

## Root Causes of Human Trafficking

### Awareness

Human trafficking (modern-day slavery) involves the use of force, fraud or coercion to control another person for purposes of exploitation. Human trafficking is a global problem—and one of the fastest growing criminal industries in the world, even though it is illegal in every country. Statistics vary widely from different sources, but the Secretary General of the United Nations (July 23, 2012 report) says 20.9 million persons have been trafficked into forced labor, with 43% of those trafficked for sexual exploitation. Today, 2014, it is thought to be as many as 27 million

persons. As many more people are becoming aware of human trafficking, one of the common questions asked is: “What are some of the reasons that human trafficking is happening?” Broadening awareness and ever-increasing research have identified some common root causes. Human trafficking is ethnically diverse as well as happening to all socioeconomic



classes. It strikes all genders and ages regardless of religious affiliations, sexual orientation or country of origin.

### Why Is This Happening?

Trafficking has become the most lucrative crime business after drugs (US State Department), because the “merchandise” can be sold over and over again. What are the root causes of human trafficking? What does root cause mean? A root cause is the basis or reason that results in some action or behavior occurring, it triggers something to happen. In general root causes of human trafficking world-wide include those which are economic, those that stem from social exclusion and gender discrimination and those which are political, legal or result from conflict.

**Economic causes** may include:

- Systemic poverty
- Economic inequality – see systemic poverty
- land reform -- large-scale agriculture, resource grabbing,

food security/sovereignty, mechanization of agriculture

- Wage and labor repression – migration, unemployment (especially youth), decent jobs or jobs without dignity, supply chain abuse, labor binding agreements, child labor
- Climate change and environmental degradation – rising sea levels, drought, floods, deforestation, commercial overfishing, mining, commodification of nature

**Social exclusion and gender discrimination causes** may include:

- Gender inequality – feminization of poverty, unpaid care work, gender-based wage gaps
- Violence against women and girls – armed conflict, crisis and instability, natural disasters

- Denial of women’s rights to – education, health, participation, credit, skills, land/property, and productive assets
- Multiple forms of discrimination – in public, economic; political, and private spheres, especially child marriage, caste systems, racism
- Weakness of social protection – passage and enforcement of protective legislation, meaningful punishment of perpetrators, education/information for awareness, willingness to report criminal action, training of law enforcement, forming partnerships/coalitions to address the problem

**Political, legal and conflict causes** may include:

- Corruption – organized crime,

border controls

- Increased militarization – armed conflict, civil war, ‘resource curse’ in extractives, refugees
- Legal – access to justice, rule of law, statelessness

(Source: Human Trafficking and the SDG Reports, summarized by Devin Tellatin, Intern, Sisters of Mercy, Mercy International at the United Nations)

More specifically, sex trafficking and labor trafficking share some common root causes. These include:

- Poverty
- Lack of education and health care
- Lack of respect for persons
- Undocumented status of immigrants
- A lack of anti-trafficking legislation

- A lack of effective enforcement, if such legislation exists
- Profit by those in control or with power

More particular to sex trafficking, common root causes include:

- Vulnerabilities from adolescence such as peer pressure or poor self-image
- Violent behavior in the home and on tv
- Drug and alcohol addiction
- Being a runaway
- Disintegration of social protection networks
- A culture that accepts treating people, especially women and children as objects
- Pornography, promoted and available globally

Common root causes for labor trafficking include:

- Ready markets and demand for cheap goods
- Increasing demand for cheap and exploitable laborers in the construction, agricultural and industrial sectors and to produce consumer-demanded goods
- Expenses of providing required benefits to regularly employ workers

Further research, data collection, interviews with trafficked persons and experiences can surface other root causes. Addressing the root causes and finding solutions to them can lead to a reduced demand for trafficked persons, whether for sex or labor.



## Reflection

### What resources from our faith tradition reinforce and strengthen us in our work to end human trafficking?

Pope Francis: “Human Trafficking is a crime against humanity: We must unite our efforts to free the victims and stop this increasingly aggressive crime.” (December 12, 2013)

*If any of your neighbors are reduced to such poverty that they sell themselves to you, you must not treat them as bonded workers. Their status is to be that of hired hands or resident laborers with you, and they will be subject to you only until the jubilee year. They may then leave your service with their children and return to their own ancestral property. You were all bonded workers in Egypt, and I freed you from your bondage. They must not be sold as bonded workers are sold. You are not to work them ruthlessly; you are to revere Yahweh. (Leviticus 25:39-43)*

#### Scripture passages:

Genesis 37:23-28

Psalm 10:17-18

Lamentations 5:1, 11, 13, 15

1 Corinthians 3:16

Exodus 21:1-11

Acts 16:16-19, 23

Isaiah 61: 1

## Faith Based Resources

*The trade in human persons constitutes a shocking offense against human dignity and a grave violation of fundamental human rights. ...Such situations are an affront to fundamental values which are shared by all cultures and peoples, values rooted in the very nature of the human person.*

—Pope John Paul II, Letter on the Occasion of the “Twenty-First Century Slavery-The Human Rights Dimension to Trafficking in Human Beings” International Conference, 2002.

