

A G20 Interfaith Forum Policy Brief
POLICY AREA: Urgent Issues

Actions speak louder than words in combating Human Trafficking and Modern Forms of Slavery: Faith-inspired Actors/Communities Supporting Global Efforts
June 19, 2019

Abstract

The Leaders of the G20 are called upon to stand up and be counted in addressing one of the most significant humanitarian crises of our generation - human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. The corrosive and detrimental effects of this scourge are felt far and wide, including in the domestic politics of G20 member states, shaking the very roots of liberal democratic norms and practices. What is required is concerted and focused action from the G20, with millions of human lives at stake. G20 leaders can be part of the solution, and faith-inspired actors/communities should stand shoulder-to-shoulder.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7: “take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor” - reflects strong multilateral commitment to end human trafficking and modern forms of slavery.

G20 leaders can advance progress towards this goal in various tangible ways, highlighting its priority and committing themselves to action on specific initiatives that address and prevent distinct abuses. Faith-inspired actors and communities play critical roles in articulating, promoting, and directly contributing to global frameworks to combat human trafficking and modern forms of slavery, at levels from the most global to the most local. Closer cooperation and coordination between religious communities/faith-inspired actors and policy makers could better align efforts and ensure that respective knowledge, and resources, best contribute towards common goals. G20 recognition of this cooperation and explicit focus on the topic of combating human trafficking and modern forms of slavery could advance integration and effectiveness.

This brief urges a concerted focus by G20 leaders on human trafficking and modern forms of slavery during the 2019 Osaka G20 Summit. It highlights efforts by religious and interfaith actors to support global strategies to combat human trafficking, forced labor, and modern forms of slavery, and points to actions that could strengthen integration of religious, moral, and values-based strategies. The brief reflects deliberations of faith-linked groups actively involved globally, regionally, and locally on the topic, and underlines specific steps to multiply impact, and strengthen global efforts to end human trafficking and modern forms of slavery by 2030.

The Challenge

Vast numbers of people are trafficked. No matter how poor and flawed the data involved, the scale of suffering is enormous.

Between 2012 and 2016, an estimated 89 million people experienced some form of modern slavery, defined as forced labor, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage.¹ Forced labor victims in 2016 included an estimated 16 million people working in the private economy and 4.1 million forced to work by their state authorities.² Also in 2016, 4.8 million persons, the vast majority women and girls, were victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Victims of commercial sexual exploitation, including over one million children, were typically trapped in such situations for an average of two years. In addition, over 15 million people were enduring forced marriage, more than a third married under the age of 18, and often made to provide labor under the guise of marriage. Poor country-level reporting and other data limitations suggest that numbers of victims of human trafficking and modern forms of slavery are probably higher than the available data suggests.

According to Europol-Interpol, members of criminal networks (predominantly) facilitate travel by 90 percent of irregular migrants to the European Union (EU). Key migratory routes identified as main corridors for human trafficking are fluid and influenced by factors such as border controls. Human traffickers are organized in loosely connected networks in a multinational business linked to the Sicilian mafia that earned between US\$5 and US\$6 billion in 2015 - negatively affecting transnational security, with suspects originating from more than 100 countries.³

Trafficking is linked to priority global security issues including genocide. Under-Secretary-General Adama Dieng, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Prevention of Genocide, stresses that human trafficking is an “atrocious crime” that comes under the purview of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide that entered into force on January 12, 1951, and is reflected in General Assembly Resolution 260.

Action to address the issues is mixed and in many countries human trafficking networks continue to operate with high degrees of impunity.

This applies especially for different forms of labor, which begin as voluntary but become traps with coercion involved. Trafficked humans are expected to work as slaves (sold publicly at ‘auctions’ in Libya), indentured labor, sex workers, and even sell their organs (e.g. Sicily) to pay off the ‘costs’ of trafficking to criminal gangs.⁴

¹ Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: *Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*. Geneva: ILO, 2017. ISBN: 978-92-2-130131-8 (Print), 978-92-2-130132-5 (Web PDF).

² Ibid.

³ de Silva, Purnaka L. “Regional Impact of Human Trafficking and Forced Migration: Looking for Solutions in Libya” in Robin Anderson and Purnaka L. de Silva (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Media and Humanitarian Action* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁴ ISSD Malta field research.

Women and children are particularly vulnerable in many societies with practices tied to gender norms that make victims vulnerable and little seen (household labor is a prime example).

