

A good intention is not always a good idea: a proposal to combat orphanage tourism

White paper ‘initiatiefnota’ to Dutch parliamentarians
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INITIATIEFNOTA (WHITE PAPER)

Summary

Human trafficking and modern slavery are among the key challenges of our time. In fact, together they form one of the most profitable industries in the world. Children are among those being exploited, especially in poor countries, to please the interests of Western tourists. Dutch tourists contribute inadvertently to the problem by participating in programmes that are packaged as volunteer work, but in reality are often façades for human trafficking, where children are exploited, abused and their families misled. In Australia, parliamentary action has led to the development of new laws and regulations, largely of a preventive nature, in order to tackle the Australian contribution to human trafficking, including trafficking related to orphanages. The approach taken in Australia can serve as an example for similar approaches in the Netherlands.

Introduction

Anyone who kept an eye on their social media timelines during the summer may have seen adventurous travel photos of young people doing volunteer work in distant countries. The image of Western youth posing with young children in Latin America, Southeast Asia or sub-Saharan Africa, is now so familiar that it is no longer seen as special.

The phenomenon has become increasingly popular since the 1990s: the emergence of cheap air travel - and the need to give more meaning to holidays or gap years than just traveling - have led to a new form of tourism. Many young people from Western countries set off after secondary school or university to countries like Cambodia, Vietnam, Nepal, Peru, Bolivia or Indonesia to do something meaningful in addition to travelling. A large number choose to volunteer, for example in an orphanage or a school, either making plans in advance or spontaneously while travelling. Some do it for a few days, others commit for weeks or even months. Working in an orphanage or at a school in a developing country is also increasingly seen as an option for people who have already embarked on their careers and want to do something meaningful. These experiences are often organised and encouraged by churches and schools. Most are unaware that these experiences are often contributing to a business model which exploits vulnerable children.

Definition

The phenomenon of “orphanage tourism” is indeed a recognised problem. The term is used to denote a broad spectrum of activities involving orphanages¹ or children's homes. It usually concerns individuals who want to do some form of socially-oriented volunteer work (or an internship or similar research-oriented volunteer programme) during their stay abroad, and therefore invest time - and often money - in institutions where children, in their eyes, need help. In addition, there are organisations that offer tourist excursions to orphanages and opportunities to attend “shows” by children in orphanages. Many tourists arrange volunteer placements in advance, others do so spontaneously during their stay. Some continue to give financial or material support to orphanages after their trip.²

¹ In the relevant literature the term “orphanage” is widely used to denote all institutions whose main purpose is the care of orphaned children outside parental or family care. Other terms such as “children’s home” and “institutional care” are also used. In this paper, the term “orphanage” is used for convenience as an umbrella term, in line with common practice in the literature.

² Punaks, M., Feit, K. & Next Generation Nepal (2014), *The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering: Combating Child Trafficking Through Ethical Voluntourism*. Eugene: Next Generation Nepal, p. IX.

Different terms are used for the same phenomenon. In the literature, terms such as “volunteer tourism” or “voluntourism”, which cover all forms of well-intentioned volunteer work or internships, are commonly used. In practice, however, the phenomenon often involves commercially-organised volunteering in which volunteers, mostly from western countries, come into contact with children, and notably children in orphanages. In some cases, it involves children with HIV/Aids.³ The specific term “Aids orphan tourism” is sometimes used for this type of tourism, which is especially found in sub-Saharan Africa. The broader phenomenon of “voluntourism” is often associated in the academic literature with what researchers have called “geographies of compassion”, where the behaviour of tourists abroad is guided by moral principles and motives of social justice.⁴

Since corrupt orphanages involve the exploitation of children under false pretenses which benefit the orphanage operators (practice which is discussed in more detail below), experts consider the practices in these institutions to constitute a form of human trafficking. According to Article 3 of the *Protocol on the prevention, control and punishment of trafficking in human beings, in particular trafficking of women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, which has been signed by the Netherlands, the definition of trafficking in human beings denotes “the recruitment, transport, transfer, and provision of accommodation or taking of persons, by threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, deception, abuse of power or abuse of a vulnerable position or the provision or receipt of payments or benefits in order to obtain the consent of a person who has control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation also includes, among other things, the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices comparable to slavery, servitude or removal of organs”.⁵ In the case of orphanage tourism, there is evidence of deception, abuse of a vulnerable position and exploitation. In Australia, attempts are currently under way to consider orphanage tourism under the definition of slavery and to incorporate it in new anti-slavery legislation.⁶

Practice

Orphanage tourism mainly occurs in developing countries. Countries known to have a problem with orphanage tourism include Cambodia, Indonesia, Ghana and Nepal, but the phenomenon has been identified in dozens of countries, from Bolivia to India, from Uganda to Vietnam. The countries or areas in which orphanage tourism occurs are usually poor. Another driver that leads to orphanage tourism is (natural) disasters. The head of the Haiti police, for example, said that after the earthquake of 2010 that he witnessed the emergence of countless "so-called orphanages" which were not really orphanages at all, but initiatives of "criminal organizations that abuse homeless and hungry people". The earthquake created opportunities that criminal interests took advantage of.

³ Richter, L.M. & Norman, A. (2010) “AIDS orphan tourism: A threat to young children in residential care”, *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 5:3, p. 217-229.

⁴ Mostafanezhad, M. (2013) “The Geography of Compassion in Volunteer Tourism”, *Tourism Geographies*, 15:2, p. 318-337.

