Forum: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNW)

Issue #2: Measures to address human trafficking and the exploitation of women

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Zehbrauskas, Andriana. "While walking home from school in Yoro, Honduras, the 13-year-old girl in the middle was grabbed, thrown into a van, beaten, raped and released one hour later." UN news, https://shorturl.at/O4ifG

Introduction

Human trafficking and the exploitation of women remain important and urgent issues in the current world, affecting millions of lives every year. Women and girls, most noticeably, are disproportionately targeted for sexual exploitation, forced labor, and other forms of abuse. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in 2022, 61% of detected trafficking victims worldwide are female, with the majority trafficked for sexual exploitation (*Special Points of Interest GLOBAL REPORT on*

TRAFFICKING in PERSONS 2024). The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) further reports that approximately 27.6 million people are in forced labour, 39.4% of them are women and girls ("Data and Research on Forced Labour"). Despite the growing awareness and legal frameworks continuing to create progress, the trafficking networks are still thriving in the shadows of society and taking advantage of the gaps in enforcement and victim protection. Complex factors, including systemic gender inequality, poverty, and conflict, fuel the continuation of these crimes. Crisis such as armed conflict, natural disasters, and humanitarian emergencies add a heightened risk for vulnerability ("Statement: Crises Drive an Increase in Human Trafficking – Here's How We Stop It | UN Women – Headquarters").

Efforts to address human trafficking have been included to have prevention strategies and created international frameworks such as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, also known as the Palermo Protocol ("Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime"). However, despite the widespread adoption of this policy, the anti-trafficking measures vary for each country. Many countries still face challenges such as limited support for the victims, under-resourced law enforcement, and government corruption that make women all the more vulnerable to trafficking ("2023 Trafficking in Persons Report - United States Department of State").

Definition of Key Terms

Human Trafficking: According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, human trafficking is the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, intending to exploit them for profit." (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)

Exploitation: The act of taking unfair advantage of a person for one's personal benefit, typically through abuse of power, coercion, or deception.(Cambridge Dictionary). In the context of trafficking, this can look like forcing individuals into prostitution, domestic servitude, or other forms of labor with little to no compensation (Phinney).

Sexual Exploitation: Forcing individuals into executing sexual activities for monetary gain or in exchange for goods and services (The Problem of Sexual Exploitation of Women Belonging to Vulnerable Groups).

Forced Labor: When individuals are forced to work against their will under the threat of violence, consequences, or other forms of coercion (Blue Campaign).

Coercion: The use of pressure, such as threats, force, and intimidation, to pressure someone to act against their will (Cambridge Dictionary, "COERCION | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary").

Victim Protection: Policies and services aimed at supporting and rehabilitating survivors of trafficking. This involves access to legal help, psychological and medical care, shelter, and reintegration programs ("Rights of Federal Crime Victims").

General Overview

Scope and Impact of Human Trafficking

Two of the most serious violations of human rights are considered to be human trafficking and the exploitation of women and girls worldwide, affecting millions every year. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) conducted research regarding human trafficking and found that nearly 70,000 trafficking victims were detected worldwide in 2022, marking a 25% increase when compared to pre-pandemic levels. Approximately 61% of all detected cases of trafficking are represented by women and girls, with sexual exploitation accounting for the majority of cases involving females (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). The number of trafficking victims under the age of 18 has risen by nearly 40% since 2019, with many being trafficked for domestic servitude, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, and other forms of sexual violence (Smith). These figures highlight the growing scale and evolving nature of trafficking, which is worsened by factors such as gender inequality, poverty, conflict, and political instability that increase the vulnerability to exploitation ("UNODC Global Human Trafficking Report 2024: An Increase of 25% of Victims").

Differences in National Responses

Due to significant differences in national responses to human trafficking, addressing this issue has become complicated. Mechanisms to address human trafficking vary in each nation, while some countries have developed comprehensive legal frameworks and victim support systems, others face challenges such as limited resources, corruption, weak law enforcement, or political hesitation (Public Safety Canada). For example, in the European Union (EU), 10,793 victims were registered in 2023, indicating a 6.9% increase when compared to the previous year, with 63% of the victims being both women and girls. Despite these numbers, many victims remain undetected due to a lack of adequate identification mechanisms and the unawareness of frontline officials. The EU has seen some improvements, with a 10% increase in convicted traffickers and a 5% rise in suspected traffickers, but prosecution rates globally remain low ("New Data Indicates an Increase of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in the EU"). On the other hand, in countries with fewer resources, law enforcement often lacks the training and ability to investigate human trafficking effectively, with corruption further hindering these efforts (United Nations). These differences in factors such as capacity and political commitment contribute to uneven development and further complicate international cooperation, especially given the intercontinental nature of human trafficking.

