The role of OSCE participating States in combating orphanage trafficking

OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

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Kari Johnstone
OSCE Special Representative
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Prologue

Stephen Ucembe
Regional Advocacy Manager for Hope and Homes and Lived Experience Expert

The Land Rover turned left from the main road and stopped outside a tall, rusty black gate. A guard, as if expecting the car, quickly opened one gate to the left with his left hand and swung the other to the right with his right hand. He ushered me and my two siblings into a childhood in an orphanage in the outskirts of Nairobi. I was about five years old, joining over 150 other children inside. The image of my arrival is stuck in my mind, partly because we hardly ever left that rusty gate afterwards. The place felt more like a prison.

Despite my father and three other siblings being alive, we were immediately labelled as orphans during our first encounter with volunteers and donors, mostly from the global north. Volunteers were a common sight, frequently arriving in tour vans on weekdays and weekends. As soon as they arrived, we were quickly summoned, gathered and paraded under a large old tree at the centre of the orphanage. We had already been taught how to behave; we had memorized poems and songs to convey gratitude to them and the orphanage, to sing praise of how happy we were to have the volunteers at our 'home'.

We were trained to believe the orphanage was our home, even though many of us knew we had families and other places we considered home. During the introduction and presentation by staff, all visitors and donors were made to believe that we had nowhere else to go and no one else to support us. We were presented as 'abandoned', 'rejected', or as though all our parents had died with no known relatives. The whole idea was to make the visitors see that there was no life for us apart from the orphanage.

These visits by volunteers reinforced a feeling of how different we were from those children in the communities with their families. We had no private life, were there to be seen and experienced, to gratify the sought exotic experience of donors and volunteers. There was no choice about entertaining them; we knew this was to ensure they would give and come back. These volunteers came with donations in kind or cash, some committed to sponsoring some children, while others promised to fundraise for the orphanage after returning to their countries.

Over decades, many orphanages have been started or sustained by funding from global north donors and the 'voluntourism'[1] industry. Incentivized not by the plight of these children but by the perceived and real amount of external funding to 'orphans' in the orphanages, the global south has experienced a proliferation of orphanages that have been established by unscrupulous individuals and agencies, mostly unregistered and unregulated, hiding behind the veil of 'care and protection' centres.

Many volunteers and global north donors are unaware of the reality of how children are removed from their families and communities and confined to orphanages where they are silenced, exploited and used as bait for fundraising.

Families struggling with livelihoods are often approached and coerced into making a devastating choice: either forego assistance or allow their children to be taken to orphanages to receive help. Others are duped into believing their children are being taken to facilities where all their needs will be met free of charge.

1 Voluntourism, a combination of volunteering and tourism, is used to describe tourist trips that are taken with the intention to volunteer in a foreign country.

Although my father visited me once in the orphanage when I was about ten, he was warned never to come again. He was told to either stop visiting—and we would continue getting support—or to take us with him, which would be the end of the support by the orphanage. He made the tough choice to leave us behind, but it should have never been so. After years of living in that orphanage, over 300 kilometres away from the rest of the family, my identity was shaken and broken. I lost my cultural background and my mother tongue, and my relatives and siblings became more like strangers; the bond was severed. There was no feeling or inclination in me to call or identify them as family.

Today, thousands of children confined in orphanages are denied the chance to visit or be with their families because many of these orphanages want to appear to be keeping 'real' orphans—kept in servitude, to bring these orphanages as much money as possible while camouflaging as 'care centres'. The truth is that over 80 per cent of children in these orphanages are not orphans. And, given a choice and the right support, many parents and caregivers with children in orphanages have said they would prefer to keep their children.

Today, I share my story and experiences not to elicit sympathy but to help people who unknowingly have fed this system understand this issue better and, when they know better, to better protect these vulnerable children. Therefore, you might be asking: now that I know the problem, what can I do to stop this vice, a vice that has now been recognized as a form of modern-day slavery.

First, speak up against orphanage trafficking. Do not fall prey to individuals and agencies, including tourism agencies, that offer tourism experiences to orphanages in forums and on social media pages and websites.

Second, stop supporting orphanages. Remember that whatever we feed, grows. We should stop funding orphanages. We are not asking you to stop giving. Give wisely, understand the cause you are giving to, and support initiatives that uphold human rights.

Third, educate yourself and others. Ensure that even the younger generation understands orphanage trafficking. Schools and other tertiary institutions can join hands to learn, create awareness and commit to stopping orphanage trafficking.

Lastly, through their external actions, countries in the OSCE should ensure that their funding does not support orphanages. They should encourage and support governments in the global south to end the era of orphanages.

Foreword

Kari Johnstone
OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator
for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

The OSCE has long placed the prevention of child trafficking, the protection of child victims, and the prosecution of perpetrators at the heart of its anti-trafficking efforts. These priorities have consistently guided our work, ensuring that children's rights and well-being remain at the forefront of our agenda. As early as 2005, the Addendum to the OSCE Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings urged participating States to develop national co-ordination and referral mechanisms specifically addressing child trafficking. Combating child trafficking has since remained a key area of political commitment within the OSCE framework, and Ministerial Council Decisions 7/17 and 6/18 have shaped my Office's engagement with participating States since then.

One of the most misunderstood and often overlooked forms of child trafficking is orphanage trafficking. This practice emerges at the nexus of child institutionalization and exploitation and involves the deliberate recruitment of children into institutions to attract donations, volunteers, and/or other forms of financial support. The OSCE Ministerial Council has long recognized the risks associated with institutionalization and child trafficking. Decision No. 1107: Addendum to the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings: One Decade Later specifically highlights in Article 1.2 that special attention should be given to children in institutions/orphanages. Additionally, Decision No. 13/04: The Special Needs for Child Victims of Trafficking for Protection and Assistance calls for countering the demand that fuels child trafficking, including through combating child sex tourism, which is closely linked to orphanage trafficking.

Orphanage trafficking represents a complex challenge that requires targeted and co-ordinated responses from countries that contribute to the problem and where such trafficking occurs. Orphanage trafficking thrives on systemic weaknesses in child protection systems, poverty and social inequality; and it is driven by the demand of the global orphanage industry, including international donor funding and orphanage tourism, where volunteers and tourists pay to visit orphanages and interact with the children there.

This publication seeks to shed light on the role of OSCE participating States in combating orphanage trafficking—a pressing yet overlooked form of child trafficking. It highlights the pathways through which children are trafficked into institutions, analyses both the demand and supply side that fuels orphanage trafficking, examines the policies that perpetuate the institutionalization of children, and showcases best practices for reducing the exploitation and abuse fuelled by the orphanage industry.

As much of the demand for orphanage tourism and volunteering, funding, and unregulated donations originate in the OSCE region, we bear a significant responsibility to address and dismantle this harmful practice. I therefore urge you—as policymakers, practitioners and advocates—to use this publication as a tool to drive meaningful change. This includes ensuring foreign aid does not inadvertently fuel orphanage trafficking and instead strengthens family-based alternatives to institutional care and eliminates exploitative voluntourism practices. No child should be separated from their family and placed in an institution simply to meet the demand for volunteers. Our collective efforts must work toward keeping children everywhere safe from exploitation and trafficking and allowing them to thrive.

Acronyms and abbreviations

APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
Guidelines	Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
LMIC	Low- and Middle-income Countries
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Palermo Protocol	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNTOC	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

What is Orphanage Trafficking?

Orphanages are often thought of as institutions where children without parental care live, however in many cases the children living in such institutions are not orphans.[2] Some of these children have been transferred or recruited into orphanages for the purpose of profit and exploitation—a process referred to as 'orphanage trafficking'.[3]

Orphanage trafficking is a relatively recently identified form of child trafficking, which emerges at the nexus of child institutionalization and exploitation.[4] Orphanage trafficking typically involves a child being recruited or transferred into residential care from their family, often based on false pretences or deceptive promises.[5] Once in the orphanage, children may be exploited in various ways, including through being forced to participate in orphanage tourism and/or made to perform for tourists or volunteers, or by being used to attract funding from donors, but also for sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery-like practices and other forms of exploitation.[6] In many cases, children who are victims of orphanage trafficking are exposed to multiple forms of exploitation while living in residential care.

The publication *Description of Indicators of Orphanage Trafficking*, drafted by Griffith University, the UBS Optimus Foundation and the Better Care Network, provides a detailed analysis of the key indicators of the acts, purpose and means of orphanage trafficking. It explains how orphanage trafficking involves deceptive or coercive means to place children in institutions for purposes such as profit, forced labour, sexual exploitation and illicit adoption. The document outlines specific warning signs, including unauthorized admissions, falsified documentation, active recruitment of children and patterns of financial misappropriation. It also highlights the psychological and behavioural consequences experienced by trafficked children, such as trauma bonds and coerced narratives.

For further details on orphanage trafficking and the specific indicators outlined, readers are encouraged to refer to the Appendix of this publication and/or the publication Description of Indicators of Orphanage Trafficking*, which can be accessed here:* **Description of Indicators of Orphanage Trafficking**.

This definition of orphanage trafficking aligns with Art. 3 of the **United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime Supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children** (Palermo Protocol), adopted in 2000.[7] Most victims of orphanage trafficking are children at the time the trafficking occurs.

2 Orphanages may also be known as children's homes, children's villages, childcare homes, shelters, hostels or boarding houses.

3 van Doore, K.E. (2022). *Orphanage Trafficking in International Law.* (Cambridge University Press). p. 4.

4 Bales, K., Hedwards, B., Silverman, B., Costaguta, L., Trodd, Z., & Wright, N. (2018). *Modern slavery research: the UK picture*. **https://iascresearch.nottingham.ac.uk/ResearchingModernSlaveryintheUK.pdf**. p.9.

5 Commonwealth Government of Australia. (2018). *Hidden in Plain Sight.* (Senate Committee Inquiry into establishing a Modern Slavery Act in Australia). **https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/ModernSlavery/Final_report**. Chapter 8.

6 van Doore, K.E. (2016). *Paper orphans: Exploring child trafficking for the purpose of orphanages*. The International Journal of Children's Rights. 24(2). 378–407.

7 The Palermo Protocol has been ratified by all OSCE participating States.

According to the **Palermo Protocol** and the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, a child is any person under the age of 18 years of age. The trafficking of children is a process comprised of only two distinct stages: the act and the purpose.[8] In recognition of the vulnerability of children, the means element is not required to establish the crime of child trafficking. Despite orphanage trafficking often involving the deliberate recruitment or transfer of children from their families to residential care institutions via deceptive means, such as convincing parents that they cannot care for their children, or by claiming the children are orphans when they are not, the means element is still not required.

The process of orphanage trafficking where the child is transferred into an orphanage for the purpose of exploitation takes place in what are termed 'occurring countries'. The demand for orphanage trafficking is created by international funding and people engaging in orphanage tourism emanating from what are termed 'contributing countries'.[9]

PHOTO: Shutterstock / William.Visuals / Chiang Mai, Thailand - 17/10/2019

8 Art. 3(c), Palermo Protocol.

9 van Doore, K.E. (2022). *Orphanage Trafficking in International Law*. (Cambridge University Press). p. 179.

Relevance for the OSCE

Combating trafficking in human beings is a core mandate of the OSCE, with participating States committed to addressing all forms of exploitation, including through eliminating the demand that fosters human trafficking. Orphanage trafficking is driven by this demand, as contributing countries—including OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation—send funding, visitors and volunteers to orphanages in occurring countries.

Orphanage trafficking exploits the most vulnerable children—including those separated from families due to poverty and/or conflict, children from disadvantaged communities or rural areas, children belonging to minority groups, and children with disabilities, among others. The OSCE consistently prioritizes the protection of vulnerable populations, especially children, who are disproportionately affected by trafficking. Addressing orphanage trafficking is therefore not only within the scope of the OSCE's mandate but also a critical part of its commitment to upholding the rights and well-being of these children.

Voluntourism, a demand driver for orphanage trafficking, is valued at US$1.7–2.6 billion annually and involves over 10 million volunteer tourists per year.[10] *A study focused on the United States found an estimated 4 million people from the United States alone volunteer in orphanages every year, and that US Christians donated US$3.3 billion annually to residential care facilities overseas.*[11]

The **2003 OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings** provides a comprehensive framework for addressing all forms of human trafficking, including practices like orphanage trafficking, even though it does not explicitly mention orphanage trafficking. Recommendation 1.1 of the **2003 OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings** calls for the collection of data on trafficking in human beings and particularly specifies that the OSCE should promote more research and exchange of information on trafficking in children. Recommendation 3.3 calls for all countries to adopt or strengthen legislative, educational, social, cultural or other measures and, where applicable, penal legislation, including through bilateral and multilateral co-operation, to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that in turn leads to trafficking.

10 Milne, S., Thorburn. E., Hermann, I., Hopkins, R., & Moscoso, F., (2018). *Voluntourism Best Practices: Promoting Inclusive Community-Based Sustainable Tourism Initiatives.* (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation). **https://www.apec.org/publications/2018/05/final-report---voluntourism-best-practices-in-the-apec-region**. p. 5.

11 Barna Group. (2021). *Residential Care: US Christian Giving and Missions*. **https://www.faithtoaction.org/wp-content/uploads/F2A_Residential-Care_Report_Final.pdf**. p. 10.

PHOTO: Shutterstock / Grobler du Preez / Wolwefontein, South Africa - 07/03/2016

This is supported by **Decision No. 1107 Addendum to the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings: One Decade Later,** Art. 1.2 of which particularly articulates that special attention should be put on children in child institutions/orphanages and children in alternative care, amongst others, by promoting targeted awareness raising and public education.

The OSCE has specifically targeted combating sexual exploitation of children, particularly in the context of child trafficking. **Decision No.15/06 Combating Sexual Exploitation of Children** recognizes the trafficking of children for sexual exploitation and calls for action to combat the issue through co-operation between OSCE participating States, including by facilitating legal protection and assistance for child victims, enhancing investigation and prosecution of perpetrators, and supporting measures to eliminate demand in collaboration with civil society. **Decision No.13/04 The Special Needs for Child Victims of Trafficking for Protection and Assistance** calls for countering demand for child trafficking, including combating child sex tourism, which is closely linked to orphanage trafficking. It calls for participating States to consider extraterritorial jurisdiction for the sexual exploitation of children when such exploitation had occurred in another country. In that regard, **Decision No. 685 Addendum to the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings: Addressing the Special Needs of Child Victims of Trafficking for Protection and Assistance** calls for strengthening co-operation and improving exchange of information between States with a view to prevent child trafficking and protect and assist child victims of trafficking. **Decision No. 6/18 Strengthening Efforts to Prevent and Combat Child Trafficking, including of Unaccompanied Minors** calls for a child protection framework to be adopted in addressing child trafficking, and that efforts to prevent child trafficking and to reduce demand should be promoted.

The demand for orphanage trafficking involves transnational elements, including international donor funding and orphanage tourism, where volunteers and tourists pay to visit orphanages and interact with the children. While OSCE participating States have enforced strict laws and policies governing who can work with or interact with vulnerable children in their own jurisdictions—requiring specific professional qualifications and experience—these standards are often not extended to tourists and volunteers visiting and volunteering in orphanages in low-income countries. In this respect, Art. 4 of **Decision No.7/17 Strengthening Efforts to Combat all forms of Child Trafficking, including for Sexual Exploitation, as well as other forms of Sexual Exploitation of Children** is particularly pertinent to combating orphanage trafficking as it acknowledges the link between tourism and child trafficking. It calls on participating States to prevent all forms of child trafficking and sexual exploitation, including in tourist destinations, and to work with the private sector and civil society to raise awareness and educate travellers to help eliminate the demand that fuels child trafficking and sexual exploitation of children.

