

The extent of trafficking with children

UNICEF estimates that around 1.2 million children are trafficked every year. Just to Western Europe there are between 120 000 and 500 000 women and children brought yearly, according to statistics by IOM. Since these operations are covert and illegal, there are no fully reliable statistics on how many people are victims and suffer.

The world's third largest organized crime

Trafficking is unfortunately not a minor phenomenon that occurs far away. There is a large and profitable, organized international trade going on as you are reading this.

Human trafficking is lucrative partially because it takes place in several stages and with many players. The victims can, unlike other products such as narcotics and weapons, be sold over and over again. The UN estimates that criminal groups earn between five and seven billion dollars every year on human trafficking . This means that human trafficking today is the world's third largest organized crime, after drugs and weapons. Gathering statistics and gaining knowledge is hard, since it is such a hidden activity, but the above figures are what is estimated.

Which are the trade routes in the trafficking of children?

The routes for trade are constantly changing. This is due to economic and political circumstances, the opening of new markets, strengthening of law and police and customs awareness, or lack thereof, of the problem. But still, the trading occurs mainly from rural to urban regions and from poorer to richer places.

Trafficking of children takes place in all directions in the world, and countries of destination will vary depending upon the demand and risks combined with a certain country. Many destination countries can be found in Western Europe, the USA and the Middle East.

The industry of trafficking is "ever-moving" since it consists of so many places and relationships. The countries involved in trafficking are easiest divided into origin countries, transit countries and destination countries, where the first type is the country where the victim is taken from, the second type is the country/countries the victim is transported through and the last is the country in which the victim is finally taken. Trafficking can also take place within a country, which is a very neglected and less understood area. Also, since trafficking is in constant motion, one and the same country can be an origin-, transit- and destination one.

Asia

In East and Southeast Asia, some countries are more involved than others, both when it comes to origin and destination. One of the major source countries of trafficking in women for the commercial sex industry in the United States is Malaysia.

Europe

Europe's main origin countries are in Central Europe and the Balkans, such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Latvia and Estonia.

The report also claims that Central and South-East European countries are origins for trafficking victims destined mainly for exploitation in the western and southern parts of the continent. Victims with European heritage are rarely detected in other regions of the world.

Africa

Many African countries are simultaneously countries of origin, transit and countries of destination for trafficking. The existence of trafficking in children for labour exploitation is recognized in the countries participating in the ILO-IPEC project to combat trafficking in children: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Togo. The document reporting this is called "Combating Trafficking in Children for Labour Exploitation in West and Central Africa" and is made in 2001 by the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

Sub-Saharan Africa has the most economically active children – 26.4 % of all 5-14 year-olds, compared to 18.8 % for Asia and the Pacific and 5.1 % for Latin America, according to IPEC.

U.S.

The United States is thought to be the destination for 50,000 trafficked women and children each year, according to the ILO's study "Stopping Forced Labor" from 2001. The sex sector is a main destination for the victims, as well as domestic and cleaning work (in offices, hotels etc.) fuelling much of the demand. Main entry points are i.e the state of New York and California.

Scandinavia

In 2003, Swedish police estimated that the number of victims of trafficking in Sweden were between 400 and 600 women and children.

According to the U.S. State Dept Trafficking in Persons Report, June, 2009, "Norway is a destination country for women and girls trafficked from Nigeria, Bulgaria, Brazil, Estonia, Ghana, Eritrea, Cameroon, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation.

Victims from Africa and Brazil are frequently trafficked through Italy, Spain, Morocco, and the Balkans. Men and children are trafficked from Thailand, the United Kingdom, India, Sri Lanka, Romania, and Bulgaria to Norway for the purposes of domestic servitude and forced labor in the construction industry. Children in Norwegian refugee centers are vulnerable to human trafficking. "

Women and girls are taken into Scandinavia from Russia, the Baltic states and Central Europe, according to a study called “Trafficking in Women and Children in Asia and Europe” that was made in 2001 by the Swedish government .

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

Since the sexual exploitation of children is illegal and the people profiting of it tries to hide their activities, there are no exact figures on how many children are exposed. The figures commonly used are based on the estimates of organizations involved in the fight against child exploitation, such as UNICEF, IOM or ILO.

Child sex trade in the world

In Asia, approximately 1 million children are involved in the sex industry. 200 000 - 250 000 of them are exploited sexually in Thailand and 400 000 in India.

In Brazil, there are an estimated 100 000 abused children and in Peru the number is approximately the same.

When it comes to Africa, urbanization, poverty and increased tourism has led to a proliferation of sexual exploitation of children. A study in Kenya shows that several thousand children are victims of it, and in West Africa an estimated 35 000 children are being sexually exploited.

The United States is estimated to have 300 000 children who are victims of sexual exploitation. From Canada, an increased rate of sexual exploitation among homeless children is reported. In industrialized countries, the sexual trafficking is often less visible than in developing ones, but new technology in the form of i.e computer networks makes it easier for criminals to pull children into the sex industry without being detected.

Child sex trade has increased dramatically in Eastern and Central Europe over the last decade and approximately 175 000 young people are believed to have become embroiled in the sex industry.

Increased mobility within and between countries has made trafficking easier. Europe, for example, has seen an expansion in the trafficking of girls and women, in i.e Poland, Germany, Holland and Sweden.