Emerging Challenges and Digital Exploitation

New challenges in combating human trafficking have emerged with the rapid evolution of technology. Traffickers now exploit multiple digital platforms, social media, encrypted messaging apps, and online marketplaces to recruit and control victims anonymously. This has significantly expanded their reach while also complicating detection and intervention efforts. Tech-Facilitated Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (TFSEA) is considered to be growing at an alarming pace globally, including online grooming, livestream of sexual abuse, child sexual abuse material (CSAM), online sexual coercion and extortion, and image-based sexual abuse ("Europe and Central Asia - Equality Now"). Traffickers often target women and girls from marginalized or vulnerable backgrounds, and manipulate them and their trust by forcing them into exploitative situations, and using technology to maintain control as well as evading law enforcement. The main perpetrators are organized crime groups, who exploit

vulnerabilities such as displacement, climate change, and insecurity, especially in regions such as Africa ("Tip of the Iceberg" – New U.N. Data Shows Spike in Exploitation of Girls Worldwide).

Root Causes and Vulnerabilities

The root causes of human trafficking and exploitation are deeply ingrained in social, economic, and political inequalities. Women's vulnerability to human trafficking is disproportionately affected by socioeconomic factors such as poverty, lack of education, and limited economic opportunities. These risks are worsened by conflict and political instability, as they cause displacement and the breakdown of social protections. Cultural norms and systemic discrimination often restrict women's access to both justice and support services, which adds difficulty for victims to escape trafficking circumstances and situations. Across the globe, 47% of forced labor cases have surged since 2019, showing how exploitation in industries such as agriculture, domestic work, and construction is driven by economic desperation. The ability to understand these underlying factors is crucial to grasping why women and girls are constantly the majority of trafficking victims internationally, and why their exploitation continues and worsens, despite global efforts.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

India

Human trafficking is deeply involved in India, primarily as a source and transit country with significant internal trafficking as well. "According to India's National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), over 6,500 human trafficking victims were identified in the country during 2022 — 60% of them women and girls. Experts believe the actual numbers are much higher, due to acute underreporting." (Aziz). Women and girls are mainly used for purposes such as forced labor, domestic slavery, and sex trafficking. The Indian government publicly recognizes that human trafficking is a human rights violation and that the exploitation of women is a severe crime, but it faces several challenges in the enforcement, social attitudes, and support systems.

Nigeria

Nigeria plays a central role in human trafficking networks, used particularly as a source country for women who are trafficked within the borders of their country and to others, especially to Europe, where they are forced into sex work and most notably exploitative labor conditions (Odhiambo). "Nigeria is one of the African countries that identifies the highest numbers of human trafficking victims, of which about 83 percent are women and girls" ("Trafficking in Persons"). According to the U.S. Department of State, Nigerian trafficking networks often use enforcement, debt bondage, and spiritual threats such as "juju" rituals to control the female victims ("Nigeria - United States Department of State"). Despite this, Nigeria has signed international protocols like the Palermo Protocol and publicly affirms its commitment to eradicating trafficking, yet victims still face stigma, inadequate support, and re-trafficking risks.

United States

The United States connects to this issue by both being a source and a destination country for trafficking. The global slavery index estimates that the number of people living in modern slavery conditions is 1,091,000, meaning 3.3 victims per 1,000 ("Modern Slavery in the United States | Walk Free"). Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the sexual exploitation aspect. In states like Nevada, 90% of trafficking victims are female, with a vast majority of these cases involving sex trafficking. The United States has adopted several policies and frameworks, with the cornerstone legislation being the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000. It was created to address human trafficking, including sex and labor trafficking. It does this by having measures for prevention, protection, and prosecution ("Key Legislation").

