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### Abstract

n 2017, the G20 pledged to implement immediate and effective measures to eliminate forced labour, human trafficking, and other forms of modern-day slavery. Such declaration of commitment is impactful, given the G20's economic and political heft. This Policy Brief focuses on how the G20 can lead efforts to put survivors of human trafficking back in society's mainstream. To prevent survivors from being re-trafficked and help them establish a foothold in resuming their

lives, it is crucial to provide them with market-relevant skills training that would allow them to find reliable sources of income. Building upon case studies of skill development programmes being implemented by both governments and non-government organisations in developing countries in South and Southeast Asia, this Policy Brief outlines recommendations for the G20 to facilitate the promotion of these initiatives.

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### Introduction

mong the declarations that the G20 made in 2017 was to eradicate modern-day slavery.

The grouping emphasised the need for immediate and effective measures to eliminate child labour, forced labour, human trafficking, and all forms of modern-day slavery by 2025. Such an aim will help fulfil Goal 8.7 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which calls for the eradication of forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking by 2030.

The trafficking of women and children violates their basic human rights. Yet this crime remains one of the least

understood forms of transnational crime, with significant gaps existing in both data on its incidence, and the legislative measures that countries have implemented to respond to the challenge.

This Policy Brief assesses the current situation of trafficked women in India and its adjacent countries in Southeast Asia. It offers an understanding of trafficking in women in South and Southeast Asia, and outlines policy recommendations for finding sustainable solutions to help survivors of trafficking in South and Southeast Asia resume their lives.

## The Challenge

ncidents of human trafficking are underreported, resulting in a lack of comprehensive understanding of its reach and scale. In both South and Southeast Asia, human trafficking thrives for multiple reasons (see Box 1).

**Box 1:** 

#### Causes of Human Trafficking

- Poverty
- Economic insecurity
- Unemployment
- Gender inequality
- · Lack of education
- Demand for cheap labour
- Natural disasters
- Forced migration due to conflict
- Political instability
- · Social media-related trafficking
- Lack of safe migration options
- Deception/kidnapping

Source: TIP 2022 report

Most trafficked individuals are low-skilled, domestic helpers, sex workers, or sweatshop employees.<sup>2</sup> In this context, it is noteworthy that migration within and outside these

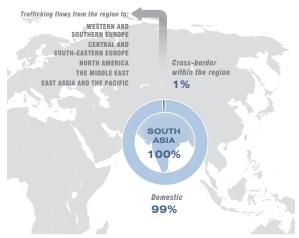
regions has been feminised because of the increasing demand for domestic and care jobs in Asia and beyond.<sup>3</sup> In most cases, these women make up the majority of workers in the vulnerable and largely informal sectors of domestic work, hospitality, and sex work.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Eastern South Asia**

A significant proportion of human trafficking takes place in South Asia, with victims from this region being recorded in over 40 countries across the world.<sup>5</sup> The destination countries include those in the Gulf region, as well as Western and Southern Europe and North America; a smaller number are taken to countries in Southeast Asia and Africa (see Map 1).

Obtaining accurate statistics on the number of women who fall victim to trafficking is a massive challenge. However, recent reports from government entities, NGOs, and the media suggest that trafficking within and outside of South Asia is on the rise. Figure 1 shows the domestic trafficking trends in the region. Adding to the complexity of trying to address the issue of human trafficking in South Asia, is the absence of universal regulations.

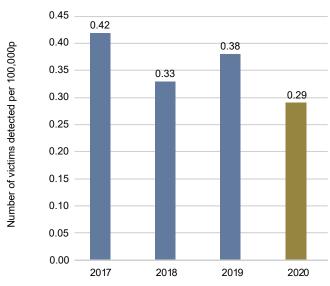
Map 1: Trafficking Routes in South Asia



Source: UNODC 2022

**Figure 1: Domestic Trafficking Trends in South Asia** 

Number of victims of domestic trafficking detected per 100,000 population in South Asia, 2017-2020



Source: UNODC 2022

Table 1 gives a snapshot of the situation in the eastern part of South Asia—comprising India, Bangladesh, and Nepal—the hub of human trafficking

in the region. Table 2 lists the border points through which human trafficking takes place in the region.

