

Sex Trafficking Fact Sheet

What is the definition of trafficking?

The 2000 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, defines trafficking in persons as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” The Protocol goes on to explain that exploitation “shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

This long definition can be broken down into three parts:

- **The Act:** Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons
- **The Means:** Threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim
- **The Purpose:** For the purpose of exploitation, including the exploitation of the prostitution of others, other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery or similar practices and the removal of organs

How many people are trafficked and subjected to commercial sexual exploitation?

Gathering comprehensive and accurate statistics on human trafficking is difficult given the underground nature of trafficking, the reluctance and inability of victims to come forward, and the vast and increasing scale of this crime. With this in mind, the following figures reflect the magnitude and general characteristics of this horrific crime.

- There are at least 12.3 million adults and children in forced labor, bonded labor and commercial sexual servitude at any given time.¹
- An estimated 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year.²
- Between 14,500 and 17,500 foreign nationals are trafficked into the U.S. each year³ (this does not include U.S. citizens trafficked within the U.S.).
- According to UNICEF, as many as 2 million children are exploited yearly in the global commercial sex trade.⁴
- A 2009 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report states that 79% of *identified* cases of human trafficking involved sexual exploitation.⁵
- A 2005 ILO report estimated that women and girls made up 98% of victims trafficking for sexual exploitation, and 56% of victims of labor trafficking.⁶

¹ United States Department of State, *The 2010 Trafficking in Persons Report* (2010), citing ILO statistics.

² United States Department of State, *The 2007 Trafficking in Persons Report* (2007).

³ United States DOJ, HHS, DOS, DOL, DHS and USAID, *Assessment of U.S. Government Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons* (June 2004).

⁴ United States Department of State, *The 2010 Trafficking in Persons Report* (2010), citing UNICEF statistics.

⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* (Feb 2009).

⁶ Patrick Belser *et al.*, *ILO Minimum Estimate of Forced Labour in the World*, International Labour Organization, (April 2005).

What can be done to combat trafficking for sexual exploitation?

The destination for sex trafficked women and girls is the commercial sex industry and as long as there is a demand for women and girls in prostitution, they will be trafficked for sexual purposes. Therefore, curbing the demand for commercial sex by holding commercial sex buyers accountable can help reduce sex trafficking. In addition to curbing demand, we must address sex discrimination and provide real economic opportunities for women so that they can choose non-exploitive work to support themselves and their families.

Sweden has effectively addressed the demand for commercial sex and sex trafficking by decriminalizing those in prostitution, and criminalizing those who purchase sexual services. This has led to a significant decrease in street prostitution, and has made Sweden an undesirable destination for human traffickers.⁷ Additional countries have taken this approach, including Norway and Iceland. Other countries that have not taken significant efforts to focus on the demand that fuels sex trafficking and who have legalized or decriminalized the prostitution industry have witnessed an increase in the prevalence of the sex industry and the incidence of trafficking in women and girls.⁸

Addressing demand includes taking a strong stance against sex tourism. Sex tourists – individuals who travel to another country for commercial sex – fuel the commercial sex trade and the exploitation of women and girls from poor and marginalized communities. U.S. citizens make up an estimated 25% of sex tourists who travel abroad to exploit children.⁹

Equality Now works with grassroots organizations around the world to combat the trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of women and girls. Recent campaigns by Equality Now include calling for the amendment of the trafficking law in India to hold commercial sex buyers accountable, and calling for the prosecution of U.S. based sex tour companies whose clients exploit women and girls around the world. In addition, in 2007 Equality Now established the Fund for Grassroots Activism to End Sex Trafficking which currently supports 11 grassroots organizations around the world working to end the commercial sexual exploitation of women and girls.

⁷ Swedish Ministry of Justice, *English summary of the Evaluation of the ban on purchase of sexual services* (1999-2008), 2 July 2010. It should be noted that the report acknowledges the limitations in trying to determine the prevalence of illegal activities (such as trafficking and the purchase of sexual services), but even with these limitations, it is confident in the statements listed above.

⁸ See e.g. Nomi Levenkron, *The Legalization of Prostitution: Myth and Reality*, The Hotline for Migrant Workers, 2007, pgs 61-3, (noting the increase in the illegal prostitution sector and in the numbers of sex trafficking victims), see also “Amsterdam busy brothels in red light clean up,” AFP, 20 September 2007 (reporting that the mayor of Amsterdam decided to close 1/3 of the “prostitute windows” in the red light district because of an increase in trafficking and exploitation since legalization in 2000).

⁹ “The child sex tourism prevention project,” World Vision, available at: <http://www.worldvision.org/content.nsf/learn/globalissues-stp>, last accessed on 9/3/10.