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Conference Paper

Stopping human trafficking

Session Handouts, Global Economic Symposium 2010 (GES), 27-29 September 2010, Istanbul, Turkey

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The Global Polity

Stopping human Trafficking

The Challenges

The exploitation and trafficking of men, women and children is a humanitarian problem of global scale. At least 12 million people worldwide are trapped in conditions of forced labor, a fifth of these are being exploited as a result of human trafficking. These forms of modern day slavery have become one of the most profitable and most horrifying businesses in the world.



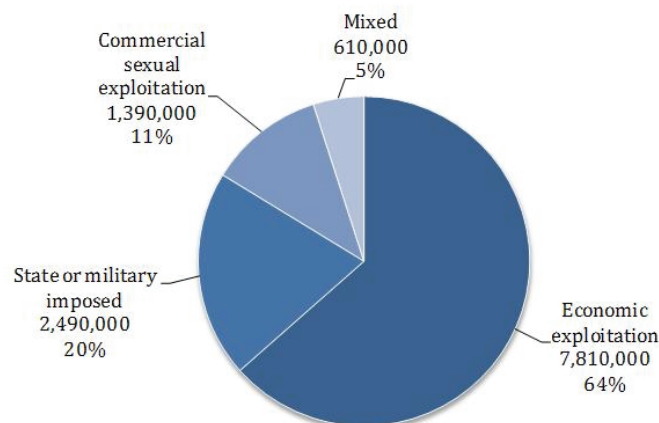
Human trafficking and coerced labor is said to be the fastest growing source of income for organized crime and its third most important, exceeded only by drugs and arms trade.

A fundamental reason for trafficking and exploitation is the demand for cheap workers and prostitutes in both developing and developed countries. At the same time, there are millions of poor and vulnerable people who are willing to depart and seek a better life abroad.

But, with closed borders, there are only few legal job opportunities in destination countries. This situation has created a breeding ground for smugglers, traffickers and exploitative employers willing to use force or restraint to make a profit.

Against this backdrop, this session seeks to answer the following questions: Can the current anti-trafficking campaign have any real impact? Are more severe trafficking laws and amnesties to trafficking victims helpful, or do they exacerbate the problem? Could better information provision by both governments and businesses help, e.g., via overseas employment agencies, awareness campaigns, or migrant-tailored websites? Do we need a new global agency, or public-private-partnerships in the fight against trafficking? Should emigration countries do more to protect their citizens abroad? Finally, would open borders and more legal migration opportunities help mitigate the problem?

Forced Labour by Form





Proposed Solutions

Mary Goudie

Chair, Women Leaders' Council to Fight Human Trafficking, UN.Gift

An essential requirement for redacting human trafficking is to raise awareness that it exists and how prevalent and evil it is. This orgatrates on two levels:

First, raising awareness on the part of those who may become the victims of trafficking; and, **second**, raising awareness on the part of society at large.

No doubt there are few who would deny that human trafficking exists; but most of those who are trafficked probably never appreciated the risk that it would happen to them: And the countries from which and to which victims are trafficked may not recognize that trafficking occurs in their part of the world.

Refugees and asylum seekers are especially vulnerable to trafficking. However, a key point is that it is vital to distinguish between those groups and the victims of trafficking. Before they are trafficked the victims of trafficking may have no problem, or no problem other than poverty. They do not realize that they are going to be trafficked. When they are trafficked that is likely to be because they are misled. Unlike arms and drugs, humans who are trafficked are likely to be persuaded to undertake a course of action by someone whom they perceive at the time as being a friend. What is needed is to raise awareness of how traffickers operate and of what should arouse suspicion on the part of any potential migrant.

The second requirement for combating human trafficking is to seek to protect the victims. This has to be much more focused than protecting all migrants, or all illegal migrants, from exploitation generally. The victims of trafficking need particular protection. For example they should not be subject to exportation, whatever the position may or should be in relation to illegal migrants generally.

Other measures include that employment and recruitment processes must be subject to more scrutiny; laws against trafficking, and especially the enforcement of those laws, must be strengthened; and businesses which benefit from trafficked labor should be hold to account.

Above all, the specific evil of hum trafficking should not be lost sight of by failing to distinguish it from the wider issues relating to migrants and labor exploitation generally.

Migrants may well be aware that they face all manner of problems, as indeed commonly they will. The damage is that this awareness may extend to the risk that in addition they may themselves be a victim to someone who does not appear to them to be a danger to all. It is the risk above all of which heightened awareness is vital.

