

HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND  
CRIME

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## **Human Trafficking–United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime**

### **Background Guide for 2024 Southwest Florida Model United Nations Office**

#### *The Necessity of an International Address of Human Trafficking*

The purpose of this paper is to define and describe the broad term of human trafficking, explore the multiple avenues and methods in which this crime may occur, and evaluate potential solutions in order to combat this international issue. Key concepts within this paper include sex trafficking, the exploitation of labor, and the growth of human trafficking as a sector of international crime. The underlying theme of this topic is trafficking victims' absolute loss of human rights and lack of protection from the act of being trafficked. With the radical growth of this sector of international crime, it is imperative to find a solution for the preservation of these human rights that can be applied as international protocol.

#### *What Is Human Trafficking*

Human trafficking is a crime that involves compelling or coercing a person to provide labor or services, or to engage in commercial sexual acts. The issue of human trafficking has been at the forefront of the most common human rights violations internationally for years. Trafficking in persons is a serious crime and a grave violation of human rights that threatens national security and undermines sustainable development and the rule of law, as recognized in the Declaration of the High-Level Meeting on the Rule of Law (UN 1). The act of human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion for labor or a sexual act. Traffickers may use violence, manipulation, the false promise of work, and or romantic relationships in order to gain compliance from the victim. Those in economic hardship, survivors of natural disasters, and victims of political instability, homelessness, or poverty can become easy targets for traffickers (Blue Campaign 1). Language barriers can make it difficult for them to ask for help from law

enforcement, as can fear of the trafficker or the police, particularly when the victim has been transported across different countries or arrives in another country undocumented.

### *Sex Trafficking*

Sex trafficking, under the umbrella of human trafficking, is a problem that disproportionately affects women and girls. Eighty percent of the 800,000 individuals trafficked across international borders are women and girls. Sex trafficking also represents the largest growing form of commerce, estimated at bringing in \$32 million dollars annually (Deshpande & Nour 1), and it is considered modern slavery by which individuals are manipulated, forced, or coerced into performing sexual acts or becoming involved in prostitution rings. Traffickers commonly recruit potential female victims who are either economically or socially vulnerable- “These include women and girls who are susceptible to poverty, societal isolation, drug addiction, violence in the family, a history of child sexual abuse, family dysfunction, school failure, or a history of criminal behavior. It may also include orphans, women with physical disabilities, and those who are innumerate and illiterate” (Deshpande & Nour 1). A common form of involving women in sex trafficking is a tactic called finesse pimping in which the trafficker uses kindness, compassion, gifts of food, cash, protection, or shelter in order to make the victim feel indebted to their trafficker.

Victims of sex trafficking suffer a range of physical and psychological health conditions and social disadvantages. They may face legal barriers, since traffickers confiscate all forms of immigration and citizenry documentation. Language barriers, fear, limited knowledge, and lack of money are other barriers that women and girls may face to prevent them from escaping the sex trafficking ring (Deshpande & Nour 1). Another method to keep victims in compliance is to get the women in these prostitution rings addicted to drugs. This way, traffickers can then use the victim’s accessibility to these drugs as a means of control in order to severely decrease her

chances of escape. Inevitably, such women are far more susceptible to a multitude of health issues.

Sex trafficking victims are often physically abused and tortured. Providers should test these women and girls for physical injuries such as broken bones, bruises, burns, scars, and broken teeth or dental problems. A history of concussions and head trauma should also be taken to screen for traumatic brain injury, which may result in memory loss, dizziness, headaches, and numbness. Food deprivation represents an indirect form of physical harm that should be considered by screening victims for malnutrition (Deshpande & Nour 1). Infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, malaria, and pneumonia may be more prevalent among sex trafficking victims as a result of unsanitary and dangerous housing conditions, use of unclean needles, and little to no access to health care. In addition to severely decreased physical health, victims of sex trafficking also have a multitude of mental health issues as a result. They may face moderate to severe psychological trauma from daily mental, emotional, and psychological abuse and torture. Post-traumatic stress disorder, acute anxiety, and depression are all common psychological issues among these women. Health care providers should test for feelings of helplessness, shame, humiliation, distrust, self-hatred, disbelief, denial, suicidal thoughts, disorientation, confusion, and phobias among suspected victims ((Deshpande & Nour 1). It is common for sex trafficking victims in their early 30s to have become psychologically and emotionally disabled from working in prostitution. In one study, providers reported that sex-trafficked women were less stable, more isolated, had higher levels of fear, more severe trauma, and greater mental health needs than other victims of crime. Additionally, victims may develop substance abuse problems or addictions from being coerced through drug use by their traffickers or by using substances to cope or escape their desperate situations (Deshpande & Nour 1).



