

Does your
business include
voluntourism
products or
orphanages in
tourism programs?



**We protect
children in
travel and
tourism**

For more information visit us at
www.thecode.org

The Code Policy on criteria for:



organisations offering
voluntourism products



organisations involved in
orphanage activities as
tourist attraction

This policy outlines the issues of voluntourism and orphanages¹ in relation to child protection, and states the criteria by which organisations (private commercial companies, social enterprises and charities) involved in voluntourism activities may apply to join The Code. This document is primarily intended for use by the Secretariat of The Code and Local Code Representatives (LCRs) when assessing a membership application from an organisation engaged in voluntourism and/or orphanage activities as tourist attraction.

¹ The Code is not against orphanages per se, but against orphanages as a tourist attraction

The document is divided in five parts :

1 Definition and scope of voluntourism and orphanages

2 Description of the issues on voluntourism and orphanages

3 Selection criteria for The Code

4 Extra criteria for voluntourism and orphanages

5 Development of tools for members offering voluntourism products and LCRs

1 Definition and scope of voluntourism and orphanages

The term 'volunteer tourism' or 'voluntourism' is used in many ways. Therefore, definition and delimitation of scope is necessary.

The tourism industry proposes a variety of travel possibilities including the dimension of 'doing something good and meaningful at the same time'. The diversity of customer behaviour is evident in many ways. For example, it may be the 'consumerist' way of booking a two-week trip teaching English to children in Ecuador, where the customer takes annual leave 'with a special touch to it' and with a departure possible at short notice. It may also be a 'local village tour' stopping for a couple of hours at a local orphanage to practice English or help with arts or sports activities. Alternatively, it may be the long thought-out process of preparing, via a volunteering agency, a nine-month volunteering commitment helping a local NGO in organising extracurricular sporting activities for public school-going children in Kenya.

According to the ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents) Volunteer Tourism Guidelines (2016) *volunteer tourism is generally comprised of the following*²:

- Travel experiences purchased as part of a package that includes flight, accommodation and/or other elements of the trip (e.g. work placement);

2 ABTA Volunteer Tourism Guidelines, August 2016

- The opportunity for tourists to 'work' while on the trip;
- The expectation that work is delivered 'free of charge' at the point of delivery;
- The concept that the work the traveller (or volunteer) does, will benefit the recipients and the tourist at the point of delivery.

Within these guidelines, volunteer tourism is defined as organised and packaged tourist trips with a duration of a few hours to a year in which the main purpose is to work as a volunteer. The volunteer provides their 'work' within the destination free of charge at the point of delivery.

Definition of an orphanage³:

Formal terminology refers to institutional care, and is essential to highlight as other alternative care systems are in the best interest of the child. As 'orphanage' is a popular term, this policy provides the following description :An 'orphanage' refers to an institution providing residential care for children who have lost one or both parents. ***However, this term is not representative, as in practice these facilities often admit many children who are not actually orphans.***

3 <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/news-updates/newsletter/bcn-newsletter-may-june-2016>.

2 Description of the issues on voluntourism and orphanages

Voluntourism in its various forms is on the rise. The market for ‘meaningful holidays and experiences’ attracts many travellers and the forecast over the coming years is for the market to continue this expansion. Estimates of the size of this market vary widely, however a 2015 study estimates the amount spent by around 10 million volunteers at around USD 2 billion annually.⁴

Three main types of voluntourism products are typically offered:

- environmental protection oriented activities;
- activities with children;
- animal care activities.

For The Code it is only relevant when voluntourism implies direct or indirect contact with children. Activities with children encompass items such as: residential centres for children (including orphanages), day-care centres, teaching, sport activities, creative classes, etc. Activities that put children in direct contact with adults present risks that cannot be reduced to zero, but can certainly be minimised. This last statement is certainly consistent with the mission of The Code initiative, which states: *along with tourism companies, to manage and minimise the risk of sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, fully aware that zero risk does not exist.*

4 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/29/us-travel-volunteers-charities-idUSKCN0P91AX20150629#i53Cslc15PtY7xIL.97>

As the demand for voluntourism is growing, some entities such as the Better Care Network⁵ have noted a pattern in some tourism destinations of organisations creating new shelters for children (orphanages), with a view to capitalise on this opportunity to gain financial support from tourists.

Since 2010, a range of international actors have been drawing attention to the issue of how voluntourism, and the demand for ‘orphanage’ experiences, is fuelling a rise in the number of residential care centres, and encouraging the separation of children from their families in countries across the world. The role of tourism in such children’s rights concerns is highlighted in the Children’s Rights and Business Principles and the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Impact of the Business Sector on Children’s Rights.⁶ A global initiative, *Better Volunteering Better Care*, led by Better Care Network and Save the Children UK, has documented the negative impact of volunteering in orphanages and other forms of residential care centres for children. It has brought together actors from the travel, education, child protection and faith-based communities to promote responsible volunteering alternatives.⁷

Much attention has been focused on this particular issue in Cambodia and other countries in Southern Asia (such as Nepal) primarily due to a wider availability of research and campaigns by organisations such as Friends International.⁸ However, child protection experts have expressed concern on this matter in over 20 countries worldwide – including countries in Africa and Central and Southern America.⁹

5 The Better Care Network was launched in 2003 as an interagency initiative aimed at strengthening and supporting family and community-based care options for children and discouraging the use of residential care...

