

# On Thin Ice : Proving What We Know to be True

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*An Examination of the Nexus Between  
Human Trafficking and Corruption*

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Previously, Ms. Odell worked in the Caribbean field office of an international anti-trafficking organization, where she was involved in mobilization and advocacy about the commercial sexual exploitation of minors. This provided her with a unique perspective on the realities facing victims of trafficking and other forms of exploitation, and prepared her to effectively build partnerships with organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most human rights practitioners and scholars agree that corruption creates the environment in which human trafficking occurs, facilitating the exploitation of millions and allowing perpetrators to commit crimes with less fear of punishment because they know they have weakened the rule of law. While various studies support this conclusion, we highlight the need for further research, particularly that which considers and gathers new data sources and encourages new forms of collaboration. There is research indicating that corruption occurs at every stage of the trafficking process and takes both passive and active forms. Much of existing research is drawn from case studies, anecdotal evidence and regional studies, and is not comprehensive enough to draw detailed conclusions about the nexus between human trafficking and corruption on a global scale, or to pinpoint decisively how and where corruption occurs most frequently in a given country. Examining measurement tools of human trafficking and corruption, we find that, while correlation between several of the most recognized measurements exists, some datasets are self-reinforcing and there is a need for more robust indicators, and ultimately more is required to determine the extent of causality.

Through a review of literature and interviews with anti-trafficking stakeholders, we found general consensus that data on the connection between human trafficking and corruption is thin. More evidence is necessary in order to better inform our understanding of how these issues interrelate and support the development of targeted policies and strategies. In this paper, we asked *why does current research and data on human trafficking and corruption remain limited?* Collecting data on illicit actions that are purposefully kept hidden is inherently challenging, as victims and perpetrators are often afraid to speak out due to the consequences doing so could have for them personally. Additionally, the media, whose investigative work is important in bringing corruption to the light of the public eye and demanding accountability, often face high risks to their own security when investigating corruption, and may focus on high-profile stories while missing “everyday” corruption, which may be more relevant. Many are also bound by the legal and political climate they work in, which may mean limited press protections and freedom of speech. There is also a lack of systematic data collection on the human trafficking–corruption nexus from public institutions, who are not keen to highlight corruption within their own ranks, and few NGOs and service providers, who are uniquely placed in their ability to communicate directly with victims, are proactively collecting information on corruption. Data sharing and aggregation also present significant challenges. There is often a lack of communication amongst public institutions within a country and across borders, and harmonizing data from different sources proves difficult. The benefits of data collection, however, remain limited if not accompanied by the ability to aggregate, store and analyze this data.

These challenges help account for the limited response to calls for further research on corruption and human trafficking. While legitimate, we argue they should not be considered insurmountable, if indeed the international community believes that corruption forms a necessary and important piece of the environment in which human trafficking takes place. Our paper concludes by asking *what is needed for progress to be made in developing data on this nexus?* In particular, we highlight the role played by governments, the media, NGOs, service providers, and international organizations, and the leadership and political will required. We also consider what types of sources could prove most useful, recommending a research approach that expands the universe of data signals identified as proxies for corruption, and highlighting key areas to focus research efforts. Finally, we emphasize the need for collaboration in order to improve sharing and aggregation of data from multiple sources, and the importance of developing good governance that is supported by infrastructure and transparency.

# The Human Trafficking-Corruption Nexus

Corruption is a nebulous term, as what is and isn't considered a "corrupt act" is often informed by one's cultural perspective, norms and worldview. For the purpose of this paper we refer to corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain," as defined by Transparency International in their Anti-Corruption Glossary.<sup>1</sup> When referring to human trafficking or trafficking in persons, we use the definition set forth in the Palermo Protocol.<sup>2</sup>

The link between corruption and human trafficking has long been recognized by academics, international organizations and the NGO community. Environments in which officials can be bribed to overlook suspicious behavior, or participate actively to help human traffickers remain undetected, allow and are necessary for crimes of human trafficking to take place. Corruption is said to occur in each phase of the trafficking process, including victim recruitment (which often occurs in informal channels), transport and exploitation (Transparency International 2011; Center for the Study of Democracy 2010; OECD 2015; Sakdiyakorn, Vichitrananda 2010; Broad, Lord 2018). Studies have called corruption a "significant predictor" of human trafficking (Bales 2007), and have even concluded that it is "probably the most important factor in explaining human trafficking" (Zhang, Pineda 2008).

To better understand findings on corruption and human trafficking, and to identify knowledge gaps, we began by reviewing past and current literature. This review is limited in scope and is meant to highlight research that has contributed to an evolving dialogue on the corruption-human trafficking nexus. In the following section we consider sources that utilize a primarily qualitative research approach. Following this we discuss studies that have focused on quantifying the connection between human

trafficking and corruption by analyzing the statistical significance of corruption as an indicator of human trafficking, and by finding correlation between various measurement tools. We also use several of these indexes to examine this relationship more ourselves.

In addition to a literature review, we carried out interviews with individuals who offer varying professional perspectives, including individuals from two Southeast-Asian based counter-trafficking NGOs, three investigative journalists, and a legal expert. The interviewees chose to remain anonymous and asked that we limit identifying information about where they operate so as to allow them to speak more candidly. These interviews were particularly helpful in informing the writing of the later sections on Data Collection Barriers and Recommendations for Developing Data.

## *Findings from Literature*

One of the earliest publications to focus specifically on trafficking in persons and corruption came as the result of the Programme against Corruption and Organised Crime in South-Eastern Europe's 2002 regional seminar in Slovenia. The seminar brought together over 100 judicial officials, law enforcement officials and NGO representatives from ten Southeastern European countries, directing attention towards this nexus and creating proposals on how to address corruption and human trafficking. An important contribution of the report is its outline of the potential actors involved and spheres in which opportunities for corruption arise. This framework is worth considering briefly as it has since been utilized in later publications (UNODC 2011; OECD 2016). The first sphere identified is the trafficking in persons chain, which includes recruitment, provision of documentation, transport, and exploitation of victims, as well as laundering of the proceeds. Police, customs authorities, embassies, immigration services, intelligence/security forces, local officials, travel agencies, airlines and financial institutions are highlighted as potentially corrupted actors in this sphere. In the criminal justice chain, actors such as parliamentarians, government officials, prosecutors and judges are identified as potentially involved in corruption and human trafficking. Finally, even those in the victim services sphere can be involved in corruption. The report mentions that opportunities for corruption arise when individuals from NGOs or public service providers, for example, share victim information in exchange for bribes (PACO 2002).

1 For Transparency International's definition of corruption and other related terms, visit: <https://www.transparency.org/glossary>

2 Trafficking in persons, as defined in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (Palermo Protocol), is "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs." For the full Protocol, visit: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/protocoltraffickinginpersons.aspx>

Another source to consider is Holmes' 2009 chapter titled "Human Trafficking & Corruption: Triple Victimization?" Holmes argues that in addition to being victimized by criminals, trafficking-related corruption can subject trafficked persons "to a double or even triple victimisation" when officials do not address the original crime, and when governments, in turn, do not address their officers' corrupt involvement in trafficking. Holmes starts by recognizing the general lack of data on human trafficking, explaining that most references to human trafficking and corruption in literature "are general criticisms of this collusion, without any detail." He goes on to provide examples of cases in which corrupt public officials were involved in human trafficking in a number of countries, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Poland, Lithuania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Germany. He mentions that while the amount of concrete evidence directly linking officials to trafficking is relatively small, it is "only the tip of an iceberg" (Holmes 2009). Similar conclusions are drawn in other publications, and indeed among our own team, as instances such as those highlighted by Holmes unveil exactly how corruption can play out in real cases, and lend one to believe that a far greater amount of corruption in human trafficking goes unseen or unreported. Yet we highlight that this publication is one of many that, due to the lack of more comprehensive data on human trafficking and corruption, relies heavily on anecdotal evidence to demonstrate the connection between these two phenomena. While helpful in understanding the mechanics of specific instances, such evidence is limited in its ability to shed light on questions related to general levels of prevalence of corruption in human trafficking, or trends such as which actors are most commonly involved in corruption in a given country or region.