Orphanage trafficking is a growing issue, fuelled in part by the demand stemming from countries within the OSCE region. Therefore, the OSCE plays a crucial role in addressing this issue. OSCE participating States are key players in both creating and responding to the demand for orphanage trafficking, often through weak regulation and lack of oversight. By addressing orphanage trafficking as part of national anti-trafficking responses, countries in the OSCE region can take concrete steps to address the demand side of orphanage trafficking and tackle its root causes, including through the regulation of foreign aid funding, the strengthening of legal frameworks and the enhancement of child protection systems. Additionally, the OSCE can support the creation of more robust governance structures to prevent exploitation. These efforts would allow the OSCE to combat child trafficking more effectively, ensuring that children are no longer trafficked or exploited under the guise of care and protection.

The Context for Orphanage Trafficking

There are up to 5.4 million children growing up in orphanages globally, yet it is estimated that at least 80 per cent of these children have a living parent that could care for them with support.[12] The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that there are 20,000 child victims of trafficking globally, with a lack of parental care cited as a key vulnerability to trafficking.[13] Neither of these figures represent the number of child victims of orphanage trafficking who remain hidden due to a variety of factors.

These factors are largely predicated on the failure to recognize the connection between child institutionalization and human trafficking. This means that orphanage trafficking is not included in domestic legal frameworks and child institutionalization is not recognized as a potential risk factor for child trafficking, leading to a corresponding failure to identify victims of orphanage trafficking.

Orphanage trafficking, in which children are recruited and trafficked into institutions for the purpose of financial profit and other forms of exploitation,[14] is a form of institution-related trafficking of children. There are four main ways in which institutional care and human trafficking are linked:

children are recruited and trafficked into institutions for the purpose of exploitation and profit, known as orphanage trafficking;

children are trafficked out of institutions into other forms of exploitation;

care leavers who have grown up in institutional care are highly vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking; and

child victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children are placed in institutional care in the absence of parental care, which can put them at risk of exploitation, trafficking and re-trafficking.[15]

In recent years, orphanage trafficking has gained global attention, shedding light on the exploitation of vulnerable children for profit. In 2019, a **report from the United Nations Secretary-General** highlighted the potential harm to children stemming from orphanage voluntourism, particularly from a wave of short-term, unqualified staff, volunteers and interns in orphanages, and stated that awareness campaigns educating such potential participants were an emerging area of progress.[16]

This was followed by the **2019 United Nations General Assembly Rights of the Child Resolution on children without parental care**, which specifically addressed orphanage tourism as a driver of child trafficking into orphanages and encouraged State Parties to take appropriate measures in addressing the harms related to volunteering programmes in orphanages, including in the context of tourism, which could lead to trafficking and exploitation.[17]

12 Nowak, M. (2019). *Report of the Independent Expert leading the United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty.* (UN Doc A/74/136). **https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc/united-nations-global-study-children-deprived-liberty**. 13/23.

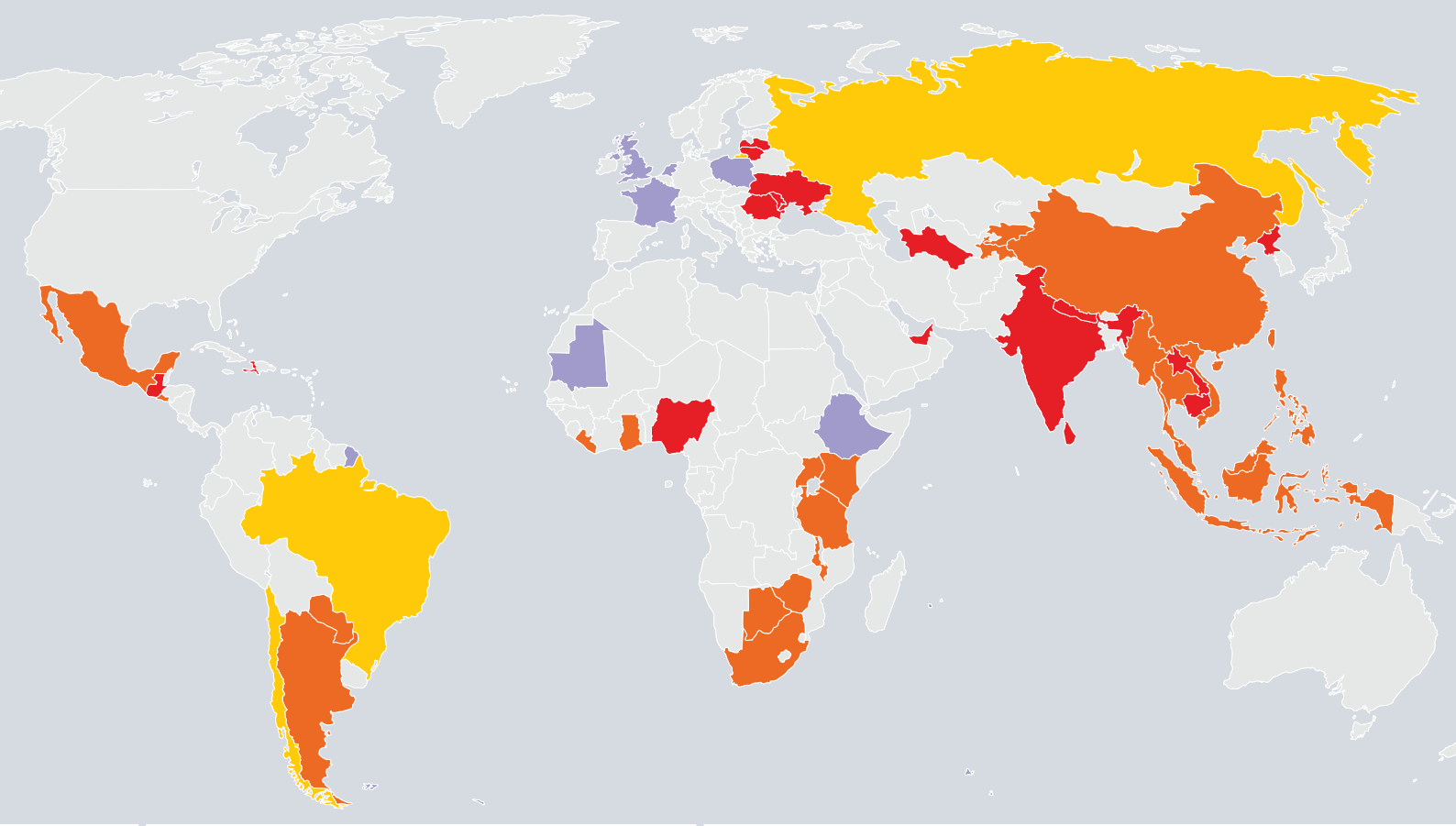
13 UNODC. (2024). *Explainer on Child Trafficking.* **https://www.unodc.org/unodc/frontpage/2024/July/explainer_-understanding-child-trafficking.html**

14 van Doore, K.E. (2022). *Orphanage Trafficking in International Law.* (Cambridge University Press). p. 4.

15 Lumos. (2021). *Cycles of Exploitation: The Links Between Children's Institutions and Human Trafficking. A Global Thematic Review*. **https://www.wearelumos.org/resources/cycles-of-exploitation**. p. 6.

16 Secretary-General, United Nations. (2019). Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – Report of the Secretary General. (A/74/231). **https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n19/232/06/pdf/n1923206.pdf**. 9/17.

17 United Nations General Assembly. (2019). Promotion and protection of the rights of children: Report of the Third Committee. (A/74/395). **https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n19/387/07/pdf/n1938707.pdf**



	US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report or United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report (2017–2021)
	Academic literature source (2000–2020)
	Grey literature source (including media articles) (2000–2020)
	Call for evidence submission or key informant interview (2019–2020)
	No relevant evidence found

MAP 1: DOCUMENTED GLOBAL OCCURRENCE OF TRAFFICKING INTO INSTITUTIONS
Country-level evidence from after 2000, including cases of exploitation of children residing in institutions and reports of increased vulnerability to human trafficking (broken down by most relevant evidence category)

Source: Cycles Of Exploitation: The Links Between Children's Institutions And Human Trafficking - Lumos Foundation (page 11)

The **2022 report by the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children** noted that orphanage trafficking constitutes a form of trafficking to which children in institutional care are particularly vulnerable.[18]

This high-level international attention belies the actual identification and prosecution rates of orphanage trafficking. It is critical that States are aware of the issue and take action to combat orphanage trafficking, whether they are a contributing or occurring country.

Orphanage trafficking often emerges in **low- and middle-income countries** (LMICs) with specific vulnerabilities regarding a combination of socio-economic, legal and institutional factors. Such factors typically include a weak rule of law, under-developed child protection systems, and an over-reliance on **residential care institutions (orphanages)** that are often privately run, poorly (or not) regulated, and heavily dependent on overseas funding.

In countries with privatized orphanages and residential care institutions, the motivation for running these institutions can shift from child protection to profit generation. Some orphanages may resort to fabricating orphan statuses or maintaining fake records to secure donations, volunteer support, or tourism, contributing to trafficking in children. This is particularly the case in countries where international donations and volunteer tourism are significant sources of funding. In countries with insufficient child protection frameworks, children may be more vulnerable to orphanage trafficking. Without strong child gatekeeping systems to verify the legitimacy of whether a child requires out-of-home care, children can be trafficked or placed in institutions under false pretences.

Inadequate or poorly enforced legal frameworks for orphanage trafficking create gaps in child protection and criminal law systems that traffickers or unethical

18 Singhateh, M.F. Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material. (2023). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material.* (A/78/137). https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a78137-sale-sexual-exploitation-and-sexual-abuse-children-report-special

orphanage operators can exploit.[19] While most countries are signatories to international treaties such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Palermo Protocol, enforcement of laws related to child protection, trafficking and the regulation of orphanages and residential care institutions is often inconsistent. In some countries, law enforcement agencies may lack the capacity or the political will to investigate and prosecute cases of orphanage trafficking.[20]

The 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report highlights that in Nepal, "some orphanages and children's homes force children into manual labor or begging, force them to entertain visitors for donations, and sexually abuse them. Under false promises of education and work opportunities, some Nepali parents give their children to brokers who take them to frequently unregistered children's homes and force the children to pretend to be orphans to garner donations from tourists and volunteers. Approximately one-third of registered orphanages do not meet the government's minimum standards, and some children's home operators force children to beg or keep children destitute to attract donations. Observers estimate nearly 11,000 children remain in Nepal's approximately 418 registered children's homes and "orphanages" despite approximately 80 percent having at least one living parent. Seventy-five percent of registered Nepali orphanages and children's homes are located in the country's five main tourist districts, and police sometimes arrest tourists or international volunteers, mostly from Western countries, for sexual abuse of Nepali children, including child sex trafficking."[21]

Following consistent research attesting to the harms of child institutionalization,[22] many countries have adopted deinstitutionalization mandates to progressively phase out the use of institutional care for children in favour of community- or family-based care. However, in some countries where residential care institutions are predominantly privatized and depend heavily on international donor funding, this outdated model of care is sustained by orphanage tourism and foreign financial support. This abrogation of state responsibility to civil society and the subsequent increased privatization of alternative care has seen unregistered orphanages proliferate in some lower-income countries obfuscating governmental oversight, with some governments failing to conduct or enforce registration or monitoring requirements.[23]

A study by the Lumos Foundation found that at least US$70 million was donated to over a third of Haitian orphanages annually. This funding was primarily given by Christian donors from North America. However, at least 140 institutions were found to have extremely harmful living conditions where children were at high risk of violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and preventable death.[24] *The 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report stated that in Haiti, ''Orphanage entrepreneurs operate unlicensed orphanages that exploit children in trafficking. In June 2023, media reported 30,000 children were in orphanages. Approximately 80 percent of children in orphanages have at least one living parent, who may place children in an institution deemed more likely to be able to care for them, and almost all have other family members."*[25]

19 ECPAT. (2016). *Offenders on the Move: Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism* **https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Global-Report-Offenders-ovn-the-Move.pdf**. p. 62.

20 Lumos. (2021). *Cycles of Exploitation: The Links between Children's Institutions and Human Trafficking.* **https://www.wearelumos.org/resources/cycles-of-exploitation**, p. 49.

21 United States Department of State. (2024). *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report – Nepal Country Report.* **https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/nepal**

22 Sherr, L., Roberts, K.J., & Gandhi, N. (2017). *Child violence experiences in institutionalised/orphanage care*, Psychology, Health & Medicine. 22 (sup1). p. 33.

23 Brubacher, S. P., van Doore, K. E., & Powell, M. (2021). *Responding to orphanage trafficking from an information gathering perspective.* Child Abuse & Neglect. 120. 105222.

24 Lumos. (2017). *Funding Haitian Orphanages at the Cost of Children's Rights*. **https://www.wearelumos.org/resources/funding-haitian-orphanages-cost-childrens-rights/**. p. 3.

25 United States Department of State. (2024). *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report – Haiti Country Report.* **https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/haiti**.

The Nexus between Orphanage Tourism and Orphanage Trafficking

Orphanage tourism is linked to orphanage trafficking and refers to the practice where tourists or volunteers visit orphanages to provide care, support or funding to children.[26] This can include both short visits and longer-term volunteering experiences by tourists and travellers, often from high-income countries.

Orphanage tourism is often referred to as a form of voluntourism or volunteer tourism. **Voluntourism and volunteer tourism are organized and/or packaged tourism products that involve a period of volunteering, often with little to no supervision and no criminal background checks conducted.**[27] Voluntourism is estimated to be worth over US$2.7 billion annually, with more than 800 organizations globally offering voluntourism opportunities to over 151 countries.[28] An Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) study found that the largest number of sending organizations were located in the United States, with the highest numbers of volunteers coming from Western Europe, the United States and Canada. While the profile of voluntourists is predominantly young (20–25 years) and female, the second largest demographic are older (60–75 years), illustrating that voluntourism is not exclusively a youth-led activity. In APEC countries, 79 per cent of all volunteering with children takes place in residential care settings.[29]

Orphanage tourism has been documented in 37 countries.[30] The reliance on foreign funding and orphanage tourism to sustain institutional care models undermines national efforts to reform care systems and invest in family-based services. In some regions, orphanages are established in tourist hotspots to cater to the demand for orphanage tourism.[31] When children are separated from their families to live in institutions for the purpose of meeting this demand or securing foreign funding, their fundamental rights—such as the right to family life, parental contact and protection from exploitation—are at risk of being violated.[32]

Orphanage tourism can also include short visits to orphanages to watch child performances, or to entertain the children and conduct activities with them. During these interactions, volunteers and tourists often have unsupervised and unrestricted access to the children, posing further risks to their safety and protection.[33]

Orphanage tourism results in children being vulnerable to forms of labour and sexual exploitation with children residing in the most corrupt centres "often perceived to be accessible for more than humanitarian activities".[34] Orphanage tourism contributes to a cycle of harm and exploitation for children by fuelling a system that prioritizes profit over the children's welfare and perpetuating the existence of residential care institutions.

26 van Doore, K.E., & Nhep, R. (2023). *Orphanage tourism and orphanage volunteering: implications for children*. Frontiers in Sustainable Tourism, 2. 1177091. p. 1.

