

Child Protection in Sustainable Travel & Tourism in Vietnam

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Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel & Tourism (SECTT) in Vietnam

- ▶ Vietnam is trending as one of the most highly anticipated countries for tourism re-opening
- ▶ Both boys and girls are vulnerable, from low-income families in both urban and rural areas and ethnic minority groups
- ▶ Exploiters, some of whom actively seek virgin girls, include Vietnamese and foreign nationals, men and women, and people of all ages and professions⁸
- ▶ SECTT has been migrating to remote and mountainous areas such as Lao Cai and Mekong Delta⁹

⁸ ECPAT, "Vietnam Country Overview: A report on the scale, scope and context of the sexual exploitation of children. 2018.

⁹ MOLISA and UNICEF Viet Nam, "An Analysis of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Selected Provinces and Cities of Viet Nam", 14.

SECTT in Vietnam

- ▶ The growth of travel and tourism in Vietnam carries specific risks for children, as having more people mobile creates more opportunities for offenders
- ▶ Online child sexual exploitation (OCSE) is a growing problem since COVID travel restrictions (child sexual abuse material, online grooming)
- ▶ Strengthening of policies and law enforcement to combat SECTT in Thailand and the Philippines diverted exploiters to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos⁵
- ▶ Vietnam was identified as a key destination for exploiters from all over the world starting in 2016⁶
 - ▶ Official response from VNAT was that child sex tourism does not exist in Vietnam⁷
- ▶ Online bookings and private rental accommodation led to the spread of sex tourism

⁵ Fondation Scelles and Charpenel Y., “4° Global Report: Prostitution: Exploitation, Prosecution, Repression”, 438.

⁶ US Department of State, “Trafficking in persons report”, 428.

⁷ Minh. A. “Child sex tourism does not exist in Vietnam: official.” VNExpress. 20 May 2016.

How are Children in VN Vulnerable to SECTT?

- ▶ In general, there are five influencing factors of why a child is vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking:
 1. Economic status: Children from poorer families have a higher vulnerability of being exploited or trafficked
 2. Education: Children who have lower educational attainment or drop out of school have a higher risk
 3. Gender: Both boys and girls are vulnerable, but girls make up a higher share of Vietnam's overall victims
 4. Identity: There are certain groups of people who are more vulnerable to trafficking than others. Examples include ethnic minorities and children people from rural "hotspot" tourism areas like the Mekong Delta and northern Vietnam
 5. Law enforcement: How well-trained are police, customs and immigration officials, and border guards in identifying potential perpetrators and preventing them from entering Vietnam
- ▶ All of these factors should be assessed both individually and together to determine a child's vulnerability

1 "COVID-19 and the labour market in Viet Nam." International Labour Organization. 21 April 2020.

2 "COVID-19 and child labor in Vietnam." Tran, Quang Nguyen Ha. Science and Technology Development Journal. Viet Nam National University HCMC. 12 August 2021.

3 "UN assessment of the social and economic impact of COVID-19 in Viet Nam." United Nations Viet Nam. September 2020.

4 "TOURISM AND CHILD LABOUR IN VIETNAM: between the law and reality." Ngo, Thi Minh Huong.

Informal Child Labor in Travel & Tourism

- ▶ About 82% of employees in the tourism and hospitality industry are informal workers¹
- ▶ In 2019 MOLISA found that 1.4 million children (about 54% of the total child population) were being exploited as illegal (informal) child labor²
- ▶ The UN found that around 3% of rural households surveyed reported pulling their children out of school permanently during COVID lockdown³
- ▶ Children from poor families who dropped out of school during COVID lockdown will seek informal work in tourism
- ▶ Children in informal tourism jobs that are less visible are higher at risk for sexual exploitation and slavery⁴
 - ▶ Street vendors, servers in restaurants, and sales in markets or souvenir shops near tourist areas-all places that are generally unsafe for children.

¹ "COVID-19 and the labour market in Viet Nam." International Labour Organization. 21 April 2020.

² "COVID-19 and child labor in Vietnam." Tran, Quang Nguyen Ha. Science and Technology Development Journal. Viet Nam National University HCMC. 12 August 2021.

³ "UN assessment of the social and economic impact of COVID-19 in Viet Nam." United Nations Viet Nam. September 2020.

⁴ "TOURISM AND CHILD LABOUR IN VIETNAM: between the law and reality." Ngo, Thi Minh Huong.

Child Protection in Sustainable Travel & Tourism: Challenges

- ▶ Child protection in travel and tourism is an extremely sensitive topic
- ▶ Fear of negative impact on tourism reputation and economy
- ▶ Human rights discussion is difficult
- ▶ Buy-in from tourism industry members
- ▶ Additional task for HR departments
- ▶ Focus is on post-COVID recovery for tourism industry

Child Protection in Sustainable Travel & Tourism: Stakeholders and Solutions

- ▶ COVID reset allows for new strategies to drive growth while protecting and appreciating what makes Vietnam an attractive destination: People, environment, and culture
- ▶ It's much more difficult to rebuild the reputation of a travel destination if it becomes known as a hotbed of child sex tourism
- ▶ Multiple stakeholders must be involved: Law enforcement, government, parents, schools, and private sector
- ▶ Multiple solutions must be deployed: Stricter identification at the border, preventing school dropouts, informing parents, raising awareness among tourism & hospitality (industry and worker levels) and setting industry-wide standards

Child Protection in Sustainable Travel & Tourism: Actions

- ▶ Shift view of child protection from a law enforcement, human rights issue to a sustainable tourism business issue
- ▶ Get buy-in from the tourism industry and business chambers (e.g.: Vietnam Business Forum, American Chamber of Commerce)
- ▶ Actively reach out to both local tourism companies and hotels as well as multinational companies
- ▶ Demystify solutions by running workshops for HR directors/managers and COOs on practical solutions, such as The Code

Thank you!

