

# HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: A MODERN FORM OF SLAVERY

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the complex relationship between globalization and human trafficking, framing the latter as a modern form of slavery sustained by global economic systems. As globalization increases the movement of goods, services, and people, it also creates vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit—particularly among immigrant populations and marginalized communities. The paper outlines the historical development of human trafficking, notably through the adoption of the Palermo Protocol, and examines its presence in multiple industries, including sex work, agriculture, and mining. Using data from international organizations and firsthand survivor accounts, the research highlights how economic inequality, migration pressures, and unregulated supply chains enable exploitation. The paradox of globalization is emphasized: while it promotes economic development, it simultaneously facilitates illicit labor practices. This paper concludes by recommending systemic reforms such as stronger international collaboration, corporate accountability, legal protections, and survivor-centered support as key strategies in the global fight against trafficking.*

## I. Introduction

An estimated 27.6 million people worldwide are victims of human trafficking.<sup>1</sup> To put that into perspective, the continent of Australia's entire population is only 27.1 million people.<sup>2</sup> Human trafficking, a repercussion of globalization, is fueled by economic inequality, insecure state borders, and the demand for cheap labor. Globalization, as defined by George Ritzer and Paul Dean, is "a planetary process or set of processes involving increasing liquidity and the growing multidirectional flows of people, objects, places and information as well as the structures they encounter and create that are barriers to or expedite those flows."<sup>3</sup> It involves increasing interconnectedness among state economies, cultures, and nations, and is driven by trade, technology, and communication. Although globalization allows for global collaboration, it also presents challenges such as inequality and exploitation. Human trafficking is a stark example of the negative impacts of globalization, as interconnected economies enable criminal networks to take advantage of vulnerable populations. The rise of human trafficking as a "modern form of slavery" is deeply intertwined with globalization, as low labor standards and global inequalities have created exploitation in industries like sex work, agriculture, and mining.<sup>4</sup> Thus, this paper examines human trafficking to understand how the integrated global economy has led to an increased exploitation of humans to learn how this "modern form of slavery" can be fought.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, "About Human Trafficking," *US Department of State*, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/humantrafficking-about-human-trafficking/>.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, "National, State and Territory Population," Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics, September 19, 2024), <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/mar-2024>.

<sup>3</sup> George Ritzer and Paul Dean, *Globalization : The Essentials*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2019), 2.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of State, "What Is Modern Slavery?," United States Department of State, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/what-is-modern-slavery/>.

## II. Forms, Victims, and Historical Development of Human Trafficking

According to the United States Department of Homeland Security, “Human trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act.”<sup>5</sup> Modern forms of human trafficking include sex trafficking, forced labor, and child exploitation. Although trafficking does supply human beings for interpersonal relationships, i.e. prostitution, marriage, and adoption, nearly 70% of victims are exploited in the private economy, enduring brutal conditions across industries like manufacturing, agriculture, and mining.<sup>6</sup> These industries possess physical and psychological hazards, as victims face abuse, low wages, and the constant threat of being replaced. Furthermore, Dr. Loring Jones, a scholar of sociology at San Diego State University, reports that “Among illegal enterprises, trafficking is second only to drug dealing, and tied with the illegal arms industry, in its ability to generate dollars.”<sup>7</sup> With over \$150 billion in profits annually, human trafficking has become a low-risk, high-reward industry for perpetrators who thrive on the exploitation of some of the world’s most vulnerable populations—immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

As of 2006, the International Organization for Migration estimated that there were more than 191 million immigrants worldwide.<sup>9</sup> As Dr. Jones goes on to write, “Immigrants are frequently treated as outsiders in their host countries and not afforded the same protection and rights as citizens.”<sup>10</sup> Due to this outsider status, immigrants are more vulnerable to exploitation—most clearly seen in human trafficking. Thus, this modern form of slavery is one

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Homeland Security, “What Is Human Trafficking?,” Department of Homeland Security, September 22, 2022, <https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/what-human-trafficking>.

<sup>6</sup> “Exploitation and the Private Sector,” Human Rights First, May 1, 2016, <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/exploitation-and-the-private-sector/>.

<sup>7</sup> Jones, Loring; Engstrom, David W.; Hilliard, Tricia; and Diaz, Mariel (2007) "Globalization and Human Trafficking," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 34: Iss. 2, Article 8, 108.

<sup>8</sup> “Exploitation and the Private Sector”

<sup>9</sup> “Globalization and Human Trafficking,” 108.

