

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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international workshop organised as a contribution to the celebration of the 15 years of the mandate of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (UNSRVAC)<sup>2</sup> who endorsed this global initiative.

**ECPAT International would like to thank all the partners** for the rich exchange of knowledge, experience, learning, and best approaches to effectively integrate child protection into the training curricula.



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<sup>2</sup> Read more about the 15 years of the mandate of the <u>UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children</u>, the workshop organised by ECPAT International on 3-4 October 2024 in Vienna.



The workshop supported the formation of a network of professionals and brought to light the unique position of tourism academies, universities, schools, and vocational training institutions to collaborate in creating an effective child protection system.<sup>3</sup> By integrating core competency-based courses and modules, travel and tourism education institutions can have a sustained impact on the young workforce joining the sector and ensure that the industry ecosystem is better equipped to meet international standards on protecting children from all forms of violence, including sexual exploitation.

In the follow up to the workshop, this group of experts worked closely with ECPAT International to validate the draft core competencies framework, and ensure that it holistically captured the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to bring about a comprehensive set of competencies for travel and tourism professionals. To ensure that it is fit for purpose, the framework was reviewed by some of the partners in this initiative together with their students, applying their point of view as future professionals in the industry.

ECPAT International is grateful to all the partners and young people who dedicated their time and worked together on this core competencies framework, which was published as a result of joint initiatives to inform the development of curricula and training in tourism education academies, universities, schools and vocational training institutions around the world.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> This publication was developed as part of the project "Strengthening Child Protection System in the Travel and Tourism Context" implemented by ECPAT International and made possible by funding from the UBS Optimus Foundation.





# WHY SHOULD TOURISM EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS BE PART OF THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM?

The travel and tourism industry encompasses a diverse variety of sectors offering students a wide range of professional opportunities as they enter the job market. These include among others roles in multinational hotel chains and franchises, all forms of accommodation provided to tourists and travellers comprising guest houses in local and remote communities, apartment rentals facilitated through digital platforms, the leisure and entertainment industry, or travel agencies and operators. The sector spans a vast array of services, from international flights and airports to online transport booking, taxis, trains, buses, cruises, and tuk-tuks. It also includes top-tier restaurants, local dining experiences, interactions with the informal economy, volunteering initiatives, ecotourism ventures, and guided tours with local experts.

Each aspect of the travel and tourism industry presents its own challenges and operates within specific contexts. One of these challenges is the fact that **children** and youth are nearly always in contact with these travel and tourism services

and experiences, that offer a broad range of opportunities, as well as risks that must be acted upon and mitigated.<sup>4</sup>

The tourism and hospitality students, as future staff and leaders of the industry, where they may be responsible for developing industry guidance and standards, should be prepared to understand the specific role they should play within a contextualised and large child protection system.



They need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to prevent and respond to situations that could compromise child protection, in alignment with their role and responsibilities.

As the travel and tourism industry's purpose is very much rooted in the notion of "serving" attitude towards customers, which may increase the risks of overlooking vulnerable people including children, businesses can benefit from hiring skilled professionals who know how to act safely and professionally to play their part in protecting children, thereby reflecting the values and commitment of the sector to prevent the misuse of their premises and services by those who can exploit children.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Learn more from: <u>Trafficking in children on the rise: Immediate action required</u>, Side-event on the margins of the 58th session of the Human Rights Council, organised by the Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, 14 March 2025, and <u>A global call for robust child protection structures in travel and tourism.</u>





A key economic reason for including child protection in tourism education and training is the harmful impact that violence against children can have on tourism destinations, putting local and national economies reliant on the travel and tourism industry at risk. In 2023, research conducted by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) indicated that the sector contributed

9.10/0
TO THE GLOBAL GDP,

demonstrating already an increase of 23.2% from 2022 and only 4.1% below the pre-pandemic 2019 level.

At the same time, the assessment about the direct and indirect costs of violence against children that was conducted by the office of the UNSRVAC estimated that, while the cost varies across countries, these can be up to

110/ OF THE NATIONAL GDP°

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> UN VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN, 8th October 2024, New York.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), <u>Economic Impact Research</u>.

