

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM CASE STUDY: PHANG NGA, THAILAND



How to develop sustainable
tourism destinations with child
protection at the core



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1. INTRODUCTION

International and domestic tourism plays a key role in the Thai economy, significantly contributing to Thailand's gross domestic product. According to the statistics of Thailand's Ministry of Tourism and Sports, during the first six months of 2024 Thailand welcomed over 17 million foreign visitors. Tourism is a key sector for Thailand, as it generates a high amount of revenue estimated to be

**approximately
825 billion Thai Baht**

(US\$22.5 billion) for the tourists who visited Thailand in the first six months of 2024.¹

Thailand is one of the world's leading travel destinations, where traditional forms of tourism have been growing back after the Covid-19 pandemic, and new forms of tourism are emerging. From community tourism to ecotourism, digital nomads and voluntourism, these evolving types of tourism may open avenues for easier access and closer contact with children.² The dynamics of business travel and the digitalisation of the industry add another layer of complexity, fostering an environment where violence against children may be overlooked or tolerated, especially in locations near travellers' lodgings, homestays, workplaces, or transportation hubs.

Phang Nga, nestled between southern Thailand's mainland and Phuket, is a beloved tourist destination, boasting attractions like the beautiful Khao Lak beach resort, the diving and snorkelling havens of the Surin and Similan National Parks, the stunning limestone karst landscapes and mangrove forests of Phang Nga Bay, and the historic charm of Takua Pa. In 2022, Phang Nga welcomed over one million tourists.³ The local infrastructure is less developed compared to the neighbouring province of Phuket. Agriculture also plays a crucial role in the local economy, with oil palm and rubber plantations, as well as vegetable and fruit production, being key contributors. While the concept of sustainable tourism—integrating social and environmental considerations—had been a topic of

conversation in Phuket for over a decade, it remained less understood among stakeholders in Phang Nga, which is a key touristic region to promote sustainable practices that benefit both the environment and the local communities.

Making tourism safe for children is an intrinsic and necessary element of holistic sustainability.

Tourists are increasingly aware of sustainable choices and are choosing destinations that are committed to children's rights principles.⁴ Making tourism safe for children not only helps protect them but also adds value to tourism offers attracts quality tourists contributing to the growth of the economy and quality tourism. Making tourism safe for children is also key when looking at the "costs" associated with violence against children. Indeed, the Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children estimated that the direct and indirect costs of violence against children, although varying across countries, can be up to

11%
**OF THE NATIONAL GROSS
DOMESTIC PRODUCT⁵**

Although the national gross domestic product cannot be seen as the only indicator of progress, this estimate demonstrates that violence needs to be prevented to ensure also economic development across all countries and regions.

¹ The Thai Government Public Relations Department. (2024). [Thailand welcomes 17.5 million foreign tourists during first half of 2024.](#)

² Voluntourism describes a field of tourism, in which travellers visit a destination and take part in projects in the local community. Projects are commonly nature-based, people-based, or involve restoration of buildings and artefacts.

³ The Nation. (2022). [Phang Nga's millionth tourist lands with much fanfare, province aims for 10m next year.](#)

⁴ 80% of travellers indicate that travelling more sustainably is important to them, more at: Booking.com. (2023). [Sustainable Travel Report 2023](#) and ECPAT International. (n.d.). [Is child protection a priority for travellers? Results from a poll with the German public.](#)

⁵ UN News. (2024). [UN / Violence against children.](#)

With the objective of making tourism safe for children, ECPAT Foundation, in coordination with ECPAT International and with support from Defence for Children (DCI)-Netherlands, engaged with key

stakeholders in the industry, tourism authorities, civil society organisations, and children themselves to make Phang Nga a truly sustainable destination.

ECPAT Foundation's vision is the realisation of the right of all children in Thailand to live free from all forms of sexual exploitation.⁶ ECPAT Foundation works to increase awareness, participation, and capacity of all relevant stakeholders at the local, national, regional, and global levels so stakeholders are equipped to tackle all manifestations of child sexual abuse. It engages with partners throughout the country, and through "Together to End Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel & Tourism in Phang Nga" it built a model that can be replicated in Thailand, for developing sustainable tourism destinations with child protection at the core.

DCI-Netherlands works to promote and defend children's rights.⁷ Therefore, several actions are undertaken in the following priority issues: justice with children, children on the move, sexual abuse and exploitation of children, education, information and training on children's rights and child protection, including in the travel and tourism context.

ECPAT Foundation and DCI-Netherlands are the Local Code Representative for The Code (short for "The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism").⁸ The Code is a multi-stakeholder initiative with the mission to provide awareness, tools, and support to the tourism industry. It is coordinated by ECPAT International in cooperation with its global network of civil society organisations, to help companies assess risks and impacts on children, understand the issue of sexual exploitation of children, and know how to take action to prevent and respond to this crime. The Code is a voluntary tool to support the industry, as part of broader sustainable development initiatives.

ECPAT International is the world's largest influencing network fully dedicated to ending the sexual exploitation of children, with a membership of 134 civil society organisations in 110 countries. ECPAT is supported by an international secretariat based in Bangkok to uncover and share information on child sexual exploitation, providing a platform for exchange and knowledge transfer amongst the membership, facilitating the development of joint strategies, coordinating collective efforts, and maximising impacts.

This case study reflects the experiences documented throughout the implementation of the project that offers a model for building sustainable tourism destinations with child protection at the core.

It is intended for government authorities, business and donors for potential replication of this model in other regions of Thailand and globally. This case study is also intended for ECPAT member organisations and other civil society organisations interested in working with their respective governments and the private sector to adjust and replicate this model in other countries.

As part of the documentation process for this project, questionnaires to evaluate the project's implementation

were completed by different actors - private sector, authorities and civil society organisations. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders during the working sessions and the closing conferences that were organised both in Thailand (see Annex A) and in The Netherlands. Online interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders by an independent consultant to capture key lessons learned for the purpose of developing this case study.

⁶ ECPAT Foundation.

⁷ Defence for Children - ECPAT Netherlands.

⁸ The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.

2. CONTEXT OF DOCUMENTATION

In the process of building protective environments for children, ECPAT Foundation in partnership with ECPAT International and local partners - Phang Nga Children's Home, a government temporary shelter for children and family, and DISAC Surat Thani, a local faith-based organisation - implemented "Together to End Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel & Tourism in Phang Nga" pilot project in the South of Thailand. The project was implemented from mid-2023 to December 2024. It intended to strengthen the ability of travel and tourism businesses to protect children, establish a child protection network to prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation of children, and empower children and youth to recognise sexual exploitation, report cases, and access services.

The central message of this project was that sustainable tourism cannot be achieved without protecting children.

The initiative focused on three key target groups:

1. **the travel and tourism industry,**
2. **multidisciplinary child protection teams at both provincial and community levels, and**
3. **children and young people from Thailand, and migrant children living in Phang Nga region.**

This pilot project was guided by several essential elements, including needs' assessment, partnership, capacity building, child participation, community-based child protection, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and a strong emphasis on scalability and sustainability.

To ensure ownership and achieve the project's sustainable outcomes, local partners were strategically selected. The collaboration with the Phang Nga Children's Home and DISAC Surat Thani allowed to create a vital alliance that actively involved stakeholders from the local community, including out-of-school children, migrant children from Myanmar and undocumented youth.

Local, regional, and national level tourism authorities were engaged to help build a protective environment for children and youth, ensuring that their safety and

well-being remain at the forefront of sustainable tourism efforts to create a safer, more supportive environment for all children as part of broader national efforts to make tourism safe for children.

Simultaneously, the project worked to socially and economically empower disadvantaged youth through the TUI Academy co-financed by Fund against Child Labour, commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and implemented together with TUI Care Foundation, Plan International, DCI Netherlands, ECPAT and ROBINSON Khao Lak. The TUI Academy has been set up to create decent job opportunities for young people in Thailand in the tourism industry. Students participated in vocational training as well as life skills training to improve their skills in personal development, gender equality, leadership, teambuilding, and entrepreneurship.

AS A RESULT, YOUNG PEOPLE COULD:

- **recognise signs of exploitation,**
- **know how and where to seek support,**
- **make conscious decisions about their future.**

3. CHILD PROTECTION IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM IN THAILAND

Overview of the issue of sexual exploitation of children in Thailand

Despite prevention of child sexual exploitation being a top priority for the Royal Thai Police, this remains a pressing issue in the country.⁹ The 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report by the US State Department highlights that children from Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos are increasingly trafficked for sexual purposes in venues like brothels, massage parlours, bars, and private residences. Traffickers lure Thai children into performing sexual acts online, sometimes blackmailing them with explicit images. Many are targeted through social media, messaging and dating apps, with children in orphanages being also at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.¹⁰

The economic fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic has heightened vulnerability to all forms of exploitation, especially among families that lost employment, including migrant families. As an example, a police

officer was arrested in 2022 in Phang Nga for exploiting Myanmar migrant workers on an oil palm plantation, with the case under consideration by public prosecutors as of 2024.¹¹

Additionally, children fleeing political instability and violence in neighbouring countries face exploitation in hazardous labour situations, particularly in border regions where informal work is prevalent.

Approximately 158,000 Thai children aged 15 to 18 (legal working age) are working in agriculture and service trades.¹²

The Disrupting Harm report for Thailand launched in 2022 revealed that

9% OF THE 967 SURVEYED INTERNET-USING CHILDREN AGED 12-17 IN THAILAND WERE VICTIMS

of grave instances of technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in the year prior to the survey.

Perpetrators of these crimes were most often people already known to the child, such as friends or acquaintances of the child (both peers and adults) but

also romantic partners and family members. Individuals unknown to the child accounted for around one-fifth of cases.¹³

⁹ Royal Thai Police. (2024). *Royal Thai Government's Country Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts. 1 January - 31 December 2023.*

¹⁰ US State Department. (2024). *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Thailand.*

¹¹ Royal Thai Police. (2024). *Royal Thai Government's Country Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts. 1 January - 31 December 2023.*

¹² Ibid.

