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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Protecting the Future: Improving the Response to Child Sex Offending in Southeast Asia

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Telephone: +6622882100

Fax: +6622812129

Email: fo.thailand@unodc.org

Website: www.unodc.org

This report is part of ongoing research undertaken by UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific to inform the development and management of its programme of assistance. The aim is to identify needs and offer long term strategic solutions to support the region in areas related to UNODC mandates including: controlling the demand and supply for illicit drugs and precursors; criminal justice; preventing crime and terrorism; and related security sector issues.

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The report has been drafted to strengthen the evidence base on child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism to better understand the nature, pattern and prevalence of the phenomenon. It will be used as a basis to inform stakeholders of the need to continue providing support to Member States in the Southeast Asia region and to strengthen collaboration with donors, government counterparts and organisations with a longstanding history of work in the protection of children.

A team comprised of UNODC staff, including Margaret Akullo, Snow White Smelser, Richard Priem, Akara Umapornsakula, the Regional Representative, Jeremy Douglas, and an expert adviser were involved in the development of this report.

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Foreword

This report outlines patterns in child sexual exploitation in Southeast Asia and explores factors that inhibit prevention and effective responses to combat the crime. It is one of a series considering acute and far-reaching challenges that face governments and communities in Southeast Asia, developed by UNODC as part of the analytical process informing our Regional Programme.

Threats and opportunities in Southeast Asia are changing rapidly, and UNODC must remain at the front line of international action to provide effective responses. In recent decades, Southeast Asia can count many successes in combating sex crimes against children, but a rapidly changing world has created new threats and new opportunities for action to protect those affected by this crime. As 25 years have passed since the development of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, there is a need to more proactively address the sexual exploitation of children in Southeast Asia. Child sex offenders are taking advantage of the increased mobility associated with regional integration, as well as gaps in international and domestic capacities. The purpose of this report is to help the region and international community respond to these challenges, and disrupt the environment that makes these crimes possible.

Encouragingly, civil society organisations are increasingly dedicated to this issue and are amassing indispensable experience that can boost government and inter-governmental efforts. Social norms, both among local communities and foreigners, are also shifting towards more proactive opposition to child sexual exploitation, and the United Nations will continue to assist governments and partners in the region to address this crime.



Jeremy Douglas
UNODC Regional Representative
Southeast Asia and the Pacific

Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| APLE | <i>Action pour les Enfants</i> |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| CCPCR | Cambodian Center for the Protection of Children’s Right |
| CSEC | Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children |
| ECPAT | End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes |
| EU | European Union |
| FACE | Fight Against Child Exploitation |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GMS | Greater Mekong Sub-region |
| ICMEC | International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| KAP | Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices |
| Lao PDR | Lao People’s Democratic Republic |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| U.K. | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNIAP | United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking |
| UN-ACT | United Nations Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children Fund |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| U.S. | United States of America |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

Glossary

Child Pornography – see Child Sexual Abuse Material.

Child Sexual Abuse – the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.

Child Sexual Abuse Material – any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes. This term is increasingly replacing ‘Child Pornography’ as it highlights the abusive nature of the crime.

Child Sexual Exploitation – any actual or attempted abuse of a child via a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

Child Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism – the sexual abuse and exploitation of children by those who do not normally live in the location where the abuse takes place. It includes children that are abused and exploited through (a) prostitution, (b) paedophilia-related child abuse, and (c) pornography. This term has largely replaced “child sex tourism” as it highlights the abusive element of the crime and better incorporates business travellers and expatriates.

Child Sex Offender – an individual who engages in the sexual exploitation of a child or children. Child sex offenders are usually categorised as either situational or preferential offenders.

Child Sex Tourism – See Child Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.

Child Sex Tourist – see Travelling Child Sex Offender.

Foreign – for the purposes of this report, foreign refers to a person in a country who is not a citizen of that country.

Grooming - refers to actions deliberately undertaken with the aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, in order to lower the child's inhibitions in preparation for sexual activity with the child, or exploitation. Grooming usually commences with activities that are legal in order to gain the child's trust and then progresses to situations of abuse.

Online Grooming – refers to actions undertaken over the internet with the explicit aim of befriending and establishing an emotional connection with a child, in order to lower the child's inhibitions in preparation for sexual activity with the child, or exploitation.

Paedophilia – a recurrent sexual interest in pre-pubescent children, reflected in persistent thoughts, fantasies, urges, sexual arousal, and behaviour. Not all child sex offenders are paedophiles and not all paedophiles commit child sexual exploitation offences.

Prostitution of a child – the use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration, whether it is paid to the child or a third party.

Sexual Exploitation through live streaming – describes the act of child abuse committed on video and simultaneously broadcast, publicly or privately, over the internet.

Travelling Child Sex Offender – domestic and international tourists, business travellers, and expatriates who engage in sexual abuse and/or exploitation of children in a location in which they do not usually live. This term has largely replaced 'Child Sex Tourist' so as to better encompass expatriate offenders.

Western – for the purposes of this report, Western refers to individuals of Caucasian appearance.

1. Introduction

This report is one of a series considering acute and far-reaching challenges faced by governments and communities in Southeast Asia. The region's rapid development and commitment to further integration is placing increased demands on social and state capacities. UNODC's experience in analysing and responding to regional threats suggests a need to prepare for a new era of safeguarding human security, migration and trade—in this case the safety and wellbeing of children. New forms of commitment are required to secure the basic rights and freedoms that all people should enjoy, especially children. In the pages that follow, this report examines the threat posed by offenders engaging in the sexual exploitation of children and avenues for improving responses.

The International Labour Organisation estimates that there are approximately 4.5 million victims of sexual exploitation around the world, of which around 20 percent are children.¹ These child victims exist in every country in the region and are caught in a range of different circumstances that make them vulnerable to exploitation. To be clear, sexual exploitation refers to

any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.²

The sexual exploitation of children thus encompasses the overlapping issues of the prostitution of children, the depiction of children in sexual abuse material (commonly referred to as child pornography), trafficking of children for sexual purposes, and the sexual abuse of children (including but not limited to child sex tourism). Child sexual abuse, which is at the core of sexual exploitation of children, is defined as:

the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.³

This report provides an overview of child sexual exploitation in Southeast Asia, looking particularly at the threat posed by people who travel for this purpose in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). The report presents high-level factors that hinder an effective response to this critical situation and concludes with overarching recommendations for urgent efforts to address the threat of sexual exploitation faced by children in Southeast Asia.

¹ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Global estimate of forced labour: Executive Summary*, 2012, p.1.

² UN Secretary-General's *Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) (ST/SGB/2003/13)*

³ World Health Organization (WHO), *Report of the consultation on child abuse prevention*, 1999. (WHO/HSC/PVI/99.1).

2. Challenges in protecting children from sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation of children involves the often overlapping areas of the prostitution of children, the preparation and consumption of child sexual abuse material, child trafficking for sexual purposes, child sex tourism and child marriage, usually for commercial gain.⁴ Child sexual exploitation is not a new phenomenon in Southeast Asia, but the social and economic factors rendering children vulnerable are evolving.⁵ The sections that follow will examine challenges in protecting children from all forms of child sexual exploitation, but with a particular focus on travelling sex offenders and their offences.

A Typology of Child Sexual Exploitation

Child Sex Offences

Child sex offenders comprise a broad category of criminals who commit sexual offences against children either by participating in, organising, or facilitating child sexual abuse. The category of child sex offender includes diverse types of offenders with diverse motivations and methods. To develop strategies to combat child sexual exploitation, a clear understanding of the different types of offenders is required and strategies tailored to each type of offender is critical.

Before examining the salient types of child sex offenders, it is worth recapping the primary types of offences. Not all offenders commit each offence – for example, there are likely to be different motives or practical actions distinguishing participants, organisers and facilitators of child sexual abuse. Furthermore, even among the group most commonly identified by the public as offenders (the participants), there are practical distinctions that require targeted responses – for example, addressing the problem of non-contact consumption of child sexual abuse material over the internet may be quite different from contact sexual abuse by a traveller. The most prominent type of crime against a child is sexual abuse. This can occur in the home, at institutions such as schools or youth centres, in commercial sex establishments or on the streets. Different profiles of offenders are more or less prominent in each of these locations.

Prostitution of children is a form of sexual abuse that can occur through dedicated arrangements with sex establishments or be organised by children and pimps on the street. Some offenders target children not yet involved in the industry and can be the cause of them being forced into prostitution, while other offenders, usually men, target younger prostitutes, sometimes with a preference for children and in some cases virgins.

A large number of the offenders who engage in child sexual abuse, both through prostitution networks or outside of them, are foreigners. These individuals who travel internationally to engage in child sexual abuse are generally classified differently to those individuals who offend within their own country. Foreign offenders may engage in any or all forms of child sexual exploitation, but the main aim of authorities to date has been to stop those who travel to a specific destination to engage in sexual abuse.

⁴ UNICEF, *Measuring and Monitoring Child Protection Systems: Proposed Core Indicators for the East Asia and Pacific Region*, Strengthening Child Protection Series No. 1, 2012, p.85.

⁵ UNICEF, *Child Trafficking in East and South-East Asia: Reversing the Trend*, August 2009, p.13.

The involvement of children in sexual abuse materials (child pornography) also constitutes a major child sexual exploitation offence. Offences in this field extend beyond the creation of such materials, but also include possession and distribution, both online and in physical formats. In terms of responses, it is important to recognise that through child sexual abuse materials, offenders can harm children without ever travelling to the child's country. This is linked to the more recent phenomenon of live online streaming of child sexual abuse, where sex offenders are using the increasing availability of the internet in developing countries to live-stream the abuse of children to paying customers across the world. Recent cases have identified offenders around the world⁶, and with increasing access to the internet in Southeast Asian countries more children will become vulnerable to what British authorities have named 'an emerging trend'.⁷

Child trafficking for sexual purposes is a distinct offence that can be linked to any or all of the above offences. Put simply, trafficking involves the confinement or transfer of someone through force, coercion or deception for the purposes of exploitation.⁸ Thus children may be trafficked into prostitution, to become child brides or to be exploited through the production of child sexual abuse materials. They may also be trafficked for forced labour and due to the clandestine nature of their work become vulnerable to sexual abuse at the hands of their employer or other workers.

Child Sex Offenders

Child sex offenders are often divided into two broad categories: situational and preferential. The situational child sex offender does not have a true sexual preference for children, but engages in sex with children because he/she is morally and or sexually indiscriminate or may wish to experiment with young sex partners. Such offenders may also exploit children because they have entered into situations in which a child is easily accessible to them and/or certain factors are present which allow them to delude themselves about the child's age or consent to the sexual activity. Sexual exploitation of children may be a once in a lifetime act while on a holiday, or it may develop into a long-term pattern of abuse.