27 The Code. (2021). *Voluntourism Policy.* https://thecode.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Voluntourism-Policy-2021.pdf.

28 Milne., S., Thorburn. E., Hermann, I., Hopkins, R., & Moscoso, F., (2018). *Voluntourism Best Practices: Promoting Inclusive Community-Based Sustainable Tourism Initiatives.* (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation). https://www.apec.org/publications/2018/05/final-report---voluntourism-best-practices-in-the-apec-region. p. 5.

29 Ibid.

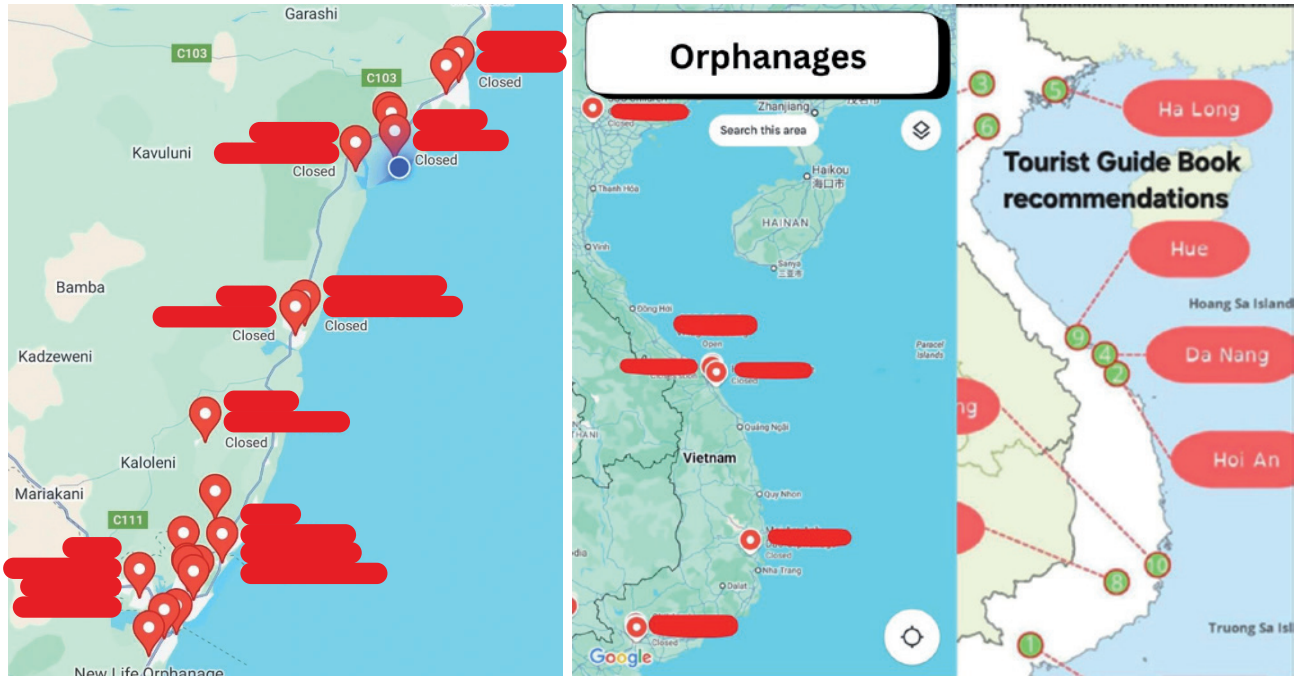
30 Better Care Network. (2014). *Collected viewpoints on international volunteering in residential care centres: an overview.* https://bettercarenetwork.org/bcn-in-action/key-initiatives/rethink-orphanages/resources/collected-viewpoints-on-international-volunteering-in-residential-care-centres-an-overview.

31 Ibid.

32 Reid, H. (2019). *Orphanage Tourism and the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. In Cheer, J., et al. (2019). Modern Day Slavery and Orphanage Tourism. (CABI). 3–18.

33 ECPAT. (2016). *Offenders on the Move: Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism* https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Global-Report-Offenders-on-the-Move.pdf. p. 40.

34 Guiney, T., & Mostafanezhad, M. (2015). *The political economy of orphanage tourism in Cambodia*. Tourist Studies. 15(2). p. 141.



The map on the left illustrates a high concentration of orphanages along Kenya's coast, aligning with the country's major tourist hotspots. **The map on the right** shows the correlation between the orphanage locations and tourist attractions in Vietnam.

The consistent global messaging that there are millions of orphans in need of support creates a demand for interventions such as orphanage tourism that are often perceived as altruistic.[35] Orphanage tourism is consistently legitimized by faith-based communities, education providers, gap year organizers, travel companies, and even embassies. This varied support base means that multi-sector-based approaches are necessary to tackle the issues associated with orphanage tourism and orphanage trafficking.

It is important to note that while orphanage tourism should be discouraged by OSCE participating States, this does not mean that all volunteering and voluntourism is harmful. Ethical volunteering and voluntourism programmes that seek to minimize negative impacts and maximize benefits for local communities should be encouraged. Volunteering and voluntourism programmes that focus on sustainable and responsible travel practices that do not exploit vulnerable populations or reinforce harmful systems and aim to empower communities and support long-term development rather than short-term emotional gratification should be encouraged.

35 Cheney, K.E., & Rotabi, K.S. (2014). *Addicted to Orphans: How the Global Orphan Industrial Complex Jeopardizes Local Child Protection Systems*. In: Harker, C. et al (Eds) Conflict, Violence and Peace. Geographies of Children and Young People. p. 11.

International Legal and Policy Framework to combat Orphange Trafficking

The international legal framework related to combating orphanage trafficking is shaped by a combination of international conventions, regional treaties and national laws designed to protect children's rights, prevent trafficking and ensure that vulnerable children are not exploited in institutional care. These key international legal instruments provide guidance for OSCE participating States on their obligations to address orphanage trafficking.

International Legal Framework

The following international conventions provide a framework of obligations and responsibilities regarding orphanage trafficking.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted in 1989 and entered into force in 1990. The CRC establishes that children should grow up in a family environment or, when this is not possible, in alternative care settings that protect their rights. It sets out the framework for ensuring that any form of institutionalization is in the child's best interests and under appropriate legal safeguards. Art. 9 states that children should not be separated from their parents against their will unless it is necessary for their best interests (e.g., when there is abuse or neglect). This is particularly relevant to orphanage trafficking, as children are sometimes separated from their families under false pretences. Art. 20 provides that children who are deprived of their family environment have the right to special protection and assistance. It underscores the obligation to provide appropriate care and protection for children who cannot live with their families. References to trafficking and exploitation are contained in Arts. 35 and 36, which provide that State parties are required to take all appropriate measures to prevent the abduction, sale or trafficking of children, and that States must protect children from any other forms of exploitation that may harm their well-being.

The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol), adopted in 2000 as part of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and entered into force in 2003, aims to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, protect and assist victims, and promote co-operation among countries.

Further to the definition of trafficking in children found in Art. 3(c), the Palermo Protocol recognizes the specific vulnerabilities of children in trafficking situations, including in Art. 6, which establishes the obligation of States to provide assistance and protection to victims of trafficking, including the need to ensure safe and secure shelter and psychological care. Further, Art. 9 calls for States Parties to take measures to alleviate factors that make persons, especially children, vulnerable to trafficking and to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons that leads to trafficking. Although children are consistently identified as being in special need of protection, they are often grouped together with other broad categories of vulnerability populations, resulting in a lack of comprehensive strategies tailored to address their specific needs.

PHOTO: Shutterstock / Anna_plucinska / Gam Island, Raja Ampat, West Papua, Indonesia - 28/10/2019

The **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography**, adopted in 2000 and entered into force in 2002, explicitly addresses the sale of children for exploitative purposes, including trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced labour and other forms of abuse. It provides an international legal standard for protecting children from all forms of exploitation that may be linked to orphanage trafficking. Art. 2 requires State parties to criminalize the sale of children, including trafficking for the purpose of forced labour or sexual exploitation. In some instances, States may prosecute components of orphanage trafficking as sale of a child. Art. 3 requires States to take all measures to prevent the sale of children and to provide victims with appropriate support, protection and reintegration into society.

The **International Labor Organization Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour,** adopted in 1999 and entered into force 2000, explicitly prohibits the trafficking of children for exploitative labour, including forced labour and sexual exploitation. The Convention requires governments to take immediate and effective measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including trafficking. Children trafficked into orphanages are at risk of being subjected to harmful labour practices, including forced labour in orphanage-run enterprises or illegal activities.[36]

The **Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children**, welcomed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2009 and adopted in 2010, provide a critical framework for addressing orphanage trafficking by promoting policies and practices that reduce the demand for institutional care and prioritize family-based alternatives. The Guidelines emphasize that institutional care should be a last resort, used only when all other family-based and community-based options have been exhausted. Orphanage trafficking often thrives in environments with an over-reliance on institutional care, where orphanages are seen as the default solution for vulnerable children. By discouraging unnecessary institutionalization, it directly targets a key driver of orphanage trafficking.

In the context of orphanage trafficking, the separation of children from their families is often manipulated. To address this, the guidelines emphasize the importance of family-strengthening programmes, poverty alleviation and community support to help keep children with their families and eliminate incentives for institutionalization.

36 Lumos. (2020). *Cracks in the System: Child Trafficking in the Context of Institutional Care in Europe.* **Cracks In The System - Lumos Foundation**, *p. 18.*

Traffickers frequently exploit families' financial struggles or lack of knowledge to recruit children into institutions under false pretences. Stringent oversight, monitoring and regulation of alternative care systems, including residential care institutions, are called for. Orphanage trafficking often occurs in poorly regulated settings where there is little accountability for the recruitment and treatment of children.

The Guidelines urge residential care facilities to operate transparently and comply with strict standards to prevent exploitation. They indirectly address issues such as orphanage tourism and donor-driven institutionalization, which are key enablers of orphanage trafficking. The emphasis on family-based care and community services over institutional solutions discourages the creation and funding of unnecessary orphanages, thereby reducing the demand for trafficked children.

The Guidelines explicitly state that the care and protection of children must not be driven by financial gain or donor interests. Orphanage trafficking often involves exploiting children to attract donations or voluntourism. By advocating for ethical practices and prioritizing the best interests of the child, the Guidelines can be implemented to eliminate the financial incentives that fuel trafficking.

The Guidelines prioritize the reintegration of children into their families or placement in family-based care, such as foster care, rather than long-term institutionalization. This shift reduces the population of children in orphanages, diminishing opportunities for traffickers to exploit institutional care systems.

The **Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Guidelines on the deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies** (CRPD/C/5 2022) provides in paragraph 143 that States parties should prevent volunteering by foreign tourists in institutions (i.e., 'voluntourism') by providing appropriate travel guidance and raising awareness about the Convention and the dangers of institutionalization.

The **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)** representing 181 parliaments adopted a resolution on **Orphanage Trafficking: The Role of Parliaments in Reducing Harm** at its 147th Assembly in October 2023, addressing the issue of orphanage trafficking and outlining specific actions for Member States to combat this form of exploitation. Key recommendations for States include criminalizing orphanage trafficking as a distinct offence, promoting family-based care, strengthening deinstitutionalization programmes, enhancing regulation of alternative care for children, prohibiting practices such as orphanage tourism and volunteering in orphanages, fostering international collaboration and co-operation to combat orphanage trafficking, allocating resources for enforcement, and supporting victims of orphanage trafficking.

The **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015 do not explicitly mention orphanage trafficking, but they address many of its underlying drivers and related issues through broader goals and targets, including Target 8.7: Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms; and Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. The SDGs provide a framework to combat orphanage trafficking by promoting child protection, reducing poverty, improving education and strengthening justice systems. However, the heightened vulnerability of children is underlined by a lack of reference to them and the challenges they face in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the absence of associated targets.

The **Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption**, adopted in 1993, focuses on illegal adoption, which is distinct from orphanage trafficking; however, there are intersections. For example, where a child is trafficked into an orphanage for an initial purpose of exploitation, they may then be further trafficked into international adoption.[37] The Hague Adoption Convention primarily addresses intercountry adoption but includes safeguards against the illegal or unethical practices of trafficking and abduction of children for adoption purposes. The Convention mandates that children involved in international adoption be given appropriate care and protection, ensuring that no child is trafficked for adoption purposes or placed in institutions where their status as an 'orphan' is fabricated.

The Convention stresses that children should not be deprived of their family environment unnecessarily, which is relevant to the context of orphanage trafficking, where children are falsely presented as orphans to attract donations or volunteers.

Links between exploitation and tourism are also acknowledged by Art. 2.3 of the **World Tourism Organization Global Code of Ethics for Tourism,** which calls for States to energetically combat exploitation in accordance with international law, but does not mention orphanage tourism or trafficking explicitly.

Regional Legal Frameworks

In addition to the OSCE commitments referenced above, the **European Convention on Human Rights** (ECHR) adopted in 1950 provides a broader legal framework for the protection of human rights within the Council of Europe's Member States, including the protection of children from exploitation and abuse. Art. 3 prohibits torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or punishment. Children placed in exploitative orphanages are often subjected to conditions that could be considered degrading or harmful, making this article potentially relevant to addressing cases of orphanage trafficking. Art. 8 protects the right to private and family life. Any form of trafficking or wrongful separation of children from their families, as seen in orphanage trafficking, may violate this fundamental right.

The **Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings** adopted in 2005 is aimed at preventing human trafficking, protecting victims and promoting international co-operation. The Convention specifically targets trafficking in persons for various forms of exploitation, including labour exploitation, sexual exploitation and illegal adoptions. Art. 4 obligates States to criminalize trafficking and to adopt preventive measures to address the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty and lack of family-based care options. The Convention also emphasizes the importance of providing protection and assistance to victims of trafficking.

The **European Union Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims** adopted in 2011 provides that child victims of trafficking should have an individual assessment of their special circumstances undertaken to find a durable solution for the child and to prevent re-trafficking. Arts. 14 and 16 particularly highlight that Member States should appoint a guardian for child victims where they are unaccompanied or their parents are precluded from ensuring the child's best interests due to a conflict of interest. Art. 7 of the **Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU** on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims outlines that children placed in residential and closed-type institutions are particularly vulnerable to trafficking in human beings. It highlights their vulnerability to trafficking when being placed in an institution, whilst residing in the institution, and after they leave the institution. Art. 33 encourages EU Member States to ensure that their national child protection plans have specific plans to prevent trafficking in children, including children in residential or closed-type institutions.

In sum, the legal framework addressing orphanage trafficking is primarily composed of treaties and conventions designed to safeguard children from exploitation, including trafficking, while promoting transparency and accountability in institutional care systems. Although these frameworks establish comprehensive protections, their enforcement at the national level presents significant challenges. Combating orphanage trafficking necessitates enhanced national implementation of these international instruments, stricter regulation of alternative care for children, strengthened international collaboration, and a shift toward alternative care models that prioritize family-based care over institutionalization.

37 van Doore, K.E. (2022). *Orphanage Trafficking in International Law.* (Cambridge University Press). pp.7–8.

How do OSCE participating States contribute to Orphanage Trafficking?

As with all forms of human trafficking, orphanage trafficking is driven by demand (voluntourism, orphanage tourism, donations and funding), which must be met with a ready supply (the child portrayed as being orphaned). Many OSCE participating States, being key donors and volunteer-sending countries, are unintentionally driving the demand for orphanage trafficking.