In 2011, Kendall published "Greasing the Palm: An Argument for an Increased Focus on Public Corruption in the Fight against International Human Trafficking." As the title suggests, the article highlights that corruption has not been seriously considered in anti-human trafficking protocols and monitoring systems and argues that efforts should be expanded to explicitly address corruption. Kendall provides recommendations for governments and international organizations regarding what this should look like, such as amending national statutes to include a specific anti-corruption provision that focuses on researching and monitoring corruption in human trafficking, and expanding the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's list of minimum standards to include a country's efforts to address public corruption (Kendall 2011).

Kendall's article is one of a number of publications reviewed that focuses on the need to address corruption and human trafficking in conjunction, and that develops recommendations for how to do so (PACO 2002; Holmes 2009; UNODC 2011). Another such publication is the OECD's 2016 report "Trafficking in Persons and Corruption: Breaking the Chain." This report establishes a set of principles called the "Guiding Principles on Combatting Corruption related to Trafficking in Persons." These are important in that they bring together recommendations made over the years by a number of bodies and publications, creating a more formal set of guidelines aimed at strengthening States' focus on addressing corruption in anti-human trafficking efforts. The report explains how the Guiding Principles were tested in the Philippines and Thailand, noting that this practical application provided feedback which aided in the revision of the principles (OECD 2016).

The UNODC 2011 issue paper, "The Role of Corruption in Trafficking in Persons," offers an interesting perspective by considering the human trafficking-corruption nexus from the angle of relevant international legal instruments designed to combat both issues. In particular it focuses on the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and one of its three supplementing protocols, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol). The paper highlights corresponding and complementing provisions in the Conventions and Protocol, arguing that the large number of corresponding provisions "strongly suggest there is not only a need but a solid basis for a concerted effort on combating corruption in human trafficking" (UNODC 2011).

The idea raised in the UNODC's report of utilizing anti-corruption and anti-human trafficking legislation in complementary ways is one which Liberty Global | Asia has explored as well. Our briefing paper on "Modern Slavery and Corruption" and the accompanying "Legal Analysis of Relevant Laws and their Application," examines the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) in depth, calling out its relevance to anti-human trafficking efforts. The FCPA "creates criminal liability for corrupt action taken by certain substantial commercial organisations and their employees that directly facilitate and contribute to the occurrence of modern slavery in industry and business." The two papers suggest that synergy can be reached between FCPA and human trafficking

compliance programs (Liberty Asia, Ropes & Gray, MWE China Law Offices & the Freedom Fund 2016).

Another publication which has contributed to knowledge on corruption and human trafficking is Rusev's 2013 article "Human Trafficking, Border Security and Related Corruption in the EU," which highlights the role of border control authorities in corruption and human trafficking. This source goes beyond general statements about what types of actors can be involved in corruption to examine more granular details related to border control authorities in particular. Rusev identifies risk factors for those officials targeted by traffickers and the approaches used to corrupt them, and considers typologies used to categorize the involvement of corrupt border guards who have been linked to organized crime. Younger border authorities, those with greater power, and situations of income disparity amongst neighboring countries, for example, are examined as factors that lead to increased risk of facing corruption pressure (Rusev 2013).

Several studies that examine migrant labor and corruption are also worth considering. While migrant workers can be recruited and transported through legal methods, the situation can also lend itself to human trafficking in cases where individuals become indebted to the person/agency who recruited them, and are consequently forced to work off their debt via labor or sexual exploitation. Verité and The Freedom Fund, in a 2016 exploratory study, measured the typical amounts of illegal kickback commissions and bribes paid between recruitment agents, government officials and employers, and calculated the fees borne by migrant workers as well as the benefit to employers in three migrant worker recruitment corridors. They concluded that corrupt payments "are central to the efficient recruitment, selection and deployment of workers" and that they allow employers to "pass along significant upfront employment costs to vulnerable migrant workers" (The Freedom Fund, Verité 2016). This study is important in that it successfully established estimates for the amounts paid in bribes, kickback commissions and unofficial fees, and narrowed in on the actors making and receiving these payments. Liberty Global | Asia's recent research on the palm oil industry also looks at the use of migrant labor, particularly undocumented workers, identifying how illegal salary deductions and regular instances of workers being unpaid or underpaid contribute to ongoing situations of debt bondage. Our position paper about potential legal liabilities for unpaid wages estimates the quantum of unpaid wages owed to undocumented workers in the Malaysian palm oil industry (Liberty Global | Asia 2018, Position Paper 1).

Studies such as the aforementioned, which look at corruption in migrant labor recruitment, and studies that consider corruption in migrant smuggling (UNODC 2013), are useful in informing our understanding of similar dynamics in human trafficking. Many of the ways that corruption comes into play in migrant labor recruitment and in migrant smuggling parallel those found in human trafficking. In a report on fraudulent recruitment practices in trafficking in persons, the UNODC highlights how there is often a "direct connection between the corrupt practices occurring in the foreign migrant labour supply chain and the types of red flags associated with human trafficking and forced labour." These "red flags" include issues like deception regarding terms of employment, illegal fees charged to workers, and retention of workers' passports (UNODC 2015).

Throughout our review of literature on human trafficking and corruption, several trends emerge. First, much of existing literature provides fairly general conclusions about how corruption functions in human trafficking, and tends to rely on case studies and anecdotal evidence as primary information sources. Rarely are studies accompanied by much in the way of hard data. While the following section will present more quantitative studies that examine the relationship between human trafficking and corruption, it is worth highlighting now this general scarcity of data.

Studies also often have a regional or country focus, with a particular number that examine these issues in South and Southeast Asia (Bashir Uddin 2014; UNODC 2017; Sakdiyakorn, Vichitrananda 2010; Guth 2010) and Eastern and Southeastern Europe (Balkans ACT Now! 2013; Rusev 2013; Rodríguez-López 2017). Such an approach may ultimately prove to be the most useful, as country or regional studies may be best suited to providing information that can guide individual countries and organizations in implementing policies that are most relevant in their unique environment. However, we also ask if data on human trafficking and corruption trends on a more global scale would not also be useful. Little, if any, information on global trends exists currently.

A final pattern worth noting in the literature is a focus on public sector actors and their role in facilitating corruption (UNODC 2011, International Bar Association 2016; Rusev 2013; Kendall 2011). Verité has highlighted the involvement of some private sector actors in corruption and labor trafficking, particularly employment agents and brokers who charge migrant workers exorbitant fees which in fact

go towards bribes (Verité 2013). Guth has looked at the role of recruiters and employment agencies in the Philippines, considering how corruption is used to obtain employment agency licenses (Guth 2010). While recruiters and employment agencies have garnered some attention (UNODC 2015), many other actors who are involved in corruption but fall outside the realm of public officials - such as law firms and travel agencies (Rusev 2013), and trade unions and NGOs (UNODC 2011) - tend to be mentioned only in passing. Furthermore, the corrupt involvement of less formal intermediaries, such as village chiefs and elders who help recruit laborers in the palm oil industry, for example, (Liberty Global | Asia 2018, Position Paper 1), are rarely mentioned in the literature.

## Efforts to Demonstrate the Nexus

### *Statistical significance of corruption as a “predictor” or “causal factor” of human trafficking*

A number of publications have focused on quantitatively demonstrating the connection between human trafficking and corruption by examining the statistical significance of corruption and comparing it with other contributing factors to human trafficking. One of the earliest to do so was Bales, who sought to determine the “strongest predictors” of trafficking to and from a country. He found that, of six individual variables found to be statistically significant predictors of trafficking from a country, such as infant mortality rate, population density, and conflict and social unrest, government corruption was the most significant predictor. Amongst the factors tested as predictors of trafficking to a country, Bales concluded that governmental corruption was the second strongest predictor (Bales 2007).