Preferential child sex offenders actively seek children for sex, and can be divided into two broad groups – paedophiles and 'other preferential offenders'. Clinically, paedophilia is a psychiatric disorder in persons 16 years of age or older characterised by a primary or exclusive sexual interest in prepubescent children (generally age 13 years or younger, though onset of puberty varies). These preferential offenders usually display one of three major patterns of behaviour in accessing victims:

⁶Australian Federal Police, *Media Release: Live online child abuse – 29 International arrests made*, 16 January 2014, <http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2014/january/media-release-live-online-child-abuse-29-international-arrests-made.aspx>.

⁷ Travis, Alan, 2014, *Live online streaming of child sex abuse an emerging trend, crime agency warns*, The Guardian, 2 May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/may/01/live-online-streaming-child-sex-abuse-emerging-trend>.

⁸ The definition of trafficking in persons as per the United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons* is as follows: the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

- “Seducers” use affection, attention and/or gifts to lure children. They are willing to spend long periods grooming their victims in preparation for the abuse and use threats, blackmail and/or physical violence to discourage disclosure. However, the techniques employed vary in accordance with the child’s age, the situation of the child, the duration of the abuse and other factors.
- “Introverted” offenders have a preference for children but lack the seducer’s ability to interact with children. They engage in a minimum amount of verbal communication with victims and tend to abuse unknown or very young children, often using facilitators to arrange contact.
- Third are “sadistic” offenders who are the least common but most shocking. They have a sexual interest in children, but also derive sexual pleasure from inflicting pain on their victim. This type of offender is most likely to use force to gain access to the child and is more likely to abduct and even murder the victim.

In Southeast Asia, the behaviour of paedophiles is generally predictable: they either engage in long-term grooming of victims or focus on street-based exploitation where children are highly vulnerable and are directly accessible without having to negotiate unfamiliar networks. For western offenders, this includes a large percentage of men targeting boys.⁹ Organised networks of paedophiles also share information about victims among closed circles of offenders. Methods of approach are covered in more detail below, but vary according to the type of offender and the amount of time available to them.

Other preferential offenders (who are not paedophilic) include various groups, including men who seek sexual intercourse with virgins. This trend is more common among East Asian offenders and local men in many of the countries in Southeast Asia.¹⁰ These men and other non-paedophilic offenders often target older children, i.e. pubescent children generally between 14 and 18 years of age. Although, in many of these cases, offenders may not pay special attention to the age of the child, since the obsession is with virginity not age or development *per se*. Exploitation can occur through methods similar to those mentioned above for paedophiles but also commonly occurs through institutionalised arrangements such as brothels, karaoke (KTV) bars, massage parlours and other venues that offer sex to patrons. Some establishments even cater to specific nationalities of offenders providing victims based on offenders known preferences. In Thailand, however, there has reportedly been a shift from prostitution of children in brothels to organised street-based solicitation, which may be attributable to the Thai authorities devoting more energy to shutting down the organised crime groups involved in supporting child sex exploitation.¹¹

All types of preferential child sex offenders are generally repeat offenders. The number of victims can range from one to hundreds but various studies place the median much lower, somewhere between one and three.¹²

⁹ APLE, *Investigating Traveling Child Sex Offender*, February 2014.

¹⁰ Childwise, *Who are the sex tourists in Cambodia?* December 2006.

¹¹ ECPAT, *Alternative Report – Thailand*, July 2011, p.8.

¹² Richards, K, *Misperceptions about child sex offenders*, September 2011, Australian Institute of Criminology, accessed at: <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/tandi/421-440/tandi429.html>.

Travelling child sex offenders include both situational and preferential offenders. They pose a significant law enforcement challenge. As described above, they use multiple methods to access their victims and without any visible signs of intent to abuse children, they often go undetected by authorities. Many are able to exploit the most vulnerable children and either return to their home countries with impunity or, in the case of long term residents, remain hidden in the community. With thriving tourism in the Greater Mekong Sub-region and among certain ASEAN countries, Western men are perhaps the most visible sex tourists—however, more recent information indicates that local demand from Asian travellers represents the majority of travelling child sex offenders.^{13 14} For example, for over seven consecutive years, the US *Trafficking in Persons Report* suggested South Korean men are a significant source of demand for child sex tourism in Southeast Asia.

Although most attention in relation to child sex offending falls on men, the role of women in child sexual exploitation should not be discounted. Sex industries in the region predominantly serve local and foreign men, with women tending to engage in the industry as facilitators.¹⁵ For example, in Cambodia and Thailand, almost all *offenders* arrested for child sexual abuse in the past decade were male, yet a recent study of Cambodian child sexual exploitation cases over a 10 year period, by Action Pour Les Enfants (APLE), found 69% of accomplices were female.¹⁶ The role of women as facilitators is not novel, and relies on their ability to engender trust in their victims. In contrast to most male offenders, women are engaged for monetary gain not sexual gratification.

Some recent studies have looked more closely at the origins of offenders. However, given the different types of approaches favoured by different types of offenders, particular research methodologies can unintentionally bias results. The APLE study in Cambodia mentioned above, focused on street-based sexual abuse and found Westerners constituted 63.8% of offenders (134 individuals),¹⁷ Cambodians 31% (65 individuals) and the remaining 5.2% (11 individuals) were Asian nationals.¹⁸ Separate research, by Childwise and again in Cambodia, interviewed 119 current and former child prostitutes, which by necessity focused on child sexual abuse in sex establishments. For female respondents, it found that their first ‘clients’ were most commonly Khmer (50%, 49 individuals), followed by other Asian nationalities (32%, 31 individuals) and then Westerners (18%, 18 individuals).¹⁹

Figure 1 (next page), shows APLE’s findings and data from Fight against Child Exploitation (FACE) in Thailand, showing that in the period of 2003-13, U.K. nationals made up 30% of foreign offenders in Thailand, followed by the U.S. and Germany. It also suggests that in the Thai dataset, the only Asian

¹³ UNICEF East Asia and Pacific, *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children*, accessed at: http://www.unicef.org/eapro/activities_3757.html; Childwise, *Who are the sex tourists in Cambodia?* December 2006, p. 20.

¹⁴ While travelling child sex offenders are not always foreigners – child sex tourism also includes offenders who move within the borders of their own country – this paper will focus on foreign travelling child sex offenders.

¹⁵ However, social attitudes towards relationships between a woman and boy may result in even greater under-reporting or under-emphasis on such situations.

¹⁶ APLE, *Investigating Traveling Child Sex Offenders*, February 2014, p.9.

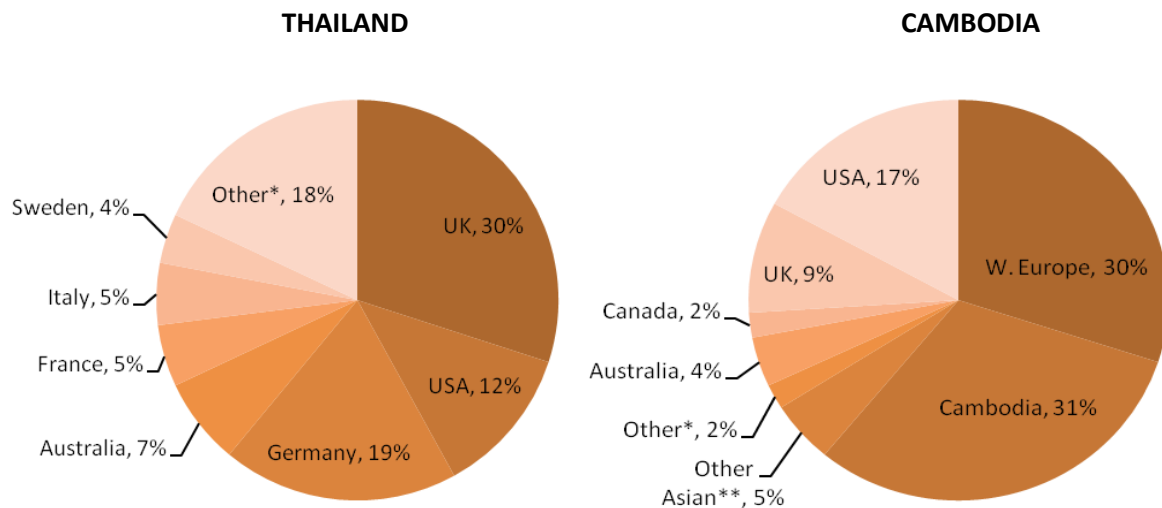
¹⁷ Comprising primarily of citizens of United States (U.S.) (17.1%), France (11.9%), United Kingdom (U.K.) (8.6%), Germany (5.2%), Dutch (3.8%) and Australian (3.8%).

¹⁸ Analysis of primary offenders only, excludes accomplices. In contrast, 100% of accomplices (78 individuals) were from Asia with 67.9% Cambodian and 32.1% other Asian nationals.

¹⁹ Childwise, *Who are the Child Sex Tourists in Cambodia?*, December 2006.

foreigner was from Japan. In Cambodia, there is a stronger representation of Western Europeans among foreign perpetrators (30% or 64 of 210 perpetrators), with proportionately fewer from the U.K. (note the APLE data includes Cambodians, whereas the FACE data does not include Thai). Nationalities from Asia other than Cambodians represented 5% (10 of 210 perpetrators).

Figure 1: Nationalities of foreign perpetrators in Thailand (left) and Cambodia (right), 2003-2013 (in %)



FACE Thailand: *Other nationalities are those with less than 3 cases each, including Belgium, Canada, Finland, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Spain and Switzerland (total 17 cases).

APLE Cambodia: * Other aggregates Russia, New Zealand and Israel. ** Other Asian nationals were from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

APLE and Childwise investigations suggest that while both Western and Asian offenders target girls, sexual abuse offences against boys are largely committed by Western men.²⁰ In Cambodia, the APLE study producing the data above examined 147 cases of child sex offences by foreigners, showing that their preferred victims were boys (57% of 147 offenders) rather than girls (42% of 147 offenders).²¹ An analysis over the same timeframe in Thailand showed a similar trend in foreigners clearly favouring boy victims—96 foreign child sex offenders victimised 136 children (70%/95 boys, 30%/41 girls).²² Against the trend, there are some high profile cases of Westerners sexually abusing girls, such as Paul Gadd (alias ‘Gary Glitter’), a British celebrity who was convicted of sexual abuse involving minors in Vietnam in 2006.²³

The inconsistent information about who the primary foreign offenders are may be caused by a number of factors. As mentioned above, research design often impacts which types of offenders are most likely to be counted in NGO or academic studies. In the public realm, it is likely that Western offenders create more controversy and are therefore more likely to be highlighted by local media

²⁰ APLE, *Investigating Traveling Child Sex Offenders*, February 2014, p.11; Childwise, *Who are the Child Sex Tourists in Cambodia?*, December 2006, p. 35.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Raw data on *Child victims testifying against foreign suspects*, from 2003 to 2013, provided to FACE by the Royal Thai Police.

²³ BBC News, *Glitter charged with obscene acts*, 6 January 2006, Accessed at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4586460.stm>.

and governments, with under-reporting of national and regional offenders who are less conspicuous and may not generate the same media attention. Government numbers of arrests are also likely to be skewed by law enforcement priorities and approaches—whether they focus on sex establishments or street based prostitution. Overall, the focus by international organisations, media outlets and national governments on Western offenders may result in neglect of a large caseload of national and regional offenders operating throughout the region. Improved data collection methods will be essential to accurately determine the burden of offenders by nationality and tailor responses accordingly.

