Modern slavery and human trafficking in South America

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Authorship and acknowledgements

Contents

Key definitions

The concept of **slavery** as described by Bellagio-Harvard Guidelines (Allain, 2015) outlines the legal definition of slavery according to the 1926 Slavery Convention and the 2003 Palermo Protocol, stating that slavery involves the exercise of powers related to the right of ownership over an individual. The exercise of these powers in cases of slavery is characterised by significant control over a person, intending their exploitation through actions like use, management, profit, transfer, or disposal. The foundational aspect of slavery is possession, which signifies control over a person, even when the state does not support a property right in relation to individuals. This control may manifest physically or through more abstract means, such as attempts to restrict movement, withhold identity documents, or force changes in identity, religion, language, residence, or marriage. The guidelines emphasise that possession is crucial in legally determining a case of slavery, whether through physical or more subtle forms of control.

Modern slavery is an umbrella term used to describe a set of exploitative practices. The exact scope of the term varies between different commentators. However, it is broadly understood as encompassing slavery itself (as defined above), servitude, institutions and practices similar to slavery, forced or compulsory labour, and trafficking in persons. Forced marriage is also recognised by some actors (including the International Labour Organisation, Walk Free, and International Organisation for Migration in their Global Estimates of Modern Slavery) as a form of modern slavery.

In this sense, the **concept of human trafficking** is included in the concept of modern slavery. Human trafficking has three core elements. First, an act of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a person or people. Second, that this act is committed through specified means, such as threat or use of force, other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, or abuse of power or a position of vulnerability. Finally, the act must be committed for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation may take the form of exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Executive summary

The project aimed to enhance the understanding of regional human trafficking dynamics in South America, employing three distinct methodologies: stakeholder interviews, an econometric model utilising UNODC data, and a systematic review of literature on labour exploitation in the region. By combining and comparing between these methodologies, the project seeks to analyse various aspects, including the socioeconomic profile of victims, the strategies employed by traffickers, and the countries involved in the trafficking process.

Key findings

Vulnerability and root causes: Vulnerability caused by dysfunctional families, cultural *machismo,* and poverty (for instance) emerges as a key factor justifying human trafficking across the studied countries.

Underreported cases: Despite Brazil's substantial national modern slavery database, the extent of the issue is underestimated in UNODC data (2023). Annex 1 highlights underreported cases, revealing individuals trafficked to Brazil from Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Venezuela. This crucial information is currently lacking in existing databases.

Gender dynamics and cultural machismo: Cultural *machismo* reinforces the perception that certain responsibilities, such as domestic tasks, are intrinsic obligations for women. Efforts against slavery in Brazil tend to underreport sexual exploitation, and forced marriage and domestic work are not adequately reflected in UNODC databases across all analysed countries.

Underreported regional dynamics: Annex 1 underscores the underrepresentation of Brazilian victims in Ecuador, Venezuela, and French Guiana, emphasising the necessity for separate reporting distinct from France. This finding reveals a critical gap in existing data, necessitating a more comprehensive approach to capture the true extent of human trafficking.

Hidden flows and unreported cases: The research identifies Peru's underreported flows from Venezuela and the absence of reported victims from Suriname in the UNODC data. Interviews and articles referenced in Annex 1 also uncover instances of human trafficking from Ecuador and Brazil to Suriname, illuminating hidden flows and emphasising the need for increased attention on unreported cases in regional trafficking dynamics.

Case-specific insights: Uruguay faces underestimation, as indicated by interviews, highlighting challenges for men in terms of rescues and instances of exploitation on Asian fishing boats near its waters. This underscores the importance of intensified investigations and training to identify instances of forced labour and slavery.

The econometric analysis revealed several key correlations between various socio-economic factors and the number of detected trafficking victims, shedding light on the complex dynamics influencing human trafficking. Four key dynamics were identified through this analysis:

Impact of female self-employment in destination country: The percentage of female self-employment in the destination country is negatively correlated with the number of detected trafficking victims. This suggests that improved economic opportunities for female-headed households may reduce vulnerability to exploitation, highlighting the intricate interplay between economic conditions, gender dynamics, and the risk of exploitation.

GDP in destination country: GDP in the destination country has a negative impact on the number of detected victims. This implies that more robust economic conditions may provide better job opportunities for vulnerable individuals, reducing their susceptibility to exploitation. This underscores the crucial role of economic factors in influencing vulnerability and choices of individuals at risk of trafficking.

Education in origin country as a protective factor: Higher educational attainment in origin country correlates with a diminished likelihood of falling victim to human trafficking in destination country. The negative impact of the literacy rate among youth in the origin country further supports the protective role of education.

