

# Human Trafficking: Everybody's Business

## Introduction:

The increased global scope of corporate activity today demands that businesses remain attentive to the many ways their operations can both positively and negatively affect human rights around the world. Although the connection between business and human trafficking may not be initially evident, human trafficking should be of pressing concern to companies – especially those with international operations and/or complex supply and production chains.

## What is human trafficking?

Human trafficking is defined in international law as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of 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 [...] for the purpose of exploitation.<sup>1</sup>

Exploitation includes sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery-like practices, servitude or the removal of organs. Forced or compulsory labour is all work or service, which is exacted from any person under the menace of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily. It is irrelevant whether the person was paid for the work or service.

The definition of trafficking consists of three core elements, the *action* of trafficking, the *means* and the *purpose*. If all the elements of human trafficking are present, the fact that an adult initially consented is irrelevant. It is also considered trafficking if the victim had no real or acceptable alternative but to submit to the abuse. If the victim is a child, it is considered trafficking even if there is no threat or use of force. Trafficking need not be across borders; it can occur within the borders of a single country.

## The facts:

- 161 countries are reported to be affected by human trafficking by being a source, transit and/or destination country. Human trafficking affects every continent and every type of economy.<sup>2</sup>
- The majority of trafficking victims are between 18 and 24 years of age<sup>3</sup>
- An estimated 1.2 million children are trafficked each year<sup>4</sup>
- 95% of victims experience physical or sexual violence during trafficking<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 2237, No. 39574.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Trafficking in Persons: Global Patterns (Vienna, 2006)

<sup>3</sup> International Organization for Migration, Counter-Trafficking Database, 78 Countries, 1999-2006 (1999)

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, UK Child Trafficking Information Sheet (January 2003)

- 2.45 million people are estimated to be in conditions of forced labour as a result of trafficking<sup>6</sup>
- 43% of victims are used for forced commercial sexual exploitation, of whom 98% are women and girls<sup>7</sup>
- 32% of victims are used for forced economic exploitation, of whom 56% are women and girls<sup>8</sup>
- Many trafficked persons (18%) have at least middle-level education<sup>9</sup>

#### Why businesses should be concerned:

The increasingly complex composition of corporate activity, with various supplier and subcontractor relationships, challenges the ability of companies to monitor their activities around the world. However, because human trafficking violates international human rights norms and laws, often defies international labor standards, and regularly involves corruption, businesses should ensure that all elements of their operations, including their products, premises and services are not contributing to human trafficking. Doing so enables companies to manage risk and ensure that their reputation and integrity remain intact. Further, companies should consider ways to help eliminate the existence of human trafficking through the promotion of codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility in an effort to enhance stakeholder relationships and improve business environment.

#### Private Sector Survey on Human Trafficking:

In order to better understand corporate perceptions and concerns regarding human trafficking, raise awareness of the issues, and determine how the UN system can more effectively support business efforts to combat the problem, the UN Global Compact, UN.GIFT and the ILO teamed up to produce and administer a ‘Private Sector Survey on Human Trafficking’.

While companies did indicate that they were aware of human trafficking and there was a general consensus amongst participants that human trafficking is morally unacceptable, the relationship between business and human trafficking proved less evident to those who took the survey.

As demonstrated below, less than 20% of participants indicated that human trafficking posed a serious threat to the security of their global supply chains and only 31% identified being motivated to address human trafficking in order to manage risk and maintain the company’s reputation.

