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Trafficking in Zimbabwe

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# Introduction

Human trafficking is a grave global problem that affects millions of people worldwide. It is estimated that 11.7 million people are exploited in Asia, 3.7 million in Africa, 1.6 million in Europe, and 3.4 million in other areas. Human trafficking is the recruitment and movement of individuals using deception and coercion for exploitation. Victims, including men, women, and children, are trafficked across international borders and within countries for exploitation in forced sex work, domestic servitude, and various industries- including fishing, agriculture, construction, or forced criminal acts. Human trafficking is a multi-dimensional threat, as it deprives fundamental human rights and freedoms and fuels the growth of organised crime networks. The impact of human trafficking is devasting, leaving people to suffer through physical and emotional abuse, rape, threats against themselves and their families, passport theft, and even death. Nevertheless, the ramification goes beyond the immediate victims as human trafficking undermines the safety and security of all nations it touches.

Zimbabwe is among the countries facing the challenges of human trafficking, serving as a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children mainly subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. Men and children are predominately subjected to forced labor in agriculture and domestic servitude. At the same time, women are especially vulnerable to being trafficked for sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, forced marriage, domestic servitude, and other forms of forced labor. Human trafficking is destroying many people's lives, especially young and juvenile women. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a collective effort from all sectors of society to fight the vice.



Zimbabweans trapped in Turkey as labor and sex slaves



# **Background**

The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimate that approximately 27.6 million people will be trapped in forced labor in 2021. The deteriorating socio-economic conditions and widespread poverty is the predominant cause of trafficking. The World Bank estimates that extreme poverty in Zimbabwe has risen over the past few years, from 33.4% of the population in 2017 to 40% in 2019. Projections indicate that poverty levels will continue to rise in 2020 to between 6.6 million and 7.6 million people, leaving about half of the population in Zimbabwe to live on less than \$1.90 per day.

Traffickers exploit vulnerable individuals, particularly women, subjecting them to domestic servitude, forced labor, and sex trafficking in destinations like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. There have been reports of Zimbabwean women being lured to China and the Middle East under pretences of employment, where they are prone to trafficking. Other cases show traffickers attracting Zimbabwean students to Cyprus and elsewhere with promises of education via scholarship schemes, only to have them susceptible to forced labor and sex trafficking. In search of better opportunities, many Zimbabwean adults and children migrate to South Africa with the assistance of taxi drivers who transport them to the Beitbridge border or nearby unofficial crossing locations, and traffickers take this opportunity to exploit these victims. Some migrants are transferred to criminal gangs that subject them to abuse, including sex trafficking in cities like Musina, Pretoria, Johannesburg, and Durban.

# **Problems Raised**

#### Forced Labor

Forced labor is met when traffickers recruit, harbor, transport, provide, or obtain an individual for labor or services through threats of force, debt manipulation, pay withhold, confiscation of identity

documents, psychological coercion, reputational harm, use of addictive substances, threats to other people, or other forms of coercion. Due to worsened economic conditions by the pandemic, undocumented victims increasingly travel to South Africa for employment, where their lack of legal status hinders proper job



A boy carries a bucket of river sand searching for gold



opportunities and increases their vulnerability to traffickers. Refugees and asylum-seekers face similar challenges as they are not permitted bank accounts and experience difficulties obtaining identification documents, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking.

Some Zimbabwean men, women, and children in South Africa are subjected to months of forced labor without pay, on farms, at construction sites, in factories, mines. Forced laborers are exposed to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse and various means of coercion to induce work in unsafe or otherwise undesirable conditions. Traffickers exploit Zimbabwean adults and children in sex trafficking and forced labor, including cattle herding, domestic service, and mining in the gold and diamond sectors. In South Africa, traffickers exploit Zimbabweans for labor in agriculture, construction, factories, mines, information technology, and hospitality businesses. Syndicates operating in South Africa recruit undocumented Zimbabwean migrants with promises of legitimate employment in mining and force them into labor in the illegal mining industry.