One of the most widely cited studies to examine the relationship between corruption and human trafficking is Zhang and Pineda’s chapter “Corruption as a Causal Factor in Human Trafficking.” This publication is important in that it challenged the “poverty assumption,” or the idea that poverty is the primary factor driving people into human trafficking, and brought discussion of public corruption to the forefront. Zhang and Pineda utilized Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI) as a measurement of corruption, and considered a number of variables as measurements of poverty,

including per capita income, infant mortality, life expectancy, and primary education rates. While all of these variables were found to be correlated with the Tier rankings of the U.S. State Department’s Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP), only corruption came close to statistical significance, leading to the conclusion that corruption may be the most important explanatory factor of human trafficking (Zhang, Pineda 2008)

Seo-Young Cho also aimed to pinpoint the most important causal factors of human trafficking. Recognizing a lack of consensus about the primary determining factors of human trafficking and conflicting results regarding the significance of these factors across different studies, Cho tested the robustness of 70 factors pushing victims to be trafficked from origin countries (“push factors”), and 63 factors pulling victims into destination countries (“pull factors”). “Control of corruption” was one of the variables tested as both a push and pull factor. As a push factor, it was found to have an insignificant effect overall, yet Cho notes that in two of the three models tested it was a significant factor, with a negative effect. Cho concludes that the results indicate that “poor institutions are a push factor of human trafficking.” As a pull factor, control of corruption was found to have a negative effect. (Cho 2012).

While we hesitate to frame corruption as a “causal factor” of human trafficking, we argue that it creates the space in which human trafficking occurs. Corruption networks have long existed and serve different illicit purposes, allowing all forms of organized crime to function (Shelley 2010), from drug trafficking to terrorism financing and money laundering. Human traffickers and the many intermediaries that engage in the trafficking process take advantage of these corrupt networks to carry out their crimes.

A more recent article by DiRienzo looks at corruption and human trafficking from an interesting angle, examining the mediating effect of corruption on the relationship between the share of women in government and a country’s compliance with the Palermo Protocol. DiRienzo explains that while research suggests that countries with a greater share of women in government would also demonstrate greater compliance with the Protocol, this relationship has not been supported empirically. The study argues that this lack of empirical support can be explained by the mediating effect of corruption. DiRienzo concludes that while the “share of women in government does have a significant impact on compliance,” that effect is indirect and is “dependent on corruption” (DiRienzo 2018).

## Correlation between corruption & human trafficking indexes

Turning to measurements of correlation between human trafficking and corruption, in 2001 Lyday became one of the first to compare the CPI with TIP rankings. By dividing countries into three groups based on their CPI score (to mirror the three Tiers of the TIP report), a clear correlation was found between “the extent to which a country tolerates trafficking in or through its territory and the extent to which it is also seen as being corrupt” (Lyday 2001). Verité, in a White Paper on labour trafficking in global supply chains, compared the 2012 version of these measurements and they too found a clear connection between them. A majority of the most corrupt states were also those with the most severe human trafficking issues (Verité 2013).

We considered these measurement tools using 2017 data and arrived at similar conclusions. The scale for CPI scores is 100 to 0, with 100 being “very clean” and 0 being “highly corrupt.” The TIP report classifies countries by Tiers (Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 2 Watch List, and Tier 3), where Tier 1 Countries are those considered to be doing the most to meet the Trafficking Victims Protection Act’s (TVPA) minimum standards, and Tier 3 Countries are those that do not fully meet the TVPA’s minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so. In our comparison of these measurements, we found that Tier 1 Countries tend to have some of the highest CPI scores, as represented in by the countries in green in Figure 1 below, while Tier 3 countries had some of the lowest CPI scores, as seen in red, suggesting that high levels of perceived corruption go hand in hand with poorer responses to human trafficking issues.

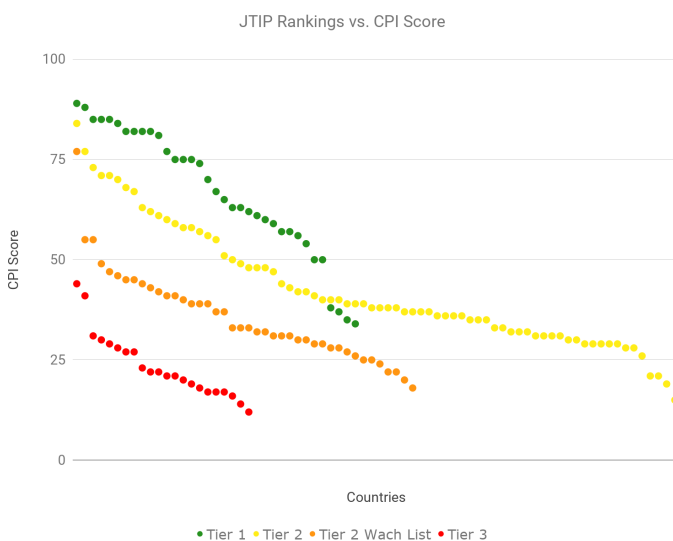


Figure 1: TIP rankings compared to Corruption Perception Index.

To see if this correlation was present across other measurement tools, we compared 2017 CPI scores to the 2016 Global Slavery Index (GSI). While not strictly a measurement of human trafficking, the GSI measures ‘modern slavery,’ including slavery, institutions and practices similar to slavery, forced labour, trafficking in persons and forced marriage. The Global Slavery Index is a measurement of the proportion of a country’s population in modern day slavery (Walk Free Foundation 2017). The results of this comparison demonstrated a correlation between levels of perceived corruption and levels of modern slavery (see Figure 2).

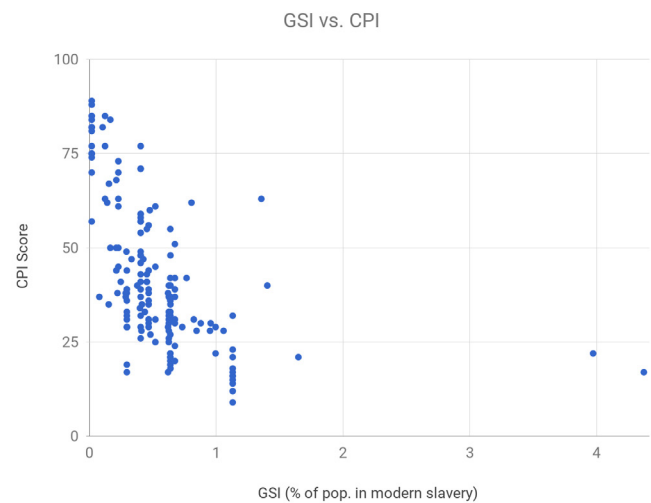


Figure 2: Global Slavery Index compared to Corruption Perception Index.

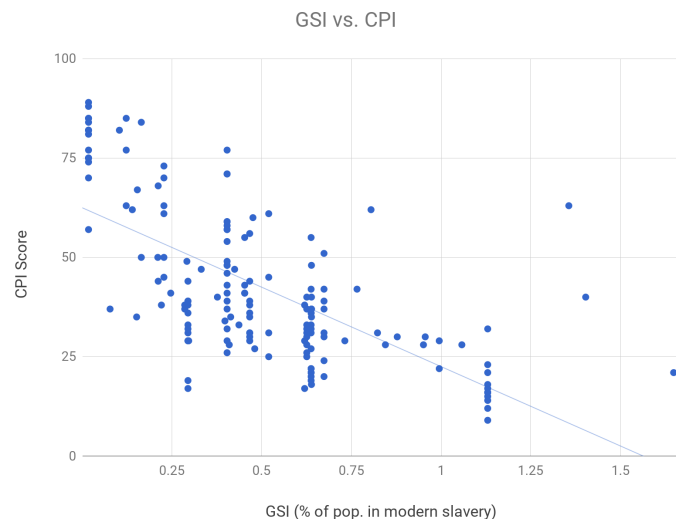


Figure 3: Global Slavery Index compared to Corruption Perception Index, with outliers North Korea and Uzbekistan excluded.