<sup>10</sup> “Globalization and Human Trafficking,” 108.

of the dark consequences of globalization where traffickers exploit power dynamics to target marginalized populations.<sup>11</sup>

As human trafficking increasingly becomes more recognized globally, its historical development highlights how globalization has transformed it into a widely acknowledged crisis. Human trafficking has long existed in multiple forms, but it gained significant global attention in the late 20th century as nations began to recognize its scale and impact as a modern form of slavery. The United Nations' adoption of the Palermo Protocol in 2000 marked a critical moment in modern history, establishing the first international definition of human trafficking.<sup>12</sup> The Palermo Protocol defines human trafficking as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, for the purpose of exploitation, which includes at a minimum, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs; regardless of the victim's consent if any of the aforementioned means were used to achieve it.<sup>13</sup>

Although in the 21st century human trafficking is defined and acknowledged worldwide, the surge in recognition did not begin until the late 20th century. The growth of interconnected economic systems during this period facilitated the movement of goods and services, enabling the exploitation of vulnerable populations. For example, the International Labour Organization estimates that nearly 25 million people worldwide are victims of forced labor, much of it driven

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<sup>11</sup> "Globalization and Human Trafficking," 108.

<sup>12</sup> "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime," November 15, 2000, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/ProtocolonTrafficking.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons"

by the demand for cheap goods and services in global supply chains.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the historical course of human trafficking, shaped by globalization and state interconnectedness, highlights the need for efforts to combat this human rights crisis.

### III. Challenges in Estimating the Scale of Human Trafficking

It is undisputed that human trafficking is an extensive issue with global implications, but its true scope is difficult to estimate due to the hidden nature of the crime and inconsistencies in research methods. The absence of a universal methodology for estimating human trafficking prevalence has led to widely varying global estimates, ranging from millions to tens of millions of victims. According to Kelle Barrick and Rebecca Pfeffer, two researchers at RTI International, the populations involved (i.e. victims, traffickers, and exploiters) are largely hidden, making it nearly impossible to create accurate estimates.<sup>15</sup> Even with the internationally agreed-upon definition of trafficking outlined in the Palermo Protocol,<sup>16</sup> national and state-level variations in definitions impact the collection of trafficking-related data. Studies often use administrative data, surveys, and interviews, each having limitations when trying to apply them across studies and contexts. This inconsistency also extends to state data. For example, while the National Human Trafficking Hotline identified 11,500 potential trafficking situations in 2019, federal law enforcement opened only 1,830 cases, which reflects the complexity of prosecuting trafficking crimes.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the anti-trafficking field still lacks a standardized approach for designing large-scale studies capable of capturing the multifaceted nature of trafficking. Developing a unified methodology for estimating human trafficking is essential to understanding its true scale

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<sup>14</sup> “Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage,” 2017, [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_75479.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_75479.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Barrick, Kelle, and Rebecca Pfeffer. 2021. “Advances in Measurement: A Scoping Review of Prior Human Trafficking Prevalence Studies and Recommendations for Future Research.” *Journal of Human Trafficking* 10 (1): 1–19. doi:10.1080/23322705.2021.1984721.

<sup>16</sup> “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons”

<sup>17</sup> Barrick, “Advances in Measurement”

and addressing its root causes so that research can guide policy and strategies to prevent future crimes.

#### **IV. The Paradoxical Relationship Between Human Trafficking and Globalization**

When considering the vast prevalence of human trafficking, it is important to understand its far-reaching impact on the lives of victims. Trafficking victims often endure severe physical, psychological, and economic harm. Kathy Zimmerman and Ligia Kiss, two researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, report that:

The exploitation that is at the heart of trafficking comprises different forms of abuse, such as extensive hours, poor pay, extortionate debt, physical confinement, serious occupational hazards, violence, and threats. These forms of abuse occur across a spectrum at varying levels of severity.<sup>18</sup>

This abuse strips victims of basic human rights and dignity and supports the notion that globalization has “spun out of control”<sup>19</sup> and expanded across industries without sufficient regulation, creating economic inequalities between nations. This social inequality leads to negative outcomes such as violence, abuse, and exploitation.<sup>20</sup> “Globally, these inequities result in the increasing socio-economic gap between developing and industrialized nations in this era of globalization. . . [thus], one of the most serious contemporary effects of inequalities between and within nations is the phenomena of global sex trade or human trafficking for the purposes of sex.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the link between inequality and exploitation makes trafficking a direct

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<sup>18</sup> Cathy Zimmerman and Ligia Kiss, “Human Trafficking and Exploitation: A Global Health Concern,” *PLOS Medicine* 14, no. 11 (November 22, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002437>, p 2

<sup>19</sup> Klaus Schwab and World Economic Forum, “Our Global System Has Spun out of Control. Here’s How to Rebalance It,” *World Economic Forum*, February 5, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2019/02/how-to-rebalance-our-global-system/>.