¹³ ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). *Disrupting Harm in Thailand: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse. Safe Online.*

Examples of child sexual exploitation cases in Thailand

In 2023, the Thailand Internet Crime Against Children Taskforce investigated 1,074 potential offences and initiated a total of 540 cases, comprising 99 trafficking cases, 236 child sexual exploitation cases, 182 cases of possession of child sexual abuse material, and 23 other cases. The Taskforce also investigated 8,626 tips from the U.S. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) through Cyber Tipline cooperation.

A TOTAL OF 358 VICTIMS WERE RESCUED.

Law enforcement agencies and civil society organisations joined forces to assist 27 Laotian girls and 4 Thai individuals who became victims of human trafficking. These individuals were deceived, exploited, and their abuse was live streamed to China. In a significant legal outcome, the court found the offenders guilty on multiple counts, with 14 individuals receiving sentences of 50 years each.

IN TOTAL, ALL 31 VICTIMS WERE GRANTED FINANCIAL COMPENSATION.

In 2022, four police investigation officers faced charges for failing to arrest offenders involved in livestreaming of child sexual abuse via a Chinese mobile application at a resort in Chiang Rai Province. Additionally, eight patrol officers were charged with accepting bribes from Chinese and Laotian nationals in exchange for ignoring illegal border crossings into Thailand.

AS OF 2023, THESE CASES HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED TO PUBLIC PROSECUTORS FOR FURTHER ACTION.

The sexual exploitation of children is a pervasive global issue that affects also Thailand. While the Phang Nga region may not be perceived as a hub for the sexual exploitation of children, limited awareness and a lack of protective measures coupled with growing tourism development in this region may put children at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. The influx of millions of tourists (domestic and international) to Thailand inevitably brings visitors, including travelling sex offenders and opportunistic individuals, who exploit children in environments lacking protective networks. Technology advancements, despite bringing innovation and many benefits, can also be misused to access and sexually exploit children. The Disrupting Harm report showed that there are as many victims in rural areas as in urban setting, challenging the idea that technology-

facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse tends to happen only within urban areas. Also, the report showed as many girls as boys are victimised in Thailand, again challenging the preconceived depiction of the victim. Perpetrators can be also young, educated and often, they build and have a trusting relationship with the child.¹⁴

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to strengthen protective measures for all children both online and in-person, to prevent exploitation.

¹⁴ ECPAT, INTERPOL, and UNICEF. (2022). *Disrupting Harm in Thailand: Evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse*. Safe Online.

Protective environments for children in the travel and tourism in Thailand

Legal and policy framework

The protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation has been covered under different pieces of legislation. The most important acts criminalising sexual exploitation of children offences in Thailand are the Criminal Code, the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act B.E. 2539 (1996), the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E. 2551 (2008) and the Child Protection Act B.E. 2546 (2003). Despite including different provisions related to child sexual abuse and exploitation, as of January 2025, the Thai legislation does not explicitly criminalise the livestreaming of child sexual abuse, online grooming, and sexual extortion. Substantive law on technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse has been drafted encompassing cyberbullying, cyberstalking, grooming, and sexual extortion. As of January 2025, the approval process of the draft bill has been ongoing.

➤ **There are no specific provisions addressing the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism contexts.**

For example, there are no obligatory government-regulated child protection standards for the tourism industry nor specific national codes for child protection as a legal requirement for the travel and tourism industry to operate. The analysis conducted by ECPAT in 2021, as part of Legal Checklist: Key Interventions to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism for Thailand remains valid as of 2024.¹⁵ Thailand is yet to develop relevant standards to ensure the protection of children in the travel and tourism sector. For example, there is a need to establish legislation requiring for a criminal background check for every person (national or non-national) applying for work with or for children or who is currently working with or for children; also, the use of volunteers, and unregulated 'voluntourism' activities is not yet regulated in settings that involve direct contact with children.

Other key initiatives to prevent and protect children from sexual exploitation of children

The Immigration Bureau of the Royal Thai Police has enacted immigration screening measures and enhanced its approaches to better identify and refer victims. It has screened and denied entry to foreign nationals, particularly those from high-risk groups with suspicious behaviour who may be deceived into travelling to neighbouring countries bordering Thailand as a transit point and subsequently became victims of human trafficking.¹⁶ Immigration officers assessed tourists entering Thailand without sustainable livelihood factors and a well-defined travel plan and considered them potential victims of human trafficking. In 2023, a notable increase was observed, with a total of 4,974 travellers being denied entry, compared to 2,036 in the previous year. The focus was on countries with a history of seeking assistance and having been previously assisted by Thailand including Myanmar, Viet Nam, China, India and the Philippines. The rationale for denying entry is based on the consideration that individuals may be at risk of falling victim to human trafficking.

Taking a proactive approach for long-term prevention, the Thailand Internet Crime Against Children Taskforce along with police stations nationwide have conducted training sessions on preventing technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse across Thailand. The training sessions were delivered to students, parents, and community leaders totalling

38,469 sessions, reaching 946,268 individuals in schools, educational institutions, and communities, and spanning 22,164 locations nationwide.

The main objective of these sessions was to boost a whole-of-society awareness and resilience on the dangers of related to the use of online social media and thus enable them to be a support system in protecting children from threats.

¹⁵ ECPAT International. (2021). [Thailand - Legal Checklist: Key Legal Interventions to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism](#).

¹⁶ Royal Thai Police. (2024). [Royal Thai Government's Country Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts. 1 January - 31 December 2023](#).

Law enforcement agencies have adopted proactive inquiry strategies and advanced collaboration with non-governmental organisations. Establishment of channels for incident reporting and communication between the Royal Thai Police and non-governmental organisations have increased prosecution of human trafficking cases.

Among 312 cases initiated in 2023, 43 cases came from collaboration with non-governmental organisations and 93 cases came from victims through complaint mechanisms or victim screenings.

These statistics also demonstrate joint efforts across various sectors in proactive investigations, building on lessons learnt from previous cases, with a view to breaking the cycle of human trafficking. In 2023, legal proceedings have also been initiated against 197 individuals who were buyers of sex services, a sharp increase of 194% compared to 2022. With regards to technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse, the number of reports online made to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) has

decreased from 523,159 in 2022 to 393,506 in 2023.¹⁷

Policies and initiatives to prevent the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism

In recent years, the government of Thailand has demonstrated increasing efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and protect children in the context of travel and tourism. Child Safe & Friendly Tourism initiative has been introduced in 2022, led by the Committee for the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking, the Ministry of Tourism of Thailand, Royal Thai Police, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, civil society organisations, the tourism industry, the Chairman of the Tourism Industry Council of Thailand, the President of Thai Hotels Pacific Asia Travel Association, the Thai Hotel Association, ECPAT Foundation and ECPAT International. The initiative focuses on awareness raising, promoting social responsibility, and supporting the business sector to play an important role in creating a safe environment for children and developing tourism standards to protect children from sexual exploitation and trafficking.

The initiative focused on conducting training sessions and developing a comprehensive handbook for both staff and tourists to mitigate potential risks and ensure the safety of children in tourism-related activities.¹⁸ The training programme, aimed to enhance the knowledge and understanding of tourism professionals, equipping them with the tools to provide safe services while being vigilant against human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children.

By fostering a culture of awareness and responsibility, this initiative seeks to create a safer environment for children within the tourism industry.¹⁹

¹⁷ Royal Thai Police. (2024). *Royal Thai Government's Country Report on Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts. 1 January - 31 December 2023.*

¹⁸ Child Safe & Friendly Tourism (2023) *Handbook for Child Safe & Friendly Tourism.*

¹⁹ Department of Tourism. (2023). *Child Safe & Friendly Tourism Project*

Barriers to creating protective environments for children in the context of travel and tourism in Phang Nga

The Phang Nga region, due to its geographical location, is a critical entry point for illegal activities, including human trafficking. This area is reportedly a transit route for various groups, such as Rohingya refugees seeking entry into Thailand.²⁰ While efforts to combat human trafficking in Phang Nga have largely focused on forced labour—particularly within the fishing industry—the issue of child sexual exploitation remained poorly understood and was often viewed as a distant concern by local communities, authorities, and businesses.

In comparison to Phuket, there are only a handful of non-governmental organisations operating in Phang Nga that support child victims of trafficking, abuse, and exploitation. Notable organisations include **DISAC Surat Thani**, based in Takua Pa, which works to uphold the basic rights of Myanmar migrant workers and prevent human trafficking. **The Foundation for Education**

and Development focuses on providing education and employment opportunities for Myanmar migrants and their families. Additionally, the **New Light Foundation** runs a centre that offers free meals to children from impoverished families, alongside a full-day school to ensure access to education for underprivileged children in the area.

Barriers to realising children’s rights and creating a protective environment in the context of travel and tourism in Phang Nga were highlighted in the Rapid Assessment of the Situation of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism commissioned by ECPAT International in 2021. Insights from stakeholders during the kick-off workshop of the project “Together for the Protection and Empowerment of Youth,” held on May 25-26, 2023, further emphasised the challenges faced in this region:

Geographical Disparities: The province’s layout, which encompasses the mainland, beach areas, and islands, complicates coordination among stakeholders. Local government offices were in the city, while businesses were concentrated along the coast, making collaboration on child protection issues more difficult.

Lack of Awareness: Authorities, civil society organisations local communities, and tourism companies generally lacked awareness of sexual exploitation of children and how to combat it. This gap in knowledge extended to prevention and reporting mechanisms, leading to a situation where isolated cases of exploitation occurred without public acknowledgment or reporting, leaving citizens uninformed.

