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FOREWORD
Florian Schmitz

Slavery seems to be a concept of the past, at least from a Western perspective. As a matter of fact, though, slavery remains a thriving business. This report will take a closer look at how the modern slave trade works; who is benefiting; what networks are being used; who the victims are; and who the people are that manage to lure human beings into renouncing their rights and gradually disappearing into a market of forced labour. The authors will highlight a fully functional global network and zoom in on two locations that play a symbolic role in modern slavery: The United Arab Emirates and Southeast Europe. Why, however, should this specific topic gain more attention globally?

In a globalized world, the theory and implementation of universal human rights oftentimes collide with national interests and create a fundamental conflict for the Western world in how to deal with economic partners regarding the practical commitment, specifically to labour rights. For the European Union, this creates a moral conundrum. The state bloc is herefore, the reliability of supply for the industrial complex as well as basic consumer goods?

inviolably bound to international human rights conventions that not only constitute the moral foundation of so-called ‘European values’, but also result in the actual implementation of certain human rights standards through a complex system of laws and regulations, ratified by all 27 member states.

The reality of upholding these values and laws, however, has been criticized starkly by human rights organizations and the media. The main critique is that lawmakers seem to ignore systematic human rights violations for the sake of economic benefit, or that fundamental problems that have been addressed and communicated don’t lead to a change of agenda, neither regarding breaches of the law within the state bloc nor in terms of the consequences in the handing of political and economic partnerships with non-EU countries. Questions are being raised as to how far strict European legislation is compatible with the economic and political reality of a globalized world. Can the idea of universal human rights be upheld, or does it compromise the economic systems and, t
In an economically globalized world, trade and supply chains are intertwined beyond borders and legislation. They create systems of interdependencies that, in many cases, seem to weigh heavier than the commitment to the basic, universal rights and well-being of individuals or groups crucial to these systems. Countless examples can be given to put a face to this dilemma: The strong economic relations between the EU and China, a country internationally criticized for its strict and repressive agenda on freedom of speech and press, labour rights, and the structural persecution and internment of the Uyghur minority. Germany, for instance, is one of the strongest economies in the world and is crucial for the economic well-being of Europe. Its foreign trade policy, though, focuses intensely on China and the country’s cheap labour and exploitative industrial agenda. Human rights activists and the media have criticized the German leadership for ignoring the pressing human rights issues in China for the sake of trade. And more than that, the German car and chemistry industry, both pillars of the country’s economy, depend on the Chinese market, both in terms of imports and exports.

At the same time, Berlin has been criticized for not importing enough from countries within the European Union, where production is more expensive, due in part to better conditions for workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many factories, located in Germany, to decrease or even stop production due to the interruption of the supply chain, caused by the industrial shortages in the Chinese market. Voices are becoming louder to reduce this dependence and focus on European markets, not only for the sake of keeping production going and strengthening Europe as an independent industrial complex but also on account of the countless human rights violations in China. Beijing’s opportunistic economic philosophy, the disastrous situation regarding human rights, and its strong ties with Moscow lead us to another example: the dependence of the European market on Russian gas, that, despite sanctions imposed on Moscow by Brussels and Washington as a reaction to the war in Ukraine, leaves a powerful ace in the hand of Russian President Vladimir Putin. This report aims to shed light on another pressing issue, oftentimes forgotten by the Western public, modern slavery and the abuse of migrant workers, with both a focus on the UAE and the role of Eastern European countries as highly efficient hubs of human trafficking.

The war in Ukraine and the dilemma around Russian gas underlines the urgent necessity to deal with this issue in the UAE. Germany’s Minister of Economy, Robert Habeck, a member of the Green Party, recently travelled to Dubai
to tackle the possible energy crisis, caused by the expected shortage of Russian gas. The media described his visit as that of a petitioner in need of fossil fuels, rather than a European statesman making human rights a basic condition for trade. This report shows both sides of the coin: the continuity of fundamental problems for migrant workers, who are crucial for the country’s economy, and the failure of the international community to draw serious consequences out of the well-known mistreatment of migrant workers to push the UAE government to structurally improve their rights.

The problem, however, is multilayered and needs to be seen in the fact that the UAE is an economically thriving country, undergoing a massive growth in population since its independence in 1971, holding a stable position in the global economy, and home to countless regional offices of highly influential, multinational corporations. The new role of cities like Dubai or Abu Dhabi at the international level, and the rapid development in all areas also show on a cultural level; the country was to host the EXPO in 2020 and is home to various global sporting events. The UAE is a sanctuary for the wealthiest members of global society with modern cities and a world of service and entertainment fitting the solvent population, creating a bubble, in which the prevailing Sharia law is cancelled out by the well-filled wallets of international visitors.

The report analytically displays how far both growth and lifestyle have been structurally built on the back of migrant workers, whose rights have been systematically abused or made impossible to exercise. It sheds light on the extent of the continuous supply of workers from foreign countries, luring people, who live under dire economic conditions, into believing that working in the UAE will improve their lives and will enable them to provide for their families back home. This system works by exploiting the despair of migrant workers in their countries of origin, bypassing existing laws, and reducing the responsibility of the government to conduct and oversee the necessary procedures.

The report leaves no doubt about how severe the working conditions are and gives a startling idea of how many people are affected. The EXPO 2020 alone needed more than 40,000 workers. According to the report, 90 per cent of Dubai’s
3.44 million inhabitants are migrants. The World Bank speaks of 88.4 per cent of the country’s population. Most of them come from southeast Asian countries, mainly India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. They are predominantly male and hired as cheap hands for construction, transportation and service. The report points out, however, that the number of women is increasing as well, with many hired as domestic workers. All of them serve the country’s growing need for a massive force of cheap labour, comprised of migrants in vulnerable positions and with a poor educational background.

Every so often, the media in the Western world criticize the dire conditions under which migrant workers in the UAE suffer. This report mentions construction workers who live in overcrowded containers with insufficient sanitary facilities. They are fenced in and are not allowed to leave the premises. They suffer both from excruciating heat and extreme cold. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the conditions for workers were not adapted to the health requirements. Specifically, the construction industry comes with severe hazards that are not being met with sufficient protection for the workers, resulting in injuries or even lethal accidents. Furthermore, the report places special emphasis on women who work in private households. It is clearly stated that living under the same roof with their employer makes them an easy target to be exploited and deprived of their rights. In many cases, their passports are taken away and they work up to 21 hours a day, seven days a week. The domestic worker becomes a prisoner at the mercy of her employer. The media has been reporting cases of sexual and physical abuse, and even cases of suicide due to despair and hopelessness.

The report traces these grievances back to a common pattern: the so-called kafala, a system of sponsorship that regulates work migration in the UAE. Companies and private individuals issue work agreements for migrants that are binding. Despite various reforms at the legal level, which allegedly improve the position of migrants, kafala reduces official government involvement and control to a minimum. It becomes clear how the rights and legal claims of the migrant worker disappear in an economic system of dependence, in which the individual is not sufficiently informed of their rights or on how to enforce them, and, more importantly, in which a network of private employment agencies put the migrant worker in a spiral of debt by charging excessive service fees. The result is that the individual works for a fraction of what they were promised to pay off their accumulated debt.

These circumstances are well known among the international community. The report, however, leaves no doubt that, despite occasional
outrage, also expressed by institutions such as the European Parliament, too many powerful people seem to benefit from this structural and exploitative system. The moral lip service on the political level comes without any practical course of action, that would apply enough pressure on the relevant stakeholders to actually improve the living and working conditions of migrants in the UAE.

Giving detailed information on the systematic exploitation of migrant workers in the UAE, the report does not fail to shed light on what can only be described as a global system of slavery that exists well beyond the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia. On the contrary, the report draws attention to the poverty in post-Soviet states and the economic despair that drives potential victims into the clutches of slave traders. It describes how former public servants found themselves unemployed after the fall of the iron curtain, pursuing opportunities to make a living within the world of organized crime. While the report mentions non-EU-members such as Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova as countries of origin of trafficked people, countries within the state bloc play an important part in the network of the slave trade as well, namely Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Poland.

The report attends to each country and describes the degree of human trafficking and the forms of modern slavery that occur. The victims are characterized not only by poverty but, also, as the report underlines, by traumatic experiences. Many people who get entangled in the web of modern slavery, especially when it comes to sexual exploitation, have been abused before in their lives and are more vulnerable to recruiters who promise them economic improvement. Shockingly, it oftentimes seems to be a person of trust close to them, even a relative, who serves as the door opener into forced sex labour – even when it comes to adolescents and children. As for non-sexual work, the report states that a person of trust puts them in touch with an agency that takes care of all required formalities before departure to countries like the UAE. As mentioned before, indebtedness starts in the country of origin. In order to pay for the high service fees collected by the agencies, victims oftentimes borrow money from relatives or professional money lenders at disproportionately high interest rates. From there on, it is almost impossible for the victim to break out of the spiral of debt.

The report, however, does not only provide a vast quantity of numbers and a general perspective on how the modern slave trade works, it also takes a look at the multiple faces of traffickers themselves. Who initiates contact? What kind of personality can engage an individual into piling up a high amount of debt and leaving their lives behind, despite the fact
that many victims are aware of forced labour? The report sheds light on the fact that recruiters don’t fit a certain profile, and neither do they focus on a certain kind of personality. Recruiting is described as an interpersonal process of deception, in which the recruiter can be either a man or a woman, and a member of all social and racial groups. And, vice versa, they don’t look within a certain group of people, but rather, build a relationship of trust with the victim, create an emotional rapport, and find the weak spot within the victim’s personality in order to attack. They promise financial benefit and safety. The report states that, while personal contact remains the main initiator for the recruiters to engage with their victims, the internet has been proven useful as well. Advertisements seek to provide a certain level of professionalism and integrity, while social media is a popular medium for recruitment, too. The goal, however, is to isolate the victim from the outside world and use financial obligations or distortion as means of structural intimidation.

The report offers a detailed overview of the system of modern slavery. It unveils a complex system of decentralized organized crime that functions beyond borders and manages to utilize existing networks, bypass legal obligations, and is lucrative due to the ever-growing demand. The report depicts a system that not only depends on, but much rather flourishes in the deeper layers of global trade, under the eyes of the international community. While the Western world seems to look at modern slavery as somewhat of a problem that concerns countries outside of European or American jurisdiction, the report manages to clarify, that the modern slave trade is a reality also within the European Union, even more so, that countries in Eastern Europe play an integral part as places of recruitment and transit. It becomes clear how various, internationally ratified human rights conventions are being levered out, or even used to provide an acceptable political surface, that allows for international partnerships and countless business arrangements, without, however, the proper implementation of laws that would contain modern slavery.

