

CIVILIAN SECURITY, DEMOCRACY, AND HUMAN RIGHTS



THE LINK BETWEEN EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES AND SEX TRAFFICKING

Extractive industries involve the removal of non-renewable raw materials such as oil, gas, metals, and minerals from the earth. Although communities can benefit from such industries by using these natural resources for sustainable development, their extraction has also “triggered violent conflicts, degraded the environment, worsened gender and other inequalities, displaced communities, and undermined democratic governance,” according to the UN Development Program. Furthermore, mining, drilling, and quarrying activities often occur in relatively remote areas with minimal infrastructure and limited rule of law, leading to the development of makeshift communities, such as mining “boom towns,” that are vulnerable to crime.

Forced labor in extractive industries has been well-documented; however, the link between these industries and sex trafficking is increasingly an issue of grave concern among governments and advocates alike. Bolivian and Peruvian girls are subjected to sex trafficking in mining areas in Peru, and women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking near gold mines in Suriname and Guyana. NGOs have reported continued commercial sexual exploitation of children related to mining sectors in Madagascar. In some areas, this exploitation involves organized crime. For example, in Colombia, NGOs report organized criminal groups control sex trafficking in some mining areas.



Any discovery of raw materials will necessarily lead to a large influx of workers and other individuals, some of whom will create a demand for the commercial sex industry. In Senegal, a gold rush resulted in rapid migration from across West Africa; some of these migrants are women and children exploited in sex trafficking. Likewise, in the oil industry, individuals are sometimes recruited with false promises of work opportunities, but instead are exploited in the sex trade. Service providers in areas near camps surrounding large-scale oil extraction facilities, such as the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota, report that sex traffickers are exploiting women in the area, including Native American women.

Sex trafficking related to extractive industries often occurs with impunity. Areas where extraction activities occur may be difficult to access and lack meaningful government presence. Information on victim identification and law enforcement efforts in mining areas can be difficult to obtain or verify. Convictions for sex trafficking related to the extractive industries were lacking in 2014, despite the widespread scope of the problem.