Discriminatory Practices: The diverse populations in Phang Nga, including local ethnic communities, Mogen sea gypsies, migrant children, and refugees, faced systemic discrimination. Marginalised child migrants and ethnic children often did not have full access to essential government services, such as healthcare, care, and rehabilitation.

Ineffective Policy Implementation: Local government officials were frequently out of touch with new policies and guidelines. For example, the operationalisation of the National Referral Mechanism and the adoption of a victim-centred approach to protection were not effectively implemented.

Inefficient resources’ allocation: Despite being a core mandate of the Department of Children and Youth, the government has allocated limited resources to local governments for strengthening the knowledge and capacity of child protection committees at both the provincial and community levels. This funding shortfall severely hampered efforts to empower the committees, leaving them ill-equipped to effectively safeguard the rights and well-being of children.

Additionally, in Phang Nga the travel and tourism sector has been growing, but to a lesser extent in comparison to Phuket. This may lead to the perception in the industry, that the region is less exposed to risk of sexual exploitation of children, which required building maturity to proactively address this issue as compared with the main and more established tourism markets.

²⁰ US State Department. (2024). [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Thailand](#).

4. THE APPROACH TO BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION

To address the challenges identified in the Phang Nga region, ECPAT Foundation engaged and mobilised key stakeholders through a strategic, three-pronged approach based on the notion that sustainable tourism destination is characterised by strong protective environments for children, which can be built with engagement across sectors. Destinations that address sustainability in a holistic way, through protecting environment and addressing social issues, attract quality and responsible tourists.

➤ **Sustainable approach with child protection at the core becomes then a positive label for a destination.**

The pilot experience from Phang Nga, demonstrated how the three-pronged approach focused on engaging business, building child protection networks and empowering children and youth, can work. This involved coordinated efforts with the travel and tourism industry, local authorities, and social services, as well as direct engagement with children and young people living in tourist areas, implemented with the perspective of creating a holistic protective environment for children.

Below are also some specific learnings on HOW to do it, that include lessons from experiences that worked and others that can be further improved, as observed by the participants and beneficiaries of the project.

Approach 1: Engaging the travel and tourism industry

The pilot approach in Phang Nga focused on:

- Engaging the local government to build credibility and profile on child protection issues.
- Training of hotel managers and providing support to them if needed when training their staff.
- Localising training with concrete cases and data from the region; building ownership, motivation, and pride among employees.
- Developing and ensuring the implementation of child protection policies and procedures.
- Identifying 'enabling factors' for the engagement with the private sector.
- Using 'The Code' as a practical tool and voluntary measure to help business integrate child protection in their operations and meet international standards.

Tourism professionals play a crucial role in preventing and responding to the sexual exploitation of children. To foster a protective environment for children in tourist areas, it is essential to raise awareness and provide training for managers and staff within the tourism industry. This approach was vital for ensuring the holistic sustainability of the pilot project in Phang Nga and could yield similar positive results elsewhere. As tourists become more aware of sustainable choices,

they are increasingly seeking destinations that uphold children's rights principles. By prioritising child safety in tourism, involved stakeholders do not only protect children in vulnerable situations but also enhance the overall value of tourism offerings. This commitment can attract quality tourists who contribute to economic growth and promote a higher standard of tourism.

Ultimately, making tourism safe supports the development of responsible, sustainable tourism in the region, which benefits local communities and offers opportunities to children.

The pilot approach in Phang Nga focused on:

Engagement of Local Government to Build Credibility and Profile on Child Protection Issues

When collaboration and engagement of the private sector proved challenging at the outset, it was important to begin by engaging directly with local government agencies responsible for child protection. Establishing strong partnerships with key government bodies, such as the Provincial and National Tourism Offices, was a strategic approach. Aligning efforts with government initiatives and projects allowed to generate more positive responses and secure greater support for their child protection initiatives.

This collaboration helped build the project's credibility and visibility, creating a solid foundation for engagement with other stakeholders, including the private sector.

Training for Hotel Managers with support in Training Frontline Staff

A comprehensive training curriculum for hotel managers was developed and included essential elements to empower them to identify risks to business and impacts on children, recognise signs of sexual exploitation of children and understand the appropriate reporting procedures and best practices for handling potential cases. It was vital that hotel managers not only attended training of trainers but also received support to ensure they could effectively train their staff, who are often the first to encounter at-risk children.

Incorporating pre-training and post-training questionnaires helped assess and demonstrate improvements in participants' understanding of risks of sexual exploitation of children and procedures to guide them in cases of suspected situations of exploitation. These assessments allowed for targeted follow-up and adjustments, ensuring that hotel managers and their teams are well-prepared to handle situations effectively and maintain a safe environment for children.

Localising Training with Concrete Cases and Data, Building Ownership, Motivation, and Pride Among Employees

To make training more impactful, it was crucial to localise the content by incorporating case studies, and relevant data from the region and Thailand. This approach helped participants connect child protection principles to real-life situations and encouraged them to discuss instances they had encountered. Sharing success stories from industry professionals also highlighted the effectiveness of proactive child protection measures, fostering a sense of pride and motivation among employees.

It was important to emphasise that sexual exploitation of children is often underreported, and to explore the reasons behind this underreporting. Participants were encouraged to understand that statistics are not the only form of evidence, and the true scope of the problem can be far greater than official reports suggest. The staff also understood that reporting a suspicious case of sexual exploitation of children, is a proactive approach to preventing travel and tourism infrastructure and services from being misused by offenders.

For hotel managers training frontline staff, using personal and relatable language – such as asking, “Do you have a child?” – helped create emotional connections, reinforcing the importance of their role in protecting all children.

This personal approach motivated staff to take ownership of the issue and feel invested in creating a safe environment for children.

Developing and ensuring the implementation of the child protection policies and procedures

In collaboration with key stakeholders, work was done to develop comprehensive child protection policies, ensuring that these were tailored to the specific identified risks and context of a given hotel. It was discussed that policies should be accompanied by flow charts and standard operating procedures to provide clear, step-by-step guidance for hotel staff in safeguarding children. The flow charts are important to help staff understand the process for reporting concerns, while the standard operating procedures detail how to respond to potential cases of child exploitation, ensuring that all actions are consistent, timely, and effective. By establishing clear protocols and procedures, the hotels were prepared to create a safe environment for children and ensure that staff are equipped to act confidently and appropriately if they encounter a situation of concern.

Identifying ‘Enabling factors’ for the engagement with the private sector

To engage with the private sector, it was essential to identify both external and internal enabling factors that can facilitate successful collaboration. External incentives that were considered were laws and policies that encourage or mandate child protection measures within businesses, as well as international standards and due diligence laws towards sustainability and corporate social responsibility, which emphasise ethical practices in all sectors, including tourism. These broader trends were perceived as those that create a favourable environment for private sector engagement.

Internal factors, such as the willingness of hotel management to improve standards and enhance their brand’s reputation and positive visibility through strong child protection practices, also played a critical role. A hotel’s desire to distinguish itself as a responsible, family-friendly establishment drove strong commitment to child safeguarding.

By aligning these external and internal incentives, private sector partners were more likely to see the value of engaging in child protection efforts, making it a mutually beneficial initiative.

IDENTIFY 'ENABLING FACTORS' FOR THE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The success of the initiative in Phang Nga was attributed to both external and internal influences. On the external front, human trafficking has emerged as a critical priority for the government.

“Human trafficking and child sexual exploitation are at the forefront of our national agenda. Hotels are eager to collaborate with ECPAT and to raise awareness among their staff about preventing these issues on their premises.”

- The Director of Learning and Development
at Pulman Khaolak resort

Moreover, international standards for sustainable tourism certification, such as Travelife played a vital role in supporting ECPAT's mission. This global certification body establishes comprehensive guidelines that encompass emissions, biodiversity, human rights, fair labour practices, child safeguarding, and animal welfare. ECPAT Foundation's Director noted that Travelife certification was an enabling factor for hotels to participate in training sessions, as many are already committed members of the programme. For instance, some TUI-contracted hotels have achieved Travelife certification, and ECPAT's training has been instrumental in helping them meet these important certification criteria. Also, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council criteria or the World Travel & Tourism Council Hotel Sustainability Basics, as globally recognised and coordinated sets of sustainability indicators, play a crucial role in building protective environments for children.

Internally, the proactive approach and commitment of hotel management to enhance their staff's knowledge on these issues has been pivotal. One hotel manager shared her journey: before engaging with ECPAT, she often encountered news stories about sexual exploitation on television but felt unsure of how to take action.

Thanks to ECPAT's training, she was able to transform her concerns into meaningful initiatives.

Using 'The Code' as a practical tool to help business integrate child protection into their operations

The Code (short for "The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism") was used as an international multi-stakeholder initiative with the mission to provide awareness, tools, and support to the tourism industry. It was used as a tool that helps companies to **assess risks and impacts on children**, understand the issue of sexual exploitation of children, and how to take action

to prevent this crime. The Code supports companies in **implementing six actionable criteria**, including **voluntourism policy**, as some forms of unregulated volunteering linked with tourism activities with children allow un-vetted access to children that may put them at risk of being trafficked and sexually exploited.

In the process, it was important to enhance companies' understanding that membership to The Code is not a sign of past issues with exploitation of children; rather, it reflects a proactive commitment to child protection, backed by the implementation of the practical set of criteria.

Six criteria of The Code include:

1. To **establish a policy and procedures** against sexual exploitation of children.
2. **Train employees** in children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation of children, and how to report suspected cases.
3. Include a **clause in contracts throughout the value chain** stating a common repudiation and zero tolerance policy of sexual exploitation of children.
4. **Provide information to travellers** on children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation of children, and how to report suspected cases.
5. **Support, collaborate and engage stakeholders** in the prevention of sexual exploitation of children.
6. Report annually on the implementation of The Code.

