

THEMATIC NOTE

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM & ONLINE



“The sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism is fully intertwined with online child sexual exploitation. Technological advances have changed the nature of online crimes – in such a rapidly changing environment, we all need to be aware of these threats to better design the responses”

Mr Steven Grocki, Board Member, WePROTECT Global Alliance and Chief Criminal Division, US Department of Justice at the International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism, Bogotá, June 2018.

OVERVIEW

The sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism (SECTT) encompasses a broad spectrum of exploitation of children, including in prostitution and pornography, for the production of online child abuse material and in the sale and trafficking of children in all its forms. Moreover, various travel products put children at risk of exploitation, such as voluntourism, orphanage tourism or mega events.

Online child sexual exploitation (OCSE) involves crimes committed by offenders who use Information Communications Technology (ICT) and the internet to facilitate the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. OCSE crimes include accessing, possessing, producing and/or distributing child sexual abuse materials (CSAM), grooming of children for sexual purposes; sextortion and live sexual abuse via webcam and live stream.

Children are exploited by both foreign and domestic tourists, travellers and longer-term visitors. There is no typical offender – while preferential offenders misuse technology to seek out victims, there are also situational offenders amongst business travellers, travelling workers and voluntourists – in all cases, technology plays a part in the process of sexual exploitation of children.

The proliferation of technology has allowed offenders to distribute and access child abuse material and to come into direct contact with children via chatrooms and social media. Travelling child sex offenders (TCSOs) are increasingly taking advantage of new technologies and creating new methods to groom and exploit children. There is no doubt that digital advances and innovation are also part of the solution for sustainable and responsible travel and tourism. However, rapid developments in digital technology combined with increasingly available and affordable travel options have made it easier to exploit children.

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION?

Online grooming, live streaming of child sexual abuse and online behavior that put children at risk are increasingly intertwined with travel and tourism; putting children at increased risk of falling victim to multiple forms of exploitation. Studies of SECTT reveal that many TCSOs are partially motivated by a sense of impunity as they are mobile and away from home. OCSE further increases a sense of anonymity among offenders and facilitates access to children.

OCSE has a faster, wider reach than offline sexual exploitation as TCSOs can use internet resources to share their grooming techniques and exploitation practices. Viewing at ‘a distance’ does not remain an isolated act. There is a strong association between the consumption of live-streamed child sexual abuse and subsequent travelling to sexually abuse children.

Increasingly TCSOs are using the internet to groom their victims online before travelling to meet them in their own country, region or abroad. Online grooming can occur through many channels, either through online chat forums, through intermediaries, or by contacting minors directly via video-sharing, instant messaging and social networks.

Cases from around the globe demonstrate that offenders continue to abuse their victims online once they have returned home. Many TCSOs record their offending and share this material online with other offenders. Some TCSOs have funded their overseas trips to commit these crimes through the sale of abuse material. With the growing use of digital technology, offenders are able to store child sexual abuse material when returning home which is more difficult for authorities to detect. Online environments (also known as the “darknet”) are increasingly difficult to detect as well. TCSOs use sophisticated methods of technology to abuse and exploit children – as technology advances, so does the nature of online crimes closely interlinked with SECTT.

THE WAY FORWARD

Intergovernmental bodies have to place SECTT and OCSE on their political agendas and governments must take direct responsibility to protect children from both forms of exploitation, whether they are countries of demand, supply or victimization.

Technology-based solutions are critical to combat sexual exploitation of children. Companies active in both travel and tourism and ICT sectors can play a key role in protecting children. Artificial intelligence can be employed for facial recognition of both victims and offenders, as well as to track offenders’ movement. Law enforcement needs to use the latest advancements in technology to get ahead of offenders.

Cooperation is also fundamental in dealing with these interrelated forms of crime. International cooperation between law enforcement agencies and a focus on extra-territoriality as well as sharing of data and information between agencies is essential to ending the impunity of offenders.

Non-governmental organizations shall play a key role in building bridges between various actors, including the general public, to protect children from sexual exploitation and end the impunity of offenders.

For the full list of the recommendations, please see [here](#).

VISIT THE CHILD PROTECTION
IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM
WEBSITE

VISIT THE GLOBAL ONLINE
DATABASE

ECPAT International acknowledges the overall funding support for its programme from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands through Defence for Children-ECPAT Netherlands in the frame of the Down to Zero program to end the sexual exploitation of children.

ECPAT further acknowledges the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Oak Foundation, Terre des Hommes Netherlands, and Irish Aid, whose funding support contributes to the various activities in the global and regional programmes.