

Forum: Health and Youth Commission 1 (HYC 1)

Issue: Combating sex tourism

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Introduction

Sex tourism is a growing global problem that fuels human trafficking, gender inequality, and exploitation¹. It involves people, often from wealthier countries, travelling to other nations to engage in sexual activities, many times with minors or individuals forced into prostitution². Women and children are the most common victims, coerced through poverty, violence, or deception³. Victims of sex tourism face severe physical, psychological, and emotional harm⁴. Many suffer from sexually transmitted infections, trauma, depression, and lifelong stigma⁵. Their families and communities are also torn apart, and social rejection makes reintegration extremely difficult⁶. The demand created by sex tourism sustains international trafficking networks³. Organised crime groups, corrupt officials, and complicit businesses profit from this industry, making it hard to dismantle⁷. Addressing the problem requires both prevention and strong accountability³. On one hand, governments must punish traffickers and buyers who exploit vulnerable people abroad⁸. On the other hand, equal focus must be placed on protecting survivors, offering them safe housing, medical treatment, and pathways to education and employment⁹.

Definition of Key Terms

Sex trafficking

Sex trafficking is an act of human trafficking for sexual exploitation¹⁰. Many victims of sex trafficking are often unaware that they are being exploited because they have been expertly manipulated into believing that they have chosen to participate in commercial sex⁹.

Human Trafficking

A broader term includes sex trafficking and labour trafficking, where people are forced to work under similar threats or lies¹¹.

Rehabilitation

Helping survivors recover physically, emotionally, and mentally. This includes counselling, medical care,

job training, and support to help them rebuild their lives⁹.

SDG 5 and SDG 16

The UN has created goals to fight human trafficking¹². Gender equality is part of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, and SDG 16 speaks to justice, peace, and strong institutions. Both are necessary to fight human trafficking, as weak justice systems allow traffickers to operate with little fear of consequence, and gender inequality increases women's and children's vulnerability¹².

Extraterritorial Jurisdiction

A state's power to prosecute its citizens for crimes, such as child sex tourism, committed abroad¹³.

Palermo Protocol

UN treaty supplementing the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, establishing international cooperation against trafficking¹⁴.

Nordic Model

Legal framework that penalises buyers of sex while decriminalising those exploited¹⁵.

Background Information

Beyond the immediate harm to individuals, sex tourism has broad social consequences, including public health risks and community destabilisation, and the urgent need to protect human rights and uphold justice. This involves strengthening legal Frameworks to prosecute offenders effectively, including applying extraterritorial jurisdiction to citizens who commit offences abroad and implementing a survivor-centred approach, such as Medical Care and educational curricula. International cooperation among governments, Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs), and institutions plays a significant role in preventing trafficking networks and promoting awareness to reduce vulnerabilities.

The persistence of sex tourism is also deeply interconnected with systemic issues such as gender inequality, lack of education, and social marginalisation. Sexual exploitation also creates significant challenges in identifying and assessing victims, many of which remain hidden due to fear, stigma, or mistrust in the authorities that had failed to protect them previously. Survivors often suffer from complex trauma that affects their mental health long after these traumatic experiences, including PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Additionally, lack of cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed support services makes recovery and their reintegration to society difficult.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

United States of America

The United States of America is a major contributor to sex tourism while also combating the crime. US citizens are among those prosecuted under US extraterritorial laws for engaging in child sex offences abroad. (Extraterritorial Child Sexual Abuse, U.S. Department of Justice) Popular destinations for these travels include Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, where poverty persists with weak legal enforcement and corruption. Domestically, the United States also faces some internal issues as sex trafficking and exploitation of victims, that persist within its own borders, particularly in major cities and major transit hubs. Federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) work to coordinate efforts to identify and arrest perpetrators while supporting programmes aimed to prevent and assist victims.

Thailand

Thailand is one of the most prominent locations for sex tourism, with cities like Bangkok, Pattaya, and Phuket known for their large and often unregulated commercial sex industry. Although technically prostitution is illegal under Thai laws, it is widely tolerated and, in some cases, indirectly supported by corruption and the economic dependence of wealthier nations on sex tourism. The environment has enabled the establishment of human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse of vulnerable populations through underground networks. Victims often come from impoverished backgrounds or neighbouring countries such as Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, and are lured through manipulation, false promises, and abduction. Thai authorities are cooperating with international organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to combat these issues. However, the high demand and high profitability of the industry continue to undermine initiatives, making illegal sex tourism a persistent issue.

