



Stop Trafficking!

Awareness Advocacy Action

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FOCUS: This month's newsletter explores how consumerism contributes to both sex and labor trafficking.

With Christmas fast approaching and holiday shopping underway, it is worth exploring the origin of some of our holiday and gift purchases. The stark reality is that many of the holiday decorations and gifts we buy, including clothing, electronics, toys, and gadgets, are likely tainted by child and forced labor. Even the seemingly innocent Christmas dinner is not exempt as trafficking and abuse of some agricultural workers, especially migrant workers, is well known, and child labor in the chocolate industry has been well documented.

This dark reality extends across supply chains, from sourcing raw materials to manufacturing, packaging, delivery, and the sale of products. Moreover, our insatiable appetite for more products at cheaper prices fuels a system that thrives on exploiting the vulnerable. It's imperative to recognize that our unchecked consumerism not only perpetuates these injustices but also fuels forced marriages and human trafficking, all in the pursuit of maximizing profits and minimizing costs.

Human Beings as Commodities

Human trafficking is the commercialization of that which no one has the right to sell – human lives. One aspect of the experience of being trafficked for sex or labor is the treatment of the victim as a commodity. Human commodification treats people as things that can be bought and sold or as objects with a market value.

We have been socialized to see what is happening to a disembodied “other” in the news, as not affecting us and not our problem. Out of a desire for even cheaper goods, we ignore supply chains and the systems that endanger or limit the lives of those who make our goods. The use of explicit sexual material through various media outlets serves to normalize the commercialization of human beings, leading to their dehumanization while also reducing the stigma of commercial sex. This “othering” serves to exclude, devalue, and dehumanize another human being and allows some human beings to enslave and sell other human beings.

Traffickers, both perpetrators and victims of this culture of exclusion and indifference, take advantage of the system. Meanwhile, leaders often disregard the human trafficking-related abuses that occur within their borders, perpetrated by their own citizens. The fundamental rights of trafficking victims, such as the right to life, security, freedom of movement, and the right not to be subjected to torture or degrading treatment, are routinely violated.

An understanding and sense of our shared humanity and the common good must obliterate the sense of otherness pervasive in society today. Understanding human trafficking and its root causes will require overcoming deep-seated beliefs of the lesser value of some human beings, of some human beings being not equal to, but lesser than ourselves.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Would knowing the human cost to our purchases change the way corporations and buyers behave?

Ask yourself, if the next time you were looking for a Christmas gift or purchasing decorations for the holiday, and the tag told you that this item was made using forced or child labor, would you still make the purchase? Would this make you reflect on how you may be consuming the suffering of a child?

An economic system built on transparency is desperately needed on a global scale.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



Awareness

The importance of consumer demand as an essential factor in human trafficking is well established. The United Nations Trafficking Protocol includes the need to address demand under Article 9 relating to the prevention of human trafficking. It states that governments should seek to 'discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking'.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2000

According to a [March 2024 report from the International Labor Organization \(ILO\)](#), forced labor in the private economy generates \$236 billion in illegal profits annually. The report estimates that traffickers and criminals make close to \$10,000 per victim, which is up from \$8,269 a decade ago.

According to the [2023 Global Slavery Index](#), an annual \$468 billion worth of goods imported into the Group of 20 industrial and emerging-market nations are at risk of being produced by forced labor. This includes nearly \$150 billion worth of garments.

[UNICEF \(United Nations Children's Fund\) reports](#) that of the more than 150 million children working worldwide, close to 75 million are working in hazardous conditions, with most invisible and far down the supply chain, such as in mining or on cocoa farms.

Consumer Demand and Sex Trafficking

Unchecked consumerism, instant gratification, and commercial sex all propel the demand side of human trafficking. Based on the economic principles of supply and demand, human trafficking thrives.

With the rise of the internet, the sex industry has expanded from traditional brothels and street prostitution to online grooming and advertising. The demand for prostitution and pornography has contributed to this expansion of the sex industry. Human beings are bought and sold as commodities, a practice promoted by the endless supply of victims, the endless demand for the product (men, women, and children), and the estimated annual global profits of [\\$236 billion](#) (for sex and labor trafficking) made by criminals.

The demand for prostitution is significantly influenced by the social and cultural milieus within a country. According to a [study by the IOM](#), the initial decision to buy sex in some cultures appears to have been promoted by friends and colleagues, making it more of a public and social matter as a private and personal decision. Social pressures to engage in prostitution appear to be stronger among some occupational groups than others, and, more importantly, they seem to be intensely focused on young men and boys rather than men of all ages.

