



I WEBINAR GLOBAL CITIES FREE OF SLAVERY PARTNERS FORUM: A COVID-19 IMPACT ANALYSIS

The Global Cities Free of Slavery project has created a network between four founding cities, Rio de Janeiro, Nottingham, Bangkok and Maputo. The network is coordinated by Dr. Silvia Pinheiro (PUC-Rio/IRI/Modern Slavery Research Center) and Dr Alison Gardner (University of Nottingham/Rights Lab) with the assistance of Heloisa Gama (Modern Slavery Research Center/I-MiGRa).

The aim of the network is to encourage dialogue between academic and practice stakeholders about the territories and patterns of slavery and exploitation that occur in cities. The project promotes visibility for actors from the public, private and voluntary sectors involved in the eradication of slavery, and for social groups vulnerable to modern slavery. It seeks to strengthen resilience in relation to the diverse factors that impact upon exploitation in different places and contexts.

In January 2020, the City of Rio de Janeiro held the first workshop between the partner cities, where the city's response to modern slavery was the focus of discussions between partners and external guests, from the public sector, academia and local NGOs. The anti-slavery agenda, legal frameworks, similarities and differences between patterns of exploitation were explored during a three-day visit (see *Workshop in Rio de Janeiro Report and film documentary – Global City Free of Slavery, 2020*).

With the spread of the Covid-19 virus worldwide, the Global Cities Free of Slavery project oriented its debates to the effects of the pandemic on patterns of modern slavery, considering the impact of emergency state policies on the labour market. Emerging official and civil society evidence (IBGE, 2020, Walk Free 2020 and ILO 2020) has shown that the pandemic has exacerbated injustices and inequalities, hitting minorities, women and informal workers and resilience of social groups that remain invisible to the state measures. These themes were debated on the I Webinar “**GLOBAL CITIES FREE OF SLAVERY PARTNERS FORUM: A COVID-19 IMPACT ANALYSIS**” held on an online platform on July 30th, 2020.

In this report of the I Webinar, we summarise the key aspects that were presented by speakers during the three hours of online debate; highlighting some of the speakers' insights and reflexions, and presenting a table with participants suggestions for antislavery resilience variables and ideas for ongoing Comparative Case Analyses, all based on the discussions.

1. RELEVANT ASPECTS OF PARTNERS PRESENTATIONS:

I – Opening: “ COVID 19 in Mozambique: impacts on public policy”

Speaker: Dr. Carlos Cunhae Professor at the Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique.

The Chair, Dr. Carlos Cunhae, introduced the event by saying that although Mozambique’s government had anticipated the problem, issuing the “State of Emergency Procedures”, its focus was mainly on prevention, ignoring impacts of the pandemic in the wider social structure of the country. Vulnerable groups did not participate in the construction of the public policies relating to COVID 19, and changes in labour laws were weakening social protections. Carlos referenced labour contracts signed after the pandemic that are sealing unfair working relations, resulting in loss of jobs, reduction of hours of work and salaries.

Also, he stressed there had been an increase in child labour, as a consequence of the impact of the measures on women. Although there was an emergency policy to prevent the disease, by imposing social isolation and lockdown, it did not minimise social-economic implications for individuals. Civil society analysis suggests that vulnerabilities and inequalities have increased after COVID 19. Carlos stressed the necessity of more investigation and debates on the effects of the new Coronavirus emergency policies on modern slavery.

II – “Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic into the lives of people vulnerable to VAWG (gender-based violence) and modern slavery.”

Speaker: Dr. Ratchada Jayagupta Professor at the Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

The presentation concentrated on the impact of Covid-19 for the lives of women and girls, who had become more vulnerable to violence and modern slavery in Thailand, based on recent numbers collected by state agencies and NGOs. Public policy for the prevention and remedy of the effects of COVID-19 in Thailand included the creation of the Covid-19 Management Centre. The Management Centre objective is to mobilise resources and cooperation of public agencies, private sector and civil society to foster fast responses to the pandemic. Among its responsibilities, the speaker emphasised:

- The provision of information on the new Corona Virus cases and health protocols to prevent the contagious and socio-economic effects;
- Training of women to produce face shields and masks to protect themselves and their families during the outbreak;
- Provision of social and economic support to vulnerable groups, such as making shelters available for single mothers threatened by domestic violence and providing training for women who have lost their jobs.