The report comes at a time in which political developments raise fundamental and ever-recurring questions on how far the ideals of human rights, mainly represented by the Western world, can withstand economic
dependencies. Is a global economic system in which the gap between the (extremely) rich and poor has grown exponentially, compatible with human rights? And, even more so, how credible is the position of the Western world in terms of the protection of individuals trapped in forced labour, while maintaining economic relations with countries like the UAE, which offer a lawless haven for the right amount of money? These are questions that arise out of the observations of a report, which tackles one of the most underrated issues of our times: Are we willing to pay the price for our belief system of universal human rights? This report painfully reminds the reader of how far Western countries play their part in the modern slave market and keep the system alive. At the same time, geopolitical developments show how frail Western economies are when replenishment from Russia, the Persian Gulf or China ceases. Therefore, this report needs to be understood in light of a different question: How far do we follow our very own interests by enforcing universal rights even beyond our jurisdiction?
I. EASTERN EUROPE’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE NOTORIOUS TRADE FOR DUBAI’S WEALTHIEST

Karina Iskandarova

Introduction

Since antiquity, conquered people were forced into becoming servants or sex slaves. In the 21st century, every country in the world has been affected by human trafficking in one way or another: whether as a country of origin, transit or destination for victims. With the invention of modern transportation like cars, buses, planes, trains and boats, traffickers transfer victims from one continent to another easier than ever. Millions of women, men and children are, every day, trafficked from one country to another, living in fear of violence from those who have purchasing power. Most people at one point in their lives have come across a human trafficking victim in one way or another; you may have come across a beggar on the streets, a nail specialist, a construction worker or a cook. Most of us could not have predicted that these individuals were trafficked and are now working under coercion, fear and threats against them or their families back home. Every decision comes from a place of need. A need for survival, financial stability and a better life. Trafficking victims arrive in a country with the hope of a better future.

Many hold the belief that victims often come from impoverished backgrounds, with no education or family structure. However, this is not entirely true; traffickers do not discriminate based on gender, race, social demographic, immigration or economic status. Anyone is at risk, but certain populations have a higher vulnerability risk. When human trafficking occurs from less developed countries to more developed countries, people are found to be most vulnerable to trafficking by virtue of poverty, conflict or other conditions. To put it into numbers, an estimated 24.9 million victims are trapped in modern-day slavery.1 In Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union has been one of the main contributing factors in explaining the stable supply of human trafficking from Eastern Europe to countries like the UAE.

The UAE is considered to be the third-richest country in the world with a $43,103 GDP per capita. Eastern European countries, particularly those that were significantly affected by the Soviet Union’s downfall,

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1 Human Trafficking by the Numbers-source: https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/human-trafficking-numbers
are amongst the poorest today. Countries like Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Belarus are considered some of the poorest countries in Europe with an annual $3,540-7,900 GDP per capita. The UAE is promoted as an exotic paradise with numerous job opportunities for Eastern Europeans. Yet, no one discloses the real dark side of the glorified country with endless opportunities; the side of modern-day slavery that goes unpunished, trapping millions from all over the world. That is why, raising awareness regarding human trafficking is crucial and everyone can and should be part of the solution by learning more about human trafficking, recognizing the signs and reporting it. Therefore, this report aims to provide the reader with greater knowledge regarding human trafficking, the human trafficking situation in the UAE and recommendations that can tackle such a dark phenomenon.

**Definitions**

- **Trafficking** is the act of buying or selling people, or of making money from work they are forced to do.
- **Sex trafficking** is a modern term. It was coined during the second wave of the women’s movement in the 1980s when female activists started protesting the exploitation of women and girls in prostitution and pornography.²

According to the US Department of Justice Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000: “Sex trafficking involves the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person forced to perform such an act is under the age of eighteen years old,”³

- **Labour trafficking** is “the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labour or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, hereditary debt bondage or slavery”.⁴
- **Forced labour** is “all work or service exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily”.⁵
- **State Imposed Forced Labour (SIFL)** refers to “work exacted by the public authorities, military or paramilitary, compulsory participation in public works and forced prison labour”.⁶

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³ Human Trafficking Defined - source: https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking
⁴ Human Trafficking Defined - source: https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking
Statistics and historical overview of trafficking from Eastern Europe

Statistics of human trafficking on a global level

Estimates of human trafficking seem to indicate that it is the second biggest source of illicit profits after the drugs trade. Human trafficking alone earns billions in profits a year from commercial sexual and labour exploitation for traffickers.⁷ According to a 2017 report from the International Labour Organization (ILO), a staggering 40 million people have been trafficked worldwide, with 3/4 trafficked for exploitation.⁸ Out of these shocking numbers, 71 per cent of trafficking victims globally are women, 20 per cent are men and 34 per cent are children (19% girls, and 15% boys).⁹ Based on the International Labour Organization, 16 million (64%) are exploited for labour (i.e., construction, mining, domestic work), 4.8 million (19%) are sexually exploited and 4.1 million (17%) are exploited in state-imposed forced labour (2017).¹⁰

Whilst 19 per cent of victims are trafficked for sex, sexual exploitation earns 66 per cent of the global profits of human trafficking.¹¹ What makes matters worse, of the estimated number of forced labour victims worldwide, only a few cases are prosecuted globally.

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Human trafficking in the post-Soviet states

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, millions of people in Soviet countries were found distressed and hopeless. The Soviet economy had been stagnant for two decades with a lack of reform and growth as Russia relied for years on foreign trade with other Soviet countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Political and economic instability such as inflation and unemployment caused an overall degradation of peoples’ living standards. This sudden structural change had a negative impact on the post-Soviet states, especially on the most vulnerable, women and children. In particular, the collapse upended economic systems and relations throughout Eastern Europe which, in turn, led to increased poverty and crime. The notorious Russian mafia, which had struggled to survive during the height of communism, emerged to become a local, national and international player in crime business and politics; with more gangs emerging in the black market to exploit the unstable governments of their former states.

During the Soviet era, the region experienced less human trafficking by crime groups; however, state-controlled prostitution was a large problem with most of the prostitutes controlled by the KGB.\textsuperscript{12} Prostitution was an unfavourable profession as it was viewed as a revolting way to profit under capitalistic ideologies and unemployment was not as common under communist rule. Although sex services were still available at the time of the Soviet Union, the availability was scarcer, and prostitution would survive as an underground business.

As the fall of the Soviet Union was approaching, economic decline and increasing poverty were significant contributors to trafficking. Unemployment along with food scarcity were at their highest levels, with women and children affected the hardest in the downtrodden economy, becoming vulnerable to being preyed upon by traffickers, who offered seemingly better opportunities elsewhere.\textsuperscript{13} Desperation to provide for their families and make ends meet would make them turn towards one of the few opportunities offered to them: prostitution. Even worse, government infrastructure ranging

\textsuperscript{12} Unique aspects of human trafficking in Eurasia: \url{https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/unique-aspects-human-trafficking-eurasia}

\textsuperscript{13} The Russian connection: How Russia became a leader in the world’s human trafficking market: \url{https://stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6299&context=etd}
from basic public utilities to police services mostly evaporated during the collapse. Government payroll services almost completely disappeared, with ex-KGB officers, police officers and former Soviet army soldiers flooding the mafia’s ranks in search of steady employment with human trafficking becoming a lucrative source of income.¹⁴ Now trafficked victims would be sent all over Western Europe, America, the Middle East and Asia, far from their home and unable to rely on the support of friends or family. A fraction of victims would work locally in brothels, private parties and on the streets. Alone in this situation with limited societal support, victims had no other option but to depend on their traffickers who had no interest in their wellbeing.

It is undeniable that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a massive contributor to modern-day slavery, making Eastern Europe one of the largest suppliers of sex workers. The post-Soviet economy failed to provide for its citizens, making its population desperate for a better quality of life. But it is crucial to understand that for any trafficking to occur there needs to be a supply and a demand, and the policies of the post-Soviet era generated both a supply of potential victims and a supply of criminals to operate in the trafficking business. The Soviet Union itself did not create a demand for human trafficking, as it was always a global phenomenon, but post-Soviet policies did nothing to curtail the demand that existed within the Soviet Union and throughout the world. Rampant corruption among government officials, law enforcement officers and passport officials in the region only exacerbated the problem of labour and sex trafficking.¹⁵ According to the World Bank database of World Development Indicators, mid-1990s poverty rates in Eastern Europe were above 20 per cent in some countries (e.g., Moldova, Poland and Romania) and above 30 per cent in others (e.g., Russia and Ukraine). Although it is hard to find statistics on the rates of individual or family poverty that are comparable across countries, economic data from the UN and the World Bank suggest a link between trafficking patterns and economic decline¹⁶.

**Trafficking supply numbers in Eastern Europe**

The collapse of communism that began in 1989 provided new resources, geographical and human for the sex trade, increasingly incorporating women from Eastern Europe. The largest number of trafficked people comes from former Soviet countries such as Ukraine, Belarus, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Hungary and Poland.¹⁷ The main destinations outside of Europe for these victims include the Middle East,
Japan, Thailand and North America. Arab states like the UAE, account for 1 per cent of all victims. In Europe, traffickers are frequently not nationals of the country where they operate, in contrast to some other regions. More than half are from Bulgaria, Romania, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the largest source countries for trafficking victims. Though the extent of trafficking in women and its geographic routes have changed in the last one hundred years, its structural causes and organization remain remarkably stable. Then, as now, traffickers used promises of marriage to recruit women and girls; others assured them of domestic service or entertainment work abroad. “Whatever the particularities of the recruitment method, there has been no shortage of individuals ready to benefit from the availability of women and girls: from traffickers who have sold them, to brothel madams/pimps who have kept them in debt bondage, to local policemen who have had financial and other interests in keeping the brothel system alive and well.” The boundaries between trafficking, prostitution and forced labour migration are often blurred, but trafficking always involved deception and coercion, whether at the point of departure when women are recruited or when they arrive at their destinations.

**Bulgaria**

Bulgaria is mainly a country of origin for victims of human trafficking, and, to a lesser degree, a country of transit and destination with the prevalence of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, mainly involving women and girls. Bulgaria remains one of the primary source countries of human trafficking in the EU with an estimated 32,000 people living in modern slavery. Reports indicate a rise in the number of cases of women and girls from marginalized communities forced to marry third-country nationals. Traffickers exploit Bulgarian men and boys in forced labour conditions across Europe, predominantly in agriculture, construction and the service sector. Government corruption in law enforcement and the judiciary continues to enable trafficking crimes, and officials have been investigated for suspected involvement in trafficking.

**Romania**

Romania remains predominantly a country of origin, a transit and destination for victims of trafficking, with the majority of those identified being sexually exploited, regardless of the destination of

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19 Trafficking Women after Socialism: from, to and through Eastern Europe: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/312-trafficking-women-after-socialism-to-and-through-eastern-europe
20 EU Commission Together Against Trafficking in Human Beings: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-countries/bulgaria_en
21 Global Slavery Index Romania: https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/data/country-data/romania/
exploitation, whether domestic or transnational. Sexual exploitation, including child pornography, accounted for 72 per cent of the victims of trafficking identified in 2020.\footnote{EU Commission Together Against Trafficking in Human Beings: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-countries/romania_en}

The Global Slavery Index shows that Romania, with an estimate of 86,000 victims,\footnote{Global Slavery Index Bulgaria: https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/data/country-data/bulgaria/} has one of the highest rates of modern-day slavery in Eastern Europe and most victims experience sexual exploitation. Furthermore, modern-day slavery is common in the following sectors including agriculture, construction, car-washing and housekeeping.

