



# Volunteering, Voluntourism, Tourism and Trafficking in Orphanages

## THEMATIC BRIEF

### Introduction

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**Violence and exploitation of children in residential care has been documented as a significant issue** in the context of orphanage tourism, voluntourism and volunteering, which takes place when individuals volunteer or visit these facilities, including in the context of an overseas trip or vacation. It ranks among the most popular international volunteering activities and has been documented in at least 37 countries.<sup>1</sup> Orphanage voluntourism serves as a critical mechanism to attract and retain international donors by facilitating direct contact between children and current or prospective donors. The popularity of funding and volunteering in orphanages has spurred a demand for institutionalizing children, sometimes met through active recruitment and long-term placement of children, contravening legal gatekeeping measures and violating children's rights and best interests.<sup>2</sup> The recruitment or transfer of a child into an institution for exploitation or profit constitutes a form of modern slavery and child trafficking termed 'orphanage trafficking'.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Better Care Network (2018) Orphanage Tourism Research. New York.

2 Cheney, K., & Ucembe, S. (2019). The orphan industrial complex: The charitable commodification of children and its consequences for child protection. In K. Cheney & A. Sinervo (Eds.), *Disadvantaged childhoods and humanitarian intervention: Processes of affective commodification* (pp. 37–61). Palgrave Macmillan.

3 van Doore, K. E., & Nhep, R. (2021). Providing Protection or Enabling Exploitation? Orphanages and Modern Slavery in Post-Disaster Contexts. *Journal of Modern Slavery*, 6(3), 46-61. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22150/jms/STCB4140>

Documented forms of exploitation associated with orphanage trafficking include sexual and labor exploitation, servitude and child institutionalization for profit purposes.<sup>4</sup> Orphanage voluntourism is linked to all forms of exploitation associated with orphanage trafficking. It creates a means of access to vulnerable children for both preferential and situational child sex offenders.<sup>5</sup> It is one of the primary ways operators exploiting children for profit generate income, in the form of donations, volunteering fees, and by recruiting volunteers to act as fundraisers.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, it incentivizes keeping children in substandard conditions to elicit sympathy and increase donations from voluntourists, while also encouraging child exploitation through coerced 'orphan performances' staged for profit.<sup>7</sup>

Orphanage trafficking is enabled in certain environments where children's care can be commodified through orphanage voluntourism, intersecting with family poverty, marginalization, and vulnerability; a lack of appropriate community-based support for children and families; widespread and inappropriate use of residential care; and privatized, foreign-funded, and under-regulated alternative care systems.<sup>8</sup> In such contexts, traffickers recruit children from vulnerable families, disguising their intent to exploit and profit from these children as charitable support. Families may also, for various reasons, place a child in an orphanage, unknowingly entrusting their children to operators who intend to exploit them once in care.<sup>9</sup>

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4 van Doore, K. E., & Nhep, R. (2022). The legal framework of orphanage trafficking in Cambodia, Nepal and Uganda: Summary report. Law Futures Centre & Better Care Network; Lyneham, S., & Fox, L. (2019). Benevolent harm: Orphanages, voluntourism and child sexual exploitation in South-East Asia. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 574(1), 1-15

5 ECPAT International. (2016). Global study on sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism: Summary for offenders on the move. [https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Ex-Summary-for-Offenders-on-the-Move\\_ENG.pdf](https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Ex-Summary-for-Offenders-on-the-Move_ENG.pdf)

6 Cheney & Ucembe (n.2); van Doore, K. E. (2020). Regulating Australia's participation in the orphanage industry. *Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond*, 7(1), 74-82

7 Guiney, T., & Mostafanezhad, M. (2015). The political economy of orphanage tourism in Cambodia. *Tourist Studies*, 15(2), 132-155; van Doore, K. E., & Nhep, R. (2023). Orphanage tourism and orphanage volunteering: implications for children. *Frontiers in Sustainable Tourism*, 2, 1177091; Miller, A., & Beazley, H. (2021). 'We have to make the tourists happy'; orphanage tourism in Siem Reap, Cambodia through the children's own voices. *Children's Geographies*, 1-13.

8 van Doore, K. E., & Nhep, R. (2021). Providing Protection or Enabling Exploitation? Orphanages and Modern Slavery in Post-Disaster Contexts. *Journal of Modern Slavery: A Multidisciplinary Exploration of Human Trafficking Solutions*, 6(3); Chege, N., & Ucembe, S. (2020). Kenya's Over-Reliance on Institutionalization as a Child Care and Child Protection Model: A Root-Cause Approach. *Social Sciences*, 9(4), 57; Nowak, M. (2019). Report of the independent expert leading the United Nations global study on children deprived of liberty (UN Doc A/74/136). United Nations.