Patterns of offending behaviour

Child sex offenders use various techniques to gain access to children and communities, create opportunities to be alone with the child in order to offend, and avoid detection by authorities and concerned community or family members. The different methods and approaches vary according to the type of offender, the amount of time they have available, and their cultural background. The focus here is again on travelling child sex offenders.

Available publications and reports, as well as independent assessment by law enforcement agencies, NGOs, regional and international organisations have identified typical *modus operandi* of travelling child sex offenders to exploit children. They generally fall into one of two distinct categories: those who approach children directly, such as street children or children in communities, and those who use networks or establishments to access children, such as brothels. Studies and reports have found that boy victims are more likely to be approached directly and girl victims are more likely to be approached via sex establishments. This is partially due to the social stigma associated with homosexuality in many Southeast Asian countries, and the longer history of female sex work in the region.

As enforcement and awareness campaigns have increased, child sex offenders have moved to more hidden operations. The shift in *modus operandi* has been towards delivering a child for sexual services directly to the customer as per a pre-arrangement and using an intermediary or broker to control the child. Brokers can be from different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, and often include those who have some contact with tourists such as taxi drivers, motorcycle taxi drivers, hotel staff, tour guides, or beach boys.²⁴ In some instances children act as agents themselves, directly approaching potential offenders on their own or other children's behalf. This is more common among male victims of child sexual abuse.²⁵

Some positive steps have been taken in the region with training and awareness programmes conducted with hotels and tour guides. The World Tourism Organization has partnered with NGOs such as ECPAT in supporting a *Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism* and developing the World Tourism Network on Child Protection. Despite this progress, there is an emergence of private accommodation websites providing accommodation that offers greater privacy for offenders and where the owner/operators may not be aware of the risks. This is creating new areas of vulnerability and risk of abuse for the child.

²⁴ Beach boys are the young boys who themselves approach tourists directly or through a pimp to provide sexual services. The activity of soliciting is conducted on the beach.

²⁵ Childwise, *Who are the Child Sex Tourists in Cambodia?*, December 2006.

Patterns in offender behaviour suggest that foreign offenders travel through a variety of means from short group tour visits, such as golf trips or sex tours arranged by non-licensed tour guides, to long-stay visits. Reports have also underlined that tour operators in other countries have sometimes made prostitution a central part of their promotions. Some local and foreign business practices also incorporate visits to sex establishments, particularly among East Asian nations, which can lead to child sexual exploitation.

Westerners who travel for sex are commonly believed to fit the profile of the dedicated paedophile that invests significant time and energy into coercing children into situations of sexual abuse. This, however, is only one form of child sexual abuse practised by Western men who travel. As discussed some offenders are situational, some pro-actively use sex establishments to abuse young girls, and others simply approach, or are approached by children on the streets.

Law enforcement agencies report that Western preferential child sex offenders are increasingly likely to be long-term residents living and working in the region, as opposed to short-term tourists. In an increasing number of cases, offenders are noted to be infiltrating more isolated communities, renting houses, employing local domestic staff and building the trust of local community members and vulnerable families and children. In a number of these cases, child sex offenders gain the consent of parents using deception and can be repeat offenders, who continue exploiting the same child on several visits after the grooming process was successful.²⁶ Authorities warn of the increasing number of child sex offenders assuming employment as teachers, tutors and other child-contact occupations with almost unrestricted access to children. The lack of screening and proper recruitment procedures for such staff perpetuates this situation.

Non-traditional forms of prostitution are also said to be on the rise, such as relationships between young girls with adult Western males who could be short-term tourists or residents. These associations could entail sexual interaction in exchange for shopping trips and travel paid by the tourist or resident, and can be easily facilitated by online dating websites or mobile applications. This type of relationship can persist undetected by authorities as the sexual interaction might not be viewed by the girls or their families as a form of sexual exploitation or prostitution.

With technological advances and the pervasiveness of the Internet, new methods adopted by those who solicit sex with children online are becoming increasingly prevalent. Offenders use computers to solicit children for sexual purposes by directly communicating with children or using websites that offer sexual services of children. Having made the initial contact, other illegal activities could involve travelling to the destination country to engage in sexual activity with children or purchase rights to view the sexual abuse of a child online. In this case, the offender pays a person in the destination country to sexually abuse a child and the paying offender watches the abuse in real-time via live streaming. Thus, children can be abused even though there is no foreigner actually visiting the country. In the Southeast Asian region, this type of approach is believed to be more common in the

²⁶ Lanning, K.V., *Child molesters: A behavioral analysis*, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2010. (cited in APLE, *Investigating Traveling Child Sex Offender*, February 2014, p.10).

Philippines because of the high prevalence of spoken English, which reduces barriers between the offender and facilitator and his or her potential victim.²⁷

For some young women or girls, having a foreign boyfriend provides status, implying financial security. Tapping into this market, foreigners will befriend and groom child victims and their family with money, leading the victims to perceive the foreigner as being their ‘boyfriend’—an idea which their parents would not usually oppose, and would sometimes even encourage.²⁸ The ‘boyfriends’ would then ‘hire’ their victims for a longer period of time, exploiting the child for sex and companionship during their stay in the country. Figure 2 shows grooming techniques used by offenders in 21 separate cases of child sexual abuse in Cambodia.²⁹

Figure 2: Grooming techniques used by offenders in Cambodia³⁰

| Grooming techniques | Used (in %) | Not used (in %) |
|--|-------------|-----------------|
| Providing money | 71 | 29 |
| Take the victim to the offender’s residence | 57 | 43 |
| Take the victim to dinner at a restaurant | 52 | 48 |
| Giving presents | 43 | 57 |
| Convince the victim to sleep overnight at the offender’s residence | 28 | 62 |
| Providing clothing as a gift | 24 | 86 |
| Taking the victim on trips | 24 | 86 |

Source: Action Pour Les Enfants

Local offenders and offenders from other countries in Asia seldom operate in this manner. Instead, it appears more common to use sex establishments in the case of East and Southeast Asian foreigners and or to force victims into compliance through marriage, violence or rape in the case of some nationals.³¹ For example, in Cambodia one study found the most frequent charges related to child sexual exploitation for locals were rape (48%) and sexual intercourse (16%) and human trafficking (15%), while foreigners (Westerners and Asians) were mostly charged with offences related to prostitution of a child (41%) and indecency (38%).^{32 33}

²⁷ See for example the recent successful investigation into an online sexual exploitation ring: AFP, Media Release: *Live online child abuse – 29 International arrests made*, 16 January 2014, <http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre/news/afp/2014/january/media-release-live-online-child-abuse-29-international-arrests-made.aspx>.

²⁸ Terres des Hommes Netherlands, *Fullscreen On View: An Exploratory Study on the Background and Psychosocial Consequences of Webcam Child Sex Tourism in the Philippines*, November 2013, p.20.

²⁹ APLE, *Investigating Traveling Child Sex Offender*, February 2014, p.23-24.

³⁰ The study does not state differentiate between cases in which the offender offered certain techniques and these were rejected by the victim and cases where the offender did not use such techniques.

³¹ APLE, *Investigating Traveling Child Sex Offender*, February 2014, p.10.

³² The statistics are based on child sex offences in Cambodia.

Other charges are *human trafficking* (15% nationals, 1% foreigners), *child pornography* (0% nationals, 5% foreigners), *sexual intercourse* (16% nationals, 13% foreigners), *rape* (48% nationals, 2% foreigners), *indecency* (9% nationals, 38% foreigners), *child prostitution* (12% nationals, 41% foreigners). APLE, *Investigating Traveling Child Sex Offender*, February 2014, p.13.

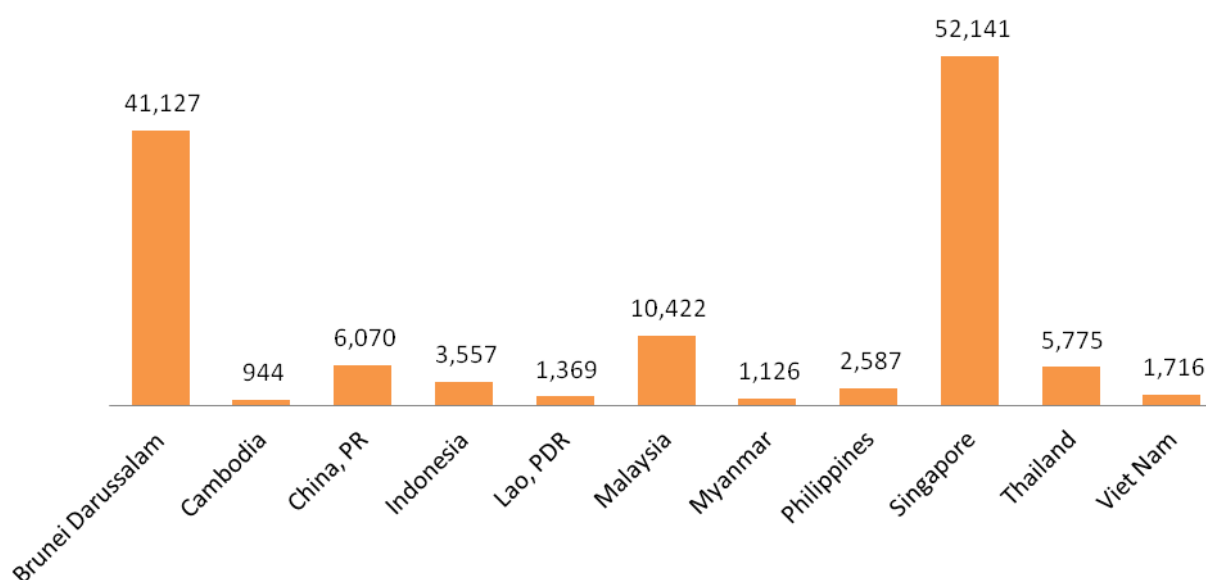
³³ Biases among law enforcement officials may also contribute to this discrepancy.

Areas of Vulnerability

Poverty and Economic Disparities

Socio-economic disparities increase vulnerability to victimisation. GDP per capita in the region ranges from US\$944 in Cambodia, followed by Myanmar, Lao PDR, Vietnam (US\$1,716), Indonesia (US\$3,557), to Thailand and China (around US\$6,000).³⁴

Figure 3: GDP per capita, USD current prices



Particularly in poorer communities in the region, children contribute to family survival and income from an early age, which augments risk of exploitation. Children who are already employed, for example in the tourism industry (karaoke bars, restaurants, travel agencies, internet cafés, hotels), are at risk of sexual exploitation by employers and patrons who may force them to fulfil 'extra' duties and earn more for the employers. In these situations, exploitation may be conducted by business owners and be unknown to parents. Conversely children without employment can be coerced into the sex industry by family members, acquaintances or strangers. Their lack of income makes them particularly vulnerable to this type of coercion as they can feel inadequate for not assisting the family. Some families may rationalise their situation by 'sacrificing' a child or children into the commercial sex trade as the only perceived option for survival.³⁵ For example, in one study 8 out of 10 Vietnamese girls exploited through prostitution in Cambodia had been sold into the industry by a family member.³⁶

There is also some evidence of children entering into prostitution voluntarily (mainly girls) under a sense of responsibility to contribute to family income. Limited access to education and information regarding child rights and practices of sexual exploitation increase vulnerability, while the

³⁴ UN Statistics Division, *GDP per Capita at current prices- US dollars* (data in 2012), National Accounts Estimates of Main Aggregates.