**Belarus**

Belarus is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour. The Global Slavery Index shows that Belarus has an estimated 103,000 victims\footnote{Global Slavery Index Belarus: https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/data/country-data/belarus/} living in modern slavery. Belarusian victims are primarily subject to trafficking to Russia and Belarus, as well as to Poland, Turkey and other countries in Eurasia and the Middle East. Some Belarusian women travelling for foreign employment in the adult entertainment and hotel industries are also subject to sex trafficking. Unemployed men with the hope of finding a better job are also subject to labour trafficking.

**Poland**

Poland is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children subject to forced labour and sex trafficking. The Global Slavery Index shows that Poland has an estimated 128,000 victims\footnote{Global Slavery Index Poland: https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/data/country-data/poland/} living in modern slavery. According to the US Department of State “for the fifth consecutive year, authorities did not convict any traffickers under the trafficking statute”.\footnote{2018 Trafficking in Persons Report-Belarus: https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3e0ba54.html} In Poland, women and girls are trafficked from further east—Russia, Ukraine, Belarus—to and through Poland. Polish women are themselves trafficked primarily to Western Europe.

**Ukraine**

Ukraine is recognized as a country of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking. Its geographic position makes the country accessible for human trafficking rings moving to and from Russia, Moldova and Belarus. The most at-risk groups among Ukrainian nationals are those from rural areas, particularly

\footnote{2018 Trafficking in Persons Report-Belarus: https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3e0ba54.html}
those from lower socio-economic groups. The Global Slavery Index estimates that Belarus has 268,000 victims living in modern slavery.²⁹

If we look today at the current situation in Ukraine, we can accurately assume that many women and children may have fallen into the trafficking industry, as traffickers take advantage of the ongoing situation. Trafficking rings are notoriously active during peacetime in the region, but during wartime, most criminals find the opportunity to pursue their illegal plans easier, as the police and the army are focusing on national security. Now in Ukraine, the targeted victims are women and children, as men under the age of 60 are obliged by the Ukrainian government to stay in the country and fight. During this stressful time, women and children try to flee the country to get to neighbouring countries with the help of volunteers and strangers. However, not all volunteers and strangers have the best intentions, as ill-intentioned individuals can pose as volunteers offering free transportation across the border with the aim to traffic women and children.³⁰ In addition, traffickers might offer jobs and free plane tickets to Mexico, Turkey and the UAE through social media and fake job postings, aiming to lure young women who want to escape from their country.

**Human trafficking operations 101:**

**Profile of victims, traffickers and clients**

**Victims**

Individuals usually find themselves trapped in their situation due to a friend, lover or relative who sold them a dream, a job opportunity or an exciting new experience. Traffickers often prey on people who hope for a better life, employment opportunities, have an unstable home life or have a history of sexual abuse. This is the case for the majority of sex trafficking victims. Many stories coming from victims that managed to escape indicate that there is usually a common denominator in the way they got involved in a trafficking ring. According to a UNODC report, 6 out of 100 recruitments are done by a close relative, 3 out of 10 recruitments are done by a close friend, and almost half of all

²⁹ Global Slavery Index Ukraine: https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/data/country-data/ukraine/
³⁰ How the sex trade preys on Ukraine’s refugees: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60891801
recruitments are done by someone known to the victim.\textsuperscript{31}

Trafficking does not discriminate based on gender, race, social demographic, immigration status or economic status. There is no one profile that fits a victim. Anyone can end up in such a situation under particularly unfortunate circumstances. Yet certain populations have a higher vulnerability risk. According to the US Department of Health Office on Trafficking in Persons 2017 fact sheet, most at-risk groups are survivors of child abuse, sexual abuse, interpersonal or intimate partner violence, or exposure to community violence.\textsuperscript{32}

Victims often suffer the impacts of trauma, which may impair the victims’ abilities to recall and talk about their experiences. Extreme physical and mental abuse, deprivation and control affect their ability to make choices. Victims of repeated and unpredictable abuse may experience traumatic bonding with traffickers, more commonly known as ‘Stockholm syndrome’.

Victims that have been trafficked for labour purposes often have a different story. Many former victims confess that someone close to them knew an agency or a recruiter that promised to find them a well-paying job in wealthy countries, like the UAE. Those agencies take care of the visa process, flight and accommodation for a costly fee. Some agencies charge the victim before departure, whereas others charge when the victim arrives and starts working at the destination. In the majority of cases, the process begins in their home countries. In the UAE, recruiters charge up to $4,000 in fees to secure employment. Funds to pay these fees are often borrowed from relatives or commercial money lenders at high interest or gathered from selling homes, farmland or livestock.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32} Public Health Research Priorities to Address Human Trafficking https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5463242/
Traffickers
“A wide range of criminals, including individual pimps, family operations, small businesses, loose-knit decentralized criminal networks and international organized criminal operations can be human traffickers.”

Traffickers, pimps and johns don’t fit a single stereotype. They represent every social, ethnic and racial group. Traffickers rely mostly on deception or soft and emotional methods when it comes to human trafficking for sexual or labour exploitation. Traffickers can be women or men. They study their victim and know their weaknesses. Traffickers are talented in quickly establishing trust with the victims they are recruiting. Trafficking operations consist mainly of male traffickers, but female traffickers are equally and, sometimes, even more successful in recruiting victims because they are perceived as more credible. Almost two-thirds of people convicted of trafficking in persons offences in 2018 were male, but in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, more women than men were convicted for trafficking in persons.

Often traffickers and their victims share the same national, ethnic or cultural background, allowing the trafficker to better understand, communicate and exploit the vulnerabilities of their victims. While many traffickers have criminal backgrounds and use trafficking as a direct source of income, there are also business owners, intimate partners and other family members involved in human trafficking.

Examples of traffickers:

- Brothel and fake massage business owners and managers
- Employers of domestic servants
- Gangs and criminal networks
- Growers and crew leaders in agriculture
- Intimate partners/family members/friends
- Labour brokers
- Factory owners and corporations
- Pimps
- Small business owners and managers

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Clients

Most of the research on human trafficking focuses on the supply rather than the demand. A buyer or client can be anyone: educated, uneducated, single, married, any race/status/ethnicity, unemployed/employed, but predominantly, adult men. Most clients looking for sex services usually visit a range of venues like “massage” brothels, adult entrainment establishments or go to well-known places for street prostitution.

When it comes to sex trafficking, during the last thirty years with the expansion of the internet and social media, clients can search for online services and book sex appointments with the click of a button. Even more, pornography, online sex cam shows and subscription services like Onlyfans, have allowed more and more people to use such services in complete anonymity. For trafficked victims, the dark web has made it even easier for both traffickers and clients to cover their tracks and financial transactions, as most underage illegal sexual content can be found in illegal hidden websites easier than ever.

Many users of online sex services might argue that most content creators are promoting their sex services as a form of empowerment and self-agency. According to the Onlyfans subscription service, its creators earn money from users who subscribe to their content allowing content creators to receive funding directly from their fans on a monthly basis, as well as one-time tips. In the majority of the cases, women and men choose to upload pornographic material or provide online sex shows. Yet, it is also an
easy way for traffickers to promote content or sell the sex services of a trafficked minor or trafficked adult through such websites. Sadly, most users of pornography and sex cam shows have seen or interacted with illegal online content involving a trafficked victim without their knowledge, due to the anonymity and the limited regulations when it comes to pornography and online sex services.

When it comes to labour exploitation, wealthy clients pay recruiters or agencies to locate and bring in cheap labour that will work extensive hours with minimum pay in agricultural, construction and domestic work. In the UAE and other wealthy Gulf countries, clients have complete power over workers and their living conditions which will be explained further in the report.

**How traffickers recruit their victims**

Traffickers have different tactics when it comes to recruitment. Some traffickers use old methods, locating homeless children and women and offering protection, others use more sophisticated methods. ‘Romeo pimps’ offer promises of money, protection or housing and, in the majority of the cases, resort to the use of force, drugs and manipulation. Victims are often recruited through fake romantic interests, false job offers or fraudulent immigration promises. Traffickers often recognize specific vulnerabilities and modify their recruitment efforts to exploit those factors by initially offering economic and emotional support.36

According to a Ukrainian study, 70 per cent of traffickers entice victims with promises of work, participating in beauty contests, modelling, affordable vacations, study-abroad programs at universities and marriage services.37 The vast majority of victims are usually recruited through personal contacts but also advertisements like job postings in newspapers, on television and online. Recruitment generally mimics legal migration; for example, binding agreements with reliable companies, employment agencies and recruiters.38 Moreover, information and communication technologies like social media continue to

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36 The Typology of Modern Slavery: [https://ag.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/agnvgov/Content/Human_Trafficking/2017-03-29_Polaris_Report.pdf](https://ag.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/agnvgov/Content/Human_Trafficking/2017-03-29_Polaris_Report.pdf)
38 Trafficking of men-IOM: [https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmbdi486/files/our_work/ICP/IDM/MRS-36.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmbdi486/files/our_work/ICP/IDM/MRS-36.pdf)
be the preferred methods of recruitment and control of victims. It starts with a ‘profile following’ and a message on social media. The trafficker starts complimenting the victim, making her believe in her potential. Within a few months, he asks her to consider an opportunity to meet to discuss her prospects, i.e., modelling. This is when the grooming phase begins. The young victim starts feeling that she has a unique chance to become successful in modelling and meets with him. After some days, she is reported to be ‘missing’. When it comes to men, the trafficker presents themselves as a trusted figure that can help the victim find a well-paid job abroad. For children in danger of trafficking, an unstructured family that lacks emotional stability and supervision makes it easier for an outsider to get closer to the child.

People usually see in movies the trafficker abducting the victim and then selling the victim to clients or other traffickers. However, there are many cases in which the trafficker, observes the victim, planning a step-by-step strategy. Perhaps the trafficker was following the child on their way to school/after-school activity or monitoring the child’s day and schedule. The trafficker starts talking to the child, and offers gifts and compliments, making the child feel special; this grooming phase resembles a similar approach to the modelling job opportunity as described earlier. The child might feel neglected, abused and hurt by their primary caregiver. That new person in their life appears to be a stable figure that can provide and care for them. However, it is far from the truth; when it comes to emotional manipulation, traffickers guard their victims closely, limiting any contact with the outside world, use physical and verbal violence, threaten victims and their families, utilize debt bondage, along with other extreme forms of confinement and monitoring.

The UAE has about 1,300 construction projects worth over $418 billion in development mostly in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The construction boom is driven by immigrant workers and low labour costs. According to Human Rights Watch and the ILO, migrant workers comprise about 95 per cent of the UAE’s workforce, and close to 70 per cent of all foreign workers in Dubai are employed in low-income but highly dangerous occupations. Workers live in inhumane conditions and work under the sun day after day, often without safety equipment or proper breaks. With the average construction worker receiving just $175 a month (compared to the per capita income of $2106 a month), and wages often being withheld for months on end to ensure the worker doesn’t quit, the migrant worker quickly realizes that it will be years before he can even pay off his mounting debts to the recruiters, never mind begin sending money home.
How is slavery enabled in Dubai?

