

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

Approximately 2 million children, most of them girls, are enslaved in the global commercial sex trade.

The term 'Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (or CSEC) is used to describe the various activities that exploit children for their commercial value including: child sex tourism, child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes.

The term implies that the child is not only sexually abused but that there is a profit arising from the transaction – in cash or kind – where the child is considered to be a sexual and commercial object. CSEC is enshrined in Articles 34 and 35 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CSEC describes a practice that exists to some degree in every society. However there has been a rapid expansion of CSEC in the last decade, making it a problem of global proportions. Although it is impossible to verify how many children are involved in commercial sexual exploitation, recent research and anecdotal evidence shows the numbers continue to increase.

Large, well organised child sex industries have emerged in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Pacific region and Indo-China. Increasing numbers of young people in developed countries are at risk of experiencing sexual exploitation and abuse. Current trends include:

- More offenders are seeking out new destinations for child sex tourism.
- More offenders are sexually exploiting children through the internet by luring children, exchanging information and distributing child pornography.
- More children and young people in developed countries are exchanging sex for survival.
- More children are being trafficked across new routes, borders and between continents.

The children/young people susceptible to commercial sexual exploitation are both girls and boys, although primarily girls aged from 10 to 18. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 'child' refers to a person aged less than 18 years of age unless otherwise specified by the law of the country.

Causes of CSEC

The causes of CSEC are complex and involve many interrelated factors. Many children entering child sex industries come from poor rural families or are homeless children living on the street. They may be sold by someone they know to a procurer, arrive in a city with false expectations and be forced into the sex industry, be misled about the nature of their work, or be abducted. Children and young people may also become involved to support their families, to supplement their income from other sources, to meet their survival and daily needs or are sexually exploited because they have no protection or shelter. Other risk factors include: histories of abuse, drug use, insecure income and unemployment, difficult family background, a lack of viable choices and isolation within society. There is great diversity in the circumstances and levels of exploitation locally, regionally and globally.

Who are the Child Sex Offenders?

There is great diversity amongst child sexual offenders. Child sex industries serve both local and foreign offenders. The vast majority of offenders are men, although women can also abuse children. The reasons for offending are many and diverse, but offenders generally fall into one of two categories: situational offenders and preferential offenders. The situational or opportunistic offender does not have a true sexual preference for children, but engages in sex with children for varied and sometimes complex reasons. The preferential offender (sometimes called a paedophile) has a definite sexual preference for children. Their sexual behaviour is highly predictable. They are smaller in numbers than situational offenders but potentially can abuse large numbers of children.