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HUMAN TRAFFICKING & REFUGEES

Table of Contents

01

Introduction

02

Human Trafficking
as an offshoot of
Globalisation

03

Key Ideas about
Human Trafficking

04

Why talk about
Refugees?

05

Concluding
Remarks



01 Introduction

“Not all migrants are trafficked. However, people fleeing conflicts, emergency situations and poverty are pushed to migrate in unsafe and vulnerable conditions.”

- Ms Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons. [a]

As of today, human trafficking remains one of the greatest threats to human security in the 21st Century. Unfortunately, most cases related to human trafficking, especially when talking about migrants and refugees, remain undetected, contributing to the perpetuation of such criminal actions.

This article sets out to shed some light on what human trafficking is and how refugees constitute to be one of its most vulnerable groups. Firstly, by exploring the clear link between globalisation as a facilitator of exploitation and human trafficking, subsequently looking into some general ideas concerning human trafficking, through some key concepts and available data. The second part of this article particularly focuses on trafficking in refugees by attempting to substantiate the reasons that lead to their susceptibility to exploitation and human trafficking.

02 Human Trafficking as an offshoot of globalisation



"Therefore a sustainable and collective roadmap should be considered, based on the principles of prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnerships, while trying to ensure a victim-centric and human rights-based approach."

The very phenomenon of globalization is well known to have created great opportunities; however, its challenges should not be overlooked. In a world where everything seems to be hyper-connected, past obstacles and frontiers are now more blurred than ever.[1] Although when we think about globalisation our first thoughts might remote us to the McDonalds nearby, living in the so-called "global village"[2] means way more than that. Going through the process of globalisation should not only mean talking about its perks, such as increased flows of capital and human mobility; it is also important to address its consequences in the world as we know it today.[3]

Trafficking in Persons - The four P's:

- Prevention
- Protection
- Prosecution
- Partnerships

Among many other negative outcomes, increasing human trafficking has emerged as one of the greatest costs brought by such phenomenon, depicting quite accurately the rotten edge of the “global village” fairy-tale.[4] While globalisation has created incentives for out-migration flows aiming at finding a better quality of life, several human security issues have come forth. Indeed, living global has promoted innovation, productivity, and new job opportunities. However, it has also enabled deeper economic and social disparities, consequently leading to the displacement of migrants (usually low-skilled), who seek better prospects in life.[5] In truth, by trying to do so, migrants often see themselves in unprotected and precarious situations, increasing, therefore, their risk of being subjected to any form of exploitation and subsequently to the world of human trafficking. Likewise, people who are forcibly displaced due to war, conflict or persecution face the same level of vulnerability upon their arrival in a new country.[6]

Exclusionary immigration policies, insufficient channels for regular migration and family reunification, as well as lack of regular access to the labour market for asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants[7] are therefore some of the factors that might contribute to the likelihood of being exploited and trafficked since these individuals usually opt for irregular means in order to arrive at their destination. This will be further discussed in detail in section four.

Overall, one could argue that globalisation facilitates human trafficking the same way expansionism has facilitated transatlantic slave trade throughout the 15th to the 19th century.[8] Similarly to slavery, modern-day trafficking is a very lucrative industry/business driven by supply and demand, as if human beings were goods. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), trafficking generates approximately US\$ 150 billion of illegal profits, of which US\$ 99 billion come from commercial sexual exploitation. [9] Put it simply, while taking advantage of the increased flow of people across countries, traffickers seek to objectify and exploit humans with the ultimate purpose of profiting from it[10]/them.

Even if throughout the years efforts to counter human trafficking are evident, they remain insufficient. Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic as of today, human trafficking is overall foreseen to get worse as numbers are expected to increase. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), considering the economic impact of Covid-19, individuals will be in a position of higher risk in terms of exploitation and trafficking, as they are now more exposed and vulnerable.[11] It is thus important to rethink the strategies against human trafficking, from the policy spectrum to its open discussion in public arenas. Human trafficking is not a third-world country problem, but a global one. Therefore, a sustainable and collective roadmap should be considered, based on the principles of prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnerships, while trying to ensure a victim-centric and human rights-based approach.[12]



Women and girls are disproportionately affected by human trafficking, accounting for 71% of all victims.

Source: Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage. International Labour Office (ILO), Geneva, 2017

03 Key Ideas about Human Trafficking



"They could be exploited and trafficked during their journey, or at destination, because of their social vulnerability."

- Ms Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons. [b]

As previously mentioned, trafficking in persons is a global phenomenon and not exclusive to third-world countries. Victims from at least 175 countries have been reported across 164 countries where exploitation takes place. [13] However, given its diffusion, data is often limited, making it difficult to estimate the real size of the problem.



