



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Singapore*



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Introduction

Singapore has undergone dramatic economic growth during the past forty years, rapidly becoming one of the wealthiest and most developed countries in Asia. However, increasing consumerism among youth is a major contributing factor to child prostitution in Singapore, pushing children, both boys and girls, to engage in occasional commercial sex to increase access to material goods. This increasingly common practice is often referred to by its Japanese name, *enjo kosai*. As **child prostitution** is illegal, it rarely takes place in legal, licensed brothels but more often in discreet locations such as hotels, karaoke, bars, apartments, and massage parlours.

Singapore is one of the major destination countries in the ASEAN region for migration for sex-related work, including **trafficking of children**. Some trafficked victims are also from South Asian countries. However, a reliable figure is difficult to obtain due to the hidden nature of the crimes. Available information suggests that children and young people are trafficked to and through Singapore mainly for exploitation in prostitution, fueled not only

by local demand for commercial sex but also by demand from foreign male workers and tourists.¹

Child pornography and sexual exploitation over the internet in Singapore takes the form of bullying and peer-to-peer exploitation more often than commercial pornography. The increasing use of new ICTs by Singaporean children and young people exposes them to various risks, including sexual abuse and exploitation. The rise in the number of cases of teenagers being sexually abused by people they have met in chat rooms as a result of sexual grooming has been reported since 2001.²

Although precise information on **child sex tourism** is not available, it appears that some Singaporean citizens engage in sexual acts with children during their trips abroad. According to a report on child sex tourism (CST) in the ASEAN region, Singapore is a sending country of sex tourists,³ especially in the Riau Islands and other Southeast Asian countries, as many working class men are searching for sex services at lower prices.⁴

National Plan of Action (NPA)

Although the Government of Singapore participated in the World Congress III against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents held in Brazil in November 2008, the country has not yet developed a

National Plan of Action to address the different manifestations of CSEC, nor has it adopted a multi-dimensional strategy on child protection or a comprehensive child rights policy.

Coordination and Cooperation

The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) chair an Inter-Ministry Working Group on the Management of Child Abuse since its inception in 1997. The Health, Police and Education Ministries coordinate and cooperate on issues concerning child protection and put into place systems and procedures for the management of child protection cases. The Government works closely with NGOs on ensuring adequate support services for victims of trafficking. Agencies are also part of a larger network of NGOs that provides a platform for coordination with relevant agencies, as well as sharing of knowledge and expertise.⁵ The National Internet Advisory Committee (NIAC) was formed in 1996 to advise the Media Development Authority (MDA) on its

policies and regulations governing the Internet, new media and related services.⁶

The country is party to the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters within ASEAN member countries (2004), with regard to trafficking in persons⁷ and also has bilateral agreements with a number of other countries. There are several exchanges of technical training programs, such as Criminal Investigation on trafficking issues and standards of conduct when dealing with victims of trafficking.⁸ Regional and international cooperation to combat cybercrime, including child pornography, has been established in the framework of the Association of National Police Forces of the ASEAN Region (ASEANPOL).

Prevention

Prevention efforts in Singapore have focused heavily on preventing child pornography and exploitation over the internet through a three-prong approach that includes a regulatory framework for relevant government departments and other stakeholder, encouraging industry self-regulation and promoting online safety awareness through public and child education.⁹

In addition to the filtering that occurs under the mandates of the MDA, the Ministry of Education has adopted a system to block access to pornographic and similarly objectionable internet sites from its proxy servers, although the government admits that it is relatively easy to circumvent these mechanisms. The government also set up software that can detect

suspected images and sites and the audience can also send the reports of child pornography or sexual images via email to MDA.¹⁰ The government also invests resources in primary and secondary schools and by training teachers on the prevention of CSEC¹¹. With regard to trafficking, the government, until recently, did not recognise Singapore's role in the problem and thus undertook no prevention measures; however, there have been positive developments recently, namely the establishment of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Human Trafficking¹² and some policy changes on the treatment of victims of trafficking. Singapore has also supported a number of awareness-raising programmes to prevent child sex tourism by Singaporeans abroad.

Singapore has three major pieces of legislation dealing with CSEC-related issues: the Children and Young Person's Act, the Women's Charter, and the Penal Code. While each of these statutes offers protection against crimes associated with CSEC, Singapore has not ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Trafficking Protocol) nor the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (Optional Protocol), which has resulted in provisions and definitions related to CSEC crimes in domestic legislation that are not fully consistent with international child rights standards.

