

Greater Horn of Eastern Africa (GHEA) Outlook

#25

Human Trafficking in the GHEA



Society for International Development

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Human Trafficking in the GHEA	3
2.1 The GHEA: New Frontier of Trafficking?	3
2.2 International Trafficking Flows	5
2.3 The thin line between voluntary and involuntary migration	7
3. Key Insights.....	8
Insight #1 - The region has turned a blind eye to a dark economy.....	8
Insight #2 - Using open borders to mitigate human trafficking?.....	9
Insight #3 - Labour brokerage could be a legitimate livelihood strategy in the GHEA	10

1. Introduction

Why should we care about human trafficking? While it may not be in the top challenges facing the Greater Horn of East Africa: famine, terrorism, poverty, political instability and conflict, it remains important to understand for various reasons. First, human trafficking thrives when these five challenges intensify. Secondly, trafficking largely affects the poor and vulnerable. Third, the region is formally opening up its borders through the East African Community regional integration process. Will greater openness and freedom of movement reduce or intensify the human trafficking business?

In January 2012, then Deputy Secretary-General of the East African Community (EAC) Ms. Beatrice Kiraso stated that “Instability at our borders has negative spill-over effects on our people and economic integration as we face a new set of menaces, including money laundering, human trafficking, illicit drugs as well as fire arms trafficking.”¹ The examples she cited are familiar, but equating human trafficking on the same level as terrorism and other national security threats was telling. Ordinary East African probably do not regard human trafficking as a significant security threat to the region. Is it a security threat that no one has heard about, or pays attention to because the vast majority of victims are poor?

This GHEA Outlooks explores this underground industry and examines why there is such a low level of awareness about it in the region. It highlights trends and insights about both the victims and traffickers themselves and how they are all part of a dark but lucrative livelihood strategy. It also speculates about the impact on trafficking of the free movement of labour enshrined in the regional integration process, and suggests that better regulation of both international and domestic recruitment could better protect voluntary migrants.

2. Human Trafficking in the GHEA

2.1 The GHEA: New Frontier of Trafficking?

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is one of the leading institutions that have done research and analysis concerning the trafficking of people. It outlines the following facilitating factors that create conditions for people to be trafficked:

- Migration
- Armed Conflict
- Aspirations
- Natural disasters

These are all present in the GHEA - given its location, demographic character, uneven economic development and restive political circumstances – making the region arguably one of the world’s important frontiers of human trafficking.

Migration. The opening up of the region's boundaries has accelerated with the deepening of economic integration in the East African Community, COMESA and other IGAD among others. As goods flow more easily across borders, it is also becoming easier for people to migrate legally or otherwise seeking work or better opportunities. This ease in movement has made it easier for people to smuggle migrants and traffic people. Trafficking and migration are conceptually linked, with easier movement of people increasing the probability of trafficking.

Armed Conflict. The conflicts between Sudan and South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and northern Uganda have created significant populations of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs). Although the region's refugee population fell from 1.2 million in 2004 to 700,000 in 2010 there remains a significant number of people who remain in a severe state of destitution. Vulnerable and desperate, they form a ready pool of potential trafficking victims. Additionally, armed conflict has often led to trafficking in labour for military reasons – highlighted mainly by the phenomenon of the 'child soldiers' and sex slaves. Civilians in conflict situations seek to migrate as far as possible from the epicenter of hostilities and instability to safe zones. Most are willing to do anything to get there. Traffickers know this and understand the psychology behind it.

Aspirations. This is also a product of rapid urbanization in the GHEA and the sentiment that life in the major cities are much better than in rural areas. IOM calls this the 'better life syndrome.' "Traffickers are able to take advantage of this gap between people's reality and their dreams by offering a service for which there is already much demand."ⁱⁱ In Tanzania, people seeking aspirations and a better life is the primary reason why women are able to transport many hundreds of [other] women from Iringa in the centre of the country and from other economically depressed regions of the country to Dar es Salaam, Mwanza and other urban centres.

Aspirations are not limited to just internal trafficking as demonstrated in Burundi where for some, better lives have to come from outside rather than inside their borders. According to the U.S. Department of State's Annual Trafficking in Persons Report 2012, tourists from Lebanon lure young Burundian women into prostitution in high-end neighborhoods. Another example was seen in 2009 when an estimated 100 Ugandan women, who were promised high wages in shops in US Army bases, were sent to Iraq. Unfortunately for the women, when they arrived in Baghdad they were bought by an Iraqi agent for an estimated fee of \$3,500 each.ⁱⁱⁱ These women sought better lives but instead became victims of their own aspirations.