³⁵ UNWTO, *Report on the 29th Meeting of the World Tourism Network on Child Protection* (formerly the Task Force for the Protection of Children in Tourism) at ITB Berlin, Germany, 7 March 2014, p.7.

³⁶ Childwise, *Who are the sex tourists in Cambodia?* December 2006 p. 8.

opportunity to earn money reduces resistance. For example, in Surakarta, Indonesia, seven out of 110 children interviewed in commercial sexual exploitation claimed they were involved in prostitution because they hoped they could make money for their families.³⁷ A separate study in the Philippines found that almost 20% of male and female child prostitutes interviewed entered the sector voluntarily.³⁸ The low percentage in these and other studies suggests that voluntary motivation is not common and supports the overwhelming evidence that most children are forced, coerced or tricked into situations of exploitation.

Another factor increasing the vulnerability of girls to the threat of sexual exploitation is the high demand for females who are virgins, which can be seen as a chance to make a lot of money for some unscrupulous family members. Sex with virgins is perceived as purifying, a symbol of status, and less of a risk in contracting HIV. In Vietnam for example, parents or family members are believed to have forced their daughters to have sex in exchange for money. Girls forced to ‘sell’ their virginity were reportedly aged between 16 and 17 years old, with younger girls believed to be violently forced by their relatives to engage in sex.³⁹

One study in Phnom Penh reports that 25% of interviewed “girl prostitutes” entered prostitution by selling their virginity to clients, 60% of whom were of Chinese ethnicity, and 25% were Cambodian.⁴⁰ Similar numbers were also reported in Siem Reap.⁴¹ Research in Cambodia has also indicated that girls may be tricked, coerced, or convinced to sell their virginity to help their family financially. Some are transported from rural areas then kept in sex establishments until they are old enough to be sold. The average price for the virginity of a Khmer or ethnic Vietnamese girl is US\$482, but can range from US\$20 to US\$2,800.⁴² In some cases girls sell their virginity and return to their homes under an agreement between the establishment owners and the family. But in many cases girls who have lost their virginity are considered ‘tainted’ or no longer suitable for marriage and as a result, may then be forced into prostitution through shame or the need for financial security.

Among the aspects of income inequality that enhances vulnerability, unemployment and homelessness are among the most critical. A child living on the street typically lacks proper adult supervision and support, can be exposed to criminal elements and may be in a situation in which survival depends on finding any type of work. Certain types of child sex offenders thrive on this kind of availability and vulnerability. The Cambodian Center for the Protection of Children’s Right (CCPCR) estimates that the number of children forced into prostitution in Cambodia is around 30,000—that is one third of all sex workers. In Cebu City of the Philippines, the province of the country with the highest number of poor families, 25% of sex workers who work on the street are sexually exploited children under the age of 18 (1,904 children). In Lao PDR, meanwhile, 3.5% of the child population in

³⁷ Terres des Hommes Netherlands, *Fullscreen On View: An Exploratory Study on the Background and Psychosocial Consequences of Webcam Child Sex Tourism in the Philippines*, November 2013.

³⁸ ILO, 2004, *Girl Child Labour in Agriculture, Domestic Work and Sexual Exploitation: Rapid Assessments on the cases of the Philippines, Ghana and Ecuador*, ILO: London.

³⁹ United States Department of State, *2007 Trafficking In Persons Report*, U.S., June 2007. (Cited in UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in East Asia and the Pacific: A Threat Assessment*, April 2013, p.21.

⁴⁰ Childwise, *Who are the sex tourists in Cambodia?* December 2006 p.19.

⁴¹ Childwise, *Who are the sex tourists in Cambodia?* December 2006 p.19.

⁴² Brown, E., *The Ties That Bind: Migration and Trafficking of Women and Girls for Sexual Exploitation in Cambodia*, IOM and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, US Department of State, August 2007.

2006 were orphans under the age of 16 (about 85,000 children)⁴³ and 59% is below the age of 25.⁴⁴ A survey by Save the Children found there were about 800 street children in Vientiane and 35% of the girls in this cohort, aged between 12 and 18 years, were forced into prostitution.⁴⁵ The combination of a youthful population and widespread poverty increases vulnerability to child sex exploitation.

Child sex exploitation can also be disguised by under-age ‘marriages’. In ASEAN, the prevalence of marriage under the age of 15 appears to be highest in Thailand and the Philippines (reportedly around 12%), then Vietnam (7%), Cambodia and Indonesia (less than 3%).⁴⁶ ⁴⁷ In Lao PDR, this is most common in rural areas, where 43% of the females are married before the age of 18, compared with 23% in urban areas.⁴⁸ A trend of under-age marriage to foreigners was apparent in parts of Indonesia that attract workers in natural resource industries. Girls as young as 13 were trafficked domestically with the promise of employment, particularly to West Kalimantan, then forced into marriage or work in jungle brothels near illegal gold mines and logging areas.⁴⁹

Exploitation in Travel and Tourism

The tourism sector has played an important role in the economic development and growth of many countries in ASEAN. However, the economic growth arising from tourism has not always translated into better opportunities for children who live in touristic areas. Children found in these areas, such as those employed in entertainment establishments or living or working on the street, are at a greater risk of being exploited. Unfortunately, historical, economic and social issues in the region have created in some cases an environment ripe for ‘sex-tourism’ and with this, avenues for the sexual exploitation of children in tourism and travel. Cambodia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam face a common challenge—they are exposed to this problem in different ways and to different degrees but all lack the resources and know-how to tackle it effectively.

The scale of the challenge is immense. Cheaper air travel, globalisation and new telecommunications technologies all interact to exacerbate an already complex and difficult problem. In Thailand, tourism constitutes 6.5%⁵⁰ of the country’s GDP. It is also a top destination for sex tourism for foreigners around the world. For example, a search on the internet using the phrase “red-light district in Thailand” provides guides to the numerous ‘go-go bars’ and ‘Bangkok bar girls’, promoting several areas such as Pattaya and Bangkok, where one can “take home a sexy all-night companion

⁴³ Save the Children, *Children’s Situation in Laos*. Accessed at:

<<http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/start/countries/laos>>, date accessed 16 June 2014.

⁴⁴ Save the Children, *Laos: Child Protection*. Accessed at: <<http://laos.savethechildren.net/what-we-do/child-protection>>, date accessed 13 June 2014.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ 1.3% in Cambodia (2005), 2.8% in Indonesia (2002), 7.3% in Vietnam (2006), 11.6% in Thailand (2005), 12.9% in the Philippines (2003). Data consists of females currently aged 15-19 who married at the age of 15 or earlier. UNICEF, *Measuring and Monitoring Child Protection Systems: Proposed Core Indicators for the East Asia and Pacific Region*, 2012.

⁴⁷ In the case of Indonesia, when considering females currently aged 20-24 who were married before 18, the percentage is an alarming 24% (ECPAT, *Global Monitoring: Indonesia*, 2011, p.11).

⁴⁸ Save the Children, *Laos: Child Protection*. Accessed at: <<http://laos.savethechildren.net/what-we-do/child-protection>>, date accessed 13 June 2014.

⁴⁹ ECPAT, *Global Monitoring: Indonesia*, 2011, p.11.

⁵⁰ Chheang, V., *Tourism and Regional Integration in Southeast Asia*, May 2013, p. 41.

for US\$50".⁵¹ In Cambodia, Phnom Penh and Svay Pak (a red-light district notorious for paedophilic activity that is frequently shut down but then re-opens)⁵² are prominent areas for sexual exploitation, as are Batam and Bali in Indonesia.

As governments in the region struggle to take control of this situation, travellers adapt and move to areas with more lax regulation and enforcement. In short, a crackdown in one country can lead to an influx in another. For example, ECPAT reports that Cambodia, Vietnam and more recently Mongolia have suffered an influx of tourists prioritising sex with a child, possibly as a result of the Thai government's efforts to combat child sex exploitation within its borders.⁵³

Identifying victims

Number of Victims

Reliable data in the sex industry is notoriously difficult to obtain and there are added difficulties in collecting data on the sexual exploitation of children—many children are not located within the organised sex industry but work clandestinely on the streets and those who are working inside sex establishments are generally hidden from researchers and other officials who might collect data. More specifically, there are no reliable figures on the number of sex tourists in any of the countries in the region, the number of clients frequenting sex establishments in a given year, the number of children exploited through sex establishments, the number of children coerced into selling sex in public places or the number of individuals travelling to the region to sexually abuse children.

A severe challenge in combating child sex exploitation comes from the difficulty of identifying victims and exact locations in which children are exploited. Children can be subject to sexual abuse by locals and foreigners in countless locations. The most obvious cases of abuse occur in establishments within the sex industry. But other cases of abuse can occur in the home, at schools, in institutional care settings such as orphanages, drop-in centres and youth detention facilities and on the streets for homeless youth. Among these different settings there are a range of reasons why children can be difficult to locate:

- Child sex offenders come from a range of locations and backgrounds and are notoriously difficult to identify before committing a crime. For authorities, this makes tracing potential child victims also exceedingly difficult.
- Child victims of sexual exploitation within establishments in the sex industry coexist with other adult sex-workers, many of whom are considered voluntary. The division between child and adult is not always clear and operators intentionally obfuscate with regard to age in order to avoid authorities and at the same time increase demand for services.
- Sex is generally considered a private affair and thus members of the general public are less inclined to report instances where they may have witnessed child sexual abuse or children working in sex establishments.
- Mistrust of authorities and other members of the public can lead to victims not seeking assistance and members of the public not reporting instances of abuse.

⁵¹ One Stop Bangkok, *Guide to the Red Light districts, Bangkok*, January 2013. Accessed at: <http://www.1stopbangkok.com/what_to_see/red_light>, date accessed 14 June 2014.

⁵² Humantrafficking.org, *Svay Pak Child-Sex Trade Back in Business – Again*. 4 June 2007. Accessed at: <<http://www.humantrafficking.org/updates/656>>, date accessed 12 June 2014.

⁵³ ECPAT, *Combating Child Sex Tourism: Questions & Answers*, Thailand, 2008, p.10.

- Foreign children who have been coerced into the sex industry can often more easily be treated as ‘illegal migrants’ than victims of trafficking or sexual abuse.
- Sexual exploitation can be concealed behind the front of legitimate employment, such as in a restaurant.
- Social acceptance of customs such as under-age ‘marriage’ can hide cases of exploitation and abuse
- Social norms that play down video and photographic pornography can encourage offenders and collaborators in these acts.