⁵ See article 3a of the *Protocol on the prevention, control and punishment of trafficking in human beings, in particular trafficking of women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*.

⁶ Reuters, 17 April 2018: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-trafficking-children/australia-vows-to-fight-trafficking-for-orphanage-tourism-in-southeast-asia-idUSKBN1HN33P>.

In practice, orphanage tourism arises due to the following sequence of events: in many of the countries mentioned, a large proportion of the population, particularly in rural areas, lives in poverty. Until recently, in a country such as Cambodia, just under 14 per cent of children lived under the (Cambodian) poverty line, for example.⁷ So-called *recruiters* approach parents in these areas, where children have little or no access to a good education, with the promise that they can provide their children with better education and a future in a boarding school. Parents are taken in by this trap,⁸ leading to *recruiters* transporting a considerable number of children to the city one village at a time. In the city, the children are sold to orphanages, if they are not already sold for other forms of exploitation. Once in the orphanage, they become "paper orphans": their names are changed, false death certificates of their parents are made, and contact with their parents is broken. Parents and families can no longer find the children in question. If they succeed, they are told that they have already given up their custody and are therefore no longer allowed to see their children, according to Kate van Doore, professor of children's rights at Griffith University in Australia.⁹ In the most favourable cases, so-called paper orphans see their families once or twice a year.¹⁰

This practice is common in Nepal, where *recruiters* are known to operate. In many cases, according to reports, parents even pay money - anything between 200 and 500 US dollars - to provide their children with a better education. Children can forget a good future in the village; the *recruiters* offer them a "golden opportunity".¹¹ In other cases, parents receive money in return for the custody of their children. "Someone came and told me that if I give the baby to an orphanage, they'd give me money," said a Cambodian mother. "I cried when I gave away the baby. I cried."¹²

In most cases the "orphans" no longer have further contact with their families. However, there are known cases where the children actually live just around the corner, and during the day are exploited to attract tourists. This was witnessed by a Dutch tourist worked in Uganda in a children's home where eight to ten children "lived". "It sounded trustworthy," she said in an interview, "but I soon found out that the parents of those children lived just a few blocks away".¹³ At least in this case the children still had contact with their parents.

Almost always, however, the parents have permanently relinquished their children to the orphanage operator. Orphanage tourism, according to research, does not necessarily arise from the presence of a large number of orphaned children, but from high levels of poverty

⁷ The Phnom Penh Post, 18 August 2017: <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/cambodias-loss-ldc-status-will-bring-challenges-world-bank>

⁸ See also: The Guardian, 13 September 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/sep/13/the-business-of-voluntourism-do-western-do-gooders-actually-do-harm?CMP=share_btn_tw. This article includes the following quote: "Parents may hand over children because they have special needs, or because the family can't afford to send them to school. 'It's a huge pull factor: if they can get food, health care, education, specialised services, parents make a decision they think is in the best interests of the children', says Shannon Senefeld, senior vice president for overseas operations at Catholic Relief Services."

⁹ The Conversation, 9 March 2015: <http://theconversation.com/the-business-of-orphanages-where-do-orphans-come-from-38485>.

¹⁰ Al Jazeera, 24 May 2012:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2012/05/201252183744156840.html>

¹¹ Punaks, M., Feit, K. & Next Generation Nepal (2014), *The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering: Combating Child Trafficking Through Ethical Voluntourism*. Eugene: Next Generation Nepal, p. 6.

¹² ABC News, 25 March 2005: <https://abcnews.go.com/2020/International/story?id=611826&page1>

¹³ Marie Claire, 25 May 2017: <https://www.marieclaire.nl/lifestyle/op-vrijwilligersvakantie-wie-heeft-daar-nu-echt-iets-aan>

and poverty-related problems.¹⁴ In fact, it is estimated that 80 percent of children in orphanages have one or even both living parents.¹⁵ These “paper orphans” are considered as orphans so that the operator can earn money by opening the orphanage to fee-paying volunteers.¹⁶ There is also a long-term interest for the operator. Volunteers often continue to send money or goods to orphanages for a long time after their trips or collect resources within their own networks. This business model can therefore be very lucrative.¹⁷

So much for the supply side. However, there is another dimension to the issue. More and more tourists are looking for “authentic” travel experiences. These tourists reject mass tourism and want to do something interactive or meaningful while abroad.¹⁸ Many want to help those who are less fortunate than themselves and, at the same time, gain valuable experiences that boost their personal life stories and their resumes - and in many cases also their Facebook or Instagram profiles.¹⁹ Indeed, the predecessor of the current Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, in answers to written questions, noted that there is a “growing interest” among young people in international volunteering, but without giving further details.²⁰

Not only the so-called orphanages, but also the volunteer providers play a role in this process. The providers can be both commercial operators and charitable organisations.²¹ By means of clever marketing, they focus on well-intentioned tourists who show an interest in volunteering, either while in their own countries or while abroad.