- According to Professor Ratchada, from February to May 2020, the number of women victims of domestic violence has increased around 60% during the pandemic surpassing the cases of human trafficking in the country.

III. “From the cradle to the grave: violence, trafficking and discrimination against people with albinism in Mozambique

Speaker: Dr. Rehana Capurchande Professor at the Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique.

The third speaker, Prof Rehana, called the attention to the increase in violence and discrimination against minorities during COVID 19 pandemic. She highlighted the unjust experience of people with albinism, who historically face discrimination in Mozambique, including social exclusion of children with albinism at school, increasing cases of verbal and physical attacks against adults driven by prejudice and religious intolerance, organ removals, trafficking and murder of victims with albinism.

In an environment of social and economic precarity, these people were even more vulnerable to exploitation. The Government has created an awareness day and an action plan devoted to people with albinism to push for rights and protection. To conclude, she noted the absence of the private sector, especially non-governmental institutions, in the support of this cause.

IV - “Covid 19 and effects on domestic servitude”

Speaker: Dr. Lurdes Rodrigues Professor at the Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique.

The situation of domestic workers in the context of Covid-19 in Mozambique is worrying, due to the lack of rights, invisibility and degrading conditions of work. Until the 1980’s, domestic servitude, in general, mainly employed men. This is still the reality in the north of the country, while in the south, domestic women are now predominant. In 2006, the Association for Domestic Workers was created and in 2008 the activity was finally regulated by law after pressure from international NGOs.

Although there are laws in existence regulating the activities of domestics, there is a lack of enforcement of the rules by competent authorities. In this context, the domestic workers still suffer from arbitrariness and discrimination, aggravated by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Domestic workers currently represent the primary source of paid work in the country, with the sector being composed of half a million people, of whom one third reside in urban areas and two thirds in rural areas. In regard to educational background, they are frequently illiterate or with primary and secondary education. Women are the least valued and receive less than men.

Most of the domestic workers experience a lack of job security, and it is not rare to see unfair dismissal without compensation. They work extensive working hours (9-12h/day for 6 days/week), and payments are low and irregular. A particularly important aspect of domestic work is that the working parameters

are usually unclear in law, which may result in the super-exploitation of a worker.

As a closing note, Dr. Lourdes mentioned that Covid-19 had impacted domestic workers in several ways in Mozambique, for example, many of them have lost their jobs or have suffered a large cut on their wages. Many of them are forced to stay in their employer's houses, not even being allowed to visit their relatives, resulting quite often in long working-hours with an average of 12h/day. She claims that it is fundamental to maintain investigation of modern slavery related to domestic work in the country and the effects of the COVID 19 on this class of workers.

V- “How resilience to Modern Slavery is being impacted by COVID 19 in the UK”

Speaker: Dr. Alison Gardner Professor and Researcher in the Rights Lab, Nottingham, United Kingdom.

Dr. Alison started with observations on the national context mentioning that the pandemic had impacted all aspects of society in multiple ways. One of the first impacts was the growth of unemployment and economic inactivity, which hit the poorest people and regions hardest. The situation as a whole has increased unemployment, decreased educational opportunities, and highlighted inequalities in the healthcare system, increasing vulnerability to modern-day slavery.

The government's social protections did not include undocumented people who have been seriously affected by the pandemic. Covid-19 also impacted on public agencies and institutions' efficiency, partly due to the decrease in face-to-face and field work, which - for example - resulted in reduced inspections for labour rights violations, and more problems accessing support for survivors. At the local level, Dr. Alison called attention to forms of exploitation that are both “more and less” visible, because, on the one hand, exploitation of homeless people became more noticed, while in the other hand “hidden harm”, such as sexual exploitation, was suspected to be increasing. Thus, pandemic highlights vulnerabilities and hides crimes.

Finally, she mentioned the impact that COVID 19 had on the ability of the private and public agencies to work in partnership, because of significant cuts in funding.

VI. “The impact on agency responses and pattern of increases in referrals”

Speaker: Ms. Jane Paling, City Council of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom.

