



Working collaboratively with children to build sustainable tourism destinations

BRIEF

Background

As tourism continues to recover from the impact of the pandemic, there is a risk that recovery is sought at all costs, leaving behind some of the most exposed and negatively impacted by the economic and degrading social conditions, the local communities, and children in particular. Children can be exposed to various forms of exploitation including sexual, in contexts related to travel and tourism and it is essential that participatory and child rights-based approaches become central to influencing the discourse on sustainability.

Children's perspectives on protection against sexual violence are critical to creating more effective and relevant programs. Interventions often remain by and large adult driven and strategies to address the issue are often developed for children, and not with children. The meaningful involvement of children in this pilot initiative aimed at offering recommendations by children for governments, the private sector, and civil society organisations (CSOs) to prevent and act against sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism contexts – to create destinations that are safe for children and offer them opportunities.

While adults have a duty to protect children from sexual exploitation – they do not always understand children's concerns, perspectives, or lived realities. While tourism can undoubtedly bring multiple benefits to communities it can also bring negative impacts that children understand from their perspectives. There are a number of reasons why we need to hear from children in developing sustainable tourism strategies:

- Children have a right to be heard and to inform and influence decisions that affect them (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC)
- Children have different views, understandings, and concerns than adults. They are also able to identify risks and protective strategies that adults need to be made aware of, and
- Children have great ideas that can be powerful and impactful on others within the community.

Children have unique, contextual knowledge resulting from their personal experience that adult professionals working to develop sustainable tourism need to understand.

The project

In 2023 ECPAT International - in collaboration with two of its member organisations, Fundación Paniamor in Costa Rica and Fundación Quito Raymi in Ecuador implemented a pilot project *Building sustainable tourism destinations that protect children from sexual exploitation*.

This project enabled children to not only discuss and explore the impact of tourism developments on children and their communities, but it also gave them an opportunity to provide recommendations and develop their own actions to prevent child sexual exploitation. The children also advocated for better policies and interventions from the government and businesses to protect children with the aim of building truly sustainable tourism destinations.

Children, between the ages of 12-18 took part in a series of workshops to explore these sensitive issues in a safe way. The workshops empowered children to influence governments, the private sector and CSOs approach to building sustainable tourism destinations where they live. Throughout these workshops, children captured details of the process they undertook and what they learned through the project. This included the children interviewing governmental officials, and representatives of the private sector, who have responsibility for tourism development in their communities. It allowed to assess their commitments and provide recommendations for strengthened approaches to protecting children in Costa Rica and Ecuador, as selected tourism destinations.

Toolkit

A toolkit on working collaboratively with children to build sustainable tourism destinations will be available for tourism actors in government, business, and NGOs sectors. The toolkit was developed based on the pilot project to guide the safe and meaningful engagement of children in the processes of development of sustainable tourism destinations. It includes examples of session plans, activities, and 'top tips' for engaging children in discussions and actions surrounding sustainable tourism development and child protection.

The toolkit includes:

- Information on the planning phase: this includes questions to help facilitators think through the purpose of engagement, activities to prepare fully, principles for practice along with advice on how to present the project to children and their families.
- Examples of session plans and activities that draw on a range of participatory and multimedia tools and methods.
- 'Top tips' and learning from the partners and children from Ecuador and Costa Rica that were directly involved in this pilot project.
- Concrete examples of completed activities developed through the pilot project.
- Templates and practical resources.

Read more about the project here <https://ecpat.org/sectt/>.