Women and girls account for fully 71 percent of modern slavery victims, and are disproportionately subject to forced labor in the commercial sex industry and forced marriages.⁵

Challenges of trafficking and slavery practices are particularly pernicious for refugees and migrants.

Forcibly displaced populations become targets of traffickers. On May 12, 2019 it was reported that 23 teenage refugee Rohingya girls were rescued from Dhaka airport and 4 traffickers arrested.⁶ Trafficking is a known evil in refugee camps where people are especially vulnerable. Illicit and prohibitive recruitment fees for migration allow new migrants to be sold to human traffickers or trapped in debt bondage. In the Gulf States, abuse of worker sponsorship systems is well documented⁷ and an example of how labor migration can lead to exploitative situations.

These practices persist because they are profitable and because demand remains strong. However, costs to society are high and practices fly against basic human rights principles and democratic freedoms.

Forced labor practices and human trafficking are a low-risk, high-gain enterprise. Modern forms of slavery generate an estimated annual profit of over US\$150 billion for traffickers, with sexual exploitation accounting for two-thirds of global profits - an estimated US\$99 billion.⁸ Debt bondage and other forms of forced labor entrap many in exploitative situations that can last years or generations, as debts are transferred to family members. Law-abiding businesses and employers are disadvantaged by forced labor, as it creates an environment of unfair competition and risks tarnishing the reputation of entire industries. Governments and societies are harmed because profits generated by forced labor bypass national tax collection systems. Prison labor is abused, with prisoners used to undercut competitors in overseas, largely construction-related, projects for economic benefit.⁹

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Rohingya girls rescued from traffickers in Bangladesh”
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/rohingya-girls-rescued-traffickers-bangladesh-190512101949513.html?ref=hpvper.com>.

⁷ “Will Migrant Domestic Workers in the Gulf Ever Be Safe From Abuse?”
<https://www.newsdeeply.com/womensadvancement/articles/2018/08/29/will-migrant-domestic-workers-in-the-gulf-ever-be-safe-from-abuse>.

“#Me Too, say domestic workers in the Middle East”
<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/Comment/2017/12/8/MeToo-say-domestic-workers-in-the-Middle-East>

“Gulf States Fail to Protect Domestic Workers from Serious Violence”
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/16/gulf-states-fail-protect-domestic-workers-serious-violence>.

⁸ Profits and Poverty: *The economics of forced labour*. Geneva: ILO, 2014. ISBN: 978-92-2-128781-0.

⁹ “China’s newest export: convicts”
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2010/jul/29/china-export-convict-labour>.

No country or region is exempt from the challenge of ending trafficking and modern slavery, but many citizens have little awareness that it occurs.

The majority of victims of modern slavery are located in the Asia and Pacific region, including 70 percent of all victims of sexual exploitation.¹⁰ However, every economy benefits from forced labor, and forced marriages, sexual exploitation, and other internal trafficking cases occur in every country. Stories of police, military, and other government officials growing wealthy from trafficking come from many countries. The challenge also often crosses borders. Countries can be sending countries, receiving countries or both. Almost one in four victims of forced labor were exploited outside their country of residence.¹¹

Notwithstanding global commitments and action plans, effective measures to address abuses are limited.

The 2017 State Department Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report indicates that there were only 14,894 prosecutions and 9,071 convictions for trafficking globally in 2016 pro rata representing 0.03 per cent of trafficked victims.¹² Prevention and protection measures are feasible and have impact in some places but meaningful action falls far short of what is promised and what is feasible, and falls well short of what is needed.

Last but foremost, trafficking and modern forms of slavery involve violations of human rights, democratic freedoms, and shared religious principles focused on human dignity.

Prominent religious leaders including His Holiness Pope Francis, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, Her Holiness Mata Amritanandamayi, Rabbi Dr. Abraham Skorka, and Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi al-Modarresi, are among prominent religious leaders who call modern forms of slavery and human trafficking a crime against humanity. These leaders are committed “to do all within their power in their own faith communities and beyond to work together for the freedom of all those who are enslaved and trafficked so that their future might be restored.”¹³ Nevertheless, coordination and alignment of common purpose both among faith groups and between faith-inspired actors and secular actors is a challenge that has to be overcome.

With the moral, legal, law enforcement, and other practical challenges abundantly clear, action to eradicate human trafficking and modern slavery by 2030 should have a prominent place on global agendas, such as that of the G20, the European Union, and multilateral actors like the United Nations.

