

Child Protection Policy

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1. Introduction

socialbnb stands for sustainable tourism that benefits everyone. In this context, it is also important to us to stand up for the protection of children and adolescents from exploitation in the tourism sector.

Tourism exposes children to many dangers, especially in the area of sexual exploitation. Over the past 20 years, international tourist arrivals have increased to 1.5 billion by 2019. Sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism is therefore a harrowing reality and occurs in many countries including European ones. Income inequality, poverty, lack of protection and social security systems increase the risks for children to be exploited.

The number of children experiencing sexualised violence during travel and tourism has increased significantly over the past years and the strategies of perpetrators have changed as well. With the two-year Global Study on Child Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism (Global Study, 2016) ECPAT International has created the largest data basis in this area until now.

New ways of travel and the intercession of tourism services also come with new risks. We are aware of our responsibility as a new tourism concept. Therefore, since the beginning of our venture, we have been working closely with ECPAT, the international and world's leading child protection organization in this field, to minimize risks and actively raise awareness about the issue.

In this Child Protection Policy, we provide an overview of the potential risks associated with our tourism services and the consequent measures taken by us. In this way, we want to actively educate and raise awareness about the issue and make our contribution to the protection of children and youths in tourism by realizing the measures to guarantee the protection of children within our work.

2. Addressees of our policy

In accordance with these principles, one of our main concerns is to raise and spread awareness about the protection of children and youths to everyone who is involved directly or indirectly in the implementation of socialbnb.

Therefore, our policy applies to all socialbnb employees. In addition, we want to address our project partners and customers with this policy in order to ensure more child protection in tourism with all parties involved.

3. Our definition of sexual violence against children

Our definition of child abuse is based on the following definition of the World Health Organization:

Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (WHO, 2021)¹.

Accordingly, five forms of abuse can be identified:

- **Neglect** includes both individual incidents and a prolonged failure on the part of a parent or other family member to provide for the child's development and well-being (WHO, 2006)².
- **Physical abuse** includes all forms of violence that cause physical harm to children and adolescents. These include hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, choking, scalding, burning, poisoning, and suffocating (WHO, 2006)³.
- **Psychological abuse** Emotional and psychological abuse include both individual incidents and a failure of a parent or caregiver to provide a developmentally appropriate and supportive environment over an extended period of time (Who, 2006)⁴.
- **Sexual abuse** is defined as the involvement of a child in sexual acts which the child does not fully understand, is unable to give informed consent, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or which violate the laws or social taboos of society (WHO, 2006)⁵.

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>

² WHO: Preventing Child Maltreatment: a guide to taking action and generating evidence. 2006. Geneva. Switzerland

³ WHO: Preventing Child Maltreatment: a guide to taking action and generating evidence. 2006. Geneva. Switzerland

⁴ WHO: Preventing Child Maltreatment: a guide to taking action and generating evidence. 2006. Geneva. Switzerland

⁵ WHO: Preventing Child Maltreatment: a guide to taking action and generating evidence. 2006. Geneva. Switzerland

4. Overnight stays

4.1 Risks

The concept of socialbnb can also give rise to risks for children due to the wide variety of accommodation options. These vary greatly in their likelihood of occurrence and relate to both psychological and physiological violations of children's rights. Especially the distance between the accommodation and the project and thus to the project target group and the extent of the presence of children contribute to the increase of the risk of child abuse. Potential perpetrators could also be voluntourists, project staff, project participants or other persons present on site. Children may be particularly vulnerable in the following three main areas:

- a. Sexual exploitation
- b. Limitation of privacy
- c. Imitation of behaviour that constitutes a risk to the person itself or a third person

The risk of sexual exploitation is particularly high when travellers or voluntourists are in the same buildings as the children and is possibly exacerbated if guests and children also stay in the same accommodation. In such a scenario, the limitation of the children's privacy is also threatened, which can result in the lack of rest, the intrusion of daily routines, as well as the reduction of the ability to concentrate with regard to school or private activities. The direct or indirect interaction between children and guests can also lead to the imitation of harmful behaviour such as the use of drugs or consumption of alcohol.

