

The Facts About Human Trafficking For Forced Labor

"There's a special evil in the abuse and exploitation of the most innocent and vulnerable. The victims of sex trade see little of life before they see the very worst of life—an underground of brutality and lonely fear. Those who create these victims and profit from their suffering must be severely punished. Those who patronize this industry debase themselves and deepen the misery of others. And governments that tolerate this trade are tolerating a form of slavery."

—President George W. Bush before the UN General Assembly, September 2003

A Victim's Story

Rajila, age 30, left her home in India to work in Saudi Arabia based on promises of a good salary and free housing from a company that supplies laborers for hospitals. But what seemed like a dream opportunity turned out to be a nightmare. Rajila, together with other foreign women, was forced to work 12-hour shifts, six days a week. She was never paid. The "free" housing was excruciatingly confining, and, when the women returned from work, they were locked in their rooms. Once a week they were escorted to the local market to purchase groceries and other necessities. She and other Muslim laborers from India were not allowed to practice their faith in local mosques. Rajila left Saudi Arabia taking with her no accumulated salary from three and a half years of uninterrupted work.¹

What is Human Trafficking?

Trafficking in persons is modern-day slavery. Every year, approximately 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders; millions more are enslaved in their own countries. The common denominator in all trafficking scenarios is the use of force, fraud or coercion to exploit a person for commercial sex or for the purpose of subjecting a victim to involuntary servitude, debt bondage, or forced labor. The use of force or coercion can be direct and violent, or psychological.

The Causes of Labor Trafficking

Most instances of forced labor occur as unscrupulous recruiters and employers take advantage of gaps in law enforcement to exploit vulnerable workers. These workers are made more vulnerable to forced labor practices because of unemployment, poverty, crime, discrimination, corruption, political conflict, and cultural acceptance of forced labor. Immigrants are particularly vulnerable, but individuals are also often forced into labor in their own countries.

Bonded Labor

One form of force or coercion is the use of a bond, or debt, to keep a person in subjugation. This is referred to in law and policy as "bonded labor" or "debt bondage." It is criminalized under U.S. law and included as a form of exploitation related to trafficking in the *UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*. Many workers around the world fall victim to debt bondage when they assume an initial debt as part of the terms of employment; others inherit debt in more traditional systems of bonded labor. Traditional bonded labor in South Asia enslaves huge numbers of people in this way from generation to generation; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) estimate that the number of bonded laborers in India alone ranges from 20 million to 65 million.

Involuntary Servitude

People are trapped in involuntary servitude when they fear that serious physical harm or legal coercion, such as deportation, would result from an attempt to escape their conditions. Victims are often economic migrants and low-skilled laborers who are trafficked from less developed communities to more prosperous and developed places. Many victims experience physical and verbal abuse, breach of an employment contract, and may perceive themselves to be in captivity. Too often, they are.

Involuntary Domestic Servitude

Domestic workers may be trapped in servitude through the use of force or coercion, such as physical (including sexual) or emotional abuse. Children are particularly vulnerable to domestic servitude in private homes, which is often unregulated by public authorities. In some wealthier countries of East Asia and the Persian Gulf, there is great demand for domestic servants, who are frequently forced into conditions of involuntary domestic servitude.

Child Labor

Most international organizations and national laws legally allow older children to engage in light work. However, the worst forms of child labor are being targeted for eradication by nations around the globe. Among these hazardous types are the sale and trafficking of children for bonded and forced labor, and the forced conscription of children into armed conflict. In this brutal practice, national armies and rebel militias illegally recruit—sometimes through abduction or force—male and female children as combatants, porters, spies, domestics, and sex slaves.

What Consequences Do Victims Face?

Victims of trafficking for forced labor are modern-day slaves. They experience permanent physical and psychological harm, isolation from their families and communities, reduced opportunities for personal development, and restricted movement. Victims are often wary of law enforcement and psychologically dependent on their traffickers. Child victims are denied access to education, which reinforces the cycle of illiteracy and poverty that facilitates their exploitation.

What is the United States Doing to Combat Human Trafficking for Forced Labor?

- The *2000 Trafficking Victims Protection Act* and the *2003 and 2005 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Acts* mandate U.S. Government efforts to combat trafficking in persons.
- The Department of State issues an annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* that assesses foreign government actions to combat trafficking, including protecting the victims of forced labor and punishing their exploiters. The *2008 Trafficking in Persons Report* includes a number of countries on Tier 3 for their lack of efforts to address forced labor in their countries.
 - These countries include Algeria, Burma, Kuwait, North Korea, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Syria.
- The *Trade and Development Act of 2000* mandates efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, including the trafficking of children and forced child labor, as a criterion for countries receiving trade benefits.
- The Department of Labor (DOL) maintains a list of products that are believed to have been made using forced child labor and produces an annual report on how countries are combating the worst forms of child labor.
- In Fiscal Year 2007 alone, the United States Government spent more than \$79 million to assist governments and NGOs on anti-trafficking efforts. More than 70 percent of that amount focused at least in part on labor trafficking.

Funded programs include:

- A partnership between the Department of State and *International Justice Mission* to utilize local laws and law enforcement to rescue victims of forced labor in India.
- A USAID project in Uganda that provides direct support to several organizations that shelter children who were exploited for labor purposes or are at risk for exploitation.
- A collaboration between the Department of Labor and the *International Labor Organization* to improve El Salvador's capacity to enforce laws against exploitative child labor and protect victims of trafficking.
- A Department of Health and Human Services program that supports efforts by the Phoenix, AZ chapter of the *International Rescue Committee* to reach out to victims of forced labor in the Latino community.

¹ Human Rights Watch. *Bad Dreams: Exploitation and Abuse of Migrant Workers in Saudi Arabia*. July 2004.
<http://hrw.org/mideast/saudi/labor>