



# RESEARCH GUIDE SOUTH ASIA

PREPARED BY  
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# BRUNEI • CAMBODIA • INDONESIA MALAYSIA • BURMA/MYANMAR THE PHILIPPINES • THAILAND AFGHANISTAN • MALDIVES • BHUTAN PAKISTAN • SRI LANKA • BANGLADESH INDIA • VIETNAM • SINGAPORE LAOS • NEPAL • TIMOR LESTE

## SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY:

**Child Marriage:** Child Marriage is defined as a marriage of a child before the age of 18 and refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which children under the age of 18 live with a partner as if married. Child marriage affects both girls and boys, but it affects girls disproportionately, especially in South Asia. Child marriage is widely prevalent in South Asia, with most marriages arranged by parents and local leaders. South Asia has the highest rates of child marriage in the world.

**Cyber Slavery:** An emerging and increasingly common practice in Cambodia, Thailand, and other Southeast Asian countries in which victims are attracted to relocate using lucrative job offers. These individuals are then held in debt bondage or other forms of slavery and forced to work in online scamming compounds run by crime syndicates. Victims come primarily from Asia but are also being drawn from places in Africa like Kenya, crime syndicates are usually operating extraterritorially and are also often from Asia, particularly China.

**Cybersex Trafficking:** An especially pernicious form of cyberslavery in which traffickers use the internet to target victims, often children, and coerce them to perform acts ranging from sex acts on live webcams to prostitution.

**Sex tourism:** The practice of traveling to foreign countries, often on a different continent, with the intention of engaging in sexual activity or relationships in exchange for money or lifestyle support. Sex tourism from around the world is very common in South Asia, especially in countries like Thailand and Cambodia.

**Forced Marriage:** Marriages conducted without the valid consent of both parties, where physical or emotional coercion is a factor. For example, slave brides in India, particularly Haryana, are sold into marriage and often face a lifetime of abuse and hardship.

**Forced/Exploitative Begging:** This recently identified form of trafficking involves beggars being coerced to beg and give their earnings to an authority figure. Children and people with disabilities are often targeted for this form of exploitation by parents, siblings, guardians, or by a third party, including criminal gangs, distant relatives, neighbors or family friends. Forced begging is very common in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and other South Asian countries.



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**Sexual Slavery:** Slavery for the purpose of sexual exploitation; may involve single-owner sexual slavery or forced prostitution. Global estimates suggest that 7 in 10 sex trafficking victims are in the Asia-Pacific region.

**Fishing and Seafood Industry:** Many South Asian countries are leading seafood exporters, but labor exploitation and modern slavery issues plague their industries. In Cambodia, Indonesia, Taiwan, the Philippines, and others, trafficked workers experience extremely hazardous working conditions and work in inhumane environments. Thailand's seafood industry is particularly problematic, and Human Rights Watch stated in 2018 that the Thai government had "not taken the steps necessary to end forced labor and other serious abuses on fishing boats."

**Passport Withholding/Confiscation:** A common practice among traffickers in South Asia in which they confiscate the passports of trafficked persons in order to prevent the victims from traveling and stop them from fleeing exploitative situations to return home.

**Rohingya Muslim:** A stateless, ethnically Muslim group who reside in the majority Buddhist country of Myanmar/Burma. They speak a Bengali dialect and primarily live in the State of Rakhine in Myanmar/Burma. They are denied citizenship under Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law, are viewed as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, live in poor conditions, and experience human rights violations throughout Southeast Asia. Traffickers victimize both Rohingya who remain in Myanmar/Burma and the large Rohingya refugee population that has fled to large camps in Bangladesh.

**Chinese One-Child Policy:** A Chinese policy in force from the late 1970s to 2016 that limited the great majority of family units in the country to one child each. The policy led many Chinese families to use sex-selective abortion and other means to ensure that their one child was a boy, leading to a significant gender gap. Young women from countries like Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar are often flown to China and sold as wives to Chinese men, many of whom cannot find wives due to a serious gender imbalance caused by the now-defunct one-child policy.

**Missing Children:** A common social problem, especially in India, in which children go missing every year. They are subjected to trafficking, exploitation, and a variety of other abuses.

**Supply chain:** In commerce, a supply chain is a network of facilities that procure raw materials, transform them into intermediate goods and then final products to customers through a distribution system. It refers to the network of organizations, people, activities, information, and resources involved in delivering a product or service to a consumer. Traffickers often utilize supply chains to traffic persons through South Asia, a practice that is expected to increase in frequency as automation impacts the region's labor market.