Image 1.

### *Exploitation of Labor*

On an international scale, human trafficking has become a major factor in the exploitation of labor. *The Diplomat* also covered this issue in an August 2022 article with details of how individuals who speak Chinese have been kidnapped and forced to work for criminal gangs in Myanmar. Hundreds of English-speaking Indians and Pakistanis have also been trafficked to Myanmar to run cybercrime operations, including online casinos (*Diplomat* 1). This news informational by Nathan Paul Southern and Lindsey Kennedy on modern slavery in the Golden Triangle was published in October 2022 and describes the lives of trafficking victims forced to work in casinos, online scams, and brothels. Southern and Kennedy focus on the online scams from the Golden Triangle and highlight how “all across South-East Asia, heavily guarded, sinister compounds have sprung up to house these industrial-scale scam operations and to trap people forced to work for them in terrifying conditions.” These Myanmar migrants are most prevalent in the workforce in Chiang Mai’s construction sector, while many of the Shan work on farms or other low-paying manual labor jobs that the Thai people do not want to do. These migrant workers are often deprived of salaries or payment and physically abused. The Thai police often prosecute them for minor offenses and then demand bribes (Lintner 1). Trafficking

for sexual exploitation is the most prevalent form in European countries, while in Africa and the Middle East, forced labor is the main motivating factor for trafficking. Women and girls make up most trafficking victims worldwide: Almost three-fourths of them are trafficked for sexual exploitation, and 35 percent are trafficked for forced labor. Children are no exception to these statistics.

A major focus in the United Nation's campaign against human trafficking is the Chocolate Campaign, which is derived from the fact that more than one-third of the world's cocoa comes from Côte d'Ivoire, where child trafficking and forced labor have been rampant and acknowledged by international initiatives, such as the International Cocoa Initiative. Since international deadlines for eradicating child trafficking were missed by manufacturers, the United Nations decided to campaign by trying to get the big chocolate manufacturers to confirm that their products are "traffic free." Until recently, most of them could not guarantee this because their supply chains were using child labor for production. The Chocolate Campaign encourages individuals to help spread awareness about child trafficking in the cocoa industry and to put pressure on big chocolate manufacturers to commit to obtaining certifications, such as from the Fair Trade or Rainforest Alliance, which are the best guarantees a company can have to indicate that products are made without the use of exploitative child labor (Dearnley 1).



Image 2.

*Demonstration of the Growth of Human Trafficking on an International Scale*

Human trafficking is also the fastest growing sector of organized crime and the third largest income revenue for organized crime after narcotics and gun sales. Particularly in the Golden Triangle region consisting of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, which meet at the convergence of the Ruak and Mekong rivers, gangs are able to take advantage of those wanting to escape or migrate to the United States, Australia, Japan, or Europe by their exclusive knowledge of the routes and necessary connections (Lintner 1). A new group of migrants is emerging in Myanmar desiring to enter Thailand as a means to escape political and economic instability in their home country. Most Myanmarans in Thailand are heavily indebted to the gangs that transported them across the border. According to a *Deutsche Welle* report published in July, “Ten years ago, horrifying reports of extreme debt bondage surfaced from Thailand’s commercial fishing industry, shocking consumers into reconsidering their position on one of Thailand’s leading sectors” (qtd. In Lintner 1). Much of that trade in humans involves criminal gangs that are active in the Golden Triangle. Separate from being a center for money laundering and drug trafficking, the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone, including the Kings Roman casino in Laos, has also become a hotbed for human trafficking. Many of the victims are young women from Laos



