



Human Trafficking & Supply Chains - part 1

Goods produced through the forced labour of trafficked people all too often end up in corporate supply chains. The sale of these goods generate huge profits for Human Traffickers and for those along the supply chain who trade, transport, distribute and sell them.

FORCED LABOUR - Definition

Forced labour, or “labour trafficking,” is the range of activities involved when a person uses force, fraud, or coercion to obtain the labour or services of another person.

The “acts” element of forced labour is met when the trafficker recruits, harbours, transports, provides, or obtains a person for labour or services.

The “means” element of forced labour includes a trafficker’s use of force, fraud, or coercion through -threats of force, debt manipulation, withholding of pay, confiscation of identity documents, psychological coercion, reputational harm, use of addictive substances, or other forms of coercion.

The “purpose” element focuses on the perpetrator’s goal to secure labour or services. There is no limit on the location or type of industry.

All three elements are essential to constitute the crime of forced labour. A victim need not be physically transported from one location to another for the crime to fall within this definition.

2021 Trafficking in Persons Report



Forced Labour is common in Palm-Oil production
©Craig Morey, Flickr CC

A GLOBAL PROBLEM

Globally, twenty-five million people are in forced labour (not including sex trafficking). They generate \$43.4 billion per annum for the governments, corporations, businesses and individuals who abuse and deny the rights of these human beings. These profits sustain demand for Human Trafficking.

In June 2021 the US Department of Labour published a list of “*Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*”. It identifies 156 items from 77 countries. These range from valuable minerals, such as gold and cobalt, through to cotton, palm-oil and everyday food items such as fish, coffee, chocolate, sugar and many others.

Further along the supply chain these are converted into products such as clothes, jewellery, electronic goods

Some of the many Products of Forced Labour



or are used as ingredients or to make components (e.g. minerals such as Coltan in Mobile-phones) in many of the common products distributed around the world that are sold through shopping outlets or on-line. Forced labour is used in mining, farming, harvesting, transporting, manufacturing, distributing and selling goods.

At all stages, from raw material to finished product, the labour of trafficked people may be used to reduce costs and so increases the profits that accrue not only to the traffickers but to all who participate in the supply chain right up to the retailer.

How the products of trafficked persons travel through supply chains.

Chocolate: Forced and child labour is used to harvest Cocoa beans in South America and West Africa. These are exported to producers who turn them into chocolate products which are distributed and sold to consumers in in Europe and the US.

Batteries: Cobalt is mined by forced labour in Central Africa and exported to factories in China. They refine the cobalt and use it to produce batteries which are exported to America and Europe where they are used in the manufacture of electric vehicles sold both to western consumers and exported around the world.

Soap and Cosmetics: Malaysia and Indonesia produce the majority of the world's Palm Oil, often using with child or forced labour. This Oil is exported and processed as ingredients in manufacturing Soap and Cosmetics. American and European consumers use the resulting soaps, detergents and cosmetic products.

SUPPLY CHAIN ABUSE

While human trafficking and profiting from it are crimes usually hidden from public view, the goods produced by victims forced labour move freely through the supply chains that facilitate commercial distribution all around the world. The fact that supply chains are global and complex helps to mask and "launder" the production, distribution and sale of goods tainted

by forced labour. This abuse of supply chains is widespread and it is deliberately exploited by traffickers and unscrupulous traders to hide their activities and generate profits in countries all around the world including Ireland.

WHY

IS IT SO EASY FOR
TRAFFICKERS TO PROSPER
THROUGH FORCED LABOUR?

LACK OF AWARENESS

Most use of forced labour occurs in geographical locations far from where the finished goods are sold and at the lower end of supply chains, for example in extractive activities such as mining, farming and fishing. It is also common in many manufacturing activities, e.g. in the garment industry. However, use of slave labour further up supply chains, for example in the retail trade, happens far less frequently. As a result the link between Human Trafficking and the goods on sale is hidden. Members of the public are therefore, unaware and unwittingly buy these goods.

For example, they do not know that, that the chocolate they buy may be made from Cocoa beans harvested by slaves in West Africa or that the cotton T-shirt they bought was produced in a factory using forced labour in Asia.

LACK OF GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

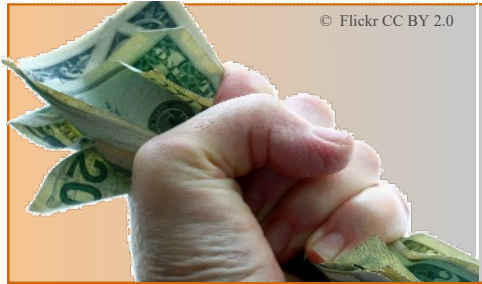
A second reason that allows the distribution and sale of “trafficked goods” is that state policies and legislation do not prevent this from happening.

Current EU policies and legislation do not hold corporations accountable for human rights abuses in their supply chains. Neither do they require that the raw materials or goods imported have been extracted or produced by trafficked labour.

By omission this is a structural injustice that facilitates the profiteering that in turn sustains the demand for slave labour and the trafficking of human beings.



Coltan Mining - Angola
Negga, Wikimedia Commons



in on the wealth and buying power of consumers. Online shopping has further magnified demand and it also facilitates the anonymous sale and distribution of goods produced by the forced labour of trafficked people.

All the above are reasons why goods produced through the labour of trafficked persons travel so easily through supply chains and are widely available.

GREED

Some big corporations, suppliers, high-end fashion brands and retailers to either knowingly ignore human rights abuses, to turn a blind-eye to protect their profits or to deem themselves not responsible for what happens outside their orbit of control further down their supply chains.

The bottom line is that their availability and sale generate the billions which motivate and sustain Human Trafficking.

CONSUMER DEMAND

This is another major driver of human trafficking. The wish for cheap goods, fast fashion and unending choice has created a huge opportunity for producers, manufacturers and for traffickers to cash-

The next Justice Briefing **Human Trafficking & Supply Chains - Part II** will look at measures needed to combat and disrupt supply chain abuse that sustains Trafficking.



“Pope Francis attaches enormous importance to the plight of the millions of men, women and children who are trafficked and enslaved. They are among the most dehumanised and discarded of people in the modern world and all over the world.

Human trafficking, he says, is an *“atrocious scourge,”* an *“aberrant plague”* and an *“open wound on the body of contemporary society.”* ...

“We are facing a global phenomenon that exceeds the competence of any one community or country,” and therefore, *“we need a mobilization comparable in size to that of the phenomenon itself....”*

The above is an abridged quotation from **Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking** published in 2019 by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.