



BOLIVIA PROMISING PRACTICE

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

Introduction

The sexual exploitation of children in the travel and transportation context is not sufficiently visible, recognized, documented and understood, although there are promising practices in several countries and regions. ECPAT International refers to “travel and transportation” as the movement of people from one place to another and the various means by which it is carried out, without regard to the duration and purpose of the trip. The approach goes beyond long trips for leisure purposes to encompass contexts associated with the movement of people such as trucks, buses, trains, transportation hubs, taxis, private transportation and other transportation-related services, also managed through online platforms.

Transportation networks can be misused by traveling sex offenders, whether national or foreign, and by all those who take advantage of the opportunity presented to exploit children. In these environments, at every stage of the journey, children are exposed to a greater risk of violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse, in the absence of protective environments and State protection institutions that are present in these spaces linked to travel and transportation.

Background and Context

The Munasim Kullakita Foundation, ECPAT Bolivia, has been selected to present an outstanding practice in the field of the travel and transportation industry, focused on sustainable tourism and the prevention of cases of sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism (SECTT). This was carried out through the “Safe Terminals Model”, which promotes awareness and strengthening the capacities of operators in the travel and transport sector, both formal and informal, as well as informal merchants who are at the stops of buses or terminals. These informal actors have a broad

presence in interprovincial, interdepartmental and international transport terminals, whether within these spaces or in their surroundings.

The main objective of the Munasim Kullakita Foundation is to support the processes of social inclusion of marginalized and excluded people, through participatory interaction between the community and state institutions as inclusive agents. This is done in order to promote and protect human rights, improve living conditions and reduce the vulnerability and risks faced by children, young people and families.

This work is aligned with the objectives and visions of ECPAT International.

The compilation of this promising practice will be incorporated into the event organized by ECPAT International and its collaborators, related to the launch of the report of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children to be presented to the General Assembly of the Organization of the United Nations, in October 2023. The report addresses the protection of children in travel and tourism, in line with their right to live free of violence and the objective of accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Introduction to the Bolivian Context

In Bolivia, the processes of dealing with cases of sexual exploitation of children are governed by regulation 263 “Comprehensive Law against Human Trafficking and Trafficking”, promulgated on July 31, 2012. This law aims to address to human trafficking and related crimes, in addition to guaranteeing the rights of victims through prevention, protection, care, prosecution and criminal sanction measures.

According to this regulation, “SEC is not an individual crime, that is, there is no conduct classified in the Penal Code as “commercial sexual exploitation of children.” However, due to the characteristics of various criminal behaviors in which the victims are minors, the motive is identified as performed sexual violence where payment and profit are the goal”.¹

However, it is important to highlight that, in this process, attention to the sexual exploitation of children (SEC) as well as sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism (SECTT) have not been addressed to the date, since there is only the classification of sexual tourism, which would be more focused on the participation of adults.

Although it mentions that the sanction has the respective aggravating factors when the victim is a child or adolescent, the intervention processes do not take into account the level of injury to their rights, as well as an exemplary sanction in relation to adult victims. Currently, the standard is in the process of review and seeks to improve and update victim care processes, with greater focus on children. In the same way, modify and clarify the typology of sexual tourism, noting that this crime ranges from the use of children for sexual activities, to sexual exploitation through lodging, transportation or other services directly or indirectly related to the tourism and private sector.

It is important to mention that no specific research has been carried out on SECTT in Bolivia, therefore, it is difficult to accurately identify the number of victims and the areas of highest prevalence (report or complaint) in relation to children. According to cultural bias, it is believed that women (girls, adolescents) are the group with the highest risk and index as victims of sexual exploitation; however, it should not be ignored that male children and adolescents are also victims of this crime, although in smaller numbers.

The US Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report,² revealed worrying findings for Bolivia in relation to the sexual exploitation of children (SEC) in the departments of La Paz and Beni, where these vulnerable groups are exploited in the context of travel and tourism. One of the alarming aspects is that the perpetrators openly promote the sexual services of minors to tourists who speak Hebrew and Arabic.³ Bolivia even appears on several Deep Web portals as a space of sexual exploitation, with destinations in the Amazon specifically mentioned as places where indigenous girls and adolescents can be obtained.

1 Quantitative data on SEC cases in Bolivia www.vuelalibre.info.

2 [Trafficking in Persons Report](#), Department of State, United States of America, 2020.

3 [Bolivia - Department of State, United States of America](#), (state.gov).