Key Lessons for engaging the travel and tourism industry

Below are key lessons for engaging the travel and tourism industry from the implementation of the pilot project in Phang Nga, which can be used by government authorities, business, civil society organisations and donors for potential replication of this model in other regions of Thailand and globally.

Create a platform emphasising the importance of the industry's action and foster a sense of ownership and efficacy

Companies must recognise the urgency of their situation and take decisive action before the exploitation of children happens. As major players in global travel,

hotels and other tourism companies have a unique ability to influence behavioural change, policies, and practices across the industry. By identifying risks and impacts on children, raising awareness, implementing robust training programmes for staff, and establishing clear, actionable policies and procedures, companies can help prevent and combat child sexual exploitation. Furthermore, by collaborating with governments, non-governmental organisations, and local communities, tourism companies can ensure that the protection of children becomes a real concern. Developing a "burning platform" encourages an immediate response, signalling that the protection of vulnerable children is not just a moral obligation, but an essential part of responsible and sustainable tourism.

Strengthen commitments of various types of companies within the broader tourism value chain

To replicate and expand this model in future programmes, consider seeking collaborations with the broader tourism value chain, including registered and non-registered accommodations, tour operators, transportation services, restaurants, and tour guides - all of which play a key role in the tourism industry. By strengthening commitments across this diverse range of companies, child protection practices can be integrated at every point in the tourism process.

Additionally, partnering with various tourism associations, including those representing smaller tourism companies, can broaden the reach of child protection initiatives. These associations often provide a valuable network for engaging with smaller businesses that may not have the resources or awareness to independently adopt child protection measures.

By fostering these partnerships, the child protection model can be scaled more effectively, ensuring that the entire tourism sector contributes to creating safer environments for children.

Be aware of already existing due diligence process

It's important to recognise that tourism companies you aim to partner with, may already be navigating a maze of due diligence processes, resulting from government regulations to various voluntary national or international standards. For many in the hotel industry, the sheer number of standards can feel overwhelming. To effectively replicate this model, it's crucial to conduct thorough research on the targeted companies and understand which standards they are already implementing, such as those related to child labour and human rights due diligence. When introducing child protection standards, communication should highlight how collaboration with civil society organisations can enhance their existing efforts rather than be seen as adding an extra burden. This approach will help

ensure that "child protection" is viewed as a valuable complement to their current practices, to help meet these standards through practical means, and meet their obligation to respect children's rights, rather than just another obligation.

Support the companies in the process of becoming members of The Code

Supporting companies to become members of the Code requires ongoing effort and follow-up beyond the project timeline, although training was conducted as part of the project. While the initial engagement can often be facilitated by a company's human resources or training manager, securing membership to The Code as an international initiative, ultimately requires the endorsement of the company's owner or Board of Directors. This highlights the need for sustained advocacy and communication to ensure that child protection becomes a core value at the highest levels of decision-making.

Local Code Representatives in Thailand and other countries should view the cooperation with business as part of The Code as a long-term endeavour, focused on cultivating relationships with companies and providing ongoing support to those interested in becoming members of The Code. It's essential to understand that The Code goes beyond support in developing policies and providing "e-learning" modules (also available in Thai) that are made accessible to its members as a complementary measure to in-person training. The Code membership encompasses community engagement, the strengthening of existing networks of responsible businesses, as well as communication with travellers and throughout the companies' value chain. Members of the Code receive support, while being part of the global network brings enhancement of their brand reputation within the tourism industry as a whole.

By fostering these connections, a more robust and responsible tourism sector committed to protecting children can be created.

Ensure that all stakeholders involved understand the shared vision and collaborate effectively to achieve it

The model of building sustainable destinations aimed to implement a three-pronged approach by collaborating with three groups of stakeholders. It's crucial to ensure that activities are not carried out in isolation, as this can obscure the larger goal of fostering a protective environment for children. When stakeholders work in silos, the initiatives and projects risks missing out on maximising its impact.

Allocate sufficient time for pre, during and post activities implementation

Allocating sufficient time for pre-, during, and post-implementation activities is crucial for the success of any project. In the tourism sector, businesses often reserve their low season for skill development of new staff, forging new partnerships, and investing in

corporate social responsibility initiatives. Therefore, time constraints must be carefully considered when designing projects that involve tourism companies.

To ensure effectiveness, it is essential that the project is structured to allow ample time for building partnerships within the industry, training tourism companies, and assisting them in developing child protection policies and procedures. Additionally, following up with hotels on the implementation of these policies poses its own challenges. Most importantly, this model approach aims to foster collaboration among different entities and sectors.

The project design should prioritise creating opportunities for dialogue among companies and between them and other entities and professionals.

It's important to recognise that different stakeholders operate on their own schedules and priorities, making it difficult to find mutually convenient times.

Conclusion: Strengthening the travel and tourism industry's action

In collaboration with tourism companies as part of Phang Nga pilot project, over

360

HOTEL MANAGERS AND FRONTLINE STAFF

were equipped with the resources to implement child protection policies and internal procedures and incorporate child protection as part of their operations and services. This initiative has led to transformative organisational changes aimed at safeguarding children, including:

- Development and introduction of child protection policies and procedures to influence behavioural change among both employees and customers.
- Implementation of employee training programmes designed to foster awareness of child protection issues.
- Build-up of organisational understanding of child protection, ensuring that all staff recognise the importance of their role in safeguarding children.
- Employee preparedness to respond effectively if a child protection issue arises.
- Plans of integration of child protection trainings into the companies' onboarding processes for new staff and interns.
- Enhancement of networking opportunities, allowing responsible hotels and businesses to meet and share best practices, thus incentivising others to join a global movement of child protection in travel and tourism.

Approach 2: Strengthening multi-stakeholder collaborations through child protection network

The pilot approach in Phang Nga focused on:

- Formalising partnership with service providers who are part of the local child protection system.
- Advocating for the issue of sexual exploitation of children to be integrated and prioritised in the mandate of government service providers through technical support and trainings.
- Direct and continued engagement with the local partners, as a key to successful partnership.
- Bringing all professionals together to understand their respective roles and areas of responsibility to build mutual trust, and shared accountability.
- Community participation and empowerment as an essential part for child protection mainstreaming.

The approach was aimed at improving the capacity of multidisciplinary child protection teams in responding to the sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism, and it focused on enhancing the skills, knowledge, and coordination among various professionals, including social service providers, healthcare workers, educators and law enforcement. Through specialised training and the development of comprehensive tools, the multidisciplinary child protection teams were better equipped to identify, respond to, and prevent instances of exploitation. Additionally, the approach emphasised strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration at both the community and provincial levels. By fostering partnerships between tourism companies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations, and community leaders, the initiative created a unified front against child exploitation.

This collaborative effort ensured a more holistic and sustainable response, leveraging the strengths and resources of diverse sectors to protect children at tourist destinations.

The pilot approach in Phang Nga focused on:

Formalising partnership with service providers who are part of the local child protection system to offer preventive and protective actions

Formalising partnership with service providers from both the government and non-governmental organisations was key to making sure that this engagement would go beyond collaborations established for one-of meeting or a workshop. Formalisation and shared workplans allow partners to set up longer-term goals, shared vision, activities and intended changes which are important for them in improving their prevention and protection services.

Advocating for the issue of sexual exploitation of children to be integrated and prioritised in the mandate of government service providers through technical support and trainings

While government service providers are tasked with preventing and protecting children from all forms of violence, the project experience proved that it cannot be assumed that they possess sufficient knowledge to address the complexities of sexual exploitation of children. Overwhelmed by extensive responsibilities, professionals often lack the expertise to identify early signs of sexual exploitation of children, resulting in missed opportunities for timely intervention. Strengthening their capacity through technical support and targeted training was essential to bridge this gap.

Providing a broader perspective on child protection to service providers was equally critical. For example, in Phang Nga, local stakeholders primarily framed human trafficking within the context of labour exploitation, perceiving it as separate from sexual exploitation. Explaining the interconnected nature of human trafficking and all forms of sexual exploitation, particularly in the context of travel and tourism, helped to create a more unified and effective response.

To build capacity, training of trainers' sessions were conducted for multidisciplinary child protection teams at both provincial and community levels. These sessions focused on essential topics such as child rights, various forms of sexual exploitation of children, identifying at-risk children, offender profiles, child-friendly procedures, reporting mechanisms, and region-specific prevention strategies in travel, transport and tourism contexts. Equipping service providers with this knowledge helped to ensure that sexual exploitation of children is not only understood but also actively addressed as a priority within their mandates.

Direct and continued engagement with the local partners as a key to successful partnership

The collaborative approach applied with local partners required engaging entities and professionals across sectors to be willing to work in new and innovative ways, demonstrating flexibility to adapt processes and activities to the unique needs of the given community. This level of collaboration required civil society organisations leading the project to take on multiple roles, such as mentors, facilitators, trainers, and experts. In addition, civil society organisations provided information, raised awareness, and offered training tools and materials to ensure that all stakeholders were equipped with the knowledge and skills needed

to address the issues at hand. While this approach demanded substantial investment in terms of time and resources, the benefits of creating sustainable, impactful partnerships made it an essential strategy for strengthening child protection system in the long term.

Bringing all professionals together for mutual trust and shared accountability

Addressing issues of sexual exploitation of children was not perceived as the responsibility of one sector alone; as it requires a collaborative, multi-sectoral approach. Bringing relevant stakeholders together was crucial to help them understand their respective roles and areas of responsibility, while also fostering a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities in tackling the sexual exploitation of children. Through open dialogue and cooperation, stakeholders developed joint solutions to create a comprehensive system of support for children.

This collaboration required a strong commitment from all those involved to work closely together, building mutual trust and fostering a culture of shared accountability. When each sector understands its part in the larger effort and takes collective responsibility, the system becomes more effective, ensuring that children are better protected and supported across all stages of intervention and recovery.

