexual exploitation of children by implementing the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Commercial Exploitation in Tourism. However, still many tourism organizations are not actively involved in the combat against child sex tourism. Therefore, ECPAT interviewed 31 experts from tour operators, hotels, airline companies, NGO's, tourism schools and governmental organizations in five countries to gather opinions on how to improve signing, implementation, monitoring and communication of the Code of Conduct (the Code).

The main reason to sign the Code is out of economical interests. Tourism companies can distinguish themselves by acting socially and ethically acceptable and incorporate this in their marketing strategy. It also fits the trend of sustainable development. Child sex tourism is a real threat to the positioning of a country as a destination of sustainable tourism. It is also seen as a moral responsibility.

Organizations do not sign the Code because of fear of additional workload to train staff and report yearly. Some organizations don't sign because of economical reasons. Sending employees to trainings means an expensive non-productive working time to them. This argument is especially important for American companies and small enterprises. There is also the fear of loosing costumers. They don't want to annoy clients with the subject, worry that clients believe they are taken for potential paedophiles. Additionally addressing this subject might tarnish the countries image as a tourism destination. Because of possible criminal structures in child sex tourism, tour operators don't encourage their clients and staff to get involved. And some organizations just don't recognize their responsibility or are not aware that a Code of Conduct exists. Therefore, ECPAT should make more tourism organizations aware of the problem of child sex tourism and the existence of the Code.

To persuade more travel and tourism organizations to sign the Code, the focus should be on a critical evaluation of the tourist system. It should be seen and used as a marketing advantage. Furthermore, ECPAT needs to actively support implementation.

To make reporting easier, the Code documents should be shorter and translated in the local language. Extensively reports can be done every three years and once a year through clear question lists. This will lift the workload of the reporting. A personal, detailed feedback on the reports for the Code is very important to create good will among the organizations. There should be clear sanctions for Code members that don't report and are not actively involved. This is important for the Code to be taken seriously.

There is a need of a practical training guide on how to deal with child sex tourists and child sex tourism as a whole. Tourist staff needs training on when, what and how to inform tourists about the issue, which tourists and how to report offenders. There should be guidelines, concrete examples, up-to-date information and local contact information. Tourist staff should have knowledge of things as risk areas, legal situation in both countries of origin and destination, roles and responsibilities of different actors and indicators of victims and child sex tourists.

The awareness raising activities should be done over a long-time period. There should be continuous trainings and awareness raising measures for personnel. Seminars should be a habit for tourist industry personnel to enable discussion, sharing best practices, create a network and joint commitment in the combat against child sex tourism.

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## 1. Introduction

Sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in tourism is probably the clearest expression of the use of the tourism platform in a way damaging the human and social development at destinations. To this extent, there is no doubt on the responsibility of travellers and tourism providers to protect children from sexual exploitation.

The travel industry with its international networks, knowledge, experience and direct contact with travellers, can make an important contribution in combating sexual exploitation of children in relation to travelling. The Code of Conduct offers the travel industry (tour operators, airline companies, hotels, travel agents, etc.) guidelines to help reduce the sexual exploitation of minors in a concrete and visible way. The aim of the Code is to make travellers and travel staff more aware of sexual exploitation of children.

Organizations adopting the Code of Conduct commit to implement the following criteria:

- To establish an ethical policy regarding commercial sexual exploitation of children
- To train the personnel in the country of origin and travel destinations
- To introduce a clause in contracts with suppliers, stating a common repudiation of commercial sexual exploitation of children
- To provide information to travellers by means of catalogues, brochures, in-flight films, ticket-slips, home pages, etc.
- To provide information to local 'key persons' at the destinations
- To report annually

In 1997 the Code of Conduct for the travel industry was developed. Since then, many organizations have implemented the Code to show their commitment for practicing a socially responsible, child-wise tourism. However, still many organizations are not actively involved in the combat against child sex tourism. Therefore, ECPAT conducted a research on how to improve the signing, implementation, monitoring and communication of the Code of Conduct.

