

The Root Causes of Trafficking and Unsafe Migration

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Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, my dear sisters and brothers engaged in eliminating human trafficking, as an *“open wound on the body of contemporary society..”*¹ It is a great honor and privilege to join this strategic meeting, which hopefully will advance ongoing efforts, not only in the Asian region but throughout the world. Given the complex phenomenon of human trafficking and of forced unsafe migration, I am fully aware of the impossibility to capture all the root causes in a short period of time. However, I am confident that our joint reflection and sharing during this international conference will equip us to become more effective in our actions.

Root Cause 1: Extreme poverty and unequal access to enjoy basic human rights to education at all levels, decent work and housing, and the physical, social, and spiritual conditions that help children to thrive and adults to provide adequately for themselves and their families. Those living in such situations easily become more vulnerable to human trafficking or to desperately seek unsafe migration routes

UNICEF’s 2019 *Report on the State of the World’s Children* and other statistical reports on child wellbeing and survival, report that:

- At least one in three children is not getting the nutrition they need to grow well, particularly in the crucial first 1,000 days – from conception to the child's second birthday – and often beyond.
- At least 175 million children –are not enrolled in pre-primary education during these vital years, deepening inequalities and missing a critical investment opportunity.
- The 2019 global Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) from the UN Development Programme (UNDP), shows that, in the 101 countries studied – 31 low income, 68 middle income and 2 high income – 1.3 billion people are “multidimensionally poor”(which means that poverty is defined not simply by income, but by a number of indicators, including poor health, poor quality of work and the threat of violence).
- Over half of the 1.3 billion people identified as poor, some 663 million, are children under the age of 18, and around a third (some 428 million) are under the age of 10.²

In speaking about different causes of human trafficking, Pope Francis calls our special attention to *“... the first place of poverty, underdevelopment and exclusion, especially when combined with a lack of access to education or scarce, even non-existent, employment opportunities.”*³

¹ Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the International Conference on Combating Human Trafficking, 10 April 2014.*

² New UN poverty report reveals ‘vast inequalities’ between countries,
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/07/1042231>

³ Pope Francis, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace: No Longer Slaves but Brothers and Sisters*, 8 December 2014.

Root Cause 2: Lack of Birth Registration and other important documents

- The recent report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic issued this alarm: *“Girls and boys also face **considerable obstacles related to documentation** and are vulnerable to exploitation through child labor or child marriage, often as a result of the death or disappearance of male parental figures. Crucially for their long-term prospects, a huge number of children have missed out on years of education and are currently out of school. This status quo will affect the ability of boys and girls to exercise their basic rights in innumerable ways as they grow older.”*⁴
- The lack of such documentation prevent access to vital services often forces migrant and refugee children and adults to seek the services of smugglers and traffickers to reach their destinations, to be reunited with family members, or to accept indecent or exploitative work situations.
- *One in four children under age 5 (166 million), on average, are not registered in the world today since parents often are deterred from applying for such necessary documentation because of high costs and complicated bureaucratic procedures imposed by public offices;*
- *Similar challenges are faced by those migrants and refugees who do not have access to their academic diplomas or certificates for professional or other specialized skills training;*
- *The Vatican’s “Twenty Points” document, Towards the Global Compacts on Migrants and on Refugees 2018, “encourages States ... to adopt policies that require the registration of all births, providing each newborn with a birth certificate”*
- *and “to enact legislation that enables the recognition, transfer, and further development of the formal skills of all migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in the host country;*
- My own organization, International Catholic Migration Commission/ICMC, in fact, is redoubling its efforts to encourage birth registration and to prevent child marriage among the Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghan refugees whom it serves in Jordan and Pakistan.

Root Cause 3: Fixation of business almost exclusively on amassing more money and profit easily leads to the commodification and exploitation of people which, in turn, could result in vulnerability of poor and marginalized people to human trafficking.

- The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reports that:
 - More than 20.9 million people around the world are considered the victims of forced labor;
 - This type of labor is estimated to generate at least \$150 billion per year of illegal profits in the private economy worldwide (ILO).
 - Human trafficking occurs with the collusion of corrupt officials with criminal gangs. Addressing human trafficking and corruption jointly is more effective than addressing these two issues individually.⁵

⁴ *They have erased the dreams of my children: Children’s Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic*, Conference Room Paper of the Independent International Commission on the Syrian Arab Republic, for presentation to the 43rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council, 24 February to 20 March 2020, UN Document, *A/HRC/43/CRP.6*

⁵ <https://www.oecd.org/gov/ethics/human-trafficking.htm>

- Pope Francis warns: *“There is a sociological fact: organized crime and the illegal trafficking of human beings choose their victims among people who today have little means of subsistence and even less hope for the future. To be clearer: among the poorest, among the most neglected, among the most discarded.”*⁶
- For the past two years, ICMC has coordinated a multi-faceted research project, in partnership with a large number of Catholic-inspired organizations and the International Labor Organization, on “The Future of Work: Labor after *Laudato Si*” which examines, through primary research and collection of good practice models, ways to prevent exploitative, indecent and corrupt labor practices that often are linked to abuses of human trafficking, corruption, and exploitation of the most vulnerable people in society.

Root Cause 4: The Demand Side. The Vatican’s *Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking* points to the “different areas in which the victims of human trafficking work or operate (agriculture, domestic work, prostitution, etc.)” and points out that “consumers constitute a huge mass who seem largely unaware of the exploitation ... yet enjoy the benefits” of the services provided by trafficked persons.

- The UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, noted in a 2013 report to the UN Human Rights Council: *“Demands for sexual exploitation, for cheap labour and domestic workers, for organ removal and sale, for illicit adoption and forced marriages, for criminal activities or begging, or for the exploitation for armed groups, all constitute substantial contributing factors to human trafficking”*;⁷
- Pope Francis is even more challenging: *“Certainly there is a lot of ignorance on the topic of trafficking. But sometimes there also seems to be little will to understand the scope of the issue. Why? Because it touches close to our conscience; because it is thorny; because it is shameful. Then there are those who even knowing this, do not want to speak because they are at the end of the ‘supply chain’ as a user of the ‘services’ that are offered on the street or on the internet.”*⁸
- ICMC works to prevent human trafficking among the vulnerable group of refugees and migrants in irregular situations by providing job training that leads to access to decent jobs or to starting their own small businesses and by maintaining “safe spaces” for socialization and learning among women and child refugees who are survivors of sexual and/or gender-based violence.

I conclude by citing once again the words of Pope Francis, who has been such a driving force, for the Church and for all people of good will, to confront the root causes of human trafficking with persistence and determination, and, with the grace of God, to put Christ’s gospel into action: *“Let us not pretend and look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone!”*⁹

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⁶ Pope Francis, Video Message to the Participants in the International Forum on Modern Slavery, 7 May 2018.

⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Demandfostershumantrafficking.aspx>, 2 July 2013.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Dialogue with Participants in the World Day of Prayer and Reflection and Action on Human Trafficking*, 12 February 2018.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, #211.