

## CHILD TRAFFICKING — GENERAL

The United Nations defines child trafficking as, “the act of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation regardless of the use of illicit means, either within or outside a country,” (UNICEF, 2006).

Sexual exploitation is the most visible and reported form of exploitation of trafficked children. It is commonly associated with organized criminal bodies which make billions of dollars annually from operating escort agencies, residential brothels, and distributing child pornography.

### Risk factors for child trafficking

Statistics vary, but around the world children aged 12-17 years are identified as a major at-risk group for trafficking for sexual exploitation. Children in this group are often socially and/or economically vulnerable.

Several UN studies indicate that children may be lured into child trafficking when they are falsely promised financial gain or “a better life” in another country. Many of these children have very limited opportunities for legal migration and come from situations of:

- Extreme poverty
- Unemployment
- Lack of education
- War and conflict situations

### Statistics

Statistics on child trafficking are hard to determine due to the underground nature of the industry and reluctance of victims to come forward. There is also a lack of uniformity in the international community on how to identify and gather information on victims and offenders.

In 2002, the United Nations estimated that 1.2 million children were trafficked each year for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

From 2004-2006, the United States Department of State estimated that each year:

- 600,000 - 800,000 people were trafficked across international borders
- 80% of those were expected to be women and girls
- 50% were expected to be younger than 18 years of age

In Canada, the RCMP estimates that 1,300 missing Canadian children are trafficked annually for sexual activity. Aboriginal girls represent a disproportionate share of this figure.

## Challenges in helping victims

The stigma associated with sexual exploitation and prostitution prevents many victims from coming forward. They are often intimidated, abused and threatened by their traffickers, isolated because of language barriers, and scared to seek help from law enforcement because they have been moved into a new country illegally. They may feel that they have no option but to continue to be sexually exploited.

In 2006, the UN released *Guidelines on the Protection of Child Victims of Trafficking*. This document encourages countries to grant child victims the right to protection whether they are nationals or non-nationals, and puts forth a presumption of minority for victims whose age may be hard to determine due to a lack of identity documents.

## Sources

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