ECPAT interviewed 31 experts on child sex tourism from tour operators, hotels, airline companies, NGO's, tourism schools, governmental organizations and journalists in five countries. The research is part of the European project 'Offenders Beware' with ECPAT Germany, ECPAT the Netherlands, ECPAT Italy, ECPAT Austria and ECPAT Estonia. The aim of the project is to raise awareness, capacity and motivation for the protection of children from commercial sexual exploitation in tourism. The project is financed by the European Commission.

## 2. Respondents

Government sector	6
Private sector	13
Civil society organizations	8
Educational sector	4

### 3. Relation tourism and sexual exploitation of children

According to the experts, actors in tourism can willingly or unknowingly become involved in sexual exploitation of children. They believe child prostitution is not caused by tourism, but that tourism creates demand. The sex industry provides a source of income for (poor) countries. When there is a large supply of adolescents looking for work, they can become involved in the sex industry. Offenders use the services and the infrastructure of the tourism industry to sexually exploit children. Most of these offenders would not sexually exploit minors in their home land, but act differently when they are abroad and outside of their own social environment. Some experts say child abusers use the travel and tourism industry to go to countries where there is a small chance to be caught. Some countries do little to change the image they have concerning the admissibility of sex with young people. There are even organizations that organize child sex tourism trips. Some respondents say that child sex tourism is a fundamental problem of society and that the tourism sector does not have a primary responsibility in this.

Most experts think that tourism will continue to increase in the future and that child sex tourism will increase as well. Some think that with the rise of new tourist destinations, sustainability will not be taken into account. Only if a tourist destination is 'well established', sustainability will get attention. Therefore, child sex tourism will shift to new tourist destinations where there are less rules and less attention for child sex tourism prevention. The rise of internet is mentioned a few times as a risk for increasing child sex tourism. People can book online and remain uninformed on child sex tourism and booking online reduces traceability of offenders.

#### What can the tourism sector do to combat child sex tourism

The box below show the opinions of the respondents on what the travel and tourism industry can do to prevent child sex tourism. Most respondents mention things from the Code of Conduct.

##### What can the travel and tourism industry do to prevent child sex tourism?

- Commit in person and as a sector to its progressive eradication
- Develop an overall plan of action to promote for sustainability (environment, conservation of tradition and culture, protection of children and so on), that is more effective than ad hoc single actions
- Tour Operators and Travel Agents should speak up against child sex tourism in one voice
- Become signatory to the existing Code, or come up with an alternative
- Inform tourists on child sex tourism, additionally to the general travel information
- Firmly transmit to clients and suppliers a total rejection of sexual exploitation of children
- Observe the law and inform tourists about this
- Train tourism personnel
- Terminate contracts with accommodations if these allow sexual exploitation of minors at their premises
- Withdraw all services towards persons identified as child sex tourists
- Impose fines or take away membership of national associations of tour operators and travel agents to travel organizations that allow child sex tourism
- Put in place reporting and monitoring mechanisms
- Allow no access for children to premises unless accompanied by family
- Contribute financially to research and awareness efforts by NGOs and local groups

## 4. The Code of Conduct

See the box below for the opinions of the respondents on reasons for tour and travel organizations to sign or not to sign the Code of Conduct (the Code), how to persuade more travel and tourism organizations to sign the Code and on how to improve the Code.

### **Reasons for travel and tourism organizations to sign the Code**

- Economical interests
- Social and ethical responsible image
- Fits the trend of sustainable tourism
- To protect the positioning of the country as a destination of sustainable tourism
- Moral responsibility

### **Reasons for travel and tourism organizations not to sign the Code**

- Not aware the Code exists
- Additional workload because of the Code for training staff and yearly reporting
- Costs for training and non-productive working time during training
- Clients might think they are taken for potential paedophiles
- Involvement endangers clients and staff because of possible criminal structures
- It might tarnish a country's image as a tourism destination
- Because of high staff turnover, signing and implementing the Code has no high priority
- Do not acknowledge that they have a responsibility