Community participation and empowerment as a key element for child protection mainstreaming

For child protection efforts to be truly effective, community participation and empowerment proved to be necessary to position at the core of the approach. Meaningful participation required ongoing consultation with communities to understand their specific contexts, issues, and needs. By adopting a community-based approach and focusing on thorough community empowerment, a deeper understanding of how to address the sexual exploitation of children at the local level was developed, ensuring that solutions are relevant and sustainable.

In Phang Nga, government service providers played a pivotal role in transferring knowledge to local child protection committees. Training for these committees at the village level focused on prevention and response to the sexual exploitation of children, as well as practical skills such as identifying at-risk children, observing signs of exploitation, collecting evidence, and properly reporting incidents. By equipping local entities and professionals with these tools, communities become progressively more capable of addressing such issues independently, strengthening the overall child protection system.

PHANG NGA CHILD PROTECTION NETWORK GROUP

A significant outcome of the multi-stakeholder collaborations in Phang Nga was the formation of the Phang Nga Child Protection Network Group. This collaborative platform brought together representatives from various organisations involved in child protection, fostering ongoing communication, knowledge sharing, and coordinated action. The Phang Nga Child Protection Network Group has jointly developed the Child Protection Action Plan for Phang Nga Province (July 2024-June 2025), aiming to address the issue of child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism. The plan reflects a multi-stakeholder approach and is based on the INSPIRE strategies to create a safe and supportive environment for all children.²¹

²¹ World Health Organization. (2016). [INSPIRE. Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children.](#)

Key strategies of the Action Plan include:

- **Implementation and Enforcement of Laws** through strengthening capacity for police, border control, and other relevant authorities on child protection laws, investigative techniques, and best practices for effective enforcement.
- **Changing community norms and values to protect children** through awareness raising campaigns targeting both tourists and local communities to highlight the harms of child sexual exploitation and promote appropriate channels for reporting of suspicious activities.
- **Engage community leaders and influencers** to advocate for child protection and change harmful social norms such as gender-based violence and social tolerance towards child sexual exploitation.
- **Create and maintain safe environments for children** through the development and enforcement of child protection policies for hotels, resorts, and other tourism industry, including background checks for staff and clear reporting mechanisms for abuse.
- **Strengthen the capacity of parents and caregivers** to protect their children from all forms of sexual exploitation.
- **Enhance economic opportunities to reduce vulnerability to exploitation** by offering vocational training and job placement for disadvantaged youth and family.
- **Improve services for child victims of sexual exploitation** by strengthening capacity of child protection communities and establish child-friendly reporting mechanisms.
- **Equip children and communities with knowledge and skills** to prevent exploitation by integrating child protection into school curricula.

Key Lessons from strengthening multi-stakeholder collaborations

Below are key lessons for strengthening multi-stakeholder collaborations from the implementation of the pilot project in Phang Nga, which can be used

by government authorities, business, civil society organisations and donors for potential replication of this model in other regions of Thailand and globally.

Consider integration of prevention and response to sexual exploitation of children in the mandate of existing child protection mechanisms

To ensure the sustainability of the child protection network group, any future programmes should consider integrating the sexual exploitation of children into the existing mandate of the Provincial child protection mechanism or other permanent mechanisms such as Anti-Human Trafficking Committee at the Provincial level given that the government has prioritised human trafficking on its national agenda. This alignment could foster a more robust framework for protecting vulnerable children in the community. Similar approaches would be valid for other countries beyond Thailand.

National advocacy should run in parallel to community-based programming

Creating a protective environment for children at the community level requires establishing the right structures and resources at both the national and provincial levels. This foundational work necessitates that national advocacy activities run parallel to community-based programming. The role of civil society organisations is crucial in advocating for government support to

secure long-term budget allocations for child protection initiatives, mandate child protection due diligence requirements within the tourism industry and ensure that key ministries actively contribute to advancing multi-stakeholder child protection networks at provincial and community levels.

Informal coordination can be useful to resolve different viewpoints

Despite efforts to unite various stakeholders in addressing child protection challenges, several persistent issues might continue to hinder progress. Sometime, discriminatory attitudes among local government officials and national policies towards migrant and undocumented children posed significant barriers to ensuring that all children received equal access to government support services.

To address these complexities, various stakeholders have suggested informal meetings and coordination as a mean to facilitate discussions and resolve differing viewpoints. Some barriers to creating protective environments for children, such as discriminatory government policies and the attitudes of officials towards undocumented migrant children, may be beyond what civil society organisations can tackle alone. However, fostering informal discussions and connections among local stakeholders offers a more feasible path to addressing urgent issues, particularly when immediate support and care are needed to protect child victims from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Conclusion: Strengthening Provincial and Community-Level Responses

The model approach in Phang Nga enhanced the capacity of multi-disciplinary child protection teams at both provincial and community levels for the prevention and response to the sexual exploitation of children. Essential training on key topics—such as the dynamics of sexual exploitation of children within the travel and tourism context—was provided to these teams. The training emphasised a victim-centred approach and improved understanding of reporting mechanisms for suspected cases.

By embedding knowledge about sexual exploitation of children within the structure of government service providers, the project successfully transferred expertise to community-level child protection committees. These committees, composed of teachers, village heads, hospital staff, community development workers, and health volunteers, gained critical skills in preventing and responding to child sexual exploitation, including how to identify potential victims and collect evidence for reporting.

Key Changes Included:

- Incorporating prevention of sexual exploitation of children and a victim-centred approach into the operations of the government shelter.
- Integrating prevention of sexual exploitation of children in training for Children and Youth Council.
- Strengthening the knowledge and capacity of multi-disciplinary child protection teams at the provincial level.
- Training Sub-District Child Protection Committees and enabling them to pass on knowledge to community members at the village level.
- Developing a Comprehensive Child Protection Action Plan for Phang Nga Province that incorporates a multi-stakeholder approach.
- Developing a handbook of guidelines and protocols to support child victims of sexual exploitation and children at risk.

INCREASED COOPERATION BETWEEN HOTELS AND GOVERNMENT COUNTERPARTS

A concrete outcome of this approach in Phang Nga was increased cooperation between hotel industry and the local government which resulted in reports from hotels to Phang Nga shelter regarding two potential cases of child sexual abuse taking place at their premises.

“As far as I could remember, this is the first time a hotel contacted us and reported cases of child sexual abuse taking place in their premises. Earlier, we never received any report.”

- The director of Phang Nga shelter

Approach 3: Empowering children and youth

The pilot approach in Phang Nga focused on:

- Identifying key actors engaging with high-risk children in communities.
- Collaborating with local organisations to strengthen youth networks through training.
- Contextualising training modules and ensure user-friendly, accessible content for young participants.
- Empowering children to make changes within their schools and communities.

This approach emphasised the need of raising awareness among vulnerable children and young people about the risks and harms they might encounter both online and in person. It aimed at empowering them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to protect themselves and their peers from potential threats.

The pilot approach in Phang Nga focused on:

Identifying key actors engaging with high-risk children in communities

To ensure that children and young people most exposed to the risks of sexual exploitation were adequately protected, it was essential to identify key actors already working with marginalised children in the community. In Phang Nga, vulnerable groups included migrant and undocumented children, Moken sea gypsies, and children from impoverished families.

For example, in Phang Nga, partnering with the Diocesan Social Action Centre of the Surat Thani Catholic Foundation proved instrumental. The Centre is recognised for its work with children accompanying their parents from Myanmar and refugee children. Through this partnership, the project accessed marginalised children more effectively.

Local organisations established relationships with children and their caregivers created a foundation of trust, making them more receptive to activities led by ECPAT, which acted as an external resource partner.

These local actors played a pivotal role in disseminating critical knowledge to selected child and youth leaders already engaged in their programmes, enhancing the overall impact of the initiative.

Collaborating with local organisations to strengthen youth networks through training

Building partnerships with local organizations that support formal, or informal youth networks was a crucial step in strengthening community-based child protection efforts. This was achieved by conducting Training of Trainers (ToTs) sessions for facilitators within partner organisations, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to train youth advocates within their networks. Such collaborations were intended to ensure that facilitators are empowered to address key issues effectively while fostering a sense of ownership within the local community.

Additionally, partnerships with local organisations helped integrate critical topics into the agendas of local youth networks. For instance, in Phan Nga, issues related to sexual exploitation of children have been incorporated into the agenda of the Phang Nga Children and Youth Council at sub-district, district, and provincial levels.

This integration not only raises awareness on the issue but also strengthens advocacy and action among youth, ensuring that the fight against the sexual exploitation of children remains a priority in local initiatives.

Contextualising training modules and ensure user-friendly, accessible content for young participants

To effectively engage young participants, particularly those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, training modules were contextualised and designed to be user-friendly and accessible. A comprehensive training package was prepared to include materials in relevant languages, addressing critical topics such as child rights, sexual exploitation of children, including in travel and tourism context and technology-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation. Training was prepared to equip young participants with knowledge and skills to enhance their resilience, build self-protection skills, promote peer support, use of trusted reporting mechanisms, and available channels to seek help when encountering situations of exploitation.

When working with migrant children, thorough planning and preparation were essential. This included translating key materials such as pre- and post-training questionnaires, consent forms, presentations, and awareness-raising resources into the appropriate languages. Interpretation support needed to be provided throughout the training sessions. Additionally,

ensuring that at least one participant in each group could communicate effectively with the facilitators and support their peers enhanced inclusivity and comprehension, fostering a more engaging learning experience.

Empowering children to make changes within their schools and communities

Enabling young people to take the lead in implementing integrated interventions is a powerful catalyst for meaningful change within schools and communities. Supporting youth-led initiatives required more significant investment in their training and capacity building, to equip them with the knowledge and skills to drive these efforts effectively. Young people possess a unique ability to connect and build trust with peers in affected communities. As peers, they bring a sense of credibility and a deep understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by those they support.