Certain children are more at risk than others due to their employment or living situation. Child domestic workers are particularly vulnerable, and the ILO reports that “sexual violence towards child domestic workers... is relatively common.”⁵⁴ This risk of abuse is especially high for those who live in their employer’s house, with studies from different parts of the world reporting up to 30% of child domestic workers suffering sexual abuse.⁵⁵ Moreover, their access to rights and protection is limited due to the hidden nature of their work and the clear power imbalance that exists between them and their employer (and his or her family). In cases where sexual abuse does occur, the child’s reliance on the employer for basic needs and her sense of duty to her parents can prevent her reporting the abuse. There are also common reports of girls who fall pregnant by sexual abuse, being rejected by their employer and family and then falling into commercial situations of sexual exploitation.⁵⁶

Ethnic minorities, people without citizenship and displaced persons may also face additional vulnerabilities to victimisation due to their marginal position in society. Thailand’s northern ‘hill tribes’, for example, account for around 5% (50,000 children) of the country’s yearly births but do not hold legal citizenship.⁵⁷ As UNESCO officials assert, the lack of legal status is a significant factor increasing the risk of trafficking leading to sexual exploitation of girls from these areas. While trafficking overall is not the focus of this report, it clearly plays a role in creating and amplifying the vulnerability of children – and particular groups of children – to sexual exploitation. In Cambodia, although ethnic Vietnamese constitute around 13% of the Cambodian population, they reportedly make up a disproportionately large amount (32%) of the sex workers.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ ILO Report on Domestic Labour, p.36.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Humantrafficking.org, *Thailand*, [online], N.D., Accessed at: <<http://www.humantrafficking.org/countries/thailand>>, date accessed 13 June 2014.

⁵⁸ UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in East Asia and the Pacific: A Threat Assessment*, April 2013, p.21.

3. Changing Dynamics

The Regional Context

Tourism

Since 1991, the number of international tourist arrivals in Southeast Asia has increased by nearly 300%.⁵⁹ This trend shows no signs of abating as international arrivals to Southeast Asian countries are expected to rise dramatically over the coming years, from 40.5 million in 2012 to an expected 112.5 million in 2018.⁶⁰ Well-established patterns of child sex exploitation integrated into tourism flows suggest future growth projections will threaten many more children. Over the period, the number of arrivals to Myanmar is expected to triple and to Cambodia, more than double (Figure 6). There are already reports from Myanmar that increasing numbers of tourists are threatening to carry an emerging child sex tourism industry with them.⁶¹

The average annual growth rate, forecasted until 2018, suggests that the fastest growing economies in Southeast Asia are (ranking from one to four) Myanmar (at 25.5%), followed by Thailand, Lao PDR and Cambodia. Development in infrastructure (hotels, restaurants and bars) will increase, as will employment opportunities and gross national income. However, despite the improved opportunities for many, lessons from Thailand and Cambodia have already shown that large income disparities, particularly between foreigners and local children, can place them at risk of sexual exploitation.

Figure 4: Estimated international arrivals per year (in millions)

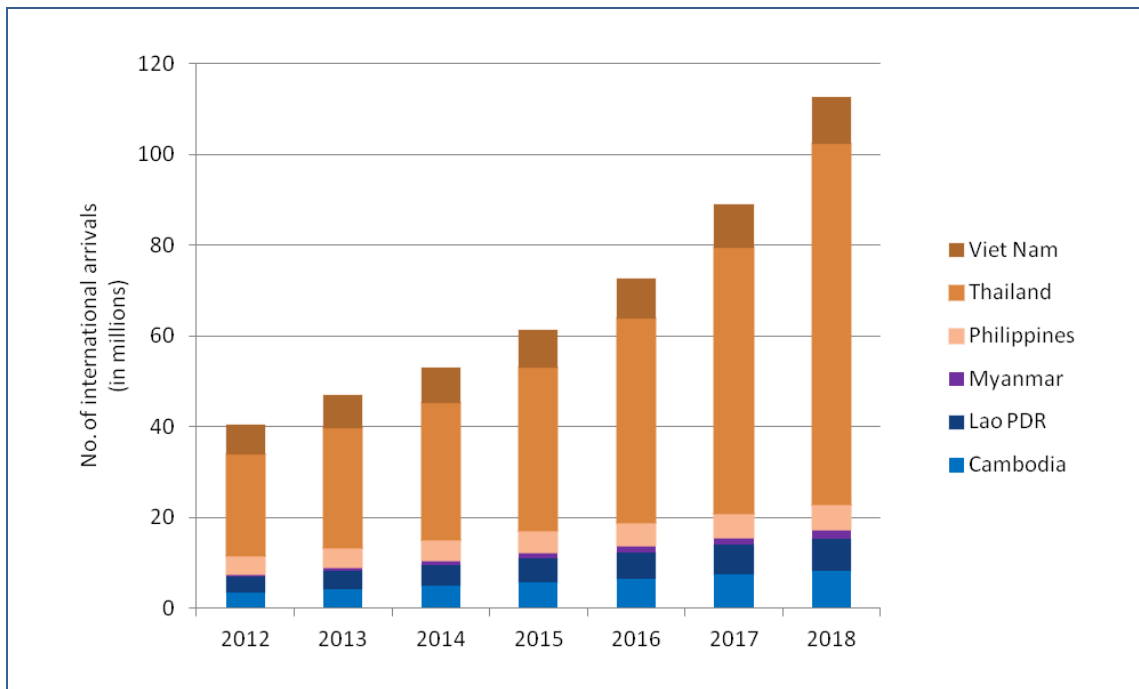
| Country | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Cambodia | 3.6 | 4.3 | 5 | 5.7 | 6.5 | 7.4 | 8.2 |
| Lao PDR | 3.3 | 3.9 | 4.6 | 5.3 | 5.9 | 6.6 | 7.2 |
| Myanmar | 0.6 | 0.8 | 1 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.9 |
| Philippines | 4.1 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.8 | 5 | 5.3 | 5.5 |
| Thailand | 22.3 | 26.3 | 30.1 | 36 | 44.9 | 58.5 | 79.6 |
| Vietnam | 6.6 | 7.4 | 7.8 | 8.4 | 8.9 | 9.5 | 10.1 |
| Total | 40.5 | 47.1 | 53 | 61.4 | 72.6 | 88.9 | 112.5 |

⁵⁹ ASEAN, *Tourism Marketing Strategy 2012-2015* (data arranged by TigerMine Research). Accessed at: <<http://www.tigermine.com/2013/01/09/growth-forecasts-southeast-asia-travel-tourism/>>, date accessed 11 June 2014.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

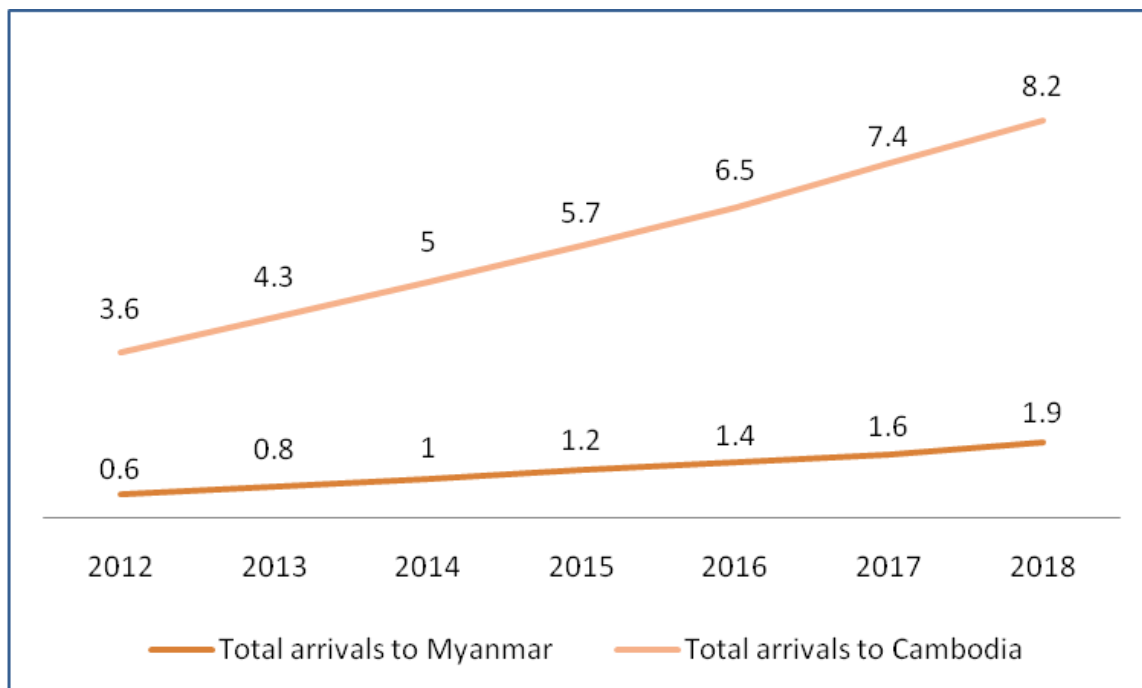
⁶¹ Save the Children Denmark, *Sex Offenders without borders: An investigation into the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in Thailand, Cambodia and Burma in relation to travel and tourism*, February 2009, [http://www.savethechildren.dk/Admin/Public/Download.aspx?file=Files%2FFiler%2FMaterialer%2FResultater%2FSexoffenders without borders.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.dk/Admin/Public/Download.aspx?file=Files%2FFiler%2FMaterialer%2FResultater%2FSexoffenders%20without%20borders.pdf).

Figure 5: No. of international arrivals in selected Southeast Asian countries, 2012-2018* (in millions)



* Statistics for years 2014-2018 are forecasts. Source: Pacific Asia Travel Association⁶²

Figure 6: Projected international arrivals to Myanmar and Cambodia (in millions)



* Statistics for years 2014-2018 are forecasts. Source: Pacific Asia Travel Association

⁶² Asia Pacific Visitor Forecasts 2014-2018 Reports, 28 January 2014, produced by Tourism Forecasting Unit of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Urbanisation

Urbanisation is a long standing trend in many of the region's countries. It is particularly intense at present in Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam, increasing at over 3% every 5 years (see Figure 7). Urbanisation will also involve cross-border movement, for example poorer people from Myanmar moving to Bangkok seeking employment.

