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OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES TO ACCURATELY MEASURING THE PHENOMENON OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Alexis A. ARONOWITZ*

Difficulty in Measuring Human Trafficking¹

Due to its clandestine nature and the hidden economies in which trafficked victims are forced to work, accurate statistics on the magnitude of the problem are elusive, and available statistics are notoriously unreliable. Not all countries have trafficking legislation. Where such legislation exists, it may be limited to equating human trafficking with exploitation in the sex industry while ignoring exploitation in the labor market. Countries differ on whether or not they include internal trafficking of their own citizens under human trafficking violations. Where legislation is in place, the lack of political will, inexperience in conducting investigations and prosecutions or corrupt practices contribute to minimal successes in the prosecution of traffickers.²

Where action is taken and statistics are collected, there is often no centralized agency collecting data on human trafficking. Statistics may be reported on an ad hoc basis by individual Government agencies operating at a local or regional (state) level, by non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) or the press. Rarely are these data sources linked.³ Data are collected for different purposes and "...vary according to the context and source of information. Governments, international agencies and NGOs provide different kind of data, which is often not comparable" (Limanowska, 2002; 4). Whereas Immigration officials may register cases of

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¹ Parts of this paper correspond to a study prepared for and owned by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. The United Nations has authorized the use of portions of that study in this paper.

² According to the UNODC (2009; 9), of the 155 countries included in their study, only 29% reported at least 10 convictions a year; 17% reported one to ten convictions a year; 41% of the countries reported no convictions; data was not available on 14% of the other countries. According to the U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report 2009, prosecutions (5212 in 2008) and convictions (2983 in 2008) worldwide have declined (U.S. Department of State, 2009; 47).

³ UNODC (2009; 19) reports that even within a country, they obtained different figures for the same indicator from different authoritative sources (e.g. police and public prosecutors).

trafficking based upon interceptions - the number of persons caught trying to leave or enter a country illegally (either without proper documentation or with fraudulent papers), the police may record trafficked persons based upon the number of 'rescues' of those found working in bars, brothels, massage parlors, farms, factories or as domestic servants. NGOs, international organizations and Embassies often count trafficked persons based upon the number persons to whom they have provided assistance or who are in shelters or have been repatriated.

It is essential, if Governments are to implement policy and measures aimed at investigation, prevention and victim assistance, that they are aware of the magnitude of the problem as well as trafficking patterns and trends and that measures taken are evidence-based.

Problems in Defining and Identifying Victims

A fundamental problem in assessing the magnitude of the problem lies in the identification of trafficked persons. Victims do not always report their victimization and are often unwilling to cooperate with law enforcement officials if identified and rescued. This is due to a number of reasons. Fear of reprisal from traffickers against themselves or their families, lack of trust in the authorities or the belief that the authorities are in collusion with the traffickers or can not or will not help, fear of deportation due to their irregular status, rejection by their families and lack of opportunities in their home countries cause many women to refuse to cooperate with authorities in destination countries. Victims often do not see themselves as being exploited, particularly if they are in love with their trafficker/pimp or may be earning more than they could in their own country (Aronowitz, 2009a). If repatriated, the women may travel abroad again, either freely or under the control of traffickers.

Authorities do not always recognize trafficked persons as victims and often mistake them for irregular migrants or freelance sex workers. This often has to do with official perceptions of the terms "victim", "exploitation", "consent" and "coercion". The term trafficked victim will be discussed in more detail below. With respect to the other concepts, the following should be noted: victims are not always deceived about the type of work they will be doing and some willingly leave their destination country knowing they are going to work in prostitution. "Coercion" does not always encompass violence or threat of violence against the victim and/or the victim's family members. It is often much more subtle. Law enforcement in a number of European countries report an emerging pattern of women working in prostitution, living in their own apartments and making a moderate salary, but yet are still under the control of traffickers (Surtees, 2007; IOM, 2004). It may be difficult, particularly when law enforcement has not had adequate training, to recognize that these women, too, are victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The problem of recognizing trafficked victims as such in cases of labor exploitation is even more difficult. According to experts in the U.K. and the Netherlands, the perception exists that “the trauma suffered by victims of labor trafficking might be significantly lower than that suffered by victims of sexual exploitation. Victims of labor trafficking might not fit the ‘stereotypical view’ of a trafficked person” and labor exploitation “...is not considered to have ‘damaged the integrity’ of the victim” (Aronowitz, 2010).⁴

What Constitutes a Victim of Trafficking?