Kafala is a system popular in Gulf countries that gives private citizens and companies responsibility and oversight over workers. The kafala sponsorship system is used to monitor migrant labourers, working primarily in the construction and domestic sectors in Gulf Cooperation Council member states. The kafala system involves withholding labourers’ passports to regulate their residency and employment, which gives employers near-total control over migrant workers’ salary, living conditions, nutrition, ability to work elsewhere, and even their ability to return home. The kafala system does not permit foreign workers to dispute employers’ nonperformance of contracts, nor does it allow them to escape a potentially abusive situation. It is hard to deny that the kafala system puts the employer in a position, not unlike a slave owner, with the worker helpless to escape from such a situation.

Besides labour trafficking, the UAE has become a global epicentre for human sex trafficking, exacerbated by the arrival of thousands of sex tourists. The United Nations World Tourism Organization defines sex tourism as: “trips organized from within the tourism sector, or from outside this sector but using its structures and networks, with the primary purpose of effecting a commercial sexual relationship by the tourist with residents at the destination”. The UAE, as a Muslim country, condones and punishes prostitution and sex outside of marriage under Sharia law. However, when it comes to Western tourists,

officials and the police often turn a blind eye, thus, allowing prostitution and human trafficking rings to thrive. It is estimated that Dubai alone hosts 45,000 sex workers, not including victims afraid to report and disclose this information.

Prostitution starts with pimps, agencies and individuals who are luring women with the promise of work in the UAE from different parts of the world: Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, East Africa, Iraq, Iran and Morocco. Traffickers tell their victims they are going to work, for example, as maids, and then force them into prostitution. How is this happening? Women then have their passports taken away after they reach Dubai, and if they try to report what happened to them to the police, they are often arrested for engaging in illegal sex acts.

**Trafficked victims’ living and working conditions in Dubai**

It is estimated that in 2018, there were seven million workers in the UAE alone. Over 90 per cent of the private-sector labour force is comprised of expatriates while UAE nationals continue to be employed in stable and relatively well-paying jobs in the country’s vast public sector. Although citizens face restrictions on their human rights, the state offers them a wide range of social benefits, including generous housing benefits, access to free education and medical services, preferential treatment in the workforce and higher salaries.

Expatriate workers choose to migrate to UAE for a place of basic survival and financial need. They are often promised a good job in another country, but they end up working for the bare minimum, owing an agency thousands of dollars, leaving them unable to send money back to their family, or, in some cases, even return home. Some receive partial pay or have to wait more than a week to receive their wages each month, which includes their food allowance. Workers are frequently denied overtime pay, termination benefits and promised bonuses. Additionally, the UAE criminalizes the formation of labour unions. As a result, workers don’t have anyone to turn to and fear reprisals, including dismissal and deportation from employers and the police, if they speak up about their labour and living conditions.

Construction workers in Dubai have contracts

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42 City of Gold, City of Slaves: Slavery and Indentured Servitude in Dubai: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol6/iss5/9/
that typically last between one to three years, pay $100 to $250 per month and leave them heavily indebted and powerless to bargain over contract terms. Most construction workers have to work 12-hour shifts, permitted by UAE labour laws. Heat, exhaustion and inadequate safety requirements pose serious health and safety risks for labourers, who are subject to substandard, and, often, dangerous work. They risk severe exhaustion from lifting or carrying heavy materials in the heat for many hours, seven days per week, often continuously for weeks or months without days off.

Domestic workers are exposed to multiple forms of exploitation and violence, including sexual, physical and psychological abuse that is rarely seen in other forms of trafficking. Victims of this type of trafficking are usually women. The nature of the work often segregates them from wider society, and they often work and live with the perpetrators of exploitation, making them particularly vulnerable.

A Ukrainian man trafficked to the UAE shared his story with the International Organization for Migration regarding the living conditions in the UAE.

“The place where we worked turned out to be an area surrounded by barbed wires and supervised by guards with arms. It was forbidden to leave the area. We lived in wagons, ten men in each, though they were designed for four men”. A Ukrainian man trafficked to the Czech Republic had a similar experience. “Conditions of living were horrible. There were too many people in the huts. There was no heating. Four men lived in very small rooms, there was much noise, shouting and fighting of drunk men... The conditions of work were horrible too. It was cold and there were no warm clothes”. Another man, from Ukraine, described the barracks where he lived as “war conditions”: nine men living in a room of ten square meters with only mattresses on the floor and no indoor hygiene facilities (IOM case files). Similarly, Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) in Italy, which runs a mobile health clinic for migrants workers, reports disease resulting from living in derelict buildings, with no running water or electricity and in inadequate sanitation. Further, one third of workers examined by MSF doctors had suffered ill-treatment (Bozonnet, 2006).

The confiscation of passports, long working hours, poor working and living environments, and the withholding of wages, contribute to the expanding demand for trafficked migrants, creating lucrative opportunities for recruiters, exploiters and brokers.

**Existing legislation in the UAE**

UAE’s officials have not aggressively prosecuted or punished acts of human trafficking, despite widespread evidence. Furthermore, data or any information regarding the pressing matter is challenging to find online. Efforts by the UAE government to train law enforcement officers on victim sensitivity have not yielded any positive results as the country continues to lack a formal and comprehensive procedure to proactively identify victims of trafficking among vulnerable populations, such as foreign women detained and charged for prostitution violations.

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47 Trafficking of men - a trend less considered. The case of Belarus and Ukraine: https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd486/files/our_work/ICP/IDM/MRS-36.pdf
As a result, some victims of trafficking who do not identify themselves to authorities are detained and automatically deported for unlawful acts as a result of being trafficked. In other cases, victims might not have a working visa, making their stay illegal, leading once again to their arrest for immigration violations.

In light of the increased scrutiny of Dubai by Western media and the international community, the UAE government has made some efforts. On paper, the UAE has signed agreements with several countries to exchange best practices for the prevention of human trafficking, including enhanced assistance for victims of this crime. The UAE also participates in several regional and international efforts to counter human trafficking and regularly raises issues with the Arab Human Rights Commission Charter Committee. Yet, the UAE is viewed by international organizations as a country characterized by a marked discrepancy between rhetoric and action. According to a 2019 report from the Gulf Research Center:

An indicator worth mentioning is the extent of ratification of international human rights and labour standards agreements. The UAE has only ratified nine ILO Conventions. It has ratified six of the eight ILO fundamental Conventions (including the Forced Labour Convention). The two unratiﬁed Conventions address trade union rights. Importantly, however, the UAE has also ratified the principal ILO Convention dealing with labour inspection. The cause of such a discrepancy could be that legislations are insufﬁciently implemented and not all employers and companies comply with laws that govern the recruitment, work and life of their employees.

The reported experiences of migrant workers whose rights are violated by private employers in Dubai are detailed in international media and NGO reports. The UAE depends on tourism and such publicity can potentially harm its market. Therefore, the government has had to work on new policies against human trafficking and to reform their labour migration governance. Most recently, the UAE took measures “to rebalance

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the employer-temporary foreign worker relationship by enabling unilateral contract termination, along with measures aimed at ending contract substitution, whereby migrant workers are deceived to sign a contract upon leaving their country of origin and another contract upon arrival in the UAE”.\textsuperscript{50} Moreover, the UAE publicly condemns, prohibits and penalizes human trafficking through a comprehensive action plan to fight it regionally and abroad. The plan includes the prevention of human trafficking, prosecution and punishment of traffickers, protection of survivors and the promotion of international cooperation. Lastly, Federal Law No. 51 of 2006 as amended by Federal Law No.1 of 2015 was the start of the UAE’s official initiative to combat human trafficking locally and to enhance its role in international efforts aimed at eliminating human trafficking. Under this law, human trafficking includes all forms of sexual exploitation, engaging others in prostitution, servitude, forced labour, organ trafficking, coerced service, enslavement, begging and quasi-slavery practices. In addition, the law ensures that a person aware of a human trafficking crime and does not report it can be punished. The law raises awareness of the crime, helps the victims, as well as protects victims and any eyewitnesses. It stipulates a minimum fine of AED 100,000 and a minimum of five years in jail for offenders.\textsuperscript{51}

**How societies can be part of the solution**

The UAE has an authoritarian government and grants limited rights and freedoms to its nationals and residents. When it comes to immigrant trafficked workers, a considerable portion of the population turns a blind eye to the ongoing problem of modern slavery in the country, holding the belief that they are offering immigrants good jobs and a place to live and, therefore, they (immigrant workers) should be grateful despite the conditions. When it comes to sex-trafficked victims, the UAE as a Muslim society condemns sex services and punishes victims. Victims are less inclined to go to the authorities and report the trafficker, for the reason that law enforcement officers have no proper training when it comes to such matters, and, even worse, officers might be deeply involved in working alongside the sex/labour traffickers. In addition, they may not report the crime, due to a language barrier, fear of imprisonment and deportation, or threats from

\textsuperscript{50} ILO UAE: https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/united-arab-emirates/WCMS_533531/lang--en/index.htm

their traffickers. This naturally makes it much more difficult to track down the victims, help them escape from such situations, and bring their traffickers to justice. Such harsh treatment towards trafficked victims instead of punishing clients and traffickers has led to underdeveloped laws against traffickers, making it a low-risk criminal activity. Additionally, estimating accurately the number of victims and traffickers in the region is an ongoing challenge as authorities do not share information regarding existing numbers for human sex and labour trafficking.

**What can be done:**
When it comes to all societies globally, service providers, law enforcement and community members have expressed general confusion about how human trafficking is defined and identified, and how to report this information.

Many countries around the world are making efforts to increase prosecutions, convictions and sentences for sex trafficking offenders, provide better training to law enforcement officers on anti-trafficking methods and to increase funding for shelters for victims of trafficking. However, most countries do not provide sufficient, up-to-date data regarding ongoing trafficking data, methodology results and the general rehabilitation status of victims.

Additionally, there are not any major recurrent global campaigns against human trafficking. Awareness is, therefore, an important factor in combating trafficking, as is cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations in promoting it. Engaging diverse means, including advertising campaigns via social media and traditional media and educational programs in schools, can play an important role in enabling individuals to become more aware and make better-informed choices about job opportunities and potential risks.

One effective way to investigate human trafficking is through a collaborative, multi-agency approach of non-governmental organizations, international police organizations like (EUROPOL, FBI), local authorities, land/sea/airport security and healthcare personnel. Furthermore, international and country initiatives must address both ‘push’ factors like poverty and ‘pull’ factors like the sex trade as a lucrative business for traffickers,
combined with existing underground sex markets across the globe, putting into practice the goals they have legislatively embraced.

Pertaining to better data collection of human trafficking cases, it could be beneficial to utilize the latest artificial intelligence tools that can assist countries in gathering information on suspected traffickers based on their past activity, criminal record and recent activity. That is why substantive and systematic research is urgently needed which includes the development of strategies to produce reliable data on the number and demographics of victims trafficked, detail their life experiences (through qualitative research), and analyze the relationship between trafficking and prostitution/labour trafficking and economic trends. This type of database can later serve as a guide for future comparisons for best practices. In addition, the authorities of each country could collaborate with human rights organizations to form national campaigns for the international exposure of traffickers and clients by name, image and location, bringing further attention to the matter along with shame.