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Although GDP cannot be seen as only an indicator of progress, it demonstrates that violence against children as a contributing factor in tourism destinations needs to be prevented to ensure economic development across countries and regions.<sup>7</sup>

Many companies are already part of the child protection movement, such as members of The Code (short for The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism), with its Top Members being at the forefront of building sustainable travel and tourism.<sup>8</sup> There have been successes and many good practices coming from leaders in the industry – both from large companies and small local businesses. Most global experience on the matter of child protection in tourism focuses on building the capacities of in-service personnel via courses, workshops and online training, often organised by the employer in collaboration with child protection experts.

The World Travel and Tourism (WTTC) recognises that every company at every level of the industry has a different role to play and can make a difference in child protection.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria require destinations to have laws, practices and established codes of conduct to prevent and report on human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Recent developments in sustainability regulations in the EU apply mostly to large corporations constraining engagement to first tier business partners, while greatest risks reside throughout the value chain.

Tourism is a big business, but

# OF TOURISM BUSINESSES ARE SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMES"),

and the smaller businesses are not governed by all regulations and have less resources to provide training for their staff. However, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), and Children's Rights and Business Principles provide guidance and apply to all businesses. Positioning child protection as an intrinsic part of sustainable tourism development is no longer an option, but a trend and risk-based due diligence requirement that can be fully embraced by future professionals.

Tourism vocational education and academia professionals have not traditionally been seen as actors in this movement, neglecting the formidable potential of integrating permanent mandatory courses and modules into the curriculum and training of such institutions worldwide in a way to sustainably equip millions of new professionals entering the industry with the competencies required to naturally incarnate this necessary adaptation in the travel and tourism sector. There are limited examples of child protection being already included in schools and

<sup>10</sup> Reflecting on OECD Tourism data prior to the 1st Global Forum on Tourism Statistics. On the road again? The future of tourism post-pandemic. https://oecdcogito.blog/2021/09/26/on-the-road-again-the-future-of-tourism-post-pandemic.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See the box below with examples from the media demonstrating how lack of proactiveness to address sexual exploitation of children can negatively impact business models in the travel and tourism industry.

<sup>8</sup> See the list of <u>The Code Members</u>, and the list of 2024 <u>Top Members</u> with examples of how these companies are making tourism safe for children.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

academies curricula, or training of vocational institutions. And when the topic is included, it tends to adopt an awareness raising perspective rather than building concretely the skills and attitudes required to know what to do in line with the standards in the sector. Indeed, to be able to shape a truly sustainable tourism industry that protects children globally, tourism students must not only be aware of the issue but gain the necessary competencies to address these.

For this reason, ECPAT International initiated a process of **identifying key core competencies** with an expert group of highly committed tourism educational professionals to establish clear guidance for effective capacity building.

This core competencies framework is intended to help the educational professionals and academia make tourism training, modules and curricula practical, engaging and relevant for various contexts in which their students, as future professionals, will work and where they can make a real difference for children and youth.







# WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS CORE COMPETENCIES FRAMEWORK AND HOW WAS IT DEVELOPED?

The purpose of this framework is to contribute to improved child protection outcomes in travel and tourism by equipping tourism educational professionals with a set of core competencies that can be used as a guiding tool when developing curricula, modules and training programmes.

This core competencies framework for tourism education professionals to integrate child protection into training curricula is based on identified **knowledge**, **skills** and attitudes that have been agreed as essential elements to effectively protect children and youth in the travel and tourism context. Young people entering the travel and tourism market as professionals are themselves vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking, therefore it is also important to increase their resilience.

In the process of developing these core competencies, ECPAT International adopted a consultative methodology. First, a *desk review* was conducted to

understand how child protection is addressed in vocational training programs across the regions. This included reviewing existing curricula and consulting key stakeholders from tourism universities, schools, vocational institutions and child protection organisations that work with the travel and tourism educational sector and industry. Based on the desk review, a *pre-workshop survey* was conducted enabling the ECPAT team to identify additional good practices, as well as the needs and expectations of tourism education professionals. Using these insights, an *international workshop* was designed and held on 3-4 October 2024. The outcomes of this workshop informed the development of the *draft core competencies* framework by ECPAT International.

Finally, a working group was formed, bringing together the representatives of tourism educational schools, universities and vocational education institutions. This group was invited to guide the validation and finalisation of the core competencies framework, ensuring it reflects diverse perspectives. Importantly, several educators involved their students in the process to ensure that this framework aligns with the needs and viewpoints of young people — the future professionals for whom it is intended. For continuity, members of the working group, together with students and ECPAT International, will discuss emerging trends in travel and tourism as well as in the sexual exploitation of children and trafficking behaviours, allowing for potential future adaptations of the framework.

