

## Intersectionality of Human Trafficking with Migrants, Refugees and Internally Displaced People

### Awareness

In 2014, several young teens travelled from their nation of birth to escape the extreme violence they witnessed in their country. They crossed through 2 or 3 countries and then arrived in a country where they were picked up by border control and placed in a shelter. Although this was not ideal, they felt safe for the first time in over a year. Nine months later some of these young boys were found in a trailer by police during an early morning raid. When the police found them, they were actually not in the trailer itself but under the floor boards, sleeping on the ground. The trailer was located on the Trillium chicken/egg farm in Marion County Ohio.

Over a period of four months in 2014, during the time when there was a large influx of unaccompanied children from Central America coming into the United States, 13 unaccompanied refugee minors from Central America were mistakenly released by a shelter to human traffickers posing as sponsors of the children. The children were forced to work on the egg farm in Ohio where traffickers threatened to kill them if they left. This story illustrates that human trafficking occurs among refugees, migrants and internally displaced people (IDP) in virtually every country.<sup>1</sup>

It was not until the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami which affected primarily Indonesia, India, Burma, and Thailand that people began to make a connection between the internal displacement of people and an increase in human trafficking. Child protection agencies working with those affected by the tsunami, noticed an increase in child abductions for adoption or exploitation.<sup>2</sup> The International



Organization for Migration (IOM) has continued to monitor trafficking after disasters and these trends have been repeated after subsequent disasters whether environmental, conflict and sudden gang related violence. Today it is recognized that human trafficking will increase by 20 to 30 percent as people are displaced during disasters.<sup>3</sup> The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) warns that the risk for human trafficking of women and children increases as families are separated and displaced during environmental disasters.<sup>4</sup>

In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan affected over 16 million people in the Philippines, in a part of the country that was already suffering from poverty and high rates of human trafficking. After the typhoon, aid agencies warned that up to two million children were at risk of abuse or trafficking.

In 2015, Nepal suffered from an earthquake which affected one third of the country.

In Nepal, as in other developing countries, birth registration is poorly enforced, so it is impossible to track children. However police and aid agencies estimate there's been a 15 to 20 percent increase in children missing since the earthquake and current estimates put the number to be around 20,000.

Official statistics regarding how the war in Syria is affecting human trafficking are hard to come by and most information is from field research or aid agencies. In most cases trafficking does not appear to take place in the migration across borders but mainly among the IDP's and refugees that are already among host communities. In Syria, just 17% of the 6.6 million IDP's are in camps. In host countries also, the majority of Syrians are living outside of official refugee camps. This affects their access to essential humanitarian aid and other services and thus leaves them more vulnerable to human trafficking. There is some trafficking by highly organized trafficking networks among the Syrian population, however most trafficking in both Syria and in the host

countries appear to be either by a family member or acquaintance and is not for money but for shelter, food, and survival. There is exploitation by all the different armed factions in Syria.<sup>5</sup>

The IOM interviewed refugees in Italy, who had traveled along the Central Mediterranean Route connecting North Africa to Europe. They found that 76 percent of respondents answered positively to at least one of the indicators for trafficking.

In 2015, almost 96,000 unaccompanied children claimed asylum in Europe. At least 10,000 unaccompanied children have dropped off the radar of official agencies since arriving in Europe and many of them are believed to have fallen victim to trafficking. In early 2017, German authorities reported 4,700 children had been lost to officials while in Sweden up to 10 children a week are reported missing.<sup>6</sup>

The IOM reported that in both 2015 and 2016, eighty percent of the four thousand plus women and children fleeing from Nigeria each of these years were trafficked.<sup>7</sup>

## Why is this happening?

Human trafficking is always an exploitation of vulnerability and migrants are among the most vulnerable populations. This vulnerability can arise in an instant, as a result of conflict or after a natural disaster. Migrants and refugees experience vulnerability along every step of their journey.

