Committee History and Structure:
Topic 2: Trafficking in Women and Children

30 September 2015

Human trafficking is “the recruitment, transportation, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of coercion, abduction, deception or abuse of power or of vulnerability, for the purpose of exploitation,” including “sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery and slavery-like practices.”\(^1\) Human trafficking is a major avenue of international criminal activity and an area of increasing international concern.

People are trafficked in different ways. Some are kidnapped and forced into work or prostitution. Others are sold by their parents to individuals who force them to work or sell them to others. Still others sell their labor or bodies to traffickers. Regardless, the result is some kind of enslavement. For example, people may be smuggled into a foreign country and forced to repay their passage through sexual exploitation, forced labor, military service, or organ removal. Or they may be imprisoned in a home or business in their own country, unable to escape.

The exact extent of human trafficking is unknown. Most government statistics simply reveal the number of trafficking cases addressed by the criminal justice system.\(^2\) To overcome this problem, international organizations such as the UN International Labor Organization (ILO), have devised statistical models that project from known cases to arrive at estimates of all trafficking activities.

According to a 2012 report by the ILO, between 2002 and 2011, 20.9 million people (about 3 people out of every 1,000 people worldwide), were “victims of forced labour globally, trapped in jobs into which they were coerced or deceived and which they [could not] leave.” Of these, 74 percent were adults, and 26 percent were children. More females than males were trafficked: 11.4 million (55 percent) of the victims from 2002-2011 were women and girls, while

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\(^1\) This background guide was written by Karen Ruth Adams and Kim Davis with contributions from Nicholas Potratz (2015). © 2015 by Karen Ruth Adams.


9.5 million (45 percent) were men and boys. In 2011 specifically, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported that women and children comprised 82% of trafficking victims.

In 2011, most people who were trafficked were sexually exploited (about 53%); 40% percent were forced to work in industries such as manufacturing, cleaning, construction, textile production, catering and domestic servitude; 0.3% were used for organ removal; and the remaining 7% fell into “other” categories that did not fall into the former three categories. Trafficking for forced labor has had the greatest increase in share of trafficking purposes in recent years, constituting only 32% of trafficking cases in 2007, but 40% by 2011. The average victim of human trafficking was exploited for 18 months.

Most (98 percent) of the people who were trafficked for sexual exploitation were women and girls. Men and boys were generally trafficked for labor. Individuals who were exploited for sex were generally (74 percent of the time) trafficked across international borders, while those who were forced into labor were usually exploited in their home country. Overall, from 2002-2011, about 6 million people (600,000-800,000 per year) were trafficked across international borders. This is ten times more than the 80,000 Africans who were transported to the Americas each year at the peak of the slave trade.

The UNODC states that “[t]he crime of trafficking in persons affects virtually every country in every region of the world.” From 2010-2012, “victims with 152 different citizenships were identified in 124 countries across the globe.” According to the ILO, between 2002 and 2011,

The Asia-Pacific region accounted for by far the highest absolute number of forced labourers – 11.7 million or 56% of the global total. The second highest number was found in Africa at 3.7 million (18%), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean with 1.8 million victims (9%). The Developed Economies and

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European Union account[ed] for 1.5 million (7%) forced labourers, whilst countries of Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe (non-EU) and the Commonwealth of Independent States had 1.6 million (7%). There were an estimated 600,000 (3%) victims in the Middle East.11

Countries affected by human trafficking fall into three categories: countries of origin, transit, and destination. In a 2004 report by UN Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer, Kristiina Kangaspunta, 147 countries were mentioned at least once as a country of origin. Among these, the most often cited were the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Nigeria. The region mentioned most often as the origin was Asia, with the former Soviet bloc countries ranking second and Africa ranking third. Ninety-six transit countries were cited. Of those, Central and Eastern European countries were most often mentioned. Finally, 150 countries were mentioned as destinations, of which the most often cited were the United States, several European Union countries, and Japan. Developed countries were the most common destination. The Asian region was cited almost equally as a country of origin and destination (second to the industrialized world). Specifically, South East Asia was the most frequently noted area of both origin and transit and was just behind South West Asia as a destination.12

