



International
Labour
Organization

Code of conduct: The contribution of the tourism industry in the fight against the commercial sexual exploitation of children (Costa Rica)

BACKGROUND

The domestic and international tourism industry that operates in Costa Rica has committed itself to the implementation of the Code of conduct for the protection of children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism. This initiative is part of the world movement driven by ECPAT International and the World Tourism Organization (WTO), with the support of other relevant organizations working with children, such as UNICEF and Save the Children Sweden.

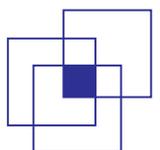
It starts from the premise that the protection of rights and the contribution to the optimal development of the new generations are inherent in all management of responsible and sustainable tourism. It recognizes that the commercial sexual exploitation associated with travel and tourism is a crime that severely affects children, constitutes a threat to the international standing of the country as a responsible and sustainable tourist destination, and generates grave consequences for security and financial losses for the industry. The implementation of the Code of conduct confronts this problem through responsible and sustainable tourism, and through corporate social responsibility by those companies that adopt it.

The purpose of the initiative is for a significant segment of the Costa Rican tourism sector to take on the implementation of the Code of conduct. The Code serves as a legitimate tool for companies to participate in the prevention, detection, and reporting of situations of commercial sexual exploitation of children in the context of their operations, as well as through their international position as promoters of a sustainable and responsible tourism intolerant of these crimes.

ACTION

The Costa Rican experience began in the year 2003 and has developed as a project led by the national tourism industry, represented by the Costa Rican Association

Good practice



of Tourism Operators (ACOT) and the Costa Rican Association of Tourism Professionals, working in strategic alliance with organized civil society, represented by the PANIAMOR Foundation, which acts as a general coordinator in the process at the national level and as the official representative to the International Steering Committee of the Code of Conduct.

From the beginning, the Code was promoted as a self-regulating mechanism for the industry, acting in strategic alliance with organized civil society, which seeks and celebrates support from the relevant authorities, but does not depend on it and is not conditioned by it.

The implementation of the Code of Conduct implies, for each company, the fulfilment of the following steps:

- The establishment of a company policy of active rejection of commercial sexual exploitation and the use of its facilities to this end;
- Training of personnel in the prevention, intervention and reporting of situations of commercial sexual exploitation associated with travel and tourism, during regular working hours and with the logistics taken care of by the company;
- Placement of external symbols that clearly identify the company as a signatory of the Code to clients and suppliers;
- Inclusion of clauses in contracts with business partners and national and international suppliers related to their commitments as signatories to the Code;
- Presentation of annual reports on the fulfilment of commitments as signatories of the Code.

Thanks to these efforts, since 2008, affiliation with the Code of conduct is required by the Costa Rican Tourism Institute in order to obtain the Sustainable Tourism Certificate, the most prestigious quality tourism seal that the institute bestows. Likewise, signing the Code is a requirement in order to be affiliated with the Costa Rican Chamber of Hotels.

The social benefits derived from the implementation of the Code by the involved actors have to do primarily with the protection that is generated for children against this problem in the country, and secondly with the strengthening of the country's capacity to confront these crimes. Among the economic benefits derived from this initiative, are the healthy revenues derived for the industry as well as for society in general, arising from the clear standing of the country as a destination that does not tolerate commercial sexual exploitation and improved international recognition accompanied by a growing influx of foreigners.

ACHIEVEMENTS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

To date, the following achievements are reported:

- Subscription to the Code by 100% of the national and local chambers and associations.
- More than 6,000 industry workers, in close to 300 companies, trained and committed to effectively act in the prevention, identification and reporting of situations of commercial sexual exploitation of children in their work environments or communities.
- Establishment of affiliation with the Code as a prerequisite to receiving the Certificate of Sustainable Tourism from the Costa Rican Tourism Institute, starting in 2008.
- Recognition of the process as a “good practice” in responsible and sustainable tourism by the WTO and in corporate social responsibility by UNICEF, Save the Children Sweden, John Hopkins University and the United States.
- Formal endorsement by the relevant public institution: the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism, Ministry of Formal Affairs and National Foundation for Children.
- Inclusion of the implementation and expansion of the Code of conduct in the framework of the National Plan for the Eradication of Commercial Sexual Exploitation 2008-2010.

SUSTAINABILITY

The initiative has been institutionalized in the national tourism sector’s organizations as subscription to the Code of conduct is a requisite demanded by the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism in order to obtain a Certificate of Sustainable Tourism. All of the chambers and associations in the country’s tourism sector have signed on to this initiative and furthermore, promote it in the companies within the country, which indicates what a policy of corporate social responsibility consists of in this sector. Moreover, having to present reports to the International Steering Committee of the Code of Conduct increases the level of commitment at the company level and at the level of chambers, which will be awaiting the punctual presentation of these reports.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Initiatives such as this should be created from within the affected sector itself in order to be successful. In other words, they should arise as the fruit of raising awareness about the problem and how it affects childhood within the country as well as within the tourism company itself.

- The participation of public institutions, if not a condition for the initiative's development, contributes to the legitimization of the process. Additionally, they have the capacity to grant and condition incentives to companies, for them to commit to not tolerate situations of commercial sexual exploitation, which gives more momentum to the initiative.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS

To develop an initiative such as this, the following are required:

- That in the country the concept of sustainability is essentially associated with the preservation of the environment.
- That the tourism industry constitutes a principal source of foreign currency.
- That the country demonstrates a certain weakness in terms of recognizing and facing the problem in this specific area.

REFERENCES

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