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HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND STATISTICS: THE STATE OF THE ART

Submitted by International Organization for Migration *

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The phenomenon of human trafficking is today one of the major concerns of governments and organisations active in fields such as migration, human rights, gender, poverty, and fight against organized crime. A most disturbing violation of human rights, trafficking in persons can be seen as a multi-staged process starting from recruitment, usually involving movements of the trafficked (often including border crossings) and various types of exploitation in the area or country of destination. Deception, coercion, physical and mental violence belong to the phenomenon.

2. The definition of trafficking in human beings, included in the 2000 United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (supplementing the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime) illustrates the process character of the phenomenon. This process is a continuum of events taking place in many locations, involving internationally linked criminal operators contributing their “services” (recruitment, transport, accommodation, document forgery, pimping, intimidation etc.) in various stages. To address the different stages and aspects of this criminal phenomenon, and its consequences, a multitude of counter-trafficking activities have been introduced throughout the world in the last ten years. Often these activities are roughly divided into three main areas: prevention; prosecution and law enforcement; and protection and assistance to the victims.

3. A recent example of the multitude of policies and measures that are deemed necessary in the combat against trafficking is the so called “Brussels Declaration”, a comprehensive set of policy recommendations for the European Union in the area of human trafficking, resulting from

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the conference on “Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings”, held in Brussels in September 2002.¹

4. Another illustrative document on counter-trafficking activities is the annual report of the US State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons in 2001.² This annual report is one of the most comprehensive reviews on counter-activities carried out by governments.³

5. Despite a growing literature and an increased interest in human trafficking during recent years, available information about the magnitude of the problem remains limited, particularly in the area of data collection, where only relatively few studies based on extensive research exist.⁴ The lack of reliable, representative and comparable statistics on trafficking is an obstacle to effective counter-trafficking work

6. This paper will outline the situation where various organizations and governments find themselves with regard to data on trafficking, describe the current activities in the data collection, and suggest measures that could be taken to improve the collection of new and the use of existing data.

II. GENERAL PROBLEMS OF DATA ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

7. Until fairly recently, the lack of a commonly agreed definition on human trafficking was seen as one of the main obstacles that made it difficult to measure the phenomenon and provide comparable data. The phenomenon was seen by different players according to their respective specializations, such as crime prevention, work to deter illegal migration, or assistance to women forced into prostitution.

8. By the end of the 1990s, a wider and more inclusive approach was developed, resulting in a broad definition, included into the “United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime”, adopted by the UN General Assembly in late 2000:

9. “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”

10. Despite the new definition, a number of commentators have pointed out the continuing difficulty of measuring trafficking, given the range of activities, situations and outcomes covered by the term and the still fairly recent acceptance of this new international definition. Only few governments have begun to systematically collect data on trafficking so far and it is still common in many countries to mingle data relating to trafficking, smuggling, and irregular migration.⁵

¹ Brussels Declaration,

http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/news/forum_crimen/2002/workshop/brussels_decl_en.htm

² Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/>

³ Laczko, Frank and Gramegna, Marco. Developing Better Indicators of Human Trafficking, in: *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*. Volume 1, Issue 1. 2003. p. 179.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 180.

⁵ *Ibid.* p.181.

11. One fundamental reason for the knowledge gaps is the clandestine and undercover nature of the activity. An underreported crime, it is never registered with global coverage.⁶

12. At the national level, many authorities and organizations keep registers of the victims that they are assisting, but this data collection is not coordinated and covers different groups of victims, depending the responsibilities of various key players. As a consequence, the collected datasets, while informative and valuable as such, are fragmentary and the representativeness of the available data remains unconfirmed. In spite of the commonly recognized definition, trafficking may also be linked to irregular migration overall, to organized crime, corruption and violence.

13. There remains much room for improvement regarding the national and international harmonization of data collection and the need to develop methods to compute the information from various national sources.⁷

14. The victims themselves constitute one of the key sources of information on trafficking. However, it is generally recognized that such testimony, and in consequence reliable data, is hard to obtain due to the fact that the trafficking victims are either deported as illegal migrants or, if identified as trafficked person, are often too frightened to testify.