6 <http://www.unicef.org/csr/theprinciples.htm> and http://www.unicef.org/csr/css/CRC-C-GC-16_en.pdf

7 <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/bcn-in-action/better-volunteering-better-care>

8 <http://thinkchildsafe.org/>

9 <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/bcn-in-action/key-initiatives/better-volunteering-better-care/activities-and-outputs>

The key concerns over volunteering in residential care centres and visiting orphanages as a tourism excursion, include the following:

- i) **It fuels the growth of orphanages** for financial gain over the well-being of children, by drawing funding and resources to institutions that benefit from recruiting more children and keeping them for as long as possible.¹⁰ Children in these institutions are often used as a commercial means to attract funds through donations or volunteers.¹¹ Sixty years of research demonstrates that residential care can be very harmful to a child's development, and the *Guidelines of the Alternative Care of Children*, welcomed unanimously by the UN General Assembly in 2009, state it should generally be used as a temporary option for children requiring alternative care.¹² The resources channelled into residential care centres from voluntourism create a scenario where this too often becomes the first option for a child, especially in countries where no other forms of alternative care, such as foster care, exist.

- ii) **It separates children from their families.** Approximately 80% of children in residential care centres worldwide have one or more living parent.¹³ Many families in poverty are persuaded that residential care is a good option for their child, without fully understanding the risks involved. Providing resources, materials, and western volunteers all serve as an incentive for parents to believe their child will be better off in an orphanage. Volunteers are misled to believe that children in these centres have no one else to care for them, potentially leading to misguided attempts to 'adopt' children.

10 <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/bcn-in-action/better-volunteering-better-care/activities-and-documents/better-volunteering-better-care-executive-summary>

11 UNICEF (2011) *With the best of intentions: A study of attitudes towards Residential Care in Cambodia*.

12 UN General Assembly 64/142. *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*. (2009). <http://bettercarenetwork.org/library/social-welfare-systems/standards-of-care/guidelines-for-the-alternative-care-of-children-english>

13 Williamson & Greenberg. (2010) *Families, not Orphanages*. Better Care Network. <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/library/the-continuum-of-care/foster-care/families-not-orphanages>

- iii) **It can disrupt children’s development.** The flow of even well-meaning volunteers means constant need for adjustments on children’s parts. There is evidence that volunteering leads to children becoming attached to multiple short-term visitors and volunteers, and are subject to repeat abandonment when these volunteers leave. These repeated patterns of attachment and abandonment are not healthy for the positive development of vulnerable children.¹⁴
- iv) **It can put children at risk of abuse.** While many volunteers have the best intentions, the lack of a screening process and proper supervision allows those with malicious intent, easy access to vulnerable children. While a stranger would never be allowed to enter a school, much less a group home in the countries where volunteers arrive without prior screening and safeguards in place, somehow this has become an acceptable process overseas. This can, and in some instances has, led to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children.¹⁵

The trends within voluntourism and the inherent risk of volunteering in contexts where there is potential contact with children, and the harm created by having orphanages as tourism entertainment, require that The Code takes a strong position and defines criteria for the selection of potential organisations applying for membership and for application to current members.

Find out more about the consequences of orphanage tourism at:

<https://rethinkorphanages.org/travel-and-volunteering/orphanage-divestment-resource>

14 Linda Richter and Amy Norman. AIDS orphan tourism: *A threat to young children in residential care. Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*. 5:3. 217 — 229. (2010).

15 See for example: Tim Talley. *Oklahoma man convicted of illicit sexual conduct in Kenya*. *US News*. (2015). Accessed on 2 July 2015 from: <http://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2015/06/19/oklahoma-man-convicted-of-illicit-sexual-conduct-in-kenya>

3 Selection criteria for The Code

The Code acknowledges that children in orphanages or residential care centers are at high risk of abuse and exploitation and are exposed to further risk of harm due to voluntourism and excursions for tourism entertainment.

Therefore, The Code has decided the following:

- The Code **does not accept** membership of organisations involved in voluntourism activities which include orphanages and other forms of residential care for children in settings with minimal support or supervision. Children in these settings are at high risk of abuse and exploitation which is only exacerbated by voluntourism. Instead, to support vulnerable children, please consider learning about, working with, or donating to programs supporting children in families and at-risk communities. Such programs include family strengthening, economic development, positive parenting, social work training, family-based care alternatives, and the development of laws and policies to protect children.¹⁶
- The Code **does accept** membership of organisations involved in voluntourism activities that limit child-related voluntourism activities to supervised teaching, sports, day-care centres and that have clear policies and procedures in place to minimise the risks and maximise the benefit to children in these settings.