Germany

Germany is a key destination and transit country for human trafficking in Europe, with women and girls often exploited for the sex trade or forced labor. In 2022, 62% of identified trafficking victims in Germany were subjected to sexual exploitation, while 34% were victims of labor exploitation (Council of Europe). The vulnerable groups for exploitation in Germany are women who are in unstable financial situations, those who don't have a reliable place to live, or those who don't speak German fluently. Part of the problem in Germany with trafficking is the severe underreporting. Only 16% of

victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation were officially registered in the prostitution register in 2022 ("Red-Carding Sex Trafficking in Germany").

South Sudan

South Sudan is one of the most conflict-affected countries, which particularly makes women and girls vulnerable to sex trafficking, domestic servitude, and forced marriage. The country faces a severe problem with human trafficking, which is due to the ongoing conflict, widespread displacement, and economic instability. Women and girls are most frequently trafficked for sexual exploitation in capitals such as Juba or border cities ("Examining Human Trafficking in South Sudan - Human Trafficking Search"). The current government of South Sudan does not fully align itself with international protocols but the government recognizes this and is moving toward more alignment ("South Sudan: More Prevention and Protection Measures Urgently Needed to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Says UN Expert").

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1949	The first legally binding international treaty addressing human trafficking and exploitation, focusing on prohibiting organized prostitution and trafficking, especially of women and children ("United Nations Convention Suppressing Human Trafficking Is Adopted | EBSCO").
1951	The United Nations Convention Suppressing Human Trafficking officially came into effect, obligating the states that signed to criminalize trafficking and related activities, and to protect both the citizens and foreigners who are victims ("United Nations Convention Suppressing Human Trafficking Is Adopted | EBSCO").
2000	Palmero protocol established the first universally agreed-upon definition of trafficking and a comprehensive framework for

prevention, prosecution, and victim protection (3 P's) ("Addressing Trafficking in Persons since 1949").

2003   The Protocol became legally binding for ratifying countries, committing them to combat trafficking, prosecute offenders, and assist victims ("Addressing Trafficking in Persons since 1949").

2009   The first global report on human trafficking, released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, revealed the overwhelming impact of trafficking on women and girls ("Global Report on Trafficking in Persons").

2015   The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included specific targets to eradicate human trafficking, forced labor, and modern slavery, with a focus on protecting women and children ("The Making of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development").

2022   The General Assembly reiterated its condemnation of trafficking, especially of women and girls, called for intensified prevention and prosecution efforts, and reaffirmed the need for gender equality and victim empowerment ("Trafficking in Women and Girls: Strengthening Access to Justice for Victim–Survivors: Report of the Secretary-General (2024)").

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

The fight against human trafficking and the exploitation of women through international efforts has been led by the United Nations (UN), recognizing these crimes as violations of human rights and a threat to global security. The UN has sought to integrate national laws, strengthen international cooperation, and guarantee that the needs of trafficking survivors are prioritized in anti-trafficking strategies through legally binding treaties, action plans, and targeted initiatives.

Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol)

In 2000, the Palermo Protocol was adopted as a supplement to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and is considered the most influential international treaty addressing human trafficking, with a specific focus on women and children. This protocol provided the first universally accepted definition of trafficking in persons, as well as establishing clear and direct obligations for countries to illegalize every form of trafficking, protect and help survivors, and to prosecute criminals. The cooperation on law enforcement, the sharing of information, and the training of frontline officers was encouraged by this protocol to all countries. Additionally, it required nations to implement both child-friendly and gender-sensitive measures, as it emphasized the unique vulnerabilities faced by women and children in trafficking environments. Today, this protocol serves as the foundation for the majority of anti-trafficking laws and has been ratified by more than 180 countries (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "The Protocol for Human Trafficking").

United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2010)

The United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons was adopted by the General Assembly in 2010 and was designed to provide and strengthen a comprehensive framework for coordinated international action against human trafficking. This plan outlines practical steps for prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership, as well as urging all Member States to implement and ratify the Palermo Protocol. It demands the development of national action plans, the allocation of resources to frontline agencies, and the establishment of victim support systems. The importance of addressing the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and gender-based violence (GBV), which all affect women and girls disproportionately, is emphasized in the Global Plan of Action. Additionally, the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, which provided direct humanitarian, financial, and legal assistance to victims around the globe, was established by this plan of action ("United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons").

