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Research report

Forum: United Nations International Children's
Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

Issue: Addressing the pervasive problem of child
trafficking and exploitation in LEDCs

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Introduction

Child trafficking and exploitation are widespread global problems that are crucial for children in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs). These weak populations are relentlessly focused on by traffickers who engage them in slavery, sex exploitations, abuse among others that deprive them of their basic rights, dignity and future prospects. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that approximately 160 million children globally are involved in child labor; out of which over 79 million work under hazardous conditions akin to trafficking (“Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward - Executive Summary”)

It is only through immediate and joint action to improve social protection systems and scale up quality education that a dent on systemic inequalities, which are key to the perpetuation of child labour, can be made. In this way, international cooperation and financial support will remain crucial, particularly to ensure the sustainability of momentum, since this is a very ambitious target: ending all forms of child labour by 2025, enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 (UN Sustainable Development Goals). Secondly, SDG 16.2 (Goal 16 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs) is indicative of a shared universal commitment toward ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence against children.

Children's vulnerability is increased in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) by a combination of factors such as poverty, lack of educational opportunities, political instability, and weak legal frameworks. While resource constraints and inadequate international cooperation are some formidable challenges with regard to devising real measures to combat child trafficking and exploitation, at the same time, such issues have become increasingly visible and acknowledged.

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Definitions of key terms

Child Trafficking

The act of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation, regardless of the use of illicit means, either within or outside a country. (Rafferty)

Child Exploitation

Exploitation can be defined as the act of involving a child for economic or other reasons in criminal activities. Exploitation may take place at the hands of parents, neighbours, schoolmates, cults, employers, etc. (7 FAM 1730 CHILD EXPLOITATION)

LEDCs

Less Economically Developed Countries, also referred to as developing countries or low-income countries, are nations characterised by a lower standard of living, lower GDP per capita, and less industrialization compared to more economically developed countries. These countries often face significant challenges in economic development, infrastructure, health, education, and social services.

Child Labour

The term "child labour" is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that:

- is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or
- interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. ("What is child labour")

Child Sex Trafficking

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation. A child is a victim of sex trafficking, for example, when they are induced to engage in prostitution or the making of pornography for the benefit of a third party, without regard to the use of force, fraud or coercion by that third party. (7 FAM 1730 CHILD EXPLOITATION)

Child Sexual Exploitation

This is generally defined as involving a child in a sexual act for commercial gain. Examples include child pornography, child sex trafficking, sextortion, the live streaming of child sexual abuse, and child sex tourism. (7 FAM 1730 CHILD EXPLOITATION)

Child

Any person under the age of 18 (7 FAM 1730 CHILD EXPLOITATION)

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General overview

Child trafficking and exploitation in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) represent critical challenges that jeopardise the welfare and rights of millions of children globally.

Child exploitation and trafficking have serious repercussions, such as damage to the body and mind, disturbances to the educational process, and perpetuation of cycles of marginalisation and poverty. International legal frameworks that offer vital recommendations for stopping human trafficking, safeguarding victims, and upholding justice include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography.

These criminal groups who smuggle children into the EU frequently act through intricate networks that take advantage of helpless children for various forms of exploitation. According to Europol data, there is a significant involvement of non-EU criminal groups, namely Nigerian organised crime networks, in the trafficking of young girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation. To transfer victims across borders, these organisations usually exploit smuggling routes and falsified travel documents. Another important factor is familial participation, since some families actively take part in the trafficking of their own children. The money obtained from this illegal activity is usually laundered and returned back to the countries of origin of the offenders, such as Nigeria.(Europol)

In India, over 51% of victims of child trafficking are girls, accounting for over 80% of all victims. These marginalised groups are especially susceptible; these include religious minorities, Dalits, and tribal people. These populations' children are frequently forced to work as forced labourers in the culinary and agricultural industries, or they are exploited through begging ring operations and dangerous workplaces like brick kilns that emit smoke. Many are compelled to work in the sex trade as a result of their families' appalling socioeconomic circumstances.

This problem also affects the UK, where there were almost 2,000 recorded occurrences of child trafficking in 2021. Through the national referral procedure, more than 4,500 children were identified as victims of human trafficking between 2020 and 2021. Among those trafficked for uses like forced labour and sexual exploitation include children from Albania, Vietnam, Sudan, and the United Kingdom.

Poverty is one of the main causes of child trafficking since it exposes children and their families, particularly in LEDCs, to exploitation. This vulnerability is further exacerbated by a lack of education. This vulnerability is further compounded by gender discrimination, which disproportionately impacts females involved in the sex trade. Traffickers can operate in an atmosphere where they can get away with it thanks to corruption and lax law enforcement.