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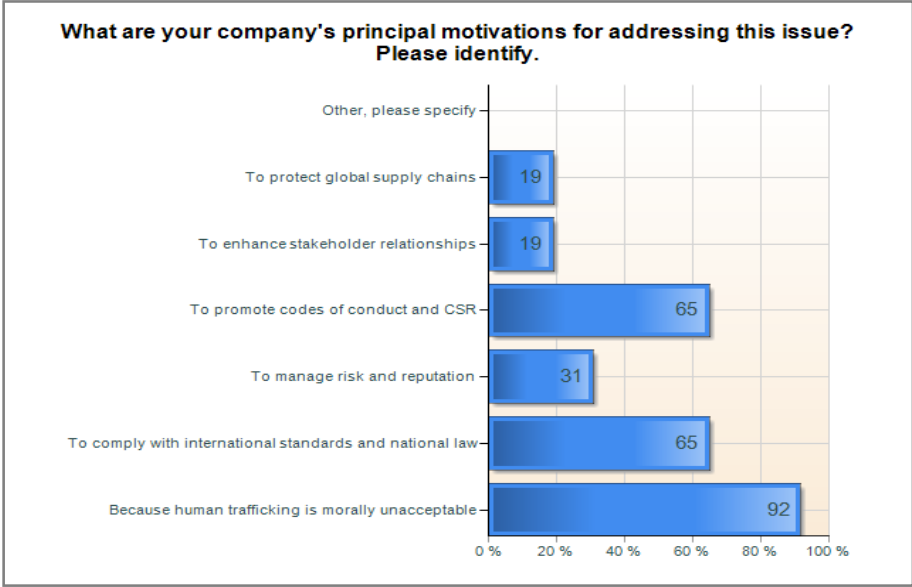
<sup>5</sup> Based on data from selected European countries. The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Stolen smiles: a summary report on the physical and psychological health consequences of women and adolescents trafficked in Europe (London, 2006), (based on data from selected European countries)

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organization, Forced Labour Statistics Factsheet (2007)

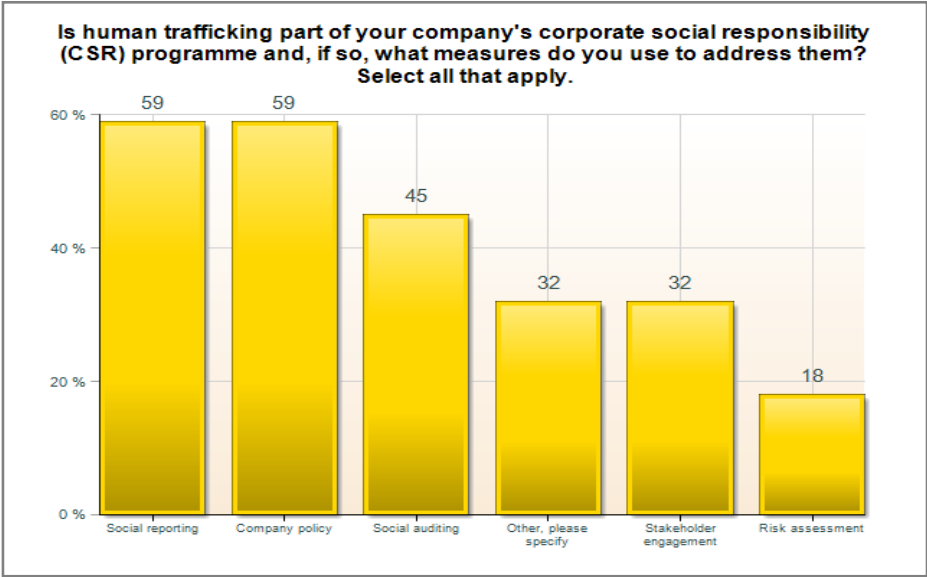
<sup>7</sup> International Labour Organization, Forced Labour Statistics Factsheet (2007)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

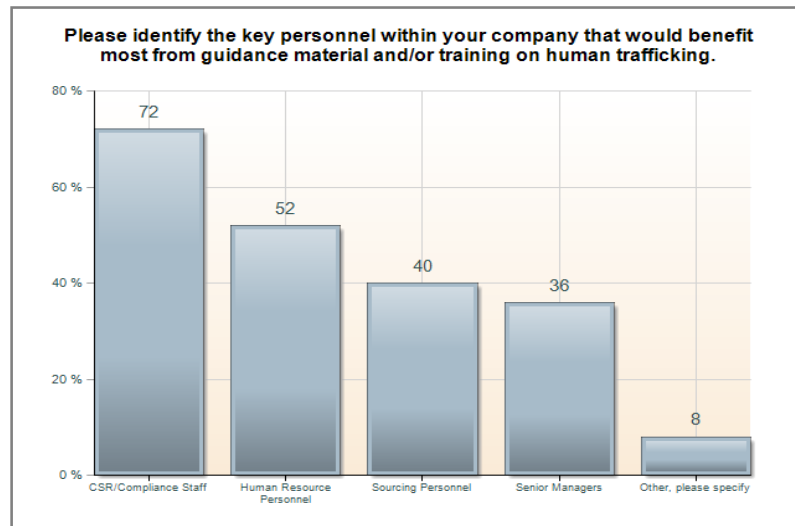
<sup>9</sup> International Organization for Migration, IOM Global Human Trafficking Database, October 2008