Those countries with lower CPI scores (i.e. higher perceived corruption) tend to have a greater percentage of their population in modern day slavery. This is especially visible when two outlier countries (North Korea and Uzbekistan) are removed, as seen in Figure 3 above.



The 2018 ITUC Global Rights Index (GRI), which depicts levels of violations of workers' rights, is an interesting measurement to consider, as environments with little protection for workers are also environments with weak mechanisms of prevention and protection from labour and sex trafficking. In Saudi Arabia, for example, highlighted as one of the ten worst countries in the world for workers, migrant workers are particularly vulnerable under the Kafala system, through which their legal status is tied to an individual sponsor throughout their contract. Often their passports are taken and they are forced into different jobs than those agreed upon (ITUC 2018).

The GRI rates 142 countries from 1-5 based on the degree of respect for workers' rights, with 1 being the best rating and 5 being the worst. Comparing CPI scores to the GRI, we found that, of the 32 countries that received a 5 on the GRI, meaning there is no guarantee of rights for workers, the average CPI score was quite low, at 38. The average CPI score fell to 33 when looking solely at those ten countries highlighted by the ITUC as the ten worst countries in the world for workers (ITUC 2018), demonstrating that countries with high levels of workers' rights violations are also perceived to be highly corrupt.

### *Data fragility & self-reinforcing measurements*

When considering the various datasets which we and others have used to demonstrate correlation between corruption and human trafficking, a glaring issue arises - JTIP Tiers already include in the country profiles issues relating to government employee complicity (i.e. corruption), and the GSI includes the CPI, so a correlation is expected. It is perhaps then the correlation with the GRI that offers the most compelling story, as the GRI's 97 indicators include lack of guarantee of due process, threats and intimidation and discrimination, and its indicators and ratings are primarily based on ILO Conventions and jurisprudence, and represent violations of workers' rights in law and in practice.

An important task, then, is to find datasets that are not self-reinforcing and therefore so fragile that it would be imprudent to rely on results from their use. We must recognize that society is still largely without rich sources of data that are sufficiently singular to be conclusive in understanding social issues as complex as exploitation.

### *Calls for More & Better Data: Unheeded?*

In reviewing research on human trafficking and corruption, publication after publication emphasized the importance of corruption in facilitating human trafficking. The idea that "human trafficking cannot exist to the degree that it does without corruption" is echoed throughout the literature (Brunner 2015). Those we interviewed also highlighted instances in their work in which they had witnessed corruption impacting human trafficking cases and spoke to the perceived prevalence of this nexus. One of the staff we interviewed from a Southeast Asian-based counter-trafficking NGO called corruption "a key factor that creates a ready and open environment for trafficking," which exacerbates and perpetuates trafficking.

While research has drawn conclusions about how corruption factors into human trafficking, often citing anecdotal evidence to demonstrate how these links play out in real cases, huge gaps in understanding remain. Recommendations about how to integrate anti-corruption and anti-human trafficking efforts have been raised repeatedly, yet there appears to be little progress in implementation of such recommendations.

The gaps in understanding of this nexus exist in large part because there is simply not enough high-quality data on the connection between human trafficking and corruption. The literature has pointed this out and has called for a deeper dive into the human trafficking-corruption nexus, particularly the development of data that can better inform policies and affect change. The director of a Southeast Asian-based anti-trafficking NGO we interviewed echoed this, calling corruption "the great unspoken issue that is getting in the way of programs that would be effective if it weren't for corruption."

*An important task, then, is to find datasets that are not self-reinforcing and therefore so fragile that it would be imprudent to rely on results from their use.*

We pause to clarify that research carried out to date has been of great value, as case studies, interviews, regional studies, comparisons of measurement tools and analysis of statistical significance have contributed to a richer understanding of the mechanics of how corruption facilitates human trafficking. Yet it is important to highlight that the need for more research and data has yet to be heeded with much seriousness.

The question then, is why, given the understood importance of corruption in human trafficking, is there still a lack of large-scale, quantitative analyses and in-depth research on this relationship? Perhaps more importantly, we also ask, what will it take to overcome those challenges so as to make notable progress in our understanding of human trafficking and corruption? We begin a discussion on these questions in the following sections.

*Why, given the understood importance of corruption in human trafficking, is there still a lack of large-scale, quantitative analyses and in-depth research on this relationship?*

## Data Collection Barriers

### *Practical challenges*

One reason that helps explain the lack of data on human trafficking and corruption is linked to the very nature of human trafficking, which is a crime of many crimes.<sup>3</sup> The difficulty in distinguishing human trafficking “from its associated criminal activities” is one factor inhibiting data gathering (Sacco Studnicka 2010). Additionally, research is limited due to challenges and risks inherent in collecting data on human trafficking and corruption, which may deter researchers from trying to collect such data in the first place. Public officials are often reluctant to talk about their involvement in corruption due to obvious fears of losing their job or facing legal consequences (Broad, Lord 2018; Bashir Uddin 2014). It can also be difficult to prove that officials knowingly accepted fraudulent documentation or allowed trafficking victims to enter or exit a country in exchange for a bribe, as “well counterfeited documents might mislead even an honest officer” (Rusev 2013). Government bodies may also choose to avoid documenting or publicly reporting corruption amongst their ranks, as this reflects poorly on them as an institution.

Gathering information from victims is also challenging, as they may be afraid to speak about the role corrupt individuals played in their victimization for fear of reprisal (Broad, Lord 2018; Bashir Uddin 2014). Victims from countries with high levels of perceived

corruption are especially vulnerable in this regard, as they are more likely to believe their trafficker’s threats that corrupt police will abuse or discriminate against them, or return them to their exploiters (UNODC 2011). In other circumstances, victims may not even be aware of how and when corruption was involved in their trafficking (OSCE 2010), making it difficult if not impossible to obtain this information from them. Furthermore, corruption is notorious for being difficult to detect. It may play out via mutually beneficial relationships that include exchanges of favors, rather than monetary payments (Webb, Burrows 2009).

### *Challenges facing journalists*

Not only does gathering this information present practical challenges, it is also risky for those investigating, particularly actors like journalists. We interviewed three investigative journalists to learn from their on-the-ground experience reporting on human trafficking and corruption. They shared about their investigative processes, challenges and the risks they face.

The first journalist we spoke with, who works for an international network that provides training and resources to investigative journalists, explained that journalists typically work backwards from visible signs, starting where they believe human trafficking may be occurring. They speak with middle men to better understand the systems in place, and talk with victims to help identify the perpetrators. However, often this only allows them to identify the lowest levels of criminality, and going directly to authorities to talk about corruption is high-risk. This is particularly true for journalists in countries with limited freedom of speech and a lack of press protections. Our source could not identify many situations where journalists have been able to “go up the chain” in identifying a corruption network. He acknowledged the importance in doing so, but explained that there may be a lack of incentives for journalists. While investigating high-level corruption is often avoided due to the associated risks, low-level corruption is rarely a focus of media stories in part because such stories do not tend to generate as much reader interest, and therefore profits, as stories that expose higher-level officials.