Children prospect for gold in the Odzi River, Marange, eastern Zimbabwe

There is no limit on the location or type of industry, so traffickers can commit this crime in any sector or setting, whether legal or illegal, including but not limited to agricultural fields, factories, restaurants, hotels, massage parlors, retail stores, fishing vessels, mines, private homes, or drug trafficking operations. Domestic servitude is a form of forced labor where victims are coerced to work in a private residence. Such circumstances create unique vulnerabilities since domestic workers are often isolated.

At the same time, their employer controls their access to food,

transportation, and housing, and whatever happens in the private residence is hidden from the world – including law enforcement and labor inspectors – resulting in barriers to victim identification. Foreign domestic workers are particularly vulnerable due to language and cultural barriers and the lack of community support, so perpetrators exploit these conditions to coerce domestic workers with minimal risk of detection.

Traffickers often target children because they are more vulnerable. Although some children may legally engage in certain forms of work, forcing or coercing children to work remains illegal. Some indicators of forced child labor include situations in which the child appears to be in the custody of a nonfamily member, and the child's work financially benefits someone outside the child's family, or the denial of food, rest, or schooling while working. Due to pandemic-induced school closures and worsening economic conditions, observers reported that child sex trafficking and child labor increased, particularly in agriculture, domestic service, informal trading, begging, and artisanal mining. More than 71 percent of child labor occurs in the agriculture sector, such as tobacco, sugarcane, and cotton farms, and in the

forestry and fishing sectors, where children weed, spray, harvest, and pack goods. Children aged 9 to 14 work as nannies, housemaids, and gardeners in urban areas and mining communities; some employers force children to work by withholding wages and denying them access to school. Children are subjected to forced labor in the agricultural and mining sectors and are forced to carry out illegal activities, including drug smuggling.

Traffickers exploit child laborers to work as gold panners and ore couriers by providing inadequate compensation, stealing their income, exacerbating food insecurity, and forcing them to take drugs to perform strenuous tasks. Near gold and diamond mines, the chances of traffickers forcing children to sell illicit drugs increased during the pandemic, with thousands of children having joined illegal diamond mining syndicates in the Marange fields in Chiadzwa since March 2020. Furthermore, some syndicates transport the victims at night to disorient potential victims and prevent them from escaping the mine. Armed gangs known as "Mashurugwi" deceive young men into abandoning gold mines through promises of self-employment but force them to work in the artisanal gold mines with threats of violence and death.

Family members often recruit children from rural areas for work, exposing them to domestic servitude or other forced labor. Some children, particularly orphans, are commonly lured with promises of education or adoption. There were cases of Zimbabwean students who were sent to Cyprus with false promises of education via scholarship schemes but then deceived into forced labor.

# Sex Trafficking

The crime of sex trafficking is met when a trafficker recruits, harbors, transports, provides, obtains, patronizes, or solicits another person for commercial sex, often accompanied by threats of serious harm, psychological torment, reputational impairment, and debt manipulation. Sex trafficking can occur in various places, such as private homes, massage parlors, hotels, brothels, or online platforms.

Traffickers often use false promises of legitimate employment opportunities through social media and messaging applications to lure Zimbabweans into sex trafficking and forced labor in neighboring



countries, particularly South Africa and the Middle East. Zimbabwean women are captivated by exploitative labor situations in agriculture, construction, information technology, and hospitality, mainly in neighboring countries, where they become victims of forced labor.

A trafficking survivor walking with her case manager and social worker

During the pandemic, hundreds of children were found to be sexually trafficked near mines, where miners forced girls - as young as 11 years old- into coercive relationships, sexually taking advantage of them in exchange for money, food, and water.

Another joint recruitment way is through promised marriage, wherein victims are forced into domestic work upon entering the marriage. When recruited for exploitation, their passports would be confiscated, leaving them trapped and unable to escape. Several traditional practices also expose young girls to forced labor and sex trafficking, such as trading daughters for food, money or using them as "replacement" brides for a deceased family member.