9 Lyneham & Lachlan (n.4).

# Audience

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The Thematic Brief on Volunteering, Voluntourism, Tourism, and Trafficking in Orphanages was developed to provide guidance to governments, policy and decision-makers. It also supports the implementation of international commitments made in the context of the 2019 UN General Assembly Rights of the Child Resolution on children without parental care. It explains how to take appropriate measures to address and prevent the harms associated with orphanage volunteering, orphanage tourism and voluntourism and the orphanage trafficking connected to it.

The thematic brief contains guidance on key policy measures and concrete steps that may assist with the development and implementation of a whole-of-government strategy to eliminate orphanage tourism and voluntourism and to combat orphanage trafficking. It includes recommendations relevant to volunteer-sending and volunteer-receiving countries. In addition, it contains practical examples of effective measures from a diverse range of countries sending and receiving volunteers. For information on attitudes and perceptions underlying the support of residential care, including through orphanage volunteering, please refer to the links in the additional resources section.

# Key Terms

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**Orphanage:** residential care facilities that provide children with care in a non-family-based group setting, where care is provided by remunerated staff or volunteers without the involvement of parents or families. These are variously referred to as orphanages, childcare centres, residential care facilities, institutions, shelters, children's homes, children's villages, pagoda or faith-based care facilities, hostels and, in some instances, boarding schools. For ease of reference in this paper, we refer to all of these facilities as 'residential childcare facilities' and 'orphanages' interchangeably.

**Orphanage Volunteering and Tourism:** Volunteering in or visiting residential childcare facilities, including in the context of an overseas trip or vacation. It includes orphanage visits organized by volunteer-involving organizations, NGOs or faith-based groups, schools or universities. These may be purchased as a part of a travel package pre-departure, as well as spontaneous visits to orphanages upon arrival in the country in response to local advertising or direct invitation. It includes short-term missions where individuals or teams visit or volunteer in residential childcare facilities in the context of a mission trip. Orphanage volunteering also includes volunteering for development or internship placements that take place in residential childcare facilities of any kind.

**Voluntourism:** Voluntourism or volunteer tourism is organized and packaged tourist trips with a duration of a few hours to a year in which the main purpose is to volunteer. It evolves around products offered through travel and tourism markets usually for unskilled volunteers, with no supervision and no criminal background checks required as an alternative to mass tourism.<sup>10</sup>

**Orphanage trafficking:** Orphanage trafficking is the recruitment and/or transfer of children to residential childcare facilities for a purpose of exploitation and profit.

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<sup>10</sup> The Code Voluntourism Policy <https://thecode.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Voluntourism-Policy-2021.pdf>

# Key legal and policy frameworks

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## **A/RES/74/133 2019 UNGA Resolution on the Rights of the Child, Article 35:**

*Urges States to take action to ensure the enjoyment of human rights for all children without parental care, in accordance with the international human rights framework [...], and also to take action to provide a range of alternative care options and to protect all children without parental care, including by: [...]*

*(t) Taking appropriate measures to protect children who are victims of trafficking and are deprived of parental care, as well as enacting and enforcing legislation to prevent and combat the trafficking in and exploitation of children in care facilities, and supporting children who are victims of human trafficking in returning to their families and in receiving appropriate mental health and psychological assistance that is victim-centred and trauma-informed, and taking appropriate measures to prevent and address the harms related to volunteering programmes in orphanages, including in the context of tourism, which can lead to trafficking and exploitation.*

## **A/77/41 2022 Committee on the Rights of the Child: Recommendations from 2021 Day of General Discussion on children's rights and alternative care Annex II. D.1.29**

*States should adopt legislation and regulations to eliminate orphanage tourism and volunteering in orphanages, prevent incentives driving institutionalization and family separation and ensure adequate offenses and penalties to prevent and enable the prosecution of violations of children's rights in alternative care, including orphanage trafficking.*

## **CRPD/C/5 2022 Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Guidelines on the deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies.**

### **XII.143**

*States parties should prevent volunteering by foreign tourists in institutions (known as "voluntourism"), by providing appropriate travel guidance and raising awareness about the Convention and the dangers of institutionalization.*