There are also other factors, so-called *enablers*, who contribute to maintaining the practice. For example, receiving people from western countries is seen as an important sign of status in some cultures, so that many local leaders maintain this phenomenon.²² Often there is also ordinary self-interest at stake: restaurants and other businesses in the vicinity of an orphanage benefit from the presence of tourists. In addition, institutionalised forms of care are accepted or even common in many countries.²³ Some countries do not have regulations that compel orphanages or tour operators to have a code of conduct or child protection policies.²⁴ If such

¹⁴ Al Jazeera, 24 mei 2012:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2012/05/201252183744156840.html>

¹⁵ https://www.bettercarenetwork.nl/pg-17382-7-68261/pagina/achtergrond_algemeen.html

¹⁶ Punaks, M., Feit, K. & Next Generation Nepal (2014), *The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering Combating Child Trafficking Through Ethical Voluntourism*. Eugene: Next Generation Nepal, p. IX

¹⁷ See also: The Guardian, 13 September 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/sep/13/the-business-of-voluntourism-do-western-do-gooders-actually-do-harm?CMP=share_btn_tw

¹⁸ Lyons, K.D. & Wearing, S. (2008) *Journeys of discovery in volunteer tourism*. Wallingford: CABI Publishing

¹⁹ Punaks, M., Feit, K. & Next Generation Nepal (2014), *The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering Combating Child Trafficking Through Ethical Voluntourism*. Eugene: Next Generation Nepal, p. XII

²⁰ Minutes of the Parliament of the Netherlands, Yearbook 2013-2014, attachment nr. 1510.

²¹ Czarnecki, D. (2015). “From Volunteering to Voluntourism: Challenges for the Responsible Development of a Growing Travel Trend”, *Voluntourism Policy Paper*, 18, p. 6.

²² Pink, S. (1998) “The White Helpers: Anthropologists, development workers and local imaginations”, *Anthropology Today* 14:6, p. 9-14.

²³ See for example: Save the Children (2009) *Keeping Children Out of Harmful Institutions: Why we should be investing in family-based care*. London: Save the Children.

²⁴ Better Care Network & Save the Children (2014) *Better Volunteering, Better Care - Collected Viewpoints on International Volunteering*.

legislation is already in place, it may be insufficiently implemented or enforced,²⁵ leading to widespread abuse.²⁶

The intention in this paper is not to give the impression that there are no reputable orphanages. However, practice shows that a large number are not reputable. Moreover, research strongly suggests, as explained later in this paper, that orphanages are almost always the worst form of care for children who are actually orphaned.

Numbers

Human trafficking and forced labor together form one of the most lucrative markets in the world. The United Nations International Labor Organization estimates that forced labour worldwide generates more than USD 150 billion a year in profits (on top of human trafficking at the state level). In Asia and Oceania, forced labour is exceptionally lucrative.²⁷ Polaris, a US-based foundation concerned with the fight against human trafficking and modern slavery, estimates that transactions in human trafficking involve hundreds of billions of dollars worldwide.²⁸

Few reliable figures are available on the scale of orphanage tourism, although estimates have been made. Lumos, the charity concerned with children who grow up in orphanages, estimates that in 2017 around eight million children worldwide were living in orphanages or children's homes.²⁹ Eighty per cent of those children had one or both living parents.³⁰ In Cambodia, the figure was 77 per cent;³¹ in Ghana³² and Indonesia³³, 90 per cent of children in orphanages still had one or both parents alive.

Research shows that the number of orphanages has mushroomed in recent years. In Cambodia alone, the number of orphanages and children's homes has grown by 75 per cent in recent years, despite a sharp decrease in the number of actual orphans.³⁴ This growth seems to have more to do with the increase in volunteer tourism than with the number of orphans. Half of Cambodian orphanages - the Cambodian government and UNICEF estimate that Cambodia has 406 orphanages³⁵ - are located in the tourist districts of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.³⁶ In Nepal, 90 per cent of orphanages are located in the five tourist districts, out of a total number of 75 districts in the whole of Nepal.³⁷

²⁵ Jane Reas, P. (2015) "'So, Child Protection, I'll Make a Quick Point of It Now': Broadening the Notion of Child Abuse in Volunteering Vacations in Siem Reap, Cambodia", *Tourism Review International* 18:4, p. 305.

²⁶ DoCarmo, T., Smith-Brake, C. & Smith-Brake, J. (2013) "The Dangers of Voluntourism: When good intentions just aren't enough", *Prism Magazine*, 41.

²⁷ ILO (2014) *Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour*. Geneva: ILO, p. 13.

²⁸ <https://polarisproject.org/human-trafficking/facts>

²⁹ https://lumos.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2017/02/Lumos_Factsheet_US.pdf

³⁰ https://www.bettercarenetwork.nl/pg-17382-7-68261/pagina/achtergrond_algemeen.html

³¹ The Guardian, 2 January 2014: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/02/cambodia-child-protection-workers-call-for-end-to-booming-orphanage-tourism>

³² IRIN, 27 May 2009: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=84582>

³³ DEPSOS, Save the Children & UNICEF (2007) 'Someone that Matters': *The quality of care in childcare institutions in Indonesia*. Jakarta: Save the Children.

³⁴ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56dfcc73c44d8dcc8546bd6/t/5af3ab95575d1f5d078094c3/1525918614/228/ReThink+Orphanages+-+Fact+Sheet+the+Orphanage+Industry.pdf>

³⁵ Xinhua, 20 April 2017: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/20/c_136223599.htm

³⁶ The Guardian, 18 August 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/19/the-race-to-rescue-cambodian-children-from-orphanages-exploiting-them-for-profit>

³⁷ Punaks, M., Feit, K. & Next Generation Nepal (2014), *The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering Combating Child Trafficking Through Ethical Voluntourism*. Eugene: Next Generation Nepal, p. XI.