These findings highlight the urgency of establishing a solid legal framework to address the problem of SECTT in the country. The report⁴ calls attention to the need to take effective measures to combat trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in the country, in order to protect them from this terrible reality. It is hoped that this information will lead to concrete and effective actions by the Bolivian authorities and the international community, to address this serious problem and guarantee a safe and protected environment for this population in Bolivia.

Since the Foundation's approach to the intervention municipalities, 38 Bolivian companies and their tour operators have signed the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, which is a call to the country to generate a voluntary guide that promotes the criminalization of the sexual exploitation of children at the international level. Bolivia does not have national regulations or a code of conduct that specifically establishes that companies in the travel and tourism sector adhere to and also assume responsibility.

There are also no direct sanctions for travel or transportation companies that explicitly or implicitly facilitate the participation of children in sexual activities. There are no regulations for the work of volunteers who interact with this population, nor for companies in the travel and tourism sector, regarding the adoption of codes of conduct for the protection of children.

Within national legislation, "Commercial Sexual Violence (CSV)" is established as a crime related to Human Trafficking⁵, which establishes a criminal sanction for "the one that pays" (person who demands and/or consumes sexual and/or erotic activity with children), equivalent to sexual exploitation. Likewise, this regulation mentions "sexual tourism" (SECTT) as a purpose of trafficking and since it is not specified as a specific crime, it is not clear which actors are involved, and therefore the responsibility of the direct and indirect actors is not established.

For this same reason, there is only general data such as the number of reports of human trafficking (or missing persons), but it is not defined how many of these victims were in sexual exploitation, forced begging, irregular adoption, child marriage or sexual tourism, disaggregated by sex and age. Likewise, cases of VSC are confused with the crime of Statutory Enforcement. These situations make it difficult to identify cases of SECTT and minimize the risks and existence of these cases in tourist regions of the country. It also leads to misinformation that limits the establishment of prevention mechanisms.

It is crucial to note that, under Bolivian legislation, only natural persons can be prosecuted for crimes, excluding legal persons/companies such as travel and tourism companies involved in SECTT. This suggests the need to include sanctions such as closure of operations of offending companies and confiscation of assets.

Article 231 bis of the Code of Criminal Procedure, allows courts to prohibit the departure of an accused from the country with sufficient evidence against them, while the Migration Law authorizes the denial of entry to the country of foreigners with arrest warrants or prosecuted for human trafficking crimes. These legal provisions are essential to prevent recidivism. In this context, the Munasim Kullakita Foundation has implemented an awareness and training process focused on various sectors, including tourism service providers who have obtained The Code membership.⁶

The initial question has been raised of how to involve transporters, merchants, artisans, product distribution centers and other actors within Transport Terminals in the prevention of SECTT since these actors play a crucial role in the tourist activity, as they are directly related to the sale of tickets and the operation of the terminals. In addition, they are "the eyes and ears" in these areas, being able to identify situations of vulnerability and risk for children.

4 [Bolivia - Departamento de Estado de los Estados Unidos \(state.gov\)](#).

5 Comprehensive Law 263 against Trafficking in Persons, Art. 35 incorporation of articles to the Penal Code (art. 322).

6 The Code of Conduct for the protection of children against sexual exploitation in travel and tourism, www.thecode.org

The relevance of transport terminals lies in the fact that in these spaces there is a “large movement” of people, they are identified as an exit point for children alone or accompanied by third parties to different regions within and outside the country (interprovincial and interdepartmental local transportation). In relation to transfers or movements outside the country, in practice the use of irregular roads and routes (in which there is no presence of traffic police or other control authorities) is identified. Generally, children are the ones who move around the terminals and mix in among the families and people boarding the buses. This situation worsens when there is no control required to prevent cases of trafficking or identify missing children or adolescents: on vacation or holidays these terminals bring together between 5 to 10 thousand people per day. These spaces are places where vulnerable populations can be recruited for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

With the aim of addressing this problem, the “Safe Terminals” model has been developed, the purpose of which is to prevent cases of SECTT as well as raise awareness about the importance of obtaining Travel Authorization for Minors and promoting co-responsibility of officials and the general population.

Collaborative action in Bolivia

Within this context, the opportunity has been found to work in collaboration with the transport sector and the commercial sector, following the approach of the Eco 2⁷ Community Treatment Model (Community Networks) of the Munasim Kullakita Foundation.

COMMUNITY TREATMENT MODEL:

It is a MODEL OF PREVENTION, HARM REDUCTION, TREATMENT AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION of people, groups, communities and networks that live in highly vulnerable contexts. Its purpose is to improve the living conditions of people, groups and communities, without removing them from the local community in which they live, where they live, through the community.