**Table 1: Human Trafficking in Eastern South Asia (2020)** 

Country	Reported Cases of Trafficking	Victims' Profile
India	Labour trafficking (5,156); Bonded labour (2,837); Sex trafficking (1,466); Potential trafficking victims (694) <sup>6</sup>	53 percent – adults; 59 percent – female;* 41 percent – male; 47 percent – children
	Sex trafficking (99)	107 adults (183 female; 4 male);
Nepal	Labour trafficking (64)	80 children
	Unspecified exploitation (24) <sup>7</sup>	
Bangladesh	Sex trafficking (580); Labour trafficking (6,378); Unspecified exploitation (717) <sup>8</sup>	Sex trafficking victims:  Women: 429;  Men: 10;  Children: 120;  20 LGBTQI+ individuals;  Labour trafficking victims:  Men - 4,328;  Women - 1,902;
		Children - 132; 14 LGBTQI+ individuals.

Source: Authors' own, based on the TIP 2022 report

\*Note: The category 'Female' encompasses both female children and adult women; 'Women' refers to adult women; and 'Children/Girls/Boys' refers to children below 18 years.

**Table 2: Corridors of Human Trafficking in Eastern South Asia** 

Corridors of Trafficking	Locations
	Darshana (Bangladesh) - Gede (India);
lo dia . Dan ala da ah	Banglabandha (Bangladesh) - Phulbari (India);
India – Bangladesh	Burimari (Bangladesh) - Chengrabanda (India);
	Benapole (Bangladesh) – Petrapole (India) 9
	Nepal - Kakarbhitta, Biratnagar, Bhantabari, Birgunj,
India – Nepal	Bhairawa, Nepalgunj, Mahendra Nagar;
	India - Raxual , Kishanganj, Maharajgunj, Rupaidiha <sup>10</sup>

#### **Southeast Asia**

Southeast Asia has known links with networks of global trafficking, particularly for sex.<sup>11</sup> More than 85 percent of victims of human trafficking in the region come from Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> Most of the women are engaged in the vulnerable and largely informal sectors of domestic work and hospitality, and the sex industry.<sup>13</sup>

Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam are the hubs of human trafficking in Southeast Asia. Some countries in the region are part of the route taken by criminal elements for the smuggling of migrants, either as source, transit, or destination country. <sup>14</sup> Table 3 shows the corridors of trafficking in Southeast Asia. <sup>a</sup>

**Table 3: Corridors of Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia** 

Corridors of Trafficking	Locations
Cambodia-Thailand	Myanmar- Cambodia- Laos
Camboda-malland	(source, destination, and transit point <sup>15</sup> )
Myanmar-Thailand	origin and transit
Indonesia-Malaysia	Malaysia - transit and destination country
Vietnam-Thailand-China	Vietnam - source and transit country
Laos-Thailand	Laos - source and transit country

a In Vietnam the government reported identifying 126 victims in 2021 (114 female, 12 male; 45 children. See: https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons- report/laos/#:~:text=Laos%20is%20 primarily%20a%20source,operating%20independently%20throughout%20the%20country.

**Table 4: Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia: A Snapshot** 

Country	Reported cases of trafficking (2020, 2021)	Victims' profile
Cambodia	270 - Forced Marriage; 43 - Forced Labour; <5 - Sexual Exploitation <sup>16</sup>	17 % - Women;* 15 % - Men; 40 % - Female; 42% - Boys
Myanmar	150 – Sexual Exploitation; <5 – Forced Labour; <5 - Other forms of trafficking <sup>17</sup>	130 - Women; 15 - Men; 39 - Girls
Thailand	<ul> <li>414 - Trafficking victims;</li> <li>181 - Sex trafficking;</li> <li>233 - Labour trafficking<sup>18</sup></li> </ul>	151 – Males; 263 - Females; 72 - Children; (Out of 414: 312 - Thai; 94 - Myanmarese; 2 – Laotian; 6 from unspecified countries)
Philippines	1,802 Victims: 535 - Sex trafficking; 501 - Forced labour; 766 - Unspecified <sup>19</sup>	551 – Male; 1251 – Female

