



Although slavery and the slave trade were abolished in the 19th century, they have not been eradicated.

Indeed, it is one of the most flourishing and profitable businesses world wide, often quoted as the third most profitable business for organized crime after drugs and the arms trade. Modern human trafficking does however differ from the 19th century slave trade in a number of ways, including great regional variations, but it is difficult to get a precise overview over the industry due to its clandestine nature.

What is human trafficking?

Today, we refer to the slave trade as human trafficking, or trafficking in persons. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, human trafficking “involves an act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving a person through a use of force, coercion or other means, for the purpose of exploiting them”, and constitutes a crime against humanity.

Trafficking in persons thus consist of three elements: The Act (what is done, such as recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons), The Means (how it is done, such as 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) and The Purpose (why it is done, for example for the purpose of exploitation, which includes exploiting the prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery or similar practices and the removal of organs).

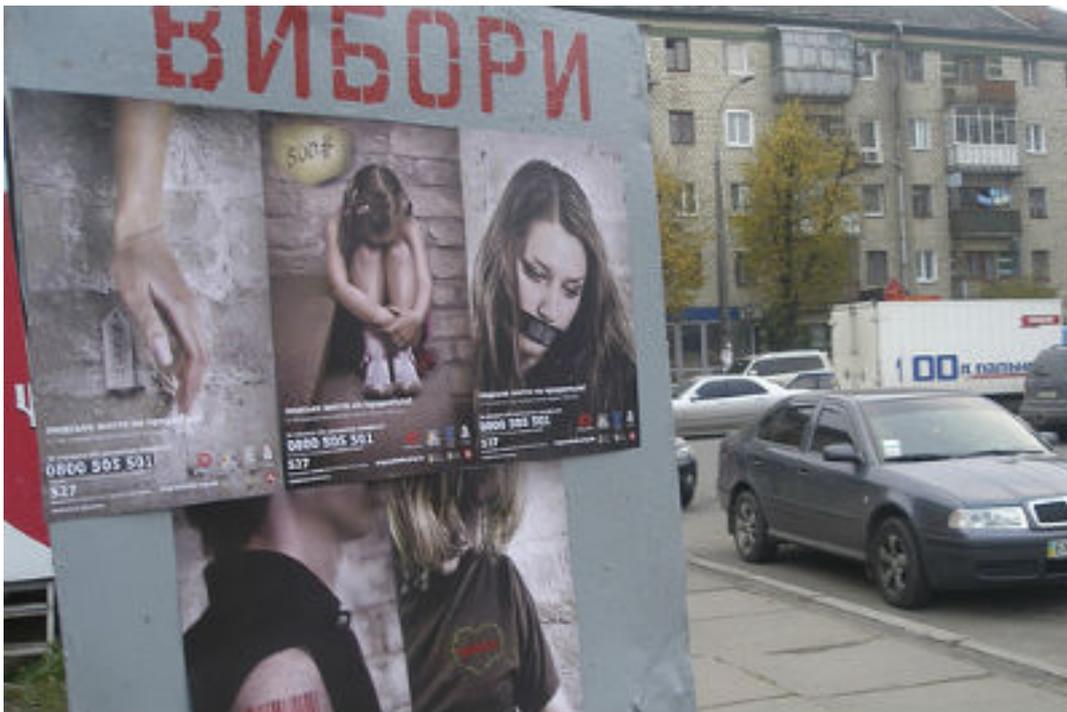
Characteristics of modern trafficking

Although historical slave trade and current human trafficking are principally similar, they are characteristically different. Today, sexual exploitation is by far the most commonly identified

How serious is the problem?

form of human trafficking (79%) followed by forced labour (18%), whereas the large scale transatlantic slave trade, for example, was mainly for the purpose of forced labour.

Geographically speaking the patterns of trafficking also differ from earlier slave trade, but it still often occurs from less developed countries to more developed countries. Modern trafficking is however mostly national or regional, although there are notable cases of long distance trafficking as well. Specifically, UNODC report that Europe is the destination for victims from the widest range of destinations, and victims from Asia are trafficked to the widest range of destinations. The Americas are prominent both as the origin and destination of victims of human trafficking. Regional variation is also prominent in terms of persons trafficked. For example, almost 20% of all trafficking victims worldwide are children. However, in some parts of Africa and the Mekong region, children are the majority, comprising up to 100% in parts of West Africa.



Caption: [„Human life is not for sale” – a media campaign against human trafficking](#) in Kiev, the Ukraine.

The difficulty of numbers

Given the clandestine nature of human trafficking, lack of large scale studies, diverging definitions of trafficking, the statistics represent rough estimates rather than actual numbers. The UNESCO Trafficking Statistics Project, located in Bangkok, aim to clarify the bases on which estimates of the numbers of trafficked persons are derived, and to separate trafficking myths from trafficking realities.

Since sexual exploitation is more frequently reported, it has become the most documented and researched form of human trafficking, and thus dominates aggregate statistics. In general, the exploitation of women tends to be relatively visible, in city centres or along highways. In comparison, other forms of exploitation are under-reported: forced or bonded labour, domestic servitude and forced marriage, organ removal, and the exploitation of children in begging, the sex trade and warfare. The media reflects this skewed reporting to a large extent by focusing on trafficked women for prostitution. However, following the earthquake in Haiti, for example, where there was an attempt to smuggle 33 children out by Americans, increased media attention has been brought to the trafficking of children and organs.

Legislations and current status:

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declared freedom from slavery is an internationally recognized human right. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms”. There is nonetheless considerable regional variation in the compliance to standards. Many African countries do still not have legislation on human trafficking, or they have laws that criminalise only some aspects of human trafficking, such as child trafficking.

Still, some progress is being made at the institutional level through increased cooperation between states and organisations, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The United Nations Protocol against Trafficking in Persons - the foremost international agreement in this area - entered into force in 2003. The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2009) shows that in the past few years the number of Member States seriously implementing the Protocol has more than doubled (from 54 to 125 out of the 155 States covered).

Furthermore, the European Union adopted a Directive to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings and protect its victims in 2011, which means that Member States are required to include the provisions of the Directive into their national legislation. In order to provide guidance

to Member States during this transposition process, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) have produced a legal commentary of the Directive with a human rights-based approach.

Moreover, increased attention to the issue has created more focus by the media and greater pressure on national governments to deal with the problem in an effective manner in order to identify and take care of victims of trafficking, prosecute and punish perpetrators and implement effective measures of prevention. The Executive Director of UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa, therefore pleads that more must be done to reduce the vulnerability of victims, increase the risks to traffickers, and lower demand for the goods and services of modern-day slaves. "We fear the problem is getting worse, but we cannot prove it for lack of data, and many governments are obstructing", he has said. Despite some progress in certain areas, human trafficking is thus a large issue at the centre of the humanitarian agenda deserving increased attention and efforts on the ground and at the political level. As activism contributed to the prohibition of slavery and slave trade, the recent developments will hopefully contribute to greater progress in the right direction.

REFERENCES:

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