The process of urbanisation can dislocate families from traditional and stable sources of income in their home countries, or regions. This economic precariousness can push some people into the sex industry, especially young people who are also disconnected from their families and susceptible to outside influence. In island based

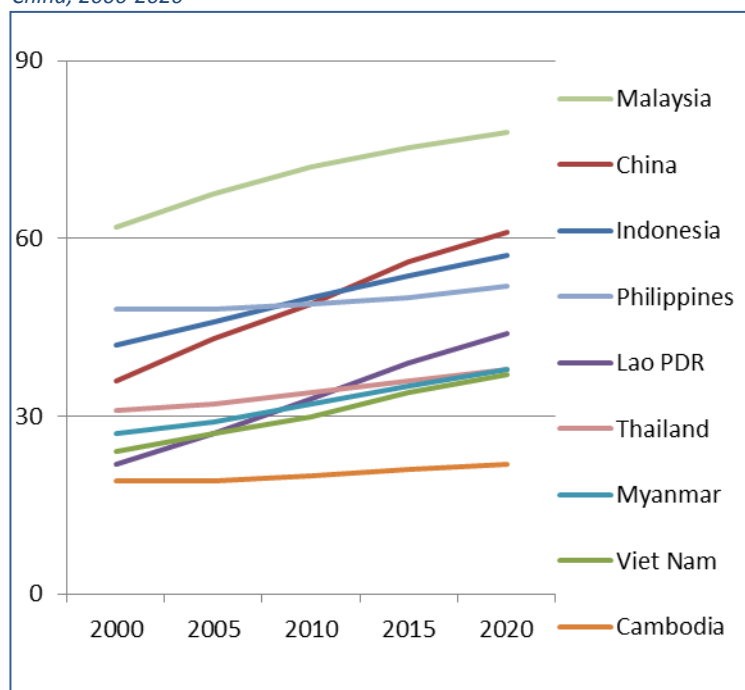
nations such as Indonesia and the Philippines communication and travel back to families is increasingly difficult. Urbanisation will continue in the region so long as there is substantial income disparity between rural populations and the urban centres. Responses to this trend should not attempt to limit the flow of people into the cities, but rather prepare them for the risks they may face, in particular with regard to the sexual exploitation of children.

Internet access

In Myanmar and Cambodia, less than 5 out of 100 people have access to the internet, and in Lao PDR it is 10 out of 100.⁶³ In Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam, however, the internet is used by approximately one third of the population, and this higher level of usage is reflected in the greater number of online sex offences reported in these countries. As internet usage becomes more widespread across the region more children will become vulnerable to online grooming and exploitation through sexual abuse materials and the online streaming of child sexual abuse. Protection in this area must encompass a wide range of actors beyond law enforcement, such as parents, schools and teachers.

In 2009, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection ranked Japan fourth (4.3%) and South Korea fifth (3.6%) among the top five countries hosting websites with child abuse images. Cases in the Philippines reveal that children may enter into the sex trade (via online video streaming of sexual

Figure 7: % population residing in urban areas of ASEAN countries and China, 2000-2020



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2012)

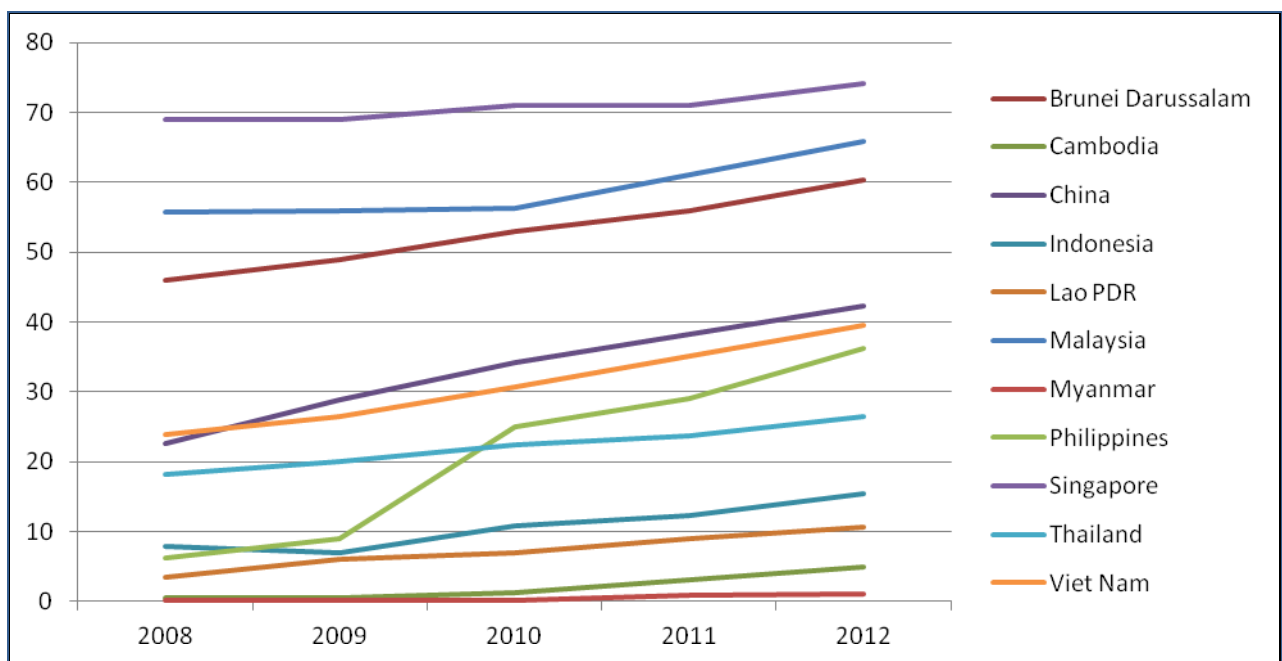
⁶³ UN Statistics Division, *Internet users per 100 inhabitants* (data in 2012), Millennium Development Goals Database.

abuse) voluntarily and without the knowledge of their parents. They do this to keep up with their peers, and as a source of independent income.⁶⁴ Others are lured into the trade by strangers offering them a way to earn fast cash, or they are coerced into it by their employers. In many cases, online child exploitation is more hidden than the physical variety and therefore more difficult to identify and prevent..

Figure 8: Top 5 Child Pornography Website Host Countries⁶⁵

| Rank | Country | Percentage of sites (%) |
|------|---------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | United States | 49.2 |
| 2 | Russia | 20.4 |
| 3 | Canada | 9.0 |
| 4 | Japan | 4.3 |
| 5 | South Korea | 3.6 |

Figure 9: Internet users per 100 inhabitants⁶⁶



Emerging Threats in Child Sexual Exploitation

Online offending

The online environment of the 21st century has transformed criminality in a number of ways: as an advanced vehicle for communications, it has created a transnational environment that provides new

⁶⁴ Similar motivations were reported by children lured into prostitution in the Philippines.

⁶⁵ Based on an analysis of 12,696 'website incidents' by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, *Child Sexual Abuse Images – Analysis of Websites by Cybertip.ca* November 2009, Accessed at: http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/LegislativeSummaries/bills_ls.asp?Language=E&ls=c22&Parl=40&Ses=3&source=library_prb.

⁶⁶ UN Statistics Division, *Internet users per 100 inhabitants*, Millennium Development Goals Database.

opportunities for organising and participating in harmful activities, and the virtual nature of the online environment means criminal activity can sometimes fall outside the jurisdiction of the criminal justice process.⁶⁷

Over the past decade, the internet has facilitated a change in the pattern of child sexual exploitation. The online realm serves various markets. For example, there are sites that offer child abuse images, live streaming of sexual abuse, and communication tools to organise sex tours and access to information on networks of potential victims of sexual abuse. The internet offers potential offenders a cloak of anonymity. They are able to construct profiles that disguise their true identity, enabling them to access information and exploitation materials without fear of detection.

The internet is favoured by travelling child sex offenders to gain access to information on children and services available at destinations. Child sex traffickers also advertise their services on the internet.⁶⁸ Watching *child pornography* online may also inadvertently serve as a promotion tool, enticing child sex offenders who were previously 'just' viewing child sex abuse material in order to travel to the destination in search of opportunities to engage in the sexual abuse of children. Thus, those engaged in the production and possession of child sexual abuse material should be targeted in all criminal justice responses as the industry is not only implicated in the direct abuse of children but it also promotes further abuse.

The internet serves to supply potential and repeat offenders with opportunities to organise plans for contact offending (i.e. physical abuse). Paedophiles in particular are able to groom their victims from a position of figurative and physical distance. This can provide a false sense of safety for the victims, as they may develop a relationship of trust with the offender thus making themselves more vulnerable to exploitation. Face-to-face contact no longer appears dangerous and meetings are entered into willingly by the victim, although usually under false pretences set up by the offender. For the offender, this type of grooming can save money, time and risk of detection by local police, particularly when compared to the 'traditional' method of wandering the streets in search of children to exploit.

Various surveys from Thailand have illustrated this trend clearly. Forty five percent of Thai teenagers have met 'virtual friends', 92% had been persuaded to talk about sex with these friends and 13% have gone on to have sexual intercourse with these friends.⁶⁹ While many of these relationships would have been innocent interactions among teenagers, they illustrate the vulnerability to manipulation by child sex offenders.

⁶⁷ See, for example: Wall, David S., 'The Internet as a Conduit for Criminal Activity', Chapter 4 in April Pattavina, ed., *Information Technology and the Criminal Justice System*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2005, p. 77–98, available at: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=740626, accessed 26 July 2014.

⁶⁸ UNODC, *Transnational Organized Crime in East Asia and the Pacific: A Threat Assessment*, April 2013, p.22.

⁶⁹ Savestanan, N, *Thailand's response to online sexual abuse and exploitation: its progress and challenges*, 12 April 2011, Accessed at: http://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/CCPCJ_Sessions/CCPCJ_20/Thematic_Discussions/Asian-Group_Thailands-response_Savestanan.pdf.

Identifying sex offenders

Child sex offenders come from all social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. They can be found in any profession and in any nation. They may be heterosexual or homosexual. Although the majority of child sex offenders are male, they may also be female.

People who sexually abuse and exploit children do not look different. There is no stereotype of the travelling child sex offender. Depending on the nature and type of child sexual abuse and exploitation, an offender may be anybody—from a neighbour, an uncle, a physical training instructor, a teacher, a business professional, a staff member of an NGO, a religious leader or even a parent of the child victim. Some offenders are important and respected people in the community who are in positions of authority over children.

Although many people are aware of children being sexually exploited by tourists, the term “child sex tourism” has been found to be inadequate for being too narrow and not conveying the fact that many children are sexually exploited by other travelling groups, which include:

- Business travellers
- Foreigners working directly with children and other vulnerable groups
- Military forces working overseas
- Diplomats and governmental employees deployed overseas
- Expatriates or foreign nationals on extended travel
- Retired expatriates residing abroad

Contrary to popular belief and media portrayal of child sex offenders as Caucasian males, several reports and studies have found the presence of significant numbers of Asian (national and regional) tourists who engage in child sexual exploitation alongside Western child sex offenders. As previously discussed, local and other Asian offenders may be less prominent in relation to these crimes due to a variety of factors that includes less conspicuous methods of abuse and a greater focus by citizens and the media on offenders of Western appearance.

Offenders have developed and shared a number of methods to disguise their criminal activities. For example, the use of multiple passports and absconding bail in order to travel between countries in the region, particularly to those that have a lower capacity for detecting these crimes, and concealing identities when engaged on online child sex abuse chat forums.

The example in Figure 10 shows an image manipulation technique used by Canadian child sex offender Christopher Neil (dubbed ‘Mr. Swirl’ or ‘swirl face’) to disguise his identity on over 200 photographs that depicted abuse on *child pornographic* websites.

