



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON

**VIOLENCE
AGAINST
CHILDREN**

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The travel and tourism sector plays a key role in supporting the livelihood and development of communities and countries worldwide. The promotion of responsible, accessible and sustainable tourism is also an important dimension of achieving the 2030 Agenda. However, many child protection challenges emerge in the context of travel and tourism, whether as a result of offenders moving within or between States or as an unintended result of the activities and operations of the sector itself.

There has never been a more pivotal moment to ensure that the travel and tourism sector is truly sustainable, with child protection at its core. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on the sector, as well as on the communities and States for which the sector represents an important source of income. As the domestic and international travel and tourism sector continues to revive, it cannot be a case of recovery at any cost.

It is time to rethink the way in which travel and tourism is conducted and to create a truly sustainable industry. Discussions on sustainability in the sector have rightly incorporated environmental, economic and social dimensions. However, freedom from violence against children is also fundamental for sustainability. **It is impossible to achieve genuinely sustainable growth – including within travel and tourism – and realize the promise of the 2030 Agenda while this violence and its drivers persist.**

Increased mobility, increased risks

Traveller numbers are now climbing as the industry recovers, with international tourism receipts rising again to reach the \$1 trillion mark in 2022 and more than 960 million tourists travelling internationally in the same year, a figure that does not include the millions of trips made by people within their own countries for both leisure and business. In addition, the most recent estimates suggest that around 169 million people are international migrant workers, who constitute 4.9 per cent of the global labour force and are concentrated in the services sector.

As traveller numbers increase, along with the accessibility of local and remote areas, so too do the risks to children. **The more people travelling, the greater the likelihood that they will include offenders who inflict violence on children with impunity, as their mobility presents challenges for ensuring justice and accountability.**

Evolving modes of travel and tourism also intersect with violence against children. One of the trends that has shaped the growth of travel and tourism in recent years is the decentralization of travel towards more tailored and individual experiences, such as community tourism and various forms of voluntourism with and for children – including in orphanages and alternative care settings – which brings travellers and children into closer contact than more traditional locations or forms of tourism.

Large influxes of visitors associated with major sporting or cultural events can heighten risks to children. In addition, vulnerable children and families may even find themselves uprooted as locations are air-brushed” to enhance a country’s image before a major event.

The greater digitalization of travel, combined with new forms of interaction from the dark web to unregulated and informal travel and tourism, can put children at higher risk. This shifting landscape generates new avenues that can

be used by offenders, traffickers, intermediaries and criminal networks to exploit children.

All of this is happening against a backdrop of increasing vulnerability of children.

Sexual offenders are known to misuse travel and tourism infrastructure and services. **The sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism can happen in any kind of venue or location and in any country in the world.** Offenders can be international or domestic tourists.

Child labour in the travel and tourism sector also has many faces, some of them well hidden. **Travel for business and work, including for large development and infrastructure projects, poses risks if it creates an environment in which violence is tolerated** in locations around or near travellers' accommodation, places of work or transportation hubs.



Revisiting and revitalizing action

A solid foundation for action is already in place to confront the challenges and risks outlined above. **The declaration and call for action resulting from the first International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism, held in 2018**, served to outline key steps to ensure proactive, comprehensive, context-specific and sustainable prevention, building on the 2016 report entitled *Offenders on the Move: Global Study on the Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism*.

The Global Code of Ethics for Tourism of the World Tourism Organization, which was a voluntary framework for responsible and sustainable tourism development, was converted into a binding instrument in 2019 entitled the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics.

States have introduced legislative and other measures to enhance the protection of children from violence in the context of travel and tourism, such as ensuring that regulatory bodies with oversight or inspection functions incorporate the protection of children into their mandates.

The travel and tourism sector has been engaged in efforts to tackle violence against children. It has, for example, been included in the action framework for the travel and tourism sector of the World Travel and Tourism Council, on preventing human trafficking, and in the Global Sustainable Tourism Council criteria.

The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism is a global, multi-stakeholder initiative that is aimed at raising awareness and providing tools and support to the travel and tourism industry to assess risks and impacts on children, understand the issue of sexual exploitation and take action to prevent this crime. The inclusion of companies working predominantly online – such as

booking platforms for accommodation in private homes and for transport – among Code members is welcome.

The financial sector is also making a contribution, for example through the development of indicators to help detect financial transactions relating to online child sexual exploitation.

A range of law enforcement measures are in place to stem violence against children in the context of travel and tourism. They include **INTERPOL** green notices: international alerts that notify all countries about a person's criminal activities and their potential threat to public safety.

The **Virtual Global Taskforce** – an international alliance of 15 dedicated law enforcement agencies – was established in direct response to the rise in offenders targeting children worldwide through online social interactions and travelling overseas to commit contact sexual abuse.

Civil society organizations and networks continue to play a key role in raising awareness, generating evidence, providing guidance and support to States and industry, monitoring progress and providing services for victims and survivors.

Notwithstanding the progress achieved, it is not happening at the scale, speed or consistency required to tackle violence against children effectively in the context of travel and tourism. We need to go further and faster.

Moving forward

The world is not on track to end all forms of violence against children and keep the promise made under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in this regard.

The travel and tourism sector can play a leading role in accelerating the 2030 Agenda, acting as a bridge between economic growth, environmental conservation and social development. The sector can provide significant benefits to local communities by creating job opportunities, ensuring decent work, preserving cultural heritage, tackling poverty and discrimination, developing infrastructure and investing in child and social protection services.

The travel and tourism sector now has an unprecedented opportunity to embed the protection of children into every stage of its development and operating practices. This opportunity cannot be missed.

Finally, all action must be informed by the views and experiences of children. Ongoing efforts to ensure the inclusion of children's experiences and perspectives in the context of travel and tourism should be replicated and widely promoted.