

FORUM: Human Rights Council (HRC)

QUESTION OF: Combating global human trafficking, while addressing root causes and implementing recovery programs for victims

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INTRODUCTION:

Human trafficking is a grave violation of Human Rights and a global crisis affecting millions every year. It exists in almost every industry, including domestic work, agriculture, mining, fishing, factory work and commercial sex work. Most victims do not receive wages. If they do, their wages are extremely low, which makes them essentially slaves.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS:

Human trafficking: “Human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit.”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

There are numerous, interconnected and complex causes of human trafficking. Root causes can be tied to individual characteristics and circumstances and deprive people of resources and opportunities, e.g., racial, ethnic and gender-based discrimination. Children are especially vulnerable because of their age and minimized ability to act.

Human trafficking consists of three elements: the act, the means and the purpose. As of the first element: a trafficker must recruit, transport, transfer, harbor or receive people. A trafficker achieves this by using one or more of the following methods: threat or use of force, coercion, fraud, deception, abuse of a position of vulnerability, giving payments or benefits, abduction. The trafficker’s purpose of doing so is for exploitation. Traffickers control their victims by using physical and sexual abuse, blackmailing, emotional manipulation and removal of official documents. The exploitation of victims is not bound to a certain place, it can take place in their home country or a foreign one, or during migration.

Human trafficking comes in many forms. These include but are not limited to exploitation in sex, entertainment and hospitality industry, as domestic workers or in forced marriages. Some victims are tricked or coerced into having their organs removed. Children are additionally forced to serve as soldiers or to commit crimes. Victims are often living in inhumane conditions, in fear of violence and are forced to work on construction sites, in factories or the agricultural sector while receiving none or inadequate salaries.

The root causes of human trafficking are diverse and hardly possible to enumerate, rather the following section briefly outlines some of the root causes.

Poverty:

Poverty and economic vulnerability are two of the most significant drivers of human trafficking. Unemployment or lack of access to equal opportunities, in addition to poverty, induces people to migrate to find better living conditions, which makes them more vulnerable to traffickers. Additionally, people sell their own family members, including children, to survive or in hope of a chance at a better life for their loved ones.

Lack of education:

Lack of education is closely related to poverty. Not receiving (good) education negatively impacts people's lives and the lives of their families and children. Without education it is much more difficult to escape poverty. In addition, jobs that require less academic education – agricultural, construction and domestic work, fisheries, mining – show lower income rates and higher rates of trafficking. Good education enables people to get more decent work and avoid conditions that lead to exploitation.

Restrictive migration and labor laws:

Restrictive migration and labor laws can create obstacles to lawful migration. In attempts to cross international borders in search for a better life, people may try to circumvent restrictions by migrating irregularly and engage the services of migrant smugglers, who may be traffickers. However, some countries try to address this problem by creating opportunities for migrants to become employed. Nevertheless, identification requirements and application processes often elongate the time until they become employed. Additionally, there might still be restrictive labor laws prohibiting migrants from working in specific sectors and sometimes tie them to a certain employer. If this employer turns out to be exploitative of their situation as migrants, it may not be permitted to switch to another employer without sanctions.

Lack of safe migration options:

Refugees and migrants are among the most targeted groups for trafficking. As stated before, they might turn to smugglers. Yet, smugglers are not necessarily traffickers, as they are getting paid for their services, however, the situation may change rapidly into trafficking as smugglers might demand more payment, sexually exploit or sell the people they are smuggling.

Armed conflict and natural disasters:

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) says, “conflict tends to fuel impunity”, hence traffickers are more willing to break laws and traffic others for profit. During conflicts or natural disasters, large groups of people can lose their home and access to education, work and basic needs like food and water. In armed conflicts, children can be forced to work as soldiers, women and girls are often victims of sexual trafficking. Displacement of people and, as a consequence of, such (irregular) migration, removing them from the protection of their families, communities or governments. This displacement can make them even more desperate and vulnerable to traffickers, as they are promised work or safety abroad. Migration often amplifies other root causes people are affected by.

Corruption:

Corruption can facilitate human trafficking as it assists traffickers to transport and exploit their victims. Public officials who are complicit or inactive hinder attempts to investigate and prosecute traffickers. Some officials may accept or extort bribes or sexual services, return victims to their traffickers or falsify identity documents. Corruption denies victims the protection they would normally receive if the law was enforced. If systemic corruption is widespread, traffickers can operate with ease while facing low risk of getting prosecuted.

Lack of Human Rights protection:

Many legal frameworks forbid human trafficking, however not all of them center on Human Rights. Certain aspects may be viewed as immigration, crime or public order issues. This often complicates it for officials to determine who is responsible for preventing and responding to human trafficking.