Between 2010 and 2012, trafficking for forced labor was more common in South Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific whereas trafficking for sexual exploitation was more common in Europe and Central Asia. Both occurred in roughly equal proportions in the Americas. While each region tended to have a greater proportion of one type of trafficking, trafficking for forced labor, sexual exploitation, and other purposes, such as organ removal, occurred in all regions.13 For example, of the 103 traffickers convicted in the US in 2007, the majority (83 percent) had engaged in sexual exploitation, and the rest (17 percent) were involved in labor exploitation.14

Human trafficking violates many of the basic human rights asserted by the General Assembly in its 1945 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), including “the right to life, liberty and security of person,” the right not to “be held in slavery or servitude,” and the right to be free from “cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.”15 As the GA sub-committee charged with improving human rights, what could and should the GA-3 do to encourage UN Member States to bring an end to human trafficking, both in general and among the most vulnerable

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12 Cited in Kangaspunta, “Mapping the Inhuman Trade,” 8-12, 16-18.


populations, namely children (who are most likely to be kidnapped and sold) and women and girls (who are most likely to be sexually exploited)?

**History and Current Events**

To reduce or eliminate human trafficking, especially trafficking in women and children, it is necessary to understand its causes, which include the economic forces of supply and demand for labor, as well as social, cultural, and political norms about women, children, poor people, and people from different ethnic and religious groups.

**Human Trafficking as an Economic Activity**

As noted, 40% of trafficked individuals become victims of forced labor. As a result, trafficking is, among other things, an economic activity, and can be understood, in part, in terms of the market forces of demand and supply.

On the demand side of the equation, it is necessary to consider who benefits from trafficking. The answer is: many people. Direct beneficiaries include individuals who enslave others as household servants, businesses who obtain workers from “recruitment agencies” run by traffickers, and governments that incarcerate people in labor camps. Indirect beneficiaries include investors who own stock in businesses that profit from such activities, as well as consumers who purchase goods and services that are made by trafficked workers and are lower in price than they would be if the workers were paid at market rates for their skill and time.

Whether traffickers are able to supply the demand for forced labor depends on economic conditions, especially whether the people they would like to “recruit” to sell their labor, kidnap other persons, or sell their children have better options. Thus poverty is a leading

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demand-side factor. The importance of poverty is evident in the fact that trafficking tends to increase in economic downturns. For example, in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, trafficking in Asia increased dramatically. In Laos,

An alarming number of children from rural areas are migrating to work in nightclubs, hotels and restaurants in Vientiane, the Lao capital, as well as other towns along the Mekong River dividing Laos from Thailand. ...Thousands of Lao youths illegally migrate to Thailand every year, with traffickers and their agents luring young boys and girls living in villages along the river across it with promises of high-paying jobs. ...The children are then forced to work without pay as factory workers, as servants in private homes, and as waitresses in restaurants and nightclubs in order to “repay their debts or fees.” ...Some children have to do hard labor without rest and are frequently beaten by their “owners.” In some cases, traffickers pay parents as much as two years in advance for the right to take their daughters to work in factories in Thailand. Some girls are then raped and “lured into prostitution.”

The supply of victims also increases as a consequence of displacement from natural disasters, such as hurricanes, and man-made catastrophes, such as war. For example, after the 2008 hurricane in Myanmar, UNICEF’s chief child protection officer in Rangoon said that “a broker came to a shelter and tried to recruit children.” According to Katy Barnett, a child protection adviser with Save the Children, “It’s something which agencies have been expecting. It’s an absolute standard thing in the fallout from an emergency like this. ... Traffickers can easily get hold of unaccompanied or separated children and tell them they’ll lead a better life or be safe.”

Together, supply and demand mean human trafficking generates $150 billion in illegal profits per year (three times previous estimates). Sexual exploitation comprises about $99 billion, with the other $51 billion deriving from economic exploitation. According to the UN, Generally the flow of trafficking is from less developed countries to industrialized nations or towards neighbouring countries with marginally higher standards of living. Even using conservative estimates, the problem is enormous, with trafficked persons

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usually ending up in large cities, vacation and tourist areas, or near military bases, where the demand is highest.\(^{23}\)

The Social, Cultural, and Political Roots of Human Trafficking

Economic logic helps to explain why people are trafficked. But why are women and children disproportionately targeted? The answer lies, in part, in their economic vulnerability. Women and children are less likely than men to be educated, to be employed in stable jobs, and to own property.\(^{24}\)

Women and children are also more likely to be seen as expendable, “throw-away” people\(^{25}\) and as sexual objects who can be bought and sold by others. According to UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet,

This human rights violation is driven by the demand for sexual services and the profit they generate; the commodification of human beings as sexual objects, and the poverty, gender inequalities and subordinate position of women and girls that provide fertile ground for human trafficking.

