



Policy brief

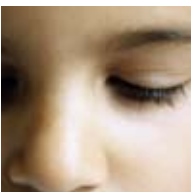
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Child Trafficking: How to Protect Children from Exploitation?

Child trafficking is a human right violation and a crime, affecting at least one million children today – and probably many more. This briefing note gives an overview of this horrifying trade, which consists in taking children away from their home, transporting them elsewhere, often across borders and even to other continents, in order to be exploited by others, who usually make money out of them. This process results in enormous suffering and severe consequences for both the children and their families. Child trafficking is a tragic pattern of abuse which is, despite continued efforts from governments and international organisations, continuing and even increasing. In order to protect vulnerable children, it is important to understand the process and patterns involved in trafficking both within and across borders. Urgently, efforts need to be intensified and coordinated at all levels if the trafficking of children is to be stopped.

What is child protection and child trafficking?

One of today's most pressing issues on the development and international agenda is child protection. The term 'child protection' is used by UNICEF (2006a) to refer to the "prevention and response to violence, exploitation and abuse against children – including commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labour and harmful traditional practices such as genital mutilation and child marriage". The issue of child protection is linked to every one of the Millennium Development Goals, from poverty reduction to education, from eliminating gender inequality to reducing child mortality and from combating preventable diseases to the need for a global partnership (UNICEF, 2006a). This briefing note focuses on one particular violation of children's rights, namely child trafficking.



A child victim of trafficking is defined as any person under eighteen, who is recruited, transported, transferred, harboured or received for the purpose of exploitation either within or outside a country ¹. The trafficking of children is a thriving and dramatic business, affecting children all over the world, both in industrialized and developing countries. UN estimates indicate that trafficking in persons generates \$7 to \$10 billion annually for traffickers (UNICEF, 2003). The clandestine nature of trafficking makes it difficult to know the exact number of child trafficked but according to the latest estimates, more than

¹ Definition of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and children. The protocol entered into force in December 2003, has been signed by 117 parties and ratified by 95.



1,2 million children are trafficked worldwide (ILO-IPEC, 2002) ². Among other means of exploitation, trafficked children are subject to prostitution, provide cheap or unpaid labour, they are forced into marriage or illegally adopted, work as domestic servants or beggars, they are recruited in army groups or used for removal of organs (see section 4). Globally, there has been increasing cross-border child trafficking in recent years partly as a result of increased economic differentials between neighbouring countries and the resulting migration's growth, which is fuelled by conflicts in many regions (ILO-IPEC, 2002). In addition, communication as well as transport methods have improved all over the world and sex tourism has been increasing in the last decade.

The international community and development organisations have pulled the alarm warning about the growing scope and trans-national complexity of child trafficking. Unchecked, it will continue to grow. For the development of effective policies, it is therefore essential to have a clear and accurate overview of the patterns and processes of trafficking worldwide.

Understanding the process of trafficking

Trafficking is not an isolated act but rather a combination or series of events. It starts with a mix of pull and push factors, which can be seen as the root causes of child trafficking. In other words, these factors explain why there is a demand for and a supply of trafficked children. Many different actors may be involved in the trafficking process, including recruiters, intermediaries, counterfeiters, transporters, employers, brothel operators, and even friends and family members (ILO-IPEC, 2002). For this note, the term traffickers will be used to refer to the persons organising the act of trafficking, i.e. the intermediaries between the victims and the 'users'. Various means may be used by the traffickers to trap the victim children, including persuasion, threats and intimidation (ILO-IPEC, 2002). In some cases, it is even the children themselves or members of their families, who take the initiative to approach the traffickers. Trafficking always involves a journey, either within a country (often from rural to urban areas) or across borders (often from poor to richer countries). After relocation, trafficking always ends up in a variety of exploitation and illegality. Clearly this process has enormous consequences both for the children victims and for their families. The different steps of the process are summarized on the figure below and each of the steps is elaborated in the subsequent sections.

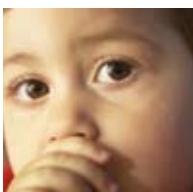
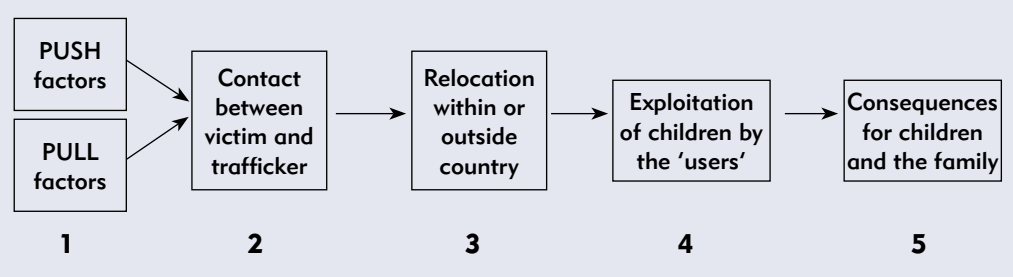