### **Recommendations to make more tourism organizations sign the Code**

- Make more tourism organizations aware of child sex tourism and the Code
- Focus on a critical evaluation of the tourism system
- Explain concrete benefits
- Present it as a marketing advantage
- Explain the extra workload and how ECPAT can assist

### **Recommendations to improve the Code**

- Actively support implementation
- Provide a protocol with concrete steps on how to implement the Code in practice
- Give regularly workshops on developing policy against sexual exploitation of children
- Make Code documents shorter and translate them in the local language
- Give examples of texts for brochures and contracts
- Have good information material for staff and tourists
- Organize trainings for tourism personnel
- Let members report extensively every three years, once a year with clear question lists
- Give a personal, detailed feedback on the reports for the Code to create good will
- Have clear sanctions for Code members that don't report and are not actively involved in implementing the Code

## 5. Communication on child sex tourism

### Tourists

The experts agree that the travel industry has an important role in making tourists aware of the problem of child sex tourism. Only putting a small text at the end of a brochure is according to the experts not effective. People don't read that and the problem of child sex tourism can not be explained in a few words. The respondents recommend brochures, flyers and in-flight videos. There should be information materials for different risk destinations and for sending countries with general information on the problem of child sex tourism and specific information on the legislation concerning prostitution, the age of sexual consent, legal consequences for offenders and how to report sexual exploitation of children.

There are mixed opinions on whether tourism organizations should encourage tourists to report suspicious behaviour. Many respondents recommend tourism organizations to actively encourage tourists to report suspicious behaviour. Important then, is to instruct tourists on what to report and how to report safely. Experts think it is a big challenge to instruct such large amounts of tourists and make reporting work. There is a risk of receiving a bulk of reports with absolutely no use. Other respondents point out the possible danger when tourists report cases. Many countries with a child sex tourism problem have also a problem with corruption and have criminal organizations involved in the sex industry. Therefore, some respondents are reluctant to encourage clients and employees to report child sex tourism. Some advise only to report to authorities, tourist organizations or ECPAT after returning home. Hotlines offer the possibility to report suspicious cases in destination countries without getting involved personally, because callers can stay anonymous. Many experts think that information material on child sex tourism should include hotline numbers on the condition that the numbers function properly and reports can be made in English.

The timing of informing tourists on child sex tourism is according to the experts very important. Some claim that people are only sensitive to information when they have already booked their holiday and search for information on the destination country. Therefore, the focus of the communication should be on travellers going to destinations with a risk of child sex tourism. The information materials should be handed out in planes that fly to risk destinations. At these destinations, tourists should get information on child sex tourism again.

It is also mentioned that tourists should not get the information fully unprepared. For some it might be too shocking and some may be offended, thinking that they are considered as a potential child abuser. Therefore, according to some respondents, child sex tourism should be included in general information on the destination country, next to information on for instance drinking water or health care. A respondent working for a charter company, had received complaints about their in-flight video on child sex tourism being too confronting. For that reason, the charter company now shows a new video in which child sex tourism is less confronting and part of sustainable tourism issues. Other respondents believe that a shocking campaign is the most effective way to inform tourists on child sex tourism.

Some experts mention that the communication should focus on the sexual exploitation of adolescents instead of young children. Many situational child sex tourists would never have sex with a child that has not reached puberty yet. The group of situational child sex tourists is an important target group in the communication on child sex tourism, because this group might act differently when they know the risks.

## Tourism staff

According to the experts, there is a need of a practical training guide on how to deal with child sex tourists and child sex tourism as a whole. Tourist staff needs training on when, what and how to inform tourists about child sex tourism, which tourists and how to report offenders. There should be guidelines, case examples, up-to-date information and local contact information. Tourist staff should have knowledge of things as risk areas, legal situation in both countries of origin and destination, children rights, indicators of victims and child sex tourists, how to report offenders safely, roles and responsibilities of different actors and how to cooperate with them.