We have all heard stories of parents selling their daughters. What we haven’t heard so much are the stories of illegal recruiters and traffickers that cash in on gender-based vulnerabilities. Studies from South Asia point to traffickers scouring villages looking for widowed, divorced women, women or girls who had been sexually abused or censured by communities who were seeking refuge from alienation and wanting economic security, or economically excluded women wanting to migrate for better work. “Fly now, pay later schemes”, were deployed, trapping women and girls in debt bondage from the outset.\(^{26}\)

Women and children also lack the physical strength and other resources to deter or resist assault, as well as political representation to obtain legal protections and justice when


others violate their rights.\textsuperscript{27} Both developing and developed countries lack legal protections. Even when there are laws on the books, politicians and police forces often lack the will to enforce them.\textsuperscript{28}

Cultural factors, such as ethnicity and religion, often exacerbate the social and political dilemmas that make women and children especially vulnerable to trafficking.\textsuperscript{29} In many countries, people see individuals from other parts of the world as less than human and, therefore, as unworthy of rights. The legacy of forced labor can sour international relations for decades. More than 60 years after the forced prostitution of South Korean women by Japanese soldiers during World War II, the actions remain a major point of contention between the countries.\textsuperscript{30}

Methods for Reducing Human Trafficking and Protecting Victims

Given the number of factors that contribute to human trafficking, no single policy will eliminate it. Instead, it is necessary to address economic factors, such as the demand for cheap products and the supply of people who, due to their economic circumstances, can be lured and coerced into trafficking. In addition, it is necessary to address social and cultural factors such as sexism, ageism, and racism, which result in unequal economic opportunities and unequal treatment before the law.

According to many people, educating women and children is the key to eliminating human trafficking because it will provide them with confidence, awareness of their human rights, and the literacy and skills needed for more secure employment.\textsuperscript{31} Education of consumers, investors, and businesses is also important.\textsuperscript{32} But without attention to the economic and political factors that create poverty and make it possible for individuals, businesses, and


\textsuperscript{29} UN Division for the Advancement of Women, “World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration,” pp. 56-61.


\textsuperscript{31} “Half the Sky: Education is the Ladder Out of Poverty for Women and Girls,” Independent Lens, PBS, \url{http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/half-the-sky/education/}.

governments to force people into prostitution and other forms of coerced labor, education alone will be insufficient.\textsuperscript{33}

In a recent article on human trafficking, scholars Liza Doran, Darci Jenkins, and Megan Mahoney provided additional recommendations on how actors could help survivors of human trafficking. The authors suggest that actors could close "gaps" in coverage for trafficking victims by ensuring that they provide services to survivors of forced labor. According to the authors, forced labor victims often do not have access to services (e.g. shelter) following their rescue due to the frequent conflation of human trafficking with sexual exploitation. This makes them "particularly vulnerable to re-exploitation."\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Previous Committee Work on Trafficking in Women and Children}

The International Agreement for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic, ratified by 12 nations in 1902, was the first international document on trafficking in women. Its aim was to protect "women of full age who have suffered abuse or compulsion, [and] ... women and girls under age, effective protection against the criminal traffic known as the 'White Slave Traffic'... the procuring of women or girls for immoral purposes abroad."\textsuperscript{35} In 1949, UN member states adopted the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. But neither of these documents defined human trafficking.\textsuperscript{36}

The first international treaty to define human trafficking was the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which is a supplement to United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (CTOC). According to the Protocol, human trafficking is "the action of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person for the purposes of exploitation."\textsuperscript{37}

States that have ratified the Protocol agree:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Bachelet, "Fighting Human Trafficking."
\item \textsuperscript{34} Liza Doran, Darci Jenkins, and Megan Mahoney, "Addressing the Gaps in Services for Survivors of Human Trafficking: An Opportunity for Human Service Providers," \textit{Journal of Human Services} 34, no. 1 (Fall 2014), pp. 131, 133, 135.
\item \textsuperscript{35} "International Agreement for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic," 1904, \url{http://www.oas.org/juridico/MLA/en/traites/en_traites-inter-wst.pdf}.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Kangaspunta, "Mapping the Inhuman Trade," p. 1.
\end{itemize}
(a) To prevent and combat trafficking in persons, paying particular attention to women and children;