In addition to the fact that there is a large dark figure of trafficked victims who never come to the attention of the authorities, there is the added problem that disagreement exists over who is a victim of trafficking and at what stage a victim should be recognized as such. During the course of their regular work or investigations, law enforcement officials, labor inspectors, health care workers, immigration and border control officials as well as NGOs and other victim service providers may come into contact with presumed victims of trafficking. Clearly many victims of trafficking will go unrecognized and unrecorded. Those who are suspected of being victims but who do not identify themselves as such and decline assistance may also fail to appear in data on trafficked victims.

How agencies, institutions or even countries register a trafficked “victim” may depend upon a number of criteria – whether the person has cooperated with authorities in the investigation and prosecution of the trafficker(s), or whether the person has accepted the services offered by a NGO or an international organization (such as the International Organization for Migration - IOM) or other victim service providers.

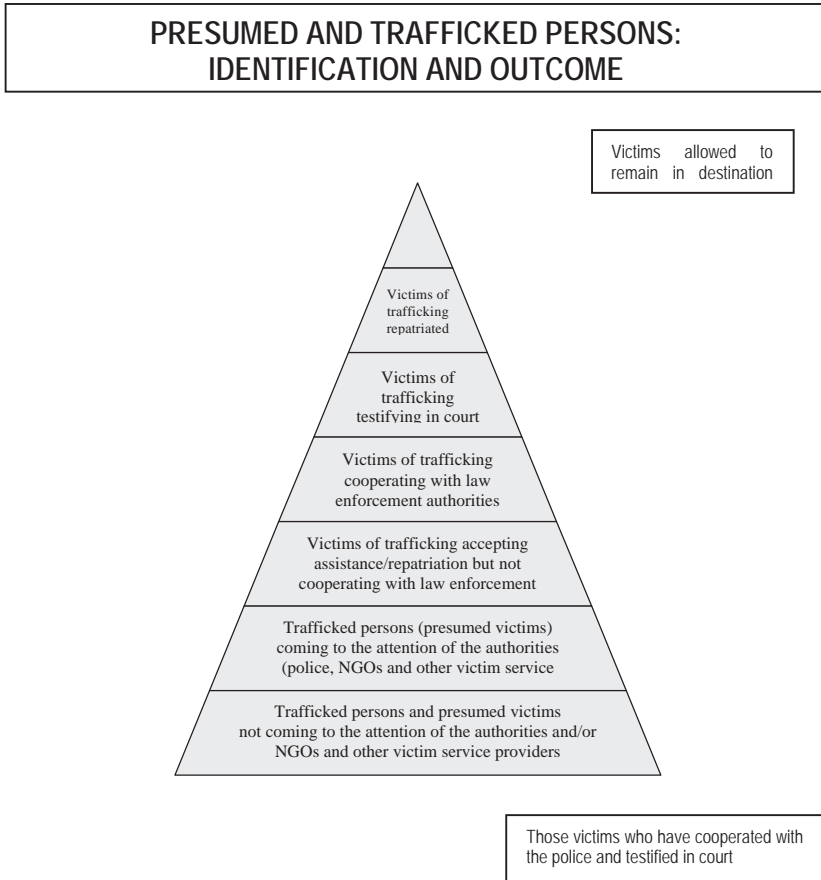
In the field of trafficking, one can talk of persons at risk, presumed victims and actual victims.⁵ The trafficking “victim” can appear at any place on a victim “continuum” or pyramid. The largest group, if estimates of trafficking can be believed, comprise persons who are trafficked victims but who have not yet been identified by law enforcement, NGOs, victim service providers or other stakeholders. Meanwhile the smallest number reflects those who have not only cooperated with the authorities and testified in court against their trafficker, but who have also been granted permission to remain in the destination country. The different categories of victims are portrayed in diagram 1 below.⁶

⁴ Interviews with experts from the UK Human Trafficking Centre and the Netherlands Expertise Center on Human Smuggling and Human Trafficking.

⁵ Persons at risk include members of vulnerable groups. Presumed victims are those where a number of indicators point to the probability that a person is a victim of trafficking (documents have been seized, movement is restricted, the victim is dependent upon one or more individuals who regulate almost all activities, etc.).

⁶ Diagram 1 is a model which represents the situation in many, but not all, EU Member

Diagram 17



Limitations in Measuring Trafficking

The statistics provided by organizations on the number of trafficked victims are either estimates of trafficking in the country or region, or comprise statistics

States. In other Member States, Belgium, for example, the possibility to remain in the country is not linked to cooperation with the competent authorities.

⁷ This diagram was developed for the study *Guidelines for the Collection of Data on Trafficking in Human Beings, Including Comparable Indicators*, International Organization for Migration and the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Austria (Aronowitz, 2009b).

based upon what is known by Governments, NGOs or international organizations. The problems with each of these approaches to providing statistics will be explained below.