<sup>20</sup> Barner, John R., David Okech, and Meghan A. Camp. 2014. "Socio-Economic Inequality, Human Trafficking, and the Global Slave Trade" *Societies* 4, no. 2: 148-160. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc4020148>

<sup>21</sup> “Socio-Economic Inequality, Human Trafficking”

byproduct of globalization where vulnerable populations are targeted through economic inequalities.

Human trafficking is paradoxical in its nature as it is both a barrier to and facilitator of globalization. In a study done by Yselle Flora Kuete Malah, a researcher at the University of Yaoundé 2 in Cameroon, and Simplicé Asongu, a researcher at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa, found that “human trafficking is positively related with economic development.”<sup>22</sup> They found that the countries where the level of human trafficking is highest correspond to states where the average level of economic, political, and social globalization is high.<sup>23</sup>

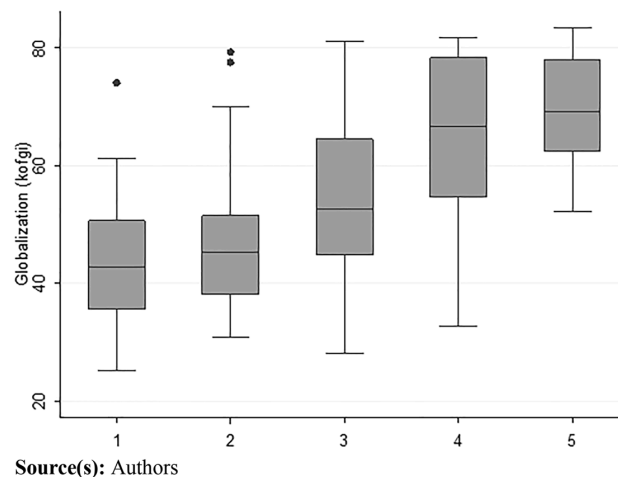


Figure 1: Demonstration of Globalization related to human trafficking levels.<sup>24</sup>

This graph shows that there is a relation between globalization and the levels of human trafficking. Even though human trafficking undermines the shared ethical foundations that uphold international cooperation—such as justice, human dignity, and mutual respect—it simultaneously sustains global supply chains by providing cheap labor. This means that

<sup>22</sup> Yselle Flora Kuete Malah and Simplicé Asongu, “An Empirical Analysis of Human Trafficking in an Era of Globalization,” *Journal of Economic Studies* ahead-of-print, no. ahead-of-print (October 20, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1108/jes-06-2021-0288>, p 1276

<sup>23</sup> “An Empirical Analysis of Human Trafficking,” p 1275

<sup>24</sup> Figure 1: As shown by the box plots, countries where the level of human trafficking is the highest also corresponds to those that have the highest levels of economic, social, and political globalization.

exploitation is an important component of globalization, generating questions about the connections between horrific crimes and an expanding global economy.

## **V. Understanding the Push and Pull Factors Behind Human Trafficking**

After understanding the interconnectedness of human trafficking and globalization, the next logical question is “why?” Why is human trafficking happening? As Loring Jones writes, global “push” and “pull” factors lure individuals to wealthier foreign countries that have strict legal immigration restrictions.<sup>25</sup> “People are ‘pushed’ out of poor countries where economic opportunity is lacking and ‘pulled’ into countries that have a higher level of economic prosperity with a corresponding demand for cheap labor.”<sup>26</sup> Traffickers use this push and pull factor to promise individuals, usually poor and uneducated victims, a better life with increased opportunity. These promises are blatant lies that lead vulnerable immigrants to be exploited. Hannah Gould, a Global Citizenship Fellow on the End Trafficking project at UNICEF, writes that, “Human trafficking is the only industry in which the supply and demand are the same thing.”<sup>27</sup> This quote underscores the unique nature of the crime: the very individuals who are exploited (i.e. the “supply”) are simultaneously driven by global economic need, creating a “demand” for traffickers to exploit. This relationship is fueled by global economic disparities and poorly regulated global supply chain vulnerabilities. The global supply chain becoming “an intricate, almost endless network of trade and production, [is] making the economic interactions of our world much more complex.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, the push and pull factors described by Loring Jones coupled with the complex web of international interconnections provide the perfect conditions for traffickers to manipulate victims into believing in false opportunities, trapping them in a

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<sup>25</sup> “Globalization and Human Trafficking”

<sup>26</sup> “Globalization and Human Trafficking”

<sup>27</sup> Hannah Gould, “What Fuels Human Trafficking?,” UNICEF USA (UNICEF, January 13, 2017), <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/what-fuels-human-trafficking>.

