

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Commercial sexual exploitation of children is one of the worst forms of child labour and a modern form of slavery. Sexually exploited children are often treated as criminals. As defined in the Declaration of the First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in 1996, commercial sexual exploitation of children is sexual abuse by an adult accompanied by remuneration in cash or in kind to the child or third person(s). The commitments made in Stockholm were reaffirmed in Yokohama, Japan, in 2001 at the Second World Congress.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- According to a recent global estimate by the International Labour Organization, of the 12.3 million people who are victims of forced labour, 1.39 million are involved in forced commercial sexual exploitation and 40–50 per cent are children.¹
- An estimated 12,000 Nepalese children, mainly girls, are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation each year within Nepal or to brothels in India and other countries.²
- From 28,000 to 30,000 children under the age of 18, approximately half of them 10–14 years old, are used in prostitution in South Africa.³

BUILDING A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

Government commitment and capacity

Recognition and acknowledgement by governments of the existence of sexual exploitation is crucial. Response mechanisms, including creating, enforcing and implementing appropriate legal frameworks to protect children and punish the perpetrators, are essential.

Legislation and enforcement

Police, judiciary, officials and service providers who work with children should be aware of the problem and equipped to address it. Neither the filing of a

HUMAN RIGHTS

States Parties that recognize the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (1989) undertake to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, including exploitative use in prostitution and pornography (Article 34), which the **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography** (2000) further refines.

The **International Labour Organization's Convention 182** (1999) defines sexual exploitation as one of the worst forms of child labour.

complaint nor prosecution of an offence should require the permission of the child's parents. Laws must punish those who buy sex from children; children who sell sex are victims and should not be treated as criminals.

Attitudes, customs and practices

These often enable, normalize and condone the demand for commercial sexual exploitation. Communities are often reluctant to intervene in cases of sexual exploitation due to lack of knowledge, lack of understanding about the harm to children, fear and intimidation, or for economic reasons.

Open discussion

The media can help protect children by providing information on the dangers of sexual exploitation and on penalties for exploiters. While avoiding reporting that violates children's rights, the media can be a valuable tool in mobilizing public opinion to participate in the struggle against sexual exploitation.

Children's life skills, knowledge and participation

Trafficked children often end up in situations of sexual exploitation, and their knowledge of how to avoid the risks, of strategies to protect themselves and of where to obtain help is key to making them less vulnerable. Teachers, coaches and community

leaders can help inform children about their rights and how best to protect themselves. Sexual health education is important, because it enables children to protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, also reducing the incidence of adolescent pregnancy.

Capacity of families and communities

Parents, teachers, social workers and community leaders should be able to provide information to children and answer their questions. Law enforcement, including police, judges and lawyers, should be trained and made aware that children who are sexually exploited need assistance and should never be criminalized and prosecuted. The travel and tourism industry can raise awareness about the illegality of sexual exploitation of children, provide information on penalties, and train staff and employers on where to report cases.

Essential services, including prevention, recovery and reintegration

School attendance protects children and makes them less exposed and vulnerable. Children may also need assistance in getting out of commercial sexual exploitation, accessing appropriate medical and psychosocial care, finding long-term solutions and, whenever possible and safe, returning to their families.

Monitoring, reporting and oversight

Tracking cases of sexual abuse, of arrests, or of disappearances of girls or boys is essential since sexual exploitation often thrives on secrecy.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Sexual exploitation prevents a child from going to school, might lead to infection with sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and can result in early and unwanted pregnancies, which result in higher maternal mortality. These factors all hinder the achievement of development goals, including MDG 1 (to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), MDG 2 (universal primary education), MDG 5 (improve maternal health) and MDG 6 (halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS).

Measures that have proved useful include telephone hotlines, easy access to confidential counselling and recruitment of female police officers.

EXAMPLES OF UNICEF IN ACTION

Internationally, UNICEF, the World Tourism Organization and ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) International launched a Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. The project aims to involve the tourism industry in actively combating child sex tourism.

In **Indonesia**, pilot interventions on the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children carried out by UNICEF in 2005 in two selected districts in West and Central Java helped raise awareness of the risks of sexual exploitation and trafficking. The projects helped build the capacities of parents, community leaders, law enforcement officials, policy makers and service providers to protect children.

In **South Africa**, UNICEF contributed to raising awareness on child pornography by lending technical and financial support to the National Child Pornography Conference held in May 2005. The conference adopted an Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Pornography.

Notes

¹ International Labour Organization, *A Global Alliance against Forced Labour: Global report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work 2005*, Report I (B), International Labour Conference 93rd session 2005, Geneva, 2005, pp. 12, 15.

² International Labour Organization, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, 'Facts on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children', March 2003, available at <www.ilo.org/childlabour>.

³ International Labour Organization, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, *Unbearable to the Human Heart: Child trafficking and action to eliminate it*, ILO, Geneva, 2000, p. 17.

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