



5.1 Middle East



State of CSEC/ Attitudes toward CSEC

In the Middle East there is little acknowledgement of the potential existence of CSEC. Israel is the only country which has carried out research. Questionnaire responses from Jordan assert that currently CSEC is not a problem but may potentially become one with the rise in tourism into the country. In Lebanon, NGOs do not deny the possibility of CSEC but argue that the country has other pressing problems that are using the country's meagre resources.

While Israel, Jordan and Lebanon indicate a tacit willingness to address the issue, the majority of the countries in the region have not conducted research and deny the possibility that children are being sexually exploited for commercial purposes. The governments of many countries have not responded to questionnaires. Furthermore, certain countries do not have independent organisations (e.g. NGOs) working in the country, thus limiting an important source of independent reporting. As such, conducting comprehensive analysis is difficult and relies heavily on country reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, external accounts and unreliable anecdotal evidence. In addition, many of the countries in the region lack the capacity to research and address CSEC. For example, responses from Lebanon contend that reconstruction efforts after the civil war dictate that the economy, domestic political stability, and geo-political strategy supersede any discussion of child rights. Iran is still recovering from the protracted war with Iraq and Iraq is reeling under the international economic sanctions. Yemen recently underwent civil war, and the Gaza and the West Bank are mired in a political battle with Israel.

The official position that CSEC does not exist is rooted in the belief that cultural values, religious tenets, and existing legal measures ensure that CSEC cannot be prevalent in Middle Eastern societies. Open discussions of sex related issues are regarded as a social taboo thus further explaining the lack of research and acknowledgement of CSEC. However, there are strong indications that CSEC does exist and is growing in the region. Indicators somewhat depend on the countries in question. The region can be subdivided into Israel, the oil abundant countries, and the impoverished nations. An Israeli Public Inquiry Committee commissioned by the Deputy Attorney General noted deep concern over the "gradual yet clear development of the phenomenon of the commercial sexual exploitation of minors in Israel." According to the Committee, CSEC is rooted in factors

Bahrain

Gaza and West Bank

Iran

Iraq

Israel

Jordan

Kuwait

Lebanon

Oman

Qatar

Saudi Arabia

Syria

United Arab Emirates

Yemen

similar to those in the west, an inadequate support system for children, the absence of a clear judicial system to deal with the issue, and the social legitimisation of CSEC.

In the wealthy oil producing states, (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman etc), foreigners are often the unfortunate victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The financial ability to contribute to CSEC, the lack of legal protection measures for foreign children, and the low status of foreigners in society, contributes to CSEC. Additionally, the high numbers of male foreign workers in these countries create a large demand for prostitution. In impoverished countries, such as Iran and Iraq, there are unsubstantiated accounts of increased prostitution due to dire economic conditions. In Iran for example, sources imply that prostitution has grown because of the prolonged Iran-Iraq war. In Iraq, though unsubstantiated, child sexual exploitation stems from the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf war and the ongoing sanctions imposed by the international community. There is no relevant information on the West Bank and Gaza, Yemen, Syria and Qatar; thus it is not possible to assess the extent and potential causes of CSEC.

Child Prostitution

While the extent of child prostitution in the Middle East region is unknown, anecdotal evidence indicates that there is a large problem in selected areas of the region. Israel reports that children, especially girls, are prostituted and doing sex work either on the street, in brothels or clubs. The Israeli Public Inquiry Committee found that 1770 girls were receiving assistance from the Service of Adolescent Girls, for sexual exploitation and incest. There are also reports of male children being prostituted in Israel. In Lebanon, groups claim that organised prostitution exists.