<sup>28</sup> Yoni Wilkenfeld, “The Challenges of Supply Chain Regulation,” GIS Reports, July 13, 2022, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/supply-chain-regulation/>.

cycle of exploitation. Understanding the economic and systemic forces behind human trafficking is crucial to disrupting this vicious cycle and addressing the root causes of both supply and demand.

In turn, the push-pull dynamic of exploitation allows forced labor to thrive, especially in industries like agriculture, mining, and manufacturing that are hard to regulate due to intricate global supply chains. The International Organization for Migration writes that “the vulnerability of migrants throughout the migration cycle is evident at all stages and in a wide variety of manifestations during pre-departure, transit, entry, stay and return.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, the combination of economic inequality, migration, and weak state partnerships allows trafficking to thrive.

## **VI. Sex Trafficking**

Narrowing in on the different types of human trafficking, sex trafficking stands out as a particularly devastating sector, intensified by online platforms that target and exploit vulnerable individuals. Globalization has accelerated the growth of sex trafficking by allowing traffickers to use technology to treat people as products within global markets. Advancements in international communication have been misused to make trafficking more widespread—and thus harder to stop. Online platforms have become a key tool for recruiting, advertising, and controlling victims, making it easier for traffickers to connect with potential buyers while remaining anonymous.<sup>30</sup>

Victims of sex trafficking suffer severe economic exploitation as traffickers often retain all profits, leaving victims economically devastated. Additionally, the psychological harm inflicted on victims is profound, with many enduring post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and

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<sup>29</sup> “World Migration Report 2024,” Publications.iom.int, 2024, <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2024>, p 12.

<sup>30</sup> Jo Doezema, “Who Gets to Choose? Coercion, Consent, and the UN Trafficking Protocol,” *Gender & Development* 10, no. 1 (2023): 20–27, [https://www.academia.edu/78364396/Who\\_gets\\_to\\_choose\\_Coercion\\_consent\\_and\\_the\\_UN\\_Trafficking\\_Protocol](https://www.academia.edu/78364396/Who_gets_to_choose_Coercion_consent_and_the_UN_Trafficking_Protocol).

depression years after escaping their traffickers.<sup>31</sup> A disturbing example of this issue is provided by the International Labour Organization which estimates that 4.8 million people are victims of forced sexual exploitation globally, generating approximately \$99 billion in profits annually.<sup>32</sup> This data highlights the profitable yet vile nature of sex trafficking within the broader context of human trafficking. With sex work being a highly controversial matter, often the scale of forced labor in the industry is underplayed. Instead of describing the industry as full of willing individuals, Dr. Loring argues:

Most anti-trafficking advocates, service providers, and policy makers believe that all those involved in the sex trade are coerced in some way. They argue that prostitution cannot be regarded as a rational choice, because too often it is a forced choice by those who have no alternatives for economic survival. . . . Women may even agree to be trafficked for prostitution, but when they arrive at their destination they find the conditions to be much worse than they had agreed to or been promised-but they have no way to get out of the deal gone bad or return home. . . . Prostitution arouses major concern because it is usually an illegal activity and carries stigmas that make it more difficult for the trafficked to escape than other types of work. Prostitution is also likely to involve the most vulnerable segments of the population: women and children; however, it is important to note that significant numbers of males are also trafficked as sex workers.<sup>33</sup>

Sex trafficking, a major part of human trafficking, has grown with globalization, creating an ongoing international crisis. This issue requires both global and local efforts to protect victims and stop trafficking networks.

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<sup>31</sup> David Hodge, "Sexual Trafficking in the United States: A Domestic Problem with Transnational Dimensions on JSTOR," *Jstor.org*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.2307/23721103>.

<sup>32</sup> International Labour Organization, "Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage | International Labour Organization," [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org), September 19, 2017, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/global-estimates-modern-slavery-forced-labour-and-forced-marriage>.