Cultural factors:

A persistent cultural factor is the devaluation of the personhood of women and girls who are not seen as full humans worthy of rights and respect. This becomes especially visible through

cultural practices like arranged, early or forced marriages, in general, where there is a lack of consent.

Consumer demand and buying habits:

Consumers typically demand cheap goods and services therefore corporations are sourcing goods and services from poorer nations, often using exploited labor. This happens for example in the clothing or fishing industry or in agriculture. In wealthier countries there is also demand for organs for transplant operations, pornographic material and commercial sex services.

The *Trafficking in Persons Protocol* and *Recommended Principles* specify countries' responsibility to act with due diligence to provide assistance and protection to victims of trafficking. Recovery programs should include the provision of appropriate housing as well as counseling and information in legal matters in an adequate language. In addition, medical, psychological and material assistance should be provided.

To successfully reintegrate trafficking victims, educational and training opportunities together with employment need to be provided. The special needs of children are to be considered. Additionally, families of trafficking victims might need to be traced and family reintegration may need assistance and mediation. Furthermore, victims should be effectively protected from harm, threats or intimidation by traffickers or associated persons. Likewise, re-trafficking ought to be prevented.

Countries should consider cooperating with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to achieve successful recovery of trafficking victims. The stated provisions should not be contingent on the willingness of victims to cooperate with public authorities. As victims have the right of access to diplomatic or consular representatives from their state of nationality, embassy and consulate staff should be trained accordingly. This, however, in addition to counseling and information in legal matters, does not necessarily include legal representation in court.

IMPACTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS:

Right to liberty and the security of person (Article 3): Trafficking inherently involves the deprivation of freedom through force, fraud, or coercion. Victims are often physically

restrained, have their movements controlled, and are denied the right to make decisions about their own lives.

Ban on slavery (Article 4): Human trafficking represents a modern form of slavery, whether it involves sexual exploitation, forced labor, or organ trafficking.

Ban on torture (Article 5): Trafficking victims routinely face physical violence, psychological manipulation, threats, and degrading treatment.

Right to freedom of movement (Article 13): Trafficked individuals are often tied to a certain place and cannot move freely.

Right to marriage (Article 16): Trafficking victims might be forced into marriage.

Right to work (Article 23): Trafficked persons are often exploited for labor, favorable working conditions, wages and safe working environments are often denied.

POTENTIAL ISSUES:

Different agencies have different approaches to the problem, focusing on one may neglect important aspects. A holistic approach is advisable.

Insufficient victim identification and protection mechanisms.

Limited international cooperation and data sharing.

Inadequate funding of recovery and reintegration programs .

Stigmatizing and re-traumatization of victims.

Source, transit and destination countries need to focus on different measures.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

When combating root causes, capacity building, cooperation on various scales and awareness of the work of other institutions may be central issues.

To support a recovery process, temporary residence permits might be helpful. Depending on the design, victims may then receive state funded medical aid, psychological counseling or legal assistance. Fees for working permits may be waived. The possibility of applying for citizenship may also be established.

Enhancing cross-border collaboration for investigation, prosecution and victim support.

Addressing root causes

- a) Investing in education and economic development,
- b) Supporting conflict resolution and peacebuilding,
- c) Promoting gender equality and child protection.

Victim-centered recovery programs.

Public awareness campaigns: educating communities to recognize and report trafficking.

Source countries should focus on prevention by addressing root causes. Transit countries are well advised to focus on strong border monitoring, training for officials to identify victims, and disruption of trafficking networks. Destination countries ought to emphasize victim identification, functional enforcement, reduce demand for services provided by trafficking victims.

MAIN PARTIES INVOLVED:

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR)

UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons (UNVTF)

Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT)

Source countries: Bangladesh, Philippines, Ukraine, Brazil, Colombia, Ghana, Ethiopia

Transit countries: Central America, Turkey and Balkan route, Indonesia, Malaysia

Countries of destination: US, western Europe, Australia, gulf states, China, South Africa

These roles are fluid and can overlap depending on the type of trafficking and regional dynamics. Also, countries can have multiple roles like India, Thailand, Mexico and Russia. Additionally, countries can have internal trafficking these include but are not limited to India, China and Brazil.

In general, the following patterns emerge global south to global north movement, rural-to-urban flow as well as post-conflict vulnerability.

QUESTIONS FOR DELEGATES:

What measures has your country implemented to combat human trafficking?

How can international cooperation be improved to address cross-border trafficking?

What strategies can be used to tackle the root causes of trafficking in vulnerable regions?

How can we ensure that recovery programs are culturally sensitive and sustainable?

What role should NGOs and civil society play in prevention and victim support?

What measures have been implemented and need improvements?

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