In oil rich countries, there are several reports of

brothels and prostitution. Sources indicate that many women come voluntarily, explicitly to work as prostitutes. There is a particular phenomenon of Eastern European women in the UAE. Despite this, many more females are trafficked into the region under the guise of legitimate employment and then forced into prostitution. In Saudi Arabia, there are reports of females from Thailand, Indonesia, Nigeria and South Asia being trafficked into the country under the false pretence of employment. While there are no concrete reports of this occurring in other countries, the same phenomenon is probable in other Gulf States which also have high numbers of foreign workers. This might account for the anecdotal evidence concerning the existence of many brothels in these countries, particularly the UAE, and other regional reports that note the high levels of trafficking into the Middle East. Beyond this, in the oil rich countries many females from South Asia and South East Asia are employed as labourers and domestic help. There are reports that many females encounter sexual exploitation in the course of their jobs. The unbalanced power relationships and the lack of legal provisions and assistance services do not afford victims any option of leaving positions as they and their families often rely on their salaries.

In many Arab States, the legal age of marriage for females is very low and men are able to exploit this and promulgate “pseudo legalised child prostitution.” For example, the Iranian government allows for short term contracts (Siqueh) by which a man can marry a female for a short period (ranging from hours to months). This was put in place to assist war widows who had no other means of supporting their families. However, the law is also used to circumvent the illegal act of prostitution as men exploit the low age of marriage (13.8 years legally) and offer eligible females a Siqueh marriage for payment. These women are divorced a short time later, however the marriage/divorce does not afford the female the entitlements of a wife as would be received in a regular marriage.

While little information is available regarding child prostitution, there are many accounts of Middle East nationals engaging in sex tourism. The men most often mentioned are from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait. Men from the other Gulf States and Israel are also mentioned but not as often. Common destinations include Thailand, India, Pakistan, Morocco, Egypt and Europe. In addition, there are accounts of Saudi men using wealth to exploit the poverty of Egypt and Pakistan. They travel to these regions and offer farmers several thousand dollars for their daughters. These marriages mirror the aforementioned Siqueh marriages and after a period of time, weeks or months, the men will leave the child and return to Saudi Arabia.

Child Pornography

The information available on the extent and nature of child pornography in the region is negligible. There are Israeli reports of the growth of child pornography but there is no evidence to support this claim. Likewise, there is unsubstantiated information about South Asian children trafficked into Oman and the UAE to participate in the production of child pornography.

The lack of evidence on child pornography may in part be due to the low accessibility of the Internet in many of the countries of the Middle East, thus dampening the visibility of the issue. A second factor are the rigid cultural mores that dominate the region. In the name of cultural integrity, information is strictly defined. As such, in countries like Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, there exist general prohibitions against information (e.g. magazines, books, images and broadcasts) that do not reflect the particular ideological slant of the state.

The Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes

Though there is little information on child trafficking, the issue receives considerable international attention, particularly in the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Israel. All indications point to the fact that child trafficking is a significant problem in the Middle East. The Gulf States and Israel are important destination countries with a plethora of accounts of women and children trafficked for forced prostitution and indentured labour. Source regions are South East Asia, South Asia, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Africa. The promise of well paid jobs is what lures the victims. There are limited reports of women and children being trafficked out of impoverished nations of the Middle East but these cases are extremely rare.

Within the Arab world, the UAE is perhaps the most cited destination for trafficking victims. The wealth of the region combined with looser political structures, and immigration policies, in comparison to neighbouring states, perhaps contribute to this phenomenon. Primarily, children come from South Asia, South East Asia, Central Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. There is a paucity of estimates on the numbers of children trafficked into the country and available numbers vary widely. However, it is safe to assume that thousands of women are trafficked annually. Saudi Arabia is another significantly mentioned trafficking destination for females. There are also reports of mass deportation; for example, Saudi authorities recently deported 17 Nigerian prostitutes en masse. In Oman, there are accounts of children being trafficked to the country to produce child pornography.

In Israel, the problem of child trafficking is growing though no official statistics corroborate this assertion. Moreover, trafficking to Israel is somewhat different than in neighbouring states. Most of the victims are from Eastern Europe, with the

majority coming from Russia. Compelled to claim Jewish heritage, the victim's entry into the country is facilitated by Israel's repatriation policy. Moreover, there are strong indications of the involvement of the international Russian mafia.

Status of National Plans

All governments in the Middle East Region, excluding, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen committed themselves to developing a National Plan of Action against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children by 2000. To date, only Israel has drafted a national action plan and it does not appear as though many other governments are following suit. However, Yemen, Gaza and the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan have drafted general plans of action though it is not known to what extent CSEC is addressed in these plans.