As sexual activity is often seen as a private matter, communities are sometimes reluctant to act and intervene in cases of sexual exploitation. This counterproductive attitude make children even more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Myths, (such as the belief that HIV/AIDS can be cured through sex with a virgin), technological advances (such as the Internet, which has facilitated child pornography) and sex tourism targeting children, all add to the children’s vulnerability.

Some figures from UNICEF

“Training manual to fight trafficking in children for labour, sexual and other forms of exploitation” was launched in September of 2009 by ILO, UNICEF and the Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT).

In it, UNICEF estimates that 1 000 to 1 500 Guatemalan babies and children are trafficked each year for adoption by couples in North America and Europe.

UNICEF also claims that in Lithuania, 20 to 50 percent of the sexually exploited are believed to be minors. Children as young as the age 11 are known to be exploited sexually on the street. Children from children’s homes, or orphanages some, 10 to 12 years old, have been exploited to make pornographic movies.

In the report can also be read that a large number of children are being trafficked in West and Central Africa, mainly for domestic work, but also for sexual exploitation and to work in shops or on farms. Nearly 90 per cent of these trafficked domestic workers are girls.

Children from Togo, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana are trafficked to Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Cameroon and Gabon. Children are trafficked both in and out of Benin and Nigeria. Some children are sent as far away as the Middle East and Europe.

Surveys indicate that 30 to 35 per cent of all sexually exploited in the Mekong sub-region of Southeast Asia are between 12 and 17 years of age.

Mexico’s social service agency reports that there are more than 16,000 children engaged in ”prostitution” with tourist destinations being among the areas with the highest figures.

The choice of the word “prostitution” when discussing trafficking is unfortunate and is hopefully on its way out, since it suggests an active choice. Selling your body is never done mandatory – it is done due to either force or lack of options.

The world congresses

On the initiative of ECPAT Sweden, the Swedish government hosted the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation in 1996 in Stockholm. The Deputy Secretary General of UNICEF had promised the full backing of his organisation in planning the congress. Key representatives of the ILO, Interpol, WHO and the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child had also indicated their willingness to help.

The Congress was the first of its kind and had a significant commitment of world governments. The meeting resulted in the “Stockholm Declaration and an Agenda for Action” which summarized the challenge and the commitment. This, among many other things, included commitments regarding prevention, protection, reintegration of the victims and the importance of child participation .

The congress hosted decision makers from all over the world who came together to find ways to stop the exploitation of children and adolescents. This included governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia, corporations, children and adolescents .

Since the first World Congress in 1996, there has been two more. The second was held in Yokohama, Japan in 2001 and the third World Congress took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2008.

Together, participants in these congresses find solutions and commit to taking actions, so that all children and adolescents can realize their rights to health, safety, protection and freedom from harm.

Other commitment against exploitation of children

Countries and states around the world have in recent years shown an increased commitment against sexual exploitation of children.

Child labor – a global problem

Child labor is increasing at an alarming rate in both developed and developing countries. Exactly how many children are being exploited in child labor is difficult to calculate because many are working in the informal sector, e.g. in families and in the street, and thus often invisible to statistics. Furthermore, the authorities in many parts of the world are in denial as to the existence of child labor and therefore the problem is not estimated, and continues to be ignored.

UNICEF, on the other hand, estimates that there are around 158 million children between five and fourteen years of age engaged in labor. An estimation of 120 million of them are working full time, while the remainder combine work with study and other pursuits.

Some figures from ILO

The book "Child Sex Trade" (2011), authored by ECPAT Sweden, gathers a range of important figures from ILO:

In 2002 an estimated number of 8.4 million children were victims of the worst forms of child labor. In total, 1.8 million of these were estimated to be exploited in either prostitution or pornography.

ILO estimated in 2005 that 2.45 million people are in forced labor as a consequence of human trade. The greatest form of exploitation is commercial sexual exploitation (43%). In industrialized countries, it is estimated that the dominant form of forced labor consists of commercial sexual exploitation (55%) in which many women and girls are human traded in so called prostitution.

Contributing factors

Most child laborers are active in Asia, Africa and Latin America. With the economic development of Southeast Asia, the number of child workers are decreasing in the area. But in Africa, one child out of three is working and in Latin America, one out of five. Child labor has increased in these areas, possibly as a result of the economic crisis in the 1980's.

It is often believed that child labor is a problem that exists only in developing countries, but it also occurs in the western world.

In the U.S., it is estimated that 5.5 million children between the ages of 12 and 17 years are economically active.

In Portugal, children as young as 12 are used to perform heavy and dangerous work on construction sites. This is not a problem that is limited to only Portugal.

Of course there is a difference between harmful child labor, and young people working according to the law, in a way that is moderated.

Rapid urbanization can also be seen as a contributing factor of child labor distribution. People move from rural areas in the belief that cities will offer them better living conditions.

Instead, they may end up in large, shanty towns where many children are forced to help work to support their families.

Death or illness in the family can also force children to start working to help support their family. In Africa, where an estimated 23 million people (acc. to UNAIDS Global report fact sheet from 2010) are infected with HIV/AIDS, a whole generation of adults is in danger of extinction and millions of orphans are forced to take over security of the family.

Other causes of child labor are problems such as overpopulation, war and traditions.

To sum up, the problem of trafficking exists all over the world in various forms, and should be identified as such. The highly criminal phenomenon is the direct effect of a large demand, and won't be solved until the demand is suppressed.

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