For example, following a capacity-building workshop organised by ECPAT in Phang Nga, a 16-year-old boy from Myanmar shared his experience:

"After joining the workshop, eight of us conducted a subsequent training for our friends at school, raising their awareness about sexual exploitation of children, helping them identify risky situations, and teaching them how to protect themselves.

Around 50-60 children attended the session in our school."

- A 16-year-old boy
from Myanmar

This peer-led approach highlights how empowering children to take active roles fosters a ripple effect of awareness and action, amplifying the impact of child protection initiatives across schools and communities.

EMPOWERING VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN PHANG NGA

"I had an opportunity to pass this knowledge on to my friends, classmates and families. Now they are aware how to reach out for help."

- A 16-year-old girl from Myanmar

The project successfully engaged and organised capacity-building activities for children accompanying their parents from Myanmar, particularly those working in the fishing and construction industries.

"We worked with around 10 to 15 Myanmar children. The topics of sexual exploitation of children and online child sexual exploitation and abuse were new to them, but they were excited to learn because these issues are directly relevant to their lives. Now, these children understand the reporting mechanisms available to them. Some even shared that they had been groomed online in the past but didn't know how to respond in those situations."

- A representative from DISAC Surat Thani, a local partner

IN TOTAL, NEARLY

400

CHILDREN PARTICIPATED IN THE
CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOP,

equipping them with valuable skills and knowledge about child rights, sexual exploitation of children, the role of communities and government to protect children, and how to report suspicious incidents.

These trained youth leaders had the opportunity to submit proposals for a one-time grant to fund their micro-projects, which focus on raising awareness among their peers in the communities.

Activities conducted by youth leaders included:

- Delivering training to their peers to provide knowledge about dangers and patterns of sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism and technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Campaign through bag painting under the topic: Let's help protect children from sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism.
- Walk rally campaign to raise awareness of child protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and reporting incidents in communities and disseminate awareness raising materials.

Key lessons from empowering children and youth

Below are key lessons for empowering children and youth from the implementation of the pilot project in Phang Nga, which can be used by government authorities, business, civil society organisations and donors for potential replication of this model in other regions of Thailand and globally.

Invest sufficient time to empower children and youth.

This model focused on empowering local partners by equipping them with the tools and resources needed to support vulnerable children. In Phang Nga, these vulnerable groups include children from the mainland, Mogen children from the sea gypsy community, and those accompanying their parents from Myanmar.

For effective replication and scaling, it's essential that a continuous training sessions are provided to youth

motivators that allows sufficient development in three key areas:

1. building knowledge and capacity among local partners;
2. empowering vulnerable children and youth adequately;
3. enabling trained youth advocates to share their knowledge with peers.

This extended timeframe of the projects would also alleviate pressure on participating children who are balancing their studies, particularly if any activities fall during crucial exam periods.

Provide comprehensive training modules for youth leaders

The pilot project encountered challenges regarding the length and depth of training offered to youth advocates. While participants showed enthusiasm and gained valuable self-protection tools—like cautious interactions and strategies for intervening in risky situations—they felt that a single training session wasn't enough to cultivate robust leadership skills.

To tackle this issue, potential replication and scaling should prioritise longer training sessions and integrate a wider range of leadership skill development. This includes enhancing facilitation skills, boosting public communication abilities, and educating youth leaders about various harms they may face. By offering more comprehensive training, participants will be empowered

with greater skills and confidence, equipping them to become effective leaders and advocates in their communities.

Future training programmes should prioritise identifying and nurturing youth leaders with the potential to become trainers themselves. Empowering these individuals not only fosters their personal development but also ensures a sustainable model for knowledge transfer in the long term.

By equipping target groups to take on training roles, it is possible to create a ripple effect of impact, strengthening the community's capacity to advocate for child protection.

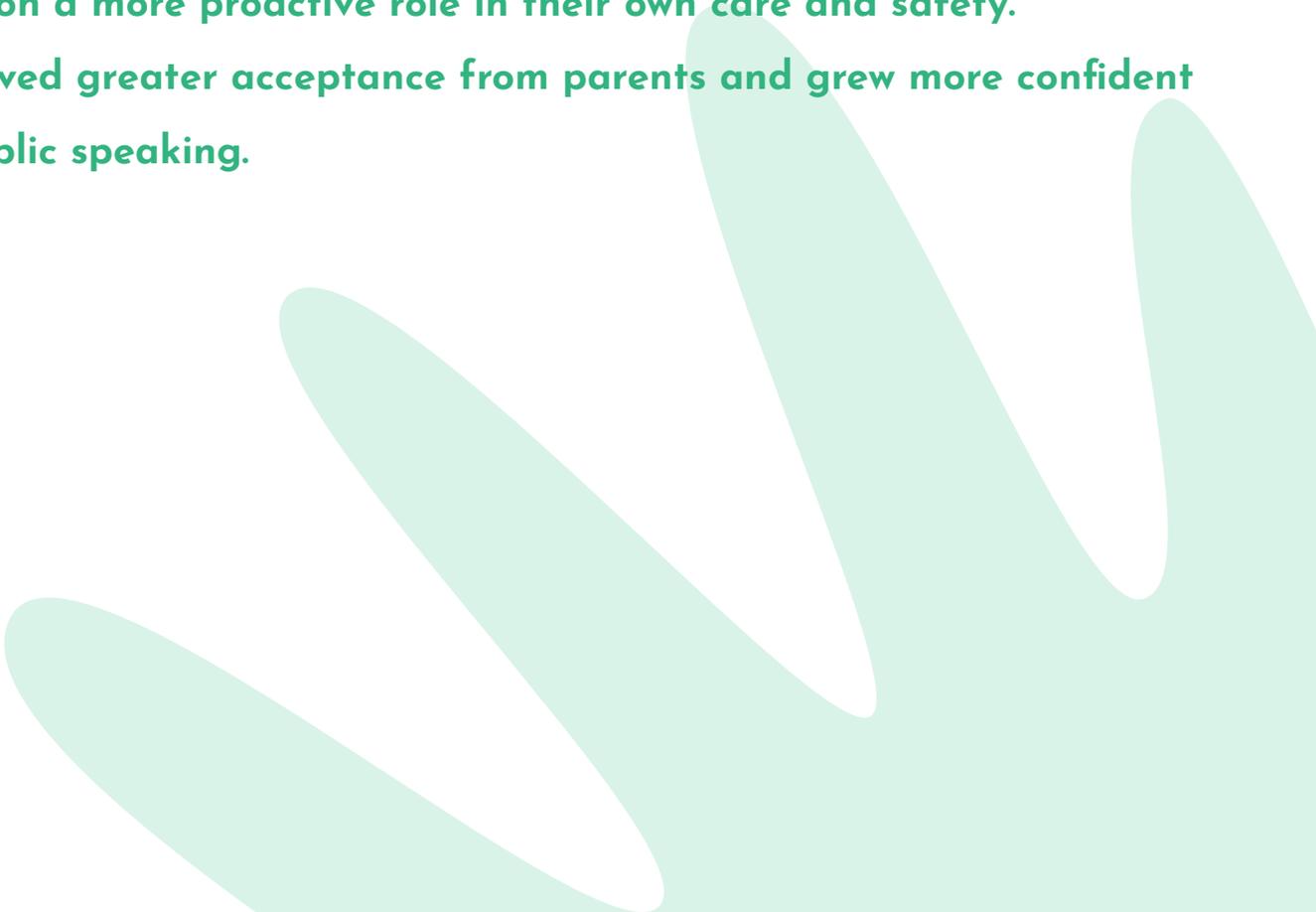
Conclusion: Empowering children and youth

Through empowering local partners working with children and youth, the project successfully integrated prevention of sexual exploitation of children into the curriculum of local schools that offer free education to vulnerable children. Additionally, raising awareness

of the marginalised young people allowed them to embrace the project's opportunities. These young people recognised the experience as transformative and a crucial learning opportunity.

KEY CHANGES OBSERVED INCLUDED THAT CHILDREN AND YOUTH:

- **Developed self-protection skills, particularly in being cautious with any interaction.**
- **Gained confidence in discussing self-protection with peers.**
- **Received peer acceptance at school and became more comfortable in sharing their experiences.**
- **Became more open in discussing risks and self-protection with close friends.**
- **Took on a more proactive role in their own care and safety.**
- **Received greater acceptance from parents and grew more confident in public speaking.**



A CHILD FRIENDLY VERSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS' REPORT ON CHILD PROTECTION IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM

As part of efforts to amplify the voices of children and empower them, ECPAT Foundation engaged children living in Phang Nga in a dialogue organised by the office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children. The regional dialogue focused on addressing child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism, and was held online, in September 2023. The perspectives and insights gained during the dialogues with children directly influenced the Special Representative's presentation at the United Nations General Assembly, driving child-centred solutions to combat violence against children in travel and tourism.

As part of the dialogues, ECPAT International and ECPAT Foundation contributed to the development of a child-friendly version of the United Nations report presented to the United Nations General Assembly in Thai language. The report reflects also the practices from "Together to End Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel & Tourism in Phang Nga" and highlights the pivotal role of the travel and tourism sector in supporting sustainable development while working towards the 2030 Agenda. The report also addresses the child protection challenges that arise within the industry and emphasises the need to prioritise sustainability with child protection at its core.