15. In addition, relevant legislation is still often lacking, inadequate, or not implemented, making the prosecution of traffickers very difficult or impossible. Inadequate legislation, for both prosecution and for victim and witness protection, can result in police authorities preferring not to prosecute traffickers at all which overall contributes to the low prioritization given to combating of human trafficking by authorities in many countries.⁸ In one of the most comprehensive studies on human trafficking in Europe by Kelly and Regan in 1999 on behalf of the British government, it was found that the level of priority given by local police forces to combat trafficking has an impact on whether or not data is gathered.⁹

16. Furthermore, many government agencies and, to a lesser extent, NGOs are still unfamiliar with trafficking; where relevant data do exist, they are often not properly categorized as trafficking. In addition, existing data are not comparable as national criminal laws differ among countries and do not necessarily conform to international standards.¹⁰

17. The quality and focus of data also vary according to the financial resources, priorities and definition of the organizations or programmes producing them. Statistics on trafficking are too often linked to data on other types of offences, which makes them less clear and useful. Besides, while new sources of data are appearing, there is no single body to systematically gather and harmonize those currently produced by the numerous agencies already active in the field.¹¹

18. Sharing of data on the international level occurs on ad hoc basis as states invoke such reasons as confidentiality and protection of personal data, restrictions on classified information,

⁶ Kelly, Elizabeth. *Journeys of Jeopardy: A Review of Research on Trafficking in Women and Children in Europe*, In: IOM Migration Research Series, No. 11. 2002.

⁷ Mattila, Heikki, Farquet, Romaine and Laczko, Frank. *Human Trafficking: A Global Review of Literature*. International Expert Meeting: Improving Data and Research on Human Trafficking. Rome 2004.

⁸ Laczko, Gramegna. 2003. p.183.

⁹ Kelly, Liz and Regan, Linda. "Stopping Traffic: Exploring the Extent of, and Responses to, Trafficking in Women for Sexual Exploitation in the U.K.", in: Home Office, Police Research Series, Paper 125, London. 1999.

¹⁰ Laczko, Gramegna. 2003. p.184.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.184.

concerns about the quality of the data and mistrust of source countries' authorities suspected of participating in trafficking activities.¹²

III. SOURCES OF DATA ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

19. Data on human trafficking can originate a) from source/origin areas where indicators such as data of missing people can be used; b) from different stages of the process of movement, where for example border crossing statistics and border apprehension data provide a basis for estimates and, c) at the destination where law enforcement agencies, health professionals, researchers or intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations assisting victims may collect and provide useful data.¹³

20. Only very few countries are currently able to provide official statistics on trends in trafficking over several years, making it difficult to accurately establish the extent to which trafficking may be increasing, as often suggested. In Europe, the German Federal Criminal Office (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA) and the Dutch National Rapporteur on trafficking in human beings are among the few providers of national data.

21. The BKA that has issued yearly trafficking statistics since 1999, reports that in 2001 there were 987 victims of trafficking identified by the police investigations of suspected cases of trafficking, a figure nearly 25% higher than in 1999.¹⁴ The reports of the Dutch National Rapporteur, who has recently given out the third yearly report, also show an increase in trafficking cases.¹⁵

22. However, the data from both reports refer primarily to cases of trafficking in women for the purpose of prostitution and do not include trafficking in other sectors of work nor do they include trafficked men. It is also unclear to what extent the reported increases are due to a genuine rise in cases of trafficking or more due to better police enforcement efforts and improved assistance from NGOs.¹⁶

23. Various regional initiatives have also been taken. In the Balkans, the Stability Pact Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings has since 2002 a Regional Clearing Point (RCP) responsible i.a. for the collection of a regional database on human trafficking. The first annual report on victims of trafficking in South Eastern Europe provides verified figures regarding the number of victims of trafficking identified and assisted in the seven countries and two areas (Kosovo and Montenegro) covered by the Clearing Point, and describes assistance and protection mechanisms for victims of trafficking. The report also outlines gaps and recognizes good practices and measures created to assist victims of trafficking in the region.

24. According to the first report, between January 2000 and June 2003, the total number of victims of trafficking identified and assisted by different authorities, international governmental and non-governmental organizations in the region was 5203. This figure mainly pertains to women and girls trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation. It is important to note that the

¹² Ibid. p.185.