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## INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS:

All of the countries in South Asia other than Bhutan and Pakistan have ratified or signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

International anti-trafficking agreements include the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which has been ratified by Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam. ASEAN's 2017-2020 Bohol TIP Work Plan describes a streamlined, holistic, and inclusive regional approach to combating trafficking in persons. ASEAN members are in the process of developing a new plan to improve anti-trafficking measures.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's (SAARC) Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (the SAARC Trafficking Convention) was the first of many measures taken by the organization to curb human trafficking. Some countries have created bilateral anti-trafficking initiatives, like the 2015 Agreement between Cambodia and Vietnam on Bilateral Cooperation For Eliminating Trafficking In Women And Children And Assisting Victims Of Trafficking.

## MAJOR TRAFFICKING ROUTES:

South Asia is a crucial point of trafficking both in and out of Asia, and the Mekong region is an especially prominent origin, transit, and destination region. Most of the trafficked victims identified in Thailand are from neighboring countries like Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos, and have been forced, coerced or defrauded into labor or commercial sexual exploitation. Within South Asia, India is the main destination for victims from Nepal and Bangladesh.

The United Nations estimates 56 percent of global human trafficking victims are in the Asia-Pacific region, with victims from Southeast Asia and South Asia being trafficked to destinations around the world. South Asian victims are commonly trafficked to the Middle East, East Asia, Western and Southern Europe, and North America.



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## TIP REPORT:

The U.S. Department of State releases an annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP), which ranks countries on a four-tier system based on their efforts to combat human trafficking. TIP Reports can be found on the Department of State's website and the HTS database. Tip Report rankings for 2022 are listed below, for a more detailed breakdown by country, please refer to the 2022 Tip report where information is listed alphabetically. The US Department of State places each country in the Report onto one of four tiers, as mandated by the TVPA. This placement is based not on the size of a country's problem but on the of government efforts to meet the TVPA's minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking (see page 58-61 of the 2022 TIP Report).

These standards are generally consistent with the Palermo Protocol. While Tier 1 is the highest ranking, it does not mean that a country has no human trafficking problem or that it is doing enough to address the crime. Rather, a Tier 1 ranking indicates that a government has made efforts to address the problem that meet the TVPA's minimum standards.

## MAJOR TYPES OF TRAFFICKING:

- Sex Trafficking
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
- Cybersex Trafficking
- Cyberslavery
- Labor Trafficking
- Labor Exploitation
- Forced Labor
- Bonded Labor
- Domestic Servitude
- Child Begging
- Child Soldier
- Child Bride
- Bride Trafficking
- Organ Trafficking

## SOUTH ASIA AND THE TIP REPORT:

Over the last few years, TIP Reports have documented a decline in prosecutions and convictions related to human trafficking and modern slavery in South Asia. At the same time, domestic and international pressure on South Asian governments to address human trafficking has increased.

In the TIP Report's "East Asia and Pacific" boundary, which includes Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Singapore, and the Philippines, prosecutions and convictions numbers continued to decline in 2021, down to 1440 prosecutions and 1066 convictions in 2021 from a peak of 3276 prosecutions and 2662 convictions in 2019.



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## TIP REPORT CONTINUED:

This decline comes amidst a broader global decline in anti-human trafficking prosecutions and convictions. Victim identification numbers have also declined, with 3,348 victims being identified in the region in 2021, down from 14,132 in 2019. These shrinking numbers, along with other factors, have led to downgrades in TIP Report tier for a number of South Asian countries - in this year's report, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Brunei were both dropped down to Tier 3, while Indonesia was lowered from Tier 2 to the Tier 2 watchlist. Burma (Myanmar) has been at Tier 3 since 2018. Only two of the Southeast Asian countries, Singapore and the Philippines, are in Tier 1.

In the TIP Report's "South and Central Asia" geographic designation, which includes Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and India, prosecutions and convictions showed a steep decline from a peak of 8,105 prosecutions and 2,465 convictions in 2017 to 1,910 prosecutions and 483 convictions in 2021. Victim identification numbers are stronger, with 38,426 victims being identified, an above-average figure. All countries in this geographic designation are between Tier 2 or Tier 3.

