

Fact Sheet: The Global Slave Trade

Slavery is not a thing of the past. At its peak, from 1700-1811, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade saw 55,000 Africans trafficked to Europe and the USA each year. That figure is dwarfed by the 800,000 people the US State Department estimates are now trafficked across international borders every year and forced to work as slaves.

What do we mean by 'slavery'?

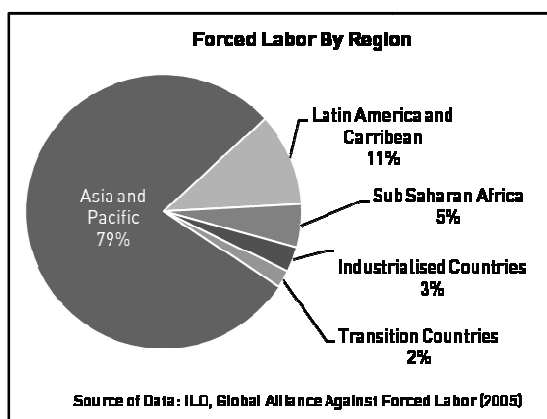
Modern day slavery refers to situations where people face all three of the following conditions:

1. **Economic exploitation:** they are not paid for their work;
2. **Threat of violence:** they are threatened with violence if they try to escape;
3. **Loss of free will:** they are not free to leave or to make choices about their future;

These three conditions are all present in the three main forms of modern day slavery:

1. **Chattel labour:** slaves are considered the property of their owners;
2. **Forced labour:** people are not 'owned' but are forced to labour against their will;
3. **Bonded labour:** people are not 'owned' but are forced to work without pay and without freedom to leave in order to repay a debt.

How many slaves and where are they?



Slavery is illegal everywhere in the world, so it is difficult to be precise about the numbers enslaved. The *International Labour Office* (ILO) estimates there are at least 12.3 million people in forced labour in the world today. *Free the Slaves*, a leading Non-Government Organisation in the field, estimates the number at 27 million. The bulk of slaves are found in Asia and the Pacific, particularly South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal). Within Australia estimates range from under 100 people trafficked into forced labour at any given time (Australian Government's Action Plan To Eradicate Trafficking in

Human Persons, 2004) to 1000 (Project Respect, an NGO working with women in the sex industry). The US Department of State estimates that every year 14,500-17,500 people are trafficked into the United States and enslaved in domestic services, agriculture, commercial services such as hospitality, and the sex industry.

How do people become enslaved?

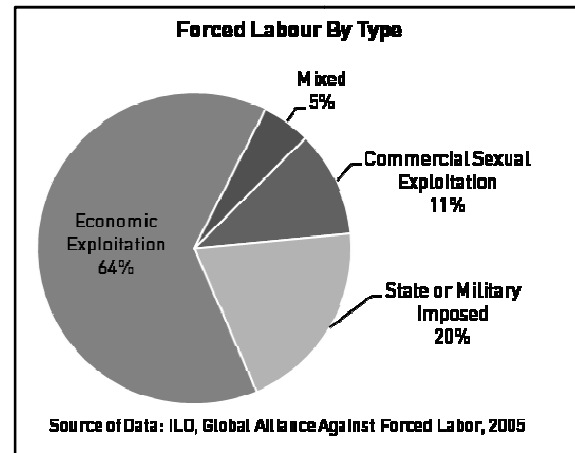
People become enslaved because there is a demand for their services, there is a ready pool of people vulnerable to being enslaved, and traffickers are able to avoid prosecution. **Demand** is driven by the

desire to make profits (slave labour is cheaper than paid labour) and the lust for power and illicit sex. **Supply** is driven by poverty and marginality. The poor and marginalised (eg refugees, women, cultural minorities) are easy targets for traffickers who deceive them with offers of employment or education, make unconscionable loans that leave people trapped in debt bondage, or abduct people knowing the capacity of family members to find and free them is limited. **Traffickers avoid prosecution** due to corruption, low capacity of authorities to enforce the law, and discrimination against the poor and marginalised that makes investigation of their cases a low priority.

What do slaves do?

Slaves can be found in the following areas:

1. **Prostitution;**
2. **Production:** documented cases of slavery exist in industries as diverse as cocoa production, clothing and textiles, rugs and carpets, mining, fruit and vegetable farming, fishing, and more;
3. **Partnering:** (forced marriage);
4. **Soldiering:** forced labour as soldiers, porters, and military sex slaves;
5. **Services:** domestic services (eg housekeepers), and hospitality services (eg restaurant workers).



What is being done?

To end slavery it is necessary to work on three levels: **prevention, prosecution** of traffickers and **protection** of victims. A United Nations Protocol On Human Trafficking was established in 2003. It provides a universal definition of slavery and requires signatory countries to act to prevent slavery, investigate and prosecute traffickers, and protect the human rights of victims. Although many countries have signed the Protocol, only a handful have made significant efforts to implement it. Australia is a signatory, and in 2004 adopted a national plan to combat trafficking that included establishment of a specialist anti-trafficking unit within the Australian Federal Police. This unit has investigated over 100 cases of trafficking since it was established and a handful of successful prosecutions have been made. Australia is also part of the *Bali Process*, a cooperative effort among nations of the Asia-Pacific to share knowledge and build skills in preventing people smuggling and trafficking.

What more can be done?

Global efforts to prevent slavery are failing. Kevin Bales, President of *Free the Slaves*, has developed a plan to end slavery within 25 years. This calls for a cooperative effort between individual citizens, community groups, governments, corporations, and international bodies such as the United Nations and the World Bank. The Bales Plan lays out achievable, actionable steps. A key to achieving the plan is the emergence of a global movement of citizens who are aware of slavery and demand their governments and corporations take the measures necessary to combating slavery.