# Recommendations

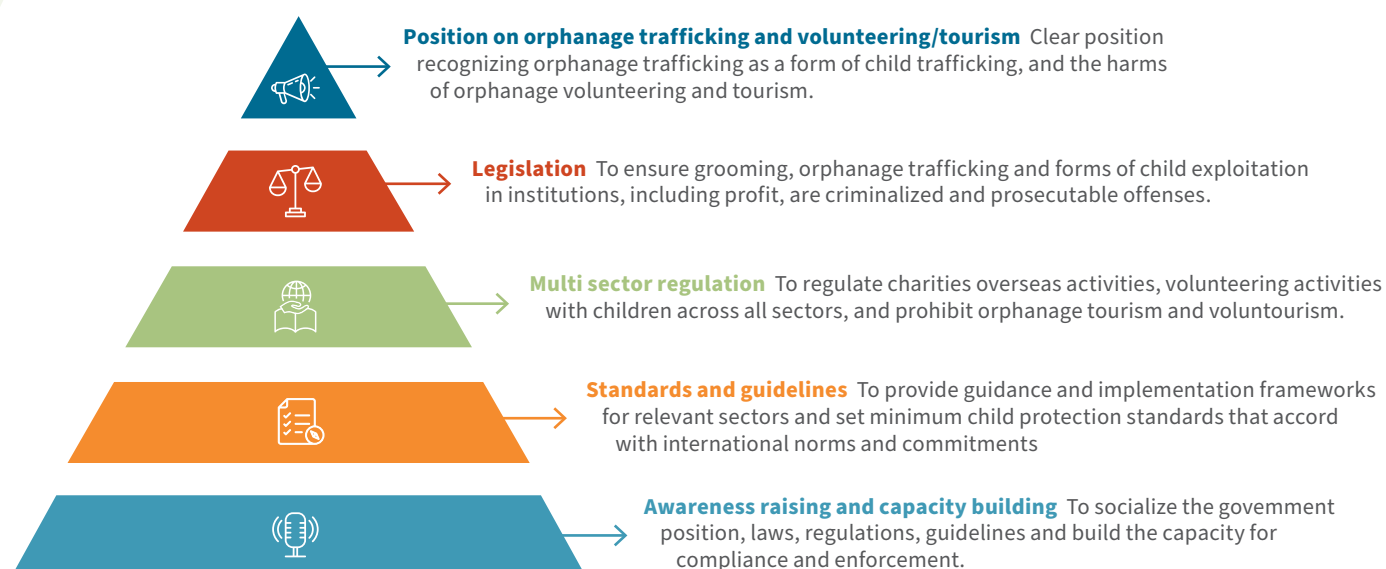
## 1. Whole of government approach

### POLICY STATEMENTS

Governments should employ a whole-of-government approach to eliminating orphanage tourism and voluntourism and to combating orphanage trafficking. Per Art. 35(t) of the 2019 UNGA Resolution on the Rights of the Child, whole-of-government approaches should be based on a clearly articulated position recognizing orphanage volunteering/voluntourism as a risk to children, a potential driver of orphanage trafficking, and orphanage trafficking as a form of child trafficking. The strategy should incorporate a data and evidence agenda to develop a baseline understanding of the issue and involvement of various sectors. It should include appropriate legislative and regulatory measures aimed at curtailing orphanage volunteering practices, and work with volunteer-involving organizations and tourism operators to ensure that guidance is disseminated and supported by sector-based engagement and awareness-raising initiatives.

### Whole of Government Approach

Implementing international commitments, obligations and recommendations on combatting orphanage volunteering, orphanage tourism and orphanage trafficking



- Governments should have an explicitly stated position on orphanage volunteering and other forms of unskilled and unregulated voluntourism that recognizes the harm to children and potential links to orphanage trafficking,
- Governments should issue travel advisories to warn citizens and residents of the potential harms of involvement in orphanage volunteering and other forms of unskilled and unregulated voluntourism with or for children in the context of overseas travel,
- Governments should prohibit orphanage tourism and volunteering within the context of all state-sanctioned or funded volunteering programs, or in the context of government agency-led or facilitated community engagement initiatives, whether domestic or overseas,
- Governments should ensure harmonization across government agencies concerning the official position on orphanage volunteering and other forms of unskilled and unregulated voluntourism with or for children to ensure alignment across agency-level policy and practice frameworks,
- Governments should prohibit the allocation of government funding, including Official Development Assistance (ODA)<sup>11</sup>, to programmes, initiatives or organizations involved with orphanage volunteering or voluntourism,
- Data should be used to inform whole-of-government approaches and to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of strategies.

