

# What is Orphanage Trafficking

Orphanage trafficking is when children are separated from their families and placed in institutions to attract donations—turning children into commodities. It is one of the most misunderstood and overlooked forms of child trafficking.

## What is Orphanage Trafficking?

A form of human trafficking — specifically child trafficking — involving the deliberate recruitment or transfer of children into orphanages or other residential care institutions for the purpose of exploitation or profit. There is no formal, separate legal definition of orphanage trafficking. OSCE and UN bodies refer to it as a form of child trafficking.

Orphanage trafficking occurs because some orphanages operate as profit-driven businesses. Donations and volunteer programs create incentives to keep beds filled, and in many countries poverty — rather than the loss of parents — makes families vulnerable to giving up their children.

### Key Facts

- Exploitation often aims to attract donations, volunteers, or other financial support.
- Many children are falsely presented as orphans.
- It occurs at the intersection of child institutionalization and child exploitation.

## Modus Operandi



### Recruitment/Transfer

- Children are taken from families under false promises of education, work, or care.
- Parents may be deceived or coerced.



### “Paper Orphaning”

traffickers or institutions falsify documents to make a child appear parentless so they can be placed in an orphanage for profit, often through forged records or false claims about their family situation.



### Institutionalization

Placement in orphanages or residential care facilities, often private and profit driven.

## Exploitation Forms in Orphanage Trafficking

Once institutionalized, children may be:

- Forced to participate in orphanage tourism.
- Made to perform for tourists or volunteers.
- Victims of illicit adoption.
- Subjected to sexual exploitation and production/distribution of CSAM.
- Forced into labor or slavery-like practices, including forced criminality.

## Contributing Factors

It can be driven by the global orphanage industry, including international donor funding and orphanage tourism, where volunteers and tourists pay to visit orphanages and interact with children.

**“Orphan addiction”** — demand for “rescued orphans” leads to children being taken from families or falsely labeled as orphans.

**Orphanage Tourism** — visits and donations from faith groups, schools, gap-year programs, travel companies, and even embassies legitimize the orphanage model and fuel trafficking.

**Social Media** — can both mitigate and increase the problem allow orphanages to attract volunteers and donors with misleading stories and volunteering, while exposing children’s locations and personal details, increasing risks of exploitation.

**State and Citizen Contribution** — States can unintentionally drive demand by relying foreign donations, low awareness, and enabling unintended paid program effects.

## Where it Happens?



### Occurring Countries

(where children are trafficked into orphanages)

- Mostly low - and middle - income countries (LMICs) with high reliance on institutional care.
- Hotspots documented: Cambodia, India, Nepal, Thailand, Peru, Costa Rica, Uganda, Kenya, Haiti.
- Regions: Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Latin America & the Caribbean.

### Contributing Countries

(creating demand through funding and volunteering)

- Australia, USA, Canada
- (mostly Western) European nations.

## Myths vs. Reality

- Myth:** All children in orphanage trafficking are orphans.
- Reality:** Over 80% of children in orphanages worldwide have at least one living parent who could care for them with support.

## Impact on Children

- Family separation and emotional trauma
- Higher risk of neglect, abuse, and exploitation
- Developmental delays due to institutionalization
- Lost connection to culture, community, and identity

## Case Examples

### Russia - Ukraine

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, a significant number of Ukrainian children have been taken by the Russian Government for pro-Russia re-education and, in some cases, military-style training. Many were sent to various recreational camps in Russia and Belarus under the guise of “vacations,” while others were placed in orphanages or institutional facilities connected to Russia’s foster and adoption systems.

### Nepal

Some orphanages force children into labor, begging, entertaining visitors for donations, or sexual abuse. Under false promises of education or work, parents give children to brokers who place them in often unregistered homes, where they are made to pose as orphans to solicit donations from tourists and volunteers. (OSCE, 2025).



Learn more about it at:  
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