Figure 10: The ‘swirl’ image manipulation technique



Source: Interpol via The Canadian Press

The German *Bundeskriminalamt*⁷⁰ successfully unravelled the disguised image, which eventually led to his arrest in 2007⁷¹ after an INTERPOL red notice was circulated worldwide.⁷²

It should be noted that Neil was able to travel without restriction between Cambodia, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and Vietnam (as have several other child sex offenders⁷³) and that he worked as a teacher. Despite children being entrusted to their care, police background checks are rarely conducted on foreign teachers in the GMS.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ BKA or Federal Police of Germany.

⁷¹ The Canadian Press, *'Swirl Face' pedophile faces 10 new child abuse, pornography charges in B.C.*

⁷² INTERPOL notices are international requests for cooperation or alerts allowing police in member countries to share critical crime-related information. A Red Notice is to seek the location and arrest of wanted persons with a view to extradition or similar lawful action. Accessed at: <http://www.interpol.int/INTERPOL-expertise/Notices>, 26 July 2014.

⁷³ Foreign male teachers who have been arrested were from Italy, U.K. and U.S.

⁷⁴ According to the Korean Foundation, several English teachers were found to be sexually harassing their students. In one case in 2006, a U.S. citizen murdered a Korean girl after sexually abusing her.

Korea Focus, *Verifying Backgrounds of Native English Teachers*, 28 November 2007, The Korea Foundation.

Accessed at:

http://www.koreafocus.or.kr/design2/pdf/pdf_download.asp?pdf_name=/images/upload/pdf/101769, date accessed: 14 June 2014.

4. Improving Responses

This section provides an overview of current efforts and presents recommendations to protect Southeast Asia's children from sexual exploitation. The suggestions below are generally confined to issues and areas that UNODC knows best – developing law and justice frameworks, attitudes and capacities. Some of the recommendations may assist UNODC in programme development; other needs may be better addressed by our partners or working in collaboration with them.

Policing

Capable and committed police will be at the heart of any effective response to child sexual exploitation. With this in mind, UNODC has developed two training programmes to support capacity building of law enforcement officials. These are introductory training curricula for Frontline Officers and Specialist Investigators and include gender issues police encounter when dealing with child sexual exploitation cases.⁷⁵ The curricula are restricted to police and are available in five languages - English, Khmer, Lao, Thai and Vietnamese.

Traditional models versus pro-active policing

Traditional models of policing have proven to be ineffective against the sexual exploitation of children; its clandestine nature precludes easy detection. In many jurisdictions there is a tacit acceptance of brothels and other sex establishments by police, which may or may not be accompanied by bribes. Rather than turn a blind eye to the entire sex industry, police could be better utilised to locate and arrest those committing offences against children.

In many communities in the region, policing is absent, light or under-capacitated, particularly in rural areas. According to INTERPOL, experience of investigating sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism varies between Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. In Thailand and Cambodia, for example, police rarely conduct pro-active investigations due to lack of skills, evidence integrity and case management. In most GMS countries, intelligence-led policing is embryonic or non-existent, and police-to-police cooperation remains weak.

UNODC conducted law enforcement knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) surveys in 2013. This helped to identify some common issues and themes that countries in the region might usefully address. One key lesson that emerged was that pro-active policing is inhibited because a significant proportion of police in GMS countries do not have fundamental information, such as:

- the legal definition of a child is anyone under the age of 18;
- photographing a child for sexual gratification or exposing a child to pornography are acts of child sexual exploitation and illegal;
- unsupervised use of the internet by children poses a potential risk factor, given its use as a grooming tool; and

⁷⁵ The curriculum for Frontline Officials contains the following four modules: Introduction to Child Sexual Exploitation, Victims in Child Sexual Exploitation Cases, Evidence in Child Sexual Exploitation Cases, and First Response Duties in Child Sexual Exploitation Cases. The curriculum for Specialist Investigators contains the following six modules: The Legal Framework, Victims in Child Sexual Exploitation Cases, The Child Sex Offender, and Evidence in Child Sexual Exploitation Cases, Investigating Child Sexual Exploitation Cases, and Cooperation in Child Sexual Exploitation Cases.

- children have the right to be heard in criminal proceedings, and children in conflict with the law have the right to be treated fairly.
- children in sex establishments are victims of exploitations, not criminals.

Attitudes among some officials also hinder pro-active policing. Some commonly held beliefs about the sexual exploitation of children included that it:

- is only conducted with ‘naughty’ children;
- is only conducted by strangers, and people who the child or family do not know;
- occurs when a person is homosexual;
- is never conducted by women against children;
- is a private family problem (not under the realm of the state’s law enforcement); and
- is acceptable, if the family and/or child have provided consent.

Police integrity

In addition to these capacity limitations, corruption within law enforcement is also problematic—many sex industries have developed relationships with police over decades of tolerance, mutual benefit and tacit agreement regarding ‘self-policing’. For example, Thai police have been known to guard commercial sex establishments, and even procure children for prostitution.⁷⁶ One report, from 2004, states that a prominent brothel owner in Thailand claimed to have spent over 100 million baht in bribes to operate his various sex establishments in Bangkok.⁷⁷ The U.S. Department of State reported in 2011 that police and immigration officials extorted money or sex from Burmese citizens detained in Thailand for immigration violations, and then sold those unable to pay their fines to traffickers.⁷⁸ There are cases in which police have protected brothel owners or leaked information to the subject during or in advance of investigations.⁷⁹

These situations provide business owners with an opportunity to exploit children sexually while being safe in the knowledge that police will not investigate their premises. The United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) - now the United Nations Action for Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons (UN-ACT) - and ECPAT report that some sex establishments in Cambodia are operated or protected by elements of the police, creating a safe environment in which even more damaging criminality can thrive, including the sexual exploitation of children.⁸⁰ In this scenario, alerting authorities is considered unethical, since the act of whistle blowing is disloyal to

⁷⁶ ECPAT, Alternative Report – Thailand, July 2011. Accessed at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/ngos/Thailand_ECPAT_OPSC.pdf>, date accessed 9 June 2014, p.7.

⁷⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2004/feb/21/weekend.adrianlevy>.

⁷⁸ United States Department of State, *2011 Trafficking In Persons Report*, U.S., June 2011.

⁷⁹ Burkhalter, H. 2012, “Sex Trafficking, Law Enforcement and Perpetrator Accountability”, *Anti-Trafficking Review*, Accessed at <https://www.ijm.org/sites/default/files/download/resources/Sex-Trafficking-Law-Enforcement-and-Perpetrator-Accountability.pdf>.

⁸⁰ United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP), *Trafficking Estimates: Measuring the Extent of Sex Trafficking in Cambodia–2008*, January 2011. Accessed at: <http://www.no-trafficking.org/reports_docs/estimates/uniap_cb_estimates_report.pdf>, date accessed 11 June 2014, p.12.

the authorities who are ‘protecting’ the localities.⁸¹ Victims in these environments may also fear the consequences of attracting law enforcement—in Cambodia, for example, victims have faced imprisonment while traffickers go unpunished.⁸²

Susceptibility to corruption is not just an issue for police. The KAP surveys revealed police officers’ thoughts on obstacles to successful prosecutions on child sex abuse cases and found the top responses were: (i) payments by the accused to the child victim’s family; (ii) corrupt payments by the accused to either the police or the prosecution service; and/or (iii) lack of knowledge, skills and/or resources for the police to effectively investigate and help prosecute such cases.

Computer Facilitated Crime

There are opportunities to develop capacities for detecting online offending and collecting digital evidence. This would entail providing training, software to secure and manage computers and scanning the internet activities of suspects. Countries with more experience in internet based crime can share experiences and best practices with others where the internet is still in the initial stages of growth.

As seen in the ‘Mr. Swirl’ incident, collaboration with international organisations in terms of information sharing and the proper use and conduct of information technology supports successful measures. Offenders would be deterred through the knowledge that governments have the know-how to investigate them. On the ground, basic processes of computer preservation and recovery will provide tangible evidence during police operations and investigations.

Regional and international cooperation

Within the region, cooperation between Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam has been most prominent. A number of international initiatives such as suspect/offender alert mechanisms, an INTERPOL database, and extra-territorial legislation regarding child sex tourism are in development or in place.⁸³ INTERPOL manages an ‘International Child Sexual Exploitation image database’, an intelligence and investigative tool which allows police worldwide to share data and make connections between victims, abusers and locations.⁸⁴ These initiatives can help connect authorities in the region with countries outside the region to share information, monitor suspects and extradite and prosecute offenders. For example, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, the United Kingdom and United States have a Child Sex Offender Registry, with which they offer to notify a country if someone on the registry is travelling to their country. Using information from the Child Sex Offender Registries, Thai Immigration officers have been increasingly able to monitor and prevent entry of foreigners with prior sex-related offences. In 2012, seven Australians and three New Zealanders

⁸¹ Ibid. and ECPAT, *Combating Child Sex Tourism: Questions & Answers*, Thailand, 2008.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ ECPAT lists 44 countries worldwide with extra-territorial legislation against Child Sex Tourism including several from East and Southeast Asia. See: ECPAT, 2008, *Protecting Children from Sexual Exploitation in Tourism: An ECPAT Training Resource Kit*, accessed at: http://www.ecpat.net/sites/default/files/ECPAT_CST_Code_Toolkit.pdf.

⁸⁴ Interpol, *Victim identification*, [online], accessed at: <<http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Crimes-against-children/Victim-identification>>, date accessed 13 June, 2014.

were prevented from entering the country, and this number increased to a total of 41 offenders in 2013.⁸⁵

While this is a positive step in suspect/offender alerting, there are a number of weaknesses—notifications are only effective for officials at airports, offenders can cross porous land borders such as in the GMS and crucially, there is heavy reliance on the sex offender to notify authorities in their home country that they are travelling abroad. Canada was involved in the infamous case of child sex offender Christopher Neil, who victimised boys in Thailand and Cambodia. Notably, a lack of cooperation between Canada and Thailand had resulted in a non-response from Canada to a Thai alert that an offender may be abusing two girls.⁸⁶

Despite the presence of an international information sharing platform and offender alert systems in some countries, more vigilance regarding offence-alerting and screening of offenders is required, particularly to ensure all countries use these networks. For countries in and outside the region with otherwise excellent law enforcement capacities, connecting to these networks would be a relatively simple contribution to protecting the region's children. Again, ASEAN may be able to lead an effort that uses the international systems that already exist as a model. A parallel by-product of this effort may be to encourage police-to-police cooperation.

Law enforcement cooperation should not be limited to government actors. There are now many local and international civil society organisations that have detailed insight into patterns of exploitation including specific insights into child sex offending. Enhanced cooperation between law enforcement and the non-governmental sector could bear positive results for both sides in this area.

