



THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Certain industries face particularly high environmental risks, including agriculture, fishing and aquaculture, logging, and mining. Workers in these sectors also face risks; the use of forced labor has been documented along the supply chains of many commercial sectors. Exploitation of both people and natural resources appears even more likely when the yield is obtained or produced in illegal, unregulated, or environmentally harmful ways and in areas where monitoring and legal enforcement are weak.



AGRICULTURE (CROPS AND LIVESTOCK)

Unsustainable agricultural practices around the world are a major cause of environmental degradation. The manner in which land is used can either protect or destroy biodiversity, water resources, and soil. Some governments and corporations are working to ensure that the agricultural sector becomes increasingly more productive, and also that this productivity is achieved in an environmentally sustainable way. Alongside the movement to protect the environment from harm, governments must also protect agricultural workers from exploitation.

Agriculture is considered by the International Labor Organization to be one of the most hazardous employment sectors. Particular risks to workers include exposure to harsh chemicals and diseases, work in extreme weather conditions, and operation of dangerous machinery without proper training. Moreover, many agricultural workers are vulnerable to human trafficking due to their exclusion from coverage by local labor laws, pressure on growers to reduce costs, insufficient internal monitoring and audits of labor policies, and lack of government oversight.

As documented in this *Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report* over the years, adults and children are compelled to work in various agricultural sectors around the globe.

For example:

- Throughout Africa, children and adults are forced to work on farms and plantations harvesting cotton, tea, coffee, cocoa, fruits, vegetables, rubber, rice, tobacco, and sugar. There are documented examples of children forced to herd cattle in Lesotho, Mozambique, and Namibia, and camels in Chad.
- In Europe, men from Brazil, Bulgaria, China, and India are subjected to forced labor on horticulture sites and fruit farms in Belgium. Men and women are exploited in the agricultural sectors in Croatia, Georgia, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom.
- In Latin America, adults and children are forced to harvest tomatoes in Mexico, gather fruits and grains in Argentina, and herd livestock in Brazil.
- In the Middle East, traffickers exploit foreign migrant men in the agricultural sectors of Israel and Jordan. Traffickers reportedly force Syrian refugees, including children, to harvest fruits and vegetables on farms in Lebanon.
- In the United States, victims of labor trafficking have been found among the nation's migrant and seasonal farmworkers, including adults and children who harvest crops and raise animals.

FISHING AND AQUACULTURE

The 2012 *TIP Report* highlighted forced labor on fishing vessels occurring concurrently with illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, which threatens food security and the preservation of marine resources. Vessels involved in other environmental crimes, such as poaching, may also trap their crews in forced labor. Testimonies from survivors of forced labor on fishing vessels have revealed that many of the vessels on which they suffered exploitation used banned fishing gear, fished in prohibited areas, failed to report or misreported catches, operated with fake licenses, and docked in unauthorized ports—all illegal fishing practices that contribute to resource depletion and species endangerment. Without proper regulation, monitoring, and enforcement of laws governing both fishing practices and working conditions, criminals will continue to threaten the environmental sustainability of oceans and exploit workers with impunity.



In recent years, a growing body of evidence has documented forced labor on inland, coastal, and deep sea fishing vessels, as well as in shrimp farming and seafood processing. This evidence has prompted the international advocacy community to increase pressure on governments and private sector stakeholders to address the exploitation of men, women, and children who work in the commercial fishing and aquaculture sector.

Reports of maritime forced labor include:

- In Europe, Belize-flagged fishing vessels operating in the Barents Sea north of Norway have used forced labor, as have vessels employing Ukrainian men in the Sea of Okhotsk.
- In the Caribbean, foreign-flagged fishing vessels have used forced labor in the waters of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.
- Along the coastline of sub-Saharan Africa, forced labor has become more apparent on European and Asian fishing vessels seeking to catch fish in poorly regulated waters. Traffickers have exploited victims in the territorial waters of Mauritius, South Africa, and Senegal, as well as aboard small lake-based boats in Ghana and Kenya.
- In Asia, men from Cambodia, Burma, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, China, India, and Bangladesh are subjected to forced labor on foreign-flagged (largely Taiwanese, Korean, and Hong Kong) vessels operating in territorial waters of countries in Southeast Asia, the Pacific region, and New Zealand.

