

NORWAY PROMISING PRACTICE

The role of the travel and transportation industry in preventing and addressing the sexual exploitation of children



Introduction

The issue of sexual exploitation of children linked to travel and transport contexts is not sufficiently recognised, documented, and understood, although promising practices exist across countries and regions. ECPAT International refers to “travel and transport” in our context as the movement of persons from place to place and the various means by which such movement is accomplished, without taking into consideration the length and purpose of the journey. The focus is beyond longer trips for leisure purposes, in contexts associated with the movement of persons such as trucks, buses, trains, transport hubs, taxis, private transport, and other transportation-related services managed also through online platforms. Transportation networks can be misused by both domestic and foreign traveling sex offenders and all those who take the arising opportunity to exploit children. In these environments, at every stage of the journey, children and young people are exposed to a heightened risk of violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse with no protective environments.

Background information and context

ECPAT Norway was selected to present its promising practice in engaging the transport industry through a comprehensive approach involving authorities, businesses, as well as children and young people. This promising practice reflects the work of ECPAT Norway as the lead organization that partnered with the Norwegian School of Hotel Management, Hotel University of Stavanger to identify prevention efforts and opportunities for strengthening children and young people’s safety in taxis. ECPAT Norway has the mission to work against all forms of sexual exploitation of children in Norway and internationally in line with ECPAT International’s goals and visions.

This case study is complementary to the recommendations from the report of the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children SRSG VAC’s report on child protection in travel and tourism that will be launched at the UN General Assembly in October 2023.

Introduction and background to Norwegian context

The population in Norway is currently 5,5 million. 1,241,427 are children and young people from the age of 0-19. The Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) at Oslo Metropolitan University recently issued its third report on violence and abuse against children. The “Young violence” (Ung

vold) studies are based on surveys with young people between the ages of 16-19 years. While the prevalence of lifetime exposure to sexual violence was approximately the same in the 2007 and 2015 UngVold studies, the 2023 levels of nearly all surveyed forms of sexual violence were nearly twice as high for both girls and boys as they were in 2015. Around one in four respondents in the UngVold 2023 survey reported having been subjected to at least one instance of sexual violence during their lifetime.¹ Two percent of the respondents had been exposed to sexual violence in a car or in public transport.²

Over the last two years, media reports have revealed serious cases of sexual violence against young people within the taxi industry. According to these reports, less than 50% of sexual abuse cases were resolved. To address this issue, ECPAT Norway (EN) decided to explore the risks further and identify ongoing prevention efforts and opportunities for strengthening children and young people's safety in this industry.

Collaborative Action Norway

ECPAT Norway commenced the project in mid-June 2023 and is focused on the following activities:

- 1) Review of case law and conduct a survey online to better understand the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse of children and young people in taxis;
- 2) Advocate to strengthen the protection of children and young people through better regulations and accountability in the taxi industry;
- 3) Raise awareness in cooperation with children and young people on how to keep safe, where to seek help, and the importance of reporting incidents.

REVIEW OF CASE LAW: ECPAT Norway's search in the official database Lovdata.no, found 1 007 court decisions that involved sexual violence and taxis, but did not come across cases that link taxis to exploitation through prostitution or human trafficking.

The victims in several of the situations had been encouraged to take a taxi home actually for safety reasons. In most of the cases reviewed, a male taxi driver was the offender. Girls and young women in particular, were at heightened risk of sexual harassment, touching, rape, abduction, deprivation of liberty, aggravated violence, and sexual assault when being alone in the taxi. In addition, most abuses happened at night, on the way home from the city or a party. Oftentimes, the victims were under the influence of alcohol. Disabled girls and women were also victimized when using taxis from the hospital to their homes. The penal code does not yet have a provision on sexual exploitation of children, however, in most cases reviewed, the offender was also charged with abuse of his position as a taxi driver and lost the right to ever work as a taxi driver again.

SURVEY ONLINE: in late June 2023, ECPAT Norway launched an anonymous survey on social media. The survey focused on children and young persons up to the age of 25 years old. By August, ECPAT Norway received 122 replies (49% girls, 48% boys, 3% other). 45 persons reported being victims of harassment, unwanted sexual attention in a taxi, rape or rape attempt, and among these, 69,77% experienced it more than one time. Three respondents had been raped by a taxi driver and one of them reported being abducted and subjected to sexual assault. Two reported harassment and abuse for being homosexual. Due to feelings of embarrassment, shame, self blame and fear of not being believed, *only one of the respondents reported the incident to the police.*

21 of the victims were able to name the responsible taxi companies, which gives ECPAT Norway a unique opportunity to follow up with relevant authorities and engage with the companies to take action to prevent sexual exploitation by implementing the six criteria of The Code www.thecode.org. In ECPAT Norway's previous attempts to engage travel and tourism companies in Norway, there has been a reluctance by businesses to acknowledge that such incidents happen within their services. Gathering evidence, including directly from survivors, and raising

1. ond, L.R, Lid, S., Schwencke, E.O & Stefansen, K. (2023). Vold og overgrep mot barn og unge. Omfang og utviklingstrekk 2007–2023. [Velferdsforskningsinstituttet NOVA Rapport 11/2023](https://www.nova.no/rapporter/vold-og-overgrep-mot-barn-og-unge-2007-2023), p. 121.

2. Ibid, p. 63.

awareness of the problem and measures that could be adopted to prevent it, will be important in stepping up the way forward.

EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND YOUNG

PEOPLE: The project shows that consulting young people and survivors through the anonymous online survey can promote their safe engagement and involvement in advocacy efforts. The information received through the survey, such as the names of taxi companies involved, is key in promoting business accountability and constitutes a unique source of information. Equally important is the involvement of children and young people in the development of information and prevention material on how to keep safe in travel and tourism – the risks and safeguards they identify may differ from the ones that adults know.

Next steps for Norway

In order to prepare the ground for the advocacy to strengthen the protection of children and young people through better regulations and accountability in the taxi industry, ECPAT Norway carried out an analysis of existing legislation and policy development and found an opportunity to influence change.

On 11 October 2022, the Ministry of Transport appointed The Taxi Committee to **undertake a comprehensive review of taxi regulation and prepare proposals for regulation in the area.**

The committee submitted its interim report on June 30, 2023. It is this partial report that was circulated for consultation. In September 2023, ECPAT Norway is going to submit a proposal concerning safeguards and children's right to be protected at all times and raise awareness among relevant authorities within the transportation sector.

Call for Action from Norway

Child protection should be everybody's business. The responsibility cannot be limited to the Ministry of Children, but needs to be mainstreamed into every Ministry and all relevant authorities. Beyond the Transparency Act (Business and Human Rights law) in Norway concerning due diligence requirements for companies, there is a need for specific legislation and/or regulations concerning each sector – including transport industry – in order to ensure the necessary safeguards for children and young people.



This promising practice has been developed as a contribution to the event organised by ECPAT International, PACT – Protect All Children from Trafficking, and the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG VAC).

Building on the findings and recommendations from the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children Report to the UN General Assembly on child protection in travel and tourism (October 2023).

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