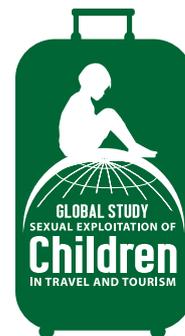


IN BRIEF

VOLUN-TOURISM



WHAT IS VOLUN-TOURISM?

The term “volun-tourism” refers to a short-term volunteer experience that is combined with travel for work, study or leisure. Many tourists now seek unique and different experiences during their travels. They may seek to get closer to nature through eco-tourism, to enjoy a more “authentic” experience via a homestay or to engage in short-term volunteer work. The volunteer experience might consist of a few hours of work, purchase of a volun-tourism package from a specialised tour operator or time spent with an ongoing development or humanitarian aid project. The appearance of this new kind of “do-good” tourism is part of the general diversification of the travel industry. Increased demand has **transformed volunteering into a marketable product and one of the fastest-growing and most lucrative sectors in the tour industry market.** Volun-tourism is thought to have generated US\$2.6 billion in 2014, prompting tour operators to attract as many volun-tourists as possible.

DEMAND, SUPPLY AND POTENTIAL IMPACT

Volun-tourism has been popular among travellers from the U.S. and Australia for some time, and has begun to catch on in Europe. **Typical destinations for volun-tourists include South and Southeast Asia, and increasingly Africa,** taking different forms

in different countries. For instance, while Bhutan mainly attracts long-term volunteers who bring technical expertise, Cambodia has seen a rise in the number of “orphanage tourists”.

Volun-tourism can have a positive impact on local communities. The arrival of “volun-tourists” creates an additional source of income, and in the best-case scenario, their involvement can facilitate development projects with long-lasting social, economic and environmental benefits. However, volun-tourism also presents risks, especially for children.

RISKS FOR CHILDREN

The involvement of volun-tourists in activities that bring them into direct contact with children creates **opportunities for preferential and situational offenders to gain access to potential victims.** This is the case at schools, refugee or IDP camps, shelters, orphanages, etc. Interviews with travelling child sex offenders (TCSOs) noted that they often serve as professionals (e.g. teachers) or volunteers to facilitate their abuse of the children with whom they work -- a finding consistent with other, larger-scale studies. The UK police reported that during 2006-2011 some 7-19% of [British] offenders were employed in roles that provided them with regular, unfettered contact with children. In the Netherlands about 15% of reports of SECTT involved a relationship between victim and perpetrator established through aid work.

This tendency is further aggravated by the development of “orphanage tourism” and the opening of an increasingly large number of volunteer positions for tourists in orphanages, as described in the box.

WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

The problems described above lie not with volun-tourism itself, but rather with the lack of regulations governing it. For example, **selection criteria and training offered to volunteers before their departure are often inadequate, or even non-existent**. Since no specific skills or experience are required, **background and reference checks are rarely carried out**. Even when in place, background checks cannot ensure reliability, and carrying them out can be burdensome if the aspiring volun-tourist has travelled extensively or lived in several countries. A recent German study showed that even in cases where background checks and preliminary interviews were required, fewer than half (44%) of the projects examined required volun-tourists to provide a police clearance –which in any case only reflects an absence of convictions.

Another important problem is that **rules of conduct for volun-tourists are lacking**. Visitors and volunteers are often allowed to spend time alone with children, or even to take them out of the facility. Some governments and protection agencies, notably in Africa, are trying to put effective child protection guidelines and monitoring processes in place, but so far these efforts have been outpaced by volun-tourism’s rapid growth. Weak regulations for

orphanages, residential care centres and shelters coincide with a lack of specific child protection policies to enhance risk. Unfortunately, to date government oversight of volun-tourism has been lacking; instead governments encourage all forms of travel and tourism in the hope of boosting economic development and generating employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS (SAMPLE ONLY)

Governments (countries of destination): Tighten regulations for residential child care centres and restrict the use of international volunteers to qualified or skilled volunteers with police background checks.

Governments (countries of origin): Maintain child sex offenders' registers to enable the issuance of Green Notices to warn counterparts in other countries about the possible threat posed by travelling convicted child sex offenders ; ensure that volun-tourism is regulated and increase accountability for groups or firms sending volun-tourists abroad.

Receiving organisations: Develop a child protection policy; do not allow volun-tourists to be alone with children; introduce systematic background checks and require police clearances

Child rights organisations: Work with the tourism industry to develop child protection strategies and tools; initiate campaigns to educate all stakeholders about the dangers of volun-tourism activities involving children.

ZOOM: OFFENDERS WORKING IN ORPHANAGES

Volunteering in residential care centres, orphanages and shelters has become popular among international travellers. Orphanages quickly began to take advantage of this growing interest, transforming it into a source of funding, even reportedly “recruiting” children from their parents – 80 percent of the estimated 2 million children placed in orphanages worldwide still have at least one living parent. Increased “volun-tourism” at orphanages places these children at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Cases of North American TCSO “volunteers” abusing children in orphanages were reported in Cambodia, Kenya, Haiti, Nepal and Honduras. European TCSOs have engaged in “orphanage tourism” in countries such as Cambodia and Pakistan. In Cambodia, some residential care managers were directly asked about the children’s availability for sex.

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