Intergovernmental organizations could also share step-by-step detection and reporting of trafficking tools on their governmental sites and fund educational workshops with the help of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Workshops will assist in removing the stigma of what is modern-day slavery, teaching youth, parents and instructors (in schools, summer camps and religious gatherings) to understand the importance of reporting suspicious activities (in relation to human trafficking).

When it comes to family structure and protection, parents have to become more knowledgeable about the dangers of the internet monitoring their children’s online and offline activity. As was previously mentioned, traffickers use a variety of methods in locating and grooming victims. Therefore, detecting online and offline dangers can be a great start in the prevention of children coming into contact with a trafficker.

In addition, to better understand the conditions of victims and to take relevant interventions, it is recommended that human trafficking should be examined at each stage of the trafficking process: pre-departure, travelling, destination,
detention and integration/reintegration stages. When victims report and share any information regarding their trafficking story, their initial meeting with the trafficker, further involvement, the countries they were trafficked in, information about their traffickers and clients, authorities need to share this intel with human rights organizations and the public, for further detection and prosecution of those involved.

Lastly, we, as part of wider society, are playing a crucial part in voting in representatives who advocate for human rights issues and support organizations and government programs that assist victims’ physical and psychological health and their overall reintegration into our societies. The more involved, aware and alert we are, the more we make our society a safer place to live in for all.

**Examples of undercover operations**

Most human trafficking operations begin in one of two ways, with a reactive or proactive approach. Reactive cases present themselves to law enforcement through a variety of avenues that require different types of law enforcement responses. Law enforcement may encounter a potential trafficking victim in the course of their law enforcement duties. They may arrest a trafficker for other crimes and encounter victims. They may conduct an enforcement action when they encounter potential victims of human trafficking. Other sex trafficking cases are initiated when a street officer arrests or interacts with a person engaged in prostitution. Labour trafficking cases may also be reactive if a victim escapes and interacts directly with law enforcement, or if a nongovernmental organization or a bystander contacts law enforcement. A raid or sting operation to seize evidence to develop a prosecutable case may occur in multi-victim sex and labour trafficking cases, in which it is appropriate to identify and offer services to victims.\(^5\)

Proactive cases do not present to law enforcement at all; instead, they result from operations that are pre-planned, over time, through the use of more advanced investigative methods and criminal intelligence. All cases should involve close coordination with victim service providers in anticipation of encountering potential victims. For example, in the US, operations like ‘Operation March Sadness’ have been highly successful. Undercover detectives found suspects through online sites that identified prostitutes and victims looking for

‘johns’. The detectives then communicated with the suspects, arranged to meet them and arrested the suspects at the location. Such operations do exist in other countries and seem to be highly effective. In other cases, there are non-governmental organizations along with local authorities that help families find their missing children by searching for them on the dark web (in case they are advertised there), then pretending to be clients to locate the missing child and potentially arrest the trafficker.

Unlike sex trafficking, labour trafficking investigations are less clear cut. It is an emerging and dynamic area that takes creativity to address. One strategy to consider is partnering with key stakeholders, such as labour or code compliance inspectors, who may have more access and the ability to identify cases if given proper training. Bringing public awareness of human trafficking and doing direct outreach to stakeholders, such as utility workers, hotel employees, emergency room staff, school personnel and others, can help build cases for law enforcement.

Further Recommendations

The three PPPs: prevention, prosecution and protection.

- Governments have to pass new labour laws, imposing hefty fines on companies that do not meet the criteria for providing workers with a safe working and living environment.
- Governments need to institute monthly labour inspections, increasing the number of labour inspectors, their pay and their expertise.
- Law enforcement and prosecutors need to impose more severe criminal penalties for individuals behind the demand for sex and/or labour trafficking.
- Police investigations should expose convicted traffickers and clients on all existing media.
- Governments should provide sustainable funding for shelters and free legal and health services for trafficked victims.
- Governments along with non-governmental organizations need to organize annual international campaigns to raise peoples’ awareness regarding human (sex and labour)

trafficking, ways to detect human trafficking victims and where to report suspicious activity.

**Conclusion**

This report aimed to provide information with regards to human sex and labour trafficking in the world by numbers; the origins of human trafficking from former Soviet countries to Eastern Europe; the involvement of the UAE in the notorious human trade demand, alongside several recommendations to tackle this ongoing phenomenon. Trafficking of human beings equals the abolition of freedom, sexual, physical and emotional abuse, unpaid or low-paid work, long working hours and reduced protections. Patterns of trafficking recruitment for forced labour do not vary across countries and one aspect is especially true for all: trafficking takes place due to the ongoing high demand globally. High-risk groups are those living in financial hardship who migrate to other countries like UAE for a better life. Systems like the kafala sponsorship system within the UAE give freedom to employers to act with impunity. Employers often abuse the human rights of their foreign workers who were trafficked to the country via organized trafficking rings. Overall, when it comes to the international community, efforts are being taken globally on paper, but more needs to be done in punishing traffickers and clients. Countries have to upgrade their methods and make a collaborative effort towards the elimination of human trafficking through online detection systems, training of their police forces and strict law enforcement. This report aims to raise awareness and persuade readers to read more on the topic and help in the global fight against trafficking.
II. ADDRESSING THE UAE’S MIGRANT WORKERS’ ABUSE ISSUE: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CHALLENGES, RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, LEGAL MECHANISMS AND ACTORS INVOLVED

Marta Nuevo Falguera

Introduction

Dubai, a former UK outpost in the Gulf, only became an independent country in 1971, when it joined six other Emirates to form the United Arab Emirates. However, Dubai has undergone a massive makeover and a population boom in the span of a generation. The city is now home to almost three-quarters of the regional offices of the Fortune 500 companies and is one of the world’s cultural and business hubs, hosting international cultural events such as the Expo 2020, and sporting events like the Rugby Sevens and the Dubai Cup. Dubai’s population has grown exponentially in the same period: from the 46,000 citizens that lived in the city in the late 1960s to 3.44 million inhabitants in 2021. However, nearly 90% of the city’s population is comprised of migrants, primarily from South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Africa. This figure should not come as a surprise given that, according to the World Bank, 88.4% of the UAE’s population is also made up of migrants, making the UAE one of the countries with the world’s highest net migration.

The almost overnight transformation of Dubai, from a sleepy Gulf harbour into the bustling metropolis that it has become, has benefitted some but at what cost? Millions of blue-collar migrant workers have worked in slave-like conditions for years to build the skyline of what is now referred to as the ‘Pearl of the Gulf’. Although there are no official records, it is believed that several thousand have perished while working and thousands more have experienced human rights abuses. While slavery was outlawed in Dubai in 1963, slave-like practices persist and, in many cases, are left unpunished despite international condemnation.

Employers usually take advantage of the migrant’s vulnerable position, their lack of familiarity with the UAE’s laws, and their desperate situation. Most of them are fleeing poverty in their home countries and are going to Dubai to earn a living so they can send money to help their relatives back home. There are several reports that point out that migrants are systematically tricked into paying exorbitant fees to obtain a kafala sponsorship that allows them to enter the country. The kafala patronage system is the means by which migrants obtain the right to work in the UAE as a ‘guest worker’ for an Emirati company or individual. However, the worst part comes once they obtain the sponsorship and become employed: several human rights reports state that migrant workers are subject to abusive labour conditions and live in unsanitary and dire conditions.

As of 2020, the majority of migrants were composed of workers from India (40%), Bangladesh (12%), Pakistan (11%) and Egypt (10%). Another significant percentage of migrants come from the Philippines (6%), Indonesia (4%) and Yemen58 (2%). The majority of them are male and are mainly employed in the construction, transportation and service sectors. The number of female workers has increased in recent years due to the rising demand for domestic workers. According to the Vatican-based Migrants and Refugees Section, about 52 per cent of all the reported 1,174,000 female workers were employed in the domestic labour sector in 2019. Female workers primarily come from the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.59 The same organisation found that the UAE has the lowest percentage of primary-educated migrants (44%) of all the Gulf countries.

Becoming an international event host with the international community’s consent

The international community has encouraged and contributed to the transformation of Dubai into a luxurious playground for the world’s richest. For the most part, foreign companies and governments have disregarded the human rights violations committed against employees for the sake of their own interests. The city’s status as a tax-free commerce hub has attracted businesses from around the world, particularly in the banking, finance, aerospace and defence sectors. In fact, 70 per cent of Fortune 500 companies have chosen Dubai to establish their regional headquarters, surpassing neighbouring Abu Dhabi. The city is expected to remain the preferred option for international companies despite the UAE’s recent announcement that it will introduce its first-ever corporate tax.

Businesses are seeing an increasing need for cheap migrant labour to maintain the city’s reputation as a global hub as Dubai becomes a host for big-name international events such as the Expo 2020. Considered the largest megaproject in the region, the Expo 2020 is also the first world expo held in the Middle East. Human Rights Watch described the event as “a decades-long campaign to whitewash its reputation on the international stage” and “obscure its abuses” against migrant workers. A study from the human rights not-for-profit organisation Equidem reported that over 40,000 migrant workers were needed during the construction process. Thousands more have been subject to forced labour practices during the Expo’s six-month run. Many of the exploitive practices reported at the Expo 2020 were identical to the ones migrant workers have been reporting for years and are illegal per the UAE’s law: retention of passports, non-payment of wages, no access to grievance mechanisms, working overtime and workers being charged illegal recruitment fees.


Assessing migrant workers’ rights in the UAE

Labour laws in the UAE are of a lower standard by international estimates and offer fewer worker rights. When compared to other Gulf countries, the UAE\textsuperscript{65} offers the lowest level of protection to migrant workers, aside from Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{66} Labour unions remain illegal, while striking and mobilising for better treatment is criminalised and can lead to the worker’s temporary suspension of wages. Migrant workers were not entitled to a minimum wage\textsuperscript{67} nor were they protected against bullying and sexual harassment until a new labour law passed in 2022. Before this, the country’s labour laws were regulated by the 1980 Federal Law No. 8 Regarding the Organization of Labour Relations and, on paper, apply to both UAE nationals and foreign workers.

In the last decade, the UAE has undergone much-needed reforms to its labour laws, including the controversial kafala system. Nevertheless, these reforms are, for the most part, insufficient and have failed to confront the real challenges faced by migrant workers. The 2016 kafala reforms,\textsuperscript{68} aimed at better protecting migrant workers, were unequal and discriminatory on the grounds of skills, race and gender. While the reforms granted more rights to highly-skilled workers and, on a smaller scale, blue-collar workers, female domestic workers and agricultural workers were left out.

These discriminatory practices are, for instance, present in regulating job transfers if they give their employer one month’s notice, highly-skilled migrants can end their fixed-term contract at any time without facing an employment ban; meanwhile, blue-collar workers have to wait at least six months to end their contract if they do not want to face a six-month employment ban. The reforms managed to close 250 recruitment centres engaging in unlawful practices and replace them with state-supervised


private management centres called *Tadbeer* (procurement) recruitment centres. However, the administration continues making little effort to punish recruiting agents and employers who are complicit. These achievements are of little help unless the government applies regulations and penalties in a more effective way.

