

Forum: ECOSOC

Issue: Combating human trafficking in the Asia-Pacific region

Student Officer: Derin Sönmezalp

Position: President

Introduction

Human trafficking is a pressing and crucial issue in the South Asia and Pacific region. It has significant impacts on communities, families and overall well being of the individual victims. It usually takes place in the forms of sex trafficking, labour trafficking, and child labour (1). For sex trafficking, women are usually the subject of forced marriages, and other variations of sexual exploitation for economic gain. Labour trafficking is the variation where workers face threats and abuse for little freedom and low wages. Child labour is evident in the South Asia and Pacific region which can also occur in the form of organ trafficking, involving the illegal harvesting and market for organs (10). These situations commit grave violations of human rights. This issue intersects with migration patterns, poverty, gender inequality, and weak governance, highlighting its significance on the global scale, and committing grave violations of human rights.

This is becoming increasingly of concern due to the increase in mobility of individuals in the region and general migration. When people move to other countries or areas in order to seek better opportunities economically and migration from conflict or natural disasters, which this area has seen an increase of due to rapidly increasing severity of the effects of climate change, they become more vulnerable to this human trafficking (2). Traffickers often seek and recruit the people that seem most vulnerable, such as refugees and migrants who have lack of legal documentation and who may have language barriers.

Additionally, people living in poverty are more vulnerable to this trafficking, with traffickers using deceptive techniques such as offering better paying jobs to lure them into these situations (3). This is often seen in the South Asia and Pacific region which struggles with severe poverty levels in certain areas. Although this human trafficking has been officially banned in accordance to national legislation of each of the countries in this region, this still remains a persistent issue

as enforcement of these and corruption in the government allows the traffickers to not be held accountable for their actions (9).

Definition of Key Terms

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking refers to the illegal coercion, forcing people to work or provide a service, often for the purpose of exploiting them. It is a practice that involves grave breaches of human rights (10).

Labour Trafficking

Labour trafficking is a form of human trafficking in which people are deceived or threatened to work in exploitative and often dangerous conditions. They usually are not paid proper wages and are entrapped by the traffickers in their situations (1).

Migration

Migration refers to when people move from one area to another often seeking better opportunities (2).

Debt Bondage

Debt bondage refers to when a person is forced to work in order to pay off their debt, and often the debt is constantly increased or inflated, making them entrapped in a forever off payment of this debt. It is considered a modern form of slavery (4).

Sex Trafficking

Refers to when individuals are coerced or deceived into engaging in sexual activity without their consent or with forced consent. Individuals are sexually exploited (9).

Background Information

a. Origins of the Issue

Human trafficking in the Asia-Pacific has deep historical roots. Labour migration has long been part of the region, and traffickers exploit informal recruitment systems, promises of employment,

and vulnerable populations. Economic inequalities, political instability, and weak legal frameworks provide opportunities for traffickers to operate across borders (1).

b. Current Situation

The Asia-Pacific is home to the highest number of trafficking victims worldwide. According to UNODC, over 25 million people are trapped in forced labour or sexual exploitation in the region (3). The fishing industry in Southeast Asia, forced domestic work in urban hubs such as Singapore and Malaysia, and online sexual exploitation in the Philippines highlight the range of trafficking practices. Women and children remain the most vulnerable groups, making up the majority of victims and facing severe physical, psychological, and social consequences (7).

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

India

Despite all of this, illegal human trafficking is still a major and pervasive issue in India. Sexual exploitation and forced labor are the two most prevalent types that take place in India (5). While men were trafficked for forced labor, women are frequently trafficked for forced marriages and sexual exploitation. Children made up a sizable portion of the trafficked population and were employed as forced labor in factories. In addition, Indian women were sent to Middle Eastern nations for sexual exploitation, and people from Bangladesh and Nepal were brought to India for forced labor. In India, debt bondage is the most common way for people to become victims of human trafficking.

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, there is a noticeable prevalence of human trafficking. It manifests as prostitution and forced labor. Most frequently, debt bondage or traffickers who offer phony employment opportunities trick or entice people into this (4). People are forced to do this and frequently tricked into selling themselves or their kids into it. Human traffickers in Bangladesh frequently transport victims to other nations where they are in greater need and can earn more money for their labor. The government hasn't done much to enforce preventative measures.

Nepal

Human trafficking is a serious problem in Nepal. People from Nepal are frequently transported to India for labor, and victims of human trafficking are frequently transported to Nepal for employment. Between 100,000 and 200,000 Nepalis who have been trafficked are thought to live in India (6). The poorest people, particularly women, are frequently the targets of human trafficking. In this nation, forced labor and sexual exploitation are the most prevalent types of human trafficking.

