



Human Security at the United Nations

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United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Human Security Unit

Human Security at the United Nations

This is the sixth issue of "Human Security at the United Nations," a newsletter produced by the Human Security Unit at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

This issue focuses on trafficking in persons and its impact on human security and the broader international community.

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Trafficking in Persons – An affront to human dignity

Today there are approximately 214 million international and 740 million internal migrants dispersed across the globe. In the midst of this mass movement of human beings, trafficking in persons has emerged as a truly global enterprise. Driven by poverty and conflict and facilitated by the global liberalisation of markets, labour and transportation, it is estimated that as many as 2.4 million people are victims of trafficking at any given point in time, generating an estimated annual revenue of US\$32 billion. Combating this trade is high on the agenda of the United Nations. In an opening address at the Third Global Forum on Migration and Development in November 2009, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon called on the international community to "devote special attention to the most vulnerable migrants of all - the victims of human trafficking, especially women and girls".

Trafficking in persons most often takes place in three stages: (1) recruitment at place of origin, which often involves coercion or abduction; (2) the transfer of victims to a final destination, either crossing international borders or moving internally within the same country; and finally, (3) the exploitation of the victims. The most widespread forms of exploitation are forced commercial sex and labour, including domestic servitude, but victims are also trafficked for purposes of forced marriages, organ removal and ritual killings. Traffickers target the most vulnerable sectors of society luring their victims, many of whom are women and children, with promises of a better life through employment or education.

The Impact of Trafficking in Persons

Trafficking in persons, often referred to as modern day slavery, is not only a threat to the victim's most fundamental human rights and freedom of movement, but it also poses a serious and widespread challenge to human security at all levels of society. The individual victims of trafficking endure atrocious living and working conditions that physically injure, psychologically traumatize and, in some cases, cost victims their lives. Often bonded by debt, victims can be subjected to physical torture and sexual abuse and are exposed to higher risk of contracting HIV and other STDs with limited or no access to health care and social services.

Meanwhile, trafficking in persons also has significant impact on the human security of communities from which victims are recruited. Creating an environment of violence, crime and fear, trafficking in persons separates families, erodes social bonds and support networks, and undermines the economic prospects of communities. Furthermore, facilitated by large-scale international organized criminal networks that are linked to illicit trade in arms and narcotics, trafficking in persons can also compromise state security and impede human development by weakening the rule of law, undermining health systems and threatening public safety.



A UNTFHS funded project in Moldova – A social worker visits at-risk households to trafficking in persons. © UN/2010

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Supply and Demand – Trafficking in persons in a time of global financial and economic crisis

Like most global trade flows, trafficking in persons is driven by supply and demand conditions; a supply of vulnerable victims hoping for a better life and a demand for cheap labour and forced prostitution. On the supply side, those that fall prey to the deceit and coercion of traffickers usually endure lives of extreme poverty and lack the empowerment and knowledge to resist the lure of the traffickers. This can often be attributed to ethnic marginalization, gender discrimination and exclusion from education and employment opportunities. Extreme downturns such as natural disasters and armed conflicts also provide a ready supply of potential victims, as traffickers prey on displaced populations who, in the face of weakened family and community bonds, growing poverty, and lack of effective law enforcement, see little alternative but to take greater risks in ensuring their survival and livelihood.

Moreover, with an estimated 50 million jobs cut globally by the end of 2009, the current global financial and economic crisis may make more people and communities vulnerable to human trafficking. Faced with growing unemployment and deepening poverty, it is likely that people will be prepared to take greater migration risks, while traffickers wait ready to capitalize on an expanding supply of vulnerable people whose social and economic safety nets have been devastated by the crisis. Meanwhile, insufficient protection mechanisms in countries where institutional corruption is wide-spread and law enforcement is weak, allow networks of organized crime and fraudulent employers to capitalize on the economic downturn with impunity.

The global financial and economic crisis has also fuelled the demand for trafficking in persons. Economic hardship in destination countries has increased the desire for cheap goods and services. Moreover, as profits fall, a greater number of businesses move their operations underground to avoid taxes and to produce cheaper goods under conditions that are unacceptable under unionized labour laws in destination countries.

[Bibliography: Human security and human trafficking](#)

[Report of the Secretary-General on Human Security, 2010](#)

[Fact-Sheet on the Impact of the Economic Crisis on trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants, UNODC 2009](#)

[ILO Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, ILO 2008](#)

[Human Security and Human Trafficking, Anna Jonsson, 2008](#)

[General Assembly Thematic Debate on Human Trafficking, Background Paper and Summary Document, United Nations, 2008](#)

An extensive list of human security publications can be found in the [Human Security Unit Digital Library](#)



A UNTFHS funded projects - Participants from the NGO "Legal Clinic" inform villagers in Soldanesti district of the risks of and human trafficking as a part of the "From house to house" campaign. © UN/2010

A Global Response to a Global Threat

As a threat to global, national and individual security, trafficking in persons must be tackled collectively through a human security approach that advocates for comprehensive, people-centred, context-specific and preventive solutions. Placing people, and the conditions in which they live, at the centre of analysis, the human security concept argues for not only the physical safety of the affected individuals, groups and communities but also addresses the root causes behind human trafficking. For example, by considering the relevant threats to the survival, livelihood and dignity of the affected individuals and communities, the human security concept can highlight the underlying cultural, social, political and economic root causes behind human trafficking and advance the necessary partnerships required to tackle this multifaceted global threat.