Australia

Australia is a strong advocate for human rights and aims to combat illegal sex tourism and human trafficking. In Australia, strong legal frameworks have been established, such as the Criminal Code Act 1995, to criminalise sex trafficking, slavery, and child sex tourism. The Australian Federal Police (AFP) forces maintain a dedicated Human Trafficking Team to investigate both domestic and international cases of human trafficking in collaboration with state police and immigration authorities. Australia has also established the Australian Border Force's Human Trafficking and Slavery Unit to identify and protect victims entering the country. Internationally, Australia has collaborated with organisations such as the International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and funded anti-trafficking programmes in Southeast Asia.

Sweden

Sweden is internationally recognised for its approach to combating sex tourism and trafficking through its "Nordic Model," which criminalises the purchase of sexual services while decriminalising the sale of sex by victims. This approach focuses on reducing demand by penalising clients rather than those

exploited. The Swedish Police authority has specialised units dedicated to investigating sex trafficking and related offences and works closely with social services to provide and support rehabilitation for victims.

ECPAT International (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking)

The End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking, also known as ECPAT International, is a global network of non-governmental organisations working to eliminate all forms of child sexual exploitation, including prostitution, child pornography, and trafficking. ECPAT International was established in 1996 and focuses on advocacy, policy development, and more. It provided technical assistance to governments in drafting and implementing child protection laws and protocols, ensuring children's rights are prioritised in national and international frameworks. ECPAT promotes data collection and research to understand trafficking trends and support global initiatives. ECPAT also facilitates collaboration between governments, civil societies, and international bodies around the world.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a UN-led agency that addresses transnational crime, including human trafficking and sexual exploitation. UNODC assists member states in enhancing their legislative frameworks by developing comprehensive anti-trafficking laws aligned with the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Palermo Protocol). The UNODC provides specialised training for law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges to improve the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases. UNODC also supports victim identification, protection, and rehabilitation programs, working closely with governments and NGOs.

Viable Solutions

The initial step to fighting sex tourism is having binding international legal instruments with strong enforcement systems¹⁶. Member states can implement laws that specifically criminalise sex tourism and impose extraterritorial jurisdiction to prosecute the offenders outside their countries of origin¹³. Regional extradition treaties need to be fortified so that criminals cannot find an escape in crossing frontiers¹⁷. A UN-mandated global offender list can be established to monitor those convicted of sex tourism offences, shared between immigration systems to keep repeat offenders out of vulnerable countries¹⁴.

To diminish the vulnerabilities traffickers target, states need to establish direct economic alternatives in regions of high risk¹⁸. This includes targeted investment in infrastructure, formal work opportunities, and conditional cash transfer schemes to families under threat of exploitation⁹. Member states and global institutions like the World Bank can set up a "Resilience Fund" specifically for poor people in

tourism-reliant economies to make sure that poverty cannot be trafficked by exploiters¹⁹. Trade agreements might also have embedded protections for workers, so exploitative sectors cannot thrive⁴. A survivor-focused rehabilitation system will need to extend beyond shelters to ensure enforceable legal rights and integration assurances⁹. National governments will need to create survivor compensation programs, financed by proceeds from confiscated assets of traffickers and complicit companies²⁰. Survivors should be ensured education and long-term job access, supported by legally enforceable quotas for employment in the public sector⁹. National governments need to establish fast-track courts to move survivor cases more quickly, so justice is not delayed or denied²¹.

The Palermo Protocol needs to be modified to incorporate mandatory reporting of domestic anti-trafficking activities¹⁴, with independent UN review panels having the authority to sanction non-compliant countries¹². A single worldwide task force under UNODC should coordinate international sharing of intelligence¹⁴, with INTERPOL obliged to give priority to sex tourism cases in its transnational crime database¹³. Those nations which do not regulate their tourism sectors or enable systemic corruption to promote exploitation must be fined financially⁷. The private sector needs to be brought under legal obligation through binding compliance mechanisms²². Airlines, hotels, and websites need to be mandated by international law to screen, report, and block sex tourism transactions, with severe penalties for failure to do so²³. An independent auditor needs to check tourism operators once a year, with the mandate to cancel licenses in case of complicity in exploitation²². Further, confiscated profits from enterprises discovered facilitating sex tourism must be channelled into survivor rehabilitation trusts²⁰. The latest technology needs to be completely integrated into law enforcement tactics²⁴. AI-powered monitoring systems, which can interpret travel history, internet ads, and financial transactions associated with trafficking, need to be deployed by governments²⁴. Satellite monitoring and biometric identification may be employed for tracing cross-border traffic of traffickers and victims²⁴. All member states should make it obligatory for telecom companies and internet service providers to cooperate in investigations, with penalties for not providing data to the authorities²⁴.

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