



# STRENGTHENING COUNTER-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS (SCOUT) IN SRI LANKA



---

For further details about the SCOUT project, our Counter-trafficking work or child protection work in general, please contact:

**Ms. Shyamali Gnanasena**

Senior Programme Manager – Child Protection

Save the Children International

18, Sinsapa Road, Colombo 06, Sri Lanka.

Tel + 94 (0)11 2555336 - 8 | Fax +94(0)2555077 & +94(0)2555477

# THE SCOUT JOURNEY

Dec. 2018 to March 2021

Save the Children in Sri Lanka (SC) has been working towards promoting child rights in Sri Lanka since 1974 through a variety of initiatives. One such initiative is the project titled 'Strengthening Counter-Trafficking Efforts (SCOUT)'. This project has been implemented by IOM in partnership with Save the Children (SC) and nine local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), aimed at empowering CSOs to support government efforts to tackle trafficking in persons. SC's role in this project is to strengthen the capacities of Government and CSOs to effectively identify, support and prevent child trafficking in Sri Lanka. The strategies used to reach this objective ranged from developing a Guidance note on identifying and protecting child victims of trafficking to the existing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on Identification, Protection and Referral of Victims of Trafficking,

developing capacity of civil society and the child protection and law enforcement workforce on child trafficking (with a focus on preventing as well as detecting child trafficking) and implementation of the SOP guidance on child victims of trafficking, and introducing guidelines on techniques for interviewing child victims of trafficking for law enforcement officials. As part of the project, SC also undertook research to assess the nature and push/ pull factors of child sex trafficking in the Tourism Sector in Sri Lanka. Further this project provides mental health & psychosocial support for child victims of trafficking and conducts a public awareness campaign on child trafficking in high-risk areas.

The project has three main objectives and five components as described in the above paragraph. Each component contributes to a unique outcome in strengthening counter trafficking effort.

# THE PROJECT HAS THREE MAIN OBJECTIVES

## Objective 1:

To empower CSOs (including the non-governmental organizations and the CBOs) to support Government efforts to address TIP at local levels



## Objective 2:

To build the capacity of government and non-government stakeholders (NGOs) to identify all forms of trafficking victims and provide effective protection

## Objective 3:

To increase understanding and reporting of TIP through national outreach and research

# Develop a guidance note on the implementation of SOPs with a focus on preventing child trafficking and deliver SOP training programs for child protection service providers and members of District and Divisional Women and Child Development Committees

The SOP that was developed to identification, protection and referral of victims of trafficking in 2014 did not have special procedures or considerations for children. Thus the SOP was not completely relevant for child victims of trafficking, as they would be within the child protection system, which is different to the generic criminal justice system that adults face. Therefore, a timely intervention was to develop a Guidance Note as a supplement to the main SOP, to assist officials in identifying and supporting child victims of trafficking.

The Guidance note was developed with a series of consultation with government interlocutors and other relevant institutions and individuals. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Preschool and Primary Education, School Infrastructure Development & Education Services (the Ministry) and IOM continually supported in reviewing and revising the SOP Guidance, to improve the quality of the Guidance note.

Some training programmes had to be conducted virtually, due to a rise in the pandemic; however, every effort was made to deliver these as interactively as possible, to enable a quality learning experience for

**There were 15 training programmes on the Guidance Note of the SOP held in Gampaha, Colombo, Kalutara, Badulla and Galle districts for 252 female and 89 male officials have indicated a 63% increase in understanding and capacity of identification, protection and referral of child victims of trafficking**

the participants. A series of further trainings for officers in the Police Women and Children's Bureau, based on the trainings developed by the SCOUT project, will be conducted by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2021 through other sources of Save the Children's funding to the Government.

There were 15 training programmes on the Guidance Note of the SOP, **held in Gampaha, Colombo, Kalutara, Badulla and Galle districts for 252 female and 89 male officials.** The evaluation results indicated a 100 % increase in understanding and capacity for identification, protection and referral of child victims of trafficking.

## 2

# Introduce guidelines on interviewing techniques for law enforcement officials

A key issue that research findings emanate is the lack of skills among law enforcement officers in interviewing child victims of trafficking, being aware of their vulnerabilities and complexities of their circumstances.

To strengthen the interviewing processes, The Guidelines for Law Enforcement Officials on Interviewing Victims of Child Trafficking was developed and approved for publication by the NCPA on 22 October 2020. A series of TOT programmes were conducted to roll out these Guidelines (see below) and printed copies were disseminated among the participants of the training programmes, Ministry and its affiliated institutions such as DPCCS, NCPA and Children and Women's Bureau.

The Training of Trainers (TOT) programmes on the Guidelines for Law Enforcement Officials on Interviewing Victims of Child Trafficking was conducted for 13 female and 8 male officials representing NCPA, Department of Probation and Child Care Services and was conducted by resource persons from the Police Training Academy currently providing training for Police officials.