Natural disasters. Complex emergencies create an environment for trafficking because you have a significant population who are forcibly displaced and extremely vulnerable. Disasters, both natural and man-made, create refugees and internally displaced peoples (IDPs) just like armed conflicts. People in such conditions are desperate for food and shelter and as a result susceptible to trafficking and kidnapping.

2.2 International Trafficking Flows

Source countries. Given the nature of the industry, accurate figures on the numbers of people trafficked are hard to find. The closest estimate available is that 600,000 to 800,000 individuals are trafficked across international borders each year with millions more trafficked within their own countries. These only available data may understate the true magnitude of the problem.

Destination Countries	Origin Countries				
	Tanzania	Kenya	Uganda	Burundi	Sudan
Tanzania		YES	YES		
Kenya	YES		YES	YES	YES
Uganda					
Burundi	YES				
Sudan			YES		
Malawi	YES				
S. Africa	YES		YES		
UK	YES	YES	YES		
Europe	YES	YES	YES		
Oman	YES				
M. East	YES	YES	YES		

Source: IOM Kenya Human Trafficking Baseline Assessment (2008)

The Table above gives us a snapshot of the countries from which people are trafficked in the GHEA. Not enough information was given for countries like Somalia and Ethiopia. This table does paint a picture of the destination countries; some of the trends are not surprising especially in areas where countries share borders (Tanzania-Malawi). It is interesting to see that people from Burundi are not trafficked to Tanzania even though Tanzania has historically hosted a large refugee population from Burundi. While Rwanda does not appear in the table above based on a 2008 assessment, it is not immune to the human trafficking as these April 2012 excerpts from the Rwanda National Police website demonstrate^{iv};

“Police in Kicukiro District have arrested three men suspected for human trafficking. In the first incidence, Police arrested Valentine Rukimbira and Walter Bwanakweli from Nyarugenge Sector and Kicukiro District respectively as they planned to take five young girls to China... The girls were intercepted as they tried to cross into Uganda at Gatuna border crossing. “A man called Walter approached us and said there were jobs in China’s supermarkets and hotels.

In another incident Police apprehended another man identified as Gabriel Ngendabanga 47, from Gasabo District at Kigali International Airport as he was about to transport two young men and a girl to Europe. Ngendabanga claimed that he intended to travel with the three to help out in several flower shows he was staging in Europe.

Police Spokesperson Superintendent Theos Badege said that human trafficking in Rwanda is not a common crime but that Police was always on the lookout in case such criminal incidences happen. "It's not something that happens every day but we also make sure that people's travel circumstances are clear," Badege said."

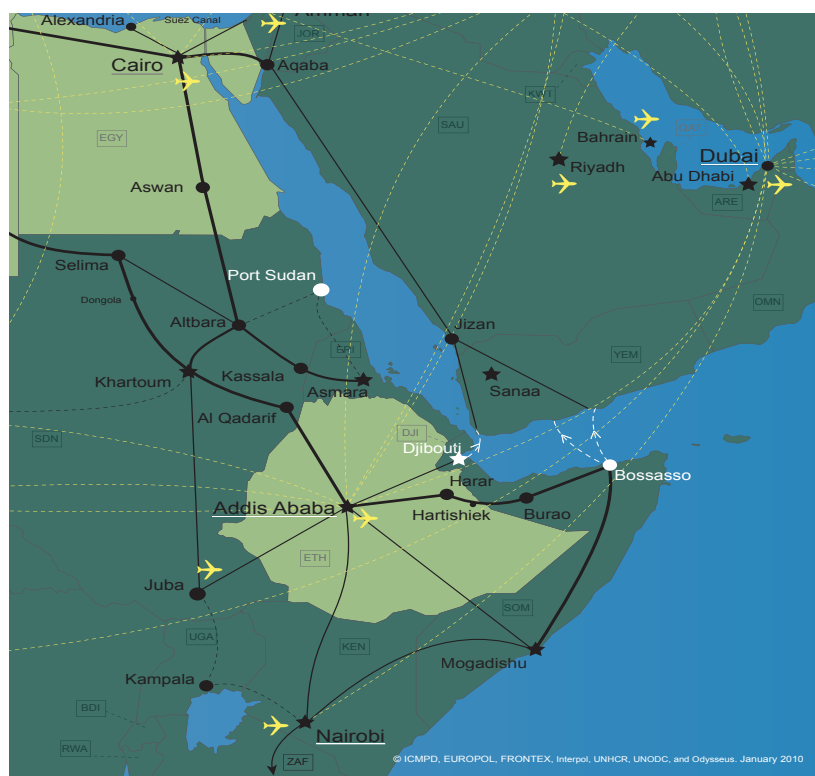
Rwanda has also been a human trafficking transit country. In December 2010, Rwanda and Bangladeshi authorities cooperated to repatriate 64 Bangladeshi men who had paid their airfares to Kigali on the promise of their suspected trafficker to secure well-paying jobs for them.^v