The Nordic model, first adopted in Sweden, is an approach to human trafficking and prostitution that aims to criminalize the purchase of sex and pimping while decriminalizing the sale of sex. The model is based on the idea that prostitution and sex trafficking are harmful to both the people involved and to society as a whole and that criminalizing the purchase of sex is a way to end violence against women and achieve gender equality. When the buyers risk punishment, consumer demand decreases, profitability decreases, and human trafficking for sex decreases in countries and states that have adopted this model.

It is widely believed that legalizing prostitution can inadvertently contribute to the demand for prostituted women and, consequently, sex trafficking.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



Child Labor and Your Christmas Decorations

[Global March Against Child Labor](#) found children, ages 8 to 14, working in a sweatshop in New Delhi making Christmas decorations and seasonal gifts to be sold in the United States and Europe. The children were working in small, unventilated spaces for up to 15 hours a day, forced under the constant threat of violence. During the holiday season, heightened consumer demand for these goods leads to a labor shortage. To cope with this, teenagers and children are often recruited or, as in a New Delhi case, trafficked into forced labor. Poor parents are frequently tricked into selling their children to middlemen for a few dollars after being told that their children will receive care and free education and that their wages will be sent back to the family.

And if the label on your decoration's states "Made in China"? Forced labor is so integrated into the Chinese supply chain that it is almost impossible to find a product made in China that has not caused an extraordinary amount of human suffering, particularly by the Uyghur people. Moreover, the [Department of Labor List of Goods made by Child Labor](#) reports that child labor was used in the making of Christmas decorations.

And toys? Prior to Christmas 2022, an investigation of toy factories in China, where 85 percent of the toys on the American market are produced, revealed that about 300 child workers were drafted to help with the holiday demand.

Many Other Industries Profit from Human Trafficking

Aside from Christmas decorations and toys, many other industries profit from human trafficking, whether directly or indirectly. From the clothes we buy as gifts or to wear ourselves to electronics, there's a good chance that child or forced labor was involved at some point in the production line. Certain products and industries are more likely to rely on forced or trafficked labor in their supply chains. These include:

Fashion

"Fast fashion" is notorious for its questionable supply chains. From raw materials to manufacturing, packaging, and delivery, child and forced labor are embedded in the global garment industry's supply chains. The clothing industry has doubled in size in the last 15 years alone, partly driven by demand for fast fashion.

Brands that prioritize cheap labor often exploit countries with weak or non-existent labor rights, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation. The fashion industry, driven by consumer demand and industry greed, significantly contributes to child and forced labor practices. According to the International Human Rights group [Walk Free](#), every stage of the garment supply chain is at risk for forced and child labor.

Electronics and Mining

Like the fashion industry, electronics and mining have long, shadowy supply chains. For instance, rare minerals used in smartphones are mined under hazardous conditions, sometimes by children or trafficked individuals.

Agriculture

Cheap produce sometimes comes at a high human cost. Forced labor in the agricultural sector is a widespread problem, especially in nations where monitoring and regulation are weak. Migrant workers are particularly susceptible to forced labor in the agricultural industry.

Conscious Consumerism

[Conscious consumerism](#) is a rapidly growing movement in which consumers make informed decisions about their purchases to bring about positive change in society, the economy, and the environment.

Conscious consumers often buy only what they need and prioritize sustainability when purchasing.

When people understand the link between human trafficking and conscious consumerism, they become part of a significant movement to end exploitation. By collectively choosing products made with human rights in mind, we are challenging the profitability of modern slavery. This shift in shopping habits is not just about personal choices, it's about joining a larger movement that is fostering sustainable and ethical business growth. To learn more please click [here](#).



Action

How can you shop ethically this festive season?

Educate yourself and share what you learn. Recognize that everything we purchase impacts other people and the planet. Demand transparency and avoid brands that don't tell you who made their products.

An increasing number of fashion brands and consumers are embracing the concept of ethical and sustainable fashion.

Download the Good On You: Ethical Brands application. This app is available on the App Store and Google Play.

Support organizations that work to help survivors of human trafficking.

The [Fair Wear Foundation](#) has a list of over 120 brands that have signed up to its code of labor practices, which does not allow the use of child labor. Accredited brands must ensure, through regular audits, that all the suppliers in the cut-make-trim stage of production meet these standards, which go beyond most companies' in-house policies.