## CONCRETE STEPS:

- **Data:** Governments should develop a baseline understanding of the scope and scale of involvement in orphanage volunteering and tourism, including through:
  - Identifying all sectors and government agencies involved in orphanage volunteering and orphanage tourism specifically, and volunteering initiatives broadly,
  - Determining the scale of involvement across sectors through data collection and data mining.
  - Sharing data as a means of facilitating international cooperation and noting the transnational nature of orphanage volunteering and tourism.

Governments should ensure data collection mechanisms are in place to regularly gather monitoring data and evaluate the effectiveness of measures including compliance with regulations.

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<sup>11</sup> Official Development Assistance (ODA) refers to official government aid to promote economic development and welfare in developing countries.

- **Awareness-raising:** Governments should take the lead with sector-based engagement and develop communication strategies that include:
  - National campaigns to improve awareness of the harms of orphanage volunteering and orphanage tourism, including via mass media, to inform and warn citizens of orphanage volunteering in both sending and receiving countries, including in countries of particular concern,
  - Providing information to the public in the context of campaigns or awareness-raising materials on how to report concerns of abuse or exploitation in orphanages,
  - Interministerial/ interdepartmental communications to ensure all government agencies are informed of, and can integrate, the government position on orphanage volunteering and orphanage tourism and to support the implementation of the prohibition on orphanage volunteering activities within state-sanctioned or funded programmes or initiatives,
  - Sector-based engagement to disseminate campaigns and to socialize travel advisories and any new legislation within involved sectors.
- **Child rights impact assessments:** Governments should introduce a requirement for child rights impact assessments to be conducted before the allocation of ODA grant funding. Impact assessments should consider positive and negative impacts on child rights, and the potential for initiatives to result in a conflict of rights or rights regressions.
- **Parliamentary inquiries:** Governments should consider holding parliamentary inquiries, looking into the issue of orphanage volunteering, unregulated voluntourism, orphanage tourism and orphanage trafficking in the scope of related child rights, alternative care or modern slavery inquiries, as a means of raising the profile of the issue, garnering broad political support for action and developing regulation appropriate to their context.

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE:

**United Kingdom** Hope and Homes for Children partnered with the Anti Modern Slavery Unit of Border Force UK and ABTA (Travel Association for Travel Agents and tour operators in the United Kingdom). This was done to use their unique access to airports and the travelling public to raise awareness of this issue amongst holidaymakers who may unwittingly contribute to child trafficking and slavery by visiting or donating to orphanages. The campaign highlighted the serious unintended consequences that orphanage tourism and volunteering can have for vulnerable children and communities.



It took place in the run-up to and during Anti-Slavery Week (17 – 24 October 2022) and included the distribution of material and displays at UK airports, participation in media events and encouraging holidaymakers to visit the #EndOrphanageTourism website.<sup>12</sup>

**The Netherlands** Ministry of Foreign Affairs commissioned an independent research company to investigate the extent of volunteer travel from the Netherlands to residential childcare facilities in other countries and to define roles, responsibilities and scope for government action. The investigation report was published in January 2021.<sup>13</sup> The largest group of organizations that provide volunteer work in residential facilities for children are private initiatives, which are subject to the least scrutiny. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has appointed a project leader to map out and review the proposed governmental actions together with other relevant ministries. This resulted in a proposal to have a mandatory criminal background check for all volunteers travelling abroad to work with children. On the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government strongly discourages volunteer work in orphanages in the travel advice for 21 countries and general advice not to volunteer in orphanages.<sup>14</sup>

**In the Philippines** in 2014, The Department of Tourism (DoT) recognized that serious child protection risks existed in relation to the travel and tourism industry. In collaboration with ChildSafe and Bahay Tuluyan, DoT launched a wide-reaching child protection training and advocacy campaign targeting tourism operators and subsequently committed to introducing a system for recognizing child-safe establishments in the Philippines. The training and advocacy campaign included raising awareness of the dangers of orphanage tourism and orphanage volunteering. Since 2021 DoT has taken a leading role in training accredited tourism providers and distributing the Childsafe Traveler's campaign.<sup>15</sup>

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12 [#EndOrphanageTourism – campaign against child trafficking and slavery in orphanages - Hope and Homes](#)

