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### Human Trafficking in Eastern Europe

Human Trafficking is defined as the illegal and non consensual movement of people from one place to another by means of fraud, corruption, abduction, or deception for the purpose of exploitation. This exploitation can come in the form of prostitution, forced labor, slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs. While we know the magnitude of this problem is great, we are unaware of just how many people are affected by it. Tens of hundreds of people are abducted from less privileged countries -- and even highly privileged countries -- every year, forced into a servitude from which there is no escape. The people who are targeted are typically women and children, those that are less prepared to take care of themselves and who maintain a low social and legal status. More often than not, victims of human trafficking are first and foremost seen as illegal immigrants by governments, and typically get deported back to their home country before receiving the help that they need (Konrad, 43). The people affected by this issue the most are those from underprivileged countries, especially those with economic instability and civil and political unrest. The chaos in these areas make it easy for smugglers to work within the country undetected. That is not to say that it doesn't occur in countries that are stable, just that it happens more frequently in these countries with copious amounts of turmoil. We have many different organizations trying to stop these many underground operations, but it is too big of an issue to

handle alone. It is important for everyone to be aware of this issue, as it can affect anyone anywhere around the world.

Eastern Europe is a prime example of a part of the world with much political and economic instability. Because of this chaos, it is easier to recruit people for “work” than it would be in a more stable country, such as Canada. This part of the world has carried many destination, transit, and source countries alike, resulting in a large amount of people migrating in search of work or a safe place, and a large amount of those people being tricked into servitude.

The United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) holds the only international legal instrument addressing human trafficking as a crime: The Trafficking Protocol. Its purpose is to prevent and combat trafficking, assist its victims, and promote cooperation among nations to achieve these goals. Because traffickers are often people who the victims trust, a relative or a close friend, the UNODC creates videos and public service announcements to bring awareness to the issue (UNODC). Awareness for the victims is crucial, especially when it could potentially save their lives.

NGOs in many countries of origin do their best to help women and children seeking help on their return. In Bulgaria, these NGOs meet the women at the airport and provide them with immediate life basics: food, emergency housing, water, first aid, and psychological assistance (Tzvetkova, 61). They provide shelters for escapees to stay, so the women know they aren't alone in their fight. They have people working and trying to better their situations. One drawback of these NGOs is in the area of illegal immigrants and women that participated in illegal prostitution. If the women do not want to be sent back to their home country, then they are afraid to go to any of these organizations or a police station. The NGOs cannot support those who are

undocumented. Many of these women are afraid to seek help, because if they go back they will inevitably be stuck in the loop of human trafficking again. This is an extremely helpful thing for the government to do for survivors, but what about those that are still stuck in the loop?

Bosnia has had much strife in the last few years regarding the state of their country. There have been numerous corrupt government officials, a civil war, and now the refugee crisis in Syria. Refugees migrating are seen as easy targets for recruiters; they are already in distress, so they may not think clearly or about the future, just about being safe now. Because of this, the levels of organized and unorganized crime have risen sharply, and with it, the rate of children being exploited. Teenage girls are typically trafficked for sexual exploitation, while younger girls and boys are put to work on the streets -- forced to beg and execute hard labor for no profit. Several international treaties were created to help solve this issue, including the Palermo Trafficking Protocol. This describes general protections that children have to protect them against some trafficking laws, such as being deported back to their home country (Rosga, 262). This means that the children that are a part of this vicious cycle have the chance to start a new life, away from the harsh conditions and the recruiters in their home country, and out of that dreadful loop.

David Feingold, an international coordinator for Trafficking Projects for UNESCO Bangkok, corrected some myths surrounding human trafficking. He explains that while focusing on the sex trading aspect of human trafficking can inspire people to act, it is not the largest form of exploitation there is. That title belongs to forced labor, especially in children. Many children feel that they have no way out of a bad situation, especially if they are orphaned or living in extremely poor conditions, as many refugees are. These children, being naive as they are,

continue to be tricked by relatives or close “friends” who they believe have their best interest at heart. Children do not know many of the horrors of the world, so it is all too easy for them to become a victim to trafficking.

Another point that Feingold makes is that solutions to this issue do not come as easy as they seem. Many may make the argument that tightening borders will decrease the flow between countries, and therefore decrease the amount of trafficking done. This is false. People believe this because quite a few politicians have used this excuse in the past to create tighter borders and prevent immigrants from coming in when they are in need (such as the Syrian refugees). The idea that this would decrease the amount of trafficking is a nice idea, but it isn't as simple as that. If border security is increased, people will turn to third parties to smuggle them in and out of the country to try to find a better life. In many cases, they find a life of servitude and enslavement.

Solving this global issue is going to take a lot of work. This is not a simple endeavor. Finding and obliterating all of the underground operations that run in the world is a monumental task that requires scores of people and knowledge, as well as a healthy political environment to foster a community that makes it nearly impossible to eradicate the problem completely. That being said, there are still steps I believe we can take to make this world a safer place for all, beginning with awareness. The UNODC has made great strides in attempting to bring awareness of the issue, but many still do not know, especially victims. If they can spot the signs of a recruiter, they can help themselves before they get into trouble.

I think it is important to realize that these are people's lives. Children are being taken from what they know, and sold into some sort of servitude, be it sex or labor. Many countries have agreed to treaties defining human trafficking, and some have gone to the extent of trying to

protect some of its people, but this is close to all they do. All over the world this is a big issue, it just does not come up in a heated debate because it is a sneaky, underlying issue. The crime rings that organize this try to stay out of sight, they instill fear into the victims so they don't try to escape. People are living like this, in fear, in terrible conditions, sick and afraid. Bringing awareness to an issue is something that everyone can participate in, even without power or connections in the government. Like Feingold explained, sex trafficking is the most well known, and brings about the most awareness, but what if we tried a little bit harder as good people and made it known that forced child labor is actually the largest form of exploitation? As human beings, we can relate to the horrors we would not want to be put through, but these children are living in it. They are brutally beaten and raped while being transported, and then are forced to work against their will. Many of these children don't ever make it out, and it seems as though we have done very little to change that. Bringing awareness is the first step, actively changing laws and saving people comes next.

Overall, Human trafficking is terrible, awful, and happens all around the world. Changing policy is a daunting task, and it may not do much in the end. But, if we are acting as a unit, as the human race, we can help to stop this unlawful, dreadful experience that so many people must endure.

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