Figure 1: the chain process of child trafficking



² The IPEC is the International Programme on the Elimination of the Child Labour from the ILO



1. Root causes of child trafficking: push (supply) and pull (demand) factors

One way of understanding why trafficking occurs, is to look at it from a demand-supply perspective. Child trafficking occurs firstly because there is a market for child labour and in sex trade, and this is matched by an abundant supply of children (ILO-IPEC, 2002). While the supply side of the equation has largely been documented, there is a recent emphasis on the demand-side factors linked to the globalisation paradigm, including labour market migration flows in particular (Dottridge, 2004). This section outlines some of the push-factors making children and their families particularly vulnerable to trafficking as well as the elements behind the demand for trafficked children.

Supply-side causes or the push factors

Poverty and desire for a better life. It is largely acknowledged that poverty is by far the most important root cause of child trafficking. Children from poor families, communities or countries are vulnerable to the lure of higher wages and standards of living and they sometimes take the initiative themselves to leave home in order to escape violence, neglect or in the hope of earning a living (ILO-IPEC, 2002). A report from Pakistan concluded that “it is not only the desire for a better living but also an increasing tendency towards materialism, which leads children to fall prey to traffickers” (ILO-IPEC, 1998). In addition, poor families who are unable to feed their children may not see any other alternative but to send their children(s) to urban areas or other countries, where they can support themselves (and thereby reduce the costs of the family) or even provide income for the rest of the family.

Lack of educational opportunities. Education is an important factor for the vulnerability of children. Several studies show a clear correlation between the risk of trafficking and the level of education, both of the children and their parents. In Burkina Faso for instance, research shows that there was a link between a lack of schools available in certain villages and the parents’ inclination to send their children away (Kielland et al, 2002). Similarly, research from IPEC (2001b) in Nepal shows that trafficked girls largely originate from illiterate households, particularly where there are illiterate mothers and sisters. Moreover, rapid assessments in Albania, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine (ILO-IPEC, 2005) indicates that most of the children who had been trafficked or were at risk of trafficking had not entered school, had dropped out, or attended irregularly and were therefore failing students.



Crisis, conflicts and natural disasters. Civil unrest, internal armed conflicts and natural disasters destabilise and displace populations, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation, abuse and trafficking (Fitzgibbon, 2003). A report from Human Rights Watch (2002) estimates that over 120 000 children have been used in armed conflicts in Africa. In addition, HIV-AIDS has left more than 15 million children orphaned worldwide (UNAIDS et al, 2004), turning children into heads of households and breadwinners, precipitating many of them onto the streets and making them especially vulnerable to trafficking.



Cultural attitudes and discrimination against girls. The magnitude of the problem of child trafficking also depends on cultural traditions, which disregard children’s rights and encourage gender discrimination. In many African countries, sending children to work in faraway places is seen as socially acceptable and occurs because of large family size, inability to care for children and often in the hope of giving them a ‘better life’ (Fitzgibbon, 2003). Associated with this wide acceptance of children leaving home for work is the admissibility of payments





to families and traffickers (ILO-IPEC, 2002). In addition, it is widely acknowledged that girls are especially vulnerable to trafficking. That is partly because girls are, in many societies, expected to sacrifice education and take on responsibilities towards their families. Moreover, since it is expected that once they marry, they will bring little money to the parental home, girls are seen as a relatively 'poor investment', and sending them away to work may seem a viable option (ILO-IPEC, 2002).

Demand-side causes or the pull factors

The two main sources for demand of trafficked children occur for cheap labour in growing economies and in the commercial sex industry. These two sources of demand are shortly elaborated here below, while other sources of exploitation will be considered in section 4.

Economic growth/economic disparities and the demand for cheap labour. Economic growth can result in increased demand for cheap migrant labour, including children, as the domestic workforce is able to move away from low-skilled, low-wage employment. For example, in Thailand children from Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar have migrated and been trafficked for various types of work. In addition, economic disparities between regions also lead to more migration flows, as the more affluent countries attract the potential workforce of poorer countries as a source of cheap labour. Irregular migration and trafficking generally accompany such large movements of people (ILO-IPEC, 2002).