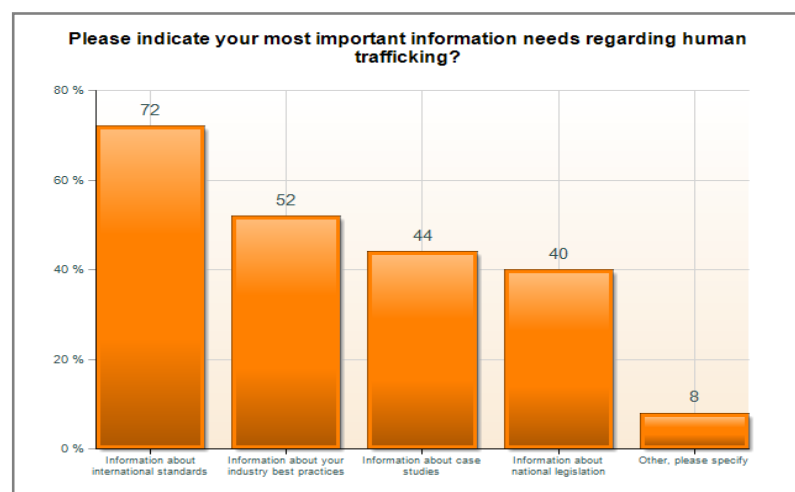
Further, less than 60% of businesses consulted reported having a company policy that addresses human trafficking and only 18% of companies made use of risk assessments.



Similarly, while 72% of participants indicated that their CSR staff would benefit from guidance material and or training on human trafficking, only 36% believed that engagement with senior management was necessary.



The survey's results clearly indicate that companies are in need of increased access to information about human trafficking and the relationship between human trafficking and business activities. Participants showed particular interest in gaining greater knowledge about international standards and showed interest in exchanging information about industry best practices. Additionally, with respect to technical guidance, company participants were particularly interested in training and policy development and also indicated that guidance on measuring impact and auditing, as well as communications, would be beneficial.



## Conclusion:

As the ‘Private Sector Survey on Human Trafficking’ indicates, the connection between human trafficking and business has yet to be sufficiently recognized by most companies. While un-monitored business activity has the potential to aid human trafficking, companies also have the means to contribute to its eradication. Further, businesses must realize that by failing to address human trafficking they risk violating international standards and laws, tarnishing their reputation, and ruining stakeholder relationships.

Companies can avoid the risk of human trafficking by taking steps to make it harder for traffickers to traffic people using their products, premises or services and by helping raise awareness of the problem. Some other steps include adopting and implementing corporate policies with commitments to respect human rights, labour standards and anti-corruption.

Companies with operations in sectors and regions of higher risk may find it helpful to conduct a risk assessment to become aware of, manage and eliminate this risk. They may also wish to undertake training and internal and external communications to raise awareness of the problem and identify how staff, business partners and customers may come into contact with it. A number of businesses in the travel, tourism and technology sectors have introduced diverse measures to combat the problem.

Using the results of the ‘Private Sector Survey on Human Trafficking’ as a basis for further action, the UN Global Compact, UN.GIFT and the ILO will continue to work together to better meet the needs of businesses in their efforts to address human trafficking. Currently, tools and guidance materials to help companies can be found on the UN Global Compact ([www.unglobalcompact.org/issues](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/issues)), UN.GIFT ([www.ungift.org](http://www.ungift.org)) and ILO ([www.ilo.org/forcedlabour](http://www.ilo.org/forcedlabour)) websites.

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