"The 64 men, aged between 20- and 50-years-old, arrived in Rwanda in October, having paid their own tickets to Kigali. [The suspected trafficker Bangladeshi Abdul Sattar Miah] initially claimed they were his relatives, and he wanted to set up a tourism company. They were housed in two houses he rented, which the police raided after a tip. [Police spokesperson Eric] Kayiranga said the men paid Miah between 1,100 and 1,300 euros in exchange for the promise of "well-paying jobs". Police are investigating the theory that they were being sent to Mozambique to work on farms set up there by white Zimbabwean farmers."

Destination countries. The Middle East, UK and Europe are the three areas where the majority of the victims from the GHEA are to be found. Due to the close proximity to the Middle East, it is no surprise that many victims find themselves in places like Dubai or Lebanon. Some events shed light on how expansive the trafficking network can be. The Honorary Counsel of Uganda in Malaysia claimed in March 2012 that 600 Ugandan women have been trafficked into sex trade. It was unclear over what time period the Honorary Consul was referring to. "They are conned into coming to Malaysia for high-paying jobs, which are non-existent."^{vi} More revealing was the reaction by the Government of Uganda:

James Mugume, the Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, says the staggering figure of 600 women took government by surprise. "Trafficking was not an issue until we got this big problem of Malaysia," he said.

The sentiment that trafficking is a new phenomenon or takes authorities by surprise is itself surprising and hints at serious lack of awareness among authorities and citizens about the problem. The 600 Ugandan women in Malaysia were sent there by the Uganda Veterans Development Ltd, which initially had a license to export labour. The license was apparently revoked but reissued again in December 2010. The same company that was responsible for sending over 100 Ugandans to Iraq who were then sold into bondage.



The stories of international trafficking demonstrate the expansive network that exists in this lucrative economy. However, internal (both within countries and regionally) trafficking is just as common signified by the estimated 20,000 children kidnapped and used as child soldiers by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda.

'Kenya is rapidly becoming a destination and transit point for human trafficking.' People have been trafficked into Kenya from places like Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and Sudan. Kenya also hosts the largest refugee camp in the region, Dadaab. *"As of September [2011] there were more than 452,000 refugees, mostly Somalis, at Dadaab camp. The huge influx of refugees has complicated the movement of people in the region; it has increased the vulnerability of people to trafficking, smuggling and other forms of exploitation."*^{vii}

The port of Mombasa and the suburb of Eastleigh in Nairobi "constitute East Africa's hub for the smuggling of migrants as well as for the trafficking of women and children for prostitution, the sex industry, and other forms of forced labor."^{viii}

2.3 The thin line between voluntary and involuntary migration

Many trafficked persons, men as well as women, begin their journey as ordinary migrants but end up exploited and trafficked. This is the thin line that exists between voluntary and involuntary migration. IOM and Bridge have definitions of what can be classified as voluntary and involuntary migration:

Economic (voluntary) migrant: "A person leaving his or her habitual place of residence to settle outside his or her country of origin in order to improve his or her

quality of life. [...] It may equally be applied to persons leaving their country of origin for the purpose of employment.”^{ix}

Forced (involuntary) migrant: A person who leaves his or her habitual place of residence due to external factors/individuals like conflict or traffickers and sometimes natural disasters.

A dated but relevant report by Bridge concludes, “Real life examples show the problems in categorizing the motivations of migration as either forced or voluntary.”^x Young, poor and vulnerable people often start their journey as voluntary migrants, but may end up as modern slaves, commodities sold by their own relatives.