The training should be specific for different target groups and give concrete ways on how travel and tourism staff in different countries of origin and destination can take actions to stop child sex tourism. Trainings should also be given to law enforcement, local government officials, embassy personnel, tourism education students and representatives who get into contact with tourists, i.e. hotels, transport companies and leisure and entertainment facilities. Participants should learn to see themselves as responsible actors who can play an active role and can make a change.

The awareness raising activities should be done over a long-time period. The trainings must start before the employees go to the destinations and continue after they have arrived. The training should have a strong methodological design and instructors should have experience in leading participatory processes. Workshops should be used as an instrument for all tourist industry personnel to enable discussion, sharing best practices, create a network and joint commitment in the combat against child sex tourism. The accessibility of information and knowledge should be guaranteed within the company. E-learning tools can be used to reduce costs.

## 6. Prosecution of offenders

In the box below the opinions of the respondents concerning the prosecution of child sex offenders are listed.

### Problems in prosecution of child sex tourists

- Getting evidence is difficult
- Lack of international collaboration
- Corruption, lack of political will
- Lack of financial resources
- Judges and prosecutors are not sufficiently trained
- Law enforcement has many leaks for offenders to escape
- Extritorial legislation for combating sexual exploitation of children is not sufficiently known
- Victims have to come to the country of the offender to testify
- Victim's rights are not considered well enough

### Solutions for problems in the prosecution of child sex tourists

- Training for police, judges, prosecutors, embassy staff and other authorities
- More financial resources
- Increase the number of coordinating officers in countries of destination
- Increase international and interdepartmental collaboration
- Create standard strategies and procedures
- Sensitize communities and tourists to report cases of sexual exploitation of children
- Increase general awareness in the media
- More research and distribute more data regarding child sex tourism

## 7. List of recommendations

### **Recommendations to make more tourism organizations sign the Code**

- Make more tourism organizations aware of child sex tourism and the Code
- Focus on a critical evaluation of the tourism system
- Explain concrete benefits, such as a marketing advantage
- Explain the extra workload and how ECPAT can assist

### **Recommendations to improve the Code**

- Actively support implementation
- Provide a protocol with concrete steps on how to implement the Code
- Give regular workshops to develop policies against the sexual exploitation of children
- Make Code documents shorter and translate them in the local language
- Give examples of texts for brochures and contracts
- Have good information material for staff and tourists
- Organize trainings for tourism personnel
- Let members report extensively every three years and once a year with clear question lists
- Give a personal, detailed feedback on the reports for the Code to create good will
- Have clear sanctions for Code members that do not report and are not implementing the Code actively

### **Communication towards tourists**

- Communicate child sex tourism by means of brochures, flyers and in-flight videos
- Information material should have general information on the problem of child sex tourism and specific information on the legislation concerning prostitution, the age of sexual consent, legal consequences for offenders and how to report sexual exploitation of children for different risk destinations and sending countries
- Encourage tourists to report suspicious behaviour
- Instruct what to report and how to report safely
- Include hotline numbers in information materials on child sex tourism on the condition that the numbers function properly and reports can be made in English
- Focus the communication on travellers going to destinations with a risk of child sex tourism
- Hand out information materials in planes that fly to risk destinations and at hotels
- Don't give the information fully unprepared
- Include local people in the communication
- Include child sex tourism in general information on the destination country
- Focus on the sexual exploitation of adolescents instead of young children

### **Training of tourism professionals**

- On when, what and how to inform tourists on child sex tourism, which tourists and how to report
- Give information on risk areas, legal situation in both countries of origin and destination, children rights, indicators of victims and child sex tourists, how to report offenders safely, roles and responsibilities of different actors and how to cooperate with them
- Provide guidelines, case examples, up-to-date information and local contact information
- The awareness raising activities should be done over a long-time period
- Workshops should be used as an instrument for all tourist industry personnel to enable discussion, sharing best practices and to create a network of experts
- The accessibility to information and knowledge should be guaranteed in the company
- E-learning tools can be used to reduce costs
- Train next to tourist personnel, also tourism students, hotels, transport companies, leisure and entertainment facilities, law enforcement, local government officials, embassy personnel