<sup>33</sup> "Globalization and Human Trafficking"

Amid the statistics and complexities of sex trafficking, individual stories demonstrate the human cost of this worldwide emergency. An anonymous victim known by the name Susannah experienced firsthand the falsely promised opportunities and the harsh reality of exploitation, shedding light on the real and personal impact of this issue. Susannah's story began when she fled an abusive domestic violence relationship and decided to try commercial sex work because "[she] had been having sex since [she] was two years old and knew that [her] body could provide income."<sup>34</sup> She met someone she thought was her savior who had promised to keep her safe. Initially believing she was in a business partnership, she quickly realized she had lost all autonomy as her trafficker took full control, moving her across state lines and profiting from her forced sex work. "This was the first time in my life where I was labeled with a price and sold as goods to others," Susannah recounted, emphasizing the profound loss of dignity that comes with being reduced to an object.<sup>35</sup> She recounts that the abuse she went through in the four years as a trafficking victim was worse than the domestic violence relationship she had previously escaped from. She wrote, "I have always dealt with shame over sexual abuse, but trafficking stripped me of my dignity."<sup>36</sup> Susannah's escape was made possible by the National Human Trafficking Hotline, a resource she discovered through a sticker on a bathroom stall. The hotline's assurance that her situation would not be reported to law enforcement without her consent was critical. "If they had said we have to report, I would have hung up the phone and figured it out on my own," she explained, noting that her traffickers had threatened her child's safety.<sup>37</sup> By offering resources and empowering her to make choices, the hotline became her ticket to freedom. Susannah's story highlights the immense economic despair, psychological harm, and personal

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<sup>34</sup> Susannah, "Survivor Story: Susannah," [polarisproject.org](https://polarisproject.org/survivor-story-susannah/), February 10, 2023, <https://polarisproject.org/survivor-story-susannah/>.

<sup>35</sup> "Survivor Story: Susannah"

<sup>36</sup> "Survivor Story: Susannah"

<sup>37</sup> "Survivor Story: Susannah"

toll victims endure as a result of sex trafficking, underscoring the importance of survivor-centered approaches to combat trafficking.

Building on the devastating experience of Susannah, the story of a young Colombian woman trafficked into sex work in Japan provides an additional example of the dark side of globalization and its role in enabling exploitation. Born in Colombia in 1978, Marcela became a single mother at 17, working several jobs to provide for her child. “My circumstances made me a perfect target for human traffickers,” she explained, as a man who loaned her money for her child’s hospital bills later offered her a job as a professional dancer in Japan.<sup>38</sup> Upon arrival, her passport was taken and she was told she had to repay \$50,000 by becoming a prostitute. For 18 months, she was forced into sex work, enduring unimaginable physical and emotional trauma. “When I was able to escape, I returned to Colombia feeling afraid and hopeless,” she recounted, noting the lack of any assistance upon her return.<sup>39</sup> Initially driven back into prostitution by her circumstances, she refused to remain a victim. She published two books to raise awareness about trafficking. Her advocacy efforts expanded as she partnered with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and established a foundation in her name to support survivors.<sup>40</sup> Her story not only highlights the human cost of the unchecked aspects of global systems but also serves as a powerful call for efforts to prevent exploitation and support survivors worldwide.

## **VII. Agricultural Trafficking**

Agricultural trafficking is a critical yet often overlooked facet of human trafficking that is tied to globalization and the demand for inexpensive food in global markets. Trafficked immigrants working in agriculture are subjected to harsh physical and economic exploitation,

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<sup>38</sup> “Testimonies by Victims of Human Trafficking from around the World,” n.d., [https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/GLO-ACT/GLOACT\\_Victim-Testimonies\\_October\\_2017.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/GLO-ACT/GLOACT_Victim-Testimonies_October_2017.pdf), p 1

<sup>39</sup> “Testimonies by Victims of Human Trafficking from around the World” p. 1

<sup>40</sup> “Testimonies by Victims of Human Trafficking from around the World” p. 1

often working long hours in dangerous conditions for little to no pay. According to the International Labour Organization, approximately 11% of the 25 million victims of forced labor globally are exploited in agriculture, forestry, and fishing industries.<sup>41</sup> These individuals are coerced into farming, harvesting, and processing food that becomes part of the global supply chain. For example, a case study in Florida's tomato industry revealed widespread exploitation, with workers forced to pick tomatoes under conditions that constituted a form of modern-day slavery, earning less than \$4 an hour despite grueling 12-hour shifts.<sup>42</sup> This exploitation affects global food systems as it drives down costs for consumers while hiding the human cost of cheap agricultural products. Globalization intensifies this issue by creating a demand for low-cost labor to maintain competitive food prices, leaving vulnerable migrant workers at risk of being trafficked. Addressing agricultural trafficking is essential to creating ethical and sustainable global food systems that prioritize human rights.