# Psychological Harms

The experience of human trafficking can cause many severe and long-lasting psychological effects on victims. Possible psychological effects of human trafficking include depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or even suicidal ideation. The risk of developing a mental health disorder as a victim of trafficking may be influenced by multiple factors, such as the experience of trauma or abuse, duration of exploitation, degree of violence, and the extent of restrictions on movement while being trafficked. Victims may find it challenging to evaluate and change their circumstances realistically, have trouble thinking clearly and making decisions, find it challenging to generally perform as they navigate their fears and worries, avoid any triggers or reminders of the traumatic events, and trust new people and situations. These effects may lead to maladaptive behaviors and mental health concerns as victims struggle to cope with their traumatic experiences independently.

The type of violence endured during the trafficking plays a role in shaping the psychological impact. Sexual violence is mainly associated with PTSD, while physical violence is positively associated with anxiety symptoms. A United States study claimed that 71% of trafficked individuals had high rates

of depression, and 61% had symptoms of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD). Another research in England found that 78% of women and 40% of men trafficked experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms. Women in a trafficking situation cannot predict or manage events that affect their health and safety, such as when they work or sleep, what they eat, how many and which clients they accept, or whether they are using protection



Women trained as community health workers

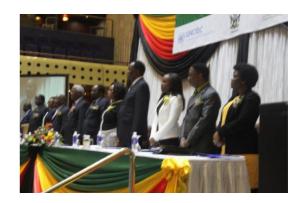
during sexual exploitation use. This "unpredictability" and "uncontrollability" intensify their psychological reactions to abuse. Injuries and sexual violence during trafficking were associated with higher levels of PTSD, depression, and anxiety. For example, a study from Israel reported that 79% of migrant sex workers had depression symptoms, and 17% had symptoms of PTSD. Trafficked victims urgently need psychological support services but are not getting enough proper counseling or assistance. This lack of support would further worsen their suffering or hinder their ability to recover and rebuild their lives.

# **International Actions**

Prosecution, Protection, and Prevention

The Government of Zimbabwe has taken a significant step in the fight against human trafficking by launching a Trafficking in Persons (TiP) National Plan of Action (NAPLAC) to fight against human trafficking and to implement its obligations under the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish

Trafficking in Persons. The Protocol is the legal framework on which governments build their domestic policy prescribing the 3Ps' of Prevention, Protection, and Prosecution as the pillars of anti-trafficking. In addition, a fourth "P"—for partnership—is a complementary means to achieve progress across the 3Ps and enlist all segments of society in the fight against human trafficking. This 3P action prioritizes strengthening tools for Identifying victims of trafficking, which is the baseline for measuring an adequate response.



The Government of Zimbabwe launching a Trafficking in Persons (TiP) National Plan of Action (NAPLAC)

Vice President Mnangagwa noted that the launch of the TiP NAPLAC demonstrates the government's commitment to fighting human trafficking and protecting its citizens, especially children and women who are most at risk of trafficking.

# **Key Players**

The United States of America

The United States government has taken a strong stance on the global fight against human trafficking, making it a policy priority on a global scale. It employs approaches to hold human traffickers accountable, protect victims, and prevent crime. In 2017, the Departments of State and Labor and the U.S. Agency for International Development spread headed over 120 international counter-human-trafficking projects across more than 40 countries. They have worked on preventing human trafficking through public awareness, outreach, education, and advocacy campaigns, protect and assist victims by providing shelters as well as health, psychological, legal, and vocational services, and prosecute human trafficking

by providing training and technical assistance for law enforcement officials, such as police, prosecutors, and judges. In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly, President Bush raised the issue of human trafficking and asked world leaders to work together to end it. The State Department is working extensively with governments on action plans for prevention, protection of victims, and prosecution.