ความเสี่ยงต่อความรุนแรง ต่อเด็กในการเดินทาง และท่องเที่ยว

รายงานประจำปี พ.ศ. 2566
เพื่อยื่นต่อที่ประชุมสมัชชาใหญ่
แห่งสหประชาชาติ
(ฉบับนี้จัดทำเป็นมิตรสำหรับเด็ก)

โดยผู้แทนพิเศษ
ของเลขาธิการ
สหประชาชาติ
ว่าด้วยความรุนแรง
ต่อเด็ก



Office of the Special Representative of
the Secretary-General on
**VIOLENCE
AGAINST
CHILDREN**

**ผู้แทนพิเศษ
และทีมงาน**

United Nations

"สหประชาชาติ" หรือยูเอ็น (UN) เป็น
หน่วยงานที่มีรัฐสมาชิกแทบทุกประเทศ
ทั่วโลก ซึ่งก่อตั้งขึ้นเพื่อส่งเสริมด้าน
การพัฒนา สันติภาพความปลอดภัย และ
สิทธิมนุษยชน สหประชาชาติเป็นสถานที่
ที่ซึ่งรัฐภาคี (ประเทศที่เป็นสมาชิกของ
สหประชาชาติ) อภิปรายประเด็นต่างๆ
และหาวิธีแก้ปัญหาด้วยกัน เพื่อมวล
มนุษยชาติ รวมถึงเด็กด้วย หัวหน้าของ
สหประชาชาติ เรียกว่า "เลขาธิการ
สหประชาชาติ" เลขาธิการสหประชาชาติ
คัดเลือกบุคคลไปทำงานด้วย ในประเด็น
เฉพาะด้านต่าง ๆ

**ผู้แทนพิเศษของเลขาธิการ
สหประชาชาติ ว่าด้วยความรุนแรงต่อ
เด็ก (SRSG-VAC) นัจาต มาลลา มะฮิด
(Najat Maalla M'jid) คือหนึ่งในนั้น**
นัจาต (Najat) และทีมงานช่วย
สนับสนุนประเทศต่าง ๆ ในการยุติ
ความรุนแรงต่อเด็กในทุกรูปแบบ
ทุกบริบท ทุกแห่ง โดยให้ความ
สำคัญกับเด็กเป็นลำดับแรกเสมอ!



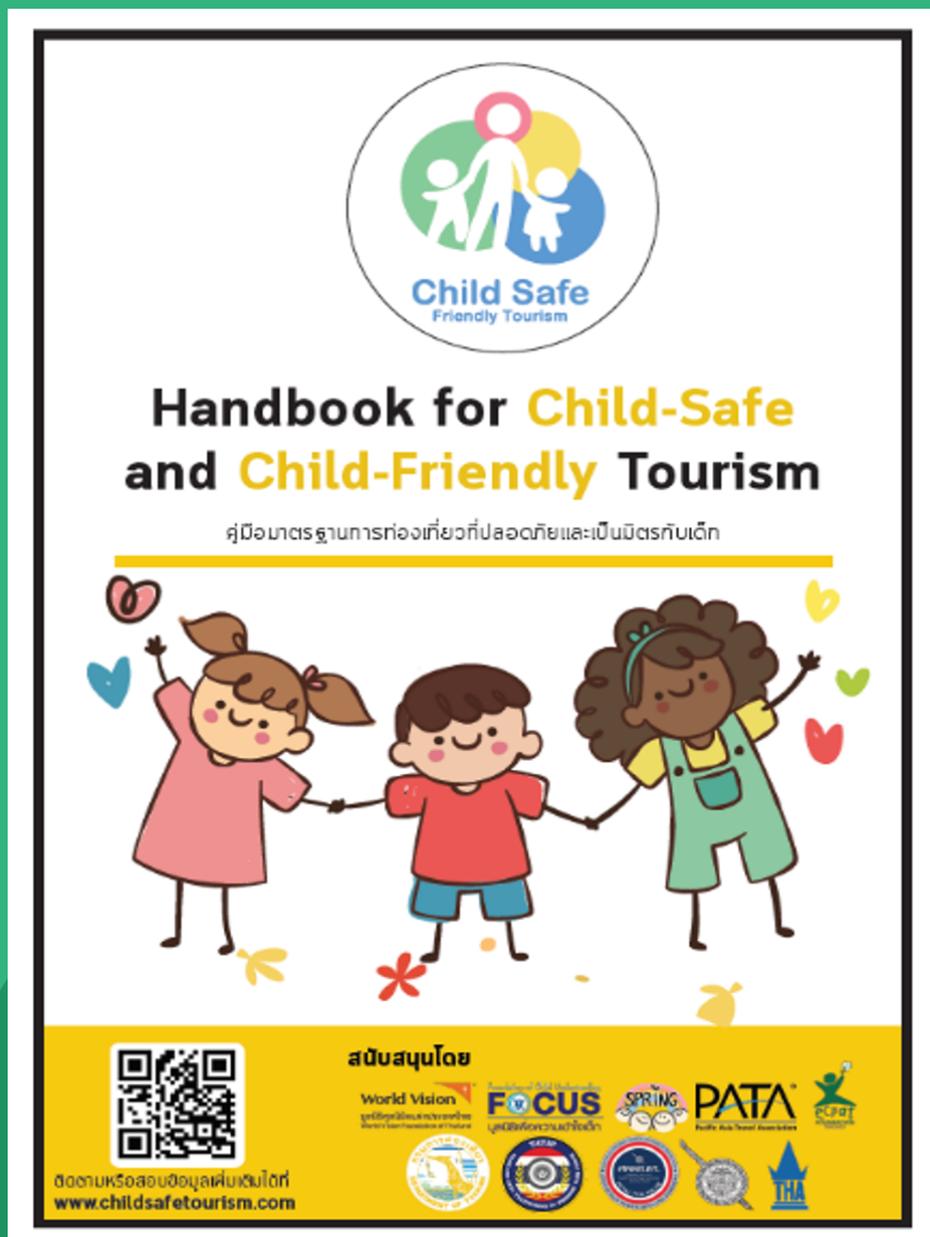
This means that solutions to sustainable tourism development need to be based on children's insights and experiences. Children need to be well informed and empowered to navigate the risks of sexual exploitation and other forms of violence. The project in Phang Nga allowed them to build peer networks, and demand accountability from States, institutions, and the industry, to implement robust prevention, protection, and referral measures.

“Children are part of the solution, and it’s really [about] making them involved from the beginning. They know very well where the services are failing. They are the experts.”

- Dr Najat Maalla M’jid, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

UPSCALING THE REGIONAL APPROACH FROM PHANG NGA TO NATIONAL LEVEL COOPERATION

While working in the Phang Nga region of Thailand, the ECPAT Foundation engaged with Child Safe & Friendly Tourism initiative led by the Committee for the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking, the Ministry of Tourism of Thailand, Royal Thai Police, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, civil society organisations, the tourism industry, the Chairman of the Tourism Industry Council of Thailand, the President of Thai Hotels Pacific Asia Travel Association, the Thai Hotel Association, ECPAT Foundation and ECPAT International. The initiative focuses on awareness raising, social responsibility, and supporting the business sector to play an important role in creating a safe environment for children and developing tourism standards to protect children from sexual exploitation and trafficking.



ACTIVITIES INCLUDED TRAINING FOR 700 PROFESSIONALS OF THE TRAVEL AND TOURISM SECTOR

on reporting and case referrals in 5 provinces, and the group published a Handbook for Child Safe & Friendly Tourism.

The initiative is based on a cross-sectoral approach and includes the knowledge and experiences from The Code for the protection of children in the travel and tourism context. The work of Child Safe & Friendly Tourism inscribes itself in a global movement towards robust child protection structures in travel and tourism by navigating the intersection of child protection and sustainable tourism, based on the two United Nations reports on child protection in travel and tourism launched by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, and the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children to innovate, collaborate, and create solutions for child protection in travel, tourism and online context.

5. CONCLUSION

Lessons learned and recommendations for the upscale of this model in other regions of Thailand and globally

“We need a renewed and relevant agenda for action that promotes sustainability in its broadest sense. Sustainable means being green. Sustainable means being inclusive. Sustainable means respecting local cultures and empowering communities. But it also means being safe for children.”

- Dr Najat Maalla M'jid, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

Creating Holistic Protective Environments for Children

Holistic approach means children, communities, practitioners, local government and the industry are engaged ensuring that their roles and strengths are taken into account, and their actions are aligned and synergetic.

This pilot project, presented through this model approach, sought to create comprehensive and systematic protective environments for children by engaging key stakeholders, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and tools, and ensuring that child sexual exploitation prevention is embedded in their operations and services. These included among others strengthening the understanding of child sexual exploitation (particularly in the context of travel and tourism where they live) and ways to combat it by working with community leaders, local authorities, social services and industry.

As the saying goes,

“It takes a village to raise a child.”

The presented model underscores the vital role that a wide range of stakeholders play in creating environments where children can grow, learn, and thrive. It also highlights the importance of strengthening local expertise, enabling communities to mobilise their own knowledge and solutions to the unique challenges they face in building protective environments for children.

The model of building sustainable tourism destinations with child protection at the core through three-fold approach, was developed to enhance the capacity of local governments and community stakeholders to provide quality, equitable, and comprehensive services for children vulnerable to sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism. It also focused on empowering local authorities to lead, sustain, and own

Finally, successful integration of this model takes time. It requires time to build partnerships and engage communities; time to foster a culture of collaboration among professionals; time for joint planning across sectors; time for meaningful participation of children; and time for continuous reflection and adjustment throughout the process. The greater the change we seek, the longer the journey it takes.

the coordination of policies and services that address the needs of vulnerable children and families in their communities.

The benefits of this project have been recognised by all stakeholders, who view it as an excellent model for replication and scaling, both within Thailand and in other countries. As one representative from the Thai Hotel Association - Southern Chapter remarked, “This model should be replicated in tourist towns like Krabi and Songkla.” Similarly, a local partner non-governmental organisation noted, “This model should be replicated in every province of Thailand.”

Importantly, building on the lessons learned from this pilot approach, any future replication can be done in an increasingly informed and structured way.