As the UAE’s international presence grows and its government receives more pressure to guarantee workers’ rights, it has also worked on improving its legal system. For instance, the UAE concluded satisfactorily the 2010 initiative ‘UAE 2021 Vision’ to provide a safe public and fair judiciary. Most importantly, it updated its controversial 1980 labour law. The new version of the law, which came into effect in February 2022, has been advertised as the biggest legal overhaul in decades. Some of the most drastic changes include setting a minimum wage for the first time, granting the same pay for men and women for the same work, and workers being exempt from judicial fees when filing cases against their employers. Despite promising improvements for migrant workers, the 2022 labour law has failed to address the abuses and violations that migrant workers suffer under the kafala system. As such, it is uncertain if these new rights will reach all blue-collar migrant workers, even the thousands who are currently employed in exploitive conditions.

**UAE law on domestic labour workers**

Domestic labour workers have historically been the most prone to exploitation and slave-like employment conditions since they are excluded from the UAE’s 2022 labour law and remain exempt from the reforms to the kafala system that the UAE implemented in January 2016. The 2017 Federal Law on Domestic Workers has been the first step in, securing more rights for them. However, domestic workers in the UAE are subject to worse labour conditions than their counterparts in the construction and service sectors. The fact that they live in the same house as their employers make them an easy target for rights abuses and make it harder to report them to authorities. A 2014 Human Rights Watch study highlighted that domestic workers are more likely to work longer hours (up to 21 hours), with no

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breaks and no days off. They are also more likely to be physically and sexually assaulted by employers. In addition, female workers who give birth in the UAE face the risk that their babies will be stateless.⁷³

Although the 2017 Federal Law on Domestic Workers grants domestic workers some of the same rights provided under the 1980 labour law, like having 30 days of paid leave per year and one rest day per week, there are many provisions that domestic workers are exempt from. For example, the law dictates that domestic workers can work a maximum of 12 hours per day and up to 72 hours per week. To put it in perspective, other migrant workers follow international labour standards on working time and work a maximum of 8 hours per day and 48 hours per week. Domestic workers have no regulations for overtime working, and they are only entitled to 15 days of paid sick leave while other migrant workers are entitled to 45 days of paid sick leave. Lastly, the 2017 law requires that domestic workers willing to terminate their contract prior to its completion have to compensate their employers with one month’s salary and pay for their own tickets home. Overall, the 2017 law is weaker than the 1980 labour law and falls short of international standards.

**Legal mechanisms that migrant workers have in the UAE**

The loopholes in the UAE’s legal system make it hard for migrant workers to find legal protection against exploitation, abuse and discrimination at the hands of Emirati nationals. In addition, sponsors can easily take advantage of migrant workers since a sizeable percentage have received little or no education, are not familiar with UAE legal proceedings and have little access to proper legal assistance. Due to their condition as sponsored guest workers by the private sector, migrant workers are less likely to have their rights protected in the same way. In addition, their guest worker label allows the UAE to justify any accusations made by international actors of non-compliance with international norms on migration. Complex access to legal protection and ineffective enforcement by the administration has been condemned by international labour and human rights organisations for decades with little to no progress.

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Because their stay in the UAE is legally bound to their sponsor, migrant workers are faced with difficulties when changing jobs or quitting unless they have their employer’s permission. Hence, the majority of workers decide against quitting their jobs despite working in awful conditions. Unpaid debts are another major reason why migrant workers cannot leave their jobs. The majority of them are still repaying the debts incurred to pay for the visa sponsorship. Once their debts are paid, leaving the UAE and returning home becomes easier. However, their employers may still refuse to hand their passports back or fabricate false claims against them.

Migrant workers employed in the private sector and as domestic labours are entitled to seek a hearing before the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation or the Ministry of Labour. However, courts have limited availability for arbitration. In addition, some arbitrators have been accused of prioritising the protection of Emirati businesses instead of implementing the provisions of the labour law in a just and fair manner. Time is also a constraint for migrants suing their employers as they may be forced to abandon the country before the end of the trial due to their poor living conditions. Even when workers succeed in obtaining judgments against their employers, the enforcement of the sentence rarely happens. In the majority of cases, migrant workers have been unable to recover their unpaid wages and employers have not been punished.

**Conventions and charters in application in the UAE**

According to data from the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UAE places below all other Gulf countries with only a third of the 18 International Human Rights treaties ratified. The country ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2004, with some reservations. However, it is necessary to point out the UAE has not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and the Members of their Families. The failure to ratify treaties regarding the protection of migrant workers’ rights questions the UAE’s involvement in providing fairer and more comprehensive laws to protect migrants.

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A similar pattern is seen in the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions that the UAE has not ratified. A member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) since 1972, the UAE has only ratified nine of the 190 existing ILO conventions. Among those not ratified are the ‘Migration for Employment Convention’, enacted in 1949, the ‘Migrant Workers Convention’ (1975), the ‘Safety and Health in Construction Convention’ (1988), and the ‘Domestic Workers Convention’ (2011). It has also not ratified the ‘Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention’ (1930).

However, there are still instances of ratified ILO conventions that the UAE has not put into practice. For instance, the ‘Hours of Work (Industry) Convention’ (1919) states that workers should not work more than eight hours per day or 48 hours per week. However, most migrant workers working in the construction sector in the UAE acknowledge their working days can last up to 15 hours. For domestic workers, workdays can sometimes last up to 21 hours. ‘The Abolition of Forced Labour Convention’ (1957) advocates for the end of debt bondage; however, it has not stopped the kafala system. Finally, there’s the case of the ‘Equal Remuneration Convention’ (1951), which was ratified by the UAE in 1997. The convention promotes the establishment of determining rates for wages and equal remuneration for men and women. However, the UAE does not uphold either. For once, migrant workers are not ensured a determined rate and are oftentimes subject to significant wage reductions once they start their jobs. Moreover, female domestic workers get compensated less than their male counterparts.

There are other instances in which the UAE has tried to whitewash its image on the international stage through its endorsement of global projects to protect migrants and guarantee their welfare. As such, the UAE has endorsed the International Organisation for Migration’s (IOM) ‘Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration’ and the agreement to implement the IOM’s ‘Comprehensive

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Information and Orientation Programme (CIOP) Phase II Plus project in December 2018. The project, which aims to strengthen the labour market integration of migrant workers and provide newly arrived workers with timely and useful information, seems to run counter to the reality of thousands of migrant workers.

At the regional level, the UAE is one of the Middle Eastern countries that ratified the Arab Charter on Human Rights. Although the Charter has been criticised for setting lower human rights standards than the ones recognised internationally, particularly concerning women, it imposes labour standards for national and migrant workers. It also penalises any forms of slavery, human trafficking and forced labour. According to article 34 of the Charter, states should ensure migrant workers “the requisite protection in accordance with the laws in force”. When it comes to the rights of all workers, it adds that “every worker has the right to [...] just and favourable conditions of work which ensure appropriate remuneration, [...] rest and holidays with pay”, and states shall “establish appropriate regulation of working hours and conditions”. The Charter also addresses sexual discrimination by remarking that men and women should have the right to “receive equal remuneration for equal work”.

**The arduous journey to becoming a migrant worker in the UAE**

Migrants wanting to flee the bleak prospects in their home countries for a better life in Gulf countries incur many obstacles even before their departure. Once settled in their host country, they are highly likely to face discrimination, suffer abusive work conditions and have their rights violated. At first glance, these malpractices might seem counterintuitive for Gulf countries like the UAE because the Emirates is one of the countries that is more invested in developing a ‘life-cycle’ approach to migrant workers through cooperation between governments. This level of investment becomes obvious when taking into account that, generally, businesses and individuals in the UAE are in dire need of migrant workers to meet the increasing demand for new projects. The economies of origin countries also benefit immensely from the exchange through remittances.

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The kafala or patronage system

According to article 34 of UAE’s domestic law, it is illegal to employ a foreigner that is not under the sponsorship of an Emirati national. Therefore, in order to obtain the right to work in the UAE as a guest worker, migrants need to obtain a mandatory work visa through a private sponsor, be it an individual or a company, rather than being processed through the public administration. An Emirati company or individual can, thus, legally issue working visas and sponsor foreign workers to move to Dubai and work for them for a period of up to three years. This patronage system, known as kafala in Middle Eastern countries, is the tool used by governments to control the much-needed foreign manpower, manage the influx of blue-collar migrants, and guarantee only a limited stay in the country and bar their path to citizenship.

The delegation of the sponsorship of blue-collar workers to the private sector and the fact that they are labelled as guest workers serve other purposes for the UAE government. Given the privatisation of the hiring process, the government is opting to turn a blind eye to migrant workers’ welfare and all the potential abuses they will be subject to by their sponsors. In addition, local and national administrations do not normally employ the necessary means to detect these abuses. Due to an opaque government system and the lack of knowledge, resources and assistance offered to migrants, it is less likely that any abusive practices committed against migrant workers will reach the courts or the media. On the rare occasion it does reach the court and it rules in favour of the migrant, companies often end up not paying their dues to migrant workers. The same opacity and legal ambiguity concerning migrant workers will make it more likely that, when records of rights violations do reach the media, the government will look to justify their non-compliance with international norms on migration due to migrants’ status as temporary guest workers sponsored by the private sector.

The process of obtaining the kafala sponsorship is fraught with scams, even before migrants have left their home countries. Emirati sponsors are required to pay for all recruitment fees to subcontractors,

visa issuance fees and all transportation expenses of their future workers. However, sponsors looking to economise on the hiring process have methods to divert these expenses onto the migrants. Thus, migrants are usually tricked into paying for all the costs or having to hire private recruitment agencies in their home country to arrange travel and visa expenses. A Human Rights Watch report found that migrant workers had to pay fees ranging from USD 2,000 to USD 3,000\textsuperscript{88} for those services as far back as 2006. Since migrant workers often do not have the means to reimburse these amounts, they end up incurring unnecessary debts that will have to be repaid for months through the small wages they will earn. This practice binds them to their employers before even setting foot in the UAE. It is important to clarify that such recruitment charges are forbidden under UAE law and are, therefore, not required in order to obtain kafala sponsorship.

Once in the UAE, the kafala system ties migrant workers to their sponsors for as long as the job contract lasts. The sponsor is legally required to meet the worker’s basic needs, namely accommodation costs and health insurance. Meanwhile, the worker is bound to their employer for a period that normally lasts three years and depends on the employer for the renewal of their visa. However, due to the debt workers have accumulated to get to the UAE, they are extremely dependent on their employers and susceptible to exploitive labour practices and penalties. For instance, resigning before the completion of their contract or absconding can lead to fines, prison sentences or deportation.

**Working conditions**

As soon as they arrive in Dubai, migrant workers’ passports are confiscated to prevent them from fleeing the country. This is yet another illegal practice under UAE law. Being left undocumented, penniless and not speaking the language, absconding is not a viable option. Since the UAE Government is not part of the sponsorship process, it is more likely that migrant workers are not properly granted their rights as migrants, leaving them at the whim of their sponsors and vulnerable to any abuses until their job contract ends.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported for years that most migrant workers end up living in slave-like conditions, working up to 15 hours a day\textsuperscript{89} with almost no breaks and only one free


day per week. For construction workers, these long working hours take place regardless of the weather conditions. In Dubai, temperatures can rise to up to 50ºC (122ºF) in the summer months. Living conditions are no better. Most construction workers reportedly live in work camps near the construction site. There, they live in overcrowded poorly kept barracks in unsanitary conditions, where up to 30 people have to share one bathroom. Meanwhile, there are accounts of domestic workers who, despite living with the family they serve, are not offered any private chamber or are made to sleep on the floor in storage rooms.