Growing demand for children for commercial sex. The growing demand for children for commercial sex is associated with a growth of the sex industry both at the national and international levels. Young and adolescents girls trafficked into prostitution most likely end up being exploited alongside adult prostitutes and are seen as 'young adults'. Nevertheless young child prostitution is also on the rise partly because of the prevailing erroneous belief that sex with a virgin will cure HIV/AIDS or that sex with a child decreases the likelihood of contracting HIV/AIDS or another sexually transmitted disease (Fitzgibbon, 2003). Finally, the growth of the sex tourism, often fuelled by dedicated websites, has drawn vulnerable young children -both boys and girls- into high-risk situation as they may be trafficked into tourist resorts in order to meet an increased demand for child prostitution (ILO-IPEC, 2002). In Sri Lanka for instance, the majority of the child prostitutes (estimated 20 000-30 000) are boys. From Europe, paedophiles can arrange to have one or more boys waiting for them when they arrive (UNICEF, 2001).



2. Contact between victim and trafficker: coercive or voluntary

Children may become victims of trafficking by abduction or kidnapping but the majority are trapped in more subversive ways such as persuasion and false promises. Many children also voluntarily seek and go with traffickers. NGOs in some parts of Asia, for example, report an increase in voluntary recruitment, where the child comes to believe that relocation for employment is beneficial, and where he/she may even seek out the recruiters (ILO-IPEC, 2002). The children's expectations may be based on what they hear or see in the media, the false testimonies of others who have returned from work abroad or the misguided hope that anything must be better than what they have at home. Finally and in a horrifying number of cases, the individuals who ensnare children into trafficking are either close relatives or close friends of the family (Dottridge, 2004). In Albania for example, 90% of the children surveyed (IPEC study, 2005) had been recruited through an arrangement between a recruiter and a





family member. Most of the families involved however do not know the extent of the abuse and degradation their children will suffer and the likelihood that they will be trapped in debt bondage (UNICEF, 2003).

3. The process of relocation: within or across countries

In many countries, children are trafficked **from rural to urban areas** for exploitation in labour and in commercial sex. This reflects both economic differentials between rural areas and cities, and also often includes tourism-related demand (for commercial sex). In South-East Asia (for example Indonesia and the Philippines), internal trafficking of children from poor/rural areas to more affluent areas is very common and so it is also in many parts of Africa (ILO-IPEC, 2002). **Cross-borders trafficking** has become more widespread as economic differentials between neighbouring countries widen and transport as well as communication methods have improved all over the world (UNICEF, 2003). This has been facilitated further in regions with open borders, e.g. Europe, where there have been massive movements of people –both legal and illegal- from east to west in recent years. Cross-border international trafficking is usually following patterns similar to internal trafficking, where children from poor countries are moved to wealthier neighbouring or further away countries.

4. Exploitation

While commercial sexual exploitation remains the predominant form of exploitation of trafficked children, studies show that it is far from being the only one. Consequently, the term ‘trafficking in children’ has increasingly been applied to cases involving all sorts of exploitation, rather than just to cases involving sexual exploitation (Dottridge, 2004). The different forms of exploitation most frequently reported are listed in the figure 2.

BOX 1: THE “CAMEL KIDS” OF THE GULF STATES

In South Asia, young boys are trafficked to the Gulf States to work as camel racing jockeys, known in the region as ‘camel kids’. These boys are highly sought after because of their generally small and light physiques – the preferred weight of the boys is around 20 kilos and the limit is 40 kilos. The boys are strapped to the camel and the louder the child screams, the wilder the camel becomes and the faster it runs. Apart from the extreme terror, the children often also suffer injury when they are thrown from the animal, become entangled in the strapping and dragged along. *Source: ILO- IPEC 2002*

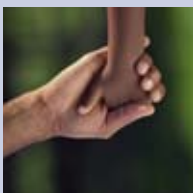


Figure 2: Child trafficking, forms of exploitation and geographical patterns

Forms of exploitation	Children involved	Main patterns and geographical areas
Commercial sex exploitation	Mainly teenage girls but also increasingly boys, most are aged 16-17 years but sometimes demand for younger children	Widespread, internal and across borders, increasingly associated with sex tourism. Often pull factors for unmet demand for commercial sex, e.g. within Thailand, from Nepal to India, Baltic states to Scandinavia, Nigeria to Western Europe.
Marriage	Teenage girls	Especially to China and bordering countries. Growing demand for young virgin brides in Africa (associated with fear of HIV/AIDS)
Adoption	Usually babies	Notably children taken from Latin America to North America and Eastern to Western Europe. Also reported elsewhere
Use of organs or body parts	Mostly children in Africa, predominantly from rural areas	Reported cases of so-called "mutti killings" in South Africa as well as East and West Africa – murders committed to obtain organs of children for the practice of witchcraft and magic
Slavery, bonded and hazardous child labour	Teenage and younger boys	Reported primarily in South-East Asia and West Africa. E.g. in agricultural in Africa, as 'camel kids' in North Africa or work in tea plantation in South Asia
Domestic servants	Mainly teenagers or younger boys and girls recruited under the age of 10.	Widespread within and sometimes between developing countries, in Africa and elsewhere.
Begging	Younger children, often from ethnic minorities – in worst cases deliberately disfigured to provoke pity	Widespread, e.g. within India, South (east) Asia to Saudi Arabia, Albania to Western Europe (By 2002 NGOs estimated that more than 2,000 children from Albania had been trafficked to Greece over the previous five years to earn money by begging (UNICEF, 2006c)
Illicit activities	Children used to carry out thefts, house break-ins or for claiming social security payments	Ex. Romanian children exploited in Western European countries
Army recruits	Mostly teenage boys but also girls, abducted for both governments and militias	Reported among others in conflicts involving Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Congo (RDC), Uganda, Somalia and Sudan.