¹⁰ Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: *Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*. Geneva: ILO, 2017. ISBN: 978-92-2-130131-8 (Print), 978-92-2-130132-5 (Web PDF).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Trafficking in Persons Report 2017. U.S. Department of State, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/271339.pdf>.

¹³ Signed Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery. Vatican City: Global Freedom Network, 2014. <http://www.endslavery.va/content/endslavery/en/events/declaration/signed.html>.

Pathways Forward

Dismantling complex systems that contribute to human trafficking and modern forms of slavery calls for transnational, regional, national, and very local action. Policy and legal reforms, monitoring, policing and law enforcement need to go hand in hand with actions that address social and behavioral patterns that contribute to abuses. Effective support to victims is vital but prevention is even more pressing. Effective measures must involve public and private actors. Religious leaders and broad networks of faith-inspired actors currently play significant roles in focusing political and media attention on the issue and in practical responses, that nevertheless could be far better integrated.

Enforcement “with teeth” and adequate resources to implement existing legislation that are further strengthened by swift legal reforms is central to ending human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. International legal instruments provide the framework for concerted action: they include the United Nations 1956 Convention on slavery and slavery-like practices, the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (‘Palermo Protocol,’ 2000), supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Crime, the ILO Forced Labor Conventions No. 29 and 105, the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No. 182), the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labor Convention, 1930 and the Forced Labor (Supplementary Measures) Recommendation, 2014 (No. 203). Refinements and expansions could enhance the regulatory framework (an example is ratification and implementation of fundamental ILO labor standards and compliance in law and practice¹⁴). Legal reforms at a national level and reinforced inspection in sectors where risks are highest are imperative in order to curtail forced labor and debt bondage. Cross-border law enforcement cooperation is vital, but must be made less cumbersome and time consuming. The courts systems to try criminals engaged in human trafficking must be fast-tracked and stringent measures taken to stop the corruption and perversion of justice systems, including interference from politicians.

Improving the evidence base on human trafficking and modern forms of slavery by strengthening and extending national research and data collection efforts will help improve policies and programs. Increasing the capacity of countries to detect, systematically collect data, and report on trafficking cases is vital. Information sharing efforts need to consider all victims, and segmented by groups in operationally effective ways and focus on priority issues (e.g. documenting gendered patterns of abuse that disproportionately affect women and girls, illegal organ harvesting, etc.).

Children, who are victims of every form of modern slavery, including sexual exploitation, deserve priority in all efforts to identify victims and focus efforts at protection and rehabilitation. This must include a focus on children who are displaced and unaccompanied across the world including in Asia, Africa and Europe.

¹⁴ Recommended by Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Anti-trafficking efforts in conflict and crisis situations (where trafficking is rampant) deserve priority. Prevention and protection measures are an integral part of improved humanitarian action and migration governance. The introduction of the EU Conflict Mineral Regulations in 2021 provides a blueprint for change, but essential to implementation will be properly resourced monitoring. Better cooperation and sharper focus on trafficking patterns within global initiatives could help. Initiatives that reduce vulnerabilities faced by indigenous people and internal migrants are also critical.

Development programs must focus more explicitly on human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. Decent work and ethical economic growth are crucial to sustainable development. Microcredit and microfinance initiatives, land tenure reforms, and stronger social protection systems (including cash transfer schemes, public employment programs, health protection, maternity protection, disability benefits, unemployment protection, income security in old age and Forecast-based Financing¹⁵) can reduce vulnerabilities to poverty, natural disasters, economic crises, and other shocks that leave people vulnerable to exploitation.

More forceful and coordinated global responses are needed to address the different but interlinked abuses involved. The central need is greater political will among legislators in order to implement stronger partnerships and demonstrate a more forceful common will to combat human trafficking and modern forms of slavery by 2030.

Religious Responses

Global efforts led by prominent religious leaders and institutions aim to solidify commitment, raise public consciousness, and point to specific actions. International gatherings and widely disseminated resources highlight the issues and needed action. The Forum on Modern Slavery, co-sponsored Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, has been held annually since 2017, with a joint task force for modern slavery.¹⁶ His Holiness Pope Francis has called human trafficking a crime against humanity, including at an international conference held in April 2019, where the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development launched a handbook, “Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking,” to guide Catholics worldwide.¹⁷ The Lutheran World Federation published “Human Being-Not For Sale,” a guide to the subject from a Lutheran perspective, as a subtheme to the 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017.¹⁸ The Central Conference of American Rabbis resolved to fight against human trafficking since 2004.¹⁹ Prominent global faith leaders who have signed the Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery include Pope Francis, Rabbi David Rosen, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mohamed Ahmed El-Tayeb, Her Holiness Mata Amritanandamayi, The Most Ven. Datuk K. Sri

¹⁵ R  th, Alexandra et al., “Forecast-based Financing, Early Warning and Early Action: A Cutting-Edge Strategy for the International Humanitarian Community” in Robin Anderson and Purnaka L. de Silva (eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Media and Humanitarian Action* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁶ <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/awareness-action-and-impact-a-forum-on-modern-slavery>.