13 [www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/07/15/investigation-of-the-extent-of-volunteer-travel-from-the-netherlands-to-residential-care-facilities-for-children-in-low-and-middle-income-countries-roles-responsibilities-and-scope-for-government-action](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/07/15/investigation-of-the-extent-of-volunteer-travel-from-the-netherlands-to-residential-care-facilities-for-children-in-low-and-middle-income-countries-roles-responsibilities-and-scope-for-government-action)

14 [www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl/reisadvies/nepal](http://www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl/reisadvies/nepal) [www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vrijwilligerswerk/vraag-en-antwoord/checklist-vrijwilligerswerk-in-het-buitenland](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vrijwilligerswerk/vraag-en-antwoord/checklist-vrijwilligerswerk-in-het-buitenland)

15 <https://thinkchildsafe.org/travelers/>

## 2. Legislation and Regulation

### POLICY STATEMENTS

Governments should take appropriate legislative and policy measures to:

- Ensure criminal laws enable the prosecution of orphanage trafficking and exploitation offenses, including the unlawful removal of a child from parents or guardians and placement in a care facility for the purpose of exploitation or profit,
- Criminalize the grooming<sup>16</sup> of children under the age of 18 and trusted persons (parents, guardians, caregivers) for child sexual exploitation purposes to facilitate both online and offline sexual exploitation by persons in positions of power, authority, or trust,
- Establish by law extraterritorial jurisdiction for all offenses of child trafficking, exploitation and grooming,
- Establish enforceable child protection regulation for the travel, volunteering and tourism industry that includes a prohibition on orphanage volunteering and visits to orphanages, and regulation of other forms of voluntourism activities with or for children. Regulations should apply to all tourism and volunteering activities carried out within the country's territory, as well as to the activities conducted by domestically registered entities, including those implemented by third parties through supply chains. Penalties should be prescribed for infringements and focus on penalizing legal persons who facilitate and/or profit from orphanage tourism/voluntourism
- Incorporate regulation on the use of volunteers and visitors in existing child protection, child welfare and alternative care regulations, and specifically prohibit visits to and volunteering within residential childcare facilities,
- Ensure there is a child and youth-friendly reporting mechanism accessible to children in residential care and children and young people who have transitioned or aged out of care,
- Establish sufficient not-for-profit (NFP) sector regulation and ensure charitable activities comply with international child rights norms, safeguard children's best interests, and protect children from harm, abuse, rights violations and regressions.

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<sup>16</sup> Grooming refers to the process of establishing/building a relationship with a child either in person or through the use of the Internet or other digital technologies to facilitate either online or offline sexual contact with that person. <https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Terminology-guidelines-396922-EN-1.pdf>

## CONCRETE STEPS:

- **Legislative and regulatory reviews<sup>17</sup>:** Governments should conduct a review of:
  - Existing child trafficking, exploitation, grooming and child protection legislation to identify gaps, areas of inconsistency with international commitments and develop plans to propose and pursue amendments,
  - Regulation governing child protection, alternative care, travel/tourism, and voluntourism. This is to identify opportunities to strengthen and amend regulations and include prohibitions on orphanage volunteering and tourism in relevant regulations. It should include in the context of national minimum standards for residential childcare or alternative care policy,
  - Implementation of laws and regulations and identifying gaps in implementation or effectiveness.
- **Legislative and regulatory reforms:** Governments should pursue legislative and regulatory reforms:
  - To address gaps and recommendations identified throughout the review process, taking into account the legislative and policy measures outlined above,
  - To develop mechanisms to ensure child safeguarding standards are implemented as part of the regulatory frameworks that govern the tourism industry.
- **Governments should ensure there are effective implementation mechanisms** for all relevant laws and regulations, including the identification and appointment of mandated authorities for implementation, monitoring, remedial action and sufficient resourcing and support for law enforcement, including training,
- **Not-for-profit sector regulation:** Governments should conduct a review of existing not-for-profit sector registration, regulation and reporting mechanisms and institute necessary reforms to ensure that NFP regulation includes at a minimum:
  - Mandatory registration for all types of not-for-profit organizations, including religious groups,
  - A requirement for charities to identify their charitable purpose and core activities, including whether they engage with vulnerable children and children outside of parental care (necessary for data collection, monitoring and compliance purposes),

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<sup>17</sup> For reference, consult the Legal Checklist: Key Legal Interventions to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism [www.ecpat.org/resource/legal-checklist-key-legal-interventions-to-protect-children-from-sexual-exploitation-in-travel-and-tourism](http://www.ecpat.org/resource/legal-checklist-key-legal-interventions-to-protect-children-from-sexual-exploitation-in-travel-and-tourism) composed for governments with suggestions for interventions to adopt and enforce – if they have not done so already – to improve their national legal and policy frameworks to address the sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism, along with its online elements more effectively.