**Following the training, a number of participants said how much they had appreciated it and found it very useful. In particular, Mr Wijesena Withana (former Office In charge of Investigations and current consultant at NCPA) mentioned that “we have attended number of training but this is the first time we attended an interview technique training in this nature and it is very useful”.**

## Identify child victims of trafficking who are held in juvenile detention centers, certified schools and other care institutions to refer to victim support services and subsequent re-integration within their families and communities

Child victims of trafficking are often wrongly identified only as victims of abuse or exploitation. The trafficking process that is a precursor to the abuse and exploitation is hardly recognized, resulting in children not receiving appropriate care or justice. Therefore, a key component of this project was to identify children in detention centers who may have been victims of trafficking, and to work towards their development and re-integration.

Within the Rammuthugala Certified School for Girls, 6 children were thus far identified as probable victims of trafficking. However, working with these children towards their re-integration during the pandemic was a challenge. Therefore, the immediate needs of the victims of trafficking at the Rammuthugala Girls' Certified school were identified and provided. Additionally, a 'Guideline on Re-integration of Child Victims of Trafficking into their Communities of Origin' was developed for the DPCCS by Save the Children to assist in the mainstreaming of standardized practices of re-integration across the country.

The following areas were identified as immediate support required to respond to the vulnerabilities created by the impact of COVID-19:

- Provision of hand sanitizer
- Workbooks for children who are sitting for G.C.E. Ordinary Level examination
- Provision of special tutoring in English and Maths
- Development of a child friendly Reading Corner
- Provision of a minimum of 100 books for the Reading corner, which are age and content appropriate for victims of violence
- Provision of mental health and psychosocial support based on individual assessments conducted by clinical psychologists

### KEY next steps

**The Department of Probation and Child Care Services and Save the Children will work with the Makola Certified School for Boys to identify probable victims of trafficking while continuing to work for the development and reintegration of the identified child victims at Ranmuthugala school. SC will continue to support victims' reintegration beyond the SCOUT project.**

# 4

## Develop a behavioral change communication strategy, and conduct a national public awareness campaign, and monitor effectiveness

IEC materials were developed and published in three different categories:

- 1 Newspaper articles in all three languages
- 2 Billboards in high-risk areas focusing on the importance of reporting Child TIP cases.
- 3 Social Media posts were also published to cover all users across the country and elsewhere.

### Social media campaign

The social media campaign in Save the Children LinkedIn and Facebook pages was conducted during the period of 25 September to 11 November 2020. The virtual campaign reached 19,425 individual viewers: 15,008 through Facebook, 953 through LinkedIn and 3,464 via Twitter. Therefore, on average, the campaign had reached at least 1000 per day during the 15 days

Prior to launching, the public awareness campaign design was shared with all the development partners working on trafficking issues in Sri Lanka. Some of them actively responded and contributed to their development. Government agencies particularly supported to develop and revise the designs to make them more appropriate and impactful.

### Newspaper article

Tamil newspaper article was published on 17th September 2020 on Veerakesari newspaper, with a circulation of 120000 copies. Further the same article's Sinhala version was published in the Daily Lankadeepa on 13 October 2020 with a circulation of 280,000 copies, while 175,000 copies of Sunday Observer of 30th of August 2020 carried the same news article in English language. In summary the message was printed and circulated via 575,000 copies of newspapers around the country.

### Billboards (Negombo, Galle and Ella)



# Undertake research to assess the vulnerability of child sex trafficking in the country

5

One of the key contributing factors for poor interventions to prevent or respond to child trafficking is the absence of valid data and information, to base policy and practice. Research into prevalence of child trafficking is also a problem, due to ethical issues that researchers would face in gathering information about criminal activity. To circumvent this issue and still gather research evidence on this problem, Save the Children conducted research with adults who have been victims of sex trafficking in the tourism industry in their childhoods. Through a qualitative inquiry method, the participants provided narratives of their lived experiences during their childhood.

The objective of the research was to generate an in-depth understanding of child sex trafficking in the tourism industry in Sri Lanka, including understanding which children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking, push & pull factors, and geographic areas where exploitation is commonly found.

The data collection was carried out in eight Districts under two main categories of Local and International tourist areas targeting four types of geographical areas such as Coastal - Galle, Gampaha and Ampara, Local - Hamabantota and Anuradhapura, Rural and Plantation – Nuwera Eliya and Rantapura and Urban – Colombo.

## The research identifies four main vulnerabilities driving the children into trafficking;

- Family dysfunction, poverty, neglect of children’s basic needs and impediments to education and health
- The lack of protection mechanisms within the family, community as well as the State
- Poor parenting, the loss of a parent, parental migration (overseas or domestic), emotional distress and the muted voice of the child in all settings
- Child victims of sexual abuse are more likely to fall victim to sex trafficking and exploitation

## The key areas of the research recommendations are;

- Increased monitoring, vigilance and support to families that are known to be vulnerable
- Suitable care and protection for child victims of trafficking
- Strategic engagement with the Tourism industry
- Effective detection and investigation of child trafficking







**Save the Children**

**Save the Children International  
18, Sinsapa Road,  
Colombo 6,  
Sri Lanka**

**Telephone: +94 (0) 11 255 5336  
Fax: +94 (0) 11 255 5077, +94 (0) 11 255 5477  
[srilanka.savethechildren.net](http://srilanka.savethechildren.net)**