## 2022 TIP REPORT RANKINGS: SOUTH ASIA

- TIER 1: Singapore, Philippines
- TIER 2: Thailand, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Laos, Nepal, Timor-Leste
- TIER 2 WATCHLIST: Bhutan, Indonesia
- TIER 3: Afghanistan, Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia

## DOMESTIC LEGISLATION:

All countries in South Asia have some form of domestic anti-trafficking legislation.

You can find legislation related to trafficking for each country in South Asia at the following links: [Bhutan](#), [Brunei](#), [Cambodia](#), [Indonesia](#), [Malaysia](#), [Burma/Myanmar](#), [The Philippines](#), [Thailand](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Maldives](#), [Pakistan](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Bangladesh](#), [India](#), [Vietnam](#), [Singapore](#), [Laos](#), [Nepal](#), and [Timor Leste](#).





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## KEY ORGANIZATIONS

There are a number of local organizations working to aid victims of human trafficking in South Asia.

Notable local organizations include:

- **ECPAT:** An international NGO headquartered in Thailand designed to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children
- **International Justice Mission:** An international NGO with field offices throughout Southeast Asia (India, Cambodia, Thailand, Philippines) that aims to eradicate modern slavery.
- **Freeseet:** Social entrepreneurial that creates employment opportunities for women affected by sex trafficking in West Bengal, India.
- **Blue Dragon:** NGO based in Vietnam that finds children and young people in crisis and offers a range of services including rescue from sex trafficking, forced labor, and slavery and the providing of shelter, education and employment.
- **Chab Dai:** Founded in Cambodia, a coalition of diverse stakeholders committed to working together to abolish all forms of sexual abuse, human trafficking, and exploitation
- **Prajwala:** A pioneering anti-trafficking organization based in Hyderabad, India, working on the issues of sex trafficking and sex crimes in India.
- **Prerana:** NGO that works in the red-light districts of Mumbai, India to protect children vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking.
- **Rahab Ministries Thailand:** A Christian NGO that offers outreach for sexually trafficked women and children in Thailand.
- **Renew Foundation:** A Christian NGO dedicated to empowering female survivors of human trafficking and prostitution in the Philippines.
- **Urban Light:** An organization that works to help young men break free from child prostitution and sexual exploitation in Thailand.
- **ZOE International:** The Children's Homes in Thailand provides rescue and aftercare services for children who were at risk or who were already sold into trafficking.
- **Sala Bai Hotel and Restaurant School:** A Cambodian vocational school funded by international NGOs that provides vulnerable Cambodians a free one-year vocational training in the skills necessary to find employment in the hospitality industry.
- **The Rescue Foundation:** The Rescue Foundation is a registered, non-profit NGO involved in the rescue, rehabilitation, and repatriation of victims of human trafficking trafficked from India, Bangladesh, Nepal and subjected to commercial sexual exploitation in India. It especially focuses on missing children.
- **Alliance Anti Traffic (AAT):** A Vietnam-based Southeast Asian organization dedicated to fighting against the sexual exploitation of women and minors, protecting women and minors, and preventing and reduce the risk of sexual exploitation.



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## MAIN RESOURCES:

There are several standard worldwide publications that discuss human trafficking and modern-day slavery in South Asia including the Global Slavery Index's 2018 report on Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's 2020 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, and the US Department of State's 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report.

There are also a number of NGO and academic publications on human trafficking in South Asia, some of which include:

- [UNODC's Global Report on Trafficking in Persons \(GLOTIP\), South Asia section \(pp. 148\)](#)
- [A Hidden Scourge: Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia](#)
- [A Global Fight: Supporting Efforts to Address Sex Trafficking in South Asia](#)
- [Modern Slavery Prevention and Responses in Southern Asia: An Evidence Map](#)
- [Laws, Policies and Practices within ASEAN relating to the Identification, Management and Treatment of Victims of Trafficking, especially Women and Children](#)
- [ASEAN Handbook on International Legal Cooperation in Trafficking in Persons Cases](#)
- [Human Trafficking in the South Asian Region: SAARC's Response and Initiatives](#)
- [Global Study on the Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism: South Asia](#)
- [Multi-Country Study on the Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons From Nepal](#)
- [Responses to Human Trafficking in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka](#)

**For more resources on all forms of human trafficking and modern slavery, please visit [HumanTraffickingSearch.org](https://www.humantraffickingsearch.org) and select or enter specific search terms in the [Global Database](#).**