¹⁷ <https://migrants-refugees.va/documents/en/email/pastoral-orientations-on-human-trafficking.pdf> .

¹⁸ https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/human_beings_1_1.pdf.

¹⁹ <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-resolutions/human-trafficking-resolution-on/>.

Dhammaratana, and other leaders representing major religious and faith groups across the globe.²⁰

Religious and interfaith networks work alongside other civil society and private sector actors. The Santa Marta Group, endorsed by Pope Francis, has built an alliance of police chiefs, law enforcement agencies, international organizations, and bishops working together in over 35 countries.²¹ Resulting partnerships between governments and local religious actors – women’s religious orders in particular – facilitate law enforcement being promptly alerted so that they are better able to investigate and respond to trafficking cases. and work to develop improved legislation or policy implementation. The Global Sustainability Network, co-chaired by an Anglican Bishop, includes a multifaith group focusing on developing decent work and ethical economic growth to achieve SDG 8.7. T’ruah trains Rabbis to engage their communities in addressing slavery and trafficking locally, co-leading the Jewish Coalition Against Trafficking together with the National Council of Jewish Women. They also work with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to help expand fair food programs and eliminate slavery practices in U.S. agriculture.²² The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) focuses on raising the awareness of corporations about global supply chain abuses, and advocates for policies that would require businesses to disclose steps taken to identify and address modern slavery practices in their supply chains.²³

Many faith humanitarian aid organizations and community initiatives focus specifically on anti-trafficking efforts. The Salvation Army has been a long-standing leader in efforts to abolish human trafficking, and along with various other Christian organizations is a member of the Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST).²⁴ Another global network of over 45 Christian organizations working to combat human trafficking is COATNET, coordinated by Caritas Internationalis.²⁵ Christian organizations can have a large global reach, such as the International Justice Mission,²⁶ or the International Network of Consecrated Life Against Trafficking in Persons (Talitha Kum).²⁷ Chab Dai Coalition began as a grassroots Cambodian anti-trafficking organization and has grown to a membership of 51 local and international NGOs working on projects that include prevention and community engagement, client care and legal support, and advocacy.²⁸ The Anglican Alliance, particularly through their Freedom Year campaign,²⁹ and The Clewer Initiative, enable dioceses and wider church networks to develop strategies for detecting modern forms of slavery in their communities, and help provide victim support

²⁰ Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery, Religions for Peace Australia, 2014. http://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Joint_Declaration_of_Religious_Leaders_against_modern_slavery__December_2_014.pdf.

²¹ <http://santamartagroup.com/>.

²² <https://www.truah.org/campaign/slavery-and-trafficking/>.

²³ <https://www.iccr.org/our-issues/human-rights/human-trafficking-and-modern-day-slavery>.

²⁴ <https://faastinternational.org/about-us/faast-members>.

²⁵ <https://www.coatnet.org/about-us/>.

²⁶ <https://www.ijm.org/>.

²⁷ <https://www.talithakum.info/>.

²⁸ <https://chabdai.org/about>.

²⁹ <https://anglicanalliance.org/development/ending-human-trafficking/>.

and care.³⁰ A specific initiative with impact was ‘End Trafficking in Persons’ (ETIP) a five-year anti-trafficking program run by World Vision across the six countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region, reaching an estimated 240,000 community members.³¹

Religious groups have historically been at the forefront of providing safe shelter and resources, helping to reduce the likelihood that migrants and refugees will become victims of human trafficking schemes. This is witnessed presently in the Northern Triangle/Mexico migration route, in Venezuela and its neighboring countries, in the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, the Horn of Africa, and European recipient countries involving Mediterranean refugee and irregular migration routes, and in Myanmar/Bangladesh. Best practices include Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) work in Cambodia to protect irregular migrants,³² HIAS’s work with global refugees,³³ and Islamic Relief programs to protect life and dignity in crisis situations.³⁴

Religious groups indirectly assist human trafficking victims and contribute to preventative measures by confronting poverty and other social ills. Given that poverty and illiteracy are directly correlated with increased risk of becoming a victim of modern forms of slavery, charitable and humanitarian aid, education, and social work, are critical parts of overall solutions. Religious institutions provide the largest non-governmental education system in the world, often serving the world’s poorest and most vulnerable communities. Using that reach to raise awareness, prevent, and provide support for child victims of human trafficking and modern slavery could increase positive impact.