Where volunteer tourism was previously only offered by a handful of NGOs, there is now a huge industry with numerous providers. In the 1990s, it is estimated that about 1.6 million people volunteered abroad every year; in the first decade of this century that number had jumped to 10 million people per year.³⁸ Companies offering volunteer trips are part of a multi-billion-dollar industry.³⁹ According to Jolijn van Haaren, children's rights expert at UNICEF Netherlands, the increase strongly correlates with the drop in the price of air travel since 2000 and the rise of the digital age, leading to the formation of organised business interests. "Originally the intentions were good, but it has become an incredibly lucrative business."⁴⁰

The exact number of people from the Netherlands who do volunteer work abroad, and particularly in orphanages, is not known.⁴¹ It is thought to be in the thousands. Following the heightened attention to the issue in Australia, estimates have been made about the size of the market there. *The Guardian Australia* carried out research on Australian support for orphanages in Southeast Asia. The research shows that 51 per cent of Australian churchgoers - often through their own churches - donate money to orphanages and children's homes. Orphanages are also supported on a large scale by mosques. More than 57 per cent of Australian universities advertise volunteer trips in orphanages. And between 4.35 and 15.61 per cent of public schools raise money for or visit orphanages.⁴² In Australia, this has led to a public awareness campaign and increased attention to the issue in schools.

The Better Care Network Netherlands, a network of NGOs that campaigns against orphanage tourism, recently approached 135 Dutch-based tour providers to obtain information about the market. A total of 39 organisations responded. The findings show that these organisations send 4,200 volunteers annually, representing only a small proportion of the total market. Africa and Asia are the most important destinations for volunteers, followed by Latin America.⁴³ From other sources, we know that volunteers often pay hundreds of dollars per week to volunteer in orphanages or children's homes.⁴⁴ Statements made by employees show how much profit the operators can make: an employee in a Cambodian orphanage told a tour operator that a volunteer would pay roughly 1,695 euros for a short stay, while the employee in question would earn \$100 per month.⁴⁵

It is expected that the global interest in volunteering, including volunteering with children, will continue to increase. For example, in 2015 a large American company concluded, on the

³⁸ Tourism Research and Marketing (2008). *Volunteer Tourism: A Global Analysis*. Barcelona: Association for Tourism and Leisure Education.

³⁹ Tourism Research and Marketing (2008). *Volunteer Tourism: A Global Analysis*. Barcelona: Association for Tourism and Leisure Education.

⁴⁰ Marie Claire, 25 May 2017: <https://www.marieclaire.nl/lifestyle/op-vrijwilligersvakantie-wie-heeft-daar-nu-echt-iets-aan>

⁴¹ De Volkskrant, 24 november 2017: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/de-gids/hulptoerisme-naar-weeshuizen-aan-banden-gelegd-na-groeiende-kritiek-en-perverse-uitwassen~be67da73/>

⁴² The Guardian, 17 April 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/17/orphanage-tourism-a-scam-fostered-by-australians-liberal-senator-says>

⁴³ De Volkskrant, 24 November 2017: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/de-gids/hulptoerisme-naar-weeshuizen-aan-banden-gelegd-na-groeiende-kritiek-en-perverse-uitwassen~be67da73/>

⁴⁴ Punaks, M., Feit, K. & Next Generation Nepal (2014), *The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering Combating Child Trafficking Through Ethical Voluntourism*. Eugene: Next Generation Nepal, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Czarnecki, D. (2015). "From Volunteering to Voluntourism: Challenges for the Responsible Development of a Growing Travel Trend", *Voluntourism Policy Paper*, 18, p. 16.

basis of its own research, that 84 per cent of millennials were interested in volunteering abroad.⁴⁶ The Netherlands - together with other prosperous Western countries such as Australia, the US and the UK - is a large and growing provider of “voluntourists”. As previously stated, the predecessor of the current Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation noted that there is a “growing interest” among young people in international volunteering.⁴⁷ This Member is of the opinion that the reality calls for more attention to the harmful effects of this industry.

Impact

What many “voluntourists” do not realise is that orphanage tourism often achieves the opposite of what is intended: it keeps children away from their families and it worsens the conditions in which children live. Instead of being helped, children are commodified.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the road to abuse is sometimes paved with good intentions.

That orphanage tourism maintains a corrupt industry has already been argued in this paper. But there are other harmful effects. For example, dozens of studies have been carried out which establish that orphanages - and the tourism that they attract - are harmful to children in a developmental sense. Most volunteer tourists lack the relevant pedagogical experience, according to experts.⁴⁹ This analysis confirms random samples in the sector: many volunteer organisations do not ask for information about the experience or even the motivations of prospective volunteers.⁵⁰ Among the providers sampled, 79 percent did not ask for a curriculum vitae and only a very small number asked for a certificate of good conduct, either in the volunteer’s own country or in the host country abroad.⁵¹

The lack of experience means that, according to experts, volunteers do more harm than good in practice.⁵² It is known that children growing up in orphanages can have lower IQs and suffer behavioral problems.⁵³ The many cognitive disadvantages that children incur are not so much related to orphanages in themselves, but to the large number of people typically involved in caring for and raising children in orphanage settings. Rien van IJzendoorn, a professor of family pedagogy affiliated with Leiden University, describes in an opinion piece how studies in Ukraine with three-year-old children found that they experienced more than fifty different carers since birth.⁵⁴ His plea to put an end to orphanage tourism is striking: “Volunteers who spend their gap years working in an orphanage want to mean something for children who have been less fortunate than themselves. This is a commendable motive. It suits an age which feels injustice sharply. Young people also have the adventurous tendency to roll up

⁴⁶ Business Wire, 27 May 2015: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20150527005936/en/Millennials-Tra>

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Parliament of the Netherlands, Yearbook 2013-2014, attachment nr. 1510.