- A NFP sector responsibility to respect human rights and protect vulnerable persons from harm, abuse and exploitation. This should include a requirement for NFPs to conduct child rights impact assessments for any activities engaging with children,
- A requirement for NFPs' domestic activities involving children to be appropriately licensed or registered with the relevant government department/agency, and comply with relevant sector-based laws, policies, minimum standards and regulations,
- Obligatory overseas conduct standards that regulate NFPs' overseas activities. Such regulation should preclude NFPs from operating or supporting residential childcare facilities that are unlawfully operating or non-compliant with relevant laws, policies and national standards pertaining to alternative care and child safeguarding. It should prohibit NFP involvement in orphanage volunteering and tourism, and child sponsorship fundraising models for children in residential care,
- An enforceable obligation to report regularly on the use of funds, activities and compliance with minimum standards,
- A complaints and redress mechanism.

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

**Colombia** has a set of policies that seek to protect children from negative impacts related to travel and tourism development. The 2009 Law 1336 requires all travel and tourism companies to adopt codes of conduct<sup>18</sup> for the protection of children from sexual exploitation. Additionally, the national policy establishes concrete requirements for the prevention and eradication of sexual exploitation of children (2018-2028). This includes minimum standards for child protection, including the requirement of providing criminal background checks. Decree No. 753 (2019), which implements Law No. 1918 of 2018, relates to the positions or professions that involve direct contact with children. These include the following environments: educational, recreational settings, child protection, assistance, health, well-being, cultural and religious, which may involve direct and habitual contact with children. This also includes the staff in contact with clients in hotel and tourism services. Article 1 specifies that these are relevant both within a paid relationship and as part of volunteering; that is, unpaid participation in a cause or activity developed by a public or private entity.

**Peru** prevents people from volunteering if they have a criminal, police or judicial record for crimes committed against sexual freedom. This is specified

<sup>18</sup> For more information about national codes of conduct for child protection in travel and tourism consult The Americas – Overview of Child Protection Standards for Travel and Tourism <https://ecpat.org/resource/the-americas-first-overview-on-child-protection-standards-to-make-travel-and-tourism-free-from-sexual-exploitation/>

in Article 11 of the General Law of Volunteering, modified by the Supreme Decree that approves the Regulation of Law No. 28238. The Law applies both to Peruvians and foreigners.<sup>19</sup>

**Australia** has taken several steps to regulate charities' engagement with orphanage tourism and volunteering, including restricting access to government funding and introducing regulatory measures for charities with overseas activities. Residential care for children, overseas volunteering and child sponsorship are recognized as high-risk activities under the regulation and charities are required to meet minimum safeguarding requirements and relevant minimum standards, as set out in Australian law and the laws of the host country. Effectively this makes support for unregistered overseas institutions an ineligible activity for Australian charities, including churches. Australia acknowledges orphanage trafficking as a reportable type of modern slavery under the Modern Slavery Act 2018. Engagement with children through orphanage tourism and other forms of voluntourism is recognized as a sector or industry risk indicator for modern slavery in the Act's guidance material for reporting entities.

**France** incorporated two new articles into the Programming Law on Solidarity Development and the Fight Against Global Inequalities, which came into effect in August 2021. Article 9 requires background checks for all volunteers and trainees intending to work with minors overseas. It also mandates domestic prohibitions on contact with minors for persons convicted of certain offenses, as prescribed in Article 777 of the Criminal Code, to be applied to overseas volunteers. Article 8 classifies the categorizing of paid-for and for-profit voluntourism activities as 'voluntary work' or 'volunteer', to evade rules imposed on tourism companies, as an act of fraud that falls within the meaning of Article 1137 of the Civil Code. This opens an avenue for victims to seek compensation and damages for fraudulent practices implemented. This article will affect and potentially curtail the practices of voluntourism companies who falsely advertise for-profit orphanage tourism products as volunteer work for the benefit of children.<sup>20</sup>

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19 Perú – Lista de verificación legal: intervenciones jurídicas claves en la protección de niños, niñas y adolescentes contra la explotación sexual en el contexto de viajes y turismo [www.ecpat.org/country/peru](http://www.ecpat.org/country/peru)

20 LOP-DSLIM <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000043898536>

## 3. Standards and Guidelines

### POLICY STATEMENTS

Standards and guidelines are important elements of the implementation framework for the legislation and regulations set out above. They should be designed in accordance with established legislation and regulation and as a means of implementing, rather than as an alternative to, this legislation and regulation. Where legislation does not yet exist or is being created or reformed, this should be done in line with the guidance set out under 'Legislation and Regulation' above. Standards and guidelines should be developed to support its implementation.