who have been forced into prostitution rings, according to a March 2022 report by Radio Free Asia: "Many women and girls are exploited, abused and victimized by human trafficking," a member of the Lao Women's Union of Nomo district told RFA. "They are from poor families, uneducated, unaware of the risk, and sold" (Lintner 1). Those individuals in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai are mostly of Shan ethnicity and have come across the mountains from the Myanmar area of the Golden Triangle, being transported by gangs that will charge fortunes for smuggling individuals and families into Thailand. Yury Fedotov, the Executive Director of the United Nations on Drugs and Crime, states in a recent report that "human trafficking has taken on horrific dimensions as armed groups and terrorists use it to spread fear and gain victims to offer as incentives to recruit new fighters," in which he cites child soldiers, forced labor and sexual slavery (Scotti 1). The report focuses on the impact of armed conflict on human trafficking. In conflict zones, where the rule of law is weak, and civilians have little protection from crime, armed groups and criminals take the opportunity to seek out potential victims. An example provided in the study is the phenomenon of girls and young women in refugee camps in the Middle East being married off without their consent and subjected to sexual exploitation in nearby countries (Scotti 1).

### *Influence of Mexican Organized Crime in Mexico on Human Trafficking*

Organized crime organizations are utilizing sex trafficking to their financial advantage and are using Mexican and foreign men, women, and children as lookouts and assassins, as well as forcing their involvement in the distribution and sale of drugs, among other illegal activities. Many, including Mexican lawmakers, have established connections between organized criminal gangs' trafficking in women, their killings, and violence against women and girls. Experts are now incredibly concerned about the forced criminalization of indigenous children and youth through recruitment, use of torture, and death by organized criminal groups. Additionally, they have expressed concern over the latest deportations of foreign migrants and Mexican nationals

being used as human shields by organized crime gangs. Authorities claimed that because of their economic weakness, migrants were open to being trafficked in a variety of ways.

### *Human Trafficking from Mexico to the United States*

There are now an estimated several hundred groups of organized crime across Mexico, many of which are now being linked to human trafficking from Mexico to the United States. Officials usually characterize major organized crime groups often referred to as "cartels" as the ring leaders of human trafficking, but in reality studies of the United States-Mexico border indicate there is actually a much wider range of organizations that are actually responsible for this issue. The most extensive of these studies has been conducted by InSight Crime, an organization investigating and analyzing how human trafficking networks operate along the Mexico-United States border, in which researchers describe three major findings about how people are trafficked from Mexico to the United States.



Figure 1.

The InSight Crime project depicts the primary routes and cities in Mexico with high rates of human trafficking, and the means by which these routes reach the United States border. Along the US-Mexico border, there are four main criminal routes, and the methods of conducting human trafficking vary slightly in each. The majority of these operations are managed by small, clan-based criminal organizations that work together or are bought off by corrupt local officials. The degree to which the top organized crime organizations in Mexico are involved in each varies greatly. While it occasionally entails complete control over these operations, this might range from providing victims to human trafficking networks to extorting money from those networks. The different colored routes shown on the figure show locations of high concentrations of organized crime. Migrant smuggling and organized crime in Mexico have a direct connection to human trafficking. Although the two crimes are separate, vulnerable migrants frequently end up being led through this area by opportunistic individuals who force them to work for organized crime groups or who sexually exploit them. To combat human trafficking, policymakers should advocate for more study and more funding for data collecting and analysis. On both sides of the US-Mexico border, there is a severe lack of information regarding this crime, making it difficult to decide where to focus available resources. It is difficult to understand the amount of human trafficking in this area, and even more difficult to provide resources for victims due to the lack of data about trafficking and smuggling. (The Geography of Human Trafficking on the US-Mexico Border).

### *Solutions*

#### **Human Rights Advocacy for Trafficking Victims**

Most often, victims of human trafficking are involuntarily moved across borders without any type of personal identification, documentation, or other identifiable information. This is intensely different from the voluntary nature of migration to another country to seek work or an improved

quality of life. The UN Summit for Migrants and Refugees is the venue for world leaders to address any gaps in the protection of real and potential victims of trafficking within huge migration movements. UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons Maria Grazia Giammarinaro reminded states of their obligation to provide victims with remedies—or at least access to remedies—including restitution, rehabilitation, compensation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition: "Provision of immediate assistance, protection, and support should not be conditional on the capacity or willingness of the victim to cooperate with criminal justice agencies," she said. "They cannot be re-traumatized by responses guided by policies, especially immigration policies which are inconsistent with the priority of preventing and eradicating human trafficking and exploitation" (Human Trafficking Risks in the Context of Migration).