⁴⁸ Punaks, M., Feit, K. & Next Generation Nepal (2014), *The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering Combating Child Trafficking Through Ethical Voluntourism*. Eugene: Next Generation Nepal, p. XII.

⁴⁹ Brown, F. & Hall, D. (2008) “Tourism and development in the Global South: The Issues”, *Third World Quarterly* 29:5, p. 839–849.

⁵⁰ Czarnecki, D. (2015). “From Volunteering to Voluntourism: Challenges for the Responsible Development of a Growing Travel Trend”, *Voluntourism Policy Paper*, 18, p. 7.

⁵¹ Czarnecki, D. (2015). “From Volunteering to Voluntourism: Challenges for the Responsible Development of a Growing Travel Trend”, *Voluntourism Policy Paper*, 18, p. 12.

⁵² Palacios, C.M. (2010) “Volunteer tourism, development and education in a postcolonial world: Conceiving global connections beyond aid”, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 18:7, p. 861–878.

⁵³ Save the Children (2009) *Keeping Children Out of Harmful Institutions: Why we should be investing in family-based care*. London: Save the Children, p. 6.

⁵⁴ IJzendoorn, M.H. van (2014) “Geen vrijwilligers in weeshuizen”, *NVO Bulletin* 15:5, p. 12.

their sleeves. We should cherish this sense of justice and resolution. But it should not be at the expense of vulnerable children who experience a large number of temporary carers with whom they bond for a short period, only to be abandoned each time."⁵⁵

In addition to effects at the cognitive level, there are other ways in which children in orphanages are made vulnerable by orphanage tourism. For example, the extreme “helplessness” of circumstances in some institutions may lead to serious invasions of privacy. A young woman who volunteered in a Vietnamese orphanage, for example, described how tourists would take pictures with the children (a practice that is widespread on social media). In this specific case, however, the staff members at the orphanage also informed volunteers which children had been sexually abused, and which not.⁵⁶ One can only guess what this information was meant to achieve, but it shows how the exploitation of a sense of “helplessness” can seriously threaten the privacy and personal integrity of children.

Unfortunately, international volunteer work often goes hand in hand with sexual exploitation: when there is a lot of “voluntourism” in a country, there also tends to be sexual abuse as well.⁵⁷ This phenomenon is all too often associated with orphanages. Sometimes the orphanage management is responsible for the abuse,⁵⁸ but in many cases, it is the tourists themselves who are responsible.⁵⁹ Research shows that the risk of abuse is higher when the institutions use an open-door policy, whereby volunteers can take children outside independently for an “excursion”.⁶⁰

In summary, orphanage tourism is harmful in various ways, but primarily for the children themselves. Institutionalised childcare can in itself be harmful; but exploiting it in the context of tourism produces even more misery. It is not without reason that experts worldwide have called for the fight against orphanages, orphanage tourism, and the organisations that offer harmful volunteer projects. In passing, it is worth noting the organisations that charge relatively high fees do not necessarily offer more responsible travel. On the contrary. Recent research at Leeds Beckett University showed that the most expensive volunteer trips were the least responsible.⁶¹

Developments

In recent years attention to corrupt orphanages – and abuses in orphanages - has grown steadily. In Nepal, stories have surfaced of children growing up in orphanages who are not

⁵⁵ IJzendoorn, M.H. van (2014) “Geen vrijwilligers in weeshuizen”, *NVO Bulletin* 15:5, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Czarnecki, D. (2015). “From Volunteering to Voluntourism: Challenges for the Responsible Development of a Growing Travel Trend”, *Voluntourism Policy Paper*, 18, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Doore, K. van, Martin, F. & McKeon, A. (2016) *International Volunteering and Child Sexual Abuse*. Bangkok: ECPAT, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Mulheir, G., Christopoulos, A. & Munroe, A. (2017) *The Case for an Australian Modern Slavery Act: Recognising the relationship between trafficking and exploitation of children in orphanages as a form of modern slavery*. London: Lumos, p. 12.

⁵⁹ Coventry Telegraph, 8 September 2012: <https://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/charity-boss-jailed-after-sex-3019243> ; McArthur, D. (2010) *Ten steps forward to deinstitutionalization: Building communities to support children's rights*. Kathmandu: Terre des hommes Foundation & Hope for Himalayan Kids.

⁶⁰ Schyst Resande & Fair Trade Center (2013) *No child's play: Respect for Children's Rights at Tourist Destinations*. Stockholm: Schyst Resande, p. 37.

⁶¹ The Telegraph, 11 February 2014: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/news/Expensive-voluntourism-trips-the-least-responsible/>

actually orphans and are used as part of lucrative tourist scams against their will.⁶² Former employees and volunteers from an orphanage on the Indonesian island of Bali described how children were only rarely genuine orphans, and how they were abused to make money from tourists. It was discovered that almost all children came from the island of Sumba, about 500 kilometers east of Bali, and had been relinquished by their parents in the hope of a better future.⁶³ Blog posts by advocates such as Pippa Biddle ("The Problem with Little White Girls (and Boys): Why I Stopped Being a Voluntourist")⁶⁴ and Ted Talks by Tara Winkler⁶⁵ have gone viral and intensified the worldwide attention to the voluntourism phenomenon.