Europe

The majority of victims trafficked in Europe are adults, with a slightly higher proportion trafficked for labour than sexual exploitation.



Asia

Most victims exploited in Asia are trafficked for labour exploitation, particularly into domestic work.



Americas

Over two thirds of victims trafficked in the Americas experience sexual exploitation. Over 80% of victims are female, and almost a third are children.



Africa

Victims trafficked in Africa are in almost equal proportions male and female, and more than half are children

Source: Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC). (2021). [Dataset]. <https://www.ctdatacollaborative.org/>

Breaking down the key concepts: Human Trafficking, Smuggling and Refugee

Key Term	Definition
Human trafficking [i]	is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit. Men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world. The traffickers often use violence or fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims.
Human smuggling [ii]	is the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or permanent resident.
Refugee [iii]	is a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

[i] UN General Assembly, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 15 November 2000

[ii] UN General Assembly, Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 15 November 2000

[iii] UN General Assembly, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951

Forms of Human Trafficking

Although sexual exploitation remains one of the most known forms of human trafficking, other exploitive activities shall not be overlooked. When we talk about human trafficking we can think about a broad range of dimensions such as forced labour, organ removal, domestic servitude, forced begging, etc...

01

Sexual Exploitation

It occurs when someone is pressured or forced into prostitution, exploited in the sex industry or subjected to other forms of sexual abuse, such as sexual slavery.

02

Labour Exploitation

It occurs in numerous industries globally. Common types of this type of exploitation include people working in agriculture and factories with precarious conditions.

03

Forced Marriage

When the victim does not consent to enter the marriage. A forced marriage will often involve sexual exploitation or servitude.

04

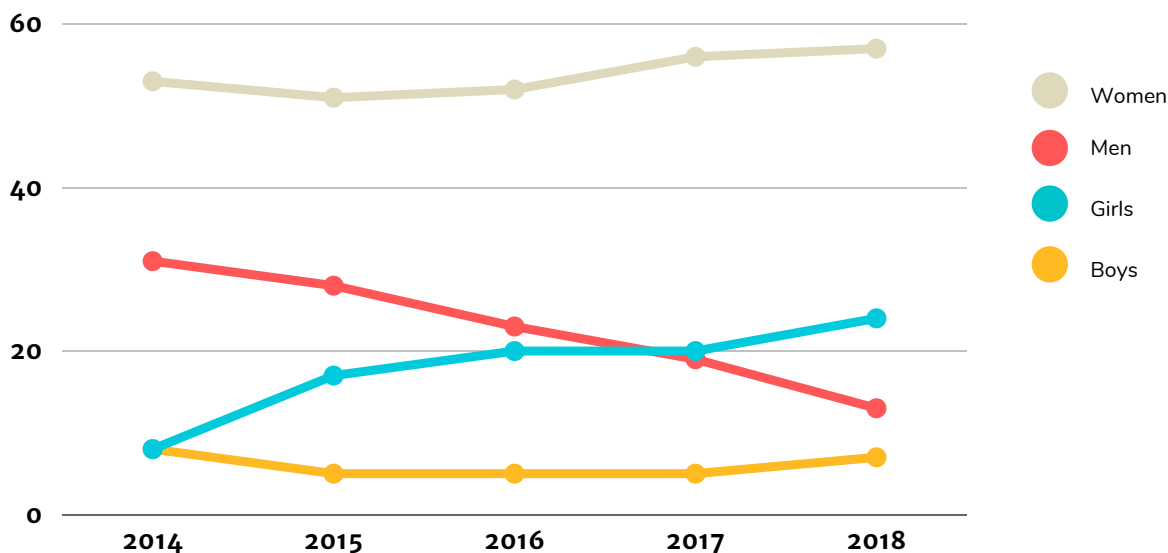
Other forms of Exploitation

Forced begging, domestic servitude, organ removal and child soldiers can be considered means of exploitation.

Datasets on Human Trafficking

GENDER OF VICTIMS IDENTIFIED OVER TIME

A large proportion of victims identified are women, as human trafficking has generally been seen as a crime which affects mostly women. Over time, a higher percentage of men have been identified and it is acknowledged that men are also vulnerable to human trafficking.



21%

Approximately one fifth of all identified victims are children. IOM and Polaris assist a significant caseload of child victims each year.