4.2 Measures

In order to minimise the listed risks of children and adolescents, we implement targeted measures with everyone involved in the socialbnb concept.

For socialbnb

Select project partners

- Going through the quality criteria of socialbnb on the basis of a corresponding evaluation form, which validates essential aspects for the protection of children.

Refuse a cooperation with certain projects

- Projects which do not score enough points in our evaluation form due to a lack of protection aspects will not be admitted offering accommodation on our socialbnb platform. The achievement of a certain score of points is essential for cooperation.

- In addition, projects which evolve around orphanages entail and institutions similar to it are excluded from our concept. We refuse to cooperate with organisations that exclusively run an orphanage. On the one hand, it is impossible for us to assess whether the children living there have been torn from their families and whether the institution in question was set up for purely commercial reasons. On the other hand, there is growing criticism on institutions such as orphanages as the interests of the institution (e.g., working hours, employees) are often placed above the needs of the children. In addition, growing up isolated from their family and their community in these institutions is detrimental to health and development (Lumos, 2021).
- Projects where travellers stay in the same building as the children are excluded, too. There is a risk that the children's privacy will be significantly limited.
- We do not cooperate with projects that work with children and take in volunteers for a short stay (less than four weeks), as there is a high risk that the volunteers will perceive their stay as a holiday and as a consequence may behave in a more inappropriate manner (e.g. consumption of alcohol, drugs etc.)
- We also refuse to cooperate with projects which allow short-term volunteers to teach the children in school. There is a high risk that children imitate the behaviour of the volunteers. Of course, this does not always have to be a negative consequence, but the project's work should aim towards an authentic school education in correspondence with the values of the community and the local culture which cannot be provided by external visitors. In addition, there is a risk of psychological damage for children as the build-up trust to their rapidly changing teachers which then leave the country after a few days or weeks.

Training for the socialbnb team regarding the sexual exploitation of children in tourism

- Participation in expert lectures:
We constantly educate our team internally about current problems and potential new challenges. This includes attending lectures and events as well as regular exchanges with other tourism companies and organisations that have committed themselves to the protection of children in tourism by signing THE Code.
- Exchange with experts:
Above all, we continuously develop our criteria and guidelines in exchange with experts.

For partner organizations

Close cooperation with partner projects plays a crucial role in protecting children from sexual abuse and in safeguarding their privacy in the best possible way.

Therefore, if the suspicion arises, that children are exposed to a higher risk of sexual abuse either due to the nature of the project (e.g., orphanage) or due to the project structure and lack of safety measures, the cooperation is denied. This decision is based on an exchange with the specific organization regarding our quality criteria.

Furthermore, the exchange on the topic of child protection with our existing partner organizations is very important to us. Thus, it includes education on specific risks, as well as on means to reduce them. The following aspects play a significant role here:

Education and empowerment of children

- Strengthening the self-confidence of the children cared for in the project (e.g., teaching them about boundaries and strengthening their ability to communicate boundary violations)
- Strengthening trust in caregivers so that children have a contact person in critical situations

Constant presence of caregivers

- Interaction between travelers and children is only possible under supervision and must be well planned beforehand
- Guarding the children's premises (especially at night)
- Informing travelers about the privacy of the children
- Preventing invasions of children's privacy (e.g., raising awareness that in certain situations children should not be disturbed by talking to them, taking pictures, or watching them)
- For homestays:
 - Ensure that children are supervised by their guardians or by the community
 - Good preparation of the hosts through the respective contact person of the projects

Establishing rules and communicating them to travelers

- Where are travelers allowed to stay?
- When are travelers allowed to be there?
- Is there a possibility of interaction with the children?

If so, when and under what circumstances?

Adjustment of the local project infrastructure

- Separation of premises from travelers and children
- Separation of sanitary facilities from travelers and children
- Outdoor areas with visual protection and places of retreat
- Toilets have visual protection
- Sleeping places have visual protection

Respect for the privacy of children

- Diapering, etc. in a separate space, which provides visual protection

Defining specific rules and communicating them to travelers

- What rules must travelers adhere to on site? (e.g., consumption of alcohol)
- Dealing with rule violations

For travelers

Working with travelers to minimize the risk of sexual exploitation of children, protect their privacy and minimize the risk of imitating negative behaviors is based in particular on educating them through posts on our blog, on social media and in the Traveler Guideline. In addition to more general advice, this also contains specific information on how to deal with the suspicion of sexual exploitation or the observation of a criminal offence. Within the Traveler Guideline, attention is drawn to the possible disruption of daily routines, the possible distraction and restriction regarding educational opportunities and the pursuit of leisure activities, and awareness and adherence to certain rules is requested.