(b) To protect and assist the victims of such trafficking, with full respect for their human rights;

(c) and To promote cooperation among States Parties in order to meet those objectives.\(^{38}\)

One of the most important aspects of the Protocol is that state parties agree both to treat trafficking as a crime and to define the crime broadly to create a strong deterrent effect. Persons who consent to exploitation because they have been persuaded “by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits” are considered to have been trafficked, regardless of their consent. Moreover, children under the age of 18 are considered to have been trafficked regardless of the means of persuasion, as long as their “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt” is “for the purpose of exploitation.”\(^{39}\)

In terms of protecting and assisting victims of trafficking, state parties to the Protocol agree to protect victims’ privacy; offer protection to victims who provide assistance to the police or courts; and consider humanitarian factors in considering whether to allow victims to remain in the destination country or be repatriated. Optional protections include social benefits, such as housing, medical care, and legal or other counseling. The preventive elements of the Protocol include agreements to “alleviate the factors that make persons, especially women and children, vulnerable to trafficking, such as poverty, underdevelopment and lack of equal opportunity,” as well as commitments to publicize the fact that trafficking is a human rights crime, improve border security, and cooperate with other countries to share information.\(^{40}\)

According to the UNODC, as of August 2014, 160 states have ratified and become parties to the Protocol, which entered into force in December 2003. Marked progress on combating human trafficking at the national level has accompanied the creation of the Protocol. While 42% of countries had national legislation against human trafficking when states officially adopted the Protocol in 2003, more than 95% of countries have now implemented laws against the practice.\(^{41}\) The US is one example of a state that has implemented many of the

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\(^{38}\) “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children,” Article 2.

\(^{39}\) “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons,” Articles 3 and 5.

\(^{40}\) “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons,” Articles 6-10.

measures called for in the Protocol. Since 2000, the US has passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, established the State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, and begun to publish the annual State Department Trafficking in Persons Report. This report lists countries according to their involvement in trafficking, with countries listed as “Tier 3” or “Tier 2 Watch List” likely to be sanctioned by the US government.42

Despite the increase in the national criminalization of human trafficking, the UNODC reports that nine countries do not currently have any legislation against human trafficking, and eighteen more have only limited legislation. Many of these countries contain densely populated areas, meaning that approximately 2 billion people do not have legal protections in their country against the crime. Moreover, the UNODC notes that “impunity prevails,” as only 40% of countries had more than 10 convictions against traffickers from 2010-2012, and 15% of states had no convictions at all in that time.43

After the Protocol came into effect, the UNODC began the Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings (GPAT) to help countries combat trafficking by improving their criminal justice systems. In March 2007, the UNODC launched the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN GIFT), which focuses on preventing trafficking through information and international cooperation. The slogan of UN GIFT is that human trafficking is “a crime that shames us all.” 44

The UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air also supplements the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The definition of “smuggling of migrants is the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.” The smuggling of migrants differs slightly from the trafficking of persons. The smuggling of migrants occurs when the relationship between the person being smuggled and the smuggler ends once they reach the country of destination. In trafficking, on the other hand, persons are delivered to organizations or individuals who have paid for their delivery and the trafficked person must, after the delivery, repay their debt to the organizer through prostitution or forced labor.45


In addition to the CTOC protocols, other agreements contain provisions intended to address the trafficking, forced labor, and sexual exploitation of women and children as well. For instance, Articles 11 and 35 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly call for national, bilateral, and multilateral measures to prevent the “illicit transfer,” abduction, sale, or trafficking of children; Article 32 requires states to protect children from economic exploitation; and Article 34 requires parties to prevent the sexual exploitation of children.\(^{46}\) Similarly, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women not only addresses socioeconomic factors that make women and girls vulnerable to trafficking, such as gender-based economic and education inequality (particularly in Articles 10, 11, and 13), but also requires states to “take all appropriate measures,..., to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women” (Article 6).\(^{47}\)

