

New tech fuelling global boom in child sex tourism: study

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Researchers say the spread of communications technology is facilitating child abuse at every step

Technology is transforming the global sex trade and making it easier than ever for travellers to prey on children, a landmark study on paedophiles warned Thursday.

The UN-backed report shines a light on the rampant spread of child sex

tourism, a scourge that touches every corner of the world and is outpacing all efforts to contain it.

Researchers say the spread of communications technology is facilitating abuse at every step—by helping offenders groom and procure [children](#) on the Internet before they arrive, network among themselves and share or even livestream images of abuse.

"With the click of a button, offenders can have children 'delivered' to their hotel room or anywhere else they choose," the report says.

Paedophiles can now speak directly to victims, using social media channels, with an immediacy "that was impossible 20 years ago," it adds.

In a country like South Korea, where advanced communication technologies are widespread, more than 95 percent of commercial [sexual exploitation](#) of children is arranged over the Internet, according to researchers.

Shadowy digital spaces are also offering abusers thicker layers of anonymity, with tools like cloud computing and encryption reducing their visibility and risk of arrest.

"Thanks to the increasing use of the so-called 'darknet', predators can securely post, view and exchange child abuse materials produced during their trips through networks that are difficult to detect", the report said.

New inventions in tech have also transformed the nature of abuse itself.

In the Philippines, identified as a key hub in Southeast Asia for organised cybersex, tens of thousands of children are believed to have been exploited by "webcam child sex tourism", which involves children performing sexual acts in front of a camera directed by the abuser.

The take-off of the "sharing economy" has also freed up new, more private places for travellers to abuse children, with sites like Airbnb inadvertently offering further insulation from the public eye.

The report writers called on tech companies to "take a lead" in developing solutions to undermine online business deals, such as programs that can track or block payments.

The "Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism" was compiled by more than 70 child protection agencies, charities and academics.

It bills itself as the most comprehensive review of how child sex tourism has evolved in the last two decades.

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