

EXPERT PAPER

# COMMENTARY ON THE GLOBAL REPORT 'OFFENDERS ON THE MOVE'



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## INTRODUCTION

The new study 'Offenders on the Move', May 2016, is a much needed, closer look at progress – or lack thereof – in a very specific field of child protection. That 20 years after the 1st World Congress on the Sexual Exploitation of Children there is 'growth' in the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism is a moral outrage. It is also an affront to contemporary humanity. ECPAT, the author of the study, and the researchers should be congratulated for their efforts.

Several of the key findings of the study merit comment. This is particularly true in light of the new commitments the international community and multiple stakeholders have made with Agenda 2030, the new sustainable development goals (SDGs). There are specific targets throughout this ambitious agenda that call for better protection of children, in all countries, from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, torture, trafficking, child labour, child marriage, and a range of violations of the rights of children.

'Offenders on the Move' and its findings are timely as policy makers and politicians commit to action and implementation of the SDGs:

1. A key finding of the study is that sexual exploitation in travel and tourism needs a broader view. Countries are source, transit and destination countries where there are victims. This finding underscores something that lies at the heart of Agenda 2030 universality. Whereas historically one might have distinguished between wealthy countries and poor countries there is no place, irrespective of income, where children have the full protection they have a right to.



2. Another key finding is that the protection of children lags far behind the growth in travel and tourism. As tourism brings in income, the study argues, strong measures need to be put in place both to assess impact on children, but also to inform the development of protection mechanisms. In light of Agenda 2030, and keeping children safe from violence and exploitation, it is important to underscore the significant role that the private sector must play. Where laws are put in place they need to be complied with, and impunity for crimes against children need to end. At the same time, private tourism interests must comply with taxation and other regulations, in order that countries have sufficient resources for social welfare, education and other services that will be part of efforts to keep children safe. The global study itself goes even further, noting that: 'The private sector has a pivotal role to play in the solutions to SECTT, from prevention to awareness-raising, and from reporting to blocking the pathways exploited by offenders.'
  3. 'Offenders on the Move' reminds us that there are neither typical victims, nor typical offenders. This returns us to the sobering reality that the exploitation of children knows no geographic, ethnic, cultural and linguistic barrier. The study shows that the one thing victims have in common is their vulnerability. Whereas in the past there may have been stereotypical victims and offenders the picture is much more opaque today. Agenda 2030 insists that no one be left behind in our efforts, and this holds particularly true for children vulnerable to sexual exploitation in travel and tourism. Countries need to work better within and across their borders, additionally, to bring an end to the impunity of offenders, national and international.
  4. The study points to tremendous power imbalances that exist between those who violate children in travel and tourism, and the victims. It is true that social tolerance, social norms and certain attitudes perpetuate crimes against children, however when ones delves a little more deeply into the matter it is equally true that offenders see the children they victimize as 'the other'. Not 'our' children in other words. Addressing this dehumanization must be at the heart of all work to keep all children safe.
  5. Importantly, the study points out that legislation alone is not enough, that implementation is hampered by a number of factors. Among these, and critical to implementation of Goal 16 of the SDGs, the security and justice sectors need to be strengthened. True, victims need social welfare, health and other services, however good governance and the rule of law are equally important. Moreover, the development of good laws wherein the process engages societies and communities, and young people themselves.
  6. Finally, among the many insights of the study is one of crucial importance – that it is important to get beyond siloes and narrow approaches to ending the exploitation of children in travel and tourism. It is linked to work on social norms broadly, to justice and rule of law as mentioned earlier, and to social and economic development. So much must be done in good faith and good partnership, within and across national borders, within and across discipline and sectors.
- These six of the many important findings of 'Offenders on the Move' will further fuel the mission, vision, principles and goals of the new Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. The study outlines 'tasks' to be carried out by various stakeholders including the private sector, ICT industry, non-government organizations, international and regional organizations and governments outlining the importance of creating a platform for various stakeholders to come together and take comprehensive action for the wellbeing of children. Fittingly,

the new Partnership will bring together stakeholders from across the world to end all forms of violence against children, turning the belief that no violence against children is justifiable and all violence is preventable into a compelling agenda of action. At its heart, and as called for in ECPAT's important study, the Partnership will focus on prevention and on solutions – scaling up what works. The Partnership is a multi-stakeholder initiative, designed to provide governments and other partners with a 'means of implementation' for Agenda 2030, particularly focussed on keeping children safe.

There are three goals of the Partnership, consistent with what 'Offenders on the Move' calls for. First, there is an ambition to build greater political will when it comes to the protection of children from all forms of violence. It is important to see these issues, including sexual exploitation in travel and tourism – essentially sexual violence – as

high level policy priorities. A second goal is the acceleration of action. More needs to be done for and with children to keep them safe. This is urgent and important. Finally, again consistent with the rallying cry of the study – the Partnership will help countries to work better together, to share solutions, highlight areas where new norms and standards are needed. Ultimately, the Partnership hopes to ignite a truly global and 'joined up' movement to end violence against children.

'Offenders on the Move' is a stark reminder that we are not starting from zero. Much important work has been done within and outside the UN system, including by some important civil society and other actors. Much more remain to be done. If not now, when?

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