Counter – Trafficking
Programme overview and future interventions

Introduction

Sri Lanka is an origin as well as destination country for men and women trafficked mostly for bonded labour, but also for commercial sexual exploitation. Children sadly are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation often linked with the tourism trade. Sri Lankan nationals, mostly women, migrate for employment to destination countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, initially to work as domestic help but eventually find themselves trapped in involuntary servitude with appalling working conditions or find themselves in forced prostitution.

The conclusion of the Sri Lankan conflict in 2009 resulted in a large number of internally displaced persons. The conflict contributed to men, women and children being vulnerable to human trafficking as they sought jobs and educational opportunities abroad to escape forced recruitment or other direct threats of violence. The rapid rise in the cost of living, a lack of employment opportunities, particularly outside of a few principal cities, and a resulting decline in optimism about the future are likely to increase the numbers of people seeking opportunities outside of their communities, whether by regular or irregular means.

Many immigration laws and policies in Sri Lanka consider trafficked women as irregular migrants and/or prostitutes, rather than as victims of organized crime, and they are therefore punished with deportation or imprisonment. Migrant workers report that labor recruiters promise well-paid jobs in the cities, or abroad but then trap them in involuntary servitude.

The 2012 Trafficking in Person (TiP) report from the U.S. Department of State placed Sri Lanka in Tier 2 recognizing the government’s efforts at preventing human trafficking. The report notes that the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force that meets monthly has improved communication and coordination among the relevant ministries and department in addressing human trafficking in Sri Lanka.

Awareness Street Drama in Bogawanthalawa

Counter-Trafficking training curriculum being handed over to the police
Organizational capacities

IOM has been working in Sri Lanka since 2002 and has developed programmes and expertise significantly, from humanitarian relief to migration management, including counter-trafficking and labour migration projects. IOM has worked successfully with GOSL authorities including the Immigration and Emigration Department (IED), the Examiner of Questionable Documents (EQD), the Attorney General’s Office (AG’s), Criminal Investigations Department and other Police departments, to improve migration management. IOM supports the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, including the Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), to manage outward labor migration, and dialogs with members of the diplomatic community on migration issues. IOM also works to benefit returned refugees and displaced populations in Sri Lanka. IOM Sri Lanka is an active member of the UN Country Team, the GOSL-led Border Management Working Group, various Health and Psychosocial forums, and the UN HIV/AIDS Theme Working Groups, among others.

Key components

The key components of IOM’s counter trafficking work could be grouped under three P’s: Prevention, Protection and Prosecution. Under prosecution, comprehensive training on identifying and investigating cases of trafficking for law enforcement officers is provided, mass media campaigns are conducted to ensure that the public are informed on the risks and consequences of human trafficking as a method of prevention and direct assistance or assistance through IOM’s partners is provided to victims of trafficking to ensure their protection.

IOM’s experience in Sri Lanka includes:
- Providing logistical support for Sri Lanka in the Bali process to counter trans-national crime.
- Providing customized training, curriculum material and equipment for migration management.
- Technical support on migration management strategies; and on national trafficking law.
- Awareness on UN Protocols, study of TiP laws; seminars on TiP for parliamentarians.
- Facilitated the voluntary return of several Sri Lankan and foreign VoTs.
- Livelihood and psychosocial support to thousands of Sri Lankans vulnerable to TiP.
- HIV/AIDS medical and psychosocial support for internal migrant workers.
- Support to SLBFE to establish and manage eight Migrant Information Desks island-wide.
- Safe migration hotline; media campaigns and awareness for youth and adults.
- Develop a database in order to collect and disseminate information on cases of trafficking.

Counter-Trafficking training for state counsel

A meeting highlighting achievements on counter trafficking activities in Sri Lanka
**Victim Assistance**

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) held several discussions with the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force led by the Ministry of Justice on the importance of establishing a government shelter for women victims of human trafficking to ensure necessary assistance and protection is provided to identified victims of this crime.

Subsequent to these discussions, with the close collaboration of the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs, and the Ministry of Health, Indigenous Medicine, Social welfare and women affairs, Probation and Child Care and Council Affairs, Western province an appropriate building situated in the Gampaha District was selected for this purpose.

IOM undertook to complete renovations to this building and support the Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs to manage the full functioning of this first government shelter for women victims of human trafficking.

The shelter would initially provide assistance to women victims of trafficking identified by law enforcement and non-governmental partners to ensure that the immediate need of a safe shelter is provided to victims and also refer them for necessary assistance including medical, psychological and legal assistance.