The speaker gave an overview from a practice perspective on modern slavery in the City of Nottingham during the pandemic. Since COVID-19 hit, they have received many more referrals to the City's Slavery and Exploitation Risk Assessment team, with Council departments, NGOs and other civil society organisations referring cases. They used to receive an average of 11 per month but had received 85 during the lockdown (until July 2020), corresponding to more than twice the usual cases previously processed monthly.

Sexual exploitation and cuckooing are the most present forms of crime. Also, as a consequence of the pandemic, there was a significant reduction of staff presence in the field, thus the team is

intensely relying on partners. They predict a continuing increase in numbers of cases because the vulnerability is higher than it was before. Jane also noted how hard it is to plan and implement long term policies nowadays.

VII. “The local responses to COVID 19 and Modern Slavery in the periphery”.

Speaker: Dr. Silvia Pinheiro researcher at the Centre of Modern Slavery at the BRICS Policy Center, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Dr. Silvia started with a brief description of the Brazilian context emphasizing the lack of public policy to fight the new coronavirus nationally and the ability of local organizations to fight the pandemic locally. She stressed the difficulties of observing health protocols for self-isolating and cleaning in areas of population density and where the provision of water is intermittent.

The emergency measures to reduce the socio-economic effects of the pandemic on employment have not considered the informal workers, resulting in a significant number of people left aside without any support. Some marginalised local groups started campaigns attracting organisations and people from across the city in a network of support to produce face masks and deliver basic-needs packages targeting people in need.

Based on official statistics, Dr. Pinheiro reminded that almost 20% of Rio de Janeiro’s population live in favelas. These areas have as main characteristics: the illegal occupation of the land, precarious provision of essential public services, deficient urbanisation and an informal economy. Isolation and invisibility to the State are social determinants of slavery in these areas, added to residential segregation. Historically, segregation in the city of Rio de Janeiro is a strategy to control social reproduction and subordinate vulnerable social groups, resulting in reservoirs of cheap workers for both legal and illegal activities.

Thus, during moments of humanitarian tragedy affecting the city, these areas are usually left behind by public agencies. To conclude, she argued that there is much to learn from partnering civil society with state, companies and people during these moments. The emergency State policy to fight the pandemic should consider local actions and actors to construct and implement emergency measures.

VIII. “Fighting slavery in Brazil during COVID 19 pandemic: old and new challenges”

Speaker: Ms. Ludmila Paiva, Sub secretary of Human Rights, State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The speaker reminded the group of the origins of precariousness of the labour market in Brazil, aggravated after 2017, due to labour and pension reforms. She explained that judges at the labour courts in the country face challenges, due to the changes in the Brazilian labour laws, to hold large companies accountable for using outsourcing with the aim of lowering the production costs undervaluing the workforce. She added that the pension reform has made workers even more vulnerable by making them work for even more extended periods to access retirement aid.

According to the public servant, the end of the Ministry of Labour and its shift to the Ministry of Economics resulted in a reduction of budget and increase in bureaucracy. The budget reduction, along with a lack of inspectors (the government needs to hire more inspectors and has been delaying it for years) has resulted in weak and less frequent rescue operations. In 2019, 1.054 workers were rescued in 267 operations as opposed to 231 rescued workers in 29 operations this year. Due to COVID 19, almost 90% of labour inspectors in the state of Rio de Janeiro are working from home.

Ludmila drew attention to denunciations related to health care, delivery and domestic workers exploitation, stressing the significant number of cases in rural areas, child labour and domestic servitude. The challenge to inspect domestic work, especially at this pandemic scenario, results in exhausting hours of work and wage retention, added to the restriction of freedom of movement.

Although denunciations were reaching the State competent agencies, the official numbers did not show any rescued victims. She added that her team at the sub-secretary of human rights had been focusing on promoting strategies to generate income for those in poverty. For that, they partnered with local-level governments and civil society organisations to register vulnerable groups and deliver basic-needs packages to provide basic and necessary livelihood conditions, in the face of mass unemployment generated by the lockdown.

2. Closing notes:

Afterwards, during the debate, **Heloisa Gama**, who is the **project assistant** and founder of the **Institute MiGRa**, highlighted several similarities and challenges faced by the four countries and cities in a comparison of what was shared during the webinar. Some similarities that she highlighted are connected to gender-related issues and informal jobs. She argues that women seem to be very vulnerable in the midst of this pandemic situation.