The story of a young girl, Phengma, from the Savannakhet province in Thailand who was trafficked into forced labor highlights the brutal realities of agricultural trafficking and how globalization's demand for low-cost labor creates advantageous conditions for human trafficking. Phengma left school at grade 5 to help her family in the rice fields. Hearing about "a good job in Thailand,"<sup>43</sup> offering 75 Euros a month with food and accommodation, she left home seeking a better future. Instead, Phengma was enslaved. Her trafficker, Mr. P, forced her to labor in his food shop and later at his home, where she was brutally beaten "on the head and torso with a metal ice shovel every day" and doused with hot water.<sup>44</sup> "With raw bruises, I was forced to

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<sup>41</sup> "Forced Labour: Global Overview" (International Labour Organization), accessed November 19, 2024, [https://flbusiness.network/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ilo-gbnfl\\_factsheet\\_jan2020.pdf](https://flbusiness.network/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ilo-gbnfl_factsheet_jan2020.pdf), p 1

<sup>42</sup> Ian-Paul Poulos, Barry Estabrook, and Andrews McMeel, "Tasteless Tomatoes and Slave Labor in Florida's Factory Farms," 2014, <https://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/academics/colleges/hclas/cld/cld-rlr-sp14-tomatoes-poulos.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> "Testimonies by Victims of Human Trafficking from around the World" p 2

<sup>44</sup> "Testimonies by Victims of Human Trafficking from around the World" p 2

work” Phengma recounted, sleeping outdoors on the floor and receiving no pay.<sup>45</sup> This exploitation reflects how traffickers exploit economic desperation for low-cost labor. Despite her suffering, kind neighbors eventually helped Phengma escape and monks brought her to a hospital. Phengma’s two years in a shelter in Thailand led to legal action against her traffickers where she ultimately received 500 Euros in compensation. Phengma’s story illustrates how traffickers capitalize on the vulnerabilities of the poor without care for the real human impact. Experiences like Phengma’s highlight the dark side of globalization, where economic inequities fuel trafficking networks, underscoring the need for systemic reforms to prevent such exploitation.

### **VIII. Mining Industry Trafficking**

The mining industry is a prominent industry for human trafficking, particularly for trafficked labor in the extraction of precious metals and minerals like cobalt and gold. This is considered a form of human trafficking because adults and children “are working against their will and under threat, intimidation or coercion.”<sup>46</sup> Although the exact number of humans forced into labor in the mining industry is unknown,

The International Labour Organization estimates that about one million children aged 5 to 17 are engaged in small-scale mining and quarrying activities worldwide. These children toil under dangerous conditions and go without access to schools, health clinics, and other basic necessities.<sup>47</sup>

These situations occur under trafficked or forced labor conditions. The exposure to toxic chemicals and collapsing mines frequently results in injuries, long-term health issues, and death.

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<sup>45</sup> “Testimonies by Victims of Human Trafficking from around the World” p 2

<sup>46</sup> James Melville, “From Stone to Phone: Modern Day Cobalt Slavery in Congo,” *Byline Times*, June 19, 2020, <https://bylinetimes.com/2020/06/19/from-stone-to-phone-modern-day-cobalt-slavery-in-congo/>.

<sup>47</sup> “The Burden of Gold Child Labour in Small-Scale Mines and Quarries,” International Labour Organization, August 2005, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/burden-gold-child-labour-small-scale-mines-and-quarries>.

Furthermore, a significant portion of cobalt, crucial for “rechargeable lithium-ion batteries, electronic devices, and electric cars,” is mined in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where of the “255,000 Congolese mining for cobalt, 40,000 are children, some as young as six years.”<sup>48</sup> The global demand for electronics, jewelry, and other products encourages trafficked labor, as cheap commodities are an integral part of global supply chains. Thus, consumer demand in wealthy nations drives the exploitation of vulnerable workers in developing countries.