UNODC's Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (GLO.ACT)

Targeted, on-the-ground support to countries struggling with trafficking in persons, especially women and girls, was provided by the GLO.ACT initiative, launched by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The GLO.ACT works closely with national governments to create measures and mechanisms that help combat trafficking, such as drafting and implementing anti-trafficking laws, training law enforcement and judicial officials, and developing comprehensive victim assistance and support services. The initiative recognizes that trafficking networks often operate across borders, promoting both regional and international cooperation. The GLO.ACT partners with civil society organizations, which helps ensure that survivors' voices are heard and that interventions are culturally sensitive and practical. Since its establishment, GLO.ACT has assisted and supported multiple countries across continents, helping build stronger legal systems and improving effective responses to trafficking and exploitation ("Objectives").

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

In the past two decades, there have been several international treaties and national legislations that have aimed to combat human trafficking and exploitation. While these measures have made important progress in raising awareness and strengthening existing legal frameworks, the effectiveness of these efforts depends on the individual countries' enforcement, cultural context, and political will. Below is an evaluation of several significant attempts to address this global issue:

UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol)

Adopted in 2000, the Palermo protocol is often referred to as the cornerstone international legal framework for combating the issue of human trafficking. It provides for an extensive framework for the criminalization of trafficking, protection of the victims, and promotion of international cooperation among countries to come together and fight this issue ("The Protocol for Human Trafficking"). It urges states to adopt certain measures that prevent trafficking and punish offenders while protecting the rights of the

victims, specifically women and children. Despite being adopted in widespread areas, the protocol faces many challenges in the actual implementation. Many countries have incorporated their provisions into domestic law, but the enforcement remains inconsistent due to the weakness in institutions, lack of training, and corruption within countries (Seideman). Moreover, the protection measures for victims are often underfunded or unavailable to everyone, especially for women who may face additional stigma or the risk of being re-trafficked if not properly supported. (Suchecki)

U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report and Tier Ranking System

The Trafficking in Persons report (TIP), which is published annually by the U.S. Department of State, evaluates the efforts that worldwide governments are putting towards combating the issue of human trafficking. Certain countries are placed into one of a four-tier system based on their efforts to meet the minimum requirements set by and outlined in the U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). The report highlights the best practices, challenges, and gaps in the institutional ways of solving the issue of human trafficking. The report also provides specific emphasis on vulnerable groups such as women and girls (Gehring). The TIP report has helped to generate international pressure for reevaluating the current law systems and implementing new laws to combat this issue and has also provided for greater enforcement of these laws in several countries. For example, low rankings on the TIP report can lead to reputational harm for the country and even withdrawal of certain types of U.S. aid (Storck). However, the TIP report has also faced many critics for the one-sidedness of the report and the lack of transparency in the rankings. Some governments have even argued about their place in the rankings and questioned what methods were used in the system. Additionally, while the report encourages policy reform, it does not plan on or guarantee improvements for the implementation or survivor outcomes, especially in nations with weak judicial systems, corruption, or limited resources to support the women victims of trafficking (Search).

Community-Based and Survivor-Led Interventions

In recent years, there has been more of a shift toward local and survivor-based efforts for prevention, awareness, and rehabilitation for human trafficking. Programs such as Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihood (GEWEL) in Zambia and

Free the Slaves' community mobilization model have been focusing on empowering the affected women through education, business/career training, and awareness campaigns that challenges the social norms surrounding trafficking and economic vulnerabilities that fuel trafficking (*Community Based Model for Fighting Slavery Facebook.com/Freetheslaves @Freetheslaves | #Freetheslaves*)("-"). These initiatives being taken have had localized success, such as reduced trafficking risks, improved resilience, and more reporting and standing up by the survivors. However, such programs and ones like it often lack sufficient and sustained funding, scale, or backup from certain policies that are needed to ensure long-term sustainability and effectiveness. They also struggle in areas where the patriarchal norms, poverty, and weakened legal systems are present and persist ("Evaluation of the Domestic Victims of Human Trafficking Program: Final Report"). Survivor-led organizations provide important support among peers and advocacy, but many remain underfunded and rarely are considered to be integrated into the official policy-making processes and have a voice in the solutions, which limits their influence and interventions to the survivors' needs ("Human Trafficking | OVC Efforts").