LOGGING

One out of five people in the world relies directly upon forests for food, income, building materials, and medicine. Yet laws to protect forests are often weak and poorly monitored. Illegal logging has led to forest degradation, deforestation, corruption at the highest levels in governments, and human rights abuses against entire communities, including indigenous populations. Human trafficking is included in this list of abuses. While some governments and civil society organizations have voiced strong opposition to illegal logging and made pledges to protect this valuable resource, the international community has given comparably little attention to the workers cutting down the trees, transporting the logs, or working in the intermediate processing centers. At the same time, the serious problem of workers in logging camps sexually exploiting trafficking victims has garnered insufficient attention.

There is a dearth of documented information on working conditions of loggers and the way the logging industry increases the risk of human trafficking in nearby communities.

Recent reports of trafficking in this sector include:

- In Asia, victims have been subjected to labor trafficking in the logging industry. For example, Solomon Islands authorities reported a Malaysian logging company subjected Malaysians to trafficking-related abuse in 2012. Burmese military-linked logging operations have used villagers for forced labor. North Koreans are forced to work in the Russian logging industry under bilateral agreements. Migrant workers in logging camps in Pacific Island nations have forced children into marriage and the sex trade.
- In Brazil, privately owned logging companies have subjected Brazilian men to forced labor.
- The Government of Belarus has imposed forced labor on Belarusian nationals in its logging industry.

MINING

Mining—particularly artisanal and small-scale mining—often has a negative impact on the environment, including through deforestation and pollution due to widespread use of mercury. The United Nations Environmental Program estimates that the mining sector is responsible for 37 percent of global mercury emissions, which harm ecosystems and have serious health impacts on humans and animals. In addition to degrading the environment, mining often occurs in remote or rural areas with limited government presence, leaving individuals in mining communities in Latin America, Africa, and Asia more vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking.



Examples of human trafficking related to the mining industry include:

- In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, a significant number of Congolese men and boys working as artisanal miners are exploited in debt bondage by businesspeople and supply dealers from whom they acquire cash advances, tools, food, and other provisions at inflated prices and to whom they must sell mined minerals at prices below the market value. The miners are forced to continue working to pay off constantly accumulating debts that are virtually impossible to repay.

- In Angola, some Congolese migrants seeking employment in diamond-mining districts are exploited in forced labor in the mines or forced prostitution in mining communities.
- A gold rush in southeastern Senegal has created serious health and environmental challenges for affected communities due to the use of mercury and cyanide in mining operations. The rapid influx of workers has also contributed to the forced labor and sex trafficking of children and women in mining areas.



- In Guyana, traffickers are attracted to the country's interior gold mining communities where there is limited government presence. Here, they exploit Guyanese girls in the sex trade in mining camps.
- In Peru, forced labor in the gold mining industry remains a particular problem. In 2013, a report titled, *Risk Analysis of Indicators of Forced Labor and Human Trafficking in Illegal Gold Mining in Peru*, catalogued the result of interviews with nearly 100 mine workers and individuals involved in related industries (such as cooks, mechanics, and people in prostitution). It traces how gold tainted by human trafficking ends up in products available in the global marketplace, from watches to smart phones.

NEXT STEPS

Governments, private industry, and civil society have an opportunity to push for greater environmental protections in tandem with greater protections for workers, including those victimized by human trafficking. Additional research is needed to further study the relationship between environmental degradation and human trafficking in these and other industries. It is also essential to strengthen partnerships to better understand this intersection and tackle both forms of exploitation, individually and together.