Actual Figures

In one of the most comprehensive attempts to measure trafficking worldwide, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2009) gathered data on human trafficking in 155 nations around the world. Based upon data provided by 111 countries in 2006, over 21,400 victims of trafficking were identified through victims' assistance organizations and the criminal justice process. Where data on gender and age were available, in 61 countries, two thirds of the victims were adult women, 13% were girls, 12% men and 9% boys (UNODC, 2009; 10-11). This picture may be skewed by an overemphasis on trafficking for sexual exploitation.⁸

Estimates

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that approximately 2.5 million people are in forced labor as a result of trafficking, including both trans-border and internal trafficking. Calculations put the number of people subjected to commercial sexual exploitation at 1.1 million; 800,000 are trafficked into other forms of labor exploitation and 600,000 are classified as "undetermined" (Belser, 2005). Within the United States alone, the U.S. Department of State (2004) calculated that between 14,500 and 17,500 victims are trafficked into the United States each year.⁹

There is a large disparity between the number of estimates and the number of known cases or victims. Using the U.S. Department of State estimates of 14,500 to 17,500 trafficked persons entering the country annually, between 87,000 and 105,000 persons were estimated to have been trafficked into the United States during the period 2001 to 2007. During that same period, the U. S. Office of Refugee Resettlement certified only 1,379 (131 minor and 1248 adult) trafficked victims, providing even fewer with a T-visa.¹⁰ The U.K. Home Office estimates

⁸ This pattern also varies by region. Trafficking for labor exploitation involving young children is extremely prevalent in Western Africa.

⁹ These figures reflect a change from those in 2000 at which time the U.S. Department of State estimated between 45,000 – 50,000 victims were trafficked into the U.S. This change is due to a more accurate methodology. These figures disappeared altogether in the 2005 and more recent reports.

¹⁰ The T-visa is provided to victims of severe forms of trafficking, allowing them to remain in the United States. Webber and Shirk report that "[t]he large discrepancy between the number of trafficking victims estimated to be present in the United States and the total number of victims receiving protection under the TVPA is the result of several factors: (1) the imperfect nature of trafficking estimates; (2) misidentification of victims by law

4,000 victims of trafficking for prostitution annually. At the same time, the Joint Committee on Human Rights in its report to the British Parliament stated that, "Referrals from the Poppy Project in some ways provide the most reliable figures on the numbers of identified victims of trafficking for prostitution in the UK, since they relate to the actual women who have been encountered".¹¹ However, between March 2003 and May 2006, only 489 referrals were made to the scheme.¹²

In a study of the magnitude of trafficking in the United Kingdom, Kelley and Regan (2000), based on 71 known cases, extrapolate the actual figure at between 142 and 1420 cases annually. In a report for IOM on the trafficking of women and children from the Russian Federation, the author states, "The number of women and children who have become victims is unknown, but it is estimated to be in the tens-of-thousands and possibly the hundreds-of-thousands" (Hughes, 2002; 7). The bottom line is, we simply do not know.

There are a number of criticisms of trafficking estimates. First and foremost is the fact that the methodology for computing the estimates is rarely given. Reports also often fail to indicate whether estimates are annual figures or cover a period of several years (Makkai, 2003). Furthermore, the ranges are often wide with a high of 10 times that of the low estimate.

There is a danger in using estimates, particularly when it is unclear how an organization arrived at the figure. According to UNESCO (2003):

Numbers take on a life of their own, gaining acceptance through repetition, often with little inquiry into their derivations. Journalists, bowing to the pressures of editors, demand numbers, any number. Organizations feel compelled to supply them, lending false precisions and spurious authority to many reports. For instance, the widely cited figure of 5000-7000 Nepalese girls trafficked each year to India seems first to have appeared in 1986, and has been regularly quoted ever since. However, one organization apparently felt this to be a gross underestimate,

enforcement; (3) the conditional nature of victim protections; and (4) overly restrictive eligibility requirements for the T-visa" (2005, 1).

¹¹ Joint Committee on Human Rights (2006, 29).

¹² Other examples exist from other countries as well. Estimates placed the number of trafficked women and children in the U.S. at 45,000 – 50,000, while the number of documented cases was 38 involving 5,500 women for the year 1999-2000. Both the Netherlands and Belgium estimated between 1,000 and 3,000 victims, while the number of documented cases was 287 in the Netherlands in 1999, and 270 in Belgium in the year 2000 (Lehti, 2003; Makkai, 2003). Germany estimates the annual number of victims at 2,000 to 20,000; in the year 2000, 926 victims were registered (Lehti, 2003).

changing it to "About 5000 to 7000 Nepalese girls are trafficked to India every day."