### **The Blue Heart Campaign**

The Blue Heart Campaign raises awareness around the globe of human trafficking and its impact on people and society. This campaign encourages involvement by governments, civil society, the corporate sector, and individuals alike to inspire action and help prevent human trafficking. The blue heart represents solidarity with victims of human trafficking, the cold-heartedness of traffickers, and—through the "UN blue" color—commitment to combating this human rights issue. The Blue Heart Campaign is also raising awareness of human trafficking through the stories of the victims and thus trying to prevent further cases and raise funds for victims. All proceeds of the campaign go to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children. The Trust Fund provides vital assistance and protection to the victims of trafficking through a network of specialized organizations across the globe (The United Nations).

### **United Nations Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking**

The United Nations Global Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons was adopted on July 30, 2010, by the General Assembly. Through the Global Plan of Action, the General Assembly established the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons (UNVTF), especially for women and children. The Trust Fund's objective is to provide humanitarian, legal and financial aid to victims of trafficking in persons through established channels of assistance, including specialized non-governmental organizations around the globe (2021 Annual Report of the UNVTF). The Trust Fund additionally supports multiple international human trafficking prevention projects, such as the Blue Dragon Children's Foundation in Vietnam and Willow International in Kenya.

### **Transnational Prosecution**

A potential approach to tackling human trafficking as a transnational criminal enterprise could be utilizing an international system of criminal legislation similar to RICO laws. The Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) targets organized criminal activity and increases existing criminal punishments for acts committed in conjunction with an organized criminal enterprise (Cornell Law School). If this legislation were to be adopted into policy by the United Nations as a means to increase the punishment among organized groups caught human trafficking, it could hold member states and their officials more accountable to prevent corruption and deter future trafficking actions.

### *Policymaking Success for the United Nations*

In 2022, the United Nations accomplished many policymaking successes on an international scale in order to combat human trafficking. In 2022, they serviced and contributed to 8 intergovernmental meetings with in-depth background papers, expert guidance, presentations, and briefings. They held the 11th Convention of the Parties to the UN Convention Against

Transnational Crime. A new resolution on trafficking in persons (Resolution 11/5) tabled by Colombia had 50 co-sponsors and was unanimously adopted. It is only the third resolution of this key body on this crime in more than 20 years. It focuses on the prevention of human trafficking with a strong gender perspective and addresses in detail the potential root causes and vulnerabilities to prevent this crime. It helped Honduras to establish MENTHOR, a specialized mentoring program for prosecutors, law enforcement agents and government officials to enhance their skills and abilities in investigating and prosecuting trafficking in persons. MENTHOR was implemented jointly with the Department of Public Security of the Organization of American States (DPS/OAS). In 2022, 121 participants were trained by 14 mentors from 8 countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region. These trainings have resulted in a significant growth in the knowledge of human trafficking in these countries which can help them to prevent this crime. *Guiding Questions:*

1. Despite many current international projects, funding, education, prevention tactics and more, why does human trafficking continue to grow as a crime?

2. What are the characteristics of a target for human trafficking?

3. With access to many wide-reaching educational and prevention techniques for human trafficking being primarily digital, how should the United Nations work to provide this information to developing countries who suffer from severe human trafficking rates, but do not have equal accessibility to digital resources?

4. What are the variety of struggles different countries face with regard to human trafficking, such as economic levels or environmental conditions? Will all states receive equal treatment, or should certain regions be given more appropriate attention? 5. How should the United Nations address sex trafficking specifically, affecting predominantly women and girls, in countries where females are already facing additional human rights and security issues?

6. How should delegates address the exploitation of labor through human trafficking and its impact on the INTERNATIONAL working sector. What regulations or conduct should be in place to regulate these activities?

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