While it is important to note that no state explicitly endorses orphanage trafficking, there are several structural and policy-related factors that may inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation of the problem, both in and by some OSCE participating States. While orphanage trafficking takes place in 'occurring countries', contributing countries are those that send funds, volunteers and visitors to orphanages or residential care institutions in other countries. Typically, occurring countries exhibit a high prevalence of children in residential care due to weak implementation and enforcement of child protection frameworks.[38]

OSCE participating States may also unintentionally contribute to orphanage trafficking through unwittingly creating economic incentives for orphanage trafficking through a dependence on foreign funding and donations, a lack of public awareness, and the unintended consequences of international volunteer and aid programmes. The intersection of economic incentives, inadequate oversight, and a lack of alternative care options for vulnerable children creates an environment where orphanage trafficking can thrive.

Economic Incentives and Dependence on Foreign Aid

Despite extensive evidence that institutionalization can be harmful to the development of children,[39] institutions and orphanages have proliferated over the past three decades as a response to humanitarian crises and the increased interest of private financial donors in funding the creation and operation of institutions.[40] In many low-income countries, **orphanages** and residential care institutions rely heavily on **overseas funding** from international donors, NGOs or volunteer organizations and a significant percentage are unregistered and unregulated.[41] Where countries rely heavily on international aid, volunteer programmes and foreign donations to support their orphanages and child protection systems, economic incentives can create a false demand for 'orphans' to attract funding.[42]

Funding streams emanating from OSCE participating States include international charities, foreign assistance and embassy funds, private donors, volunteers, corporate social responsibility programmes and international non-governmental organizations. This dependence on external financial resources can incentivize institutions to keep children in care longer than necessary or even fabricate the number of children they care for, to maximize donations. Foreign donors may not always understand the

38 van Doore, K.E., & Nhep, R. (2023). *Orphanage tourism and orphanage volunteering: implications for children*. Frontiers in Sustainable Tourism. 2. 1177091. p. 3.

39 Sherr, L., Roberts, K.J., & Gandhi, N. (2017). *Child violence experiences in institutionalised/orphanage care*. Psychology, Health & Medicine: Know Violence in Childhood Global Learning Initiative. 22(1). p. 33.

40 van Ijzendoorn, M.H., et al. (2020). *Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation of children 1: a systematic and integrative review of evidence regarding effects on development*. The Lancet Psychiatry. 7(8). p. 706.

41 Cheney, K.E., & Ucembe, S. (2019). 'The Orphan Industrial Complex: The Charitable Commodification of Children and Its Consequences for Child Protection'. In Cheney, K.E., & Sinervo, A. (eds). (2019). *Disadvantaged Childhoods and Humanitarian Intervention: Processes of Affective Commodification and Objectification.* Springer. p. 33.

42 Cambodia Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation. (2017). *Mapping of Residential Care Facilities in the Capital and 24 Provinces of the Kingdom of Cambodia.* https://www.unicef.org/cambodia/media/1331/file/Residential%20care%20facilities%20in%20Cambodia%20Report%20English.pdf.

local context or the true circumstances of the children, or the legal frameworks for child protection in a country. As a result, they may unintentionally support or reinforce the existence of residential care institutions despite deinstitutionalization mandates, including exploitative orphanages. The presence of international funds can lead to a **lack of accountability**, as orphanages may prioritize generating income over child protection and welfare.

> *In 2014, a volunteer at a Haitian orphanage reported that children were being exploited to solicit donations from charities and American churches. Meanwhile, the 75 children housed there lived in dire conditions, lacking proper food and sanitation. She observed that in-kind donations were being sold by the orphanage staff and highlighted that her experience was just one example of many orphanages in Haiti operating primarily as profit-driven businesses.*[43]

Some orphanages involved in trafficking market themselves as tourist destinations or volunteer opportunities. The tourism and volunteerism industry surrounding orphanages creates a perverse incentive for institutions to present children as orphans when they are not, or to traffic children into institutions to be showcased to international visitors. Children may be made to perform for tourists or be kept in institutions longer than necessary to maintain a flow of money.[44]

> *In a 2020 study on the European contribution to orphanage tourism and trafficking, it was found that 44 volunteer travel companies offered orphanage tourism, however it is unclear whether this count included mainline travel companies or only those targeting the volunteer market. In Germany, the same study noted that orphanage tourism was more likely to be incorporated into travel packages offered by tourism companies marketing themselves as 'sustainable'.* [45]

43 Lumos. (2016). *Orphanage Entrepreneurs: The Trafficking of Haiti's Invisible Children.* **https://www.wearelumos.org/resources/orphanage-entrepreneurs-trafficking-haitis-invisible-children** p. 15.

44 Lumos. (2021). *Cycles of Exploitation: The Links Between Children's Institutions and Human Trafficking. A Global Thematic Review*, **https://www.wearelumos.org/resources/cycles-of-exploitation**. p. 47.

45 ReThink Orphanages. (2020). *Mapping the European Contribution to the Institutionalisation of Children Overseas: United Kingdom, France and Germany.* **https://bettercarenetwork.org/bcn-in-action/key-initiatives/rethink-orphanages/resources/mapping-the-european-contribution-to-the-institutionalisation-of-children-overseas**. p. 10.

PHOTO: Shutterstock / NikaDeCarolis / Zanzibar, Tanzania, Africa - 11/07/2016

An over-reliance on international aid, where orphanages seek donations from high-income countries or international organizations, can inadvertently foster a system where children are presented as more vulnerable than they are. In these instances, unethical orphanage directors can profit by exploiting this system and presenting children as orphans to attract more donations and volunteers.[46]

Impact of International Volunteer and Aid Programmes

Citizens of OSCE participating States may inadvertently contribute to orphanage trafficking through creating a demand for orphanage tourism and volunteering. The profile of tourists and volunteers coming from OSCE participating States is wide-ranging: from school children to gap year students, families to retirees, employees under corporate social responsibility programmes to embassy officials and partners.

46 Lumos. (2021). *Cycles of Exploitation: The Links Between Children's Institutions and Human Trafficking. A Global Thematic Review*, **https://www.wearelumos.org/resources/cycles-of-exploitation**, p. 47.

A mapping analysis of the European contribution to the institutionalization of children overseas identified the following countries as the top ten global orphanage volunteering hot spots: Nepal, Kenya, Ghana, Cambodia, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, India, Peru and Costa Rica. The study found that the United States, United Kingdom and Australia were the top three countries sending volunteers to orphanages overseas.[47]

While their intentions are usually positive, this influx of volunteers can fuel demand for orphanages to recruit children into care and to keep children in institutional care longer than necessary, creating an economic incentive for orphanages to maintain a constant flow of children. In many countries, governments do not regulate or oversee the volunteer sector, which can lead to a situation where private volunteer programmes engage in or support institutions that exploit children for financial gain, often unknowingly.

There is also a high risk of volunteers and visitors with criminal motives taking advantage of the easy accessibility of children residing in orphanages and residential care institutions. Research shows that child sexual abuse situational offenders seek out positions of trust where they can easily access children without supervision.[48] Orphanage tourism provides these offenders with unfettered access to vulnerable children, making residential care institutions very high-risk locations for this form of exploitation.

Lack of Awareness and Education

There is a lack of public awareness or education about the harmful impacts of orphanage trafficking and orphanage tourism. Many people are not aware that child institutionalization is associated with ongoing negative outcomes for children. In addition, there is a tradition of supporting orphans through charity and faith-based organizations with which many people align. Raising public awareness that donating to, volunteering in, and visiting orphanages and residential care institutions can result in family separation and even trafficking, can be difficult.

Some people and organizations have long attachments to supporting residential care institutions in low- and middle-income countries, as well as 'sponsoring a child' programmes. They often fear that withdrawing their support could lead to dire consequences for the children involved, believing that without this assistance, the children may face neglect or even harm. It is important that public awareness campaigns are carefully designed to promote the transition of donor support and funding to family-based care options, rather than complete withdrawal of support. This can be a powerful tool in assisting residential care institutions that are reliant on foreign aid to consider transitioning their care model in line with their country's child protection framework.

Does Orphanage Trafficking occur in the OSCE Region?

Orphanage trafficking can also occur in the OSCE region, although it is not as widespread or as well-documented as in other regions, notably Africa and Asia.[49] While orphanage trafficking may not have been documented specifically in the OSCE region, there are several examples of child exploitation, including human trafficking, in institutional care settings. There are several contributing factors that increase the risk of orphanage trafficking emerging in OSCE participating States.

In participating States where economic hardship exists, vulnerable families may be more susceptible to being coerced into giving up their children or being tricked into believing their children will have a better life in an institution. In some countries, child protection systems have historically been underfunded or poorly regulated, which allows orphanages and residential care institutions to operate without proper oversight. In these same contexts, demand for orphanage tourism and the flow of funding from international donors can create a perverse incentive for orphanages to keep children in care for financial gain, sometimes leading to exploitative practices. Where child protection systems are weak and under-resourced, orphanages and residential care institutions may be poorly monitored, allowing exploitation and trafficking to occur without being detected.

47 ReThink Orphanages. (2020). *Mapping the European Contribution to the Institutionalisation of Children Overseas: United Kingdom, France and Germany.* **https://bettercarenetwork.org/bcn-in-action/key-initiatives/rethink-orphanages/resources/mapping-the-european-contribution-to-the-institutionalisation-of-children-overseas**. p.10.

48 Lyneham, S., & Facchini, L. (2019). *Benevolent harm: Orphanages, voluntourism and child sexual exploitation in South-East Asia*. Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice. (574). pp. 2–3.

49 Lumos. (2021). *Cycles of Exploitation: The Links Between Children's Institutions and Human Trafficking. A Global Thematic Review*. **https://www.wearelumos.org/resources/cycles-of-exploitation**.

Promising Practices, Challenges and Gaps

Some OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation countries have been active in recognizing and taking action to combat orphanage trafficking. Promising practices have included early recognition and integration of the links between institutionaliza tion and trafficking in anti-trafficking policy, conducting research into how a country contributes to orphanage tourism internationally, and adopting travel warnings regarding orphanage volunteering.

Examples of Promising Practices

Australia – Regulating engagement with orphanage tourism

Australia, an OSCE Partner for Co-operation**,** has taken several steps to regulate engagement with orphanage tourism and volunteering, including restricting access to government funding and introducing regulatory measures for charities with overseas activities.

A 2016 report by ReThink Orphanages examined Australia's role in supporting the institutionalization of children abroad. The report revealed that around 75 per cent of Australian charities operate internationally with children, and nearly 10 per cent are involved in or support residential care institutions. The report also found that 57.5 per cent of Australian universities promote orphanage placements for students, while 14 per cent of secondary schools visit, volunteer at, or fundraise for overseas orphanages.

Residential care for children, overseas volunteering and child sponsorship are categorized as high-risk activities under the regulations, and charities are required to meet minimum safeguarding requirements and relevant minimum standards, as set out in Australian law and the laws of the host country.[50] Effectively, this makes Australian charities' support for unregistered overseas institutions, including through sending volunteers or facilitating orphanage tourism, an ineligible activity for Australian charities, including churches.[51]

United Kingdom and Australia – Recognition of orphanage trafficking as a form of modern slavery

The **United Kingdom**[52] and **Australia**[53] have acknowledged orphanage trafficking as a reportable type of modern slavery falling under their respective Modern Slavery Acts. Australia also explicitly identified engagement with children through orphanage tourism and other forms of voluntourism as a specific sector or industry risk indicator for modern slavery in the Acts' guidance material for reporting entities.[54]

50 Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission. (2024). *External Conduct Standards, Standard 4.* https://www.acnc.gov.au/for-charities/manage-your-charity/governance-hub/acnc-external-conduct-standards.

51 ReThink Orphanages Australia. (2019). *Working with Children in Residential Care: Implications of the ACNC External Conduct Standards for Australian Charities.* https://bettercarenetwork.org/bcn-in-action/key-initiatives/rethink-orphanages/resources/working-with-children-in-residential-care-implications-of-the-acnc-external-conduct-standards-for.

52 United Kingdom Secretary of State for the Home Department. (2019). *Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-the-modern-slavery-act-final-report. p. 63.

53 Commonwealth Government of Australia (2019). *Modern Slavery Act 2018: Guidance for reporting entities.* https://modernslaveryregister.gov.au/resources. p.80.

54 van Doore, K.E., & Nhep, R. (2019). Orphanage trafficking, modern slavery and the Australian response. *Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity.* 7(2). 114–138.

Sweden – Integration of links between orphanage tourism and trafficking in its Action Plan

The Government of **Sweden** articulated the direct links between orphanage tourism and trafficking in its 2016–2018 Action Plan to protect children from human trafficking, exploitation and sexual abuse, stating that "the general public must also be informed of the existence of exploitation and human trafficking in children in connection with orphanage tourism and voluntary work in other countries, and how this can contribute to the increasing vulnerability of children".[55]

Ireland – Codes of Good Practice for tourism

Comhlámh's and Tearfund Ireland's End Orphanage Volunteering working group has worked in **Ireland** to raise awareness about the harmful effects of orphanage care and volunteering since 2016. Comhlámh's 2024 Code of Good Practice for Volunteering Sending Agencies is a set of standards for Irish Volunteer Sending Agencies (VSAs).[56] VSAs commit to child-safe volunteering, ensuring that no programmes or activities involve the sending of volunteers to orphanages, with one exception—the sending of skilled and vetted volunteers in support of de-institutionalization. All signatories to the Code of Good Practice pledge to prioritize the best interests and well-being of children and families, to ensure that volunteering opportunities positively contribute to communities while safeguarding children.

The most significant global network of 'Volunteering for Development' organizations, the International Forum for Volunteering in Development, launched the Global Volunteering Standard in 2019, updated in 2021. A core requirement of the Standard is that "organisations do not allow volunteers to work with or within orphanages or other residential care facilities for children".[57] This includes that organizations cannot work with companies that have orphanages and other residential care centres incorporated (or with the possibility to incorporate) in tourism programmes or packages, and that organizations do not allow or facilitate one-off and short-term visits to orphanages or residential care facilities for children.

United Kingdom, Netherlands, United States, Ireland – Travel advisories warning of harms of volunteering and visiting orphanages

Some OSCE participating States have introduced travel advisories warning of the potential harm to children that can be caused by volunteering in and visiting orphanages and residential care institutions, including the **United Kingdom, Netherlands, the United States** and **Ireland**.

The **United Kingdom travel advisory** states: "In some countries, you can volunteer in or visit orphanages, or other child facilities. This can have serious unintended consequences for vulnerable children and communities. A regular turnover of volunteers without relevant training and experience can be harmful to children's development and emotional wellbeing. Some organisations that invite volunteers are profit-oriented, not charitable. Some dishonest organisations have deliberately housed children in poor conditions to attract financial support from visitors. Poor safeguarding practices also increase the risk of abuse. By volunteering in or visiting such organisations, you may unknowingly contribute towards child exploitation, and you may put yourself at risk of accusations of improper behaviour. If you're considering any volunteering opportunities with children or young people, consider these additional risks and safeguarding issues carefully in your research and planning."

ABTA, international charity Hope and Homes for Children and Border Force of the UK campaign advising UK tourists and volunteers against visiting overseas orphanages

55 Government of Sweden, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. (2016). *About what must not happen - a road map. The Swedish Government's action plan to protect children from human trafficking, exploitation and sexual abuse 2016–2018 – English summary.*

56 Comhlámh. (2024). Comhlámh's Code of Good Practice for Volunteering Sending Agencies. **https://comhlamh.org/code-of-good-practice**.