Overstating the Problem

It is not uncommon in countries for statistics on illegal migration, smuggling, migrant sex workers and trafficking to be combined. Statistics collected by police and immigration officials are often not segregated by age or gender (Limanowska, 2002). Even when that is the case, it is difficult to determine when individuals stopped at a border are being smuggled (in or out of the country) or are being trafficked.¹³ Statistics on repatriations often include illegal migrants (and possible traffickers) as well as trafficked victims. The Nigeria Immigration Service for the years 2002 – 2004 reported 31,277 repatriations (data disaggregated by gender and adults/children).¹⁴ While many of those repatriated were returned from countries known as destination countries for trafficked Nigerian women and children, it is still impossible, barring the children, to determine the status of those returning to Nigeria. This confusion between illegal migrants and trafficked victims and their inclusion into a single group can increase the number of victims.

This is particularly true in the case of undocumented unaccompanied foreign minors. This problem was documented by the European Commission in a study conducted in 2001 to determine the scale of the problem of child trafficking into the European Union. UNICEF (2003, 19) reports,

"The study ... established that during the period 1999 to 2000, a total of 33,402 unaccompanied minors came to notice, consisting of a mixture of child asylum seekers, minors found to be present as irregular entrants within a state territory, and a number who were within the protection system of one of the member states. This figure needs to be analysed with some caution, because not all of these children would have been trafficked in the first instance and not all of them would have ended up as exploited trafficked victims in any event."

In the Netherlands, 716 unaccompanied minors who had applied for asylum disappeared from reception centers in 2004, almost double the number of children who disappeared from centers in 2003. It is believed that some of these children are trafficked through or into the Netherlands and are being exploited in

¹³ The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, does not require that the exploitation take place but that the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or reception of persons occurs (by means of threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim) *for the purpose of exploitation*.

¹⁴ Nigeria Immigration Service, Anti-Human Trafficking Unit, Abuja, "Record of Deportations 2001 – 2004."

prostitution, as domestic servants, in restaurants or forced to work for criminal organizations as drug couriers or thieves (Netwerk, 2005). It is unclear how many of these children are victims of trafficking. Between 2005 and 2006, an international human trafficking network brought young Nigerian women into the Netherlands as unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, removed them from shelters and forced them into prostitution in various European Union countries.¹⁵

A recent study carried out by Terre des Hommes on the disappearance of unaccompanied foreign minors from institutions in four countries¹⁶ found that this problem "...is not a marginal or rare phenomenon: it is a variable but significant percentage of a given population which can reach 50% depending on the institutions or countries concerned" (Terre des Hommes, 2009;11). The organization reports that the children rarely arrive unaccompanied in a host country. While many of these children who disappear are boys between the ages of 14 and 17, they too, may fall prey to traffickers who have been known to force young male children into prostitution.

Understating the Problem

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) maintains impeccable statistics on the number of trafficked victims it assists in returning home. While these statistics provide an accurate picture of the number of victims of trafficking assisted by the organization, statistics measuring the number of victims rescued or repatriated reflect only the tip of the iceberg. IOM statistics and those generated by NGOs often report only those who seek help and thus under-represent the true magnitude of the problem.

In a study of trafficking in Southeastern Europe sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for the High Commission on Human Rights (UNOHCHR) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the disparity between the number of possible trafficked victims identified during police raids on bars and nightclubs, and those who agree to accept repatriation assistance from the IOM was highlighted.

"...the number of women and girls referred by the International Police Task Force (IPTF) to IOM reflects only a very small percentage of the women found during raids. For example, according to weekly security situation reports from the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) for November 2001, the local police and IPTF raided 10 bars and nightclubs, where they found 39 foreign women, of whom only eight requested assistance from IPRT. Moreover, in one week

¹⁵ Young girls from China, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and young Indian boys have also disappeared from a Dutch reception centre (Michaud, 2009).

¹⁶ The countries included in the study were Belgium, France, Spain and Switzerland.

18-24 February 2002, four bars were raided and 48 women found, out of whom only two requested assistance" (Limanowska, 2002).

It is impossible to determine if any of those women identified in the raids were trafficked victims too frightened to seek help, and if so, how many.

A similar pattern repeated itself in the *Sneep* case in the Netherlands. Based on police wiretaps, the police identified an estimated 120 women trafficked into prostitution by a criminal gang. They used excessive violence, including beating the women with baseball bats and then submerging them in ice cold water to prevent bruising. Only 15 women agreed to testify against their traffickers (Aronowitz, 2009a). Clearly, though, registering victims who agree to cooperate with the authorities or accept assistance and are repatriated fails to accurately identify the number of trafficked victims.