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This approach has been reflected in much of the United Nations' efforts to combat trafficking in persons. Based on the 3Ps approach - prevention of the trade, prosecution of traffickers, and protection of victims - **the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (Palermo Protocol)** has become the guiding principle for responses to trafficking in persons today. Entered into force in December 2003, the Palermo Protocol is now ratified by 117 governments and has spurred collaborative efforts to eradicate trafficking in persons within the United Nations and beyond.

One such example was the 2008 **General Assembly Thematic Debate on Human Trafficking**. Opening the debate, the President of the 62nd session of the General Assembly noted that trafficking in persons is a threat to human security and should be met with policies that are comprehensive, integrated and people-centred and take into account issues of security, development and human rights. The debate was followed by General Assembly Resolution 63/194 **"Improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons"** that reaffirmed the necessity for a broad international cooperation to effectively counter the threat of trafficking in persons.

United Nations agencies have also been at the forefront of this comprehensive, integrated and people-centred approach. **The United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT)**, for example, was launched in 2007 by UNODC, in cooperation with ILO, IOM, UNICEF, OHCHR and the OSCE, to create synergies among the anti-trafficking activities of UN agencies, funds and programmes, international organizations as well as other stakeholders. Key outputs of the initiative have been the **Vienna Forum to fight Human Trafficking** in 2008 and the **Global Report on Trafficking in Persons**, published in 2009.

Most recently, in 2009, UNODC released the **International Framework for Action: To implement the Trafficking in Persons Protocol** in order to further strengthen the implementation of the Palermo Protocol. The framework promotes victim-centred action plans which take into account the root causes of trafficking in persons and the vulnerabilities of its victims, while adopting a multi-disciplinary approach that supports inter-agency coordination.

The UNTFHS Responds to Trafficking in Persons – "Protection and Empowerment of Victims of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence in Moldova"

Continuous political conflict and poverty in Moldova have created high unemployment rates and a growing income disparity between urban and rural areas. As a result, up to 40% of the labour force in some of the poorest towns and villages has migrated abroad, tearing apart family structures and undermining community support mechanisms. Women and children bear the heaviest burden of the country's challenges and, in their desperate economic and social situation, many young women have turned to traffickers as their only way out. Meanwhile, the children of migrating or trafficked parents are frequently abandoned at state institutions and are exposed to further neglect, psychological stress and a high risk to be trafficked as well.



A UNTFHS funded project - Moldovan police from the Anenii Noi district receive training on the legal aspects of prevention and combating trafficking in persons. © UN/2010

By adopting a human security approach to trafficking in persons, the United Nations Trust Fund for Security (UNTFHS) funded project, entitled, "Protection and Empowerment of Victims of Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence in Moldova" considers the root causes of the trafficking epidemic in

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Moldova and highlights the inter-connections between gender-based violence, poverty, sexual exploitation and trafficking in persons. In close collaboration with UNDP, UNFPA, IOM, and OSCE, and through implementation by government and local counterparts, the project works to protect vulnerable groups from exposure to trafficking by strengthening the capacity of government institutions to provide quality identification, protection, and assistance services to those at risk of being trafficked and to victims of domestic violence. This has been accompanied by self-help groups and education services to raise awareness of the issue, while establishing repatriation funds and mechanisms to offer immediate safe accommodation, medical care and psychological counseling services to victims.

Meanwhile, the project also aims to empower communities, civil society organizations, and individuals to better address the issues of human trafficking and domestic violence. Target communities have been mobilized to lead community-based initiatives addressing domestic violence and human trafficking through forming action groups and training community leaders, individuals and local media on human security issues including access to alternative livelihoods, social responsibility and positive parenting practices. For further information on this and other UNTFHS funded projects, please visit the [HSU website](#).

Latest News and Events

The Report of the Secretary-General on Human Security was released on 6 April 2010. A General Assembly Debate is scheduled for May 2010 in New York. For a copy of the report [please click here](#).

Two further Regional Training Workshops on the application of the human security concept were held in Eastern and Southern Africa in March 2010. Organized by the Human Security Unit-OCHA and co-facilitated by Sciences-Po, Paris, the first workshop was held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 9 – 12 March in collaboration with the OCHA Regional Office for Southern and Eastern Africa while the second workshop was held in Nairobi, Kenya from 16 – 19 March 2010 in collaboration with the Sub-Regional Officer for Eastern Africa. Copies of the training materials for both workshops, in addition to previous workshops in Bangkok and Accra, can be found on the [HSU website](#).



Participants from the Rwanda and Burundi UN Country Teams engage in group exercises during the Nairobi Human Security Regional Workshop © UN/2010

Seventh Meeting of the Friends of Human Security (FHS) was held on 10 December, 2009, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Chaired by Ambassador Claude Heller of Mexico and Ambassador Yukio Takasu of Japan, Member States discussed the added value of human security in addressing the impact of the financial and economic crisis and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; health and food security; climate change; peacebuilding and the protection of civilians. Under-Secretary-General John Holmes informed the members of the FHS that the Secretary-General will present a report to Member States on human security as a follow-up to paragraph 143 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1). Documents in support of the meeting are available on the [HSU website](#).

Eighth Meeting of the Advisory Board on Human Security took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 10 - 11 November, 2009. Documents in support of the meeting are available on the [HSU website](#).

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