57 International Forum for Development. (2021). *Global Volunteering Standard*. **https://forum-ids.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/The-Global-Volunteering-Standard-EN-2021-compressed.pdf**. p. 14.

The **Irish travel advisory** states: "International volunteering in the Global South is popular among young Irish people. While in some countries it may be possible to volunteer in or visit orphanages, this can have serious consequences for children. Growing evidence demonstrates the links between institutions and trafficking, with volunteer visits helping to sustain an 'orphanage industry', increasing the risk of exposure to abuse and exploitation."

Netherlands – Research into orphanage tourism as a contributing country

In 2019, the **Dutch Parliament** held a parliamentary round table on orphanage tourism. The round table heard evidence from experts on the harms of institutionalization, how orphanage tourism intersected with child trafficking, and how Dutch citizens and organizations continued to fund institutional care in other countries. The Dutch government subsequently commissioned research on how the Netherlands was involved in orphanage tourism. The report examined the scale and impact of voluntourism from the Netherlands to residential care institutions for children, focusing on roles, responsibilities and potential actions. It found that voluntourism to orphanages often perpetuates harmful practices, including the separation of children from their families and the exploitation of their vulnerabilities for profit. Many orphanages rely on donations and voluntourism, which unintentionally incentivize institutional care over family-based solutions. The report highlighted the need for greater awareness among Dutch travellers and stakeholders about the risks of orphanage voluntourism and recommended measures to reduce its prevalence. It emphasized prioritizing family and community-based care systems, implementing stricter regulations, and fostering international collaboration to protect children from exploitation. The study concluded that the origin and maintenance of orphanage tourism was the result of a complex interplay between supply and demand and led to the government issuing travel advice discouraging orphanage tourism and warning of the potential links to orphanage trafficking.[58]

Germany - Research into orphanage voluntourism

Research on voluntourism in orphanages has also been undertaken in **Germany**. Two initial reports *From Volunteering to Voluntourism* in 2015 and 2018 examined the evolution of volunteer work into a tourism product, highlighting the challenges and implications of this trend. The analysis of 50 voluntourism products in the German-speaking market revealed that many offerings were increasingly tailored to the desires of travellers, often at the expense of local community needs. Key concerns included insufficient preparation and follow-up for volunteers, inadequate child protection measures, and a lack of genuine collaboration with local organizations. The reports emphasized the necessity for stricter standards and regulations to ensure that voluntourism benefitted host communities and safeguarded vulnerable populations, particularly children.[59]

In 2023, the study was updated.[60] It again found that voluntourism, particularly orphanage volunteering, posed significant dangers, including abuse, exploitation and emotional harm. While regulated programmes like "weltwärts" followed some standards, flexible voluntourism offerings lacked mandatory child protection frameworks, leaving gaps in safeguarding measures. Despite a shift towards environmental and non-child-related projects, orphanage volunteering remained prevalent among some providers. The study highlighted inadequate screening processes, weak child protection policies and the need for stricter regulations to mitigate risks. With the market recovering after the COVID-19 pandemic, the report called for robust measures to protect children and promote ethical practices in voluntourism.

Promising Practice – Regulating overseas volunteering with children

In 2021, **France** incorporated two new articles into the *Programming Law on Solidarity Development and the Fight Against Global Inequalities* assisting with regulating

58 Slot, B., Kinsbergen, S., Kuijpers-Heezemans, S., Hoog, G., Konijn, E., & Wijk, A. V. (2020). *Onderzoek omvang vrijwilligersreizen vanuit Nederland naar residentiële zorginstellingen voor kinderen: Rollen, verantwoordelijkheden en handelingsperspectief: Eindrapport.* **https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ministerie-van-buitenlandse-zaken/documenten/rapporten/2020/07/15/onderzoek-omvang-vrijwilligersreizen-vanuit-nederland-naar-residentiele-zorginstellingen-voor-kinderen-rollen-verantwoordelijkheden-en-handelingsperspectief**.

59 Brot für die Welt., et al. (2018). *From Volunteering to Voluntourism: Challenges for the Responsible Development of a Growing Travel Trend.* **https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/Fachinformationen/Profil/Profile18_Voluntourism.pdf**.

60 Brot für die Welt, Tourism Watch & ECPAT. (2023). *Update 2023: Child Protection and Voluntourism. Preliminary findings on the German voluntourism market.* **https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/blogs/Monshausen_Antje/German-voluntourism-market_2023.pdf**.

outgoing volunteer and voluntourists.[61] Art. 9 was incorporated, requiring background checks for volunteers and trainees intending to work with children overseas, and extending the domestic prohibition on contact with minors relevant to persons convicted of certain offences to also apply to overseas volunteers. Art. 8 ensures that voluntourism opportunities where participants pay to volunteer cannot be termed a form of 'voluntary work' by tourism companies. This provision can allow for the prosecution under fraud provisions of tourism companies that sell voluntourism products falsely advertising orphanage volunteer work as beneficial for children.

Promising Practice – Kigali Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform

Some OSCE participating States are also part of the Commonwealth. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in June 2022, the Kigali Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform was unanimously passed, recognizing that the Commonwealth must work together to end the institutional care of children and to reform child protection services. The Declaration is a landmark agreement among Commonwealth nations aimed at upholding and restoring children's rights in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a special focus on marginalized and excluded groups. It outlines commitments to transition from orphanages to community-based care for children; address the root causes of family separation; establish sustainable and effective child safeguarding systems; and eradicate child labour in all its forms, including forced labour, trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Promising Practice – Recognition of orphanage trafficking in reporting

In 2017, the annual Trafficking in Persons Report published by the **United States** Department of State articulated the link between orphanage tourism and child trafficking for the first time in the Nepal Country Narrative, stating that some children were "forced to pretend to be orphans to garner donations from tourists and volunteers". The 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report included a special interest topic on Child Institutionalization and Human Trafficking,[62] which specifically linked voluntourism as a driver of child recruitment and trafficking into orphanages, highlighting that voluntourism resulted in unintended consequences for children and potentially incentivized orphanage owners to increase revenue by expanding the recruitment of children into orphanages to open more facilities. The report highlighted that such orphanages facilitated child trafficking rings through recruiting children into orphanages and exploiting them to profit from donations. Since 2017, the US Trafficking in Persons Report has consistently recorded such links in the narratives of several countries, ensuring that orphanage trafficking is brought to the attention of governments for action.[63]

In 2019, the **Norwegian** government released a report making recommendations for the Norwegian Government's development programme to combat modern slavery. The report noted that "orphanages may be an entry point into slavery for both orphans and children with parents. Children may be exploited in such institutions, or may be sold by the institutions for exploitation in other situations. Persons who have stayed in such institutions may also be more vulnerable to enslavement later in life."[64]

Promising Practice – Development of orphanage trafficking Indicators

A first-of-its-kind study conducted in Cambodia in 2022 found that 68 out of 102 investigated cases of sexual or labour exploitation of children in residential care met the criteria for orphanage trafficking.[65] This likely represents only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the actual number of orphanage trafficking cases, due to underreporting, a narrow investigative focus on sexual exploitation and a lack of awareness of profit as a purpose for orphanage trafficking, criminalized under Cambodia's child trafficking offences.[66] In addition to an analysis of cases, the study produced the first set of evidence-based indicators of orphanage trafficking that can be used to enhance detection and victim identification.[67] These indicators were integrated into social work case management tools to improve the identification of victims of orphanage trafficking. This tool was piloted in

61 Government of France, Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères. (2021). *Programming Law on Solidarity Development and the Fight Against Global Inequalities*. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_a5_loi-developpement_v1-8.-valide_cle423118.pdf.

62 United States Department of State. (2018). *Child Institutionalization and Human Trafficking*. https://2017-2021.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/283784.pdf.

63 United States Department of State. (2018). *2018 Trafficking in Persons Report*. https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-trafficking-in-persons-report. p. 22.

64 NORAD. (2019). *Mapping of modern slavery and recommendations for the Norwegian Government's development programme to combat modern slavery*. https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/modern_slavery/id2670039. p. 7.

65 Nhep, R., Deck, S., van Doore, K., & Powell, M. (2024). *Detecting orphanage trafficking and exploitation*. Child Abuse & Neglect. 152. 106813. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.106813.

66 Nhep, R., & van Doore, K.E. (2021). *The Legal Framework of Orphanage Trafficking in Cambodia*. https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/6f308c62-25aa-4bb1-954d-71f8677bc4ca/content.

67 The *Description of Indicators of Orphanage Trafficking* is found in the Appendix.

PHOTO: Shutterstock / FranciscoMarques

the context of the closure of several residential care institutions that were unregistered and the delivery of reintegration case management services to the children previously in care. By employing these strategies, legislators can play a vital role in combating orphanage trafficking and protecting vulnerable children from exploitation and abuse.[68]

Challenges and Gaps

Despite efforts to combat orphanage trafficking, OSCE participating States continue to face significant gaps and challenges, particularly in raising awareness, ensuring adequate oversight, and effectively monitoring both aid and private funding. As orphanage trafficking has only recently been identified as a form of child trafficking, addressing it remains complex. Key challenges include preventing care reform in occurring countries from being undermined by continued funding from donor states, increasing public awareness of the harms of child institutionalization and orphanage tourism, and strengthening legal protections to safeguard children from exploitation in institutional settings.

In many countries where orphanage trafficking occurs, significant strides have been made in care reform, particularly through legislative and policy advancements. However, these efforts face challenges in regions where orphanage tourism and funding for institutional care from international sources remain prevalent. The continued funding and support driven by orphanage tourism sustain existing institutions and foster the creation of new ones, perpetuating a cycle that hinders the transition away from institutional care. In addition, it is difficult for occurring countries to monitor the issue of orphanage volunteering when in many instances visas for volunteering are not applied for or enforced.

A significant gap remains in public awareness of the harms associated with child institutionalization, orphanage tourism and orphanage trafficking. Efforts to educate the public, tourists and volunteers about the risks of orphanage tourism and orphanage trafficking are critical. Ultimately, both orphanage trafficking and orphanage tourism are deeply intertwined with the widespread and inappropriate reliance on institutional care as a primary response to child vulnerability in many low- and middle-income countries. While orphanage tourism is not inherently a crime, it contributes to poor outcomes for children's development and well-being and can drive demand for orphanage trafficking.

Finally, orphanage trafficking remains largely unrecognized as a crime, highlighting a significant gap in awareness and legal response. Orphanage trafficking, as a form of child trafficking, constitutes a criminal act and must be addressed through criminal justice mechanisms specifically targeting child trafficking. Until this gap is recognized and ameliorated in law, child victims of orphanage trafficking may not be recognized as victims of child trafficking and therefore not provided with the support and protection to which they should be entitled to under international (and most national) law. Criminal accountability for the perpetrators of such trafficking of children is not only necessary to provide victims justice but also hopefully would deter other such crimes.

68 Nhep, R. & van Doore, K.E. (2023). *Description of Indicators of Orphanage Trafficking*. https://bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/description_of_indicators_of_orphanage_trafficking_generic.pdf

The Role of Technology, Review Platforms and Social Media

Social media and review platforms can play both a facilitating and mitigating role in orphanage trafficking.

On the one hand, these tools can be utilized for **exploitation intersecting with orphanage trafficking**, such as facilitating online donations to fraudulent orphanages, marketing orphanage tourism and placing already vulnerable children at further risk by disclosing their location and situation on review platforms and social media. On the other hand, such platforms can offer powerful mechanisms to **combat orphanage trafficking**, including enhanced monitoring systems and transparency tools, international collaboration platforms, and awareness campaigns. Addressing the risks associated with orphanage trafficking requires **strong regulation**, implementation of **ethical standards** for technology companies, and **international co-operation** to harness technology in ways that protect vulnerable children and prevent trafficking.

Social media and review platforms as a risk factor to the privacy and safety of children residing in residential care institutions

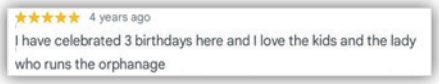
Social media and review platforms can be misused to fuel the demand for orphanage trafficking and exploit vulnerable children. The risks faced by children in orphanages or residential care institutions are significantly heightened by websites that allow users to pinpoint the exact location of an orphanage, view and share images of resident children—often uploaded by visitors, volunteers or even the institution itself—and access personal details such as names, ages and other identifying information. Some platforms also enable the sharing of explicit images of children and feature reviews from individuals who have visited or volunteered at orphanages. In some cases, visitors rent and use orphanages as venues for personal celebrations, such as birthdays or anniversaries, posting photos and videos with the children. Alarmingly, some reviews even include inquiries about whether children are available for marriage.

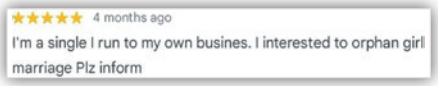
This information is freely available on the internet posing an unacceptably high risk for extremely vulnerable children. **Social media** and **websites** are often used to promote residential care institutions and seek funding, presenting children as 'orphans' to attract donations. Such platforms are also used to promote the activity of orphanage tourism as altruistic and to create **false narratives** regarding the children (e.g., using manipulated photographs or videos) to gather financial support, leading to more children being trafficked or held in institutions for the benefit of those running the facilities.

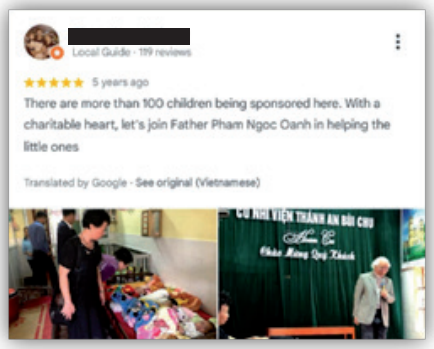
> *A study from Germany highlighted the story of a volunteer, Jennifer (not her real name), who volunteered in an orphanage in Vietnam for four weeks. In an interview, Jennifer stated "The nun in charge of the orphanage often brought tourists to the orphanage and showed them a group of children. The tourists could take photos with them and the nun explained in front of the children and tourists which one of them was raped and which one was not. I found this extremely shocking, as the children were exposed in front of strangers and their friends."*[69]

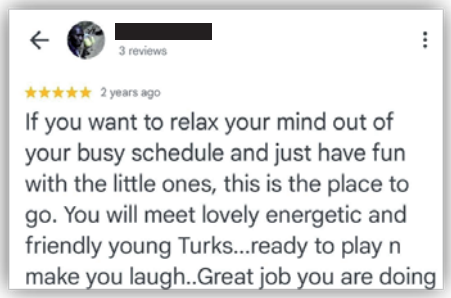
69 Brot für die Welt., et al. (2018). *From Volunteering to Voluntourism: Challenges for the Responsible Development of a Growing Travel Trend.* p. 14.