We have to have working together governments: public/private sector NGO's and the churches to make real change globally.



Toman Omar Mahmoud

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1. Raise awareness on risks of trafficking and exploitation

A globally coordinated campaign should raise awareness of the scale and real nature of human trafficking and labor exploitation. The campaign should be based on pooled resources of governments, NGOs, international organizations and the media. Higher levels of awareness are essential to protect migrants from wrong choices and lower social tolerance of exploitative working conditions. Migrant-sending countries should specifically target potential migrants and provide objective information on the risks of trafficking and exploitation. To be comprehensive and meaningful, such information must include illegal migration options. Political sensitivities about the illegal nature of some options may place NGOs in a better position to help migrants assess their risks of trafficking and exploitation. Migrants should also be informed on their rights abroad including potential complaint mechanisms.

2. Protect and empower migrants and victims abroad

Migrants and victims of human trafficking need to be better assisted. Abroad, all foreign workers should be able to seek effective help and legal protection irrespective of their legal status. Besides toll-free numbers, assistance could be given in “One Stop Shops” that include victim rehabilitation and psychological assistance. These centers could be run by NGOs or public authorities, but should be detached from police or border enforcement agencies. Migrants should be facilitated and encouraged to file complaints against exploitative employers, recruiters and traffickers without having to fear legal consequences themselves. Besides, embassies should establish special task forces and assistance centers to offer alternative ways to protect their nationals working legally and illegally abroad.

3. Supervise employment agencies and recruitment processes

Employment and recruitment processes must be subject to more scrutiny and taken out of the shadows. Migrant-sending and receiving governments should coordinate the regulation of recruitment agencies and improve working conditions of all migrants. Only employment agencies with certified practices should be allowed to operate across borders. Work contracts should be standardized, easily understandable and contain clear regulations with regard to payment of wages, overtime and retention of identity documents. To minimize instances of debt bondage and wage arrears, migrants’ remuneration should be subject to independent control, e.g., via the supervision of wage payments to migrant accounts.

4. Toughen laws and enforcement at the national and global level

Trafficking and exploitation should be punished as a severe penal offence in both sending and receiving countries, with punishment going beyond mere monetary fines. National and international laws should be strengthened and more resources are needed to aggressively investigate and prosecute traffickers, exploitative employers and recruitment agencies who violate laws. This may require special cross-border prosecution units, which incorporate both police and labor inspection agencies.



5. Foster private sector initiatives to clean the supply chain

Forced labor and trafficking should be made a core issue of supply chain and human resource management. High-risk suppliers should be asked to be certified by third parties or agree to be audited against established codes of conduct. More generally, businesses should raise awareness among their employees, clients and suppliers and give targeted training sessions to its upper and lower management. Moreover, firms should be given incentives for monitoring and cleaning the supply chain. One way is to reward good practice, e.g., via international prizes and awards. Another way is to establish certificates for “slave-free labor”. In severe cases, firms should also be held responsible for the use of intermediate products which have been produced under extremely exploitative conditions.

John Morrison

Executive Director, Institute for Human Rights and Business

Two steps towards protecting migrant workers from trafficking

A key vulnerability for migrant workers, and one which can lead to Forced Labor and Human Trafficking, is the role of recruitment agencies to bring workers across international borders or internally within large countries. A classic example of this is the recruitment in poorer countries, such as Vietnam and Bangladesh, to work in textile factories in other parts of the world—all too often bribes are paid to “unofficial facilitators” in order to get the necessarily permissions and visas. Workers who owe large sums to intermediaries are much more likely to succumb to exploitation. Although different in nature, this can also be the case for Indian construction workers in Gulf States, domestic workers from Indonesia or the Philippines worldwide or undocumented Chinese workers in Europe (as the Morcombe Bay tragedy in the UK showed). What is needed is a basic international code of code for the recruitment of workers, that should not just apply to the recruitment industry itself (as it does through the “Athens Principles”) but also to all industries that use such intermediaries (such as agriculture, textiles, construction, domestic workers, hotels and catering and so on). The code will include two basic propositions: (i) That no worker should ever have to pay fees to any agency in advance of actually starting work (this includes bribes and unofficial payments); (ii) That travel documents should never be retained by employers in the receiving countries. Just these two simple steps would reduce the risk of business related human trafficking and forced labor significantly.