What are some of the trafficking risks for refugees? Most lack money, food or shelter at some time during their journey making them vulnerable to traffickers. They experience a lack of community, family, social structures and networks. The IOM identifies hopelessness as a determining factor in victim recruitment. The trauma of leaving their home and their experiences along the way may dispose



them to be less self-protective and enable them to be easily coerced as victims of trafficking. Many may be travelling alone and if they are missing, nobody will know nor look for them.

Women and children are especially vulnerable to trafficking. Women may experience social isolation or other negative consequences resulting from sexual violence. UNICEF reports that one in ten Syrian refugee children in neighboring host countries are engaged in child labor and that refugees as young as three years old are working.<sup>8</sup>

Large numbers of displaced people increase competition over already limited resources. This may increase desperation making displaced populations more willing to take risks. UNHCR resettles a relatively small percentage of refugees and this massive disparity between those with a need for resettlement and those who actually receive resettlement creates tremendous opportunities for traffickers. The more heavily secured the border the greater need migrants feel to acquire the assistance of smugglers which often leads to trafficking.

Camps for refugees and internally displaced persons are prime targets for traffickers. The concentration of vulnerable, displaced people combined with a lack of security, services, and oversight make them ideal locations for traffickers to

operate. In long-standing camps, traffickers are able to build relationships with corrupt camp officials and establish trafficking rings. An estimated 580,000 Rohingya Muslims have crossed into Bangladesh (August-October 2017) and organized trafficking rings are embedded in refugee camps, looking for vulnerable people to traffic for both sex and labor.<sup>9</sup>

### Source Notes:

- <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Majority%20&%20Minority%20Staff%20Report%20-%20Protecting%20Unaccompanied%20Alien%20Children%20from%20Trafficking%20and%20Other%20Abuses%202016-01-282.pdf>
- [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADK469.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADK469.pdf)
- UN Environment Program, 2011
- [http://www.unep.org/pdf/rra\\_gender\\_screen.pdf](http://www.unep.org/pdf/rra_gender_screen.pdf)
- International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/19/human-traffickers-using-migration-crisis-to-force-more-people-into-slavery>
- <http://humantraffickingcenter.org/sending-vulnerable-traffickers-refugee-vulnerability-migration-policies>
- Assessment of the Impact of the Syrian War and Refugee Crisis on Trafficking in Persons (AIS-TIP),” implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and financially supported by the United States Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP).
- <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-20/sexual-predators-human-traffickers-target-rohingya-refugee-camps/9068490>



## Actions and Resources

- If you think someone may be trafficked report a tip to the **Polaris Project hotline at 1-888-373-7888**.
- Host a film screening on human trafficking to raise awareness, such as *A Path Appears*.
- Advocate for an increase in refugee resettlement in your country.
- Work with **Catholic Charities** in resettling of people in your dioceses.
- **Global Compact for Migration**, which is being drafted by the United Nations, includes critical anti-trafficking measures such as programs intended to expand economic opportunities for refugee women and men.
- **The Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR)** has launched the “No Fees” initiative, a program designed to ensure that workers are not forced to pay for employment. [www.iccr.org/no-fees-initiative](http://www.iccr.org/no-fees-initiative).
- Ending modern slavery is incorporated in the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals with the proposal that by 2030 we will achieve the eradication of forced labor, human trafficking, child labor, and the elimination of violence against women and children, including sex trafficking and other forms of slavery.
- Take actions that will provide migrants, refugees and IDP’s with a durable solution – one that offers permanence, legal status, safety and a means of economic support. For individuals at the greatest risk, and for whom return and local integration are not options, expanded third country resettlement options should be made more generously available.
- **The Responsible Sourcing Tool** may be employed by companies to monitor social and environmental performance in their global supply chains. The tool is a collaboration of four institutions committed to fighting human trafficking: **the State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Verité, Made in a Free World**, and the **Aspen Institute**. [www.responsiblesourcingtool.org](http://www.responsiblesourcingtool.org)
- Other resources include: **the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre**, **the UN Global Compact** and **Know the Chain**.



**U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking** is a collaborative, faith-based network that offers educational programs and materials, supports access to survivor services, and engages in legislative advocacy to eradicate modern-day slavery.