

What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is a complex issue with many faces and many layers. At a base level, the term ‘Human Trafficking’ refers to situations of exploitation and forced work: people being held against their will to produce goods, provide services, or commercialize themselves sexually.

Definition and Explanation

According to the UN’s Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons,¹ Human Trafficking has three parts, an “Act,” a “Means,” and a “Purpose.”²

“The Act” refers to:

- Recruitment
 - Finding, enlisting, and/or kidnapping a human being
- Transportation
 - Removing the trafficked person from safe, home environments and placing them into unsafe, exploitative environments. Transportation may mean movement between countries or states, although international or interstate transportation is not necessary for a crime to be called “Human Trafficking”
- Transfer
 - Exchanging a trafficked person with another trafficker
- Harbor
 - Holding a trafficked person in a location for any period of time (Note: These locations are often called “safe houses,” but are anything BUT safe for victims)
- Reception
 - Taking and exploiting a trafficked person at their final destination

“The Means” refers to the method used to lure the person. Some ‘Means’ would be:

- Use of force
- Deception
- Coercion
- Abduction
- Fraud

¹ A/RES/55/25 Annex II: The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

² UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2014 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.14.V.10).

- Abuse of Power
- Abuse of Victim's Vulnerability
- Giving Payment or Benefits

“The Purpose” is always exploitation. Some forms of exploitation are:

- Sexual Exploitation
- Forced Labor
- Removal of Organs

Looking Deeper

In different contexts, human trafficking can and does look very differently. For example:

- In India and other places across Asia, many people are kidnapped or lured with false promises to work in brick kilns where they are then unable to leave, rest, or contact anyone outside of the kiln. Some people are trapped in inhumane and hazardous working conditions for years without any way of escape.
- In Mexico and the United States of America, people desperate for jobs contract themselves for migrant labour, only to have their ID or passport taken away. They are kept from escaping the employers and are forced to work in dangerous and intense working conditions in factories, on farms, or in food processing plants.
- In Europe, girls from around the world are brought against their will and forced into European brothels. Some are minors—under the age of 18—and many who are adults did not consent and are being held against their will and forced to sell sexual services.

Of course, these small snapshots are generalizations, and any of these forms of human trafficking can occur in any place in the world.

There are many players in any case of human trafficking, and all cases of human trafficking are facilitated in part by the systems of government, law, economy, and culture of the given place wherein a person is trafficked.

Here is a simplified look at the **Layers of Players** involved in a case of human trafficking:

- **Victim:** this is the person who is in the center of the web. This person has been manipulated in some way (kidnapped, lied to, sold, etc.) and is being exploited.
- **Trafficker:** this is the person (or group of people) who controls the victim in some way; the trafficker could have been the person who kidnapped the victim and sold them to a brothel, or could be the person who gave the victim false travel documents. The role of the trafficker is very flexible, depending on the precise situation.
- **Police:** Police involvement is a major factor that perpetuates trafficking; while human trafficking is illegal in all countries, enforcement of the law often falls short. Frequently, police are often bribed by traffickers to keep quiet or even participate in the trade themselves.
- **Gangs:** Traffickers are often connected to gangs, which furthers the complexity of the problem and heightens the danger a rescuer might face.

- **Family/Community:** When a victim is rescued from trafficking and returns home, they are often ostracized from the community because of social shame and a general lack of societal understanding. They aren't welcomed home, which perpetuates the cycle.
- **Government:** Although governments criminalize the act of trafficking, government systems can create environments for trafficking to occur. Many cases of international human trafficking have roots in migration law and border protection, where people enter into agreements with a trafficker to move them across a closed border and then find themselves stuck in an exploitative environment. Also, exploitative and dangerous work environments sometimes exist because governments lack laws that protect workers or require employers to create safe working conditions.
- **Economy:** Historically, chattel slavery (the commodification and exchange of people, especially in the trans-Atlantic slave trade) was driven in part by a desire for cheap labour and a controllable, exploitable workforce, both of which lead to cheaper goods. In the same way, modern global industry and demand for cheap goods creates an environment in the supply and production chain where humane working conditions and rightful compensation for workers is less important to some corporate managers than cost-cutting and profit-boosting. Although individuals are ultimately to blame for exploiting others, the economic systems in which human traffickers live are environments that in some ways encourage trafficking-like practices for the sake of cheap products.³

Some Statistics

Global Slavery Index 2016⁴

“Estimated Number of People Living in Modern Slavery Globally” – 45.8 million

“58% of those living in slavery are in 5 countries:”

(Country – Estimated number in modern slavery)

1. India – 18,354,700
2. China – 3,388,400
3. Pakistan – 2,134,900
4. Bangladesh – 1,531,300
5. Uzbekistan – 1,236,600

“This year, the country with the highest estimated percent [4.373%] of its population in modern slavery is North Korea.”

³ L P Beutin, 'Black Suffering for/from Anti-trafficking Advocacy', Anti-Trafficking Review, issue 9, 2017, pp. 14–30, www.antitraffickingreview.org

⁴ “The Global Slavery Index 2016,” Walk Free Foundation. All rights reserved. Printed in Australia/ United Kingdom/ India. www.globalslaveryindex.org

An Alternate Estimate:

Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Alliance 8.7⁵

Alliance 8.7 is a group that advocates for all people (and especially government bodies) to work towards Target 8.7 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals established in 2015 by the United Nations.

“An estimated **40.3 million people were victims of modern slavery in 2016**. In other words, on any given day in 2016, there were likely to be more than 40 million men, women, and children who were being forced to work against their will under threat or who were living in a forced marriage that they had not agreed to.”

Of these 40.3 million victims:

- 24.9 million people were in forced labour.
- 15.4 million people were living in a forced marriage to which they had not consented.

Closing Remarks

Human Trafficking is a serious violation of human rights and a basic level of human decency. It is a massive criminal industry with huge stakeholders, including governments, corporations, and countless individuals. Although national and international governmental bodies have worked to create provisions to define trafficking, criminalize those people who traffic other human beings, and provide some restitution to former victims, human trafficking continues to be a deep and broken part of society.

You can see in the above statistics that measuring and reporting on human trafficking is very difficult, and different research entities measure Human Trafficking and “modern slavery” in different ways, leading to sometimes contradictory results. You can also see that human trafficking, as a social phenomenon as well as a crime, is very hard to define, and this difficulty makes policy decisions and law enforcement much more difficult.

We hope this resource helps you understand more about what Human Trafficking is and how complex and deep-rooted this issue continues to be. By reading this, you are supporting Guria’s efforts of fighting Human Trafficking in Northern India. Awareness and understanding are the first steps to changed societies. Thank you.

⁵ Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage. International Labour Office (ILO), Geneva, 2017