Practical concerns also affect a journalist’s ability to investigate corruption in human trafficking, including pressures of time, word count and budget. In an interview with a journalist who has fifteen years of experience reporting on sex and labor trafficking and slavery at sea, he explained how investigating corruption

<sup>3</sup> Our paper “From Every Angle: Using the law to combat human trafficking in Southeast Asia” provides more information about addressing human trafficking as a crime of many crimes. <http://www.libertyasialegal.org/liberty-asia-publications/>

and identifying the players involved is time consuming and “murky” work. Investigating the corruption elements of a story are often simply unviable given the amount of time a journalist is allotted to write a given story. The murky nature of investigating corruption may also dissuade journalists from pursuing these stories in the first place due to fears of reporting inaccurately and requiring a later correction to the article.

*“Anytime you’re writing on corruption, you’re disrupting a market where those involved have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.”*

*- Investigative Journalist*

In a third interview with an investigative journalist with thirteen years of experience reporting on human trafficking, he explained that journalists typically focus on the “human angle” of a story, and that this individual focus may draw them away from in-depth analysis or investigation into aspects of corruption. Our source also explained that reporting on corruption is particularly difficult because “anytime you’re writing on corruption, you’re disrupting a market where those involved have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.” As an outsider who steps into one of these “tightly wound markets,” journalists “must be keenly aware that there are a lot of unknown unknowns.”

### *A lack of systematic data collection*

Another factor underpinning the limitations of large-scale quantitative data on this nexus is a lack of systematic collection processes amongst governments, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. International and national reporting mechanisms on human trafficking “routinely fail to mention the link between public corruption and human trafficking” (Kendall 2011). NGOs and service providers working with human trafficking cases also often overlook information linked to corruption. Focused on gathering pertinent information about victims and perpetrators, few in-field organizations are proactively identifying how corruption facilitates the trafficking process, and do not have formal processes for recording and reporting this information.

Most governments also fail to systematically collect data on investigations or prosecutions of public officials relating to human trafficking and corruption (UNODC 2011). Despite the “perception of wide-spread corruption in relation to trafficking,” there are few reports on investigations and convictions for these cases (Lee 2013). While the ILO estimates that 40.3

million people are in modern slavery (ILO 2017), in 2016 there were just 14,894 prosecutions and 9,071 convictions for trafficking on a global scale. While up from 6,615 in 2015, these numbers reflect that the vast majority of human trafficking offenses go undiscovered or fail to lead to prosecutions and convictions (Human Rights First). According to the UNODC’s 2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, of 136 countries, 15% had no trafficking convictions on a yearly basis from 2012 to 2014, and 25% had just 10 or fewer convictions per year (UNODC 2016). If the number of prosecuted human trafficking cases is small, the number of human trafficking cases also prosecuted for corruption is even more minimal. We were not able to locate data that reflects these numbers. This lack of data reflects the reality that there are simply too few organizations looking at this issue and calling for such information to be collected and made publicly available.

### *Difficulties sharing and aggregating data*

Apart from data collection barriers, data sharing and aggregation present challenges as well. There is often a reluctance to share data across countries and even across agencies within the same country, as well as a “lack of harmonization among existing data sources” (OECD 2016). A report on corruption and human trafficking in Brazil, for example, mentions how differences in regional attitudes impact how data is recorded, and explains that researchers “have discovered how difficult it is to perform even interregional comparisons” (Sacco Studnicka 2010). Such difficulties in sharing data may span from a lack of trust, but also incompatibility amongst different databases and uncertainties on how to combine data that has been collected using different methodologies and containing varying inputs. Some of the challenges in gathering quantitative data are reflected in decisions by organizations like the United Nations to include more qualitative components in their trafficking reports (Brunner 2015).

# Recommendations for Developing Data

While barriers to data collection are legitimate, we believe they are not insurmountable. Appropriate attention and resources should be allocated to begin addressing the challenges hereto mentioned and filling in research gaps.

Estimating global numbers of people living in conditions of modern slavery is another major challenge facing the anti-trafficking movement. Like measuring corruption and human trafficking, measuring “hidden populations” is inherently challenging. Indexes like the Freedom Foundation’s Global Slavery Index and the ILO’s Global Estimates of Modern Slavery have developed considerably in the last ten to twenty years, utilizing a range of methods such as direct surveys and interviews, and analysis of reported cases to begin working towards global estimates of modern slavery. The methodologies used and numbers reported by these indexes have been heavily debated, and are certainly not without flaws. Rather than evaluating the accuracy of these indexes, we point to them as examples of how widespread recognition amongst the international community of the importance of accurately quantifying the number of people in modern slavery - so as to better measure prevalence and impact of anti-trafficking efforts over time - has led to concerted efforts and resources dedicated to developing these tools. There is reason to believe that progress can also be made in developing data on the connection between human trafficking and corruption if paid significant attention and allocated the necessary resources.

*While barriers to data collection are legitimate, we believe they are not insurmountable.*

To begin overcoming current limitations, it is important to identify the actors whose involvement and leadership is needed, the types of data and information sources that will prove most useful, the collaborative approaches needed to help better aggregate and utilize data, and the need for good governance supported by infrastructure. Below we provide several recommendations that we hope will stir discussion and begin to mount the energy needed to expand and deepen research on this nexus.

## *1. Identification, involvement & leadership of relevant actors*

### **Governments**

The active involvement and leadership of governments is needed to better understand trends about how corruption is facilitating human trafficking and to what extent. It is important that multiple government institutions be involved, and that there is communication across these institutions. Public justice system actors are needed to proactively investigate and prosecute corruption networks in cases of human trafficking. In turn, data should be systematically collected on these investigations and prosecutions. Leadership is needed to organize and facilitate information sharing across multiple public institutions, as well as between States in cases of transnational trafficking.

Government institutions and agencies should also be actively involved in identifying the presence and prevalence of corruption within their own ranks, as well as reporting and publicizing that information. Ensuring that information about cases of human trafficking and corruption is publicly accessible, including but not limited to instances where public officials are involved, is a way that States can simultaneously encourage greater accountability and facilitate research. For example, “E-government,” or public sector use of the Internet which makes data “produced or commissioned by public bodies free to use, reuse, and redistribute,” may help limit public sector corruption (Starke, Naab & Scherer 2016), and can aid journalists, NGOs, academics and activists in carrying out relevant research.

Ultimately, one of the most important pieces of government involvement and leadership on this issue comes down to political will, which is absolutely necessary if energy and resources are to be directed towards studying and addressing human trafficking and corruption. Unfortunately, in many countries, while rhetoric indicates that human trafficking is an important problem, actions demonstrate that it remains a low priority. This is “reflected in the paucity of resources devoted to criminal justice in general and to combating trafficking in human beings in particular,” as well as in attitudes that downplay the seriousness of this crime, such as treating sex trafficking victims as criminals, and treating forced labor victims first as illegal immigrants (Williams 2009). Addressing corruption is even less of a priority because it is often precisely

those in power who have the least interest in curbing corruption and thereby impacting their own interests. This is especially the case in governments where corruption is so endemic as to be the modus operandi.

As public institutions in many countries do not proactively collect information on human trafficking and corruption, and may in fact have vested interests to continue such avoidance, it's important to consider what factors would serve as motivators and how other actors can exercise influence on environments with high levels of impunity for these offenses. The personnel at one of the Southeast Asian-based anti-trafficking NGOs we interviewed spoke of the importance that the country's government places on JTIP recommendations, particularly due to the threat of sanctions if their rating drops to Tier 3. The interviewee mentioned that a similar tool that puts pressure on governments to deal with corruption would be helpful. Or, potentially a more explicit focus on corruption in the TVPA's minimum standards themselves, as advocated for by Kendall (2011), could have a similar effect.