¹⁶ http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/Orphanage%20Volunteering%20_%20Why%20to%20say%20no.pdf

- The Code **does accept** membership of organisations involved in voluntourism activities which do not focus directly on children. The Code acknowledges that even though these volunteers are not in direct contact with children, they are still staying in communities and are therefore in indirect contact with children.
- The Code **does not** accept membership of organisations that have orphanages and other residential care centres incorporated (or with the possibility to incorporate) in tourism programs or packages.

The Code **does not make a distinction** in the nature of the organisations involved in voluntourism activities or orphanages. These organisations can be private commercial companies, social enterprises and charities.

The Code **does make a distinction** in organisations involved in voluntourism activities or have orphanages in their tourism programs that are current members or new applicants. Since 2018, all new applicants have been required to adhere to the voluntourism and orphanage policy and criteria from the commencement of their membership.

New applicants are screened to determine if they are involved in voluntourism activities with children or orphanages by the Secretariat (in collaboration with the LCR, where applicable), upon receiving the application through the website, before sending the first invoice to the applicant.

The application process implies communicating with the applicant to clarify any voluntourism or orphanage activities. If the decision is positive and first invoice is paid, the applicant will be accepted as a member of the Code. This approval will be partly contingent of the applying company meeting the minimum standards for voluntourism and orphanages outlined in 4) *Extra criteria for voluntourism and orphanages below*.

4 Extra criteria for voluntourism and orphanages

in voluntourism settings, including rules applying to host organizations, rules for volunteers, etc. In 2016, ABTA launched its Volunteer Tourism Guidelines aimed at setting rules and recommendations for the entire supply chain of voluntourism products.

Members and applicants that are involved in voluntourism activities¹⁷ are required to adhere to an extra minimum set of criteria, next to the six criteria of The Code. If a member has not yet established one or more of the criteria listed below, a trial membership period of six months maximum will be established to enable the applicant to fulfil the criteria. The six criteria are:

1. A declaration, annexed to the Agreement and signed by the member offering voluntourism packages, stating that 'no programs with orphanages or other forms of residential care centres for children' are included in the products offered by the member to its customers.
2. The organisation collaborates with its partners:
 - a. The organisation can demonstrate that their partner organisations have appropriate child protection procedures in relation to voluntourism in place.

¹⁷ Members and applicants that are not directly involved in voluntourism activities but promote providers of such products should have a system in place that checks if these providers adhere to an extra minimum set of criteria, next to the six criteria of The Code, as described in this section.

- b. The organisation integrates clauses on child protection in relation to voluntourism into contracts of its partners offering voluntourism activities on behalf of the organisation.
3. The organisation can demonstrate to have a procedure to check the travellers who want to participate in a voluntourism activity. This should include:
 - a. A criminal record check or other 'proof of good conduct' (employer references, for example) from the traveller is received and reviewed by organisations involved in voluntourism activities that have direct contact with children, before finalising the selling of the voluntourism product. No one without such a background check is sold a voluntourism product related to children. Organisations involved in voluntourism activities that do not focus directly on children are not obliged to conduct a criminal record check.
 - b. An undertaking of good conduct, including ensuring child protection from sexual exploitation, is signed and returned to the organisation by the traveller before the traveller participates in the voluntourism activity.
4. The organisation involved in voluntourism activities can demonstrate that awareness on the issue of volunteering directly or indirectly with children has been provided to the traveller prior to departure.
 - a. Organisations involved in voluntourism activities with direct contact with children have obligatory basic training on child protection for travellers prior to departure, and receive support and guidance throughout their placement.
 - b. Organisations involved in voluntourism activities that do not focus directly on children are obliged to inform travellers about child protection prior to departure.
 - c. Modality of the awareness is flexible (may take the form of written material, online learning, face to face, etc).

5. A specific section in the annual report of The Code is to be completed by the organisation every year on their voluntourism products. A list of the volunteering programs¹⁸ and projects has to be included in the annual report to The Code.
6. The organisation can demonstrate that systematic feedback on the traveller is given by the organisation hosting the customer who has participated in a children-related program to the company/agency at the end of the volunteering travel experience.

This is the minimal standard for voluntourism products, which should not preclude these companies from taking further steps to achieve a higher standard in terms of management by the company.

¹⁸ LCR should also check if these projects are suitable for children and if the list is complete.

5 Development of tools for members offering voluntourism products and LCRs

In order to provide relevant service to organisations offering voluntourism products, basic tools have been developed.

- A template for the declaration, annexed to the Agreement and to be signed by the member offering voluntourism packages, stating that “no programs with orphanages or other forms of residential care for children” are included in the products offered by the member to its customers.
- Adaptation of The Code’s report format to include information about implementation of additional criteria for voluntourism providers (Section 4)

The following materials are developed by the organisation involved in voluntourism activities itself:

- Assessment tool of child safeguarding policy and measure by the counterpart.
- Template of a Certificate of Conduct.¹⁹
- Support to companies in locating/establishing prior to departure awareness material on volunteering for/with children.

¹⁹ Example of Certificate of Conduct: <https://www.justis.nl/producten/vog/certificate-of-conduct/index.aspx>

January 2020
Copyright © The Code version: 2.0

Published by: The Code
328/1 Phaya Thai Road, Ratchatehewi, Bangkok, 10400, Thailand