Advocacy and social support for migrants is an area where religious groups are especially well positioned to help move society in the direction of not only condemning human trafficking, but also condemning and stigmatizing its root causes. In this context the provision of psychosocial services to human trafficking victims and sexual abuse survivors is vital.

Faith-inspired actors, including international alliances of interfaith networks, organized religions, local faith-based organizations and religious groups, and individuals motivated by religious beliefs and values, as well as those with no belief, are all invaluable partners in every aspect of eradicating human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. Religious organizations are often both international in scope and very local, with deep knowledge of victims and perpetrators. Their efforts are difficult to map because such diverse entities are involved. Nevertheless these networks are vast and have tremendous potential for significant positive impact.

Effective engagement between religious and non-religious actors falls short of the potential to advance common objectives. Tensions among faith actors around differences

³⁰ <https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/>.

³¹ End Trafficking in Persons Programme: *Summary Report*. World Vision International, 2017. <https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/ETIP%20Summary%20Report-FINAL-28%20Sep.pdf>

³² <https://www.jrs.org.au/2532-2/>.

³³ <https://www.hias.org/protection-most-vulnerable>.

³⁴ <https://www.islamic-relief.org/category/what-we-do/protecting-life-and-dignity/>.

in approach (for example balancing law enforcement and support for victims against prevention and focusing on “root causes”) and/or poor coordination can lead to suboptimal resource allocation and service delivery. Better knowledge, understanding, and cooperation could multiply impact, and the courage to take on criminal organizations like the Sicilian mafia.

Recommendations

The 2018 G20 Interfaith Forum presented robust recommendations to the G20 Governments, urging specific commitment to the eradication of modern forms of slavery, human trafficking, and forced labor.³⁵ Specific recommendations focused on reviews of each government’s procurement of goods and services to eliminate suppliers who cannot prove that their supply chains are free of modern forms of slavery. This recommendation recognized that, as procurement involves taxpayer funds, citizens deserve to know that their money will not be spent on these criminal enterprises. The recommendation urged G20 Governments to call for and strongly support an independent international agency mandated to promote, in all nations, public procurement from supply lines free from modern forms of slavery and forced labor. Such an international agency’s mandate would include assisting governments with programs and materials to educate their citizens and businesses about the topic.³⁶

The 2019 G20 Osaka Summit should consider further and more concrete action along these lines, affirming their moral obligation and commitment to bold action. This should be set within a broader context that highlights the priority for action that affirms fundamental ILO labor standards and compliance in law and practice, protection against human trafficking as a prominent feature in refugee and migration governance, support for aggressive data mapping and collation efforts, and action to protect children and stop illegal organ harvesting as an explicit focus. They should affirm their engagement to take action to prevent Government monies or assets from even unwittingly funding or endorsing illicit activities of human trafficking, including forced labor, and establish a global agreement that ‘monies or profit’ tainted by human trafficking is seized and utilized in the fight against this crime. By making this crime financially non-viable eradication can be achieved.

We invite the G20 leaders to reaffirm their moral obligation, political will, and commitment to undertake bold and immediate action to combat human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. We invite them to work together with the G20 Interfaith Forum

³⁵ The Time Must Be Now: An Urgent Message to G20 Leaders and Governments – Action to Eradicate Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and Forced Labour in Our Generation, G20 Interfaith Forum, 2018. <https://www.g20interfaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/App-Item-2.pdf>.

³⁶ Included in item 7 of the 2018 G20 Leaders Declaration is ‘We will take actions to eradicate child labour, forced labour, human trafficking and modern slavery in the world of work, including through fostering sustainable supply chains. We will endeavor to further create enabling conditions for resource mobilization from public, private and multilateral resources, including innovative financial mechanisms and partnerships, such as impact investment for inclusive and sustainable growth, in line with the G20 Call on Financing for Inclusive Business.’

to identify areas where religious and non-religious leaders and institutions can address overlaps and enhance communication at global, regional, national, and local levels. The 2019 and 2020 G20 agendas should address specific action areas, including protection of refugees and irregular migrants and supply chain action.³⁷

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