*The seventh commandment forbids acts of enterprises that for any reason – selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian – lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold, and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit.*

—Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part Three: Life in Christ, Section Two: The Ten Commandments, Chapter Two: “You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself,” Article 7: The Seventh Commandment, paragraph 2414.

*Addressing human trafficking remains an elusive goal if the courage to address the dark reality of consumerism feeding the exploitation of vulnerable human beings is lacking. In this regard, it is necessary to recognize that it is extreme poverty which often drives those desirous of a better future into the hands of those preying upon the vulnerability of the poor and the defenseless. These individuals, prompted by a genuine desire to provide for themselves and their needy families, too easily become unsuspecting victims of those who make false promises of a better future in another country or community. Our efforts to address human trafficking are inherently linked, therefore, to our determination to address poverty eradication and lack of equal economic opportunity.*

—Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/holy-see-to-un-on-human-trafficking> May 13, 2014

## Actions

- **LEARN** about human trafficking—globally and locally.
- **PRAY** for victims of trafficking and for an end to this slavery.
- **DEMAND** slave-free products. Buy Fair Trade products when possible. Some sources for these products include: Ten Thousand Villages ([tenthousandvillages.com](http://tenthousandvillages.com))  
Made by Survivors ([MadebySurvivors.com](http://MadebySurvivors.com))  
Catholic Relief Services ([crsfairtrade.org](http://crsfairtrade.org))
- **ADVOCATE** for state and federal legislation that protects victims.
- **WORK** to find solutions to the problems resulting from the root causes and reduce the demand for persons who are trafficked. Partner with others addressing this tragedy.
- **REPORT** suspicious activity to the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or to your local law enforcement.

## Resources

### Polaris Project

[www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org)

This organization works on eradicating all forms of human trafficking and serves victims. Polaris Project operates a 24/7 national hotline: 1-888-373-7888 or text “BeFree” (233733).

### Brooks World Poverty Institute

[www.bwpi.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.bwpi.manchester.ac.uk)

The Brooks World Poverty Institute is a research institute dedicated to studying poverty, inequality and growth. We must understand the poverty issue before we can fix it.

### The Chronic Poverty Research Centre

[www.chronicpoverty.org](http://www.chronicpoverty.org)

This website is formed by a coalition of universities, research institutes and non-governmental organizations that are trying to educate people on the subject of chronic poverty.

### End Child Prostitution and Trafficking

[www.ecpatusa.org](http://www.ecpatusa.org)

This website promotes the Code of Conduct which urges hospitality industry organizations to endorse it, and to train employees to recognize and safely report possible incidences of human trafficking. The Code can be found at <http://ecpatusa.org/wp/what-we-do/tourism-child-protection-code-of-conduct>.

### Mercy Investment Services

[www.mercyinvestmentservices.org/human-trafficking-resources](http://www.mercyinvestmentservices.org/human-trafficking-resources)

MIS actively works with corporations to improve their policies and identify human trafficking victims within their industries. The resources provided are intended to help you, whether you are a consumer or hotel staff member, take an active role in ending this global tragedy.

### Truckers Against Trafficking

[www.truckersagainsthumantrafficking.com](http://www.truckersagainsthumantrafficking.com)

Educates, equips, empowers and mobilizes members of the trucking and travel plaza industry to combat domestic sex trafficking.

## Sources for additional information, data or research

1. <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/413249-Labor-Trafficking-in-the-United-States.pdf>  
October 2014 report on Labor Trafficking in the United States, 300+ pages..
2. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. No. 106-386 (2000), available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10492.pdf>
3. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/humantrafficking/litrev> literature review
4. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/fact-sheet-labor-trafficking-english> (Office of Refugee Resettlement)
5. <http://www.traffickingresourcecenter.org/> The National Human Trafficking Resource Center
6. <http://www.humantrafficking.org/updates/894> Human Trafficking. Org

**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.