Singapore legislation does not fully conform to international standards related to the prostitution of children. While all children (both boys and girls) under the age of 18 are protected from commercial sexual transactions (in exchange of remuneration or other form of consideration), protection from selling, hiring or obtaining possession of a person for the purpose of prostitution is limited to girls. Boys are left unprotected.

Section 12 of the Children and Young Persons Act specifically outlines a **trafficking in children** provision, making it an offence for anyone to participate in transferring or in conferring the possession, custody or control of a child for any valuable consideration.¹³ Trafficking in girls for sexual exploitation is also punished under the Women's Charter and its section 141(1) prohibits "traffic in women and girls"; providing that any person who buys, sells, procures, traffics or transports to or from Singapore a woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution is to be punished by a fine and imprisonment for up to five years.¹⁴ A number of provisions of the Penal Code (eg, sections 107 and 363-367) set forth offences related to trafficking, including abetment, abduction and kidnapping.

There is no specific legal provision in the legislation of Singapore concerning the illegality of **child pornography**. However, the Undesirable Publications Act and the Films Act are relied on to regulate most obscene or objectionable material, defined as those that describe, depict, express or otherwise deal with matters such as sex, horror, crime, cruelty, violence or the consumption of drugs or other intoxicating substances in such a manner that the availability of the publication is likely to be injurious to the public good.¹⁵

Activities that contribute to the commercial **sexual exploitation of children in tourism** are criminalised under Section 376D of the Penal Code.¹⁶ Singapore's extraterritorial legislation pertaining to CSEC is found in Section 376C of the Penal Code, which criminalises commercial sex with a minor below the age of 18 outside of Singapore; however, the government has not investigated or prosecuted offenders of child sex tourism committed by Singaporean nationals or permanent residents.¹⁷

The Singapore Police Force has specialized units, including the Serious Sexual Crime Branch, where officers are trained to investigate particular sex crimes and to appropriately conduct interviews for victims of CSEC.¹⁸ Under the department of Child Protection and Welfare Services, cases of child maltreatment are investigated and safe housing and trauma counseling are provided for.¹⁹ Singapore still lacks efficient, permanent and consistent assistance for victims of trafficking in terms of shelters for victims.²⁰ The MCYS and police department interview and investigate the case simultaneously to avoid re-traumatisation of a child.²¹ However, the law enforcement officers are not proactive in investigating cases, and often cases are resolved by deporting victims to their home countries without considering potential dangers.²²

Child and Youth Participation

Since 2004, the MCYS has developed platforms to seek youth feedback and consultation through online fora. The National Youth Council provides a formal platform for youth from a variety of backgrounds to study policy formulation and debate national issues.

Since its inception in 2004, the forum has engaged youth in issues of national, community and youth interest; provided training and opportunities to exercise leadership; and implemented projects on issues pertaining to youth.

Priority Actions Required

National Plan of Action and policies on children and CSEC

The Singapore Government should adopt specific policies and a national plan of action on child protection, including commercial sexual exploitation of children. Furthermore, the government must establish an independent monitoring mechanism to regularly verify that child rights mechanisms conform to the provisions set forth by the CRC.

Coordination and cooperation

The Government of Singapore should further strengthen cooperative exchange of information about potential child trafficking cases with NGOs and foreign diplomatic missions in Singapore and spur institutional change, such as establishing an independent national human rights commission in compliance with Paris Principles.

Prevention

Sustained public awareness campaigns must be conducted to inform adults and children about CSEC with a focus on the specific manifestations growing in Singapore. Sensitisation activities to prevent CSEC should also include initiatives to deter demand for sex with children in Singapore and abroad. Singapore should promote the Code of Conduct for the protection of children against sexual exploitation in tourism.

Protection

The Government of Singapore should ratify the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and

Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Singapore should further enhance its anti-trafficking legislation to ensure that all acts constituting child trafficking are punished regardless of whether final exploitation occurs. Law enforcement agencies should increase their efforts to proactively identify child victims of CSEC among vulnerable groups, to vigorously investigate and prosecute cases and to ensure that offenders are convicted and receive appropriate criminal punishments

Specialised assistance to effectively respond to the specific needs of child victims of sexual exploitation should be developed. This includes specialised shelters, hotlines, medical/psychological support services and child-friendly procedures and also legal protection of child victims from being deported back.

Child and youth participation

The government should disseminate the Convention on the Rights of the Child to students so that they can be self-informed and be active participants in its implementation. The government should continue to expand programs designed to engage youth in policy making and debates surrounding child rights.

Endnotes

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