

According to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000), child trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation. It is a violation of rights, well-being and a denial of the opportunity for children to reach their full potential. Human Trafficking is a crime against humanity.

Children may be forced into marriage, to work in sweatshops, on construction sites, on the streets as child beggars, in wars as child soldiers, on farms, or in restaurants and hotels. Some are forced into commercial sexual exploitation, prostitution and other illegal activities, such as trafficking drugs. In 2005, an estimated 5.7 million children were in forced and bonded labor.

Millions of girls work as domestic servants and unpaid household help and are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Servitude may include cleaning, childcare, cooking, gardening and looking after the elderly. In its most extreme forms, child labor involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to provide for themselves on the streets of large cities at a very early age.

While human trafficking spans all demographics, there are some circumstances or vulnerabilities that lead to higher susceptibility of victimization. Runaway and homeless youth, and victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, war and conflict, or social discrimination are frequently targeted by traffickers. Also poverty, dropping out of school, losing parents, natural disasters and migrant status make children vulnerable to exploitation.

It is estimated that there are 30 million people enslaved around the world today, which is double the number of Africans who were taken during the trans-American slave trade. For as little as \$18-dollars, generations of people can be enslaved. There are approximately 700,000 victims trafficked through international borders every year, which does not include the millions trafficked domestically within their own countries. 55% are women and girls. Human trafficking is the third largest international crime industry, behind illegal drugs and arms trafficking. According to the International Labor Organization, forced labor reportedly generates a profit of \$150 billion every year.

Human trafficking leaves almost no country untouched, including the United States. The U.S. is a source, destination, and transit point for trafficking victims. According to CIA estimates, as many as 15,000 to 17,500 men, women and children are trafficked into the United States every year. Anyone can be trafficked, regardless of citizenship, class, education, gender, or age when forced or tempted by false promises. Slavery exists almost everywhere in the world, and yet it is illegal in every part of the world.

Sources: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children <http://www.nspcc.org.uk>, Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking <http://www.castla.org>, Polaris <http://www.polarisproject.org>, Five Things You Didn't Know about Human Trafficking <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/5-things-you-didnt-know-about-human-trafficking-20140819>