

Joint Learning Initiative Anti-Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Learning Hub

Concept Note

Background and rationale

Human trafficking and modern slavery are global problems in the 21st century. Despite the formal end of the slave trade in the 19th century and the existence of laws and conventions to protect people from trafficking and slavery, millions of people are affected. While definitions and data are problematic by the nature of the problem, the Global Slavery Index tells us that ‘45.8 million people are enslaved in the world today’;¹ the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimate is that profits from human trafficking are \$150 billion annually;² and UNICEF tells us that at least 1.2 million children are trafficked every year.³

Reflecting the seriousness of this issue, addressing human trafficking is among the new UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically in the targets of three goals - 5, 8, and 16; the aim is to ensure that ‘this grave human rights violation will become a greater priority for countries and citizens around the world.’⁴

Alongside others, faith-based actors have played important roles in campaigns and activities to bring human trafficking and slavery to an end, and to support those affected by it. This legacy extends from a central position in the 18th and 19th century Abolitionist Movement to the present day, where in both the Global North and the Global South faith based organisations continue work tirelessly to oppose human trafficking and modern slavery. Faith actors involved in this sector today range widely; they include large international faith based organisations such as the Salvation Army, the Anglican Alliance and Caritas International, smaller local FBOs, individual places of worship, and global faith leaders. Moreover, affiliation to a religious tradition often motivates many working on these issues in secular organisations, rendering the distinction between faith based and secular sometimes hard to maintain in practice.

Faith based values and institutions can also have negative effects on human trafficking and slavery. For instance, religious teachings may underpin unequal gender relations that enable the flourishing of sexual and labour exploitation, faith communities may choose to ignore trafficked people, viewing their situation as the product of unwholesome lifestyle choices that are at odds with faith based values, or faith based institutions may support practices that result in the trafficking of people (e.g. ‘forced marriage’ and other harmful traditional practices).

A range of members of the Joint Learning Initiative are involved in work to end modern slavery and human trafficking. Some members, such as the Salvation Army and the Anglican Alliance,

¹ <https://www.globallslaveryindex.org/>

² http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_243391.pdf

³ https://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58005.html

⁴ <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/sustainable-development-goals-aim-end-human-trafficking/29864>

are involved in collaborative programmes for strengthening the response of local faith communities. At the same time, a number of academic institutions have been engaged in research in this area over recent years, not least in the UK due to the focus of the UK government on ending modern slavery. Although this topic is widely discussed, there are significant gaps in understanding about how religious dynamics shape this field. In academia, the intersection between faith and anti-trafficking/modern slavery is under-researched and more could be done to communicate existing research in this area and to identify where the pressing research gaps are. There is also a need for better networking between different faith based and secular actors around trafficking and modern slavery to share best practice and to improve the quality of campaigning and support.