

**Committee:** SOCHUM

**Topic:** The Question of Sex Tourism

**Chair:** Maelle Bebleadzi

**School:** Bishop Thomas Grant

---

## Summary

The sex industry is a large industry that benefits greatly from tourism. It has been estimated by the ECPAT that 250,000 people travel for sexual services and according to a 2002 study, sex tourism is worth \$20 billion. Typical destinations include Southeast and East Asia, and Central and South America. Sex tourists typically come from the United States, Europe and Australia. Some countries depend on tourism and the sex industry contributes largely to the income made through tourism. However, internationally sex work is recognised differently and this often dictates the amount of support that sex workers receive, particularly in terms of access to health care and financial support.

Poverty, lack of education and gender inequality are often reasons why millions globally are victims of sexual exploitation within the sex industry. Furthermore, it is estimated that a million children globally are forced into the global sex trade. Victims may endure physical and verbal abuse and may suffer from mental health illnesses as a result. However, their abusers may not be held accountable for their actions because they are tourists and because sex workers are often marginalised. Additionally, they are vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy and sex trafficking.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Sex tourism-** travel that is specifically planned to purchase sexual services.

**Child sex tourism (CST)-** the sexual exploitation of children by someone who has travelled from their country or region or residence to sexually abuse children.

**Sex tourist-** someone who travels to a different region/country to solicit sexual services.

**Sex work-** the facilitation of sexual services in exchange for money and goods.

**Sex worker-** refers to a consenting adult who receives money or other goods in exchange for sexual services.

## Background Information

### The Legality of Sex Work

Currently, 49 countries have legalised sex work and 12 regulate sex work. On the other hand, the legal status of sex work may not coincide with the presence of sex work in the country. Though sex work is illegal in many areas, it may make up a considerable portion of their GDP and so may be facilitated by authorities. Regardless of sex work's legal status, it can substantially contribute to a state's economy. The sex industry is also massively influenced by tourism as a large number of sex workers rely on tourists to gain an income. Due to the sex industry's effect on the economy, tourism is often encouraged and travel agencies may also advertise local sex work. However, some sex workers receive no support from the government because of its illegality and may face criminal charges. It is important to consider the ranging levels of support that the sex industry and sex workers get due to the varying regulation of sex work globally. Many states have chosen to criminalise sex work due to its links to sexual violence and sex trafficking.

### Child Sex Tourism

The vulnerability of children exacerbates existing factors such as poverty and gender inequality. The ILO estimates that 1.2 million children are victims of sex and labour trafficking. The ILO also states that 21% of victims of forced sex labour are children. There are different ways that children may be manipulated and coerced into the industry. They are more likely to be targeted by tourists in public settings such as beaches and restaurants. Some sex tourists may fund their exploitation of children through the production and distribution of child pornography. However, children may also be forced into sex tourism by carers or those in positions of authority. This can be seen in Cambodia where children may be sold into the sex industry by their parents and tortured if they refuse to go with a client. Children may also become victims through forced marriages, orphanages and international volunteering schemes. Additionally, children are particularly vulnerable to online grooming and manipulation.

Child sex tourism also has long-lasting effects on children. They become dependent on their abusers as they often come from poorer backgrounds and are not yet adults. Child victims are also vulnerable to diseases and may develop mental health issues such as PTSD and depression.

### **Relevant Factors**

Many factors may result in someone becoming a victim of sex tourism and sexual exploitation. Poverty is the amongst the most prominent factors. In return for sexual services, workers may receive money or other material goods and so they become dependent on sex tourism for their income. For instance, in Thailand, families from rural areas may encourage their daughters to move to cities to be sex workers. As they become reliant on their income, it is very difficult for them to leave abusive situations. This is particularly the case in countries where sex workers are not protected or may be criminalised.

Furthermore, gender inequality is a large contributing factor. It is estimated that 99% of forced sex labour victims are women and girls, due to this some argue that sex work is inherently sexist as often women and girls are treated as commodities and sexual objects. Typically men are sex tourists however some women also travel for sexual services. As previously mentioned, women and girls may be encouraged or forced by their families into sex work and marriages. Furthermore, female victims and sex workers often face abuse from tourists.

Additionally, it is important to consider how sex tourism differs from other potential forms of sexual exploitation. Tourists have an element of anonymity when they travel so it may be hard for them to be identified and held accountable for their actions. This is heightened by the varying recognition of sex work internationally as some tourists may be seeking to take advantage of the loose regulation of sex work in destination countries.