Catholic Ethical Purchasing Alliance

The Catholic Ethical Purchasing Alliance (CEPA) is a project of the Ignatian Solidarity Network and EthixMerch. The Alliance provides support to institutions seeking to integrate these values into their purchasing through educational resources, immersive formational opportunities, networking, and mentorship. Please click [here](#) for more information and their resources.



Many remember the first consumer boycott we heard about and participated in. For me, it was the grape boycott of the 1960s and 1970s to support a strike by the United Farm Workers, aimed to improve the lives of the grape workers. Political consumerism, the decision by consumers to intentionally refuse to purchase certain products due to political motivations such as decreasing child or forced labor, or environmental or ethical concerns, has been part of our history.

Many anti-trafficking movements are geared to awaken consumers to the fact that, by consuming, they are inadvertently complicit in the supply-and-demand structure of the marketplace that sustains human exploitation. Without a demand for products and a willingness to pay for them, supply and the need for forced and child labor to produce that produce will diminish.

Our consumer culture tells us what we need and what we need more of. The most significant action we can take to end child and forced labor is to re-examine our approach to unquestioned consumerism and Christmas shopping. Aside from this, some positive actions you can take could be to purchase from local independent businesses and craftspeople. They can show that their goods are locally manufactured, and you'll be helping to grow local businesses, employ local people, and support local suppliers. You can also shop in second-hand stores, extending the life of existing goods and clothing.

Alliance to End Human Trafficking Conference

Pathways To Prevention

February 5-7, 2025

The conference will explore avenues of human trafficking prevention that will include the use of tools like shareholder advocacy, understanding intergenerational trauma, and skills for parents, as well as awareness around the topics of forced migration, labor trafficking, and trafficking on college campuses.

BWI Airport Marriott
1743 West Nursery Road, Linthicum, MD 21090

To register, please click [here](#).

Certified B Corp Businesses

Buying from [certified B Corp businesses](#) is another way to feel confident that your purchases are made by workers who are treated fairly. “Certified B Corporations use business as a force for good,” according to B Lab. “They focus their impact on stakeholders, like their neighbors, their employees, and our planet.” The steps to getting certified are many and challenging; the label allows consumers to make choices that support healthy, safe and fair conditions for workers.

Everyday tens of thousands of American women buy makeup. Everyday tens of thousands of Indian children mine mica, which is the little sparkles in the makeup.

Slavery Footprint

[The Better World Shopper](#), a research organization that ranks corporations based on a corporation’s social and environmental practices, publishes information on more than 1,000 corporations. Walmart, Chevron, GE, Citibank and Nestle, turn up at the top of its worst offenders list.

How many slaves work for you?

‘How many slaves work for you?’ is the direct question posed by [SlaveryFootprint.org](#) on their App and website, and is the implicit message underpinning a range of anti-trafficking campaigns that seek to address the consumer demand that fuels modern slavery in the global market. Click on their website and find out “how many slaves work for you.”

[Cause Artist](#) is a platform that examines sustainable and regenerative business practices. It involves mindful and ethical consumption that considers not only the products and services being bought, but also the companies behind them. This type of consumerism encourages individuals to prioritize sustainability, human rights, and social responsibility when they shop.



The No Fees Initiative

According to the [2023 Know the Chain Benchmark Report](#), nearly two-thirds (65%) of apparel companies disclosed a general policy provision that prohibits recruitment fees in their supply chains. However, only a quarter of companies have a supply chain policy that aligns with the Employer Pays Principle (43%), specifying that the employer and not the worker must be responsible for the payment of recruitment-related fees.

Seven companies have newly disclosed a no-fee policy since 2021, including Carter’s and Under Armour. Three companies have strengthened their existing no-fee policy (Burberry, Hanesbrands, and VF), suggesting a growing recognition of the forced labor risks associated with recruitment.

Clothes Made by or to Support Survivors of Human Trafficking



[ReThreaded](#): Unique Products Created by Survivors of Human Trafficking

Every purchase and donation directly helps survivors with employment, counseling, and career development.

[Elegantees](#)

Offers apparel for both women and men. Each purchase supports the employment of survivors of sex trafficking and those at risk of human trafficking in Nepal. Elegantees also donates excess profits to organizations that fight human trafficking.

[Made for Freedom](#)

Made for Freedom products are made by survivors of exploitation and marginalization

[Joyya](#)

Offers apparel for women and men. Joyya supports job training and employment opportunities for those at risk of exploitation in India, Nepal and the United States.



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