Possible Solutions

Criminalization and Accountability of Perpetrators

To address the issue of human trafficking, the culture of impunity must be ended. Enforcing strong legal frameworks with consequences to traffickers, recruiters, and officials complicit in exploitation and trafficking not only holds offenders accountable but can act as both a deterrent and a path to justice for survivors. Nations can adopt or improve anti-trafficking legislations aligned with international frameworks such as the Palermo Protocol, as well as ensure training for law enforcement, judiciary, and border officials in victim-sensitive approaches. This can improve the investigation, identification, and prosecution of trafficking cases.

Strengthening Survivor Support Systems

Holistic, trauma-informed care is a necessity for human trafficking survivors for them to be able to rebuild their lives. To achieve long-term recovery and reintroduction, expanding access to safe shelters, medical services, legal aid, and vocational training is

crucial. To fund and operate these services, governments should collaborate with NGO's (Non-governmental organizations) and international agencies, especially in high-risk or underserved areas. By developing survivor-centered environments that prioritize dignity and confidentiality, these support programs help reduce re-victimization and empower survivors to restart their lives.

Enhancing Cross-Border and Regional Cooperation

National efforts to combat human trafficking and exploitation are insufficient, due to trafficking networks operating across borders. Prevention and prosecution measures can be improved by international cooperation through shared intelligence, extradition agreements, collaborative law enforcement operations, and harmonized legal frameworks. Both regional and international organizations can facilitate these efforts through joint task forces and multilateral agreements.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

SDG 5, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Sustainable Development Goal #5 seeks to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls, This means ensuring that women and girls have the same rights, opportunities, and privileges as men, regardless of their gender. One of the central ideas behind this goal is one of the targets (target 5.2) which calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, including trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse. This target focuses especially on the impact that trafficking is deeply rooted in gender inequality and how women and girls make up the vast majority of the victims trafficked for sexual exploitation. Target 5.1 focuses on ending the discrimination against women and girls, and trafficking flourishes in an environment where women and girls are not given rights or the necessary education and making them more vulnerable to being trafficked. Target 5.4 recognizes the value of underpaid care and domestic work; many trafficked women are exploited in domestic servitude, often in hidden and unregulated workspaces. Advancing this goal includes the forced work being recognized as real work that deserves rights and protections. To address the issue of trafficking, it requires a systemic change that challenges the gender norms, patriarchal structures, and economic inequality, which are all core to the ideas behind

the SDG 5 ("Goal 5 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs").

Appendix

This section of the issue bulletin is dedicated to providing delegates with valuable sources to utilize during their research.

https://fullerproject.org/story/tip-of-the-iceberg-new-u-n-data-shows-spike-in-exploitation-of-girls-worldwide/

Source A: This article summarizes UNODC data on global trends in human trafficking, highlighting the rise in detected cases of underage girls. Useful for understanding current patterns and the evolution of human trafficking.

https://www.dhs.gov/archive/news/2010/07/23/blue-campaign-combat-human-trafficking

Source B: This source outlines the unified fight against human trafficking done by the U.S. government. Helpful for learning about national response models and public awareness programs.

https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/newly-released-data-show-increase-trafficking-human-beings-2024-02-28_en

Source C: Report done by the EU, which provides recent statistics on trafficking in the European Union. Statistics include the number of detected victims, gender and age breakdowns, and trends in multiple forms of exploitation.

https://timesca.com/interview-a-profile-of-womens-rights-in-central-asia-from-equality-now/

Source D: This interview addresses legal and social challenges for women in Central Asia, with a focus on sexual violence, legal gaps, and the culture of impunity.

https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/protocol.html

Source E: This UNODC page details the Palermo Protocol, with a specific focus on the protocol's legal framework, obligations for states, and its role in forming international anti-trafficking polices.

https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/Crime_Resolutions/2000-2009/2009/General_Assembly/A-RES-64-293.pdf

Source F: This UN document presents the comprehensive plan adopted by the General Assembly to coordinate and strengthen anti-trafficking efforts.

https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/glo-act2/objectives.html

Source G: This page details the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants initiative.

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