Trafficking has disastrous effects. Malnourishment, tiredness, and physical maltreatment are common problems for children trafficked. They experience PTSD, anxiety, and depression on a

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psychological level. Self-harm, social isolation, and inadequate education are examples of long-term impacts. Suicide may also result from this on occasion.

Major parties involved

Nigeria

The high incidence of child trafficking are a result of conflict, poverty, and ineffective law enforcement. In Nigeria, children are trafficked for forced labour, domestic service, and sexual exploitation. Every year, hundreds of Nigerian children are trafficked, mostly to Europe and the Middle East, according to the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). Nigeria has passed a number of laws to stop the exploitation and trafficking of children. A key component of these initiatives is the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act of 2015, which establishes a legislative framework for the defence, protection, and prosecution of trafficking offences. This law guarantees the safety and rehabilitation of victims while enabling NAPTIP to look into and prosecute criminals. The Child Rights Act also plays a crucial role by safeguarding the rights of children and outlining penalties for child exploitation. (Onu and Kolawole)

India

India has a sizable population and a high rate of poverty, both of which greatly exacerbate the issue of child trafficking. Trafficked children are frequently used as forced labour, sexual slaves, or household servants. Millions of children in India are forced into labour as young as possible, mostly via trafficking, to work in homes, factories, and construction sites. This information comes from UNICEF. To fight human trafficking and exploitation, the Indian government has passed laws like the Juvenile Justice Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. It has also launched programs like the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS). (Khanagwal and Dua)

Philippines

Children are trafficked for labour, sexual exploitation, and cybersex trafficking, among other forms of exploitation, as a result of economic challenges and high unemployment rates. According to the US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report, a large number of trafficked youngsters end up in the sex industry or domestic slavery, with the Philippines serving as a major source country. In order to combat human trafficking, particularly that of women and children, the Philippine government established the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) and put laws like the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act into effect in 2003. (Duterte et al.)

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Timeline of Key Events

- 1989 Adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children. This convention laid the foundation for addressing child trafficking and exploitation globally. ("Convention on the Rights of the Child")
- 2000 The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol) is adopted. ("Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime")
- 2002 The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography comes into force, focusing specifically on child trafficking and exploitation. ("Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography")
- 2006 The UN Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT) is launched, aiming to coordinate global efforts against human trafficking, including child trafficking. (Marcos.Santos)
- 2008 The International Labour Organization (ILO) launches the 'IPEC+' initiative to combat child trafficking for labour exploitation. ("International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC+)")
- 2014 The UN adopts the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a specific target (Target 16.2) to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children. (Goal 16 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs)

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2016

The UNODC launches the 'Blue Heart Campaign' against human trafficking, emphasising protection and assistance for victims, including children. ("Blue Heart Campaign")

Previous attempts to solve the issue

International legal frameworks that have addressed child trafficking and exploitation include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its follow-up protocols. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Supplementary Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (2000) which aims to stop the sale, sexual exploitation, and involvement of minors in pornography. The Palermo Protocol (2000) strengthens the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. In addition to specific measures for the protection of minor victims and the prosecution of traffickers, it provides a comprehensive framework for international cooperation in the rough battle against human trafficking. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has made contributions with conventions like ILO Convention No. 182 (1999) concerning the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which addresses trafficking for forced labor, sexual exploitation, and hazardous work, in addition to ILO Conventions No. 29 (1930) and No. 105 (1957), concerning forced labor and the abolition of forced labor, respectively. The employment of awareness campaigns as well as international cooperation and victim assistance programs have been important strategies in the battle against these abuses. Despite progress such as this, issues such as funding and evolving trafficking tactics persist, making it necessary to continue having persistent global dedication and ingenuity to effectively protect susceptible children and eradicate child trafficking and exploitation.

Possible solutions

In order to effectively prevent child trafficking, nations, organisations, and civil society must coordinate their efforts internationally. Destroying trafficking networks, defending child protection institutions, and putting in place all-encompassing plans that stop exploitation and assist victims are vital to win this war on predators such as P Diddy.

Preventing child trafficking requires funding sustainable development, economic opportunity, and education for low-income families. Through education and awareness initiatives, communities are empowered to strengthen local resilience and become better equipped to recognize, report, and combat human trafficking.

To tackle child trafficking and exploitation in low-income countries (LEDCs), there is a need for coordinated worldwide efforts, political dedication, and consistent funding for child welfare,

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education, and socio-economic advancement. The international community can protect every child's rights and well-being by giving these initiatives top priority and working toward an exploitation-free future.

Further reading

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