

What Is Human Trafficking?

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Human trafficking has truly become a global threat to vulnerable men, women, and children worldwide. It is an injustice that affects millions of people every year on every continent and at all socioeconomic levels. Human trafficking is a highly organized and lucrative business, generating 150 billion USD per year, 99 billion of which is generated by sex trafficking within the prostitution industry.

The latest global estimate according to the International Labor Organization (the United Nations agency that deals with global labor issues), calculates that nearly **21 million people are victims of human trafficking worldwide**. Roughly 4.5 million of those victims are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

The most significant number of victims are said to come from Asia and the Pacific region, although human trafficking in Africa continues to grow when compared to 2005 estimates. The International Labor Organization also estimates that 55 percent of all trafficking victims and 98 percent of sex trafficking victims are women and girls. That is why sex trafficking is often considered a “gender” crime and why Exodus Cry focuses its intervention largely on women and girls.

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Defining human trafficking

The most widely accepted definition of human trafficking comes from the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, otherwise known as the Palermo Protocols. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000 and accepted by over 150 countries, the Palermo Protocols defines human trafficking as:

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, 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 to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”

Exploitation is at the heart of human trafficking. In the case of sex trafficking, exploitation implies the forced prostitution or sexual abuses of vulnerable men, women, and children. The United States’ Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) declares it a crime to coerce, force, or mislead men, women, and children into sex slavery, whether those efforts to coerce are subtle or overt. However, if a victim is a minor (under 18), it is a considered a crime regardless if there is evidence of force, fraud or coercion.

Victims are trafficked across both national and international borders, infiltrating nearly every part of the world, according to one World Health Organization report. The global scale of the problem is attributed to the various roles nations play in the exploitation of the victims, whether that be recruiting, harboring, transporting, or acting as destinations for victims. One UN report estimates that trafficking victims represent over 130 different nationalities and are present in almost 120 countries. While the problem is clearly of global scale, with some 600,000 to 800,000 victims trafficked across international borders each year, most human trafficking surprisingly still occurs within national borders.

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The effects of human trafficking on victims

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During the initial trafficking, victims are coerced and deceived usually through the exploitation of their current circumstances, as most victims have a history of abuse and are already living in precarious circumstances.

Once enslaved, victims typically are forced into unsanitary and stressful living conditions and receive little to no healthcare or basic services. Their movement is often restricted, their personal documentation withheld, and most experience significant physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological violence. Escaping from slavery is extremely difficult and dangerous, putting the victim at great personal risk. If rescued, integration back into society is incredibly difficult because of the shame, stigma, threat of retribution, and trauma experienced during enslavement.

Global efforts to combat human trafficking

There are several international organizations fighting human trafficking at the global level. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime combats human trafficking worldwide through promoting policies that incriminate traffickers and protect victims. The UN agency also produces tools and publications to help train law enforcers and raise awareness of this injustice worldwide.

Additionally, many governments are taking action to protect potential victims from trafficking predators. The United States' Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) was established by the US Department of State and has been highly influential in protecting potential victims worldwide. The TVPA defines, mandates, and funds United States' anti-trafficking efforts, including producing the annual Trafficking in Persons Report, which is the most comprehensive resource of governmental, anti-human trafficking efforts in the world. The United States' Officer to Combat and Monitor Trafficking in Persons is also combating human trafficking worldwide through three avenues—prevention, protection, and prosecution—which includes activities to raise awareness, identify victims, enforce appropriate laws, and convict traffickers.

However, perhaps some of the greatest work being done to combat human trafficking is performed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These anti-trafficking groups are working hard to prevent human trafficking, protect vulnerable populations, lobby for policy reformation, and even rehabilitate victims both at local and global levels. Exodus Cry is an active part of this global community of abolitionists and involved in these key areas of intervention.

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