The thin line that exists between voluntary and involuntary migration and the loopholes associated with it is why trafficking can be so difficult to curtail. Paying attention to this ambiguity and respecting it is important if authorities want to mitigate trafficking. This loophole is very lucrative as Jeffery Avina, a former director of operations with UNODC, claimed that trafficking is a \$32 billion industry.

3. Key Insights

Insight #1 – The region has turned a blind eye to a dark economy

The narratives of most reports concerning human trafficking in the region is that it is a new phenomenon. It is either seen as a surprise or not a serious problem facing the GHEA. The problem is most of these trafficking cases are not prioritized until scores of GHEA nationals are found in distant countries like Iraq, Malaysia or Lebanon. Society and government authorities responsible for the protection of their own people have turned a blind eye to a dark economy.

In October 2011 the Daily News, a local paper in Tanzania, quoted the Director of Interpol saying, “This is a new phenomenon in the country. Yes trafficking of people and sex labor slavery have been there but it has not exploded to this magnitude.”^{xi} Such statements suggest that authorities may be aware of the problem, but only respond publicly when a dramatic event occurs and cannot be ignored. The anti-trafficking unit at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Tanzania conceded that “There is a lack of public awareness and this is a very big obstacle in the fight against this vice [trafficking].”^{xii}

Soon after the Director of Interpol’s statement, 20 Somali nationals were found suffocated to death in a long-distance truck in Tanzania. They were on their way to South Africa along the Mikumi-Iringa highway and their bodies were dumped in the Ruaha River. Morogoro regional police commander, Ms. Adolphina Chialo, indicated that there was a “growing racket of people transporting Somali nationals in containers that are used for cargo and petroleum products, putting their lives at risk.”^{xiii} However, the official government position seemed to downplay the issue:

The government [of Tanzania] has said human trafficking in the country isn't so serious compared to other countries in the world. Responding to a basic question by Faida Bakari who said there was currently human trafficking in the country, which was against human rights, Home Affairs Deputy Minister Ambassador Khamis Kagasheki said it wasn't a serious issue.^{xiv}

On May 15, 2011 *The Citizen* newspaper also had a piece on human trafficking that contradicted the position expressed by the government and highlighted this information divide:

"In a period of two months, we have already recorded 114 cases of human trafficking and illegal migration in our country...this is to say there is a big problem that needs to be tackled effectively."^{xv} – Saidi Mwema, Tanzanian Inspector General of the Police.

In light of such statements, it is fair to ask at what point the problem becomes sufficiently serious for the state to accord it the attention that it deserves.

A more general indicator of government commitment to tackling the problem is their compliance with international law. According to the US Department of State's Annual Trafficking in Persons Report (2011) none of the EAC countries comply fully with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. However, the report does concede that efforts were made to deal with the problem, although how much remains to be seen. To the extent that international conventions are not domiciled in national law and the necessary tools to combat trafficking made available to relevant authorities, the fight against trafficking seems more rhetorical than substantive. A significant step to tackling trafficking would be to make sure that the countries involved comply with international laws and conventions and embolden them through national legislations.

Insight #2 – Using open borders to mitigate human trafficking?

Were the EAC and broader GHEA to completely liberalize the cross-border movement of labour, would it reduce involuntary migration? Interestingly, the share of a total population that chooses to migrate, even when borders are open, is quite small. A recent World Bank report titled "Reshaping Economic Geography of East Africa: From Regional to Global Integration" makes this point.

"Most international labour mobility is not over a great distance, and takes place within world regional "neighborhoods," especially for developing-country migrants. Only 30 percent of immigrants to the United States and 10 percent to Germany come from neighbors, but 81 percent of immigrants to the Côte d'Ivoire, for example, are from neighboring countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, movements across borders are often short journeys that are rarely monitored, leaving them indistinguishable from movements within a country."^{xvi}

It would appear therefore that more open borders in the GHEA could lead to an increase in voluntary migration, but only over short distances – to the neighbouring countries. However, the impact of more open borders on human trafficking (involuntary migration), especially over longer distances beyond the GHEA region is more difficult to forecast.