President George W. Bush signs the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005

Combating human trafficking requires a comprehensive, multidisciplinary effort. Within government, this means the participation and coordination among agencies with various responsibilities, including criminal enforcement, labor enforcement, victim outreach, and services, public awareness, education, trade policy and promotion, international development and programs, customs and immigration, intelligence, and diplomacy. The National Action Plan outlines a three-year comprehensive approach to combat human trafficking, including actions to strengthen the prosecution of traffickers, enhance victim protections, and prevent crime from occurring within our borders and abroad. The Department of Justice has focused on increasing the number of trafficking victims rescued and the number of prosecutions and convictions of traffickers. Congress has passed legislation enabling the prosecution and sentencing of Americans who sexually prey on children abroad can be prosecuted and sentenced to as many as 30 years in prison. The Department of Health and Human Services certifies trafficking victims to qualify them for assistance available to refugees. The U.S. provides money worldwide for training centers, special housing shelters, medical personnel, and social workers for victims. The Departments of Labor and Homeland Security, The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and other government agencies are executing action plans to combat human trafficking. Congress last year strengthened anti-trafficking legislation and provided more than \$70 million in funding worldwide for efforts to end slavery.

Middle Eastern Countries

Some Middle Eastern nations serve as destination countries for human trafficking. While some countries of the Middle East recognize these forms of trafficking, most legal systems of these countries have not yet specifically criminalized all forms of trafficking, nor do they provide any protection or assistance to victims of trafficking.

Women and children are brought to these countries under the guise of legitimate employment,

only to find themselves in forced prostitution later. Many, particularly women and children, are exploited in various sectors such as agricultural and domestic work, prostitution, and even military (e.g., child soldiers). More than 200 women and girls from Zimbabwe have fallen prey to false advertising for high-paying jobs in Kuwait and other Arab states in the Middle East, only to find themselves being victims of human trafficking and subjected to slavery and



Workers from Sierra Leone denied access to passports and subjected to sexual abuse

sexual abuse by their employers. Employers often hold the domestic servants' passports and other travel documents, thus preventing them from leaving their jobs for other work or returning home.

Often, women are lured to get a job in middle eastern countries with the visa costs and airfare paid, but when they get there, they are put to work as a housemaid. Zimbabwe's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the embassy was getting around ten calls daily from Zimbabwean maids asking for help to escape their employees. However, the maid's issue has escalated unprecedentedly, from only fifteen maids to hundreds. Reports show that domestic servants must work twelve to sixteen hours a day with little or no pay as employers retain 80 to 90 percent of the workers' wages, are rarely given free time, are malnourished and often abused verbally and physically, and suffer from sexual exploitation. Some employers also monitor and confine the workers, who are often in poor health due to inadequate nutrition and healthcare. Out of fear, domestic servants often do not complain or report cases of sexual exploitation or abuse to the appropriate authorities. Another case involves some forms of marriage in Middle Eastern countries that have been used to legitimize prostitution and other sexual exploitation. Most notably, the Islamic institutions of early marriage and temporary marriage have been questioned as amounting to the exploitation and abuse of women.

Children, however, are trafficked to countries of the Middle East to serve as camel jockeys and are often placed into situations of compulsory or forced labor in slave-like conditions, which are frequently accompanied by physical abuse. Reports indicate that parents sell their children as young as in exchange for as little as \$500 or are kidnapped and taken to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf States, where camel racing is popular among the wealthy. Underfed children maintain a low weight, which causes them to often fall off the camels, resulting in severe injuries and even death.

### **Possible Solutions**

# Law Enfoncement

In order to effectively combat human trafficking, it is crucial to implement comprehensive measures in line with the 2000 UN TIP Protocol. One key aspect is amending the existing anti-trafficking law to criminalize all forms of trafficking, providing a solid legal framework for prosecution. Moreover, allocating sufficient resources to the anti-trafficking national action plan is essential to ensure its successful implementation. Specialized training must be provided to law enforcement, labor inspectors, prosecutors, and judiciary officials, emphasizing the importance of a victim-centered approach in investigations and prosecutions while distinguishing trafficking from other violations. States must also invest in training relevant officials to prevent trafficking while considering human rights, gender-sensitive issues, and cooperation with non-governmental organizations. Proactively identifying trafficking victims among vulnerable populations and providing them with appropriate services through the national referral mechanism is crucial.