Unlike in Australia, in the Netherlands public attention to the harms of orphanage tourism started relatively late. An important catalyst was the Rambam television programme broadcast on 8 December 2016. Viewers saw examples of how children in orphanages were deliberately kept poor, and made to appear as sad as possible, in order to be photographed with western tourists, many of them eventually ending up on Tinder profiles.⁶⁶ In the past year, several media outlets in the Netherlands have covered the subject, varying from quality newspapers⁶⁷ to lifestyle magazines.⁶⁸

Increased international attention has already had some modest positive effects. In Kenya, due to the reports of abuses, a provisional halt has been announced on the opening of new orphanages.⁶⁹ In Ghana, the government has introduced stricter directives for foreigners who want to work with children in residential care institutions. For example, they must be at least 21 years old, have relevant education and work experience, and submit a certificate of good conduct. Volunteer work is also only allowed for a minimum period of three months to prevent children from having to interact with new foreigners every week.⁷⁰ Following many reports of abuses, Cambodian child protection advocates have made strong appeals to volunteers to stay away.⁷¹ In the Netherlands, the increased attention is having tangible results: in October 2018, Fontys University School of Pedagogical Studies (Fontys Hogeschool Pedagogiek) issued a press release announcing an end to student internships in orphanages abroad.⁷²

Attempts to tackle orphanage tourism are strongly reminiscent of concerns expressed in earlier periods about the adoption industry. In many countries, the almost factory-like conditions of the international adoption industry were curtailed or halted following reports of

⁶² Punaks, M., Feit, K. & Next Generation Nepal (2014), *The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering Combating Child Trafficking Through Ethical Voluntourism*. Eugene: Next Generation Nepal, p. I.

⁶³ The Guardian, 4 February 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/05/most-children-still-have-parents-bali-orphanage>

⁶⁴ <http://pippabiddle.com/2014/02/18/the-problem-with-little-white-girls-and-boys/>

⁶⁵ <https://tedxsydney.com/talk/we-need-to-end-the-era-of-orphanages-tara-winkler/>

⁶⁶ https://www.npostart.nl/rambam/08-12-2016/VARA_101381131

⁶⁷ De Volkskrant, 24 november 2017: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/de-gids/hulptoerisme-naar-weeshuizen-aan-banden-gelegd-na-groeiende-kritiek-en-perverse-uitwassen~be67da73/>

⁶⁸ Marie Claire, 25 May 2017: <https://www.marieclaire.nl/lifestyle/op-vrijwilligersvakantie-wie-heeft-daar-nu-echt-iets-aan> ; See also: <https://www.bettercarenetwork.nl/nw-17382-7-3677385/nieuws/overweldigende-media-aandacht-voor-de-campagne-stopweeshuistoerisme.html>

⁶⁹ Trouw, 27 January 2018: blendle.com/i/trouw/kenia-pakt-weeshuistoerisme-aan/bnl-trn-20180127-9221716

⁷⁰ De Volkskrant, 24 November 2017: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/de-gids/hulptoerisme-naar-weeshuizen-aan-banden-gelegd-na-groeiende-kritiek-en-perverse-uitwassen~be67da73/>

⁷¹ The Guardian, 2 January 2014: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/02/cambodia-child-protection-workers-call-for-end-to-booming-orphanage-tourism>

⁷² Fontys, 12 October 2018: <https://www.fontys.nl/actueel/fontys-hogeschool-pedagogiek-stopt-met-weeshuisstages/>

coercion, deception and exploitation.⁷³ But human traffickers are creative. After all, trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar industry on which numerous criminal enterprises depend. The expectation is that traffickers will do everything they can to maintain their business model and, if necessary, adapt it.

Expert opinion confirms this suspicion. In some countries, orphanages have been known to gradually disappear on paper, only to make way for so-called “boarding schools”. Old wine in new bottles, continuing the same practices under a different name, and out of the sight of authorities and ill-informed volunteers. Volunteer sending organisations increasingly label their programmes as responsible, but without taking serious measures to change. Addressing orphanages alone in a narrow sense will not therefore be sufficient to put an end to the practice of orphanage tourism.

Proposals and suggested actions

In general terms, this paper argues that more should be done to tackle orphanage tourism, both on the demand and the supply side. The starting point is that good intentions should be encouraged unless they contribute to the perpetuation of harmful and corrupt practices. This echoes the position of the Australian senator Linda Reynolds, who said of orphanage tourism during the last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting: “We have created the problem for the region, so now we have to work with other countries to fix it”.⁷⁴ The Netherlands should feel similarly challenged, given the considerable involvement of Dutch tourists in maintaining the practice of orphanage tourism.

There follows a series of proposals to give shape to an approach to the problem in the Netherlands. These proposals are followed, in accordance with article 119, paragraph two, of the parliamentary Rules of Procedure, by concrete suggestions for action.

1. Ensure that volunteer sending organisations and tour operators who offer programmes that involve children are subject to regulations to prevent abuse

In the Netherlands, the new Innovation and Quality of Childcare Act (Innovatie en kwaliteit kinderopvang, IKK) has recently come into force. This law stipulates, among other things, that young children should have a maximum of two regular carers, that pedagogical staff must meet certain educational requirements, and that volunteers cannot be deployed to provide formative care.⁷⁵ This is just a few examples from a raft of new regulations. In the Netherlands, we set extremely high standards for (employees of) institutions that offer accommodation, care and education of children. The author acknowledges that the Dutch government has no jurisdiction in countries where orphanage tourism occurs, and orphanages and volunteers in other countries must follow local regulations. However, the government can regulate providers established in the Netherlands. It is proposed that providers, both commercial and non-commercial, should be subject to existing rules on the care of children in

⁷³ Punaks, M., Feit, K. & Next Generation Nepal (2014), *The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering Combating Child Trafficking Through Ethical Voluntourism*. Eugene: Next Generation Nepal, p. 5.

