



Human Trafficking: Labor Trafficking

Awareness

As consumers, we participate in labor trafficking by providing a demand for cheap products. Children, women and men, both in the United States and throughout the world, are trafficked and held against their will to provide us with the many goods and services we purchase daily.

Whenever we enjoy a meal either at home or at a restaurant, purchase clothing or shoes, or use our cell phones and computers, our lives are intertwined with human trafficking victims who were involved at one or more points in the supply chain.

The United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) defines labor trafficking as: “The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.”¹ The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that there are 40.3 million people trapped in forced labor.² Globally, the Asia-Pacific region accounts for over 62 percent of labor trafficking victims, followed by Africa (23percent) and Latin America.²

There are several forms of insidious practices associated with labor trafficking. Debt bondage or bonded labor is the most widely used means of enslaving people. In South Asia alone it is estimated that there are millions of trafficking victims working to pay off their ancestors’ debts.³

A common scenario is that a person living in poverty will be lured by false promises of a high paying job. Money is usually paid to, or lent by, the trafficker. Once employed, the victim is not paid, or is paid a minimal wage. When faced



bonga1965/Shutterstock.com

with the reality of their situation, the victim is unable to leave the control of the trafficker.

The impact of COVID-19 can only increase the vulnerabilities that lead to labor trafficking.

Forced labor occurs when a victim is forced to work against his own will under the threat of physical or psychological coercion, abuse of the legal process, or deception. Immigrants are particularly vulnerable to this form of human trafficking, but individuals may be forced into labor in their own countries.¹

Domestic servitude is a form of human trafficking in which a domestic worker is not free to leave her employment and is abused and underpaid, if paid at all. Many domestic workers do not receive the basic benefits and protections commonly extended to other groups of workers—things as simple as a day off. Authorities cannot inspect homes as easily as formal workplaces and, in many other cases, do not have the mandate or capacity to do so. In addition to facing involuntary

servitude, domestic workers, especially women, confront various forms of abuse, harassment, and exploitation, including sexual and gender-based violence.

Child labor is an especially inhumane aspect of labor trafficking as it impairs the development of the child. Work may interfere with the child’s education or the child may work in a hazardous situation which may be detrimental to the child’s health.

Child soldiers are considered human trafficking victims as it entails the unlawful recruitment or use of children—through force, fraud, or coercion—to be used as combatants or constrained to work as porters, cooks, guards, servants, messengers, or spies. Young girls can be forced to marry or have sex with commanders and male combatants.¹

Victims of human trafficking are often kept isolated and may be kept at the worksite to prevent them from acquiring help. Working in isolation, notably in the palm oil and fishing industries, can mean little to no

governmental oversight, access to fewer protective services and law enforcement personnel as well as increasing the worker's vulnerability to the confiscation of passports or other identity documents. Victims may work in any occupation but are most often involved in agriculture, construction, food service, health and beauty services, domestic or factory work.

The NGO VERITÉ released a recent report analyzing human trafficking in the federal government and corporate supply chains. The organization traced supply chains for 43 commodities worldwide.³

Traffickers seek out people who are living in poverty and lure them into the system with the promise of high salaries and/or educational opportunities. Other vulnerable populations are new immigrants, especially those who are undocumented or who are unfamiliar with the language. People who are displaced because of conflict, civil wars, or natural disasters, anyone desperate to support themselves or their families, are targets of traffickers.

The Polaris Project has reported that between 2015 and 2019, their Trafficking Hotline registered more than 3,600 survivors of human trafficking who were legally working in the U.S. Approximately 87% of these individuals held H-2A and H-2B visas.⁴

The United States Department of Labor has identified labor trafficking in the supply chains for over 148 goods from 76 countries, as of September 2018.⁵

Why is this happening?

Labor trafficking is fueled by the desire for cheap labor, cheap consumer goods, and enormous profit. The demand for cheap goods and long and complex supply chains that cross national borders and that rely on multiple subcontractors encourages unscrupulous employers to ignore fair labor laws and practices.³ A need for low wage employees may result in a dependence on labor recruiters which creates layers of separation between the employer and the worker. This disconnect means that employers are often unaware of exploitive hiring practices within their operations. Labor trafficking generates an estimated \$150 billion a year in profits for employers and traffickers. The ILO estimates that forced labor in the private economy generates \$150 Billion in illicit profits each year.²