Taking the view that improved economic conditions and universal education can reduce the trafficking of women and children, one can perceive the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – a set of goals established in 2000 to achieve eight development-related targets by 2015 – as contributing to efforts to combat human trafficking. Goals such as (1) eradicating poverty, (2) achieving universal education, and (3) promoting gender equality could reduce the rate at which women and children in particular become victims of trafficking. The rate of success has, however, been mixed. For instance, while Asia has on average come close to reducing extreme poverty and hunger by half, it has had more difficulty in eliminating gender inequality. Africa has performed moderately well in many states on promoting gender equality, while still suffering from severe deficits in regard to poverty alleviation.\(^{48}\)

As the 2015 deadline for the MDGs has approached, states have shifted focus towards a “post-2015 agenda” to replace the MDGs with a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In August 2015, UN Member States adopted a document from a 2014 Summit on the SDGs entitled “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” The document clarified and enumerated the 17 SDGs that would replace the MDGs if adopted. These include not only new targets for areas such as poverty eradication and universal education, but also targets that directly seek to address the trafficking, sexual exploitation, and


forced labor of individuals, especially women and children. On September 25 at a summit in New York, 193 members officially adopted the post-2015 agenda.49

Each year, the GA adopts resolutions to encourage coordination amongst states in combating trafficking or to address trafficking in women and children more specifically. These resolutions, which typically change very little from year to year, encourage states to adopt international conventions and national strategies aimed at addressing trafficking, particularly the trafficking of women and children. In 2013, the GA adopted resolution 68/192, which implemented a more unique measure compared with other years by declaring July 30 each year as the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons.50

Conclusion

Despite recent international agreements, human trafficking continues to affect the lives and threaten the rights of millions of people, especially the world's most vulnerable people: women, children, and the poor. According to the UNODC, “The challenge for all countries, rich and poor, is to target the criminals who exploit desperate people and to protect and assist victims of trafficking and smuggled migrants, many of whom endure unimaginable hardships in their bid for a better life.”51

What could and should the GA-3 do to address this problem? As you research your country's position on this issue, consider the following questions:

• What role does your country play in human trafficking? Is it a country of origin, transit, and/or destination? When trafficked people are found in your country, what countries are they from, and what kind of exploitation are they experiencing? What kinds of abuses, if any, has your country been criticized for, and how has it responded?

• What economic, social, and political factors contribute to trafficking in your country and region?

• What are the effects of human trafficking in your country and on relations between your country and others? Overall, does trafficking benefit or harm your country?


• Has your country ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children? Has it ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and/or the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women? Is it in compliance with these treaties? Why or why not?

• What laws and resources does your country have to combat trafficking and to protect and assist victims? To what extent are they enforced? What more could your country do, both domestically and internationally?

• What could the GA-3 and UN agencies such as the ILO, UNODC, and UN Women do to reduce and eliminate human trafficking and restore the rights and lives of affected women and children? Which of the causes, locations, victims, and forms of trafficking should be prioritized?

Recommended Reading


This article from CSM explains how consumers benefit from forced labor.


This article goes into some detail regarding the methods used by traffickers to coax victims into forced labor in the US. It further discusses how many people forced into labor work for businesses, such as restaurants and hotels, with which many Americans interact frequently.


The OHCHR website provides access to all of the major human rights treaties, including those related to women and children. It also lists states that have ratified the treaties.


These sites provide access to the text of the Protocol, as well as a list of the states that have signed and/or ratified it. For the text and signatories of a related treaty, see the source in footnote 40.
Montana Model United Nations


This website includes information about the UN’s efforts to combat human trafficking through UN GIFT. It also has information on how specific governments have addressed human trafficking, and recent news on the organization’s activities.


This website from the UN agency that focuses on child welfare explains some of the reasons children are trafficked, including for adoption and sexual exploitation.


The UNODC site is helpful for understanding the problem of human trafficking. It provides detailed examples of measures states can take to prevent trafficking and protect its victims. See also the report in footnote 5, which discusses the trafficking situation in different regions.


This recently-created UN organization is dedicated to improving the lives and opportunities of women and girls. The site provides an overview of the situation in most countries, as well as policy advice. The speech cited in footnote 24 is especially helpful. See also the sections of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) report cited in footnotes 22 and 25.


This document discusses several “special topics” related to human trafficking, as well as recommendations for the problems with human trafficking in each country of the world (beginning on p. 63). Countries in Tier 3 are subject to US economic sanctions. See also the fact sheets at [http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/fs/](http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/fs/), which include personal case stories and discussion of the psychological and other effects of trafficking.