When it comes to remuneration, abuses are also committed. It is not uncommon for workers to not be paid for months at a time or receive lower wages than the ones they were promised. Despite already being promised rates as low as 300€ ($330) per month, some workers earn as little as 173€ ($190) each month. These salaries stand in stark contrast to the average per capita income in Dubai, which by 2021 standards is approximately 5,330€ ($5,850) per month. Since their employers are responsible for their visas, changing jobs is mired in difficulties and sometimes denied by their employers. Due to the fear of reprisals and their complete dependence on their sponsors, few workers have the courage to speak up and report their employers.

The effects of the pandemic on migrant workers’ rights

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, violations of migrant workers’ rights have increased. While some were able to keep their jobs through the worst of the pandemic, mostly domestic workers, there were many more who could not keep their jobs. Those in the construction sector who still had their jobs lived in the same overcrowded and unhygienic accommodation units through strict lockdowns. Due to their living arrangement, they could not follow the safety regulations imposed by the government, such as social distancing, and were more at risk of contracting the virus. It is uncertain how many among them caught the virus or the number of casualties. Those employed as domestic workers have reported working for longer hours, having no rest days, being kept in isolation even when

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lockdowns were over, alongside an increase in physical and verbal abuse.\textsuperscript{93} Despite it all, they are considered to be the lucky ones because they kept their job.

Although diversified, the UAE’s economy relies heavily on tourism. With tourists gone, several construction projects and cultural events were forced to stop operations and reschedule \textit{sine die}, such as the Expo 2020. As such, unemployment rates escalated, particularly among migrant workers and many were evicted.\textsuperscript{94} It is reported that tens of thousands have lost their jobs since the onset of the pandemic. Some were even dismissed without receiving several months’ worth of salary for work they had done. Once dismissed by their employers, the majority of them have not been able to find another job due to the lack of work and the loss of their sponsor’s backing. In addition to their irregular condition, the pandemic has left them at their most vulnerable with no rights, no income source and little means to return home amid an unprecedented global crisis.\textsuperscript{95}

\textit{Private recruitment agencies and sponsors}

Private recruitment agencies are the main actor in the kafala system. They are in charge of identifying potential migrant workers, connecting them to UAE sponsors and ensuring the employment process. However, these recruitment agencies have been accused of scamming migrant workers. Since the majority of them are located in the countries of origin of the migrants, these agencies do not fall under UAE law. Legal measures enforced in the UAE, like the closure of hundreds of recruitment agencies in 2018, do little to confront the problem. Therefore, it falls to the governments of origin countries to ensure these agencies do not engage in unlawful practices.\textsuperscript{96} Although the UAE and origin countries claim that recruitment agencies are subject to frequent checks, many countries only investigate them upon submission of a complaint. In addition, the high number of private recruitment agencies also complicates the monitoring process.

Most recruitment agencies in origin countries do not follow the necessary regulations and work in


an informal way. For instance, they normally scout potential workers through unofficial channels, like social media groups, instant messaging and word of mouth. Given that they act in an unregulated way, they are able to offer more competitive prices, fewer administrative requirements and shorter processing times than the ones that follow the law. This, in turn, lures many migrants, particularly those with few economic resources. However, once recruited, migrants are systematically abused. Aside from making migrants pay unnecessary fees and retaining their passports, these agencies also fail to provide written contracts in the workers’ mother tongue and pre-departure training.

Due to the increasing levels of international condemnation of the illegal recruitment practices in the UAE, the national government has enforced new regulations, like the establishment of Tadbeer recruitment centres, a public-private partnership that seeks to gain more control over the recruitment process of domestic labour workers and regulate prices. Among their services, they offer assistance in the application process, issuing and cancelling of work permits as well as residence cards, pre-employment housing and medical examination services. However, their establishment has caused tensions with migrant-sending countries that rely heavily on remittances, because it fails to guarantee an employment contract upon arrival. As of 2020, there are 23 Tadbeer centres in the UAE, with six of them in Dubai.

Sponsors in the UAE are also complicit in these unlawful recruitment methods, particularly those operating in the construction sector. Per 2020 data from the UAE government, the sector accounts for 6.4 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product and employs 21.9 per cent of the UAE’s total force (around 607,600 workers) mostly coming from India and Pakistan. Given the relevance of the sector for the country’s company and the large amount of manpower required, companies are recurrently searching for more cheap labour from abroad. As a result, large construction companies enter into business partnerships with private recruitment agencies to ensure a constant inflow of migrant workers regardless of whether they follow the law or not.

The government’s role

Although employers are required under UAE law to provide adequate accommodation and working conditions as well as medical insurance to their employees, the majority of them do not

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98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.
follow these precepts. Unfortunately, the country’s opaque system allows for these irregularities to go unpunished. Aside from the low ratio of inspectors from the Ministry of Labour in charge of regulating the thousands of companies employing migrant workers, their job tends to focus on prosecuting and deporting irregular migrants with no penalties for the employers.\footnote{Siddiq, Sana. n.d. “International Entanglements With Migrant Workers’ Rights In The UAE: Modern Day Slavery, Migration Governance & Codes Of Conduct”. Undergraduate, Brown University.}

Another factor that helps explain the lack of government action is the poor amount of documented evidence in existence. In most cases, companies employing migrants fail to even report the number of deaths and injuries. For instance, according to the government, there were a total of 34 casualties among construction workers in 2004.\footnote{“Building Towers, Cheating Workers. Exploitation Of Migrant Construction Workers In The United Arab Emirates”. 2006. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/uae1106/uae1106sumandres.pdf.} The number of casualties increased to 39 in 2005. However, based on data from construction trade publication \textit{Construction Week}, up to 880 construction workers died in 2004 alone. Almost two decades later at the Expo 2020, the UAE government is still providing conflicting figures for how many migrant workers have been injured or killed on site. Per a statement issued by the Expo spokesperson on October 2, 2022, there had been five work-related fatalities and 72 injured. However, the statement was soon changed to state there had only been three casualties.\footnote{Debre, Isabel. 2021. “Dubai Expo 2020 Offers Conflicting Figures On Worker Deaths”. AP NEWS. https://apnews.com/article/dubai-expo-2020-worker-deaths-construction-8bdd015ee55c61e2c695ac31a2a28c3d.}


The government is well aware of the massive human rights violations migrant workers are subjected to. However, it has decided to turn a blind eye and, as a rule, does not effectively enforce the law in favour of victims. Meanwhile, the UAE’s public relations department successfully delivers a compelling marketing
campaign to gloss over the scandals. Internationally, Dubai has managed to preserve an image of luxury that keeps attracting tourists and businesses.

**International efforts**

In light of the multiple reports that international human rights, migration and labour rights organisations have published in the last decade, the international community’s stance towards the UAE has hardened to a certain degree. On the one hand, the UAE has implemented new laws and regulations that are contributing to the protection of migrant workers’ rights albeit not in a satisfactory way. On the other hand, there are still several international businesses and foreign governments that prefer to turn a blind eye to labour rights violations and workers’ exploitation. Despite international condemnation of human rights abuses in the UAE, few governments and businesses are determined to take drastic measures against the UAE because they do not wish to jeopardise the strategic interests they have in the country. This tolerance makes it harder to create a strong and united front.

This lack of unanimity at the government, institutional and business levels can be seen in the response to the Expo 2020. A month prior to the beginning of the Expo and citing human rights concerns, the European Parliament voted to boycott the event, called on member states to support a boycott, and asked the Expo’s main sponsors to withdraw their support. However, the call did not have the expected result. Heads of state refrained from commenting on the issue and many of them even attended the Expo. The sponsors’ response was also overwhelmingly negative as no companies were willing to revoke their support.

Migrant-sending countries have developed strong ties with the UAE due to decades of low-skilled and domestic workers migrating to the Gulf region to seek better employment opportunities. 

opportunities and the importance of remittances for their economies. This has led to the creation of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue, a platform for countries of origin and destination to discuss the management of temporary contractual labour mobility in Asia and the creation of migration corridors with South Asian, Southeast Asian and East African countries. However, as a result of the exploitive conditions meted out to citizens and recent restrictive measures that the UAE government has implemented to control the hiring process of migrant workers, countries like the Philippines have taken action and implemented laws that bar their citizens from working as domestic labourers in GCC countries.

Human rights groups have been the most vocal in the international arena and have been punished accordingly. Since at least 2015, UAE authorities have ignored or denied access to the country to UN experts and human rights researchers. Critical academics and journalists wishing to report on the issue are placed under severe scrutiny during their stay and can face penalties such as being arrested or deported.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

National level

The growth of the UAE into the global city that is today could not have been possible without migrant workers. Emirati businesses rely heavily on migrant workers to keep servicing the ever-increasing demand from locals, tourists and foreign businesses. Therefore, the UAE and Dubai governments should ensure a fairer and safer environment for migrant workers. To do so, the UAE should, in the first place, abolish the kafala system and provide a more thorough enforcement of legal practices that take place during the sponsorship process. While the kafala system creates and contributes to the precarious status of migrant workers during their employment and provides the necessary tools for the abuse and enslavement of migrant workers, the lack of effective legal enforcement by Emirati government allows for these violations to go unpunished in the majority of cases.

Migrant workers are often unaware of their rights in the UAE. Therefore, Emirati authorities should prohibit UAE companies from doing business with recruitment agencies and impose severe penalties on those UAE businesses that do so. Moreover, they should ensure the provision of detailed information informing workers of their rights, dictating all the steps required during the acquisition of sponsorship and warning of any possible scams and wrongdoings committed by subcontractors, businesses and individuals before and during their time in the UAE. The administration should also make sure of the availability of assistance and legal counsel for migrant workers. The assurance of fair trials, independent enquiries and more robust enforcement of the law are essential steps to combat rights abuses and punish rights violations.

Another relevant issue is the lack of a broad civil society sector and the obstacles faced by international human rights organisations to assist migrant workers to document the true extent of abuses and unlawful practices. The UAE’s sole human rights organisation, the National Human Rights Institution, was established in August 2021 and has been met with international scepticism. The scarcity of data documenting rights abuses and the ineffectual labour inspection capacity procured by the administration are other issues that should be improved. A Human Rights Watch study from 2006 found that there were only 140 government inspectors responsible for overseeing the labour practices of more than 240,000 businesses employing migrant workers. No
remarkable measures to amend it have been taken since.

The UAE government’s weak commitment to international conventions and regulations is another issue hindering the proper application of migrant workers’ rights. The UAE government should ratify more international conventions and make sure the ones already ratified are upheld. In order to do so, it should strive to improve data collection on migrant workers and increase the administration’s labour inspection capacities.