The stories of boys like Gordo and Oscar, children exploited in Peru's gold mining regions, exemplify the realities of mining industry trafficking and its exploitation of vulnerable children. For many of these children, mining is the last resort. At just 12 years old, Gordo’s family was evicted by drug traffickers, “leaving the 12-year-old boy with no choice but to go down in the mines or face starvation.”<sup>49</sup> Although Gordo spent six years doing dangerous work, his only reward was barely enough food to survive on and a mat for bed. The story of Oscar, a young Peruvian boy who was sold to a gold mine by his cousin at age 16, further demonstrates the victimization of some of the world’s most vulnerable populations. “He was forced to carry at least 100 wheelbarrows full of rock per day through the mud,” leading him to contract malaria and being left to die.<sup>50</sup> Oscar shares that he was barely kept alive by the food scraps he got from the kitchen he worked in.<sup>51</sup> These cases highlight how illegal mining operations exploit children under inhumane conditions, driven by the global demand for cheap commodities. Trafficking in mining regions thrives when children are treated as disposable labor who work to meet the relentless global demand for resources.

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<sup>48</sup> “The DRC Mining Industry”

<sup>49</sup> “Gold Mining Is Modern Slavery for Many Children in Peru,” Amazon Aid Foundation, February 25, 2014, <https://amazonaid.org/gold-mining-modern-slavery-many-children-peru/>.

<sup>50</sup> “Gold Mining is Modern Slavery”

<sup>51</sup> “Gold Mining is Modern Slavery”

Globalization plays a significant role in fueling this exploitation, the interconnected global economy driving the need for precious metals like gold and cobalt. The lack of regulation and oversight in the mining industry creates a system where traffickers and illegal mining operators can exploit vulnerable children without consequences, while simultaneously making profits and supporting the global economy. This global demand leads to cycles of poverty and exploitation, ensuring that vulnerable populations remain trapped in inhumane conditions. To combat trafficking in the mining industry, it is imperative to enforce stricter regulations, promote ethical sourcing practices, and address the systemic issues that allow trafficking to thrive in the shadow of globalization.

### **IX. Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking**

The global crisis of human trafficking demands bipartisan efforts from states, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and more. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been a leader in counter-trafficking for over 25 years, directly assisting more than 100,000 victims.<sup>52</sup> IOM collaborates closely with governments, the United Nations, and NGOs to implement comprehensive strategies addressing prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnerships, along with humanitarian actors to “ensure that anti-trafficking considerations are integrated within emergency response interventions, to prevent and mitigate risk of further harm.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the United Nations has established international agreements to combat trafficking, such as the “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.”<sup>54</sup> This protocol provides a framework for countries to

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<sup>52</sup> IOM, “Counter-Trafficking,” International Organization for Migration, July 27, 2018, <https://www.iom.int/counter-trafficking>.

<sup>53</sup> “Counter-Trafficking”

<sup>54</sup> United Nations, “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,” OHCHR (United Nations, November 15, 2000),

develop laws and policies targeting trafficking, emphasizing the importance of international cooperation. Some of the important features of this protocol include protecting the privacy of victims, providing for their psychological and social recovery, offering employment and educational opportunities, information exchange between state authorities to enable trafficking prevention, and the importance of strengthening border control.<sup>55</sup> Essentially, the United Nations has created a series of rights and support networks that victims of trafficking are entitled to. Thus, global corporations play an important role in the fight against human trafficking.

Although many parts of the global supply chains inadvertently allow exploitation, many companies are taking proactive measures to combat trafficking. For instance, “Nike uses the CUMULUS Forced Labor Screen™, a due diligence tool to help identify risks related to the recruitment of foreign migrant workers by NIKE suppliers.”<sup>56</sup> This program aims to ensure ethical labor practices throughout their company. Despite these efforts, significant challenges persist. In many developing states, enforcement of anti-trafficking laws is difficult because of corruption, lack of resources, or inadequate state regulations. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) highlights that an “acute lack of quality evidence and research for the development of national policies and programs to combat human trafficking is a major setback facing governments and other counter-trafficking actors.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, addressing human trafficking requires collaboration across countries and continents, corporate responsibility, and legal regulations. By strengthening partnerships and enhancing enforcement practices, the

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<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>.