The Israeli Plan of Action stems from the recommendations of the 1997 Public Inquiry Committee. This committee investigated the causes and extent of CSEC in Israel and detailed proposals to address the issue. The National Action Plan itself is structured around legislation, law enforcement, education, information, communication and prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, information gathering, research, follow up and monitoring. It is unknown to what extent the plan addresses the above issues qualitatively.

Programmes and Policies

Protection

Many of the laws in the Middle East do not adhere to the principles of the Declaration of the 1996 World Congress and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Most countries, which to varying extents

share a common basis in Islamic principles, have put in place prohibitions against prostitution, as well as the aiding and abetting of prostitution. However, the laws in these countries do not explicitly address child trafficking and/or child pornography. For example, Saudi Arabian law does not expressly prohibit the trafficking of persons, though slavery and smuggling are illegal. While there are restrictions to access pornographic sites in Saudi Arabia, these are easily circumvented. All Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are linked to a central hub that controls what ISPs can access, thus controlling what consumers can access. To bypass this system though, one simply has to dial into and connect with a foreign ISP that does not restrict access. Other concerns are the narrow interpretations of Islam, which ignore the inherent equality of the sexes found in the tenets of the religion. The legal recourses for foreign residents are a notable problem in states where there are many foreign domestic employees such as the UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Similar to other countries in the region, Israel does not have specific laws to combat trafficking. Moreover, recognition of the trafficked child as a victim is lacking. Reports indicate that victims do not receive any assistance and they are prosecuted for illegally working in the country.

According to questionnaire responses a few countries have or are in the process of reviewing legislation and ensuring compatibility with the Stockholm Agenda for Action. The Israeli Ministry of Justice appointed an expert committee to review Israeli legislation with respect to the rights and welfare of children and to recommend legislative changes to improve Israeli law and practice. In 1998, several changes were made in relation to the production and dissemination of child pornography, offences committed on computers and the Internet; extra-territoriality, without the requirement of double criminality, was introduced.

Jordan has been proactive on the issue of protection. The Legal Committee Sub-group of the National Task

Force for Children and the Jordan River Foundation have reviewed and revised laws relating to Child Rights. Legislation on CSEC is included within this. As of 1999, a Draft Act was completed which is now before the Legislation Court awaiting adoption and inclusion in the draft Jordanian Children's Rights Law. A Legal Committee consisting of high-ranking officials has been formed to review article 30 of the Juveniles Act of 1968 with the aim of making juvenile courts more child-friendly.

As of 1996 in Lebanon, the Higher Council for Childhood was performing a legislative review to suggest changes to legislation not in accord with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Syria and Yemen have also created committees to review legislation. The Committee on the Rights of the Child commended Syria for enshrining the Convention on the Rights of the Child into the legal code. Additionally Syria has judicial procedures that take into account a child's special needs. These include, free legal counsel, confidentiality arrangements, and a provision for the child not to attend the prosecution if not in the child's best interests. This is similar to Jordan and Israel.

Proper legislation requires adequate law enforcement in order to meet the aims of protection. There are accounts of raids on brothels in Kuwait and deportations from Saudi Arabia. Despite this, the little concrete information on CSEC leaves the quality of law enforcement in the Middle East uncertain. To available knowledge, only Jordan is considering the establishment of a specialised juvenile police force.

Prevention

Prevention is the area where the least measures have taken place. This is due to a general disavowal of CSEC and a social taboo on discussing sexual matters. Furthermore, in most countries, the family, not the individual is the fundamental unit of society. Kuwait, in a submission to the Committee on

the Rights of the Child, wrote, "one of the causes of the proliferation of the phenomenon of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography is the break-up of families or parental delinquency." As such for many countries preventative actions to combat CSEC (indirectly, as CSEC is not an issue), deal with preserving the family unit through policy and legislation.

Israel, which is an exception to the general beliefs and practices of the region, also does not have CSEC prevention programs. This is despite acknowledging there is a problem. The reason given is a lack of funding. To available knowledge, the Jordan River Foundation and the Jordanian Women's Union each run telephone hotlines for children. Dar al Amal, a Lebanese NGO runs a prevention program for young girls (age 12-18) at risk of "delinquency."

Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Again, there is a lack of quality services in the region. Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, West Bank and Gaza and Yemen offer a variety of services, ranging from counselling, shelter and vocational services. In Israel, no outreach programs exist and little is done to assist the victims of trafficking. While in Lebanon social institutions provide recovery and reintegration services to a variety of needy girls. Additionally, Dar al Amal operates a project that fosters the rehabilitation and reintegration of women and child victims of prostitution. The Higher Council for Childhood is working on a recovery and rehabilitation program for juvenile delinquents. In Jordan, the Jordanian River Child Project offers counselling services and the Jordanian Women's Union operates a shelter. Defence for Children International organises a Social program in which emphasis is placed on reinforcing the rights of working children. Finally, five centres in Yemen provide, psychological, educational and vocational rehabilitation to children "who have lost their natural link to the family and are open for exploitation."

Successes and Difficulties

In the region, Israel has taken the largest steps to combat CSEC. This is partly due to the existence of a National Plan that has systemised the efforts of the country. Despite this, implementation mechanisms are poor, especially with respect to prevention, and recovery and reintegration. Israel has also done relatively little in the realm of trafficking and there is little information on law enforcement. Israel does not have the same social value system as other states and possesses the necessary resources and institutional capability to proceed further in combating CSEC. The greatest success for Israel is a better understanding of the issue. However, there seems to be inaction on the part of the government.

With respect to the rest of the region, Jordan has been a forerunner, placing child rights high on the policy agenda. The Lebanese NGO sector has also worked to combat CSEC primarily through recovery and reintegration. Syria has updated legislation to conform more to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite these first steps, CSEC in relation to the Arab world and Iran has remained at status quo since 1996. No state has either officially acknowledged the existence of CSEC, or taken steps to investigate the extent of the problem within their borders. Particularly culpable are the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In these countries, allegations about the occurrences of CSEC and international reports often cite citizens of these states as actively engaging in child sex tourism. In spite of these strong indications of CSEC violations, governments have chosen to deny the issue completely.

Awareness raising is the greatest difficulty facing the region. There are two obstacles to achieving this. Primarily there is a lack of resources and institutional capability. Several countries are suffering from downtrodden economies, the effects of wars and the consequences of international ostracization. As such, they do not

have the ability to address CSEC and other issues are taking priority. Additionally, the strong social taboo on discussing matters of sexuality, especially child sex is a compounding factor.

The following government ministries and departments, non-governmental organisations and individuals kindly contributed information to this year's report:

Jordan: Family Protection Department; National Task Force for Children. Lebanon: Centre Universitaire de Sante Familiale et Communautaire; Rotary Club of Beirut. Oman: UNICEF Muscat. Syria: Syrian Human Rights Committee.

Middle East

Country	Reports of CSEC			Stockholm Agenda for Action			ECPAT's Assessment
	Child Prostitution	Child Pornography	Child Trafficking	National Plan on CSEC	Steps taken to develop a National Plan on CSEC	General Plan with CSEC clauses	Steps taken to develop a GP with CSEC clauses
Bahrain	✓						★
Gaza& West Bank							★
Iran							★
Iraq							★
Israel	✓	✓	✓	✓			★★★★★
Jordan							★★★
Kuwait			✓				★
Lebanon							★★★
Oman			✓				★
Qatar							★
Saudi Arabia	✓		✓				★
Syria							★
United Arab-Emirates	✓		✓				★
Yemen							★

KEY:

- ★ CSEC is not regarded as a problem / No measures have been taken.
- ★★ Few adequate measures to address CSEC have been taken.
- ★★★ Some attempts are being made to combat CSEC
- ★★★★ Serious attempts are being made to combat CSEC

NOTE:

- Child Trafficking refers to the trafficking of children for sexual purposes in and/or out of the country.
- This assessment is based solely on information received by ECPAT International. It has been made on a comparative basis within regions. In some cases insufficient information has meant that an assessment could not be made.