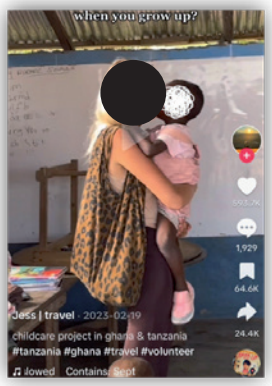
The Voluntourism's digital marketing machine: Examples of how online reviews and social media drive the global orphanage industry

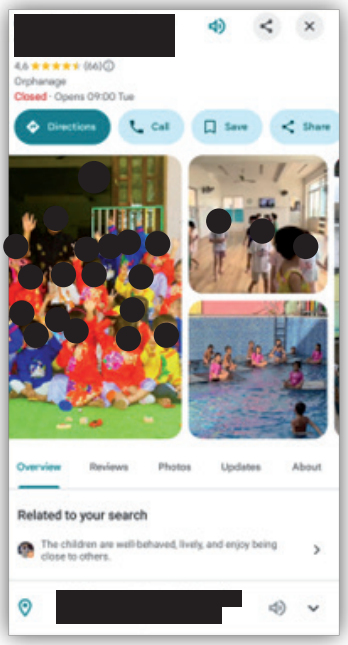


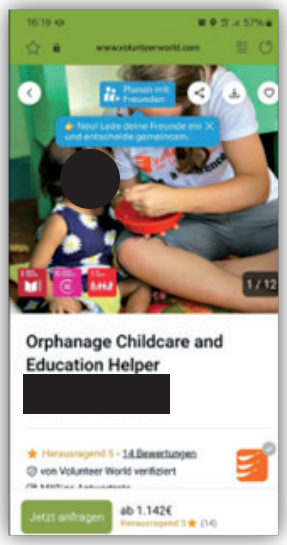


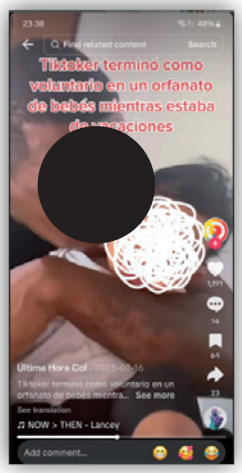


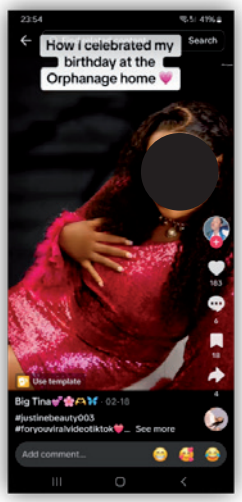


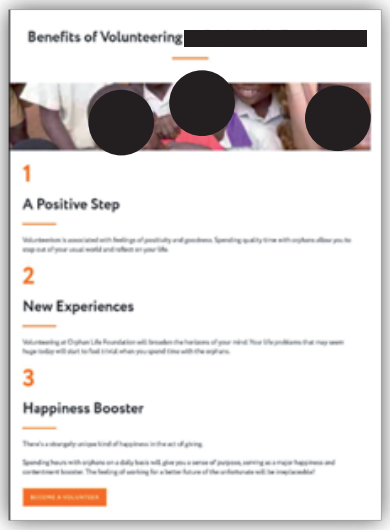












The Children are not Tourist Attractions *campaign, reproduced with permission © 2011–2021 Friends-International/ShildSafe Movement.*

Online platforms and crowdfunding websites also allow orphanages or residential care institutions to collect donations. While some organizations use these platforms legitimately, they also may be misused to attract funding by fabricating stories about orphaned children or exploiting images of vulnerable children.[70] Without proper vetting or oversight, donors, volunteers and visitors may unknowingly contribute to orphanage trafficking.

The Children Are Not Tourist Attractions campaign highlights that many children in orphanages are not orphans and that tourist visits can harm their well-being and contribute to family separation. It encourages travellers to support community-based initiatives and vocational training programmes instead of visiting orphanages, emphasizing the importance of keeping families together and protecting children's rights.[71]

The rise of **orphanage tourism** has been significantly driven by social media platforms, which allow orphanages to market themselves to international volunteers and tourists. A recent study highlighted that despite anti-orphanage tourism campaigns being strategically designed and rolled out in the last decade, Twitter (now known as X) posts about orphanage tourism remained largely positive.[72] A simple search for 'orphanage volunteering' on X, TikTok, Instagram or Facebook brings up hundreds or even thousands of posts with few, if any, referencing visiting orphanages as a potentially harmful practice. Instead, social media platforms are used to promote and advertise such activities.

Technology allows **volunteer organizations** or orphanages to recruit people from across the globe, sometimes for profit-driven motives. While many volunteers are genuinely interested in helping, some organizations may manipulate their desire to assist by using emotional appeals or showcasing children in exploitative ways to raise

70 See, for example, Radziemski, L. 2022. Think twice before becoming a 'voluntourist' at a foreign orphanage, experts say. Euro News. https://www.euronews.com/travel/2022/10/17/think-twice-before-becoming-a-voluntourist-at-a-foreign-orphanage-experts-say.

71 Friends International. (2011). *Children Are Not Tourist Attractions*. https://thinkchildsafe.org/children-are-not-tourist-attractions.

72 Park, S., Pan, B., Font, S., Schroeder, A., Lin, M., & Mowen, A. J. (2024). *Gauging indirect stakeholder sentiment towards orphanage tourism on Twitter.* Tourism Recreation Research. *49*(6). 1259–1272. p. 1272.

funds or attract international attention. Children may be used as **props** or **performers** to enhance the orphanage's appeal, turning them into commodities to gain financial support.[73] Social media can also be used to spread **misleading narratives** about children's backgrounds (e.g., misrepresenting children as orphans when in fact they have families) to attract international volunteers or donors, perpetuating the trafficking cycle.

Technology tools to combat orphanage trafficking

On the positive side, technology can also be a critical tool in **identifying, preventing and combating orphanage trafficking**. Various technological innovations and platforms are used to enhance **transparency**, **regulation** and **monitoring**, as well as to empower **advocacy efforts** to protect children. Technology can be used to develop child protection databases and monitoring tools that track the welfare of children in care. These tools can be used by governments, NGOs and international organizations to track children's statuses, monitor orphanages and residential care institutions for potential violations, and prevent the trafficking of children. For example, **Moldova** partnered with Data for Impact (D4I), funded by USAID, to improve data collection and use in child protection. D4I is creating indicators to monitor policies and developing an automated child protection information system, enabling real-time, evidence-based decision-making and improving case management for children in care. In 2020, the country's government regulated custody placement for children and partnered with NGOs and donors to develop family-based alternatives, like foster care and family support. These efforts have significantly reduced the number of children in residential institutions, from 17,000 in 1995 to 685 in 2021. Through this initiative, Moldovan case managers receive better information about available services, enabling them to make quicker, more informed referrals and improve the overall quality of child protection and care.[74]

Other countries, including those with proportionately high numbers of children in residential care like Cambodia, have implemented **digital case management systems** that allow social workers and child protection agencies

PHOTO: Shutterstock / Jose_Carrillo / Sabhung, Nepal - 26/11/2012

to track and monitor the placement of children in care.[75] In 2021, Cambodia's Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY), with UNICEF support, launched the Child Protection Information Management System dashboard. This platform consolidates 50 child protection indicators, enabling policymakers and service providers to monitor, evaluate and improve child protection programmes, enhancing planning and decision-making.

These sorts of technological interventions result in improved data that significantly enhances efforts to protect children from orphanage trafficking. Data can assist by providing accurate and timely information and can help identify vulnerable children at risk of exploitation and trafficking, enabling the tracking of trends and patterns to target interventions in high-risk areas. Reliable data facilitates the monitoring of care standards, uncovering irregularities that might indicate orphanage trafficking, while also promoting accountability by exposing those complicit in exploitation.

73 UNICEF. (2011). *With the best intentions: A study of attitudes towards residential care in Cambodia*. **https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/study-attitudes-towards-residential-care-cambodia**. p. 8.

74 USAID & Data For Impact. (2024). Data for Impact (D4I) in Moldova. **https://www.data4impactproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/FiguresImagesMoldova508c.pdf**.

75 Goldman, P., et al. (2020). *Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation of children 2: police and practice recommendations for global, national and local actors*. The Lancet: Child and Adolescent Health. 4. p. 626.

PHOTO: Shutterstock / Michael Woodruff / Philippines

Furthermore, data-driven insights inform better policies and resource allocation, strengthening family-based care systems and reducing reliance on institutional care linked to trafficking. Automated systems improve case management by ensuring consistent follow-ups, ultimately supporting evidence-based decisions that address the root causes of orphanage trafficking and enhance child protection efforts.

The internet is a powerful tool for **raising awareness** about the dangers of orphanage trafficking. International organizations have used digital campaigns and social media platforms to inform the public about the risks of orphanage tourism and orphanage trafficking. One example is the **Love you Give** campaign launched by the Better Care Network aimed at educating potential volunteers of the risks of orphanage tourism. The film focuses on the stories of four young people who grew up in orphanages in Kenya who share their stories illustrating the harmful effects of orphanage care for children. Other examples include the **Dear Volunteer** campaign which depicts the issues of orphanage tourism very simply in a two-minute video, the **HelpingNotHelping** campaign which highlights that “orphanages are not a destination”, and the **Thanks No Thanks** campaign recently introduced in the **Netherlands**. By leveraging **viral social media** and **educational videos**, these organizations can reach large audiences and raise awareness about the harmful impacts of orphanage exploitation.

Conclusion

OSCE participating States have a crucial role in combating orphanage trafficking by focusing on education, advocacy, legislation and collaboration. Contributing countries in the OSCE region should focus on prioritizing public education on the harms of orphanage trafficking and voluntourism to foster awareness and understanding among donors, tourists and the wider community.

Awareness campaigns and the use of media platforms should highlight the risks of orphanage tourism and exploitation, promoting informed and ethical choices. A focus should be placed on encouraging donors to redirect their funding to community- and family-based care initiatives.

Advocacy efforts aimed at strengthening families and addressing vulnerabilities through increased funding for preventative services should reduce reliance on institutional care and protect children from exploitation. Funding being sent by contributing countries to occurring countries should be regulated to ensure it does not sustain inappropriate models of care for children.

Comprehensive legislative measures will be essential in explicitly recognizing orphanage trafficking as a form of child trafficking. By harmonizing child protection laws with international standards, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and regulating orphanage tourism, OSCE participating States can address systemic vulnerabilities and ensure a shift from institutional to family-based care models.

Finally, **fostering regional co-operation and information-sharing** among OSCE participating States will help address the cross-border dimensions of orphanage trafficking. Partnerships with governments, civil society and international organizations will enable co-ordinated efforts to reform care systems, implement effective public awareness campaigns, and place child protection at the forefront. Through these collective efforts, OSCE participating States will make significant strides in eradicating orphanage trafficking and ensuring the safety and well-being of vulnerable children.

Recommendations

These recommendations integrate specific actions across the OSCE 4P's framework for addressing trafficking in human beings:

PREVENTION

PROTECTION

PROSECUTION

PARTNERSHIPS

They also on focus on appropriate measures that participating States should take to address and prevent the harms associated with orphanage trafficking.[76] They are categorized according to stakeholder responsibility.

Legislators

- Ensure anti-trafficking law and frameworks enable the prosecution of orphanage trafficking and exploitation offences, including the unlawful removal of a child from parents or guardians and placement in a care facility for the purpose of exploitation or profit.
- Develop and implement charity and not-for-profit sector legislative frameworks requiring that charitable activities comply with international child rights norms, safeguard children's best interests, and protect children from exploitation and orphanage trafficking.
- Establish enforceable child protection regulations for the travel, volunteering and tourism industry that includes regulating orphanage volunteering and visits to orphanages, and other forms of voluntourism activities with or for children. Such regulations should apply domestically and internationally with appropriate penalties imposed.

Tools for Policy Formulation and Capacity-Building

As there are no existing guidelines or policies in the OSCE region focused exclusively on combating orphanage trafficking, it is recommended that support be provided for the development of:

- guidelines for the *prevention* of orphanage trafficking by contributing countries in the OSCE region;
- policy guidelines for *responding* to orphanage trafficking focused on tangible interventions that OSCE participating States can undertake where their volunteers, visitors and funding have been identified in orphanage trafficking in occurring countries;
- training and capacity-building of *awareness* of orphanage trafficking for tourism providers, charities and not-for-profit entities, and companies involved in corporate social responsibility programmes; and
- effective *information and awareness-raising* campaigns on orphanage tourism and orphanage trafficking for the general public in OSCE participating States that should be undertaken.

National Anti-Trafficking Co-ordinator or equivalent mechanisms

- Take an explicit position that orphanage tourism and volunteering can contribute to orphanage trafficking.
- Include responding to orphanage trafficking in the development and implementation of national anti-trafficking responses.

76 These recommendations align with the *Volunteering, Voluntourism, Tourism and Trafficking in Orphanages: Thematic Brief* which was developed by a group of global experts through the Task Force on Orphanage Tourism, Voluntourism and Trafficking, Transforming Children's Care Collaborative to support the implementation of international commitments made in the context of the 2019 UN General Assembly Rights of the Child Resolution on children without parental care: Transforming Children's Care. (2023). *Volunteering, Voluntourism, Tourism and Trafficking in Orphanages: Thematic Brief.* **https://bettercarenetwork.org/about-bcn/what-we-do/key-initiatives/global-collaborative-platform/thematic-brief-volunteering-voluntourism-tourism-and-trafficking-in-orphanages**.

- Develop and strengthen cross-border collaborations and partnerships to prevent orphanage trafficking.
- Ensure there is a safe child- and youth-friendly reporting mechanism accessible to children in residential care, and children and young people who have transitioned or aged out of care, to report exploitation and institution-related trafficking.
- Work in co-operation with occurring country authorities to ensure that orphanages and residential care institutions operated by OSCE participating State citizens and residents can be prosecuted for trafficking crimes under either occurring country frameworks or via extra-territorial legislative frameworks.
- Enhance awareness and child trafficking literacy of criminal justice practitioners and law enforcement institutions to assist in the identification and prosecution of perpetrators involved in orphanage trafficking or the exploitation of children in orphanages.

National Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms

- Take an explicit position that orphanage tourism and volunteering can contribute to orphanage trafficking.
- Conduct comprehensive qualitative and quantitative data collection, as well as research and analysis, on the countries' involvement in orphanage tourism, as well as the scale and impact of voluntourism to residential care institutions for children.
- Systematically analyse the effectiveness of policies and measures undertaken to combat orphanage trafficking and monitor efforts in accordance with national anti-trafficking responses.
- Establish and work co-operatively to implement and enforce extraterritorial jurisdiction for child trafficking crimes.

Ministries of Foreign Affairs

- Take an explicit position that orphanage tourism and volunteering can contribute to orphanage trafficking.
- Regulate all orphanage tourism and volunteering by state-sanctioned or state-funded volunteering programmes, whether domestic or overseas.
- Ensure that the official position on orphanage tourism is reflected in the policy and practice of government agencies and harmonized between agencies.
- Issue travel advisories outlining the risks of orphanage tourism and the links to orphanage trafficking.
- Prohibit the allocation of state development and aid funding, including Official Development Assistance, to any programmes, organizations or governments that include orphanage tourism or volunteering.
- Prohibit embassies from providing funding to orphanages and residential care institutions that participate in orphanage tourism.
- Collect data and conduct research to inform whole-of-government approaches and to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of strategies.
- In occurring countries, enforce relevant visa types for volunteering and voluntourism activities to assist in limiting unintended consequences.

Ministries of Education

- Regulate all orphanage tourism and volunteering in orphanages overseas by schools, universities or educational facilities.
- Educate students on the potential harms of orphanage tourism and volunteering for children in care.

Technology Companies

- Communicate an explicit editorial position that orphanage tourism and volunteering can contribute to orphanage trafficking.
- Prohibit paid or free advertising of orphanage tourism and volunteering.
- Proactively monitor and remove reviews, images and comments by visitors to orphanages or residential childcare facilities on social media, review platforms and websites.
- Collect data and conduct research on the number of organizations using their platforms to promote orphanage tourism.
- Collaborate with occurring country authorities to identify institutions utilizing social media and internet platforms for investigation purposes.