⁷⁴ The Guardian, 17 April 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/17/orphanage-tourism-a-scam-fostered-by-australians-liberal-senator-says>

⁷⁵ Law of 31 May 2017 amending the law on childcare and quality standards for kindergartens [peuterspeelzalen] in connection with the strengthening and harmonisation of quality standards for children’s centres and kindergartens, and the innovation of quality standards and the adjustment of guidelines for quality in pre-school education (“Law of innovation and quality in childcare”): <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/dossier/34596/stb-2017-252?resultIndex=2&sorttype=1&sortorder=4https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stb-2017-251.html>

the Netherlands when it comes to offering programmes in orphanages and the requirements imposed on volunteers.⁷⁶

Suggestion [beslispunt]: The Member asks the House to agree to request the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to investigate the feasibility of ensuring that providers are subject to existing legislation.

2. Ensure that combating orphanage tourism is an integral part of policy in the coming years

It is proposed that the fight against orphanage tourism and related forms of trafficking should become part of the policy of the Ministry for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. This does not require a revision of current priorities: it is consistent with the commitment that the Minister has already made to contribute to a better world. In addition, the Netherlands is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes the right to grow up in a family environment, the right to parental care, and the right to grow up with a child's own parents, unless it is not in the best interests of the child.⁷⁷ It is suggested that the Netherlands could be a more active contributor in this area. Finally, it is argued that the Netherlands has a special responsibility, since Dutch volunteers inadvertently contribute to abuses on a large scale. The proposing Member is, moreover, of the opinion that it does not make sense to consider all policy objectives as "priority" from the point of view of the activity of the House. He does, however, believe that the House should be able to request the release of funds in order to draw attention to certain issues. The Member therefore does not propose that the fight against orphanage tourism be made a priority, but more attention should be paid to it and, if possible, resources made available to tackle the issue.

Suggestion [beslispunt]: The Member asks the House to agree to request the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to make combating orphanage tourism an integral part of policy in the coming years.

3. Prevent Dutch taxpayers' funds from maintaining the orphanage industry

In January 2018, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation received a question tabled by the Member Becker [VVD MP Bente Becker] asking whether the government supports organisations that are directly or indirectly involved in the financing of orphanages in African or Asian countries. The minister replied that the financing of orphanages "is not a specific goal within Dutch development policy".⁷⁸ The fact that the financing of orphanages is not a "specific" goal within current policy is positively welcomed by the proposing Member. However, this does not exclude the possibility that orphanages may still be financed with Dutch taxpayers' money. This matter could possibly be addressed through our contribution to the EU. NGOs have pointed out that orphanage tourism, among other things, is supported through the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission, which makes large sums of money available to give Europeans the chance to study inside or outside Europe, or to volunteer. An example of this is Service Civil International, which is financed by the Erasmus+ program. The Member hopes that in the European context it will

⁷⁶ The Member strongly recommends the *Guidelines on the Deployment of Volunteers working with Children Abroad* published by Better Care Network as a sound basis for the development of a regulatory framework.

⁷⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child, New York, 20-11-1989:

<http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBV0002508/2002-11-18>

⁷⁸ Minutes of the Parliament of the Netherlands, yearbook 2017-2018, attachment nr. 1374.

be possible to insist that volunteer work - or volunteer work as a traineeship or research project - in orphanages is not financed by the European Commission.

Suggestion [beslispunt]: The Member asks the House to agree to request the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to ensure that the Netherlands does not support orphanages through taxpayers' funds and to urge the European Commission not to provide subsidies for volunteering in orphanages.

4. Launch a public awareness campaign to warn (prospective) volunteers about the risks

The Australian government has launched a campaign to prevent Australians from contributing to the perpetuation of child exploitation and orphanage tourism.⁷⁹ The Australian Ministry of Education is responsible for the implementation of the campaign. The proposing Member is of the opinion that those who volunteer, or are considering doing so, should be aware of the risks involved, and that, if they are made fully aware, will be less likely to visit orphanages. The Member recognises that the House is not in a position to determine what government campaigns should be about: it is up to the government itself to determine what resources are used to realise policy objectives. However, the Member wishes to use this opportunity to urge strongly that such a campaign be adopted, especially since Australia - a country that is equally responsible for a large number of voluntourists - has launched a similar campaign. It is suggested that we await the (preliminary) results of the Australian campaign before embarking on a similar initiative in the Netherlands. Such a campaign should in any case reach schools and universities and preferably also youth clubs and churches. The Minister is of course in a position to make the final decision on this. However, the Member points out that awareness campaigns about sexual exploitation and abuse, including those related to orphanages, are legally obligatory. In 2010, the Netherlands ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. For example, Article 8 (1) stipulates that each ratifying party must carry out or promote awareness campaigns in order to inform the public about sexual exploitation or sexual abuse of children and about preventive measures that can be taken.⁸⁰

Suggestion [beslispunt]: The Member asks the House to agree to request the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, in consultation with her fellow Ministers, to consider launching an awareness campaign on the Australian model in order to prevent orphanage tourism and the exploitation of children.