Actions & Resources

- Verité has published an in-depth examination of more than 40 of the world's most important primary commodities, reports of forced labor and the incidence of child labor. Many, if not most, of these commodities can be found in products used by consumers every day. The report is available on Verité's website. <https://www.verite.org/commodity-atlas/>
- Microsoft has designed an online training module for businesses, "Human Trafficking and Business." The course includes actions businesses can take to combat human trafficking. <http://youth-underground.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/E-Tool.pdf>
- The United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT) was conceived to promote the global fight on human trafficking, on the basis of international agreements reached at the UN. www.ungift.org/
- 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. <https://www.responsiblesourcingtool.org/>
- Other resources include: the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, the UN Global Compact and Know the Chain.
- The Fair Food Program has partnered with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to help uncover and investigate several modern slavery cases involving farm operations across the southeastern United States. Owing to its outstanding efforts, CIW has effectively eradicated human trafficking in the farms participating in the Fair Food Program. www.fairfoodprogram.org
- The Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) has announced a new initiative, the Investor Alliance for Human Rights (IAHR), established to provide a collective action platform to facilitate investor advocacy on a full spectrum of human rights and labor rights issues. This new Alliance, the first of its kind, builds on longstanding ICCR member advocacy to amplify the global investor voice on critical human rights challenges and to promote corporate accountability on human rights. <https://www.iccr.org/program-areas/human-rights/investor-alliance-human-rights>
- Green America's Guide to Ending Sweatshop Labor <https://www.greenamerica.org/>,
- The Better World Shopping Guide <https://betterworldshopper.org/>

- USCSAHT includes a list of slave free goods and services on their website. Some of these products are made by formerly trafficked persons and proceeds from purchases support these survivors. www.sistersagainstrafficking.org/resources/survivor-services
- Could the person serving your meals or cleaning your hotel room be a trafficking victim? If you think you have encountered a victim of human trafficking, call the **National Human Trafficking Resource Center** at 1.888.373.7888.
- **Support anti-trafficking legislation** at state, national and international levels. Advocate for transparency in the supply chain. Support the H.R.6279 Business Supply Chain Transparency on Trafficking and Slavery Act (2020). Advocate for laws that prohibit recruitment fees and make companies ensure that neither they nor any of their suppliers charge them. Encourage the creation of ethical employers' associations that adhere to codes of conduct that guarantee the rights of workers.
- **Urge governments** to take and uphold social protection systems and employment policies. Advocate for government regulations that ban the importation of products known to be made with forced labor.
- **Support boycotts** of companies that knowingly produce goods and provide services through the use of forced labor.
- **Do what you can** to eradicate the poverty that encourages people into the hands of recruiters.
- **Advocate** for safety measures for refugees and immigrants.
- **Educate yourself** and others about slave labor involved in the products that you consume. There are numerous websites to help consumers learn about where labor trafficking may have been involved in the supply chains of products. Others rate corporations according to their transparency, policies and monitoring procedures. Slaveryfootprint.org estimates the number of slaves that work to provide you with items you consume each day.

Reflection

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

“Today, as in the past, slavery is rooted in a notion of the human person which allows him or her to be treated as an object. Whenever sin corrupts the human heart and distances us from our Creator and our neighbors, the latter are no longer regarded as beings of equal dignity, as brothers or sisters sharing a common humanity, but rather as objects. Whether by coercion or deception, or by physical or psychological duress, human persons created in the image and likeness of God are deprived of their freedom, sold and reduced to being the property of others. They are treated as means to an end.”

—Pope Francis, December 2014

“It is good for people to realize that purchasing is always a moral - and not simply economic - act. Hence the consumer has a specific social responsibility which goes hand-in-hand with the social responsibility of the enterprise. Consumers should be continually educated regarding their daily role, which can be exercised with respect for moral principles without diminishing the intrinsic economic rationality of the act of purchasing...”

—Caritas in Veritate, 66

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.”

—Matthew 7:12

References

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

—Proverbs 31:8-9

“God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them.”

—Genesis 1:27

“You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns.”

—Deuteronomy 24:14

Source Notes:

1. Trafficking in Persons Report 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-TIP-Report-Complete-062420-FINAL.pdf>
2. <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/TraffickingbytheNumbers.pdf>, p.2
3. <https://www.verite.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/EO-and-Commodity-Reports-Combined-FINAL-2017.pdf>
4. <https://polarisproject.org/blog/2020/06/labor-trafficking-red-flags-in-latest-work-visa-program-changes/>
5. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods>

In order to protect the identity of trafficking victims, models have been used in identifiable photos.