In addition to traditional diplomatic tools, legislation that impacts the regulatory framework in which multinational corporations operate is another avenue of impact available to governments, as successful enforcement of these laws can impact how seriously other governments address issues like human trafficking and corruption. In addition to the criminal liability for corrupt action created by the United States' Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) which was mentioned previously, legislation such as the UK's Modern Slavery Act, France's "Devoir de vigilance des sociétés mères et des entreprises donneuses d'ordre" (Due diligence of companies and main contractors), the Netherlands' "Due Diligence on Child Labour" Law and other recent legislation is increasing the level of accountability and transparency required of companies in their supply chains. The changing regulatory environment, marked by trends towards "adoption of increasingly recognisable standards" and "'joint liability' of companies for their wider supply chain" (Liberty Asia, Clifford Chance 2017) is impacting the way businesses approach and deal with risks of modern slavery, and has the potential to also effect the way they deal with corruption risks in their supply chain. While less direct than sanctions or naming and shaming, the creation and enforcement of well-tailored legislation, particularly that which includes extraterritorial liability for companies, is a powerful way that States can impact one another in terms of the energy dedicated to researching and addressing corruption and human trafficking.

## Media

The active involvement of the media, NGOs and international organizations is also crucial in holding governments accountable and filling in data collection gaps where governments may fall short. In particular, one of the NGO personnel we interviewed emphasized the need to collect data from stakeholders who "observe from the outside and have experience from the inside." An active, free media with protections in place to dig deep into potential corruption is particularly important, as investigative journalism raises public awareness and helps hold individuals and institutions accountable for corrupt acts that facilitate crimes like human trafficking. The OECD calls media reporting an "essential" but "untapped" source of detection in corruption cases. Media reports can detect and help address corruption by aiding law enforcement, companies, and anti-money laundering reporting entities to investigate corruption allegations raised in the press (OECD 2018). Data collected across many media reports can also help identify trends and patterns on both an international and country-by-country basis.

Yet for this "untapped" potential to be realized, journalists must be protected in their work and information must be made accessible to the public. As mentioned previously, journalists face significant risks in reporting on human trafficking and corruption. Of the 368 journalists killed worldwide from 2012 to 2017, nearly 20% of them were covering corruption stories (Transparency International 2017). The media's role is often limited by censorship, legal action, threats, and physical violence, as well as self-censorship due to intimidation (Starke, Naab & Scherer 2016).

*The active involvement of the media, NGOs and international organizations, then, is crucial in holding governments accountable and filling in data collection gaps where governments may fall short.*

In our interview with a legal expert, she emphasized the need for environments where freedom of speech and freedom of the press are protected and cannot be curtailed at the whim of the government. Criminal defamation laws are a particularly important piece of this environment, as they have been used to silence, intimidate and incriminate journalists and human rights activists who dig into corruption and human rights abuses. Liberty Global | Asia has identified various laws in Southeast Asia, particularly press laws and parts of national criminal codes related to defamation, that restrict reporting on human

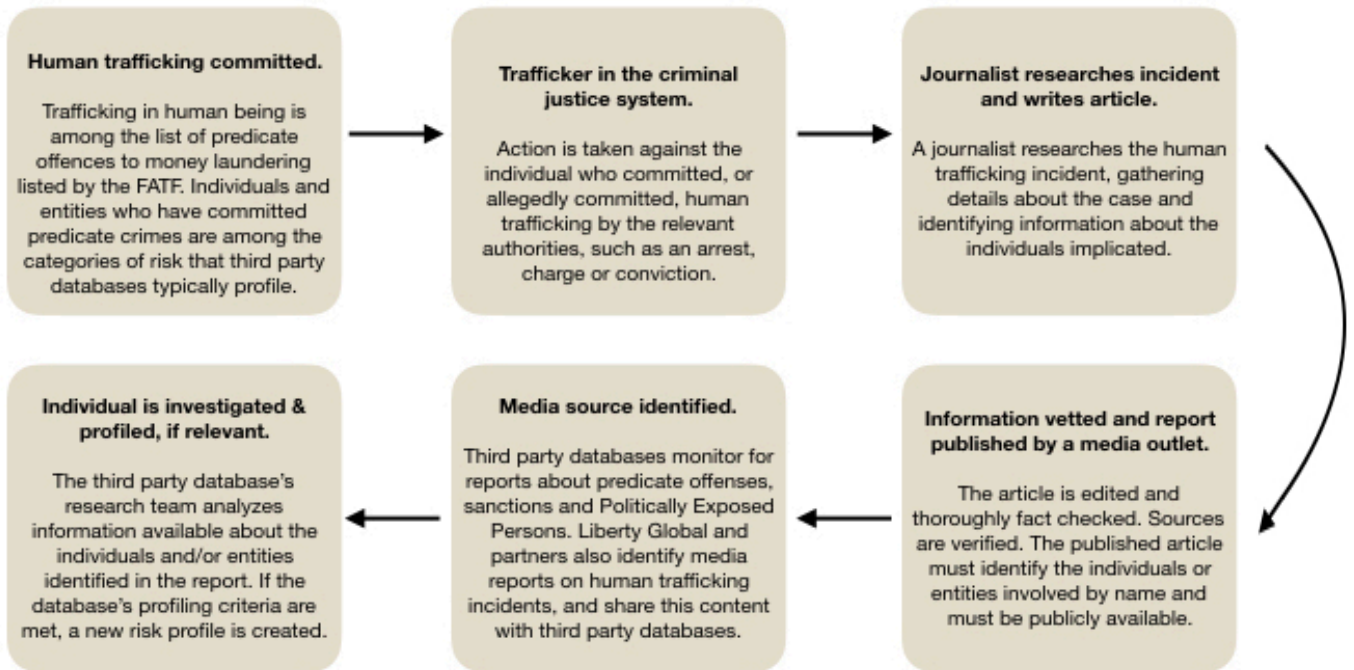


Figure 4: Process of how media reports about human trafficking and other predicate offenses to money laundering are utilized by third party databases which service the financial industry in their due diligence processes.

trafficking and transparency within the region, and has called for the repeal of criminal defamation laws (Liberty Global | Asia 2018, Making the Case).

The way in which the media reports on these issues is important to consider as well. Journalists should be equipped to report ethically, protecting the rights of both victims and the accused. Practicing the “do no harm” principle is important in ensuring that sources are not put at risk. Journalists should also be equipped to understand the ways in which the information in their reports can be utilized by industries, such as the financial industry, in the fight against human trafficking. For example, risk databases that service financial institutions in their due diligence processes use media reports as a source of information in creating risk profiles about individuals who have been linked to crimes (see Figure 4). The level of detail included in media reports, such as names, ages and locations, can be used by these databases to evaluate, and when relevant, profile individuals and entities who are connected to crimes of corruption and human trafficking. This, in return, has an impact on those individuals’ banking abilities, including their ability to fly under the radar when laundering funds gained through exploitation.

*NGOs and service providers who work directly with victims of human trafficking are uniquely positioned to collect information that can shed light on the role of corruption in their trafficking.*

Furthermore, to ensure quality reporting on these issues, it is important to consider the need for “independent funding that is decoupled from the ratings driven structure,” which was highlighted by one of the investigative journalists we spoke with. Independent funding allows for media outlets to be less restricted to stories that will bring in the most clicks and profits, and instead dedicate time and resources towards important public interest investigative journalism.

### **Nongovernmental organizations & service providers**

NGOs and service providers who work directly with victims of human trafficking are uniquely positioned to collect information that can shed light on the role of corruption in trafficking. In an interview with staff from a Southeast Asian-based anti-trafficking NGO, we learned of the ways that corruption is seen in their work. In interviews with victims of sex trafficking, for example, they often learn directly from victimized women and girls about the amounts of money that the owner of the establishment (such as a brothel, karaoke bar or massage parlor) deducted from the victims’ pay in order to pay bribes to law enforcement officials who provide the establishment owners with protection. This NGO, which also partners with local authorities in investigative work and rescue operations for sex trafficking cases, sometimes even finds physical records on the establishment’s premises that indicate exactly how much was paid in bribes to specific officials.