**International level**

The strategic importance of the UAE has impeded the creation of an international united front and the application of sanctioning measures to punish the country’s flagrant abuses of migrant workers. Governments and international organisations, such as the ILO and the IOM, should jointly pressure destination countries like the UAE to further improve existing laws regarding migrant workers, ensuring their implementation, while also applying stringent sanctions whenever violations are committed.

Migrant-sending countries should review their imbalanced relationships with the UAE and other Gulf countries and take measures to prioritise the wellbeing of migrant workers. The economies of these countries benefit tremendously from the remittances of expatriate workers. Therefore, they should make more effort to ensure migrants are informed of their rights before leaving the country and ensure migrant workers have access to proper assistance, protection and legal counselling through embassies and consulates once they are abroad. If migrant workers continue enduring slave-like conditions at work, fewer migrants will be eager to seek out jobs abroad, remittances will dwindle and, in the long term, it could have economic repercussions for migrant-sending countries. In addition, migrant-sending countries should clamp down on local recruitment agencies that engage in unlawful practices.

The international community also has a key role in preventing these abuses and holding the UAE accountable for them. The plight of abused and enslaved migrant workers should be treated the same way as other migrant abuses and must be followed by actions, not just words. Sanctioning measures, like the ones applied to Russia for the invasion of Ukraine and to China for the abuses of its Uyghur minority, should also apply to the UAE and other Gulf countries. As the executive director of Human Rights Watch, Kenneth Roth, already stated in a 2009 Human Rights Watch report,114 “While the economy of the UAE continues to grow, human rights progress [will] remain scant.”

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**CONCLUSION**

Mitko Arnaudov

Based on all data and information we have provided in this research related to modern slavery in Dubai, we have to point out that this global phenomenon is gaining momentum in developing countries. Modern slavery has become the most pronounced trend of the last twenty years in the fastest-growing economies. This suits both countries that are committed to rapid development with cheap labour but also entrepreneurs who want to reduce employee costs as much as possible in the era of challenging world economic trends. Despite legal regulations that strictly prohibit this growing phenomenon at the global level, it seems that certain countries, in this case, the United Arab Emirates, are not doing enough to eradicate modern slavery. The best example of this is the city-state of Dubai, which has experienced enormous development in the past thirty years, a development based largely on the phenomenon of modern slavery as a key mechanism in the process of rapid and comprehensive growth. Although numerous international and intergovernmental organizations strongly condemn the widespread modern slavery in Dubai, there are no mechanisms to stop this trend, despite legal regulations which are not effective in practice.

As in many political domains, when it comes to slavery, the international community also does not have an effective mechanism to help curb and eradicate modern slavery. Precisely because of that, due to the lack of international support and the lack of an effective state mechanisms, workers who are victims of the phenomenon of modern slavery are left to fend for themselves amid their struggle to adopt labour and human rights. Without a doubt, slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour, and human trafficking are global issues. Modern slavery represents a criminal activity, a gross violation of fundamental human rights and a growing concern. Based on our research we have to stress that modern slavery is happening when one person controls another for profit by exploiting vulnerability. Usually the victim is forced to work or is sexually exploited, and the trafficker keeps all or nearly all of the money. The control can be physical, financial or psychological. The forms of slavery, already presented in this research, are enabled not only by international criminal organizations and corrupt businesses but by the corruption and/or ineffectual malaise of the local and state governments in the region, as well as foreign embassies.

Today we can map six dominant types of modern slavery: *Human trafficking* - where people are exploited through the use of violence, deception or coercion and forced to work against their will. People
can be trafficked for many different forms of exploitation, such as forced labour, forced prostitution, forced begging, forced criminality, domestic servitude, forced marriage and forced organ removal. Sexual exploitation – vulnerable people, overwhelmingly women and girls, are tricked or forced into the sex trade. It often begins with a promise of good work in hospitality or modelling, or a ‘boyfriend’ is responsible; Forced labour – this is when a person has no choice or control over their work, with the money they earn taken by someone else, who often also controls where they live and even who they can speak to; Domestic servitude – a less common type of modern slavery, when a person is forced to cook, clean or do childcare for little or no pay, often living in the home with the ‘employer’ and not allowed to live their own life; Criminal exploitation – victims are forced to grow or transport drugs, made to shoplift or pickpocket, are forced to beg on the streets, or used for fraud. The threat of being reported becomes another method of control; and Forced marriage – More than 15 million people are thought to have been forced into a marriage without consent, nearly all of them women and girls, often to an older man in another region or country.

When we are discussing modern slavery in Dubai, we have to point out that UAE portrays the country as a modern, progressive, tolerant and rights-based nation, which embraces globalization and is ‘a meeting place of the world’, notably with EXPO 2020 and beyond. But, on the ground, there are many reports that attest to the opposite. Although, officially, the UAE has worked purposefully in the last decade to improve its human rights record and to change the external perception of the country’s human rights situation, the situation represented in this report witnesses the opposite tendencies on the ground. Despite this, the country has made some strides toward being an inclusive and responsive society and in 2020, adopted several new laws seeking to further promote the UAE as a tolerant, open and modern society that continues to be a destination for foreign direct investment and people from around the world.

Although Dubai was meant to be a Middle-Eastern Shangri-La, a glittering monument to Arab enterprise and Western capitalism, as hard times arrive, often in international human rights research, as well as in labour rights investigations, the truth takes on a darker form. According to examples represented in this research, many articles have been written that claim workers who built Dubai’s extravagant Expo 2020 site faced exploitation, as well as labour abuses. But in Dubai slavery does not stop at construction or labour exploitation. Another bastion of human rights violations in the city is the servitude and abuse of thousands of migrant domestic workers. In parallel to construction labourers, domestic workers are hired by recruitment agencies in their home countries, primarily from Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the
Philippines. We have also stressed that the UAE government has failed to demonstrate its commitments to worker welfare at the multibillion-dollar Expo.

From the other side, a majority of workers interviewed by respected world media were forced to pay illegal recruitment fees to get their jobs, often exceeding their monthly pay. Also, despite a ban on the practice at the Expo and in the country, our report said many employers were aware that workers paid steep fees to recruiters in their home countries and did not reimburse them, creating a situation of debt bondage.

Everything we have mentioned testifies to a massive violation of workers' rights, as well as human rights in Dubai. In addition to the huge ineffective international condemnation, which point to the violations of human rights as a form of modern slavery, it seems that the authorities in the UAE are deaf to those condemnations and continue to develop the economy in the same way. Even the European Union itself has condemned the so-called modern slavery in Dubai in numerous EU institutional resolutions, but unfortunately, all of these condemnations are ineffective because they have no effect on the ground, which would contribute to a change in the situation. In such circumstances, there is a much darker side to Dubai that most tourists are blissfully unaware of. Although there are many international experts’ reports about this huge issue, there are still no adequate international mechanisms that could contribute positively to resolving this human tragedy, even on a short-term basis.

Migrant workers, as we have explained previously, are not only at greater risk of exploitation, but are often housed in filthy conditions, with little downtime. In short, based on the data we have presented, they are the hidden slaves of a rich city. Migrant workers, who represent more than 88.5 per cent of UAE residents, together with domestic workers who are also victims of modern slavery, do not have the same rights to educate children, change employers, educate or train, enjoy leisure time or any other pleasant living benefits that Gulf citizens take for granted. This system is also clearly based on race. Almost all migrant workers we have described are brown or darker-skinned. Skin colour, therefore, serves as a sign of their low social status and an invitation to local citizens and officials to discriminate against them. Labour laws adopted by the UAE government have not done anything to alleviate the risks for the government and businesses. Labourers are forced to work long hours in the dangerous desert heat on construction projects and are not given sufficient breaks as required by law. Health and safety violations are rampant on construction projects, and the government does not enforce these regulations thoroughly. The fear and intimidation workers face in the UAE can only be ended with workers having a
voice in the workplace and a voice in shaping labour laws. Allowing workers to collectively document cases and have access to worker representatives, along with the resolution of disputes, is the basis for any reform program. In this context, it is important to stress that international organizations and officials of the UAE are not working on resolving the problem of modern slavery.

Maybe the potential solution to resolving the issue of modern slavery, in the case of the UAE, lies in the creation of an international coalition that would be ready to impose, before all, economic sanctions on the country. But, taking into account actual flows in international relations, within international society, it is unrealistic to expect such a scenario, bearing in mind the role of the UAE in the world’s energy market. It seems that migrant workers will continue to pay the exorbitant ‘visa fees’ to unscrupulous recruitment agencies in Dubai. It also seems that foreign workers who arrive in Dubai will still be the subject of systematic exploitation by employers, which includes confiscation of their passports as an attempt to prevent employees from leaving. In this context it is important to repeat, once again, that trade unionism is illegal in the UAE, leaving workers, domestic and foreign, without any representation that help them voice their concerns without fear of retribution or losing their job.

The solution to the problem of modern slavery in Dubai can take place on three levels: international, political and economic. At the international level, much more decisive and effective action of international institutions and organizations is needed in the implementation of measures against the authorities in the UAE, through sanctions, to point out the importance of eradicating this tragic phenomenon. Secondly, at the political level, the governing structure in Dubai must understand the importance of eradicating modern slavery from its country, even at the expense of slowing down accelerated development. And third, at the economic level, although in modern economic relations all economic entities are suitable for cheap labour, it is important to stop the mass exploitation of workers in Dubai through business sanctions, so that large global companies will not invest in a country where the basic rights of workers are not respected. On the other side, when we are talking about concrete measures for tackling modern slavery within the business sector in Dubai, as well as around the world, non-governmental organizations are working to stop modern slavery through analysis, training sessions for vulnerable groups and workers, as well as through cooperation with official and governmental institutions and bodies to enhance regulations and bolster the legal framework to tackle modern slavery.

An important first step in tackling modern slavery is to find out more about the issue and understand what activity is taking place locally. There is a range of comprehensive guidance documents and training
materials already available and there are many opportunities to attend awareness training on the issue. Numerous organizations have already run a number of modern slavery conferences, and several organizations provide training on the issue. Once the modern slavery landscape has been mapped out, it may be possible to identify opportunities to engage at the local level with police units by attending meetings or events or requesting feedback on local operations.

There are five essential ways how to tackle the issue of modern slavery: 1) Boost awareness - the only way that employees will be able to spot someone who’s being forced to work - and have the confidence to report their concerns - is if they’re fully aware of the issue of modern slavery and how it presents day to day. This applies to anyone who’s being exploited, too; 2) Encourage people to watch for signs - and act - a survey from 2017 suggested that four out of 10 people weren’t sure what modern slavery was, so as an employer you should encourage teams to watch for signs of exploitation in anyone they interact with as part of their work; 3) Know your supply chain - your business has a responsibility to make sure that slavery isn’t used in producing the product or service you sell. It’s key to have an honest and transparent view of your supply chains; 4) Don not cut corners with recruitment - it’s crucial to have the same level of confidence in any agencies or labour providers that you use for personnel. Less reputable recruitment agencies might not be proactive in tackling hidden labour exploitation. There’s a risk they won’t comply with the relevant regulations, which means vulnerable workers will suffer and your business will be at greater risk of heavy penalties; 5) Be committed - and communicate this - protecting vulnerable workers is overwhelmingly the right thing to do, in so many ways.
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MODERN DAY SLAVERY IN DUBAI