She mentioned that all participants approached examples of local initiatives to demonstrate how local communities are developing resilience to deal with the impacts of the new coronavirus crises, and how this is directly relevant to understanding how vulnerable people rise and move forward, despite the pandemic.

As a closing note, Heloisa expressed concerns about the sustainability of institutions and projects that rose during the pandemic - and may have become more dependent on philanthropy resources. According to the researcher, there is a probability that these currently available funds might migrate to their original agenda, rather than continuing to fund emergency projects to fight the COVID 19, once the crisis is under control.

3. Highlights:

(...) “the Mozambique State of Emergency Procedures, (...) with focus only on prevention, ignored impacts of the pandemic in the whole social structure of the country”. Dr. Carlos Cuinhane (Maputo)

(..) “the Emergency public policies to fight the pandemic should consider differences between territories in the city and include local organisations in the construction and implementation of measures”. Dr. Silvia Pinheiro (Rio de Janeiro)

“The Covid-19 Management Centre was created by the state with the objective of mobilising resources and cooperation of public agencies, private sector and civil society to foster fast responses to the pandemic”. Dr. Ratchada Jayagupta (Bangkok)

“Government has created an awareness day and an action plan devoted to people with albinism to push for rights and protection, but the NGOs have not supported the cause, so far. Currently, in an environment of precarious social context, these people are even more vulnerable to exploitation”. Dr. Rehana Capurchande (Maputo)

“Historically, segregation in the city of Rio de Janeiro, is a strategy to control social reproduction and subordinate vulnerable social groups resulting in reservoirs of cheap workers and modern slavery”. Dr. Silvia Pinheiro (Rio de Janeiro)

“We predict increasing numbers of modern slavery victims in the City of Nottingham as vulnerability is more marked than it was before (COVID 19). (...) it is hard to plan and implement long term policies during the pandemic”. Ms. Jane Paling (Nottingham)

“Denounces of degrading conditions in domestic work during the pandemic reported cases of restriction of freedom of movement, and even though the State of Rio de Janeiro has received several denounces, there wasn't any rescue so far”. Ms. Ludmilla Paiva (Rio de Janeiro)

“The pandemic highlights vulnerabilities and hides crimes”. Dr. Alison Gardner (Nottingham)

“Although laws exist, there is lack of enforcement of the rules by competent authorities in Mozambique. In this context, domestic workers suffer from arbitrariness and discrimination, aggravated with the COVID 19 pandemic”. Dr. Lurdes Rodrigues (Maputo)

“The difficulty in inspecting domestic work, currently, is resulting in exhausting hours of work and wage retention”. Ms. Ludmilla Paiva (Rio de Janeiro)

“There are concerns to the sustainability of these (local groups) institutions and projects that were created during the pandemic because there is a large probability that the funds will migrate to their original agenda, once the new coronavirus is under control”. Ms. Heloisa Gama (Rio de Janeiro)

“(…) there is an impact that COVID 19 produced on the ability of the private and public agencies to work and partner, because of significant cuts in funding”. Dr. Alison Gardner, (Nottingham)

“The budget reduction, along with a lack of inspectors (…) has resulted in weak and less frequent rescue operations”. Ms. Ludmilla Paiva (Rio de Janeiro)

“Since the pandemic has hit, there are many more cases, so to be able to process it all, we count on NGOs and other civil society organisations to address and adequately refer cases”. Ms. Jane Paling (Nottingham)

4. Recommendations:

As per noted by the held discussion, there are several common social determinants to modern-day slavery in the current context of the four partner cities.

Noticing that, the project recommends a critical analysis considering those relevant variables to comprehend the impact of the pandemic in the lives of modern-slaves and/or people vulnerable to it.

Assessment Antislavery Resilience (variables)	Suggestions for comparative case analysis
Gender based violence	NGO's performances and results
Child labour	Emergency policies and effects in vulnerable territories
Degrading conditions of work	Emergency state policies and effects in informal economy
Informality	Impact of the pandemic in domestic work
Impact on women	Impact on women (age, gender, race, class and territory)

Assessment Antislavery Resilience (variables)	Suggestions for comparative case analysis
Ability to cooperate in situations of emergency	Partnership networks
Mapping of local groups	Civil society resilience
Violence and discrimination against minorities	Social cohesion after the pandemic