

# FACT SHEET ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

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## *Why is trafficking an urgent and important issue?*

Trafficking is a growing global problem. Next to trafficking of money, drugs, and guns, trafficking in persons is among the most profitable underground business worldwide. It is clearly linked to organized crime. The greed for profits in this business is purely based on exploitation. The main purposes of recruiting persons include labor trafficking, sex trafficking, sale of body parts and illegal adoption.

## *What is Trafficking in Persons?*

In the Philippines, trafficking is now a serious crime. According to Republic Act 9208 or the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, trafficking in persons refers to:

... "The recruitment, transfer or harboring or receipt of persons"

... "By means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of position or taking advantage of the vulnerability of the person"

... "For the purpose of exploitation."

To better understand the definition, we break it down to three elements:

- a. Geographical transfer
- b. Strategies or means by which traffickers acquire their victims and
- c. Exploitative or abusive purposes.

Victim's consent is irrelevant in determining culpability of traffickers.

Many people equate trafficking to sex trafficking. However, recent data reveal that there are increasing reports of trafficking for exploitative labor, including worst forms of child labor.

## *How serious is the problem?*

The actual numbers are difficult to document. Yet, trafficking happens everywhere, everyday, and sadly unnoticed or accepted.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that in 2002 alone, some 1.2 million children worldwide fell victims of trafficking.

Southeast Asia is source to some 225,000 trafficked women and children, according to the US Trafficking in Persons Report of 2003. The report recognizes that trafficking is a complex and a massive problem in the Philippines, being a source, transit and destination country of victims.

Mass recruitment of young girls in poor communities is still pervasive, says the Asia ACTS, a regional movement focused on the prevention through advocacy.

Traffickers clandestinely organize their transport operations through different ports and land routes across the country. Others slip through porous checkpoints towards Malaysia and other destination countries.

The Visayan Forum Foundation, a non-government organization (NGO) working to eradicate child labor and child trafficking, and the convenor of this multisectoral network, says that in the Philippines many children from poor provinces are trafficked into brothels, factories and other worst forms of child labor. Six out ten of the 4 million child laborers counted by NSO in 2001, or around 2.4 million, work in hazardous situations, away from their families.

With the help of law enforcers and shipping personnel, VF have already helped about 2,000 victims who sought safe haven in the halfway house since it started operating in Manila and Davao in the year 2000.

### *What causes trafficking inside and outside our country?*

Poverty, lack of job opportunities, the conflict in the Mindanao Muslim areas, and mere inability of young girls to continue schooling are the main reasons why many children still fall victim to trafficking.

Criminal organizations continue to grow and expand. They even have their own advertising outlets to lure victims. Immigration controls need to be enhanced. Fraudulent documents can easily be obtained. Neighboring countries lack cooperation.

Many victims are afraid and unwilling to cooperate for fear of retaliation. They lack information and awareness of the protective services they can avail of.

### *How do we identify victims of trafficking?*

Women and children are the most vulnerable victims.

Trafficking victims may be rescued from abusive situations in their work places.

The tricky part is to identify them while in transit. It may be hard to prove the attempt to traffic. But day to day experiences in cooperation have enabled those in the front lines to weed them out from the volume of passengers in transit areas.

*80 people recruited from different communities in Mindanao were brought to Manila cramped in two jeeps, each containing around 40 people. While crossing in the Matnog port in Sorsogon that links Luzon and the scattered islands of Visayas and Mindanao, the recruiters covered the jeeps with tarpaulin and declared the passengers as cargoes.*  
--- VF case study

A typical victim is 15-22 years old, a first-timer in the big city, often with only a one-way ticket at hand. They do not have any money at all during travel. She has no clear information about their destination, work, and employers.

Victims usually travel in groups, but recently recruiters instruct them to disembark one at a time then regroup in a designated waiting area. They are not allowed to talk with other passengers outside their group. Recruiters force them to declare false names and ages.

### *How do recruiters operate?*

Greedy traffickers easily capitalize on fertile hopes of desperate women and children of finding safe and decent work in cities.

There are many actors involved in trafficking, from the point of origin, transit, and destinations. Aside from headhunters and recruiters, the trafficking and eventual exploitation of women and children are facilitated by intermediaries, document providers, transporters, employers, and to some extent, government officials who, wittingly or unwittingly, assist in keeping the shroud of invisibility covering trafficked victims intact.

### *What happens to victims of trafficking?*

Without help from other people and without enough information about work and their destinations, victims become totally dependent and reliant on the recruiters. Their travel documents are confiscated. They owe debts in account for their fares and finders' fees. Recruiters even use physical restraint, intimidation or simply lock the victims in cabins. Their fears and uncertainties are real.

Trafficked victims are treated more as a commodity than as human beings.

Many immediately dissolve into worst forms of labor like prostitution and exploitative domestic work. At work, they suffer physical, mental, and emotional abuse. Not adept to the language and unfamiliar with the area, they find it difficult to seek assistance from authorities.

### *What are we doing to stop trafficking?*

When fully implemented, the new anti-trafficking law can deliver a powerful blow against organized profiteering. The "Republic Act 9208 or the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act" criminalizes the sale and trafficking of persons into sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery, involuntary servitude or debt bondage. It prescribes stiff penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of up to P5 million.

Today, members of NGOs, church, civil society and private groups are joining hands to provide immediate and appropriate response mechanisms to address the trafficking of women and children.

More than thirty (30) partners of the "Multi-Sectoral Network Against Trafficking in Persons" will sign a Memorandum of Agreement vowing to creatively converge in the areas of prevention of trafficking, prosecution of offenders, protection, rescue and recovery and reintegration of trafficked persons, and to support government efforts in the fight against the problem.

This need for establishing a national multi-disciplinary task force came from the experiences in setting up cooperative efforts in major ports such as the *Balay Silungan sa Daungan*, a joint project of the Visayan Forum, the PPA and its Police arm, WG&A, Negros Navigation, Philippine Coast Guard, porters groups and other partners.

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For more information, please contact the Visayan Forum Foundation at 562.7810, 562.7821, 5627120 or 0920.267.3844 or email [information@visayanforum.org](mailto:information@visayanforum.org) . You can also visit the website [www.visayanforum.org](http://www.visayanforum.org) for recent data on trafficking in the Philippines.