

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) — Travel and Tourism Sectors

The tourism and travel industries have taken the lead in CSR initiatives targeted towards eliminating the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). Members of these industries were present at the three world congresses against CSEC. These took place in Stockholm (1996), Yokohama (2001), and Rio de Janeiro (2008).

Child sex tourism is the commercial sexual exploitation of children by people who travel from one location to another and engage in sexual acts with minors. Often, they travel from a richer country to one that is less developed.

Travel, Tourism and the Fight against CSEC

A wide variety of businesses are involved in the travel and tourism industries. Staff members who can help prevent CSEC include hotel staff, taxi drivers, tour operators, airline staff, and restaurant and bar staff. Studies show that 1 in 16 worldwide workers are employed in feeding, lodging, entertaining, or transporting guests.

However, the travel and tourism sectors face some difficulties in leveraging this large staff base in the fight against CSEC. This is because many staff are temporary, transient or have low skills and only minimal abilities to converse in the language of their employers. This can result in low job satisfaction, frustration with management, high turnover, and instability. Consequently, training staff is difficult and it can be hard to build staff support for CSR initiatives.

International CSR Industry-Wide Initiatives

The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has support from 154 countries and 300 affiliate members in the public and private sector. It promotes responsible, sustainable and accessible tourism. The UNWTO looks at tourism as a driver for economic growth, inclusive development, and environmental sustainability and aims to advance knowledge and tourism policies worldwide. In 1999, it put forth a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism.

Additionally, the Universal Federation of Travel Agents Association has developed a Child and Travel Agents Charter, which has been adopted by 100 countries. Further, the International Federation of Tour Operators adopted a Code of Operation against the Sexual Exploitation of Children. Similarly to other CSR codes of conduct these charters are a positive step but their effectiveness is limited because they remain voluntary. Implementing such codes is difficult because they are often self-serving without strict monitoring mechanisms.

Action by Canadian Companies

The use of targeted in-flight videos by airlines such as Lufthansa and Air France is a positive example of a CSR initiative against Child Sexual Tourism. These videos warn passengers that they could be prosecuted at home for committing sex crimes abroad. Air Canada recently followed this lead and launched its own video. These proactive measures can alert travelers to report incidents of child exploitation abroad.

Transat is a prominent example of a company that highlights CSR and sustainable tourism. The international tour operator specializing in holiday travel highlights a number of CSR issues including raising awareness of social issues amongst its personnel and encouraging its tourism service providers to adopt sustainable practices. Transat has signed a memorandum of understanding with Beyond Borders ECPAT Canada to work to eliminate CSEC. In 2010, Beyond Borders ECPAT Canada provided training on CSEC to Transat managers and destination representatives. Transat has since established a team of managers who serve as in-house trainers.

WestJet has also signed a memorandum of understanding with Beyond Borders ECPAT Canada to partner in the fight against CSEC. WestJet helps to increase awareness of CSEC through its social media outlets, its in-flight magazine (Up!), and westjet.com.

The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism (The Code)

The Code is one of the strongest initiatives adopted by the tourism sector as a CSR response. It aims to prevent sexual exploitation of children at tourism destinations. The Code was initiated in 1998 by ECPAT Sweden in cooperation with Scandinavian tour operators and the World Tourism Organization (WTO). As of 2011, the Code had 1030 industry members and local affiliates in 42 countries, including hotels, tour operators, travel agencies, tourism associations, and tourism unions.

The Code was launched in North America, in April 2004 by ECPAT USA, UNICEF and the WTO. The Code encourages companies to commit to:

1. Establish an ethical corporate policy against sexual exploitation of children.
2. Educate and train personnel in the country of origin and travel destinations.
3. Introduce a clause in contracts with suppliers that repudiates the sexual exploitation of children.
4. Develop information and awareness raising materials.
5. Provide information to local "key persons" at the destinations.
6. Report annually on the implementation of these criteria.

An information and training kit to implement the Code is available. For more information see www.thecode.org.

Unfortunately, Canadian companies are not sufficiently engaged in the prevention and fight against Child Sex Tourism. Only the Association of Canadian Travel Agencies and Incurion Voyages have signed *The Code*, compared to 89 companies / organizations in Brazil and 81 in Japan.

CSR and Transport Companies

The work of transportation companies and the tourism sector is often closely linked. Consequently, the role of the transportation sector is increasingly being recognized as linked to CSEC and in need of CSR initiatives. Taxi companies in particular play a key role in sometimes serving as intermediaries and communicating to child sex tourists where children can be found. Further, bus and railway terminals often serve as key locations for finding young children.

Sources

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