Gaps and Challenges in Data Collection

Methodological and definitional issues

As the definition of trafficking spelled out in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children¹⁷ gains international acceptance and slowly enters into national legislation, it will help provide a common basis for defining trafficking. Still, given this progress, there are a number of definitional and methodological issues still facing those attempting to generate accurate data on human trafficking. It is essential, if Governments are to accurately measure the number of persons trafficked, that data on smuggling and trafficking, and forced sexual exploitation and freelance prostitution are strictly separated – although, in practice, this has proven difficult. It is also essential that if a person is flagged as a presumed victim of trafficking and later is found not to be a trafficked victim, the registration is removed from the data collection system. Estimates in official reports should include an explanation of the methodology used and how the figures were calculated.

Failure to share data

Organizations within and between countries are often reluctant to share data and if and when it happens, it often happens on an ad hoc basis. This can be attributed to a number of reasons, among them, data protection laws in certain countries, the inability to produce reliable data, the fear of providing data on trafficking to a country in which Government (police and immigration) officials are

¹⁷ The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime can be downloaded at http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents_2/convention_%20traff_eng.pdf.

suspected of being involved in the trafficking trade or where mistrust exists between NGOs and law enforcement. This hampers cross-checking, validating and improving on the quality of data and avoiding such pitfalls as double counting.

Data linkage

Within a country it is important for data linkage with respect to the prosecution of traffickers and the processing of trafficking cases (data generated by police – prosecution departments – courts) to occur. Reports often contain information on the number of arrests of suspects, or cases sent by the prosecution department to court. Too often cases against suspects are dismissed when evidence is lost or compromised, or victims refuse to testify in court. Even large numbers of arrests often result in only small numbers of convictions. True progress will only be made when cases investigated result in arrests, are brought to the courts and result in conviction and imprisonment of traffickers. In order to gauge the progress a country is making¹⁸ in this area, it is important to *link* arrest data with court filing data/prosecutions, with actual convictions and sentences handed down.

Lack of common (international) approaches to systematic data collection

Sources of data are often incompatible. The reasons for collecting data differ between organizations, and data collected are often program-specific. NGOs and organizations such as the OSCE's Regional Clearing Point on Victims of Trafficking in South Eastern Europe and the International Organization for Migration are interested in collecting data on victims, countries of origin and victims' experiences in order to provide assistance to victims. Other organizations such as border patrol or law enforcement agencies collect data to improve operations or facilitate criminal investigations.

Further compounding the problem of data collection within a country, is the fact that many countries lack a national focal point – a national rapporteur or equivalent mechanism, or independent body – to collect and analyze data. This means that even within a country, it is difficult to obtain national figures on trafficking. An independent agency or National Rapporteur, such as those found in, among others, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden and the Czech Republic would greatly enhance the collection of data on trafficking within a country.

Limitations to a common international approach can be attributed to the differences in national legislation – countries define the act of trafficking differently (whether or not trafficking is aimed solely at commercial sexual exploitation or whether it includes other forms of sexual exploitation (forced marriage, child sex trafficking), labor exploitation or the trade in human organs.

¹⁸ A large disparity between the number of arrests and convictions will also point to problems within a country.

Gaps in knowledge concerning the crime side of trafficking

More is known about source and destination countries than actual trafficking routes. This is due in part to the fact that while source and destination countries (may) remain stable, trafficking routes change as transit countries are identified, law enforcement authorities increase investigations and arrests, and traffickers change their "travel plans". During a mission to Nigeria in 2000 to assess the problem of trafficking in women, the United Nations delegation¹⁹ was told by Embassy personnel of European Union Member States, that Nigerian traffickers used to 'visa shop' for the Embassy which imposed the fewest restrictions on the issuance of visas. When Embassies began coordinating their efforts and made it more difficult to obtain visas from E.U. countries, Nigerian traffickers began moving their victims to Benin to attempt to secure visas from the E.U. Member States Embassies in that country. When this failed, they began moving victims overland to Northern Africa (Aronowitz, 2006).

Limited information is known about the trafficking organizations. While some traffickers are arrested, and victims can provide demographic information on the persons with whom they came into contact (from the recruiter to those transporting or guiding them on their journey, to those involved in the exploitation phase), the actual nature of the organization is difficult to identify. While limited information can be obtained from victims, perhaps a more accurate picture can be drawn by analyzing police case files. In an in-depth analysis of trafficking case files from the police, the bureau of the Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings identifies three organizational forms: the solo operator, isolated criminal groups and criminal networks.²⁰ Understanding how traffickers and their networks operate is essential to preventing and disrupting the trafficking practices.