¹³ Asian Development Bank. Combating Trafficking of Women and Children in South Asia. Manila. 2003.

¹⁴ German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA). Trafficking in Human Beings: Situation Report 2003. Bundeskriminalamt: Wiesbaden. 2003.

¹⁵ Korvinus, A. Trafficking in Human Beings – Second report of the Dutch National Rapporteur. Bureau NRM, The Hague. 2003. <http://www.victimology.nl/onlpub/national/nl-nrmengels2002.pdf>.

¹⁶ Laczko, Gramegna. 2003. p. 183.

data published in the report are verified numbers; undoubtedly, more victims are never identified and assisted.¹⁷

25. One of the most frequently quoted global numbers are those published by official US sources. The Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons has published since 2001 annual reports about trafficking in persons. The report for 2003/4 provided 140 country narratives which described the scope and nature of the trafficking problem in the respective country, and especially assessed governments' efforts to combat trafficking.¹⁸

26. UNESCO with its Trafficking Statistics Project has produced a practical internet tool to provide worldwide data on trafficking. It not only aims to assemble trafficking statistics from a variety of sources, but also clarifies the methodology used to obtain them and to assess their validity.

27. The Protection Project at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies collects and disseminates information about trafficking, especially trafficking of women and children. It concentrates on national and international law, case law and focuses on the consequences of trafficking for U.S. and international foreign policy.¹⁹

28. A global database on trafficking trends was established under the Global Programme against trafficking in Human Beings (GPAT) of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). This database aims at systematically collecting and collating open source information that can be compared between different countries and regions. The used sources have been research reports and statistics compiled and published by authorities, intergovernmental and NGOs, academic institutions, and media. By June 2004, information from 500 sources had been entered, most originating from industrialized countries. The collected data is divided into country reports, profiles (characteristics of victims of trafficking or traffickers) and trafficking routes.

29. The preliminary results show i.a. the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Nigeria are top three countries of origin whereas the US, Germany and Italy are mentioned as leading countries of destination. On victims of trafficking, 83 per cent were women, 4 per cent men and 48 per cent children. Furthermore, 92 per cent of the victims were allegedly trafficked for sexual exploitation. These are preliminary findings and it is important to note that there is a predominant use of data from Western sources that may have introduced a bias in the data set.²⁰

30. IOM's Counter-Trafficking Module (CTM) database has been created by collecting information from the Organizations's counter-trafficking programmes. The database is built on detailed interviews of victims who were assisted through IOM's counter-trafficking activities. The quantitative and qualitative data collected contribute to a better understanding of the socio-economic profile and background of the victims, their recruitment, the trafficking process and their exploitation in the destination countries.²¹

¹⁷ Regional Clearing Point: First Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking in South Eastern Europe. 2003. <http://www.icmc.net/files/rcp200301.en.pdf>

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report. 2004. www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/34021.htm

¹⁹ Mattila, Farquet, Laczko. 2004. p.8.

²⁰ Kangaspunta, Kristiina. Mapping the Inhuman Trade: Preliminary Findings of the Human Trafficking Database. In: Forum on Crime and Society. Volume 3, No 1-2. 2003.

²¹ Laczko, Gramegna. 2003. p.187.

31. Until July 2004, information of 2791 victims was included in the IOM database, representing 35 nationalities. The most common countries of origin are Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, Belarus and the Dominican Republic whereas the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania represent the most important destination countries. Almost 59 per cent of the victims in the database are in the 18 - 24 year age range (72 per cent under 24 years), which would seem to correspond to the educational levels of the victims: relatively young, they have completed obligatory school or, the largest group having obtained secondary school education.

32. 79.5 per cent of victims in the whole database were either single, separated, divorced or widowed, and 10.5 per cent were married or in a common-law marriage (in 10 per cent of the cases the civil status information was not available). 815 of all 2,791 victims, almost a third (29.2 per cent), had one or more children. An overwhelming majority of those who had children, were sole supporters.

33. The IOM database confirms that trafficking is not run by male criminals only, but that women traffickers figure prominently at least at certain stages of the process; and that women act as recruiters almost as often as men – in 46 per cent of the cases where the sex of the recruiters was known.