Strengthening Legal Frameworks

Legal challenges in responding to child sexual exploitation include problems related to insufficient legal coverage and consistency, and problems related to implementation. Projects such as UN-ACT (formerly UNIAP) have made great strides in improving harmonisation and legal cooperation between countries, but there is still much more work that needs to be done. Analyses of domestic legal frameworks with particular focus on child sexual exploitation in travel and tourism has been undertaken in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, with UNODC's support. The reports compared domestic laws with international standards relating to child sexual abuse, identified legal gaps and provided concrete recommendations on how to strengthen the legislative framework for the protection of children. The recommendations in the analytical report are being used by the four countries as a basis for legal reform. It is of particular importance that penalties are commensurate with the offences and that all forms of child sexual exploitation are criminalised, including newer forms of abuse that are committed online.

For example, there have been efforts to increase prison terms for offences related to child sexual exploitation in recent years, but there is a long way to go before their usage and severity flow through into effective deterrence and punishment. Even when suspects reach trial, distinctions

⁸⁵ UNODC, *Child Sex Offending: Case Examples in Thailand and Cambodia*. UNODC Fact Sheet, April 2014.

⁸⁶ CBC News, RCMP ignored alleged children sexual abuse in Cambodia, non-profit says, 14 February 2013. Accessed at: <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/rcmp-ignored-alleged-children-sexual-abuse-in-cambodia-non-profit-says-1.1321230>>, date accessed: 12 June 2014.

between various laws can be confusing during sentencing. Most countries treat prostitution of children and indecent sexual acts on minors separately, with the latter attracting lower penalties. Recent reform in Lao PDR, however, is commendable: prostitution of children was previously penalised with 3-12 months imprisonment and only applicable to the victimisation of girls, whereas it now involves imprisonment of 10-20 years and is relevant to boys and girls.⁸⁷

It is common across the GMS countries that the younger the child victim the heavier the sentence, but only with regard to prostitution of a child.⁸⁸ This restriction limits the impact of the law, especially since some offenders operate outside the scope of prostitution, as they engage in street-based abuse or other forms of sexual exploitation. In these cases, offences attract lower sentences and abuses that do not involve sexual intercourse are punished even less. In Thailand, sexual relations with minors result in disturbingly low sentences graded according to age: 1 year for victims 15-18 years old; 5 years for victims 12-15 years old. The sentence then rises to 15-year imprisonment when the child is under 12 years old, as the offence changes to rape.⁸⁹ Repeat offences carry a penalty of double the term of imprisonment, but it is not clear if this clause is ever used. In Cambodia, APLE estimates that more than 50% of foreign offenders have previous convictions.⁹⁰ However, a prior punishment does not seem to ensure that subsequent offences are treated more seriously; often the judicial system does not acknowledge that a new case is in fact a repeat offence, especially in situations where previous convictions occurred internationally.

Despite some areas of progress, another problem is that possession of child sexual abuse material is not criminalised in many countries in Southeast Asia.⁹¹ Offenders will only face a (low) risk of imprisonment if the material was intended for commercial trade.⁹² More generally, in sex cases involving children, the balance of prosecution appears to be in the offender's behaviour, so long as the child was not paid for the 'service', which suggests police are not skilled in conducting investigations and/or prosecutors are lacking capacities to prosecute. There appears to be negligence in the use of criminalisation as deterrence for child sex offenders, or even to achieve the more basic benefit of curtailing the freedom of repeat offenders. Japan can be commended for its recent legislation that now criminalises the possession of *child pornography* with up to one year in jail or a fine of \$10,000. With the number of pornography investigations rising in Japan by 9.7% in 2012 to 1,596,⁹³ how effectively the law will be enforced remains to be seen.

In parallel to building up policing and non-government capacities for investigation, there is a need to seize opportunities in prosecution and judicial services. A fair, effective and efficient criminal justice system is one that respects the rights of victims and witnesses of crime as well as the rights of

⁸⁷ Lao PDR, *Penal Law (2005 Amendment)*, Article 133.

⁸⁸ In Lao PDR, for example, prostitution of a child is criminalized at 2-5 years (if the victim is above 15 years old), and even heavier (at 7-15 years penalty) if the child is under 15 years old.

⁸⁹ UNODC, *Child Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism: An Analysis of Domestic Legal Frameworks: Thailand*, Bangkok, 2014, p.18-19.

⁹⁰ APLE, *Investigating Traveling Child Sex Offender*, February 2014, p.11.

⁹¹ ICMEC, *Child Pornography: Model Legislation and Global Review*, 2012, 7th Edition. Accessed at: http://www.icmec.org/en_X1/pdf/Child_Pornography_Model_Law_English_7th_Edition_2012.pdf

⁹² *Ibid.* p.21.

⁹³ CNN, *Japanese passes law banning possession of child pornography* <http://edition.cnn.com>. Accessed on 18 July 2014.

suspects and offenders. Such a system focuses on the need to prevent crime and to assist and protect victims and witnesses. It treats them with dignity and compassion and without discrimination and allows their unhindered participation in the justice process. This is even more important when a victim or witness is particularly vulnerable—as is the case for children, especially those subject to sexual exploitation.

In practice, child victims and witnesses are frequently considered the 'forgotten party' in criminal justice systems and are sometimes re-victimised by the system itself. They are often not allowed to fully participate in the justice process, in decisions that affect them and do not always receive the assistance, support and protection they are entitled to. Redress for the harm children have suffered as a result of victimisation is often not available.

Judges and prosecutors have a tremendous responsibility to ensure that the legal system protects victims by judging cases fairly and with due regard for the severity of certain crimes. Judicial support is required across the region, and should include prosecutor and judge training on interpretation of laws and case law, collection and storage of evidence, and supporting and protecting victims in legal proceedings. A complete package of assistance can help the members of the judiciary ensure fair proceedings and deliver sound judgments.

In this context, ASEAN is in an advantageous position to assist members to cooperate in a number of ways: adopting legal frameworks and harmonising child protection laws and sharing knowledge and learning among members on the effectiveness of particular legislative and policy approaches. Collective information can greatly assist governments in building up specialist capacities effectively and efficiently – a point which also applies to training for prosecutors, judges and police.

The Broader Context

Industry Regulation

Although sex industries are difficult to regulate, others are not. Teaching, child care and children's health occupations could be protected from child sex offenders through background checks and more regular engagement by law enforcement. Placing upon them an obligation to report suspicions or incidents of child sexual abuse is a straightforward way to empower carers and law enforcement.

Positive steps have already been taken by the tourism and hotels industries with the development of the *Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism* and its implementation in many countries around the world. This could be complemented by more assertive law enforcement measures that punish hotels and other tourism operators that allow the sexual exploitation of children to take place on their premises or in their knowledge.

Data Collection

Initiatives to collect and analyse data on child sex exploitation have shown big benefits, enabling government and non-government stakeholders to better target responses. Nevertheless, there is a long way to go in this field and a promising approach would involve research and advocacy collaboration between NGOs, law enforcement and policymakers. UNODC has leading expertise in strengthening capacity of law enforcement officials and law enforcement data collection, while other agencies have strong expertise in research with children. There are opportunities to combine

data collection on investigations and intelligence analysis, and connecting with non-government organisations to develop an agreed picture of trends and threats.

Developing Commitment to Act

Many NGOs work on demand reduction and prevention projects that aim to reduce the vulnerability of children and increase awareness and understanding of the issues in at-risk communities. Despite the progress made, there is a need for more concerted efforts in specific areas—particularly with regard to vulnerability reduction in remote areas. This can be achieved not only by child sexual exploitation specific NGOs but can be incorporated into broader social, community and economic development programmes.

There have been a number of initiatives concerned with shifting norms against the acceptance of sexual exploitation of children. Governments in the region – and ASEAN as the leading intergovernmental association – have supported attempts to develop cross-border cooperation and education campaigns, which gives hope that, in the medium term, the region will shift to reduce the vulnerability of children and minimise the threat of sexual abuse. In the meantime, children continue to suffer, which highlights an urgent need for stronger action now (suggestions are discussed below).

To help accelerate a shift in norms, several additional measures are also promising. First, alongside practical enforcement capacities there would be benefit in public, high-level endorsement of a zero-tolerance approach to corruption in this area. If there is one area of enforcement that should defy excuses, it is looking the other way while children are sexually abused. Political leadership on this front should be uncontroversial. On the positive side, exemplary dedication and skill in investigating and prosecuting child sex offenders could be made the subject of honours and awards.

There is also an opportunity to build on efforts to sensitise law enforcement. UNODC has been working to influence the knowledge, attitudes and practices of law enforcement officials in order to equip them to combat child sexual exploitation and protect victims. Implemented in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand, one effect was to increase understanding of what child sexual exploitation entails, including that it does not just occur because children are ‘naughty’.

Shifting focus to foreigners, there is also a culture of ignorance and tolerance towards child sex offending. Perhaps the most basic way to prevent child sex exploitation of children in Southeast Asia is to weed out foreign offenders. The practice of turning a blind eye deserves targeting: who would be better to act as spokespeople than tourists?

Some initial steps have been taken in this area. In recent years, for example, World Vision developed a Child Safe Tourism campaign, in collaboration with ministries responsible for tourism and culture in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam and the International Tourism Partnership. The initiative provided training to travel agents and hotels regarding the issues surrounding child abuse in tourism and how they can support the protection of children.^{94 95} The initiative also reached out to individual travellers and should now be built upon by new efforts to inform and warn travellers

⁹⁴ World Vision Australia, *The Child Safe Traveller*, 2013. p.5.

⁹⁵ Through agents such as Kiwi Travel, Intrepid Travel and PATA Thailand.

UNWTO, *Report on the 29th Meeting of the World Tourism Network on Child Protection* (formerly the Task Force for the Protection of Children in Tourism) at ITB Berlin, Germany, 7 March 2014, p.9.

directly, for example during flight bookings, hotel reservations and upon arrival at their destination. The request should be twofold: first to instruct travellers to avoid this behaviour and to encourage them to report suspicious situations and second, to provide them with a mechanism by which they can do so.

Conclusions

Tackling child sex exploitation is no simple task. Finding solutions to this appalling crime will require a concerted effort from a multitude of actors across the region. The dividends from a well-coordinated response include efficiency and respect for the rule of law, but most importantly, it will create a safer environment for children and ensure offenders are stopped in their tracks.

Action in one country will be insufficient as offenders will migrate to jurisdictions with less resistance. For too long, a piecemeal approach has been the norm, and while national governments and the international community can count some major successes in the past few years, without a comprehensive response to the problem, exploitation will continue to lurk just below the surface.

The analysis above has indicated some relatively basic steps involving international cooperation and the standardisation of approaches, which would create a supportive platform for the more sophisticated efforts to strengthen dedicated capacities. A new determination to safeguarding children is not beyond the region's ability: it is the minimum required to combat the shocking actions of child sex offenders.

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UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

**United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific**

United Nations Building, 3rd floor B Block, Secretariat Building, Raj Damnern Nok Avenue, Bangkok 10200, Thailand
Tel. (66-2) 288-2091 Fax. (66-2) 281-2129 E-mail: fo.thailand@unodc.org
Website: <http://www.unodc.org/southeastasiaandpacific>