\*Note: The category 'Female' encompasses both female children and adult women; 'Women' refers to adult women; and 'Children/Girls/Boys' refers to children below 18 years.

Source: Authors' own

## **Empowering Survivors**

#### **Skill Development**

To prevent re-victimisation and promote sustainable reintegration, rehabilitation assistance in the form of skills training programs is crucial. For transnational survivors, skill development initiatives remain a temporary option while awaiting repatriation to their country of origin. Programs for skill development can help victims of human trafficking acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to find employment, or start their own small-scale income-generating livelihood.<sup>20</sup>

The provision of skills training, however, is not an easy task as survivors have to

deal with the physical and psychological trauma of their ordeal that may hinder their ability to acquire new skills. Programs for skill development should be tailored to the needs and abilities of the survivor. Many of them might require basic literacy and numeracy skills, to begin with.

#### **Livelihood Opportunities**

Livelihood training is a rehabilitative tool for rescued survivors of commercial sexual exploitation. Tables 5 and 6 summarise initiatives by governments and non-government organisations in South and Southeast Asia.

**Table 5: Skill Development Initiatives in South Asia (East)** 

Country	Government and Non-Government Schemes
India	<ul> <li>Ujjwala - vocational training for trafficking survivors;<sup>21</sup></li> <li>Rescue Foundation - skill training provided such as jewellery designing;<sup>22</sup></li> <li>Prerana - training on hospitality and catering, housekeeping, advanced embroidery, and jewellery making;<sup>23</sup></li> <li>Jabala partners - providing employment in the canteen and green police at metro and traffic control junctions;<sup>24</sup></li> <li>Skill India - vocational training<sup>25</sup></li> </ul>
Bangladesh	<ul> <li>Centre for Women and Children Studies (CWCS) - employment opportunities in garment factories;</li> <li>Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) -livelihood opportunities in coffee shops or garments factories. Ten survivors received small business support or non-cash seed money after receiving training on entrepreneurship and small business.<sup>26</sup></li> </ul>
Nepal	<ul> <li>Raksha - vocational training in tailoring to over 500 women survivors;<sup>27</sup></li> <li>Gentle Heart Foundation (GHF) - skill development as tailors, artisans, hair stylists, cooks, trekking and tour guides, and para-legals.<sup>28</sup></li> </ul>

**Table 6: Skill Development Initiatives in Southeast Asia** 

Country	Government and Non-Government Schemes
Thailand	<ul> <li>Skill development programs include provisions of shelter and support services</li> <li>Training programs such as for cooking, sewing, and handicraft; they can be used for future employment or to start their own business.<sup>29</sup></li> <li>Microfinance programs to help start their own business</li> <li>Cultural and "moral" education sessions at rehabilitation centres</li> <li>Skills training in pastry making, weaving, flower arranging, hairdressing, and tailoring</li> </ul>
Indonesia	<ul> <li>Various skill development programs, such as entrepreneurship</li> <li>Several groups offer initiatives for starting an enterprise.<sup>30</sup> These programs provide guidance and assistance on topics such as business development, marketing, and financial management.</li> <li>Programs to empower women in sex work, such as culinary skills training programs.<sup>31</sup></li> </ul>
Malaysia	<ul> <li>Skill-training programs<sup>32</sup> to help break the cycle of exploitation and pave the way to a better future by providing them with tools and resources they need to become self-sufficient.</li> <li>The Malaysian government has carried out initiatives leading towards greater compliance with its international obligations on forced labour and trafficking in persons.<sup>33</sup></li> <li>Expanded cooperation with NGOs, including through financial or in-kind support to NGOs to provide some victim rehabilitation services.</li> <li>Tenaganita - A shelter facility for women and child trafficking survivors provides skill training and enrichment activities.</li> </ul>
Cambodia	The "Sewing for Freedom" program provides vocational training in sewing and entrepreneurial skills. The women get employed in a social enterprise that produces high-quality bags and accessories, providing them with sustainable income opportunities that reduce the risk of being trafficked again. <sup>34</sup>