From the perspective of Community Treatment⁸ the intervention is done in complex local communities with the aim of building community networks, such as the Subjective Community Network, the Network of Formal and Non-Formal Opinion Leaders, the Network of Active Minorities and the Operational Network.⁹ These networks constitute a



7 [Libro-3.pdf \(munasimkullakita.org\)](#), page 9.

8 [libro-3.pdf \(munasimkullakita.org\)](#), page 9.

9 Network of Formal Opinion People Leaders in the community who influence it through their words, attitudes or lifestyles and the relationships between them, “Eco2 Community Model Training Guide.”

framework that addresses aspects such as social representations, discrimination, stigma and stereotypes related to trafficking and sexual exploitation. The network is conceived as the creation of a new organization, group, coalition, association, committee, in which different groups and institutions work together to achieve a common objective in a specific area and topic in favor of their community.

The creation of these community networks, in particular the Formal Opinion Leaders Network, is essential since through the leaders, the community can be influenced effectively. These networks, represented by formal opinion leaders,¹⁰ based on leadership attributions, influence decisions and support from their bases, develop annual work plans that are directed towards the protection of the most vulnerable groups.

In this framework, assistance facilities such as in-person assistance tents, mobile classrooms and fixed assistance centers are implemented. In addition, awareness workshops are held on SECTT and on the factors that contribute to the development of this crime. This community approach seeks to address the problem from its roots and promote a culture of prevention and protection in the context of travel and tourism.

The Munasim Kullakita Foundation has managed to establish successful collaborations with several entities, including the Autonomous Municipal Government of La Paz, the authorities in charge of the terminals (both in the commercial sector and with street vendors), tourist transport companies and merchant associations. The work carried out with this sector has resulted in the elimination of erroneous practices such as evasion in the supervision of personal identification and the children travel permits. For example, it was common for a boy or girl not to have a travel authorization or to have an identity card. Now, from the operational staff of the terminals with which we work, the periodic and routine review of this documentation is promoted for each of the passengers, ensuring the safety of children in travel and tourism.

In addition, co-responsibility among companies in the sector has been encouraged, active community participation has been promoted and work has been done on institutional strengthening to prevent and address the sexual exploitation of children in the context of travels and tourism.

The “Safe Terminals” approach was implemented in several municipalities with the objective of strengthening collaboration at the local level with interprovincial and interdepartmental transport companies, with the participation of merchants (sellers of sweets, cookies, soft drinks, artisans), assuming actions of awareness and training for the identification of possible cases of human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children. The merchant sector can be considered an indirect actor in these crimes, since they remain inside the terminal for more than 12 hours a day and, in some cases, 24 hours.

Transportation companies are also trained on the controls they must carry out when selling tickets to individuals or families accompanied by children. It includes carrying out activities in cooperation with municipal authorities through workshops to strengthen their capacities.

It is important to highlight that this work extended to the community, including merchants and street vendors, as well as informal transporters who operate outside the terminals. The result was successful, since active participation of these sectors was achieved, which showed a greater commitment to the protection of children, as well as the prevention of sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism.¹¹

An example of the effectiveness of this approach was an initiative by merchants and street vendors inside the terminals. A “social experiment” was carried out in which this group showed how a potential criminal captured and transferred a girl inside the terminal.

At that time, merchants, sellers and transporters worked together to catch the individual

10 A person democratically elected within the community, in charge of convening the bases with the objective of promoting periodic meetings to address the needs and demands of their sector in relation to the population and motivating the search for solutions with the intervention of operators and civil society.

11 Based on the Information from the La Paz Bus Terminal, 156 cases identified during the operations were shared, all referred to and resolved in defense offices from January to August 31, 2023; Of these, 18 cases were referred to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and Youth until August, 2023.

and allow authorities to rescue the girl. This exercise demonstrated how these actors can be active agents in the prevention and control of possible cases of trafficking and sexual exploitation. In addition, it was shown how transporters can indirectly contribute to this crime, which generated an analysis of their role and the possible legal consequences in case of participation.

The result of this experience is a video available [here](#).

Achievements to date

Awareness-raising and capacity-building work in the transport sector results in a perceptible change in its approach. Now people who work in terminals understand Law 263 "on human trafficking and related crimes" and recognize that ignorance of this rule and ignoring suspicious situations can make them complicit in crimes and violations of the rights of children. In terms of protection, these interventions have improved the safety of children and adolescents. Through the creation of community networks, the specific needs of the sector were addressed and empathy and co-responsibility in the protection of the most vulnerable population were promoted. The active participation of formal opinion leaders in the community was key to influencing the perception and actions of the society. Nowadays, associations of merchants and artisans at the terminals organize protection and prevention activities independently.