Additionally, fostering international cooperation through mutual legal assistance treaties and information sharing with foreign governments will enhance the collective fight against trafficking in persons. Addressing the root causes of vulnerability to trafficking, such as poverty, underdevelopment, and lack of equal opportunity, and discouraging demand for exploitation through legislative and educational measures will also contribute to the effectiveness of the anti-trafficking efforts.

# Raising Awareness

Increasing public awareness about the risks and signs of human trafficking is critical to any anti-trafficking strategy. Effective public awareness and outreach efforts can lead to the detection of human trafficking cases, ultimately helping to prevent human trafficking. The media plays an enormous role in shaping perceptions and guiding public conversations about human trafficking. Using social media platforms can raise awareness about human trafficking, using the following hashtags: #endtrafficking or

#freedomfirst. Another was to film an investigative documentary about human trafficking and uploading on social media for people to view and learn how modern slavery exists today.

An example would be the DOJ's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) Faces of Human Trafficking, a video series that includes information about sex and labor trafficking, effective victim services, victims' legal needs, and the voices of survivors.



The DOJ's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) Faces of Human Trafficking

Investigation of Crimes

Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, including complicit government officials and individuals who purchase commercial sex from children, through adequately funding law enforcement and developing the capacity to conduct thorough investigations using enhanced evidence collection. Vigorously investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, including complicit government officials; formalize procedures for identifying victims and referring them to the care of appropriate government or NGO service providers. Law enforcement, immigration, or other relevant authorities of States Parties shall, as appropriate, cooperate by exchanging information under their domestic law to enable them to determine: whether individuals crossing or attempting to cross an international border with travel documents belonging to other persons or without travel documents are perpetrators or victims of trafficking in persons; and the types of travel document that individuals have used or attempted to use to cross an international border for trafficking in persons; and the means and methods for trafficking in persons, including the remitments and transportation of victims, routes and links between and among individuals and groups engaged in such trafficking, and possible measures for detecting them.

# Support for Victims

To protect victims of trafficking persons, especially women and children, from revictimization, there should be the establishment of safe houses for trafficking victims in each province and shelters for trafficking victims in each province and actively refer identified victims to care.

Human trafficking survivors require trauma-informed healthcare and are culturally sensitive to their needs. Mental health care services such as counselling should also be provided to trafficked patients. Survivors will require careful risk assessments and safety planning, so all relevant medical team members should be aware of the patient's history, health, and social needs, and the need for follow-up while maintaining strict confidentiality of patient information. Patients may also need assistance accessing social, financial, and legal support, as well as help with techniques to regulate emotions and cope with dissociation.



UGANET staff provides counselling support to survivors

# Glossary

Asylum Seekers



A person who has been forced to leave their own country because they are in danger and who arrives in another country asking to be allowed to stay there

#### Coercion

The action of making somebody do something that they do not want to do, using force or threatening to use force

### Compensation

Something, especially money, that somebody gives you because they have hurt you, or damaged something that you own; the act of giving this to somebody

# Comprehensive

Including all, or almost all, the items, details, facts, information, etc., that may be involved **Couriers** 

A person or company whose job is to take pack

# Deception

The act of deliberately making somebody believe something that is not true

# **Deteriorating**

To become worse

# **Exploitation**

A situation in which somebody treats somebody else in an unfair way, especially in order to make money from their work

#### Lure

To persuade or trick somebody to go somewhere or to do something by promising them a reward Ramification

One of a number of complicated and unexpected results that follow an action or a decision Servitude

The condition of being a slave or being forced to obey another person

# *Syndicate*

A group of people or companies who work together and help each other in order to achieve a particular aim

#### **Torment**

Extreme pain, especially mental pain; a person or thing that causes this

#### **Transit**

The process of being moved or carried from one place to another



Vice

Criminal activities that involve sex or drugsa

Vulnerable

Weak and easily hurt physically or emotionally



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