Other key findings

- IOM case data show that **80% of international human trafficking journeys** cross through official border points, such as airports and land border control points.
- Most victims of **trafficking for labour exploitation** are trafficked into domestic work, construction and agriculture, manufacturing and hospitality.
- Victims trafficked for **sexual exploitation** are recruited most often by an intimate partner, and are more likely to be recruited by friends and family than victims of trafficking for labour exploitation.

Source: Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC). (2021). [Dataset]. <https://www.ctdatacollaborative.org/>

04 Why talk about Refugees?



“Refugees are especially vulnerable as they typically move under desperate situations.”

- Mr Benjamin Smith, Southeast Asian program coordinator for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime [c]

As a consequence of their vulnerable status, refugees are at particular risk of being subjects of human trafficking. Among several factors related to their likelihood of being trafficked, we can point out aspects of refugees’ physical insecurity; social, economic, and political marginalisation; and lack of legal protection.[14] From fleeing their country until arriving at their final destination, the dangers encountered are countless. Experiences with trauma and loss, sexual violence, pressure to engage in survival sex and victimisation by smugglers are unfortunately common patterns (and stories) shared by most people who seek international protection.[15] Furthermore, upon their arrival, refugees are often subjected to poor and dehumanising practices in terms of border enforcement, refugee camp management, labour market, and domestic policies, clearly aimed at discouraging migration while restricting their rights.[16] Thus, considering such risks, it shall not be difficult to substantiate the legitimate concern that we should have about refugees’ wellbeing and security, bearing in mind that these vulnerability factors are potentially leading to the dark road towards exploitation, abuse, and human trafficking.

A closer reality, among many others, can be used to portray these vulnerabilities to which refugees are exposed every day. Not far from today, upon the peak of the 2015 refugee and migrant crisis, more than one million people would have reached Europe’s shores by trying to cross the Mediterranean.[17] Sooner this would mean that more than one million people seeking a safe port would be or would already be at risk of being trafficked.

Although experience with abuse, exploitation, and other forms of violence are reportedly already starting in the country of origin, the continuation of such traumatic experiences is more likely to happen thereafter, as refugees find themselves in longer and riskier journeys until their last destination.[18]

Even if hard to believe that someone would profit from such unfortunate events, the refugee crisis revealed to be the dreamland for human traffickers and smugglers. Evidence shows that the current refugee and migrant crisis boosted smuggling businesses, as its runners practically have a monopoly on transporting people across the Mediterranean.[19] By taking advantage of their desperation, refugees often see smugglers as their only alternative to reach the planned destination.[20]

Children, however, remain the most vulnerable group. In 2015, 88,300 asylum seekers applying for international protection in the Member States of the European Union (EU) were considered unaccompanied children.[21] By the end of 2016, 3 out of 4 children crossing the Mediterranean had experienced abuse amounting to trafficking.[22] While many refugee children might not start their journey as trafficked, many end up being exploited throughout it due to the increasing vulnerability status when compared with adults.[23]

In short, the protection of refugees from human trafficking risks can overall be improved. However, similarly to what was suggested in the second section of this article, strategies and policies should be reconsidered and changed accordingly. By promoting effective schemes of family reunification, resettlement and relocation, and other legal protections, countering human trafficking can have a real chance. In addition to this, and often overlooked, it is urgent to push for the adoption of a refugee-centered approach and demand our governments to treat and receive refugees with the dignity they have always deserved.



05 Concluding Remarks

"You may choose to look the other way but you can never again say you did not know."

- William Wilberforce

Often referred to as modern-day slavery, human trafficking remains one of the most widespread forms of transnational organized crime. Thousands of men, women, and children are every day dragged to the rotten world of abuse and exploitation, on which their vulnerabilities account for the likelihood of being subjected to trafficking. However, even if developments towards countering human trafficking have been made, they remain insufficient.

Accordingly, future prospects to decrease the activity of trafficking in persons do not look optimistic either, as the consequences of the COVID-19 economic recession are expected to worsen, so is people's susceptibility to being trafficked, particularly the poorest communities such as refugees.

Nevertheless, even if long-term solutions do not seem to be on the horizon, it is important still to promote a better understanding and awareness about the issue. The 30th of July is, therefore, a great example of how we can do so.

Start a conversation. Use the 30th of July as a wake-up call and spread awareness.

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About the organisation

The Youth Center of Epirus (YC Epirus) is a non-profit organisation located in Ioannina, in the heart of the Epirus region, Greece. It hosts departments of young adult non-formal education and asylum seeker integration. The organisation is internationally certified for Support Services for the Improvement of Citizen's Lives and the Upgrading of General Living Conditions, by the International Organization for Standardization and has received Certification as a provider of Primary Social Care services of a non-profit nature from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

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