<sup>11</sup> The Working Group is open to other professionals, who would like to join the movement, for more information please <u>contact</u> ECPAT International.





# HOW TO USE THIS CORE COMPETENCIES FRAMEWORK?

This core competency-based approach can be used by individual tourism education professionals to reflect on their own approaches, and to develop or review their curricula, modules and training for students. It can be also used by institutions, such as tourism schools and academies or vocational training centres, to review existing programmes, or inform planning and integrate, ideally, permanent and mandatory courses on child protection into their institutional curricula.

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The core competencies have been divided into three categories to ensure that all training is based on conveying necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes that students need to acquire to develop confidence and take action.

- First, knowledge encompasses the legal and policy frameworks, structures or obligations one should know about to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse of children.
- Second, skills refer to the ability to apply the knowledge of procedures or mechanisms in their daily professional tasks.
- Third, attitudes refer to different qualities and behaviours through which one can effectively apply the competency, adapting their approach, language and way to address a situation within a given professional travel and tourism business context.

It is important to emphasise that the core competencies are designed as a **global** reference. Indeed, the concept behind them is that all professionals need to be competent in dealing with child protection risks, making these competencies universally applicable—regardless of their role, local context, or direct interaction with children. These skills are essential for fostering a cohesive sector-wide approach. Even though trained professionals may not directly implement them, they must understand how the travel and tourism sector addresses these situations and adheres to their spirit and implementation, both directly and indirectly.



# The adaptation of the framework is a strict necessity to protect children.

This means that any education professional or institution must adapt these core competencies to the market and context they serve. A variety of local factors must be considered to ensure the practical application of these competencies in training future professionals. These factors include existing referral pathways and laws applicable to child protection in the local context, the type of business and partners typically engaged in that market, the profile of students, the sector within travel and tourism that students are likely to enter, and the level of responsibility they may hold (e.g. working directly with clients, administration, managerial position, communication or other related travel and tourism services).

Some competencies, particularly in terms of the depth of knowledge and skills required, may vary depending on the specific roles and responsibilities of future professionals – whether they are managers, or staff at various levels and across various segments of the industry (e.g. hospitality, transport, digital platforms, homestays, tour operators, tour guides). Additionally, constantly evolving trends and the impact of technology on the travel and tourism industry must be considered in the risk and impact analysis on children, ensuring that the framework adapts to the developments within the sector.

"Training, and every internship class should include a simulation (related to addressing child protection), so students experience it multiple times and it really sinks in"

- a student who participated in a focus group in the USA.

THIS FRAMEWORK OUTLINES CORE COMPETENCIES THAT CAN BE APPLIED ACROSS VARIOUS AREAS OF WORK AND ROLES THAT STUDENTS WILL ASSUME ONCE THEY ENTER THE TRAVEL AND TOURISM INDUSTRY.



Integrating child protection into the curricula and training for students, future tourism professionals

#### **Competency 1**

Understand and own how
Travel & Tourism must play its
role in child protection

#### Knowledge

- Understand the key concepts and evolving trends of child protection in travel and tourism context
- Understand the
  implications of the
  international and national
  laws and policies related
  to child protection for the
  travel & tourism context
- Know how to contextualise child protection efforts in specific countries in travel and tourism

Know the right terminology to use when speaking about the child protection

#### Skills

- Explain why child protection is important to address both internally, and externally, by communicating this commitment
- Explain and act according to international and national laws and policies in travel & tourism context
- Explain the responsibilities of travel and tourism professionals in protecting children
- Use relevant child protection terminology

#### Attitudes

Be open to learning how to protect children in travel and tourism context

Act in conformity with applicable laws, regulations and policies

- Be able to speak up, challenge, reflect on and let go of preconceived notions and stereotypes related to sexual exploitation of children, including cultural and gender biases about children
- Be sensitive in using appropriate language and have recognition of why it matters



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#### **Competency 2**

Act in accordance with business and human rights principles, due diligence laws, industry codes and standards in Travel & Tourism

#### Knowledge

- Understand the implications of the UNGPs, Children's Rights and Business Principles and international standards for travel and tourism industry
- Know due diligence laws and regulations for business across value chains as applicable in the respective countries
- Know the difference between child protection, and child safeguarding measures and how these apply to the company, business or organisation staff

