

Conversations on Working in Freedom

Linking evidence and gendering policies to prevent trafficking in the wake of COVID-19 Pandemic

A discussion series with experienced trade unionists and expert researchers

Organised by the Work in Freedom programme, ILO

Second Panel Discussion on

Trafficking in the wake of COVID-19

Understanding Challenges Ahead and Evolving Collective Strategies

July 30, 2020 at 5:00 pm – 7:30 pm IST via Webex Online

Restricted to large urban cities resulting in a lockdown with a migrant exodus, the COVID-19 pandemic was predominantly an urban phenomenon during the lockdown. While cities have learnt to cope and begun resuming economic activities, the focus is slowly shifting. Moving inwards, the spread of the disease has engulfed metropolitan areas, infiltrated suburban zones and crept into the deep rural hinterland in several countries of the Global South. While some workers have returned home after facing much peril, there are increasing reports of workers slowly returning to cities, despite lockdowns in their states, as their need for employment assumes greater significance.

On the occasion of World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, the second discussion in the WIF series will focus on trafficking in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and strategies for its prevention. Vulnerabilities have deepened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for informal, unorganised workers. [Lesson learned](#) by the Work in Freedom programme over the past years indicate that migration bans increase vulnerability to trafficking in place of decreasing them while systemic causes of deprivation continue playing an important role.

With significant restrictions on mobility of all, has women's mobility for work been further restricted? Live-out domestic workers have reported job loss linked to the unavailability of public transport, women street vendors have lost their source of income overnight and continue to struggle with making ends meet as lockdown led relief measures ebb. The expert panel invited for the conversation will delve into the impact of COVID on the world of work and if trafficking is expected increase in the near future.

A corresponding issue that emerges is: are existing anti-trafficking policies helpful then, in protecting migrant women? In our previous conversation, we have seen how migrant women in sectors such as domestic work deal with poor working and living conditions. Since anti-trafficking activists tend to conflate human trafficking with sex-work, what has been the experience of sex workers in protecting victims of trafficking as well as their engagement with existing laws against trafficking in women and young girls? Has a criminalised approach been effective? This question will be explored by the expert panel in detail, ranging from experiences on the ground, dealing with social and legal institutions as well as global responses to anti-trafficking policies and standard setting. Marking 20 years since the Palermo Protocol, a reflection on what-has-worked and what-has-not would be pertinent. The panel will also discuss alternative approaches and reflect on the types of policies that are needed in the current context. The second discussion series will be held on July 30, 2020 online and speakers will include:

1. Dr. Bandana Pattanaik (International Coordinator, Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women),
2. Prof. Prabha Kotiswaran (Professor, King's College London),
3. Dr. Thérèse Blanchet (Eminent Social Anthropologist),
4. Dr. Shereen El Feki (Author of "Sex and the Citadel" and Associate Fellow, Chatham House),
5. Ms. Ayesha Rai (National Co-ordinator, National Network of Sex Workers),
6. Ms. Aarthi Pai (Lawyer and Director, SANGRAM).

The discussion will be introduced by Neha Wadhawan (National Project Coordinator - India, Work in Freedom, ILO) and moderated by Igor Bosc (Chief Technical Advisor, Work in Freedom, ILO).