Charity & Development Sector

- Ensure that charitable activities and programming comply with international child rights norms, safeguard children's best interests, and protect children from exploitation and orphanage trafficking.
- Transition financial support for orphanages and residential care to family and community-based care and support.
- Cease to offer or conduct any programmes that include visitors or volunteers participating in orphanage tourism.
- Implement robust child protection policies for any child-related programming.
- Be compliant with the laws and policies in their host country.
- Be appropriately registered and licensed in their host country.
- Meet relevant minimum/national standards, including those pertaining to child protection and alternative care.
- Employ a rights-based approach and do not directly or indirectly cause human rights infringements.
- Protect vulnerable persons, including children, from harm, abuse and exploitation in connection with overseas operations.

Tourism Industry

- Cease to offer or conduct any programmes that include visitors or volunteers participating in orphanage tourism.
- Promote ethical voluntourism in accordance with appropriate codes, such as the Comhlámh Code of Good Practice for Volunteering Sending Agencies and the Global Volunteering Standard.
- Undertake appropriate safeguarding for vulnerable populations in their programmes, including children in residential care institutions and orphanages.

PHOTO: Shutterstock / africa924 / Classroom of a primary school in Africa

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Appendix

Description of Indicators of Orphanage Trafficking

Indicators of Acts: Unlawful Removal, Recruitment, and Transfer of a Child into a Residential Care Facility

Operation of an unauthorized residential care facility (RCF)	RCFs that are not registered in accordance with stipulated laws and regulations, may not be legally permitted to operate or receive children into care. This may indicate that children in their care have been recruited or transferred in contravention of gatekeeping mechanisms[77] stipulated in law and policy. The operation of an unregistered or unauthorized RCF is therefore a strong indicator of unlawful/irregular removal, recruitment and transfer of a child into an RCF.
Irregular or unauthorized admission of children into a RCF	Based on international norms, and domestic law/policy in most countries, children should only be admitted into a facility by mandated child protection authorities and in accordance with the gatekeeping procedures prescribed in alternative care regulations. RCFs should not be authorized to initiate or independently make decisions pertaining to children's admission. Irregular admission includes all admissions not conducted in accordance with laws and regulations of the country. This may include admissions that do not involve the mandated authorities, involve authorities operating outside their jurisdiction, instances of insufficient legal justification, or situations where the procedures for determining that residential care is justified have not been followed. The admission of children into unauthorized RCFs is categorically classed as irregular.

77 Gatekeeping procedures are those that describe the process for assessment and decision making for alternative care placements. It is based on first determining whether alternative care is necessary, and if so, what the most suitable placement is, considering the child's rights and best interests. Gatekeeping requires referring mandated authorities to exhaust all family-based care options before referring a child to residential care.

Active recruitment of children from families	Active recruitment involves directors, staff and/or child finders actively seeking children for admission. It may take the form of promoting RCFs in communities, making direct approaches to families, providing incentives to community leaders to encourage referrals, or encouraging children and families to recruit amongst their peer or family networks. Active recruitment is a strong indicator of unlawful removal, as it constitutes admission by RCF operators rather than mandated child protection authorities. To prevent unnecessary separation and child institutionalization, RCFs should not be permitted to initiate or make decisions regarding a child's placement. Admission should be strictly on referral by mandated authorities who must follow rigorous gatekeeping processes. Voluntary placement of children in RCFs without the involvement of mandated authorities should also not be permissible. As lawful removal and admission should only be based on referral from mandated authorities, active recruitment is a strong indicator of unlawful removal.
Advertising the residential care services in the community	Advertising residential care services is often linked to active recruitment. It can involve direct advertising to families, to community groups, including churches, or to local authorities. Advertising is for the purpose of populating the RCF. As RCFs should not be lawfully permitted to initiate admissions or referrals, direct advertising of RCF services may indicate involvement in unlawful removal and irregular admission.
Incomplete or absent child files	Based on international norms, RCFs should be required under law/regulation to keep a secure file for each child admitted into their care. Files should contain documents such as birth certificates (or copies of), academic transfer records, contact details for families, admission-related information and any other health/education/assessment information gathered over time. The absence of child files, or significant gaps in information in files, can indicate unlawful removal. Gaps in information about a child's family or identity is of particular concern.

Incomplete child intake/ admission forms	When the removal and admission of children into RCFs follows the prescribed gatekeeping process, comprehensive information should be gathered and captured in official forms that are signed and kept in individual child files. Where a requirement to complete formal intake documentation exists in the country, yet forms are incomplete or missing, unlawful removal and irregular admission may be indicated.
Widespread irregularities in children's files and identity documents	In RCFs involved in child trafficking, multiple victims are typically recruited/unlawfully removed under similar means. Patterns of irregularity in children's files or with their identity documents may be observable when multiple files are compared and examined together. These irregularities may include evidence of changed names (non-national names in birth certificates), changes to parents listed on identity documents (for example, the same parent listed on more than one birth certificate of non-biologically related children), numerous identity documents issued from the same local government office other than the office of the child's community origin, or consistent gaps in information about the child's parents or community of origin in intake or case management forms. Consistent irregularities across multiple files may indicate unlawful removal.
Falsified reasons for admission	Gatekeeping mechanisms should stipulate legal justifications for a child's removal from family and placement in an RCF. In many cases where removal and admission is unlawful or irregular, these thresholds have not been met. Stories about hardship, orphanhood, abandonment, vulnerability or risk may therefore be falsified or embellished to justify a child's admission into the RCF. Reasons for admission may be falsified in children's files and documents, as well as in donor and online fundraising communications. In many cases, there are discrepancies between information in the child's file and information provided to the donor. This can be detected by comparing these two sources of information and looking for discrepancies. Similarly, information gathered during child and family assessments that contradicts the information in files or donor communications may indicate that the removal of a child was unlawful/irregular. This is also an indicator of profit as falsification is often for the purpose of soliciting funds.
Paper orphaning	Paper orphans are children who have living parents and whose orphanhood status has been altered on paper to falsely justify the admission of a child into an RCF. This can be through falsified birth certificates, death certificates of parents, abandonment certifications or verification of a child's orphan or abandonment status on formal case management forms. Paper orphaning severs family ties as a means of keeping children in care long-term. It is an indicator of unlawful removal but can also be an indicator of purposes including profit or adoption.

Movement of children from one residential care facility to another	Movement of children from one RCF to another more often occurs between unregistered institutions and can indicate unlawful removal and irregular admission. It is sometimes done to disrupt family contact as part of paper orphaning.
Patron-client relationships occurring in the RCI	Patron-client relationships in RCFs can be between the directors and the families of the children in care and/or the directors and external patrons who may hold positions of power in society. These relationships can be used to (a) recruit children into care, which constitutes unlawful removal and irregular admission and/or (b) protect the RCF from regulatory or legal consequences for unlawful conduct. The presence of patron-client relationships in the RCF can indicate unlawful removal.

Indicators of Purpose: Sexual Exploitation

Withdrawn, isolated, fearful, anxious or aggressive behaviour amongst children	These behaviours are common amongst children who have been victims of sexual abuse or exploitation. They may be heightened for children being sexually exploited in an RCF because they live in a closed environment and under the near-total control of the perpetrator.
Sexually harmful behaviours	Sexualized behaviour and sexual knowledge in advance of child's age may indicate exposure to sexual exploitation or abuse. This may manifest in inappropriate play, developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour towards visitors, volunteers, or other children, or as child-on-child sexual abuse in the RCF. These behaviours may indicate that sexual exploitation is occurring in the RCF.
Grooming of children in the RCF	Children in exploitative RCFs may be groomed for sexual exploitation. Grooming may be indicated when: ■ special attention is paid to certain children (by the director, staff, founder or other stakeholders); ■ some children are intentionally isolated from other children (e.g., asked to do special chores, frequently taken off-site alone); ■ favoritism is displayed towards certain children (gifts, extra food, more opportunities); ■ normal and appropriate personal boundaries are violated; and ■ some children have money or possessions other children don't have, and without occasion or explanation.
Volunteers or visitors taking children off-site unaccompanied	Allowing volunteers and visitors to take children off-site and unaccompanied demonstrates a serious lack of standards to safeguard children. In some cases, the lack of standards results in opportunistic abuse by volunteers.

Physical signs of abuse, STIs, pregnancy, self-harm, drug and alcohol use	Physical marks, bruises, unexplained bleeding, trauma to the genital area, Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), frequent Urinary tract infections (UTIs), teen pregnancy, substance and alcohol abuse and physical signs of self-harm, are all signs that can indicate sexual exploitation or abuse.
Disclosures of sexual abuse made by children/youth	Children or youth who are in care or have left care may disclose or allude to sexual abuse occurring in the RCF. They may indicate this is happening to other children or to themselves. It is rare for children who remain in the RCF to disclose sexual abuse. Typically, disclosures happen once the child/young person has left care and is no longer under the control of the perpetrator/s. Children subject to sexual exploitation as a purpose of child trafficking rarely understand the full extent of what has occurred. They may not see themselves as victims, particularly not of child trafficking. They are more likely to disclose abuse or indecent conduct but are unlikely to understand the full extent of the crime perpetrated against them. Any reports, disclosures, suspicions of sexual abuse or indecent acts of children in an RCF should be treated as potential indicators of sexual exploitation and should trigger an investigation into whether child trafficking may have occurred.

Labour Exploitation

Children working on farms, land, properties or in construction roles	Children in RCFs where exploitation is taking place are often forced to provide manual labour on farms or properties owned by the director or their family members. Labour may include clearing land, farming and construction work. Children are almost never paid for this work. It is often framed as an obligation for the children to demonstrate gratitude to the director for providing them with shelter, food and education.
Children who have been admitted into the RCF providing labour in businesses owned by the director or the director's family	Children subject to orphanage trafficking can be transported to the RCF as a transit destination and then relocated to work in businesses, farms or other initiatives that are not situated at the RCF. In these cases, children may live at these sites without caregivers or appropriate adult supervision. They may not be free to leave and the provision of labour under these conditions may disrupt their education. Where children whose names are listed on the RCF admission list are not present at the RCF and are residing on farms or other property, it may indicate labour exploitation and child trafficking.

Children providing domestic labour in the homes of directors/staff	Some children, particularly older children or youth, may be forced to work in domestic roles in the homes of directors or staff. Such labour may include cleaning, cooking, guarding the property or caring for other children. Children may live at the director's home instead of the RCF, yet may sleep, eat and generally live separately from the director's family. This may indicate child or forced labour.
Children performing for visitors/ volunteers	Children in RCFs may be forced to perform in orphanage tourism shows for volunteers and visitors. These can occur on-site at the RCF or at other tourist venues, including restaurants or theatres. This indicates the purposes of profit and forced labour. Street signage advertising regular orphanage shows, the inclusion of orphanage visits and shows in travel itineraries, performances at other tourism venues by 'orphans' and frequent sighting of tour buses at orphanages, may indicate child labour and the purpose of profit.

Servitude and Slavery-Like Practices

Never or rarely leaving the RCF, or never without the accompaniment of the director or their family members	The exploitation of children for labour or services in RCFs, including orphanage performances, may constitute servitude where children are deprived of their liberty. When children are subjected to the control of perpetrators of exploitation, they are dependent on them for their basic needs (shelter, food, clothing), making it impossible for the children to leave. Where indicators of labour exploitation are present and the child's freedom of movement is entirely or severely restricted, it may indicate servitude.
Children residing on farms/ properties where they provide labour	In some cases, children are trafficked into RCFs and then sent to live and work on farms or properties not on-site at the RCF. Evidence of children living on farms or properties where they are providing labour, who are unsupervised or inadequately supervised, and are not free to leave or cease providing labour, may indicate servitude.
School-aged children not attending school	In most cases, RCFs attract children with the promise of education. If there are children of school age residing in the RCF, who are not attending or are infrequently attending school, this may indicate they are being used to provide involuntary labour or services and are not free or permitted to leave the RCF. This can indicate servitude.

Profit

Orphanage tourism, voluntourism and volunteering	Orphanage tourism, voluntourism and visiting is a practice that places children at unnecessary risk of harm and abuse and indicates poor child safe-guarding standards. It is a strong indicator of the purpose of profit. It includes the following types of activities: ■ Advertising (online or via signage) and/or facilitating voluntourism placements at the RCF, including short-term missions teams ■ Advertising (online or via signage) and/or facilitating visits by tourists and foreign donors to the RCF ■ Advertising (online or via signage) and hosting performances by children at the RCF, or by children from the RCF at other venues Indicators that orphanage tourism, voluntourism and volunteering may be connected to the purpose of profit can also include: ■ Focusing on training children in traditional dance, music or other performing arts ■ Advertising fees for volunteering placements or visits ■ Allowing volunteers/visitors to take children off-site unaccompanied ■ Encouraging children to display inappropriate levels of affection towards volunteers ■ Children indiscriminately displaying affection towards visitors, volunteers. ■ Reporting by volunteers of excessive focus on soliciting donations ■ Using donated goods and funds for purposes other than for the care or benefit of children (being sold, locked away or misappropriated). ■ Locating the RCF in a popular tourist area ■ Connections to the tourism industry (e.g., director is a tourism operator or guide, or the RCF has strong relationships with voluntourism or tourism companies)
Inappropriate disclosure of children's personal details (poor confidentiality standards)	Disclosing a child's personal and confidential information with unauthorized persons, is a breach of the child's right to privacy. Such information includes, identifying details and images, past traumas, situations that led to the child's admission and medical details. When this information is shared with donors, volunteers, visitors, or is included in online posts, or in children's sponsorship profiles, it suggests that fundraising is being prioritized above confidentiality and can indicate the purpose of profit.

Scripted and coached interactions between children and volunteers/visitors	Children in RCFs are often coached to engage with volunteers and visitors in ways that will elicit sympathy and donations. Signs of this can include: ■ inappropriate physical interactions (initiating hugging, sitting on laps or holding hands); ■ coached verbal interactions, including scripted responses to questions, false or inconsistent claims of being orphaned or abandoned, or children appealing to visitors to make donations (e.g., saying they don't have enough food or other provisions); or ■ staged physical appearance (putting on old clothes, making themselves dirty and disheveled for visitors). These signs may indicate the purpose of profit.
Sharing falsified, improbable or embellished narratives about children's backgrounds	Details of children's backgrounds may be falsified or embellished in donor communications as a means of eliciting sympathy and attracting donations and sponsors. Improbable stories of abandonment (being found in a rubbish bin), the sale of children (sold at a market), and abuse (kept in a cage) are indicators of profit, particularly where there is no supporting evidence or verification. Evidence of this falsified information may be found in online donor communications (web and social media), in direct communications sent to donors (emails, written sponsorship profiles, messages) or verbally communicated to visitors and volunteers.
Involving children in begging, recruiting volunteers or visitors, or other fundraising activities	The use of children in the fundraising activities of RCFs, including unlawful activities such as begging, may indicate commodification of their vulnerability to elicit sympathy from donors and prospective donors. It may indicate the purpose of profit. It is incumbent on service providers to ensure they have adequate funds to run their RCFs to standard. It is not incumbent on children to raise funds for their own care.
Poor standards of care	There are two reasons why the failure of an RCF to meet minimum standards may indicate the purpose of profit. First, it may suggest that funds donated for the children's care are being misappropriated by operators who are personally profiting from the donations. Second, keeping children in subpar conditions is a tactic used by some operators to solicit donations from visitors and volunteers who seek to ameliorate the poor conditions through additional funds or resources. Therefore, subpar conditions in the RCF may indicate the purpose of profit.

