

## Talking Points

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### Obligations for States to protect children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism

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Over the past 15 years the international community has made important advances in strengthening the protection of children from sexual exploitation and abuse. The three World Congresses against Sexual Exploitation of Children (Stockholm 1996, Yokohama 2001, Rio de Janeiro 2008) placed the issue on the international and national political agendas. Governments across all regions are now recognizing the problem and taking measures to address it.

Progress has been made towards the universal ratification and implementation of key human rights treaties. By mid-2012, 158 States are party to the OPSC – representing more than 80% of all UN Member States- and 119 have signed it.<sup>9</sup> Accelerated progress in the number of accessions /ratifications is a result of the campaign to promote universal ratification and effective implementation of the two Optional Protocols to the CRC, which was launched by the UN Secretary-General with UNICEF and partners in 2010.

During the course of the two-year campaign, 21 more States have become party to the OPSC, and two more have signed it. Progress is also seen at regional level. In 2011, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union adopted a directive aimed at combating sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, and child pornography,<sup>11</sup> and Central American governments renewed their commitment to address sexual exploitation of children at a sub-regional conference in the Dominican Republic.

UNICEF's work at national, regional and global level has been instrumental to this progress. In 2012 more than 70 UNICEF country offices reported that they are supporting Governments and civil society in efforts to implement comprehensive strategies to prevent and respond to sexual abuse and exploitation of children, in and out of emergency.

An increasing number of countries are harmonizing legislation with the OPSC and other international standards, criminalizing all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation of children including pornography /child abuse images. Many countries are also implementing action plans addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2012, UNICEF work contributed to such processes in Swaziland, Ukraine, Cambodia, Guinea,Bissau and Mongolia among others. In Ukraine, for example, efforts are under way to reform the Criminal Code to combat child abuse images and protect children from exploitation in prostitution.

UNICEF support includes assistance to national authorities to increase capacity to implement legislation and policies in a coordinated manner. In a number of countries specialized police units have been set up to ensure a child and gender sensitive response to violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse. In East Timor, the setting up of such police stations and improved referral procedures led to a 25% increase in reporting of cases of violence, exploitation and abuse, during a 6 month period.

More and more countries are investing in comprehensive support services for children who have experienced sexual abuse and exploitation, including health, legal, protective and counseling services. In Uganda, more than 14,200 children at risk or victims of violence and abuse were identified in 2012, and at least 80% accessed protective services due to assistance provided by UNICEF to district authorities and NGOs. In Chile, a clinical guide to care for child victims of sexual

abuse has been developed by the Ministry of Health with assistance from UNICEF. Professionals are being trained in the implementation of the guide.

Governments and civil society are also taking action to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation of children from happening in the first place. UNICEF supports awareness raising and capacity building of children, parents, teachers, community leaders, civil society and faith based organizations, media and the private sector to help them break the silence around practices that harm children. In 2011 alone, UNICEF supported such efforts in at least 25 countries.

In Guyana, the “TELL Campaign” reached over 9,000 primary school age children with information about sexual abuse and empowered them to report abuse. In Mozambique, the Ministry of Education launched a multi-media campaign on Zero Tolerance for violence and sexual abuse against children in partnership with other key Ministries e.g. the Ministries of Justice, Health and Women and Social Action. In Afghanistan, religious leaders and scholars throughout the country have studied and discussed the many ways Islam protects women and children from domestic and sexual violence. In Latin America, the travel and tourism sector has been mobilized with UNICEF support to prevent sexual exploitation of children. In Colombia, for example, 28 companies have signed the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism a result of UNICEF and partners efforts.

Efforts are also made to strengthen the evidence base for policy and programme response to sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2011 and 12 studies on the magnitude and nature of sexual abuse and exploitation were undertaken in at least twenty countries, either as part of national level studies on violence against children or specific studies on different forms of sexual exploitation and abuse

Critical lessons learned from these activities include that the **involvement of both the public and private travel and tourism sector is essential**, i.e. the Ministries of Tourism as well as tourism associations, hotel chains, travel agencies and tour operators etc. We have seen that many times it is **actually the private sector** that has **taken the lead in addressing the issue**, since the governments many times find this to be an extremely sensitive issue. Engagement and pressure from the private sector has therefore also mobilized government action.

Travel and tourism **sector** can play a **critical role in the prevention** of sexual exploitation of children. This is not only limited to taking measures to prevent the facilities or services of the sector are used for or facilitate the sexual exploitation of children. The sector has also been able reach out to the local communities and raise awareness about the problem. This is critical for a sustainable tourism development and the prevention of sexual exploitation.

We have also seen that **local ownership** of governments, civil society and the private sector is **critical to ensure sustainability and long-term commitment**, to address this extremely sensitive issue.

We have learned that work to prevent sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism **must be part of broader efforts and strategies** to address sexual exploitation and abuse of children in a country. A comprehensive, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach is needed. Efforts need to focus both on **prevention and response**, including the strengthening of national child protection systems (e.g. laws, policies and comprehensive services) and addressing social tolerance of child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Lastly, a **lesson learned** from our work with the **private sector** is that we increasingly **need to encourage companies to think holistically**, not just address issues that are the main visible ones, but

to **consider the range of impacts that business can have on child rights**, and in a holistic way how to approach those.

For this reason, UNICEF together with Save the Children and the Global Compact has launched the ***Children's Rights and Business Principles***. These are **10 principles** that identify actions for all business to respect but also to support and promote children's rights. While the business and human rights agenda has evolved significantly in recent years, the Principles respond to the opportunity to more clearly bring in the child rights perspective. In the context of the growing number of initiatives on specific aspects of the business-children interaction, the Principles seek to be a common reference point and present a coherent vision for business to maximize the positive impacts and minimize negative impacts on children. UNICEF will be working on the implementation of these Principles and would certainly like to make the tourist industry one of the key industry sectors to work with to implement the Principles.

Despite these efforts, **challenges still remain**. Globalization with increased ease of travel, mobility and mass tourism and expansion of information and communication technologies (such as internet and mobile phones), all contribute to making countries and children vulnerable and at risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. While much progress has been made, challenges remain. UNICEF will continue to support Governments and civil society in the development and implementation of comprehensive evidenced based strategies to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.