One possibility is that the resulting larger territory across which people can move more freely could provide a deeper pool from which traffickers could ‘source’ the labour they need to move further afield. Additionally, the market for domestic trafficking would be expanded so that, for example, the labour of rural girls who would normally be moved to towns and cities within national borders, could now be brokered across the wider GHEA, without crossing borders beyond it.

Other countries experiences suggest however that more open borders seem to encourage human trafficking. Opening up the transport routes between South Africa and Mozambique in the 1990s led to an increase in the trafficking of children into South Africa.^{xvii} More recently, and further afield on the border between India and Nepal, a July 2011 news story was headlined, *“Human traffickers thrive on open border - Agents lure Nepalese girls into India with job offers, push them into flesh trade.”*^{xviii} So, it is probably naïve to expect that the opening up of East Africa’s borders to allow free movement of people will have a dramatically different result with respect to human trafficking.

Some of the questions to ask revolve around how to build the capacity of national and regional systems to respond in a timely and responsible manner to the human trafficking challenges that will emerge from more open borders. What institutions need to be engaged? What new skills/knowledge need to be embedded in them? What kinds of partnerships need to be developed?

Insight #3 – Labour brokerage could be a legitimate livelihood strategy in the GHEA

Are traffickers providing services that should be surfaced and regulated so as to protect the migrants and legitimize their labour brokerage services? Could this be the only way to prevent voluntary migrants from being trafficked? Labour brokerage is a legitimate business but in the context of the GHEA, it is essentially unregulated.

A way to protect voluntary migrants and reduce the risk of them becoming indentured would be to regulate the labour brokerage industries in the source countries in the GHEA. Having a regulatory authority enforcing minimum standards on labour brokerage companies like the Uganda Veterans Development Ltd should help. As a result people seeking legitimate work through such companies reduce the risk of being trafficked and working in conditions that were never part of the plan. Lessons could be learned from Asian countries such as the Philippines and Bangladesh that send skilled and unskilled labour primarily to the Middle East and the Gulf region^{xix}.

Endnotes

- ⁱ EAC outlines security threats in region (January 2012)
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- ⁱⁱⁱ Ugandan women tricked into domestic slavery in Iraq (March 2011)
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-12887018>
- ^{iv} Three arrested for human trafficking (April 2012)
<http://www.police.gov.rw/content/three-arrested-human-trafficking>
- ^v Rwanda to send home Bangladeshi human trafficking victims (December 2010)
<http://www.english.rfi.fr/africa/20101231-rwanda-send-home-bangladeshi-human-trafficking-victims>
- ^{vi} Uganda: Women trafficked into sex work (March 2012)
<http://www.irinnews.org/Report/95013/UGANDA-Women-trafficked-into-sex-work>
- ^{vii} East African Famine sees increased risk of human trafficking in Kenya (November 2011)
<http://www.christianpost.com/news/east-africa-famine-sees-increased-risk-of-human-trafficking-in-kenya-60246/>
- ^{viii} Ibid
- ^{ix} IOM Key Migration Terms
<http://www.iom.int/jahia/jahia/about-migration/key-migration-terms/lang/en#Trafficking-in-persons>
- ^x Gender and Migration (2005) by BRIDGE Development-Gender Institute for Development Studies
<http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/CEP-Mig-OR.pdf>
- ^{xi} Tanzania: human trafficking problem grows in Dar es Salaam (October 2011)
<http://allafrica.com/stories/201110060564.html>
- ^{xii} Ibid
- ^{xiii} 10 Illegal Somali immigrants killed while escaping to South Africa (January 2012)
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<http://thecitizen.co.tz/news/4-national-news/22377-lets-step-up-anti-human-trafficking-war-igp.html>
- ^{xvi} East African Community: Reshaping Economic Geography of East Africa: From Regional to Global Integration (January 2012). World Bank
- ^{xvii} South Africa: Open borders for child traffickers (November 2006)
<http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=61657>
- ^{xviii} Human traffickers thrive on open border (July 2011)
http://www.telegraphindia.com/1110713/jsp/bihar/story_14225043.jsp
- ^{xix} See for example the Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) which was established in 1984 to “cater to the needs of licensed recruiting agencies engaged in promoting manpower market abroad and deploy a good number of unemployed Bangladeshi manpower in various foreign countries after imparting necessary training. Currently BAIRA has about 700 Government Approved Recruiting Agents as its members.” http://www.hrexport-baira.org/history_background.htm