#### **Gaps in Implementation**

Skill development programs help empower survivors of human trafficking, providing them with opportunities to regain their dignity, earn some income, build their confidence and live independently. Despite the benefits of these programs, however, interviews

conducted by these authors and literature reviews have revealed some gaps that need to be addressed by the G20.

Lack of agency: The journey towards recovery and social reintegration is impeded by numerous obstacles, and the absence of a standardised rehabilitation policy for all survivors exacerbates the situation. The implementation of current rehabilitation policies, such as the Ujjwala Scheme in India that focuses on reintegrating victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, is unclear, and there are no audits conducted on shelter homes or reintegrated survivors.<sup>35</sup> This is the case with Bangladesh and Nepal as well.

Lack of continued support: Survivors of human trafficking face challenges when returning to their home communities after spending years under the control of traffickers and in shelter homes. The lack of supporting documents and immediate financial assistance makes it challenging for survivors to rebuild their lives with dignity, and they become

vulnerable to poverty and re-trafficking. Moreover, the stigma of trafficking exacerbates their difficulties as they are discouraged from continuing their education, acquiring skills, and pursuing employment opportunities.<sup>36</sup>

Lack of education: While there are education programs accessible for survivors of human trafficking, there is a lack of access to education beyond basic numeracy and literacy skills.<sup>37</sup>

Absence of sustainable income:
Although vocational programs are beneficial for survivors to earn a minimal income, they may not provide a sustainable source of income to support an independent life unless appropriately linked to a market.<sup>38</sup>

Institutional limitations: Organisations working with trafficking survivors note that it is difficult to come up with innovative livelihood models as the existing ones are limited by their internal capacities and capabilities.<sup>39</sup> Systematic funding remains a hurdle for ensuring the continuity of programs.

# The Role of the G20

In 2017, the G20 nations made a commitment to promoting human rights diligence in corporate supply chains and are currently developing policy frameworks to effectively eradicate human trafficking. Employment and skill development have consistently been key priorities for the G20. While the initial G20 summit in Washington DC (2008) focused on the global financial crisis, leaders recognised the significance of employment in achieving a smooth and sustained recovery during the second summit in London in April 2009. Since then, employment and skills have been on the agenda of nearly all G20 presidencies.40 Strong skills systems are fundamental to the prosperity of communities and societies. In developing and emerging G20 economies, which have relatively young populations, skills are vital for harnessing the demographic dividend.

The G20 Training Strategy and Skill Up program aims to enhance the relevance of education and training outcomes to meet labour market demands and improve the employability of both men and women.41 In this regard, it is important to include survivors of trafficking in the talent pool. G20 countries have a responsibility to address the challenges faced by women migrant workers and reduce their vulnerability to forced labour and human trafficking. Even as they are actively working on policy frameworks to effectively combat human trafficking, a comprehensive understanding of the South and South East Asian context is required to implement inclusive measures.

## Recommendations to the G20

killing is crucial particularly for emerging economies with young populations, as it can drive economic growth. Including survivors of trafficking in this talent pool would not only provide them with viable employment opportunities but also contribute to their financial empowerment. By involving trafficked survivors in the workforce, G20 countries can enhance women's labour market security and improve employment conditions. The G20 has the potential to contribute to the formulation of better policy frameworks that address the needs of women in South and Southeast Asia, ensuring their protection, promoting their rights, and fostering gender inclusivity.