Regarding interventions with transport service operators, this sector assumed its own policies in the sale of tickets and screening of passengers, promoting that all of its personnel participate in trainings (personnel who sell tickets, drivers, luggage loading assistants and companies promoting staff), getting companies to promote buses as safe spaces for children.

The administration of the bus terminal appropriated the methodology, managing to classify itself as a safe terminal and becoming a model at the national level. They are invited to present the actions they have been carrying out and have motivated other bus terminals to take these actions.

The comprehensive participation of all the people involved, both inside and outside a bus terminal, has proven to be essential, especially in a highly relevant location like this one, which is located on the main axis of Bolivia and receives influx from all departments, in addition to functioning as a distribution point to other destinations in the country. This collaboration has resulted in the creation of a sustainable intervention model rooted in the community, transforming this environment into a safe and protective space.

Next steps for Bolivia

At the beginning of the "Safe Terminals" program, the original plan focused on collaborating exclusively with tourism service providers and municipal authorities. However, during the development of the project, it was necessary to adapt it to actively include the transport sector, since its importance in the process was identified. Furthermore, in terms of key actors, it is recognized that the sector of merchants and artisans played a fundamental role in making the program visible and in inviting them to participate in it. This was due to the commitment and active participation that these sectors demonstrated in the process.

The work process with the municipality must be continually strengthened, diversifying the methodology of action and being clear about the needs and new dynamics of the crime at the international level. Bimonthly evaluations must also be carried out to measure the impact and commitment of the sector, maintain actions with community networks and promote the development of advocacy actions.

Call for action from Bolivia

From the perspective as a foundation, working with different sectors that influence the tourist activity of a destination has been considered relevant. Due to the lack of research on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, it is necessary to carry out studies that analyze the problem and to involve authorities and companies, including the informal sector.

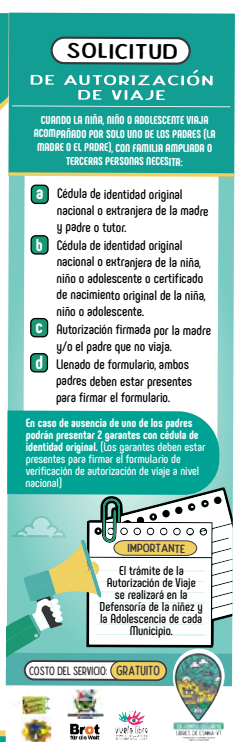
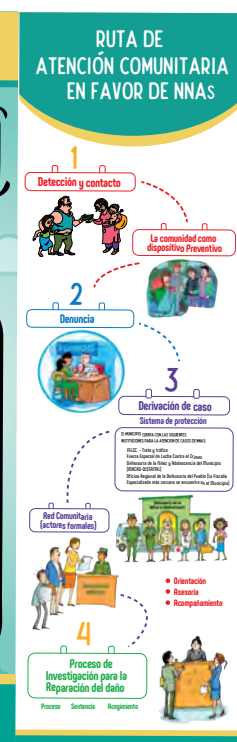
It is necessary to promote the participation of government agencies at the national, departmental and local levels, so that the Tourism Law 292 'Bolivia Te Espera' (Bolivia Waits for You) is updated, so that they commit to taking actions in favor of the prevention of SECTT, in all tourist destinations in the country.

A call is extended to all national authorities of the tourism sector in the Americas, with the purpose of raising awareness about the situation concerning travel, tourism and the transportation sector, as well as to highlight the importance of intensifying efforts in the prevention of SECTT.

This call becomes even more relevant in view of the recent increases in cases of SEC that have been observed in several indigenous communities located in protected areas.

Finally, it is recommended to keep in mind the Regional Action Group of the Americas (GARA), an intergovernmental body in which representatives of the tourism portfolios of the region coordinate actions and share good practices to protect children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism, of which ECPAT International is part as an observer organization. Both the organizations part of the ECPAT Bolivia Consortium and ECPAT International can facilitate the reactivation of Bolivia's participation in this space, from which technical cooperation and support from other countries in the region can be managed to share good practices and instruments.

THE COMMUNICATION MATERIALS OF "SAFE TERMINALS"



Down to Zero

Fighting sexual exploitation of children



The project "Stepping up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children – Empowering Children and Communities" is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Dutch development/foreign policy with Defence for Children-ECPAT Netherlands.



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