This kind of firsthand knowledge is invaluable, and when stripped of identifying information and aggregated, may reveal information that can help focus anti-corruption efforts on the most significant areas, showing trends, for example about which actors are most commonly implicated in a given country and at what point in the trafficking process. Our source explained that while other NGOs may also come across corruption in their work, they do not typically have systems in place for collecting and reporting this information. Development of such systems, and a way to aggregate the data collected from multiple NGOs, could capture valuable data currently falling through the cracks. A staff member from a second Southeast Asian-based NGO noted how information shared by victims is particularly helpful in understanding the points at which corruption comes into play in cross-border trafficking, as a victim's travel from source to destination country often requires facilitation by government officers and the victims may have to pay at each stage of the process.

While we recognize that corruption is not a focus for many counter-trafficking NGOs and therefore it may be difficult to gain their “buy-in” in contributing to the data collection process, it's also worthwhile considering some of the tangible benefits that such data can have in their work. Understanding where and how corruption is most commonly affecting the populations they work with, such as migrant workers who are vulnerable to labor trafficking and forced labor, can better equip NGO staff in their efforts to educate those they serve about their rights, and how to identify and avoid corruption.

## **International organizations**

International organizations are another player, in the limited group of stakeholders focusing on corruption and human trafficking, whose active participation is needed to develop more robust data. In addition to conducting their own independent research on the human trafficking-corruption nexus, international organizations have tremendous value to add in their ability to aggregate different data sources into consolidated platforms. The benefits of large scale data collection across States, or across NGOs are limited if not accompanied by the ability to harmonize, organize, store and analyze this data. International organizations, given their international structures and networks, may be better equipped than other actors to help consolidate and analyze existing data sources, and identify where the biggest gaps remain.

International organizations' voice is also important in shaping the conversation around these issues. Bodies

such as the UNODC, OECD, IOM, ILO and others can urge for an emphasis on deepening research about the links between human trafficking and corruption. Furthermore, regional bodies such as ASEAN, the African Union, the EU and others are in a position to influence the attention their member States dedicate towards collecting data on and subsequently addressing the presence of corruption in human trafficking.

## ***2. Expanding the universe of data signals considered***

Given the difficulties mentioned in gathering data on human trafficking and corruption, it's important to think creatively and expand the universe of sources considered. Collectively we need to be asking questions about what kinds of sources and data signals can really help capture evidence of corruption, and what methods, both quantitative and qualitative, can effectively gather this information. In addition to looking for direct evidence of corruption, which is often elusive, potential “outcomes” of corruption in cases of human trafficking should also be considered. Fraudulent documents seized and visas issued without all the requirements fulfilled are examples of outcomes that help point to the presence of corruption in facilitating human trafficking (UNODC 2011).

Information reported by the media is also a useful data source on human trafficking and corruption, and one which deserves more exploration. A global review of media sources that mention human trafficking and corruption would be particularly helpful in understanding the media's current efforts and limitations in investigating the nexus between these two issues. The Scelles Foundation's 2017 International Press Overview on Prostitution, which compiled 1,700 articles published that year on prostitution, provides an example of a focused global media review. Similar efforts that cover human trafficking and corruption could help identify gaps and trends in media coverage. Of interest would be information that contributes to a deeper understanding of the nature of the media content that is being produced, patterns or commonalities amongst journalists and types of media outlets reporting on human trafficking and corruption, limitations on journalists in investigating and publishing this material, and any geographical “black spots” in terms of coverage.

A source of media content we can readily access and consider is Liberty Global | Asia's dataset of human trafficking media stories, collected through the collaboration of over 30 anti-trafficking NGOs. Since 2015, we have collected and collated media stories

about individuals and entities linked to crimes of human and wildlife trafficking and have shared this information with third-party databases who service the financial industry in their due diligence and Know Your Customer processes. This dataset provides an interesting starting point for examining trends in media reporting on human trafficking, and will be explored in greater depth in a future paper.

Other types of sources to consider include information collected from victims by NGOs and service providers. While we have touched on the difficulties associated with gathering this information, NGOs and service providers are better placed to gather this information than other actors due to the relationships of trust that they build with victims over time. This rapport may help overcome challenges linked to victims' fear about sharing information about those involved in corruption. Furthermore, NGOs ability to de-identify and aggregate information collected from multiple victims over the course of years can help highlight trends.

Also worth examining are data gathering approaches that focus on "following the money." The financial links between individuals in trafficking networks, or between victims and perpetrators have proven useful in advancing the prosecution of traffickers. One organization pursuing this work is the Transaction Record Analysis Center (TRAC),<sup>4</sup> a centralized searchable database of financial transactions from money service businesses that provides data, training and collaboration to investigators working to disrupt criminal organizations. Entities like TRAC which identify financial evidence that demonstrates relationships within trafficking networks could also look to identify transactions that point to potential bribery and corruption within those same trafficking networks, and could work to aggregate data across a large number of these cases.

A large-scale analysis of cases of individuals investigated and/or convicted for both human trafficking and corruption would also be helpful in providing new insights. The UNODC notes that trafficking and corruption cases are typically handled separately, even when there are indicators of corruption in human trafficking cases and vice versa (2011). Furthermore, as mentioned previously, global levels of investigations into and prosecutions of human trafficking are very low. Quantifying what is assumed to be a large disparity

between total numbers of human trafficking convictions and total numbers of convictions for both human trafficking and corruption could help draw attention to the lack of investigation and prosecution for corruption in human trafficking cases. Being able to measure just how infrequently corruption is examined in these cases is an important part of mounting the international pressure needed to dedicate resources and effort towards addressing this nexus. Furthermore, comparing cases that resulted in convictions for both corruption and human trafficking could help identify factors that typically lead to the successful identification, investigation and prosecution of corruption in human trafficking cases, allowing for the development of best practices for law enforcement and prosecutors.

### *3. Identifying research needs*

While many areas deserve further research within the broader picture of human trafficking and corruption, we recommend research on the actors both directly involved in and indirectly facilitating human trafficking as an area of particular focus. In addition to individuals and entities commonly thought of as the "traffickers," there are scores of intermediaries who may be less directly involved but nonetheless provide essential services such as recruiting, transporting, or securing documentation for trafficked persons, as well as individuals or entities in positions of power who receive some kind of benefit in return for turning a blind eye, actively supporting criminal actions, providing approvals to conduct business, receiving investment and/or remitting currency. While distinguishing these roles is helpful in the discussion on where to focus research efforts, it is also worth noting that these distinctions are often blurred and that one role can easily merge into another.

The UNODC's 2016 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons is one of the most comprehensive sources available of information on offenders of human trafficking on a global scale. It found that six in ten offenders were male, a majority that held true for all but one region, and was seen across all stages of the criminal justice process, including investigation, prosecution and conviction (UNODC 2016). However it also points out that the share of women offenders, while not the majority, is notable, as few other crimes have such high levels of female participation. The report also presents a regional breakdown of offenders, mentions several of the most common trafficking 'models' found across the cases surveyed, and compares the offenders' country of citizenship with country of

<sup>4</sup> To learn about Liberty Global | Asia's partnership with TRAC, visit <http://freedom.collaborative.prod.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/TRAC%20partnership%202018.pdf>



offense (UNODC 2016). While this report provides knowledge about human traffickers generally, little is known about offenders who have also been connected to corruption charges. Research on these offenders would be particularly helpful, as would research on the social background of human trafficking offenders, as there is little existing knowledge of this area (Rusev 2013).

Turning towards public officials, we find that the ways they are involved in corruption and human trafficking has been mentioned repeatedly in existing literature, yet many of the general conclusions drawn could be further strengthened, and indeed would prove more relevant in impacting policies, if backed up by numbers.