Giving survivors agency: It is essential to provide survivors of trafficking with the freedom to choose their desired vocation for training instead of being limited to a predefined set of skills mandated by programs created by government. Income-generating activities and micro-enterprise awards,

combined with other reintegration components—such as psychological assistance and vocational training—can be an effective way of increasing the independence, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem of survivors when they are particularly entrepreneurial.

Lessons may be gleaned from the experience of the United Kingdom (UK), where the government has taken an initiative called the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) which engages directly with survivors and seeks their inputs in creating an inspection regime for support services. International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC), launched in 2021, consists of 21 trafficking survivor leaders from across the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)<sup>b</sup> offering advice, guidance, and recommendations on combating human trafficking.c

Similarly, the United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking established in 2015 provides

b 57 member states (from Europe, Central Asia, and North America)

c ISTAC contributed to Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) updated NRM Handbook, offering guidance to OSCE participating states for establishing and strengthening National Referral Mechanisms (NRMs).

human trafficking survivors with a platform to offer insights, advice, and recommendations on federal policies and initiatives related to combating human trafficking. For its part, the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking in the Philippines, a few years ago conducted virtual focus group discussions with survivors of trafficking to gather feedback on the quality of protection services, case management, and the difficulties encountered in providing such services.<sup>42</sup>

Certification of skilling programs: The state government/local government should be proactive in establishing certified vocational training centres that have robust marketing links and placement opportunities to provide community-led livelihood skills. For example, the Vipla Foundation in India collaborates with technical organisations to facilitate the training of trafficked survivors, after which they are granted certification.<sup>43</sup>

Sustained initiatives for skill development: Most programs on skill development are short-term and unsustainable, leaving victims without continued care after the program's completion. While microfinance projects

exist to assist victims in launching their own income-generating livelihood, there is a dearth of prolonged assistance for entrepreneurship. It is possible that the survivors end up still lacking the information and skills essential to operate and expand their enterprises.<sup>44</sup>

Educational support: There should be more schools that charge lower tuition fees, if at all, so that survivors of trafficking can continue their education. Organisations in collaboration with national and local governments can help them reintegrate into the educational system by providing them financial and other assistance. Children of sex trafficking survivors can also be provided assistance so they can attend school.

Awareness generation: Knowledge building alone has not prevented migration-related exploitation or trafficking in parts of South and South East Asia. 45 Individual-level interventions to increase knowledge, sense of empowerment, and awareness of rights will have little effect without interventions that address other trafficking-related inequalities—for instance, opportunities for better employment. 46

**Funding:** A special fund allocation in the government's budget that caters to survivors of all types of trafficking must be created. Systematic funding will be important to ensure the continuity of current programs.<sup>47</sup>

Market opportunities: There is a need for the creation of stable and systematic markets for products made by survivors of trafficking. In Nepal, for example, clothing companies Elegantees and Mulxify support trafficking survivors and those at-risk of trafficking, to engage them in creating handcrafted clothing,

jewellery, and accessories. Jewellerymaking company, Purpose Jewellery, through its non-profit institution, International Sanctuary, provides holistic care and job opportunities for women escaping human trafficking in California and Mumbai. Sari Bari is another institution dedicated to assisting sex-trafficking survivors in Kolkata; they are taught skills in making bags, home decorations, and baby products out of second-hand saris.d Program implementers must raise awareness about such programs.

Attribution: Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury et al., "Harnessing the Transformative Power of Skill Development Programs for Survivors of Trafficking," *T20 Policy Brief*, May 2023.

d Apart from these, Good Paper (in the Philippines), Malia Designs (in Cambodia), Freeset USA (India, Nepal and USA), and Nightlight designs (in Thailand) are several institutions that have come up with opportunities to employ survivors of trafficking, providing job skills, training, and fair pay—a chance for a new life to make the survivors economically independent. (See, https://www.prosperitycandle.com/blogs/news/7-artisan-products-that-empower-survivors-of-human-trafficking)

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