GDP per capita in high-income economies: The observed correlation between the increase in high-income economies' GDP per capita and a rise in the number of detected victims in the destination country suggests potential explanations such as increased resources for investigating cases or higher influxes of tourists from high-income economies, particularly for sex tourism. Further research is needed to validate these hypotheses.

Introduction

The project aimed to enhance the understanding of regional human trafficking dynamics in South America, employing three distinct methodologies: stakeholder interviews, an econometric model utilising the UNODC dataset, and a systematic review of literature on labour exploitation in the region. By combining and comparing the outputs of these methodologies, the project sought to analyse various aspects, including the socioeconomic profile of victims, the strategies employed by traffickers, and the countries involved in the trafficking process.

The first step entailed conducting interviews with stakeholders involved in combatting human trafficking, such as law enforcement agencies, NGOs, and victim support organisations. These interviews served to gather firsthand information, perspectives, and experiences from those directly engaged in addressing this issue. The aim was to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the nuances, challenges, and specific dynamics related to human trafficking in the region.

The second step involved constructing an econometric model utilising the UNODC (2023) dataset. This modelling aimed to estimate the factors influencing human trafficking between pairs of countries. It incorporated diverse socioeconomic indicators, demographic data, and other pertinent factors to discern the primary drivers behind the occurrence of human trafficking in the South American context.

Finally, the a systematic review of existing research papers on labour exploitation in the region was conducted. This literature review provided valuable insights into the existing knowledge and gaps in understanding human trafficking in South America by providing a country profile.

By comparing the outcomes of these three methodologies, the project aimed to determine if the information obtained through each method aligned. If the findings were consistent, it would provide a clearer and more accurate profile of the hidden population of victims who have not yet been rescued. This alignment would suggest that the victims identified by the UNODC, the stakeholders interviewed, and the existing literature share common characteristics, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

However, when the profiles obtained through the different methodologies diverged, it indicates discrepancies between the identified victims and the true profile of victims, as well as potential gaps in the total number of victims. Such disparities would highlight the need for further research and a reassessment of current approaches to addressing human trafficking in South America.

In summary, this multi-method approach sheds light on the complex nature of human trafficking in South America, providing a comprehensive analysis of victim profiles and coercive strategies in the countries involved. The project's findings contribute to a more informed understanding of this critical issue, potentially leading to more effective prevention and intervention efforts.

Human trafficking trends in South America

It is imperative to view modern slavery as a criminal act. The centrality of control, representing the power linked to the right of ownership, is fundamental to comprehending the legal definition of slavery, even in cases where States do not endorse property rights over individuals. Despite the abolition of property rights related to persons by States, modern slavery persists as a clandestine crime. The criminal nature of modern slavery practices impacts on the quality of available data. In the realm of criminal activity, there exists what is commonly known as the 'dark figure'—the disparity between officially recorded incidents and the true extent of the crime. This encompasses cases that remain unreported, unidentified, non-investigated, or unprosecuted, essentially representing a concealed population of victims who go unnoticed, unrecovered, or unsupported (DATTA; BALES, 2013).

While the 'dark figure' typically diminishes as the severity of crimes increases (given that people are more likely to report more serious offenses), various social, cultural, and institutional factors can disrupt this pattern. In the context of modern slavery and human trafficking, several factors contribute to the exacerbation of the 'dark figure':

a) Perpetrators actively conceal their crimes;
b) Victims may fall prey to psychological manipulation, resulting in confusion;
c) Stigmatization and psychological barriers hinder victims from reporting, with the added risk of being treated as perpetrators by officials;
d) Widespread unawareness within society and law enforcement further complicates the identification of slavery (FRINHANI, 2011; Bales et al., 2020).

Moreover, the inherent limitation of current datasets, capturing only a fraction of actual cases, poses an added risk: the information on identified cases may not faithfully mirror the entire spectrum of incidents. Biases in anti-slavery interventions, in particular, can introduce substantial distortions in the data, potentially resulting in the overrepresentation of specific populations targeted by focused efforts and the underrepresentation of those overlooked in official responses.

Acknowledging this potential for bias, it is important to note that the data and regression presented here do not seek to make inferences about this hidden population. Instead, their purpose is to highlight the factors influencing the cases of detected victims.

This section relies on data from UNODC (2023), acknowledging the inherent limitations outlined earlier. Spanning the years 2003 to 2021, a total of 15,782 individuals of South American origin were recorded as victims of trafficking across the globe (*ibidem*). A staggering 81% of these cases involved trafficking within South America, while 1% were destined for North America, 14% for Europe, and 4% for Central America and the Caribbean. This comprehensive overview is visually depicted in Figure 1-a).

Within the confines of South America, a detailed analysis revealed that 13,714 individuals were identified as victims. A substantial 93% of these victims were native to the region, with 2% originating from Asia and 5% from Central America and the Caribbean. Articles reported in Annex 2 highlight instances of trafficking involving individuals from Korea, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti.