#### Skills

- Explain and act according to the business and human rights principles, with a specific focus on children's rights
- Explain and act in accordance with due diligence laws and regulations
- Explain and apply child protection measures and safeguarding procedures for staff in the given company or organisation

#### **Attitudes**

- Take initiative to understand the evolving landscape of business and human rights to better protect children
- Proactively apply these rules and regulations to the working environment

Demonstrate a caring attitude towards protecting children in destinations, and youth working in travel and tourism industry



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#### **Competency 3**

Assess risks to business and impacts on children linked to Travel & Tourism operations, services or products

#### Knowledge

- Know how to contribute to, or conduct risk-based due diligence and assess impacts on children's rights
- Understand how to adapt the analysis according to specific segment and context of the travel & tourism industry
- Understand the business case for child protection and reasons for potential reluctance of some partners to engage

#### Skills

- Identify and recognise risks and actions required to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse of children in the travel & tourism context
- Explain and apply contextual adaptation of the impact assessment across the industry segments
- Articulate and promote how child protection is a business case to overcome reluctance for change

#### **Attitudes**

- Proactively identify potential risks in internal and external environment affecting children's safety
- Engage in mitigating risks across the value chain of the industry

Demonstrate leadership in speaking up about the business case for child protection measures



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#### **Competency 4**

Address and mitigate child protection risks in Travel & Tourism business operations

#### Knowledge

- Know how to address child protection issues from *an individual perspective,* for SMEs in particular
- Know how to develop, or apply existing internal policies and operating procedures on child protection of the company that you work for
- Know why targeted capacity building for staff and managers on child protection is important
- Know potential consequences of lack of action to address and mitigate child protection risks for business and children
- Know how to communicate internally within the company to engage staff and management

#### Skills

- Promote responsible business practices
- Understand and apply (or develop if needed) internal child protection policies and procedures
- Apply the content from the training to identify, address and mitigate risks and impacts on children
- Understand and be able to explain the benefits of addressing and mitigating child protection risks for business, communities and destinations
- Be able to engage management and all staff about child protection measures

#### **Attitudes**

- Be engaged in the company's responsible and sustainable practices
- Uphold and promote collective and individual responsibility among colleagues and partners
- Demonstrate leadership by fostering a culture of responsibility towards children's safety
- Be confident in taking the necessary action to address and mitigate child protection risks in travel and tourism industry
- Have a caring attitude
  while adhering to the
  role, responsibility and
  limitations of your mandate



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#### **Competency 5**

Prevent and respond to suspected and confirmed situations of child protection violations

#### Knowledge

- Know *the signs of* possible child protection violations
- Be familiar with child protection system referrals and reporting channels at local, national and international level, including law enforcement contacts, hotlines and helplines
- Know how to act

  appropriately when a child

  could be at risk
- Know how to be safe and to seek self-care and support, including in cases where the risk may be internal
- Know the consequences of not-reporting of suspicious or confirmed cases, both for the child, and business

#### Skills

- Recognise signs of a situation where a child can be at risk
- Understand and adhere to the role, responsibility and limitations of travel and tourism professionals in referral pathways
- Explain and be able to interact with a child in accordance with the roles, responsibilities and limitations of a given mandate
- Apply do's and don'ts of reporting
- Manage with confidence interactions with clients necessary to protect children

#### **Attitudes**

- Act with integrity when suspecting harm may be done to a child, be vigilant, trust your gut feeling and don't look away
- Be confident in using reporting and referral pathways while recognising that suspicions may not be founded
- Show empathy and act professionally towards children
- Demonstrate self-awareness to ensure safety, emotional resilience and wellbeing, knowing when to ask for support



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#### Competency 6

Collaborate and engage with relevant actors, including local communities, civil society organisations, children and youth

#### Knowledge

- Identify, get to know and proactively build effective relationships with *key external stakeholders* that can be allies in preventing and responding to child protection issues
- Know your *supply chain* and their measures to protect children, and engage with suppliers
- Identify and get to know community-based organisations, children and youth groups in your markets and destinations

#### Skills

- Identify, engage, communicate and collaborate with relevant stakeholders to prevent and address child protection concerns
- Engage with business partners across the supply chain on child protection risks and mitigation strategies
- Engage with communitybased organisations and child and youth groups in an ethical and meaningful way