Labour activities



The consequences of trafficking

The consequences of trafficking on children, their families and communities are multiple and devastating. Although not exhaustive, this section outlines some of the most common consequences encountered.

Child trafficking causes physical and psychological harm to the children involved. Not only are the children often exposed to various hazards through their work, but they are rarely fed properly, have little rest and they have little if any access to health care (UNICEF, 2003). An ILO-IPEC study in Nigeria (2000) found that one out of every five trafficked children dies from accidents or disease. Children involved in commercial sex exploitation may suffer violence at the hands of clients, the physical and emotional damage of premature sexual activity, and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS. Girls are in addition exposed to the risk of pregnancy, early motherhood and reproductive illnesses that might affect their ability to have children in later life (ILO-IPEC, 2002). In addition to these physical



impacts, trafficked children are often suffering deep psychological impacts. Many trafficked children find themselves isolated in a strange and illegal environment, where they might not speak the language. Children trapped in all forms of exploitation are often conditioned to believe that they have no alternative and thereby lack motivation to escape. A research conducted in Greece for instance, revealed that Albanian children were taught that the police would beat them, that social workers were also a source of danger and that the only person the child could trust was his or her boss (Dottridge, 2004). It is also common for traffickers to threaten the child if he/she does not comply with their wishes. Finally, trafficked children are denied their right to an education, which in turn leads to loss of future opportunity, thus serving to perpetuate vulnerability to exploitation (UNICEF, 2003). Trafficked children who finally return to their home (and most of them do) often suffer discrimination from the community, particularly girls involved in commercial sex. A survey from ILO-IPEC (2005) found that the majority of parents find it difficult to understand the trauma their child suffered, and they sometimes blame the child for not returning with promised earnings. Additionally, the majority of children who have been trafficked are unable to enter or re-enter school unless they are helped by an NGO or government programme. The impact of trafficking of communities and countries is similarly severe, causing both short and long-term instability and slowing rates of economic growth and economic development (ILO-IPEC, 2002).

Building a protective environment for children

Growing concern regarding the global dimension of trafficking has led to continuous research on the topic and various policy responses from governments as well as international organisations. Yet, in spite of these efforts, trafficking is continuing and even increasing. This means that much remains to be done. As by definition trafficking involves children being moved, the challenge of tackling the problem is clearly effective cooperation and coordination at every level and across all sectors at national, regional and international level. This requires partnerships between governments, inter-governmental organizations, UN agencies, NGOs and other relevant actors of civil society. The focus on legislation and enforcement to tackle trafficking has however been criticized for its lack of human rights focus and has generally been replaced by the view that the fight against child trafficking can only be won by effectively combining legislation with other policy measures, including

- **Prevention:** education (especially girls), economic support to families, awareness raising and advocacy for the rights of the child (to parents, children, police, health and social workers)
- **Protection of the children victims of trafficking:** shelter, counselling, access to education and health care and reintegration assistance.

In this regard, and in order to improve the protection of child victims in anti-trafficking efforts, UNICEF developed a 'Reference Guide on Protecting the Rights of Child Victims of Trafficking' (2006). The Guidelines outline the minimum standards for safe-guarding the rights of child victims of trafficking at each stage of anti-trafficking intervention and emphasizes that the human rights of children who are trafficked or at risk of being trafficked must be at the centre of all efforts to prevent child trafficking and to protect, assist and provide redress to children who have been trafficked.

In addition to UNICEF, numerous governments and inter-governmental agencies are involved in counter-trafficking initiatives. The challenge is now to coordinate and join efforts, generate more knowledge on the patterns and processes of trafficking and enforce general guidelines in order to make a halt to child trafficking.



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Colophon

Author:

Sophie Grooten (researcher at the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance)

Design:

Graphic design agency Emilio Perez

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How to subscribe?

Address for correspondence/subscriptions
Maastricht University
Maastricht Graduate School of Governance
P.O. Box 616, 6200 MD Maastricht
the Netherlands

Address changes can be sent to the following e-mail address:

info-gov@governance.unimaas.nl

For more information about the Maastricht Graduate School of Governance see: www.governance.unimaas.nl