### **COVID-19**

Due to the pandemic, sex tourism has decreased and a lot of sex workers have lost their income. This has been difficult for some, especially for those who do not receive government support. Restricted travel has caused an increase in online sex work and sexual exploitation as websites have been used to provide sexual services. Though this has limited the risk of the transmission of COVID and other diseases, many sex workers have received online abuse.

Furthermore, it is difficult to hold users accountable because of their online anonymity and because of the nature of sex work. However, the approaches taken during the pandemic, such as testing and tracing, have caused some to reevaluate how health services are provided to sex workers especially regarding the spread of HIV and AIDS in the sex industry.

### **Effects**

The sex industry is a dangerous industry for those involved, including both victims forced into sex tourism and state recognised sex workers. Firstly, some victims of sex tourism have also faced sex trafficking where they were threatened and forced into sex work across borders as part of sex tourism. Furthermore, they are at risk of communicable diseases such as HIV.

For instance, in Cambodia 20% of sex workers have HIV. However, global statistics on HIV in the sex industry are likely higher because many may not have access to health care.

Furthermore, women and girls may face long-lasting gynaecological issues and the risk of unwanted pregnancy. Those who do fall pregnant may be pressured to get abortions and often lose contact with the father of the child. Victims also face coercion and violence as they may be forced to take drugs or drink to be easily controlled.

In addition, there are many mental and social effects. Victims may start to lose their identity as a result of the control that their exploiters have over them. This is the case because they may start to depend on sex work and not have access to their documentation in the case of trafficking. Furthermore, they are at greater risk of developing mental health illnesses such as PTSD, depression and anxiety; this limits their ability to forge relationships in the future. Child victims may also be at greater risk of youth offending and may not have access to future educational opportunities.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### Thailand

Thailand's sex industry makes up 12% of its GDP and is worth \$25 billion. It is used to attract tourism as often travel agencies will tailor their promotion of the sex industry to Western and Thai travellers.

However, prostitution is illegal and sex workers receive little support. Spaces such as restaurants, bars and spas can be protected under the law as entertainment spaces but are known locally as hosts for sex work. Furthermore, many Thai sex workers face abuse from clients and brothel owners.

Many sex workers rely on tourists to gain their income and COVID-19 has caused many to lose their income as well as access to health care. They have not received support from the government but local organisations such as SWING and Empower have worked to provide sex workers with PPE, food and HIV testing.

### The Netherlands

Sex work was legalised in 2000 and sex workers are eligible for governmental support. Many sex workers also rely on tourists to gain money. This is particularly the case in the 'Red Light District' as 70% of its income comes from tourism.

Rules have been put in place to protect sex workers in the area: visitors are not allowed to take photos of the sex workers and tour guides are not allowed to stop in front of windows. However, many sex workers still face abuse. The government has been considering the closure of the district and the relocation of sex workers to a building outside of the district; this has been contested by many sex workers.

### The Code

The Code is an organisation that combats the child abuse in tourism. It has trained over 1.4 million tourism staff and supports the travel industry. They also share resources with tourists on children's rights and the prevention of child sex tourism.

### ECPACT

ECPACT researches the sexual exploitation of children including in the travel industry. The organisation aims to raise awareness on the issue, advocates for policy change and cooperates with law enforcement on victim support.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description
1989	UNCRC Article 34 declares that children are to be protected from sexual abuse and supported throughout their recovery.
1996	The World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children was held. A code of conduct was created to safeguard children from sex tourism. This was directed towards companies and stakeholders in the travel industry, including hospitality businesses. 122 countries implemented the 'Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action'.
1999	The UNWTO implemented the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET) to ensure accountable global tourism.
2000	The UN GA adopted A/RES/54/263 on the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.
2008	States gathered at the Rio De Janeiro Declaration to discuss the role of tourism companies in the exploitation of children in tourism. At the conference, several companies signed the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.
2017	The UNWTO hosted meetings in Madrid to discuss the sexual abuse of children in tourism. They discussed measures to reduce factors that make children vulnerable such as poverty and a lack of education. They also acknowledged the role of technology in the exploitation of children.

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

**UNWTO-** The World Tourism Organisation launched a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET). This code includes the condemnation of the sexual exploitation of children in the tourism industry and acknowledges media's and technology's responsibility in sex tourism's promotion.