Registering Cases of Human Trafficking

A limited selection of agencies that publish national data on human trafficking are provided below.²¹ Following that, examples will be given of regional and international initiatives to collect data.

National Efforts

A number of countries register data at the national level. In the United States, the Department of Justice has funded the Human Trafficking Reporting System, an incident-based data collection system which serves as a depository for data on

¹⁹ The author of this paper was a member of the delegation.

²⁰ If one examines the distribution of these criminal organizations over the period 1998 – 2002 (n=156 cases analyzed), in 41 cases (26%), the criminal organization form can be classified as soloists, 35 (22%) can be classified as isolated criminal groups and 80 (51%) are classified as criminal networks (BNRM, 2004).

²¹ This list is not meant to be comprehensive.

human trafficking incidents investigated between January 1, 2007, and September 30, 2008. Data is provided on the number of suspects, victims, and agencies in alleged human trafficking incidents, 2007- 2008 (Kyckelhahn, et.al, 2009).

In the Netherlands, the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings is an independent office established in 2001 to monitor and to report annually on trafficking in human beings in the Netherlands. The Bureau reports on the character and scale of the phenomenon, the mechanisms that play a part in the trafficking, as well as on the development in the field and the effects of the policy adopted and pursued in this respect (Bureau of National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings, 2009).²²

The Belgian Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (*Centrum for Gelijkheid van Kansen en voor Racismebestrijding*) has, since 1995, been responsible for the "promotion, coordination and the follow-up of the policy to combat international trafficking in human beings". In addition to the collection of statistics and the publication of annual reports, the Centre is responsible for a broad range of activities to include, among others, monitoring activities of government departments, the situation in various cities and judicial districts, fostering coordination and cooperation between victim reception centers and representing victims in court.²³

Reporting on human trafficking has been the responsibility of the German Federal Criminal Police (*Bundeskriminalamt*) in Germany²⁴ and the The National Police Board (*Rikskriminalpolisen*) in Sweden.

Regional and International Initiatives

A number of regional initiatives exist. The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) has developed a questionnaire-template aimed at collecting trafficker-centered data. The questionnaire was produced in consultation with anti-trafficking stakeholders in South-Eastern Europe and was elaborated in the framework of the ICMPD Data Collection and Information Management program in South-Eastern Europe (DCIM). The template was used to collect data on traffickers in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. A follow-up of this project was carried out by ICMPD in Portugal, the Czech Republic, Poland

²² The English language website lists the National Rapporteur's seven comprehensive reports on the state of human trafficking in the Netherlands.

²³ The role of the center is defined on its website at <http://www.diversiteit.be/?action=onderdeel&onderdeel=95&titel=Rol+centrum>.

²⁴ Reports on human trafficking in Germany can be downloaded by clicking on the English language link of the Federal Criminal Police at <http://www.bka.de/>.

and the Slovak Republic. The project established a harmonized system of data collection on victims and traffickers within these four countries (ICMPD, 2009).

At the European level, the "Siamsect files" (Statistical Information and Analysis on Missing and Sexually Exploited Children and Trafficking in human beings) aimed at developing a European Union-wide template and data collection plan for the collection of data on trafficking in human beings, sexual exploitation of children and missing children. This template would allow for standardized and integrated statistical information and strategic analysis at both the national and regional level. The follow-up "Montrasec" project (Monitoring Trafficking in human beings and Sexual Exploitation of Children) developed and delivered a statistically responsible and ready-to-use IT-platform which built upon the templates developed in the Siamsect Files (IOM, 2009). These two projects will allow for the collection and comparison of data on human trafficking between Member States of the European Union.

At the international level, the International Organization for Migration has developed a set of eighteen core indicators and variables based on the IOM Screening and Assistance questionnaires. These data comprise a minimum set of victim-centered trafficking data. The IOM's Counter-Trafficking Module (CTM) database – the largest database worldwide – contains information to assist in case management of trafficked victims. As of December 31, 2008, the database contained information on 13,325 registered victims of more than 80 different nationalities, trafficked to more than 90 destination countries (Aronowitz, 2009b).

The U.S. Department of State publishes an annual *Trafficking in Person's Report* (TIP report) providing data on countries highlighted in the report. The data is obtained from various sources including foreign government officials, U.S. embassies, international organizations and NGOs, published reports, and information submitted to the Department of State's email address.²⁵ In its 2009 TIP report, the U.S. Department of State (2009) reported limited statistics, trafficking patterns and government responses in 175 countries.