While understanding the actions of human traffickers and public officials is important, by focusing solely on these actors it's possible to miss the broader context within which human trafficking unfolds. We urge for studies that go beyond those individuals prosecuted for human trafficking and public officials implicated in corruption to include other relevant actors, particularly intermediaries and private sector actors. Much could be gained from expanding research to better understand how these actors utilize corruption to carry out their role in the trafficking chain.

#### *4. Emphasis on collaboration, data sharing and data aggregating*

To effectively collect, organize and analyze data on human trafficking and corruption, collaboration across institutions, sectors and borders is needed. First, there is a need for greater transparency and information-sharing amongst public institutions, including those within the same state. Human trafficking is a crime of many crimes, which may involve fraud and deception, assault, sexual violence, document forgery, employment and immigration law breaches, tax evasion, money laundering, and a host of other offenses (Liberty Asia, Thomson Reuters 2014), yet specialized agencies that deal with corruption, human trafficking, or anti-money laundering often work independently from one another. This lack of inter-institutional communication means that information that has the potential to connect corruption and trafficking is rarely shared. Bringing these actors together to share their experiences, build trust and explore ways to safely and ethically share information is an important starting place. In countries that have an anti-trafficking task force, for example, anti-corruption and anti-money laundering professionals should also have a seat at the table.

Cross-border collaboration is also needed to better understand corruption. This is particularly the case with transnational human trafficking, as no government “can adequately respond to transnational trafficking in isolation” (Williams 2009). In considering how to best aggregate and share information from multiple countries and institutions, we look to existing examples of human trafficking data collaboration as a starting point. The Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC),<sup>5</sup> launched in 2017, serves as a human trafficking data hub, pooling information from anti-trafficking NGOs globally. Much of the current data has been contributed by the IOM, Polaris, and Liberty Global | Asia, and the CDTC invites other counter-trafficking organizations to contribute de-identified data. While this platform is fairly new, it serves as an example of efforts to bring together multiple organizations to pool data and thereby arrive at conclusions that are backed not just by shared assumptions, but by numbers. While the CDTC focuses primarily on victim-related data, such as demographics and total numbers of victims by region, we see platforms like this as examples of how corruption and human trafficking data could also be pooled and harmonized across multiple organizations and countries.

The UNODC's Human Trafficking Knowledge Portal<sup>6</sup> is also worth considering, which includes a case law database that provides public access to approximately 1,500 prosecuted cases of human trafficking. It includes information on victims and perpetrators' nationalities, trafficking routes and verdicts, and allows searches by keyword and country. Platforms like this may prove useful tools in aggregating case information on human trafficking cases where corruption charges are also investigated or prosecuted.

Additionally, greater public-private partnerships, and collaboration that reaches across sectors can help expand current efforts to better take advantage of the strengths of different institutions. For example, one of the journalists we interviewed spoke to the need for closer collaboration between counter-trafficking NGOs and journalists. NGOs that investigate and report on human trafficking have extensive ground knowledge, and often have longer time periods to investigate than a journalist may have for a given story. Journalists, in turn, understand the nuances of how to communicate information so as to have the greatest reach and impact, and media outlets provide a wide audience base. Strategic partnerships between

<sup>5</sup> For more about the CTDC and access to its dataset, visit: <https://www.ctdatacollaborative.org/>

<sup>6</sup> For more about the Human Trafficking Knowledge Portal, visit: <https://www.unodc.org/cld/en/v3/htms/index.html>

NGOs and journalists can help maximize the impact of investigations on corruption and human trafficking.

### *5. Developing good governance supported by infrastructure*

To effectively carry out the recommendations made in this paper, the development of stronger governance backed by infrastructure is essential. Governance is worth addressing because most counter-trafficking governance efforts “remain fragmented and ad hoc in form” (Williams 2009), and because capacity-building alone may never address the root problems that allow for environments in which these crimes thrive. In fact “increasing capacity of a corrupt system” can be counterproductive (Eagle Enforcement 2018).

Corruption goes so often unreported and unpenalized due to a lack of transparency mechanisms that push for greater accountability. One way to build this accountability amongst public officials is through independent bodies that investigate, expose and work to prevent corruption amongst government institutions, such as Independent Commissions Against Corruption. Examples of these bodies can be found in places like Hong Kong and New South Wales, Australia.

In one of our interviews, the director of a Southeast-Asian based anti-trafficking NGO emphasized the need to identify examples of countries who have made significant progress in dealing with corruption and establishing greater transparency. These countries, and in particular the steps they have taken, can serve as models for how to address similar issues in other countries where corruption is deeply entangled in government institutions.

Good governance requires the support of strong infrastructure. Much of our focus at Liberty Global | Asia is on building the infrastructure and tools which enable systemic improvement of governance and transparency, and in turn, support greater accountability and liability. Our cloud-based victim case management system, for example, provides frontline NGOs with the ability to safely store, share and analyze their case records, and our communication platforms allow for the sharing of information directly from in-field NGOs to industries like the financial industry and the fishing industry. Our online anti-trafficking community, Freedom Collaborative, provides a space for information sharing amongst anti-trafficking practitioners globally, as well as discussions about best practices and ways to address key technological and information gaps facing the anti-trafficking movement.

While infrastructure is indeed necessary for good governance, it is not sufficient in itself. Funds and tools allocated towards building the infrastructure and institutional capacity of governments to monitor, report, and hold individuals and entities accountable for corruption in human trafficking must be used appropriately in order to have the intended impact. This again returns to the question of political will and highlights the need for non-state actors like NGOs, academics, the media and others, to hold state actors accountable and continue pressing for real transparency.

## In Conclusion

While this paper begins to address some questions about human trafficking and corruption, it raises many others. Most experts agree that corrupt environments are necessary for human trafficking to take place and thrive, yet the ways in which existing research “proves” this nexus does so “on very thin ice.” Correlations between datasets that are self-reinforcing, and reliance on case studies and anecdotal information is fragile knowledge upon which to reach conclusions about the connection between human trafficking and corruption on a global scale and establish causality.

Further research into this connection, particularly that which stretches the array of data signals utilized, is needed. In order to do so, the media, governments, NGOs and international organizations will all need to be involved and will need to create new forms of collaboration and information-sharing across institutions and across borders. Political will is needed to focus time and resources on tackling corruption, as is the development of good governance supported by infrastructure and transparency. Perhaps equally important is the need for a greater commitment to focus on corruption in anti-trafficking initiatives.

Collectively there is a need to steer away from viewing human trafficking as an isolated event and instead seek to understand it as a crime of many crimes, among which corruption, bribery, forgery and money laundering play an important role. To begin prioritizing the collection of information that has historically been ignored will require recalibrating, and will mean widening our view to consider the networks of corruption that aid and abet crimes of human trafficking.

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# Information and Data Collaboration Programme (“IDC”)

The IDC is a programme created and run by Liberty Global | Asia which collects and collates publicly available data and information to create information and research products which can be used by recipients in their decision making to benefit both themselves and the protection of the vulnerable by reducing exploitation. The IDC increases and improves the collection, the analysis and the circulation of information and data about perpetrators and incidents of slavery and trafficking activities from the ground to industry and reduces the lack of information and data now available and accessible for decision makers to reduce their risk and involvement in exploitation and contribute to the fight against slavery and trafficking.

IDC’s strategic aims are to:

- I. identify relevant and useful data sources of use to recipients in both structured (i.e. regulated with complex infrastructure such the banking industry) and unstructured (i.e. weak regulation and governance such as the fishing industry);
- II. understand the nature and dynamics of relevant environments and their structure and mechanics;
- III. identify the data signals within these sources that can create compelling actionable information and research products (e.g. profiles of perpetrators to 3rd party database providers or information for risk assessments);
- IV. develop methods of creating information products that can be developed cost effectively within civil society type budgetary constraints and distributed on scale;
- V. create sustainable operations with robust governance, risk management and transparency which are accountable to stakeholders; and
- VI. work to the benefit of the vulnerable and to minimize conflicts of interest with third parties.