34. While the type of exploitation was not known for 481 victims, comprising 17 per cent of the whole database, 2,094 cases (75 per cent of the database) were exploited in sex work and 196 (7 per cent) in forced labour. Apart from sex work, forced labour and “illegal activities” (20 cases altogether among the Moldovan and Romanian victims), the type of exploitation was still “other” than those mentioned in no less than 481 cases, or 17 per cent of the whole database.²²

35. IOM’s database serves as a knowledge bank, from which statistics and detailed reports can be drawn, feeding into research, programme development and policy making on counter trafficking. However, as the information is collected through IOM’s programmes only, it is in all likelihood not broadly representative. Furthermore, the data collection firstly began with the assistance programmes in the Balkans and is still geographically weighted towards this region. However, the concrete information with increasing number of victims, can significantly sharpen the profiles of victims, the information on the criminals and other aspects of trafficking, and provide more concrete justification for further counter-trafficking work and policy.

36. Besides the actual case data collections outlined above, there exist a number of digital platforms that provide a compilation of reports, studies and other information on trafficking in human beings. An example is the recently launched, Nepal-based digital library on trafficking, kept by the Switzerland-based NGO Terre des Hommes. This new information bank mainly focuses on trafficking in children, and provides references to over 230 studies and reports on all forms of trafficking. Furthermore, around 150 conventions, laws, policies, proposals and commentaries as well as approximately 100 links to the world’s leading anti-trafficking websites and an indexed list of resources can be found on this website.²³

IV. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

37. In recent years, progress has been made in the development of a common understanding of human trafficking and in the establishment of international legal norms regarding trafficking in

²² World Migration Report 2005. IOM Counter Trafficking Statistics. Not yet published.

²³ www.childtrafficking.com

persons. Much less progress has been made, however, in determining the scale and magnitude of human trafficking and in developing effective ways to collect data. There are few studies based on extensive research as well as a number of national, regional and global approaches to collect data. The existing data are most often either general estimates created with unclear methodologies, or administrative data kept by different involved authorities or organizations on the victims that they assist. The latter, fragmentary datasets cannot be collated into national figures nor compared at international level.

38. Many states still need to enact and implement the necessary anti-trafficking legislation and give priority to improving data collection. The Netherlands, by establishing a national focal point has been able to map out relevant data collected by different agencies within the country, which has served as a basis for the Dutch National Rapporteur's reports.²⁴ Appointing a national rapporteur or similar focal point looks like a key step on the way towards better coordinated national data collection. If the coordination can be extended at regional or wider levels, there would be possibility for international comparison of data.

39. Furthermore, it is relevant to invest resources in capacity building to enable poorer countries to compile better data, and ensuring that the collection of trafficking data is given sufficient priority.

40. Even without investing substantial new resources, much more could be done in order to fully exploit the existing information and make it more widely available (e.g. by promoting the sharing of information among agencies working to combat trafficking both within and between states).

41. In addition, agencies combating trafficking should be encouraged to systematically collect data and to develop common data collection systems. As illustrated earlier, IOM's counter-trafficking database provides an example of what agencies could do in order to collect data on trafficking in a more systematic fashion. Although these data are program-specific, they provide a rich source of information to support counter-trafficking work.

42. The number of studies on trafficking is growing, however most research on the theme tends to be limited to one country, to be short-term, or to be rather limited in funding. If the availability of data on trafficking is to improve, more detailed research to compare and assess relevant data sources across countries, and effective identification of data management practices, are needed. Such research could, for example, explore the validity of developing a broader set of indicators of trafficking to include indirect indicators. For example, it is well established that victims of trafficking often enter a country legally through "entertainer" or "au pair" visas. A more controversial indirect indicator of trafficking is the number of migrant women working in the sex industry of any given country. Other indicators may be the number, gender and origin of asylum seekers, figures on the number of illegal border crossings, statistics of departures of women leaving main countries of origin as well as the demand for visas at foreign consulates for the main countries of transit and destination. In addition, airlines and other companies in the transportation business may be able to collect and provide information on travellers who are potential victims of trafficking.²⁵

²⁴ *Trafficking in Human Beings - Additional quantitative data. Second report of the Dutch National Rapporteur* Bureau NRM: The Hague, <http://www.victimology.nl/onlpub/national/NL-NRMEngels2.pdf>.

²⁵ Laczko, Gramegna. 2003. p.187.