The WTO worked with Brazil to tackle child sex tourism. Posters were spread in 20 cities and videos were played on flights and television.

The WTO unveiled a campaign in partnership with ECPAT, ILO and UNICEF, as well as tourism companies to highlight the importance of protecting children from sexual exploitation in travel. This campaign was called the “Don’t Let Child Abuse Travel” campaign.

**UNICEF-** created a code of conduct for the tourism industry in North America to limit sex tourism and sexual abuse.

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Exchange Initiative and the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children have collaborated on producing a database to identify victims and hotel rooms. Furthermore, airlines have created the Blue Lightning programme to help train staff on identifying and reporting trafficking.

The tourism industry has also created a code to tackle the sexual exploitation of children; 1,287 signatories had signed by 2013. They agreed to implement policies to protect children, train staff, share information on children rights and signs of trafficking, as well as report on the enactment of their new policies.

## Possible Solutions

- Consider your country’s approach to sex work in general; would it be better to decriminalise it completely, heavily regulate it or criminalise it?
- If sex work is legal in your country, are sex workers given enough support (financial support, access to physical and mental health services, etc)?
- Ensuring that children who are victims of sex tourism are seen as victims as opposed to criminals if sex work is illegal in your country
- Training workers of the travel industry and careers of children to recognise signs of sexual exploitation and report any suspicions
- Guaranteeing that there are safety measures put in place in orphanages and volunteering schemes to ensure that children are protected from sexual exploitation
- Ensuring that tourists are held accountable no matter the status of sex work globally
- Training law enforcement to listen to victims of sexual exploitation within sex tourism, no matter the status of sex work in said country, and hold abusers accountable

- Raising the general public's awareness of the effects of sex tourism and signs of sexual exploitation
- Encouraging research into sex tourism and sharing that research internationally
- Promoting collaboration between states, law enforcement and travel companies to tackle sexual exploitation within tourism

## Bibliography

Brooks, A. & Heaslip, V., 2019. Sex Trafficking and Sex Tourism in a Globalised World. *Tourism Review*, 74(5), pp. 1104-1115. Available at: <http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/30603/3/Final-Sex-Trafficking-Sex-Tourism-in-Globalised%20World-19.3.18.pdf>

Gerretsen, I., 2020. *Amsterdam's 'prostitute hotel' plan to uproot red light district*. [Online] Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/amsterdam-prostitute-hotel/index.html>

Hillis, A. et al., 2020. Sex tourism, disease migration and COVID-19: lessons learnt and best practices moving forward. *Journal of Travel*, 27(7). Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/jtm/article/27/7/taaa144/5899714>

Lusby, C., Ackerman, L. & Williams, V., 2015. Sex Trafficking in the Tourism Industry. *Journal of Tourism & Hospitality*, 4(4). Available at: <https://www.longdom.org/open-access/sex-trafficking-in-the-tourism-industry-2167-0269-1000166.pdf>

Luz, M. F. F. d. I., 2018. *Child Sex Tourism and exploitation are on the rise. Companies can help fight it*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/03/changing-corporate-culture-can-help-fight-child-sex-tourism-heres-how/>

Narula, A., 2019. *What you want is what you get: realities, representations, and reputations of sex tourism in Bangkok*. [Online] Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2019/10/24/what-you-want-to-see-is-what-you-get-realities-representations-and-reputations-of-sex-tourism-in-bangkok/>

OHCHR, 2013. *Combating Child Sex Tourism*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/newsevents/pages/childsextourism.aspx>

UNICEF, 2016. *Prevention of SEC in Travel and Tourism*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/66766/file/Prevention-of-SEC-in-travel-and-tourism.pdf>

UNWTO, 2017. *UNWTO hosts meeting of global leaders on fighting sexual exploitation of children in tourism*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/archive/global/press-release/2017-07-14/unwto-hosts-meeting-global-leaders-fighting-sexual-exploitation-children-to>



UNWTO, 2020. *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*. [Online]  
Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/global-code-of-ethics-for-tourism>

Ward-Pelar, J., 2010. Rationalizing Sexual Tourism: How Some Countries Benefit from Selling Sex. *Inquiries Journal*, 2(04). Available at:  
<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/235/rationalizing-sexual-tourism-how-some-countries-benefit-from-selling-sex>