Suspicion of sexual exploitation of children

- Report (also anonymously) to the form <https://dontlookaway.report>

Observation of an offence

- Reporting an offence to a local child protective service and/or the local police

5. Activities

A stay in one of our socialbnb goes beyond the mere overnight stay, as project tours and activities on-site create an added value. However, these can cause risks, especially in social projects, that must be minimized through targeted sensitization measures.

5.1 Risks

The presence of children and travelers in the area of tourism activities entails potential risks to the personal well-being of children. Risks can be identified particularly in the following main areas:

- Sexual exploitation,
- Limitation of privacy
- Emotional as well as spiritual development difficulties
- White saviorism

The risk of sexual exploitation is increased when activities take place between travelers and children without the supervision of the project staff. Both the possible sexualisation and inappropriate touching of children in surfing, swimming or sports lessons and the sexualised behaviour of travellers towards children as well as the generally increased risk potential for sexual assault must be given special attention here.

The privacy of children is particularly disturbed by unauthorized photography, especially in situations mentioned above, which can lead in extreme cases to the dissemination of image and video material on child pornography sites.

Due to the interruption of the children's daily routine or the feeling of being committed to engage in activities with travelers, development difficulties can occur because of possible lack of rest.

Additional to mental impairments, activities can also cause emotional limitations in the long term, if, for example, the need for development is suppressed by neglecting cultural differences, both in teaching style and playful interaction with the children. The lack of pedagogical qualification is not only affecting the children's further development but can also undermine the authority of the trained teachers on site by taking on responsible tasks. The project staff may feel pressured into offering project tours in order to meet neo-colonialist stereotypes, which in turn leads to a reduction of the interaction of professional staff with children in the day-to-day activities of the projects.

5.2 Measures

For travelers

Our traveler guideline makes aware of both the risks mentioned before related to child protection and beyond that. The explanation of these issues and the resulting recommendations provide a basic understanding of how travelers should behave not only in general but especially when staying in a socialbnb. The following areas are addressed: protecting children's privacy, reporting suspected sexual exploitation, as well as the role model function of guests present.

For partner organizations

During the pre-selection interviews for potential socialbnbs, we try to find out whether visits to social projects are possible and, if so, under which conditions. We strongly advise partners to not allow activities between travelers and children without supervision, while pointing out the increased risk potential, to create awareness of the issue.

6. Marketing and communication

6.1 Risks

We additionally draw attention to the issue of child protection via our website, social media channels and blog and implement the various aspects of our Child Protection Policy. Sexual exploitation and the restriction of children's privacy do not exclusively take place on site but can also happen virtually and digitally. Critical photos showing children in poor conditions or interacting with travelers can reinforce false intentions. In addition, the impression that travelers are used as volunteers can be conveyed, when they take pictures together with children.

6.2 Measures

We are aware that there are possible risks connected to our social media channels. Therefore, we have established the following preventive measures (Social Media Guide for Volunteers and Traveler, Radi Aid)⁶:

- No upload of photos that depict children in poor and or undignified situations.
- No upload of photos that show children in vulnerable situations, e.g., in hospitals.
- No upload of photos that depict interaction between travelers and children.

⁶ <https://www.radiaid.com/social-media-guide>

- No upload of photos that depict children as a tourist attraction.
- Photos of project tours and accommodation will only be allowed if everyone photographed agree. Photos of people may only be published and distributed with the prior consent of the person displayed. If children are photographed, the consent of their parents or guardian(s) must be obtained.
- No publication of the names and other contact details of the children and their families/guardian(s).
- Questioning the intent: what is the purpose of uploading the photo? Is the privacy and dignity of the child being photographed respected?