As a hotel representative wisely pointed out, each province and region has its own unique context. To successfully scale this model, it must be tailored to reflect the specific needs of each local area. This means conducting thorough needs assessments before project design, researching local awareness and understanding of the sexual exploitation of children, evaluating existing initiatives and collaborations, and developing detailed stakeholder mapping and engagement plans.

Identifying the right local partners—whether government agencies, non-governmental organisations, or business stakeholders—is essential for ensuring any future projects are effectively integrated into the systems and policies of each participating organisation. Furthermore, scaling up this model requires strengthening networks within provinces and across regions, facilitating case referrals, and promoting the exchange of best practices. Crucially, successful project implementation depends on the foundational condition that the necessary structures are in place to support government policy, alongside adequate resource allocation to empower local governments in carrying out their responsibilities.

Recommendations for building sustainable tourism destinations with child protection at the core

To government and policy makers:

Broaden the Scope of Sustainable Tourism to Include Child Protection

Sustainable tourism must go beyond its traditional focus on low carbon emissions to encompass child protection as a core component of its framework. While national governments have made notable progress in safeguarding children within the context of travel and tourism, there remains a pressing need to integrate child protection measures more comprehensively. This involves embedding child protection due diligence into tourism policies, procedures and practices and ensuring clear communication to the public and industry stakeholders that safeguarding children is integral to responsible and sustainable tourism development.

Child protection should be prioritised alongside environmental, cultural, and other social considerations, as it directly impacts the well-being of communities and future generations.

Promoting tourism that actively prevents child exploitation and abuse not only enhances the industry's ethical standards but also aligns with global sustainability goals, fostering a tourism sector that is safe, inclusive, and respectful of human rights.

Provide Incentives for Tourism Companies Excelling in Child Protection

To foster a culture of child protection within the tourism industry, it's essential to offer tangible incentives at national, regional or local levels to companies that excel in this area. One effective approach would be to recognise and reward the efforts of hotels and other tourism businesses through established government-led awards.

In Thailand for example, while the Thailand Tourism Award support Thailand's commitment to low-carbon tourism and climate action, they have yet to incorporate child protection into their sustainability criteria.

"One of the key incentives for hospitality businesses is formal recognition from the government. Civil society organisations should collaborate with relevant government agencies to include child protection as a selection criterion for hospitality operations eligible for the Tourism Awards."

- A hotel executive.

By integrating child protection into these prestigious awards, more businesses will be encouraged to prioritise the safety and well-being of children, further strengthening country's tourism industry.

Allocate Sufficient Resources to Strengthen National Child Protection Systems

A robust national child protection system requires meaningful coordination across government sectors and actors at all levels. The strength of this pilot model lies in its ability to facilitate collaboration among stakeholders at the community, provincial, and national levels. Effective implementation necessitates close cooperation among key ministries, such as the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, and the Ministry of Interior, to create a cohesive and comprehensive framework.

Local governments play a pivotal role in ensuring the availability of child-centric, preventative, and responsive services, including robust reporting and referral mechanisms, as well as recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration support. To sustain the model's success, it is essential to allocate adequate resources and establish a supportive infrastructure.

These foundational elements ensure that services are accessible and effective, enabling the system to respond to children's needs while promoting long-term safety.

To travel and tourism companies:

Embed Child Protection into operations and services (if not done so)

Today's tourists and travellers are increasingly diligent in their research before embarking on journeys. Many are making their choices—whether it's tour operators, hotels, or other services—based on sustainability practices and the ethical commitments of these companies. By adopting and implementing child safeguarding policies and procedures, businesses send a powerful message to their customers: they are dedicated to attracting quality tourists who value responsible travel.

This proactive approach not only enhances brand recognition but also contributes to the long-term value of the company.

In a world where ethical considerations are becoming among top priorities for consumers, embracing child protection measures is not just an option; it's a strategic move toward a more sustainable future for the tourism industry.

Enhance Collaboration with Government Agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations, and Local Communities

Travel and tourism companies play a vital role in strengthening child protection systems by promoting responsible practices and actively working to prevent exploitation to children. Additionally, they can raise

awareness among travellers about ethical tourism practices and discourage also behaviours that may harm local children, such as orphanage tourism and unregulated forms of voluntourism with children. Partnerships with local governments, non-governmental organisations and law enforcement can enhance their capacity to address child protection issues effectively. Furthermore, tourism companies can support community development initiatives that empower families, reduce economic vulnerabilities, and ensure children have access to education and healthcare, ultimately contributing to a safer environment for children in tourism destinations.

Integrate Child Protection Training into Induction and ongoing programmes

It is essential to incorporate a robust corporate policy and procedures on preventing and responding to the sexual exploitation of children into the induction process for new staff and interns, as well as into ongoing training programmes. Every employee must understand that the company will not tolerate any form of complicity—direct or indirect—in the exploitation of children. A strong, integrated policy and clear internal reporting procedures not only encourage more staff members to report suspected incidents but also equips them to discuss these critical issues confidently with customers. The training helps also staff in their parental roles, to better protect their own children from the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse. By embedding child protection into the core values of the organisation, we can foster a culture of vigilance and accountability. At the same time, such programmes help to retain staff in the industry, which is affected by high rates of staff turnover.

Consider Becoming Members of The Code

The Code is a multi-stakeholder initiative hosted by ECPAT International with the mission to provide awareness, tools and support to the travel and tourism industry to prevent the sexual exploitation of children. It welcomes membership from companies in the travel and tourism industry including companies with employees who travel. The Code is a practical initiative for private sector companies that helps them implement child protection measures throughout their operations, including in their supply chains.

Code members receive support in the implementation of the six criteria, and are provided with training, either in person or through e-learnings to which all Code member staff have access, personalised to their role within the profession, available also in Thai.

The Code continues to evolve, as the travel and tourism industry changes, to ensure that it responds to changing trends as part of a “smart mix” of voluntary measures offered to the industry, along the obligatory regulations that exist for business in a growing number of countries.

To civil society organisations:

Advocate for Strengthening Child Protection Systems and Engaging the Private Sector

This model of building sustainable tourism destinations was successfully piloted in Phuket (pre-COVID) and in Phang Nga (post-COVID), demonstrating its effectiveness during both phases. It has significantly enhanced the knowledge and awareness of the tourism industry, the multidisciplinary child protection teams, and the children and young people themselves regarding protection from sexual exploitation of children. Additionally, it has fostered collaboration among multiple stakeholders to create a safer environment for children, providing also opportunities for exchange and collaboration between both regions.

To replicate this successful model in other countries or tourist destinations, it is essential to advocate for engagement of the private sector as part of the child protection system. Advocacy efforts should emphasise the mutual benefits of protecting children, including enhanced brand reputation, customer trust, and long-term community development. By adopting child safeguarding policies, training staff, and promoting ethical tourism practices among travellers, travel, transport and tourism companies can become key players in protecting children from sexual exploitation.

Utilise The Code’s Criteria and Tools as a Guidance for Developing Child Protection Measures

Encouraging participating hotels to use the six criteria of The Code as reference can serve as a user-friendly checklist, helping them evaluate their child protection standards and performance. When hotels were asked

to self-assess their effectiveness in implementing child protection policies, many expressed difficulties in doing so, often citing a lack of reported cases of sexual exploitation of children. It’s crucial to emphasise that adherence to child protection standards does not correlate with the presence of cases on their premises and needs to focus on identification of risk and impacts on children as part of the due diligence process.

Even if a company has not yet joined The Code, familiarising themselves with its criteria and tools, including for risk assessment is useful. This understanding empowers all businesses in the travel and tourism sector to proactively safeguard children against sexual exploitation. By adopting these standards, companies can take meaningful steps toward ensuring a safe environment for children in tourist destinations.

Build collaborations with Educational Institutions to Promote Child Protection in Sustainable Tourism

Education plays a pivotal role in driving societal transformation towards sustainability. By partnering with both lower and higher education institutions that offer tourism management and development programmes, we can raise awareness among students - future professionals - about the issue of child sexual exploitation and emphasise the importance of integrating child protection into the heart of responsible and sustainable tourism practices. Such collaboration will equip students with the knowledge and awareness needed to become advocates for child protection within the tourism industry. In turn, this will help shape a new generation of skilled professionals who are not only well-versed in sustainable tourism but also committed to creating safe, child-friendly destinations.

By aligning educational curricula with these values, we can better meet the growing demand for qualified labour in the tourism sector, while fostering a more ethical and sustainable future for the industry.

ANNEX A:

List of key informants interviewed for this case study

No.	Name	Organisations
1.	Ms. Supomol Chotisut	Phang Nga Shelter for Children and Family
2.	Mr. Runglert Tangsurakit	DISAC Surat Thani, Phang Nga
3.	Ms. Sukon Rakkaew	DISAC Surat Thani, Phang Nga
4.	Ms. Jariya Sriwimol	Rajaprachanukroj School, Phang Nga
5.	Deputy Inspector Pornpirom Kraikitraj	Phuket Tourism Police
6.	Mr. Anacha Inthima	New Light Foundation, Chiangrai
7.	Mr. Pitoon Smithipreechawong	Sea View Khao Lak Resort
8.	Ms. Ladawan Konchai	Pulman Khaolak Resport
9.	Mr. Suksit Suwandithayaskul	Thai Hotel Association - Southern Chapter
10.	Ms. Ketsanee Chantrakul	ECPAT Foundation
11.	Ms. Sunan Phimai	ECPAT Foundation
12.	Aung Myo Thu	Youth advocate
13.	Ei Ei	Youth advocate
14.	Wutt Hmone Thet	Youth advocate
15.	Si Thu	Youth advocate
16.	Aung Ko Hein	Youth advocate
17.	Thet Moe Htwe	Youth advocate
18.	Thu Ka	Youth advocate
19.	Aung Thu	Youth advocate