<sup>55</sup> “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish”

<sup>56</sup> “NIKE, INC. STATEMENT on FORCED LABOR, HUMAN TRAFFICKING and MODERN SLAVERY for FISCAL YEAR 2022,” 2022,

[https://admin.about.nike.com/media/files/709d93f5-36d7-49a7-8e48-31587f8e8630/NIKE\\_Inc\\_Statement\\_Forced\\_Labor\\_Human\\_Trafficking\\_Modern\\_Slavery\\_FY22\\_11.30.2022.pdf](https://admin.about.nike.com/media/files/709d93f5-36d7-49a7-8e48-31587f8e8630/NIKE_Inc_Statement_Forced_Labor_Human_Trafficking_Modern_Slavery_FY22_11.30.2022.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> “IOM and UNODC Release New Guidance to Help Combat Human Trafficking through Data,” International Organization for Migration, October 5, 2023,

<https://www.iom.int/news/iom-and-unodc-release-new-guidance-help-combat-human-trafficking-through-data>.

international community can work towards eradicating the gross violation of human rights that is human trafficking.

## **X. Solutions and Recommendations**

As human trafficking is deeply embedded in globalization, it requires an approach that addresses its root causes. Exploitation in sex trafficking, agricultural trafficking, and mining industry trafficking highlights the need for targeted solutions tailored to each sector's specific challenges and issues. By addressing economic inequality, raising labor standards, and prioritizing victim support, the systems of modern slavery can slowly be dismantled.

Economic inequality and migration policies play a central role in preventing trafficking. In the mining sector, for example, regions like Peru's gold mines exploit children such as Oscar, who's graphic story illuminates the horrors.<sup>58</sup> Traffickers rely on desperation, and this desperation leads to forced labor. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), enforcing fair wages and safe working conditions is critical to dismantling trafficking networks embedded in supply chains.<sup>59</sup> Thus raising global labor standards and addressing systemic poverty can reduce this vulnerability.

Like the mining industry, sex trafficking stems from economic desperation. As seen in the story of the Colombian woman trafficked to Japan, traffickers exploit individuals seeking better opportunities. Thus, reforming migration policies to create legal pathways for work would reduce the risk of traffickers targeting undocumented migrants.

Stricter enforcement of laws aimed at industries that rely on low-cost labor is critical in combating exploitation. In agricultural trafficking, traffickers exploit migrants in unregulated

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<sup>58</sup> "Gold Mining is Modern Slavery"

<sup>59</sup> ILO, "LABOUR STANDARDS in GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS HOW to MEET THEM to BECOME MORE COMPETITIVE and SUSTAINABLE," 2019, [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms\\_725761.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_725761.pdf).

environments as seen in Florida's tomato farms where workers endured modern-day slavery. Global supply chains must be held accountable while companies conduct rigorous checks to ensure ethical labor practices. Nike utilizing the CUMULUS Forced Labor Screen™ to mediate risks related to migrant worker exploitation sets a standard for commercial responsibility. However, mining and agriculture present additional challenges due to the informal nature and independent-contractor heavy sectors. Recommendations include formalizing these industries and increasing state oversight in regions where trafficking is most prevalent.

Education for at-risk populations is critical to reducing exploitation. In the mining sector, educating communities about the dangers of trafficking and providing alternative livelihoods can help break the cycle of trafficking. Similarly, empowering women and immigrants in vulnerable regions through access to education and economic opportunities can decrease the risks of sex trafficking. Survivor-led initiatives, like the foundation established by the Colombian woman trafficked to Japan, demonstrate the impact of giving survivors a voice and a platform to advocate for systemic change. Empowering individuals can create ripple effects in combating trafficking.

Human trafficking, the modern form of slavery, is a grim consequence of globalization, fueled by economic inequality and the demand for cheap labor. While globalization has increased the interconnectedness of economies and societies, it has also created lanes for exploitation, introducing trafficking into industries like agriculture, mining, and sex work. However, globalization also offers opportunities for collaboration and accountability across states to address this modern form of slavery. The fight against trafficking requires a global, unified response that looks at the root causes of exploitation (e.g. poverty) while also strengthening regulations and providing resources to empower vulnerable populations. Stronger enforcement of

international laws, such as the UN's Palermo Protocol, combined with corporate responsibility initiatives like supply chain audits, can curb the systemic vulnerabilities that allow trafficking to flourish.

Human trafficking is not merely a violation of human rights—it is a system that prioritizes profits over people. Addressing this issue demands coordinated efforts between governments, corporations, NGOs, and individuals. Globalization is a powerful force, and what we choose to value can profoundly influence its effects—either uplifting lives or deepening inequalities. By working together to enforce regulations, support survivors, and reduce economic inequality, we can begin to dismantle the constructs that allow trafficking to thrive, creating a world where human dignity is upheld, and exploitation is not tolerated.

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