The provision of a shelter for identified victims of trafficking will ensure that appropriate assistance is provided and that the re-victimization of victims is prevented. It will also prevent victims being placed in remand homes and detention centers due to lack of government shelter facilities and fulfill Sri Lanka’s international obligations in the protection of victims of human trafficking.

The renovations to the building were completed and the shelter declared open by the Hon. Tissa Karalliyadda, Minister of Women’s Affairs and Child Development on 12th December 2012.
Under its counter-trafficking programme, IOM has been involved in many policy discussions and advocated for the establishment of a National Task Force on Trafficking in Persons. As the government recognizes IOM as the lead agency on counter trafficking efforts, IOM’s assistance has been sought to coordinate the National Task Force and draft a National Action Plan to combat trafficking in persons in Sri Lanka. The action plan includes introducing and implementing a formal GoSL led ‘standard operating procedure’ (SOP) developed by IOM to identify and refer victims of trafficking ensuring protection and the provision of assistance.

One of the main priorities in IOM’s activities to address the problem of trafficking is to build the capacity of the law enforcement officers in order to increase the number of prosecutions which remains quite low due to the lack of knowledge as well as a lack of victim and witness protection. IOM continues its collaboration with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Attorney General’s department to increase convictions by providing comprehensive training for prosecutors on human trafficking and its applicable laws. IOM has provided training to GoSL officers such as the police, immigration and SLBFE to identify, investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking.

In order to provide comprehensive training, needs assessment and a Knowledge Attitudes and Perception (KAP) survey was conducted to develop training materials such as curriculums, CD’s, information booklets and leaflets.

So far IOM has trained over 2000 police officers covering all districts on how to identify, investigate and prosecute cases of trafficking. Study tours have been conducted to Italy, USA and Thailand to enhance the awareness of law enforcement officers on human trafficking from an international perspective.

Following these capacity building training programmes, the law enforcement departments have initiated island wide training programmes for their officers with technical assistance from IOM.

Training programmes have also been conducted for 59 State Prosecutors of the Attorney General’s Department on prosecution and legislation on human trafficking including local and international laws. These training sessions also initiated discussions among the state prosecutors on victims throughout the justice process.

Three Judicial Colloquiums on combating human trafficking was conducted for a group of 104 Honorable High Court judges and Magistrates from across Sri Lanka.

This programme was designed to sensitize Judges on general characteristics of human trafficking, national and international legislation related to trafficking and protection of victims of trafficking.

**Victim Assistance**

IOM has witnessed a lacuna in government shelters that provide assistance to identified victims of trafficking and an insufficient number of trained staff to address the needs of victims. Often NGO shelters are being used to place victims for short periods of time. IOM advocated with the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force to establish a government shelter and have now successfully identified an appropriate building and are carrying out renovations to ensure a fully operation government managed shelter is available for identified victims of trafficking. IOM will also provide technical support to train the shelter staff and ensure better and sustainable efforts at assisting victims of trafficking.
Public Awareness

A need for increased public awareness on human trafficking and its harmful consequences exists, as the lack of opportunities, low income levels and little information about migration options leave men and women particularly vulnerable to traffickers' false promises of social and economic security.

In 2007, the Sri Lankan Bureau for Foreign Employment (SLBFE) rescued girls as young as 13 who had been trained as domestic workers and were at the airport ready to fly to the Middle East. IOM also assisted the GoSL to return 25 male migrant workers who traveled legally to Dubai to work and who were then forcibly moved to Iraq, where they were bound to a state of servitude. The awareness campaigns implemented by the GoSL should also be strengthened to ensure wider dissemination of information on safe migration.

Establishment of Counter Human Trafficking Database

One of the concerns expressed by many stakeholders working on counter trafficking was that there is a lack of comprehensive data on the status of human trafficking in Sri Lanka.

Future Interventions

- The need for a national policy and strategy on prevention of trafficking in persons has been expressed by many stakeholders and advocated by IOM. As a result the national task force on counter trafficking was established. IOM’s technical assistance has been sought for this newly established task force to ensure a comprehensive policy and strategy on prevention of trafficking in persons in Sri Lanka.
- The provision of further support to build the capacity of law enforcement and other government officers to identify, investigate and prosecute of cases of human trafficking.
- The establishment of links with the Sri Lanka Police ‘Counter Human Trafficking Database Unit’ with other government departments to ensure centralized data collection on human trafficking.
- IOM seeks to provide support for the establishment of GoSL shelters with trained staff to provide direct assistance to victims of trafficking including medical, psychosocial and legal assistance. This will ensure sustained efforts to provide appropriate and immediate assistance to victims.
- Build on previous successful media campaigns to conduct island wide awareness campaigns to ensure wider dissemination of information on human trafficking and its harmful consequences and provide information to those who are contemplating migration.

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