Recommendations for Effective and Practical Methods for Collecting Reliable Data on Human Trafficking

Any attempt to produce reliable data on trafficking in human beings will meet with particular challenges. The following are recommendations aimed at specific aspects of collecting such data.

²⁵ The Department of State further claims that "U.S. diplomatic posts reported on the trafficking situation and governmental action based on thorough research that included meetings with a wide variety of government officials, local and international NGO representatives, officials of international organizations, journalists, academics, and survivors (U.S. Department of State, 2009; 9).

Raising awareness of the need for better data and standardizing data collection within a country

Before reliable data can be collected, a country must be convinced of the seriousness of the problem and the necessity to collect data. Media and NGO attention to the problem, the subsequent pressures they may exert and the number of victims NGOs and international organizations that are able to assist will influence whether a country believes it has a serious trafficking problem and is willing to dedicate the resources to deal with it. The importance attributed to the problem of trafficking and the resources dedicated to assisting victims, and investigating and prosecuting trafficking offenses will influence the numbers related to trafficking victims and offenders. Where political will and expertise exists to identify victims and cases of trafficking, larger numbers will be uncovered. Where services for victims are available, it is probable that more victims will come forward to be assisted.

Once the need to investigate cases of human trafficking and record its prevalence has been established, then data collection within a given country should be standardized (same definitions, methodology used for collecting data, same survey instruments used to analyze case files or conduct interviews with victims). Furthermore, one agency should be designated as the repository for data on trafficking, and all agencies within a country should be required to submit trafficking data to this agency. A database should be developed and maintained. Individuals must be trained to properly collect and record data. Data, where available, should be collected on trafficking routes, source and destination countries, persons involved in the trafficking (demographic data on victims, individual criminals and their networks) as well as the entire trafficking process (recruitment methods, use of fraudulent documentation, the markets in which victims are exploited, the nature of the exploitation, methods used to control victims), measures taken to rescue and assist trafficked victims (including the number of those who refused assistance) and the outcome of the assistance programs. Data must be linked so that it is possible to relate the number of arrests directly to the number of prosecutions. This will provide an indication of how well the criminal justice system in a country is addressing the problem of human trafficking.

Data collection must be an ongoing process in order to establish trends. Once certain elements are in place within a country (adequate legislation, trained police and immigration officials, political will and commitment to make human trafficking a priority, sufficient victim services, victim and witness protection and proper data collection), it will be possible to track trends in trafficking over time.

Attempt to uncover the dark figure of trafficking

Given the fact that many victims of trafficking refuse to cooperate with authorities or register with NGOs, it is extremely difficult to obtain an accurate count of trafficked victims. It is essential to get a clearer picture of this (large) group of victims for the purpose of producing accurate trends, defining policy and establishing prevention and victim assistance programs. One way to improve the quality of data might be for police, health authorities, labor inspectorates, municipal authorities or NGOs/IGOs which come into contact with suspected or presumed victims, to register these individuals as presumed victims, with information to support the suspicion. Victims who would fall into this "presumed trafficked victims" group might be women who enter a country on visas known to be used to facilitate the trafficking of women (entertainer visas to Japan), migrant women found working in prostitution or those unaccompanied minors in reception centers who simply "disappear". It may therefore be necessary to register known victims (those identified and accepting assistance) and those suspected or presumed of being victims (those rescued in raids on brothels, message parlors, bars and entertainment centers, on farms, in factories and domestic households, and minors or adults who disappear from reception centers after having entered the asylum procedure).

Expanding and harmonizing definitions

To truly understand the nature of human trafficking and exploitation, it is essential to expand the definition beyond that of sexual exploitation. It is of utmost importance to begin documenting cases of sexual exploitation of men and boys, labor exploitation, and the problem of trafficking within countries' borders (to include child sex tourism).

The methodology used to gather data in comparative studies on trafficking must be clearly documented and described.²⁶ Where definitions of trafficking or legislation differ, this must be clearly reported to prevent assessments based on skewed data or comparison of different phenomena.

Technical assistance to developing nations to improve data collection and registration

It is important that countries that do not have the resources to collect data be convinced of the importance and provided with the means to do so. This involves providing countries with training and the hardware to establish a database on

²⁶ An excellent example of this is the study *Research based on case studies of victims of trafficking in human beings in 3 EU Member States, i.e. Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands*, a study carried out by Payoke, Belgium, On the Road, Italy and de Rode Draad, the Netherlands. This report can be downloaded from the web at <http://www.nswp.org/pdf/HIPPOKRATES.PDF>.

trafficking. Developing countries should maintain information on traffickers and their own repatriated victims as well as victims it has repatriated. Source countries may be able to shed light on the number of persons leaving the country who may be suspected victims of trafficking and their destinations. Information should be shared with destination countries. Countries should be encouraged to standardize data reporting which could be shared with organizations such as IOM, involved in the repatriation of victims.