Governments should work with entities that mobilize or support volunteers, voluntourists and tourists (including those types of organizations set out in the definitions of orphanage volunteering, orphanage tourism and voluntourism above) to ensure that they adhere to relevant industry or sector standards and guidelines in their jurisdictions by:

- Ensuring that national-level policies and laws align with internationally agreed standards,
- Publicly endorsing, promoting and enforcing standards,
- Making adherence and compliance a condition for receiving government funding or contracts,
- Providing information and guidance to businesses in the travel, volunteering and tourism industry and other entities, on the dangers of orphanage visits, and other unregulated forms of voluntourism with or for children,<sup>21</sup> the risk they take on in offering them, as well as the negative impacts on children.
- Promoting information to tourists on expected child-safe tourism and volunteering sector standards, and guidance for tourists on making ethical choices.

#### **Child Welfare and the Travel Industry: Global Good Practice Guidelines**<sup>22</sup>

are a practical working tool for businesses in the tourism sector 'to better understand the main risks they may face by not upholding child welfare practices and the subsequent impacts on children and communities.' They call on businesses to avoid orphanages and other centres that host children and state that travel companies 'should never place volunteers or travelers in positions where they are responsible for caring for or teaching children.'

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21 ECPAT International (2022). *How voluntourism may facilitate the sexual exploitation of children. What can be done to protect children?* <https://ecpat.org/resource/issues-paper-how-voluntourism-may-facilitate-the-sexual-exploitation-of-children>

22 [https://thinkchildsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GlobalGuidelines\\_ChildWelfareAndTheTravelIndustry\\_2018\\_book.pdf](https://thinkchildsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GlobalGuidelines_ChildWelfareAndTheTravelIndustry_2018_book.pdf)

The **Global Volunteering Standard**<sup>23</sup> is a good practice standard for organizations that work with volunteers. It includes prohibitions on organizations:

- Allowing volunteers to work with or within orphanages or other residential childcare facilities for children,
- Working with companies that have orphanages and other residential childcare centres incorporated (or with the possibility to incorporate) in tourism programmes or packages, or
- Allowing or facilitating one-off and short-term visits to orphanages or residential childcare facilities for children.

**The Code Voluntourism Policy**<sup>24</sup> provides practical guidance for entities to ensure that only responsible and safe forms of voluntourism are undertaken with or for children. This policy outlines the risks of various forms of voluntourism and states the criteria by which organizations (private commercial companies, social enterprises and charities) may apply to join The Code. The risks outlined include the critical risks noted in orphanage-related activities in relation to child protection. The policy can also be used by other entities to protect children. Additionally, the Issues Paper: How Voluntourism May Facilitate the Sexual Exploitation of Children provides clear recommendations for governments and businesses on how to regulate certain forms of voluntourism to keep children safe<sup>25</sup>.

## CONCRETE STEPS:

Governments should:

- Endorse and/or make public statements in support of child safe and ethical standards and guidelines in volunteering and tourism,
- Develop or adapt national-level standards, guidelines and monitoring systems, based on legislation and regulations and align with international good practice standards,
- Contact the organizations responsible for the standards and guidelines set out above, to explore how they can be implemented in the national context<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> [standard.forum-ids.org](http://standard.forum-ids.org)

<sup>24</sup> <https://thecode.org/voluntourism>

<sup>25</sup> Issues Paper: How Voluntourism May Facilitate the Sexual Exploitation of Children <https://ecpat.org/resource/issues-paper-how-voluntourism-may-facilitate-the-sexual-exploitation-of-children>

<sup>26</sup> [info@thinkchildsafe.org](mailto:info@thinkchildsafe.org), [globalvolunteeringstandard@forum-ids.org](mailto:globalvolunteeringstandard@forum-ids.org), [info@thecode.org](mailto:info@thecode.org)

- Engage and consult with entities (private operators, NFPs, community/faith-based, education) in-country to encourage their leadership and adherence to child-safe volunteering and tourism as a sustainable and ethical industry practice,
- Review relevant accreditation/funding/contracting policies to make them conditional on adherence to these standards and guidelines,
- Promote child-safe volunteering and tourism information and resources/videos on government websites, including due diligence checklists for prospective tourists and volunteers.

## EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

**Fiji** The Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport (MCTTT) has recently established a Fijian Code of Conduct for Tourism Service Providers (Code). To provide minimum standards in terms of behaviour and conduct that will guide tourism service providers. The Code has undergone several review processes including with the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) in accordance with the principles of the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism and the UNWTO International Code for the Protection of Tourists.

**Australian Volunteers International** (AVI) in collaboration with MCTTT have also developed a Community-based Child Safe Tourism Toolkit to strengthen child safety measures within tourism activities. The Ministry has been advocating and promoting the Toolkit at grassroots communities. The Code contains a section Conduct with the Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Groups, which includes child-safe tourism standards. The Code is not legally binding but will guide tourism service providers to maintain the standard of services in their day-to-day operations. The MCTTT has also established a Child Safe Tourism site on the Ministry's website<sup>27</sup>

**Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation:** Destination country governments are progressively recognizing orphanages as venues for the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism (SECTT). In the Asia Pacific region, the APEC Tourism Working Group released Voluntourism Best Practices in the Asia Pacific Region in 2018.<sup>28</sup> These best practice standards explicitly discourage orphanage voluntourism in member economies' tourism sectors.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mcttt.gov.fj/division/tourism/child-safe-tourism/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.apec.org/publications/2018/05/final-report--voluntourism-best-practices-in-the-apec-region>



**Outlook Expeditions:** This is a UK-based leadership development company, providing overseas expeditions for schools and youth groups to over 30 destinations worldwide. Outlook Expeditions has partnered with the ChildSafe Movement<sup>29</sup> to integrate seven ChildSafe standards (contained in the Child Welfare-Global Good Practice Guidelines) throughout their policies, operations and value chain. Through the training and with support from ChildSafe, Outlook Expeditions conducted a review of the products and experiences being offered and drew a firm line to remove orphanage visits and volunteering in children's centres from its itineraries. In addition, by embracing the message that 'children are not tourist attractions', it removed further activities for its students, such as 'teaching' in schools and pre-organized interactions with children overseas. Outlook Expeditions is committed to championing ChildSafe and to continue taking a leading role in the travel and tourism industry to protect and support children.

## Additional Resources

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To explore the issue of orphanage tourism, voluntourism and orphanage trafficking further or to access additional resources to support the implementation of the measures described, please visit the following sites:

- ↖ [The Better Care Network](#)
- ↖ [ReThink Orphanages](#)
- ↖ [ECPAT International and The Code](#)
- ↖ [Child Safe Movement](#)
- ↖ [Global Volunteering Standards](#)

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<sup>29</sup> The ChildSafe Movement is powered by Friends-international. ChildSafe is a global initiative that empowers key stakeholders to protect children and youth from all forms of abuse. Since 2005, ChildSafe has partnered with companies in the Travel and Tourism industry to support and empower them to play a crucial role in protecting children as clients and in destinations

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This thematic brief is part of a series of briefs being developed under the Global Policy and Advocacy Working Group (GPAWG) of the **Transforming Children's Care Collaborative** to be part of a global toolkit to support policy and decision makers at national, regional, and international levels to actively implement global commitments relevant to children's rights and care.

Each thematic brief is developed by a Task Force led by members of the Collaborative through an inclusive process which includes the contributions of actors who have relevant experience and expertise to share, including from different regions and contexts, and from groups and communities who are particularly concerned or affected.

The briefs aim to articulate a set of practical measures that should be taken across different areas of care reform in order to achieve system change. They are framed by international standards and principles but seek to go beyond those to articulate what needs to be done to implement them, based on evidence and practice learning about implementation in a range of contexts and regions. Each brief includes country case examples illustrating efforts to implement these measures and lessons learnt from those.

Once finalized the thematic briefs are approved by the GPAWG before being published as a joint document of the Collaborative. Aspects of children's care and implementation that are cross-cutting between different thematic briefs will be highlighted within each brief with links to other relevant briefs.

The thematic briefs should be seen as part of an evolving Toolkit that helps clarify and guide implementation and advocacy. They will be updated and refined in light of evidence and evolving standards and practice, and new context specific examples will be added. **If you have learning or examples to add to these briefs or would like to actively contribute to their development, we encourage you to reach out to the co-convenors of the Global Policy and Advocacy Working Group at: [contact@transformcare4children.org](mailto:contact@transformcare4children.org)**

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