#### **Attitudes**

- Take initiative and be proactive to engage with external stakeholders through collaborative approaches
- Demonstrate openness in engaging with relevant partners to understand the impacts of business on children and youth
- Demonstrate adherence to company policies and procedures while engaging with external stakeholders to understand impacts on children



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#### **Competency 7**

Promote a culture of child protection in Travel & Tourism

#### Knowledge

- Know how to communicate externally when cases are identified, prevented and reported, to demonstrate that your business is managing the risks faced
- Know how to promote good business practices to inspire other

Know how to communicate effectively about child protection to *engage* customers who value responsible companies

#### **Skills**

- Shift the narrative from a taboo topic to a positive example of proactive prevention measures and child protection
- Promote good practices as part of sustainable approach to travel and tourism
- Position child protection as a positive approach attracting customers and building a responsible branding

#### **Attitudes**

- Demonstrate cultural sensitivity in fostering an inclusive and respectful environment based on awareness of cultural norms and values
- Show high sensitivity to the privacy of children and their families

Act professionally when communicating about the topics related to child protection



# IMPLEMENTING THE CORE COMPETENCIES FRAMEWORK FOR TOURISM EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

The key core competencies from the above framework are complemented with additional references and resources that can be of inspiration to tourism education professionals. The examples provided are not exhaustive and require additional materials and resources relevant for necessary adaptations for each country and context. These, as reflected by the students who participated in the focus groups in the UK, should include contextualised storytelling, videos and Q&A sessions.

To learn more, access this folder References and Resources: Core Competencies Framework<sup>12</sup>

"This feels like a very new area, and I'm trying to understand it for the first time"

 a reflection from one of the students from India, whose sentiment was echoed by other students in the focus group, illustrating the need for deeper integration of child protection topic in tourism education curricula, modules and training.





# MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

To understand the effectiveness of the use of the above core competencies framework in informing courses, modules, training and curricula, a comprehensive approach should be used, integrating both qualitative and quantitative indicators. Educators and course managers should evaluate how students' competencies shift at a range of points in the course.

To learn more about proposed modalities for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, access this folder <u>Monitoring and Evaluation</u>.





### CONCLUSION

Integrating child protection modules into the curricula and training of vocational educational programmes for travel and tourism schools, academies and organisations, requires collaboration between academic institutions, tourism businesses, and child protection experts to create structured and adaptable messages and measurable learning objectives. The modules and training that can be developed based on the above core competencies framework should be tailored to address the specific risks and impacts on children within a given travel and tourism context. They should also be adapted to the duration of the courses, educational level of students, and their prospective roles within the industry.

The inclusion of permanent, mandatory and

evaluated courses, thematic modules and training on child protection is essential for equipping future professionals to understand, recognise, and act against violations of children's rights, which can take various manifestations in travel and tourism context,

and can be facilitated by technology.

In the evolving landscape of sustainable tourism development, such courses and modules also contribute to the professional development of young people and enhance their employability.

At all stages, integrating real-life case studies, simulations and practical examples as part of experiential learning that students can identify with, is key to preparing them to act in their prospective professional roles. This approach is especially important given the emotional challenges involved in addressing issues like the sexual exploitation of children and trafficking, areas where students may be prone to disengage. Simulations also make experiences real, helping students connect with the material and making the learning more memorable and engaging.



"You'll have students that disconnect with this topic for a fair reason that it's hard for them to even wrap their minds around it. But when we did a simulation, I was showing up to a restaurant shift. I was showing up to something that felt fully school oriented to where when we transitioned into learning about trafficking, I was able to connect with it better because it felt like I was doing a work thing instead of looking into something that's gonna make me sad. It's leading with positives that can be done and ending with positive things, so that you could leave that negative thing out"

- a quote from one of the students who participated in the focus group in the USA

Academia in the tourism field can both strengthen the resilience of young professionals entering the market, and prepare students to become future stewards of sustainable tourism by upholding standards to protect all children.

These can be children living in tourism destinations and surroundings, local communities, or child care centers and orphanages; children travelling with adults from other cities, regions of the same country, or from abroad; unaccompanied children on the move; street and begging children that can live around the tourist areas; children trafficked through transport means (by air, sea and land), children of migrant parents who are travelling for work and other. Importantly, young professionals seeking job opportunities and entering the market must also be protected considering their vulnerability to forced labour, trafficking and sexual exploitation.



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