

### **Trends in Global Human Trafficking**

During the years 2002-2022, there were over 206,000 identified victims and survivors of human trafficking reported through the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC). This phenomenon is referred to as Human Trafficking by the Department of Homeland Security. It can be described as the employment of coercion, force, or any other trickery to gain labor or sexual service from another person. Human trafficking thrives under such circumstances as those where there is a sense of desperation in the economy or lack thereof, political instability, and vulnerability. Oftentimes, traffickers operate through the façade of a legitimate business or relationship. Human Trafficking is a dynamic and geographically diverse crime. It was discovered that Forced Labour Trafficking had increased by 47 percent as compared to sex trafficking from 2019 to 2022. (UN Peace and Security, 2024) Further, as of 2022, women and girls comprised 61 percent of all victims, while young girls rose from 31 to 38 percent of reported cases. (UN Peace and Security, 2024) Evidence from the UN Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report showed that 2024 marked the highest total of identified victims ever recorded, and 2025 the highest convictions for labor trafficking, suggesting positively that improved reporting is developing in tandem with the crime itself. By visualizing these trends, the patterns underlying global human trafficking can be examined in more detail.

Four visualizations have been created using the CTDC's Global Synthetic Dataset and Global Victim-Perpetrator Synthetic Dataset. The former uses differential privacy algorithms to provide statistical trends while not revealing individual-level data. Using Hans Rosling's scatterplot technique, visualization one illustrates the relationship between cases of forced labor and sexual exploitation per country, with a slider for the year page that will allow for a

change-over-time animation. The size of the bubble denotes the country population, while a map shading of victims serves as both a geographical reference point and a dashboard filter. The World Bank population data are added to CTDC's dataset to normalize case counts across countries by population size. Visualization two shows the long-term trend in trafficking types from 2005 to 2023, with a peak of around 20,000 total cases in 2010. Similarly, the third visualization breaks down victims according to their age categories in the top six countries with high trafficking cases, such as Mexico, Moldova, Nigeria, the Philippines, Ukraine, and the USA. The fourth one provides the trend of trafficking victims by age band in the same period, 2006 to 2023, as done in visualization three. One action allows for age group selection, making all relevant visualizations highlight victims in that category.

Incorporating the animation of the scatterplot across different periods illustrates that there is a gap created between forced labor and sexual exploitation in the more recent period, with Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East showing a tendency to aggregate towards higher values of forced labor volumes. This is attributed to underlying economic vulnerabilities stemming from deindustrialization. About sexual exploitation, its victims are primarily directed to North America and Europe on account of the possibility of acquiring well-paying jobs, as lured by perpetrators. Through the heatmap, it can be deduced that minors are predominantly the victims of human trafficking, especially in Mexico, Moldova, and the USA. On the other hand, Ukraine and the Philippines demonstrate an apparent aggregation of older adults, which matches the nature of forced labor trafficking. In addition, the stacked bar indicates an increase in forced labor as a proportion of all incidents. Still, despite accounting for 42 percent of global victimization due to forced labor, this form of crime comprises just 17 percent of all convictions internationally. (UN Peace and Security, 2024) According to the Human Trafficking Institute, sex

trafficking prosecutions in federal courts outpaced labor trafficking prosecutions in the United States in 2023 at a ratio of almost nine to one due to their hidden nature. (Human Trafficking Institute, 2024)

Such patterns raise questions about the circumstances that allow trafficking to continue. Based on the rational choice crime model, as demonstrated by Cook et al. (2014), individuals weigh the benefits of committing an act against the likelihood of being caught. Trafficking is therefore rampant in areas where the chances of being detected are minimal and where there is economic gain. Economic vulnerability is an accurate predictor of the risks involved, but it is not easily explained. Next, the UNODC's 2009 Global Report, drawing on data from 155 countries, found that domestic and intraregional trafficking were historically far more prevalent than the long-distance international flows that dominate public imagination, and that 30 percent of identified traffickers were women — complicating popular narratives about who perpetuates the crime. (UNODC, 2009) Political instability and displacement further amplify risk, as evidenced by the significant flows of African victims to the United States and Europe driven by armed conflict and climate change. (UN Peace and Security, 2024) In the current tumult of geopolitics, trends that exploit unstable domestic and global conditions can be expected to lead to continued surges in trafficking. Despite 183 state parties to the UN TIP Protocol and 155 countries maintaining national anti-trafficking bodies, enforcement of the 3Ps, prosecution, protection, and prevention, remains uneven. The data ultimately shows that human trafficking is a long way from being solved, but at least it is emerging in visibility.

## **Appendix**

## References

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### **AI Statement**

"No generative AI tools were used in the creation of this assignment. All research, writing, and revisions were completed independently by the author to develop foundational writing and research skills."