Director/staff interference or lack of co-operation with reintegration	RCFs operating for profit are often reluctant to allow children to return to family, including in the context of reintegration programs or case management services. This is because profit is connected to the number of children in care and the ability to retain those children in care long-term. Reintegration threatens the business model of RCFs operating for profit. Directors and staff will often attempt to interfere or block reintegration efforts. This may include through: ■ blocking social workers' access to children, children's files or children and family information; ■ seeking to control reintegration efforts and not permitting the involvement of qualified social workers; ■ controlling which children can be reintegrated, and selecting mainly children who are older or deemed difficult by the director; or ■ interfering with child and family assessments, including through coercion or threats to children and families. These indicators may suggest an intent to keep children in care long-term in violation of their rights, for the purpose of profit.
Inflated admission numbers	RCFs involved in the unlawful removal of children for the purpose of profit may inflate the numbers of children in care on official or unofficial admission lists. This is most common when the funding model involves a per-child allocation of funds. Indicators that admission numbers are inflated include: ■ discrepancies between admission lists and sponsorship lists; ■ retention of the names of children who have left care on admission or sponsorship lists; ■ inclusion of the names of biological children of the director and/or staff on RCF admission lists; and ■ inclusion of the names of non-resident children from the local community on RCF admission or sponsorship lists (transient involvement in the RCF).
Significant discrepancy between the living standards of the director and the children in care.	Where funds donated to the RCF are being misappropriated, it is common for the living standards in the RCF to be low, and the living standards of the director and their family to be disproportionately high. These discrepancies are most often visible in physical housing and the education of children in the RCF compared to the children of the director and/or staff. This may indicate the purpose of profit.
Nepotism	RCFs involved in child trafficking often employ family members in most or all key roles to prevent reports or disclosures of irregularities. Nepotism in RCF operations in conjunction with other indicators, may suggest the purpose of profit, or other purposes of unlawful removal.

Financial misappropriation or fraud	Evidence of financial misappropriation or fraud in an RCF is a strong indicator of the purpose of profit. This is best detected through a forensic audit of accounts; however, it may also be detected by reviewing budgets (looking for inflated costs), receipts (prevalence of unofficial receipts), and comparing budgets to receipts/reconciliations (looking for differences between budget line items and actual expenditure without surplus or irregular expenditure).
Sale of land/relocation of the RCF	RCFs involved in child trafficking for profit purposes may profit from selling the land on which the RCF is built or located (acquired through donor funds) and moving the RCF to a cheaper or smaller property. Land is often purchased in the personal name of the director or founder, and not held in trust or under a legally registered entity. This makes it easy and 'legal' for the director or founder to sell the property and take the profits. The sale or advertising of RCF land and relocation to smaller properties, or from urban centres to urban fringes, may indicate the purpose of profit. Checking land title records and donation records may help detect whether profiting likely occurred.
Lack of child safeguarding policies and mechanisms	The absence of policies and practices to safeguard children can indicate the purpose of profit, as it may reflect a motivation to operate an RCF for profit rather than child protection purposes. Where profit is the primary motive, there is no incentive to allocate funds towards rigorous safeguarding measures. This tends to result in lax standards, including poor caregiver-to-child ratios, unfettered access by volunteers and visitors, unsafe sleeping conditions, and lack of investment to address obvious risks to children's safety in the RCF setting. These signs may indicate the purpose of profit.
Giving children foreign or Christian names	RCFs soliciting funding from foreign donors, including volunteers and visitors, may change the children's names to foreign names or Christian names that are more familiar to the target donors. This can be to make it easier for donors to 'identify' with the children and create emotional bonds. It is more commonly associated with child sponsorship fundraising strategies and is used as a means of securing individual child sponsors. Changing a child's name for fundraising purposes is a violation of their right to identity and may indicate the purpose of profit.
Overt emphasis on fundraising	RCFs involved in child trafficking for profit purposes may exhibit a preoccupation with fundraising. Volunteers may comment on or report concerns of excessive requests for donations. Donors or donor communications, and online/social media communications, may show frequent requests for emergency funds, including for implausible events/accidents. Communications that don't involve appeals for funds may be rare. These signs may indicate profit as a purpose.

Adoption

High numbers of infants and young children in care (under 5)	Admission of infants and children under 5 is rarely justified under gatekeeping regulations and policies. Alternative care policies often restrict the use of residential care for young children due to the increased likelihood of development delays for this age group. Small children are often strong candidates for family-based care, including kinship care and foster care, often negating the need for any form of residential care. In addition, in some countries there may be a waiting list of prospective domestic adoptive families seeking an infant or young child to adopt. Therefore, RCFs with high numbers of infants and young children, and high turnover of infants and small children, including due to intercountry adoption, may indicate adoption as a purpose of unlawful removal.
High numbers of claims of abandonment or orphanhood for 'healthy' infants and small children in the RCF	In many contexts, abandonment of infants and small children, in locations such as hospitals, is more common for children with complex medical needs or disabilities. It can be uncommon for healthy and developmentally normal infants and young children to be abandoned. Some foreign governments impose restrictions on intercountry adoptions for children with special needs. In addition, the pool of prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) willing to adopt children with special needs can be more limited. This means that when adoption is illicit and for-profit purposes, healthy developmentally normal children are typically targeted for unlawful removal and admission into RCFs. Therefore, a disproportionate number of infants and small children without special needs in the RCF may indicate unlawful removal for the purpose of adoption.
Fraud in declarations of adoptability for intercountry adoptions	For children to be deemed eligible for intercountry adoption, all family and domestic solutions must be first explored and exhausted. This is a rigorous process that must meet the standards set out in the Hague Convention. Any fraud detected in the declaration of adoptability, or the falsification of other documents, may indicate adoption as a purpose of unlawful removal. Irregularities or corruption detected in the process of tracing family, conducting assessments, pursuing domestic family-based care or adoptions leading up to declarations of adoptability, may also indicate adoption as a purpose of unlawful removal.
Orphanage tourism/visits	Some RCFs involved in trafficking children for adoption facilitate orphanage tourism as a means of recruiting PAPs. These RCFs are more likely to target visitors who meet the eligibility criteria for intercountry adoption and have the means to pay fees and make significant donations to the RCF. They are less likely to facilitate orphanage volunteering targeting younger adults and gap year students, which is commonly associated with profit as a purpose. Frequent visits to the RCF by foreign couples, PAPs taking infants off-site, including to stay at their hotels, can indicate intercountry adoption is being brokered. In combination with other indicators that suggest adoptions are illicit, it can indicate the purpose of adoption.

Irregular adoption fees or donations	Evidence of large donations made by past and prospective PAPs to the RCF that do not constitute prescribed and approved adoption fees, may indicate adoptions are for profit and for the purpose of unlawful removal.

Indicator of Means: Deception, Coercion and Threats: Against families

Contracts or agreements with parents and families	Families whose children are unlawfully/irregularly removed are sometimes required to sign agreements or agree to conditions that curtail their parental powers (in effect but not under the law) and limit contact between children and families. This is for the purpose of harbouring children in RCFs long-term, preventing their reintegration, and maintaining false narratives of orphanhood and abandonment that are central to the RCF business model. Contracts and agreements may contain threats, such as financial penalties, should parents seek to remove their child before a set time (e.g., after graduation or once the child reaches a certain age). At a minimum, such agreements or contracts constitute coercion of families, and may also indicate threats and deception.
Lack of co-operation from parents during reintegration assessments	Families whose children have been trafficked into the RCF may be subject to coercion and threats or false promises that prevent or discourage them from co-operating in reintegration efforts. Families may provide rehearsed or scripted responses during social work assessments or interviews that indicate coaching. They may be evasive, exaggerate vulnerabilities in an attempt to be deemed unsuitable for reintegration, express a lack of interest in their child returning, or decline offers of support that would enable them to resume care of their child/ren. Families may indicate that they are powerless to make the decision and defer to the RCF director. These behaviours may indicate means, including coercion, threats or deception.
Limited family contact	Children in alternative care have a right to maintain contact and family relationships. According to international norms, and domestic laws/ regulations in most countries, RCFs are required to facilitate family contact, including as part of reintegration efforts. When RCFs do not allow children and families to have contact, or severely restrict contact, it may indicate coercion and threats as a means of harbouring a child unlawfully removed and admitted into an RCF for the purpose of exploitation or profit or adoption.

Deceived about the conditions of care	Parents who relinquish their children into an RCF may do so based on false promises about the standards of care and/or education their children will receive. To maintain the deception regarding the standards of care, family contact may also be limited. Evidence of discrepancies between the promised standards of care and the actual situation of the RCF may indicate deception was used during recruitment.
Deceived through false or unmet promises	Promises are often made to parents and children during recruitment to incentivize children's admission into the RCF and to keep children in care long-term. This may include promises of education, including higher education, or study-abroad opportunities, promises of support for families, including jobs, land or housing. Where there is evidence of unmet or false promises, it may indicate deception was used during recruitment.
Abuse of vulnerability of the family	Targeting of vulnerable families for recruitment of children into RCFs can constitute an abuse of vulnerability, which is an indicator of means. Recruiters are known to target families with specific characteristics that make them vulnerable to deception, coercion and threats. This includes single parent households, families experiencing significant crises, families with low education and literacy levels, and families from remote rural communities.
Cultivated situations of dependence between directors and families	RCF directors involved in orphanage trafficking may cultivate dependency with families to exercise coercive control. They may provide reoccurring support to families and make promises of support, on the condition that they keep their child in care and do not seek their reunification. Families may be threatened with the withdrawal of support should they seek the return of their child. This may be an indicator of coercion.
Families in patron-client relationships with RCF directors	Patron-client relationships between directors and families of children in care have been identified as occurring in RCFs. They can be used to create expectations and morally binding obligations that serve to facilitate unlawful removal, admission of children into RCFs and prevent their return to family. These patron-client relationships can be used to facilitate orphanage trafficking.

Deception, Coercion and Threats: Against children

Inability to speak to children alone (social workers/inspectors)	Children who have been trafficked into RCFs and exploited, may be prevented from speaking freely with social workers or mandated authorities, to prevent disclosure of information that may reveal abuse, exploitation or trafficking. RCF directors or staff may hover during social work meetings or interviews, refuse to allow children to be interviewed alone, refuse to allow interviews to be conducted in private spaces and may remain in sight of children during the interview as a way of intimidating them. This behaviour may indicate coercion or threats.
Rapid exit of some children (older children and youth) without due process	To prevent disclosures, reports, and the detection of exploitation or trafficking, RCF operators may seek to exit certain children or youth from the RCF before reintegration case management commences. These children/young people may exit care rapidly and without due process or support. They may be threatened or subject to allegations (of crime or sexually inappropriate conduct) to undermine the credibility of any reports they make. Evidence of hasty removal of select children or youth from care before reintegration case management commences may indicate threats and coercion.
Violence, physical or emotional/ verbal abuse	RCFs involved in child trafficking and exploitation may use violence against children and between children as a means of exerting control. Older children may be instructed to use corporal punishment against younger children. Children and youth may be instructed to intimidate social workers with threatening or violent behaviour to undermine the ability of social workers to develop trusting relationships with children. Violence can be used as a means of preventing disclosure and undermining processes that may lead to the detection of abuse, exploitation or trafficking. Therefore, high levels of violence in the RCF (physical, verbal or emotional abuse) may indicate orphanage trafficking.
Noticeable changes in children's demeanour during assessments/interview	During interviews conducted by social workers or mandated authorities, children might display noticeable changes in demeanour if they've been threatened to prevent the disclosure of information about the RCF. This change in demeanour may occur at the point when interviewers ask questions that relate directly to information they have been instructed to withhold (questions about the child's parents, community of origin or experience in the RCF). They may appear uncomfortable, nervous, anxious, or may begin to provide obviously scripted responses to questions. This may indicate threat or coercion.
Showing submissive, fearful, distressed or anxious behaviour	Children subject to prolonged threats and coercion may display behavioural indicators that demonstrate fear and anxiety. They may appear wary of certain adults. They may be overly compliant, particularly around certain adults. They may model negative threatening or coercive behaviour during play. They may display symptoms of depression and withdrawal. These behavioural indicators, particularly when it involves multiple children in the RCF, may indicate coercion and threats.

Forced to lie to donors, volunteers, visitors and authorities	Children subject to orphanage trafficking and exploitation have often had their identities altered and falsified (paper orphaning) and are instructed to participate in the maintenance of false narratives that sustain the RCF's operations. They may be instructed to tell visitors, volunteers and donors that they are orphans, or recount stories of their abandonment that are not factual. They may be instructed to lie to authorities in the context of inspections. Discrepancies in children's stories, and evidence that children have been instructed to lie to maintain false narratives, may indicate coercion.
Evidence of trauma bonds	Children who have been exploited may develop a trauma bond with the perpetrator of abuse. Children subject to exploitation in RCFs are at high risk of developing trauma bonds as abuse/exploitation is conflated with 'care'. Children who justify, defend and display loyalty towards the perpetrator may be displaying indicators of a trauma bond. Children may display extreme and negative feelings towards 'rescuers' and undermine rescue efforts. They may refuse to provide statements or testify against perpetrators. They may seek to return to the perpetrator after they have been rescued. They may display extreme cognitive dissonance, recognizing the abuse, yet defending the abuser at the same time. Trauma bonds can be intentionally cultivated by perpetrators as a means of exerting coercive control.

Table of Relevant Authorities and Guiding Principles

OSCE Action Plans and Decisions

OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, adopted in 2003

Decision No.13/04 The Special Needs for Child Victims of Trafficking for Protection and Assistance, adopted in 2004

Decision No. 685 Addendum to the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings: Addressing the Special Needs of Child Victims of Trafficking for Protection and Assistance, adopted in 2005

Decision No.15/06 Combating Sexual Exploitation of Children, adopted in 2006

Decision No. 1107 Addendum to the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings: One Decade Later, adopted in 2013

Decision No.7/17 Strengthening Efforts to Combat all forms of Child Trafficking, including for Sexual Exploitation, as well as other forms of Sexual Exploitation of Children, adopted in 2017

Decision No. 6/18 Strengthening Efforts to Prevent and Combat Child Trafficking, including of Unaccompanied Minors, adopted in 2018

International Conventions

Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, adopted in 1993, entered into force in 1995

International Labor Organization Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, adopted in 1999, entered into force in 2000

United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, adopted in 2000, entered into force in 2002

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, entered into force in 1990

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted in 2000, entered into force in 2003

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime Supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, adopted in 2000, entered into force in 2003

International Resolutions, Codes and Guidelines

Inter-Parliamentary Union Resolution on Orphanage Trafficking: The Role of Parliaments in Reducing Harm, adopted in 2023

United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, welcomed by the General Assembly in 2009, adopted in 2010

United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Guidelines on the deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies, CRPD/C/5, adopted in by the Committee in 2022

United Nations General Assembly Rights of the Child Resolution on children without parental care, adopted in 2019

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015

World Tourism Organisation Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, adopted in by the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization in 1999, acknowledged by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2001

Regional Conventions and Directives

European Convention on Human Rights, adopted in 1950, entered into force in 1953

Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, adopted in 2005, entered into force in 2008

Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, adopted in 2011

Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU, adopted in 2024