Harmonizing data collection instruments and (regional and international) coordination of statistics and data

An improvement could be made in the quality of data through the sharing and exchange of information on data collected, samples, methodology and survey instruments. A regional approach will provide better information on changing trends within a given area.

Regional organizations (such as the Council of Europe, ECOWAS or ASEAN)²⁷ could establish task forces to assist countries within the region to identify their needs and strengthen and standardize their data collection. Countries should be encouraged to share data in order to fill in the gaps and track trends in trafficking. Just as the OSCE's Regional Clearing Point serves as the focal point for data collection on victims of trafficking in South Eastern Europe, other regional focal points should be established to assist in the standardization and collection of data on trafficking in persons in high trafficking areas.

Just as the International Organization for Migration plays a leading role in providing standardized instruments for data collection with respect to victims, their experiences, victim service and follow-up, UNICEF and the ILO-IPEC²⁸ could play an important role in the standardization of survey instruments, methodology for data collection and research on child trafficking.

The need to identify a wider range of sources of data

Much of the data on trafficking is gathered by NGOs / organizations which provide assistance to victims or law enforcement based on investigations. Other sources of data should be explored such as Embassies which provide information, assistance and repatriation of their citizens (some of whom may be victims of trafficking). Immigration authorities may provide data on illegal departure or entry of suspected trafficking victims or the use of fraudulent documents which may be used to traffic persons. Organizations dealing with asylum seekers or unaccompanied minors can provide further data on suspected cases of trafficking.

²⁷ ECOWAS is the Economic Community of West African States; ASEAN is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

²⁸ The IPEC is the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour of the International Labor Organization.

Concluding Remarks

A number of challenges face those committed to collecting data on human trafficking. These include defining who is a victim of trafficking, distinguishing between trafficked victims and smuggled migrants, encouraging collaboration between various governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders, harmonizing definitions, avoiding double counting, and linking data.

Progress is being made in a number of countries on the collection of data on human trafficking at the national level. A number of organizations have implemented projects involving standardized instruments and harmonized data collection at the regional (ICMPD) or international (IOM) level. The Montrasec project also shows promise.

It is essential, if Governments are to implement policy and measures aimed at prevention, investigation and victim assistance, that they are aware of the magnitude of the problem as well as trafficking patterns and trends. Strategic monitoring and effective measures and policy can only be introduced when Governments are able to rely on evidence-based data.

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SUMMARY

Successful policy and measures aimed at human trafficking investigation, prevention and victim assistance require the collection of reliable data on the magnitude of the problem as well as trafficking patterns and trends. This paper examines the limitations in measuring human trafficking and how statistics usually over- or underestimate the phenomenon. Methodological and definitional issues and a failure to share and link data contribute to the knowledge gap and challenges to the collection of reliable data. The paper briefly addresses successful national, regional and international efforts at data collection and provides recommendations for effective and practical methods to enhance the collection of reliable data.

RÉSUMÉ

Une politique efficace et des mesures propres à l'enquête de la traite des êtres humains, à la prévention et à l'assistance aux victimes exigent la collecte de données fiables sur l'ampleur du problème ainsi que sur les caractéristiques du trafic et les tendances. Ce document examine les limites dans l'évaluation de la traite des êtres humains et la façon dont les statistiques en général sur- ou sous-estiment le phénomène. Les questions de méthodologie et de définition et l'absence de partage des données contribuent à disperser les connaissances, la collecte de données fiables constituant un défi. Le document aborde brièvement des efforts nationaux, régionaux et internationaux réussis de collecte de données et fournit des recommandations pour des méthodes efficaces et pratiques destinées à améliorer la collecte de données fiables.

RESUMEN

El éxito de las políticas y de las medidas dirigidas a la investigación de la trata de seres humanos, la prevención y asistencia a las víctimas requiere de la recolección de datos fiables sobre la magnitud del problema, así como de los patrones y tendencias del tráfico. El presente trabajo examina las limitaciones en la medición de la trata de personas y cómo las estadísticas suelen sobreestimar o subestimar el fenómeno. Cuestiones metodológicas y de definición y un fracaso en el intercambio y conexión de datos contribuyen a la falta de conocimientos y desafíos para la recogida de datos fiables. El trabajo aborda brevemente los eficaces esfuerzos nacionales, regionales e internacionales en la recopilación de datos y proporciona recomendaciones sobre los métodos eficaces y prácticos para mejorar la recopilación de datos fiables.