5. Ensure that orphanage tourism is treated at the international level as what it really is: a contribution to human trafficking

As argued earlier in this paper, exploitation by corrupt orphanages meets the international definition of "trafficking in human beings". Contributing to this form of exploitation is consequently a contribution to human trafficking. In order to bring a global solution closer, international agreement must be reached on the nature of the phenomenon. According to the Member, it is logical that an approach should be developed at the international level to the exploitation by, and contributions to, corrupt orphanages as contributors to human trafficking or modern slavery. An ideal outcome would be a UN resolution or an additional protocol to one of the existing treaties. Possibly, the development of a Modern Slavery Act following the

⁷⁹ <https://ministers.education.gov.au/new-campaign-tackle-orphanage-tourism>

⁸⁰ Convention of the Council of Europe on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, Lanzarote, 25-10-2007: <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBV0004127/2010-07-01> .

Australian example might be envisaged, in order to define, prevent and punish contributions to modern slavery and human trafficking at the national level.⁸¹

Suggestion [beslispunt]: The Member asks the House to agree to request the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to argue at the international level that exploitation by corrupt orphanages is considered as (contributions to) human trafficking or modern slavery.

6. Warn travellers more actively about the risks of orphanage tourism

Many would-be volunteers are barely aware of the risks they are undertaking. However, the information offered by NGOs dealing with the fight against human trafficking does not reach most potential volunteers. The Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation indicated earlier in replies to written questions from the Member Becker [VVD MP Bente Becker] that relevant information is "available" at embassies and her ministry has a "limited role" in this matter.⁸² Her predecessor also found that volunteers themselves "have a great responsibility to ensure that they are not misled or used".⁸³ The Member submits that this response is insufficient. Four countries - France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States – actively warn against the risks of orphanage tourism in their travel advice on, among other countries, Nepal.⁸⁴ The Ministry's travel advice and the related mobile app are frequently consulted by Dutch travellers prior to departure. The Member endorses the view that travellers must bear the chief responsibility, but also believes that when faced with abuses on this scale, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a responsibility to point out to Dutch nationals the risks regarding countries which have a recognised problem with orphanage tourism.

Suggestion [beslispunt]: The Member asks the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to request, in consultation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to modify the travel advice for countries where orphanage tourism is most prevalent, so that travellers are aware of the risks and of the harmful effects of volunteering in orphanages.

7. Promote responsible self-regulation among agencies and tour operators

A frequently heard complaint from prospective volunteers is that it is very difficult to compare one volunteer organisation with another. There appears to be a great need for a quality mark in the industry, provided that the quality mark is displayed responsibly by the relevant parties involved and that there is no false labelling that misleads travellers. The initiation, development and maintenance of a quality mark scheme or the promotion of accreditation agreements is, in the Member's view, largely a responsibility of the sector itself. At the same time, discussions suggest that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could play an important facilitating and stimulating role. For this purpose, the Ministry should sit down with representatives of providers, travellers, NGOs working on this matter, and possibly also the NEN [Nederlands Normalisatie Instituut], the Dutch organisation that deals with guiding

⁸¹ See the preparatory inquiry by the Australian parliament, published by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2017): *Hidden in Plain Sight: An inquiry into establishing a Modern Slavery Act in Australia*. Canberra: Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia.

⁸² Minutes of the Parliament of the Netherlands, yearbook 2017-2018, attachment nr. 1374.

⁸³ Minutes of the Parliament of the Netherlands, yearbook 2013-2014, attachment nr. 1510.

⁸⁴ Punaks, M., Feit, K. & Next Generation Nepal (2014), *The Paradox of Orphanage Volunteering: Combating Child Trafficking Through Ethical Voluntourism*. Eugene: Next Generation Nepal, p. 3

and stimulating the development of norms and standards. An attempt to develop standards for international volunteer work was already undertaken in 2016 but failed to bring about tangible results. A more active role by the Ministry, whether or not supplemented by a modest financial contribution, could promote the creation of an industry sector association, covenant or quality mark, and thus contribute to improved standards.

The sector might be inspired by the normative role played by the Dutch Association of Travel Companies (Algemene Nederlandse Vereniging van Reisonderingen, ANVR) - which most volunteer organisations are currently not affiliated to - which has successfully promoted transparency and standardisation in the travel industry for many years. Incidentally, the ANVR is currently working on an international tourism covenant (IMVO, internationaal maatschappelijk verantwoord ondernemen). The ANVR has proposed to pay more attention to human rights and children's rights in this covenant, for example the abuse and exploitation of children. The subject of orphanage tourism is not explicitly mentioned in the covenant, but it may fall under the heading of exploitation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs could play a role in encouraging this development.

The volunteer sector itself could also devise guidelines in parallel with this process. The organisation Volunteer Correct has already created a transparency index in which volunteer placement agencies are compared. Volunteer Correct is trying this year to set up a national trade association and, based on the transparency index, to establish guidelines which all members of the trade association will be expected to commit to. However, the concern is that not all providers are in agreement. Here, too, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could play a constructive role if the will exists.

Suggestion [beslispunt]: The Member asks the House to agree to request the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to engage with representatives of providers, travelers, and NGOs involved in orphanage tourism in order to establish a quality mark, guideline system, or to promote another form of (self)-regulation.

Financial consequences

The proposals presented in this paper will not incur new financial obligations. Any modest contribution to the facilitation or realisation of a form of industry self-regulation, as well as the costs of an awareness campaign, can be financed from the regular budget. The extent of measures taken in terms of awareness raising will depend on the resources available. In the Member's view, the costs of the other proposals outlined in this paper are nil.

Van Haga