Thailand

Thailand is regarded as a destination for individuals looking for better employment prospects. However, human traffickers target these migrants because they are vulnerable. Sexual exploitation is the most common way that trafficking takes place. Thai victims are frequently sent abroad to be sexually exploited and used as laborers in other nations (8). Additionally, it has a sizable sex tourism sector, which contributes foreign funds to this human exploitation.

Human Rights Watch

The Human Rights Watch works on documenting these human trafficking networks. It has documented several forms of trafficking: sex trafficking, labour trafficking, child trafficking and child labour trafficking. It works on raising awareness about this issue and helping the governments deal with the issue (9).

Relevant Frameworks and Treaties

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):

Establishes fundamental rights to freedom, security, and protection from abuse. Human trafficking constitutes a serious violation of these rights (10).

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989):

Safeguards the rights of children and specifically addresses their protection from trafficking, exploitation, and abuse (3).

Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000):

Commonly known as the Palermo Protocol, this legally binding instrument seeks to prevent and eliminate trafficking, with particular attention to women and children as the most vulnerable groups (2).

United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2010):

Provides a comprehensive framework urging international cooperation, prevention strategies, and stronger victim protection measures (1).

Viable Solutions

To effectively combat human trafficking, it is crucial to implement poverty reduction initiatives, expand access to education, and create greater economic opportunities, thereby reducing the vulnerability of individuals to traffickers (2). At the same time, stricter enforcement of anti-trafficking laws must be ensured, alongside the promotion of stronger transnational cooperation, given that trafficking networks often operate across borders (11). Furthermore, comprehensive victim support programmes should be developed or expanded to provide safe housing, medical care, education, employment opportunities, and long-term reintegration support, ensuring that survivors are empowered to rebuild their lives (10).

Previous attempts to address human trafficking have been grounded in several key international instruments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) established fundamental rights to freedom, security, and protection from abuse, highlighting trafficking as a severe violation of these principles (10). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) further safeguarded children's rights, specifically targeting their protection from trafficking, exploitation, and abuse (3). Building on these, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000), commonly known as the Palermo Protocol, introduced a legally binding framework to prevent and eliminate trafficking, with special focus on women and children as the most vulnerable groups (2). Finally, the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2010) provided a comprehensive strategy that emphasized international cooperation, prevention measures, and stronger victim protection systems (1).

Bibliography

1. Caballero-Anthony, Mely, and MELY CABALLERO-ANTHONY is associate professor and head of the Centre for Non-Traditional Security at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. "Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia – IMF Finance & Development Magazine: September 2018." *IMF*, 1 Sept. 2018, www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2018/09/human-trafficking-in-southeast-asia-caballero.
2. Exodus Admin. "Causes and Effects of Human Trafficking." *The Exodus Road*, 26 July 2024 theexodusroad.com/causes-effects-of-human-trafficking/.
3. Girls, Center for. "9 Latest Key Findings the UN Made on Human Trafficking Worldwide." *Center for Girls Foundation*, 23 Feb. 2022, center4girls.org/9-latest-key-findings-the-un-made-on-human-trafficking-worldwide.
4. "Human Trafficking in Bangladesh." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 18 Oct. 2024, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_trafficking_in_Bangladesh.
5. "Human Trafficking in India." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 3 Sept. 2024, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_trafficking_inIndia.
6. "Human Trafficking in Nepal." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 25 Aug. 2024, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_trafficking_in_Nepal.
7. "Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 22 Dec. 2024, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_trafficking_inSoutheastAsia.
8. "Human Trafficking in Thailand." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 11 Dec. 2024, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_trafficking_inThailand.
10. "International Trafficking of Women and Children." *Human Rights Watch*, 28 Oct. 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2000/02/21/international-trafficking-women-and-children.
11. "Interpol Issues Global Warning on Human Trafficking-Fueled Fraud." *INTERPOL*, www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2023/INTERPOL-issues-global-warning-on-human-trafficking-fueled-fraud. Accessed 2 Jan. 2025.
12. "Interpol Issues Global Warning on Human Trafficking-Fueled Fraud." *INTERPOL*, www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2023/INTERPOL-issues-global-warning-on-human-trafficking-fueled-fraud. Accessed 2 Jan. 2025.
13. Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking. "Human Trafficking: A Human Rights Violation." *Laboratory to Combat Human Trafficking*, 3 Sept. 2024, combathumantrafficking.org/blog/human-trafficking-human-rights-violation-3/#:~:t