Insights garnered from stakeholder interviews underscore the diverse origins of trafficking victims within the region. The narratives extend beyond South America to encompass individuals from the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, China, and Malaysia. Additionally, there were reported cases involving individuals from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago. Notably, these stakeholder accounts align with the documented data from UNODC.

Figure 1A) below draws attention to a pervasive trend—the substantial prevalence of internal trafficking not only within South America but also across other regions. This suggests that internal trafficking within a region is as prevalent, if not more so, than trafficking directed outside the region. This underscores the critical importance of regional analyses in understanding and addressing human trafficking dynamics, calling for intensified efforts in conducting intra-regional studies.

Figure 1: Origin, destination and density of human trafficking flows

A) Human Trafficking Flows by Region

B) Human Trafficking Flows Within South America
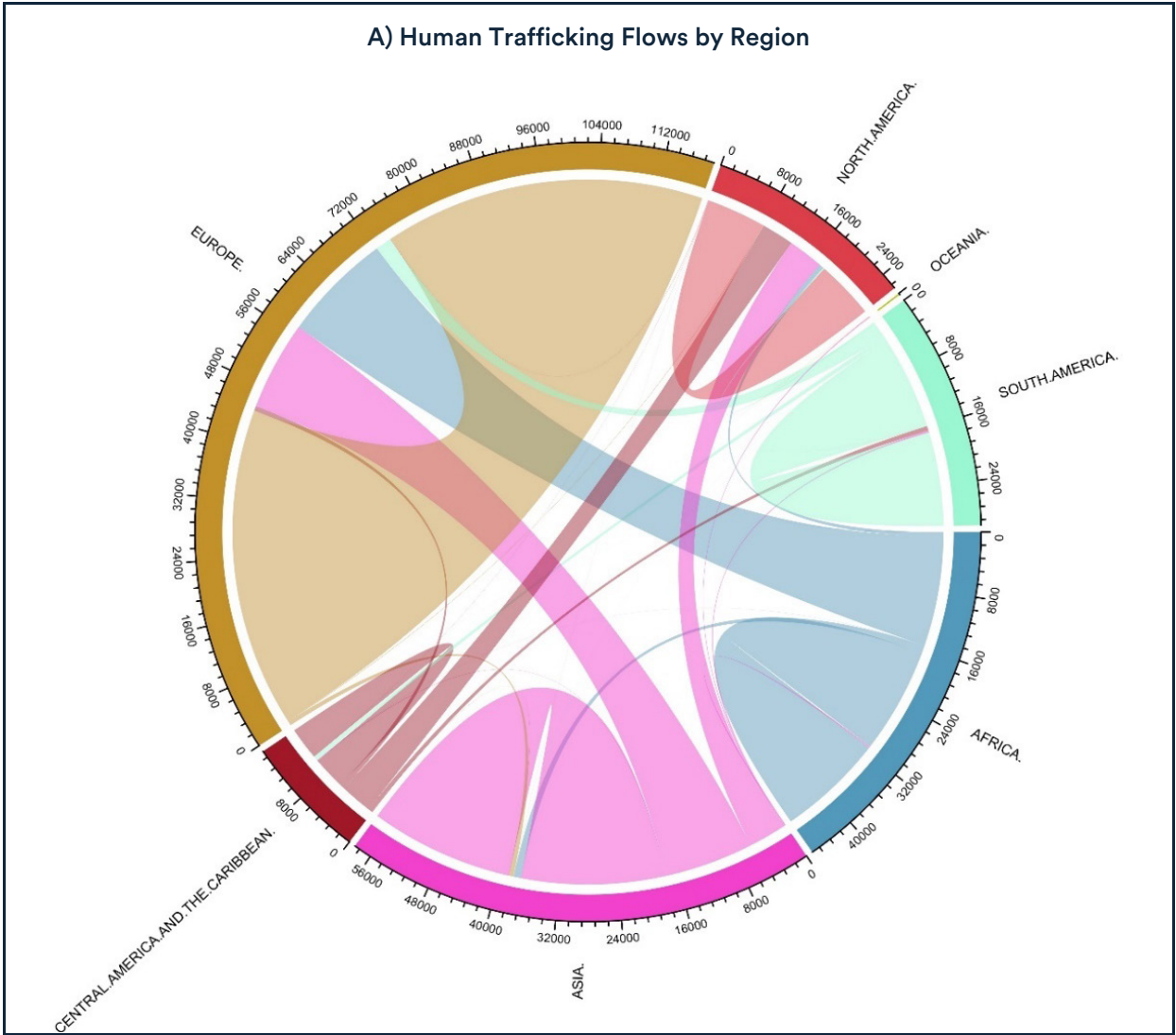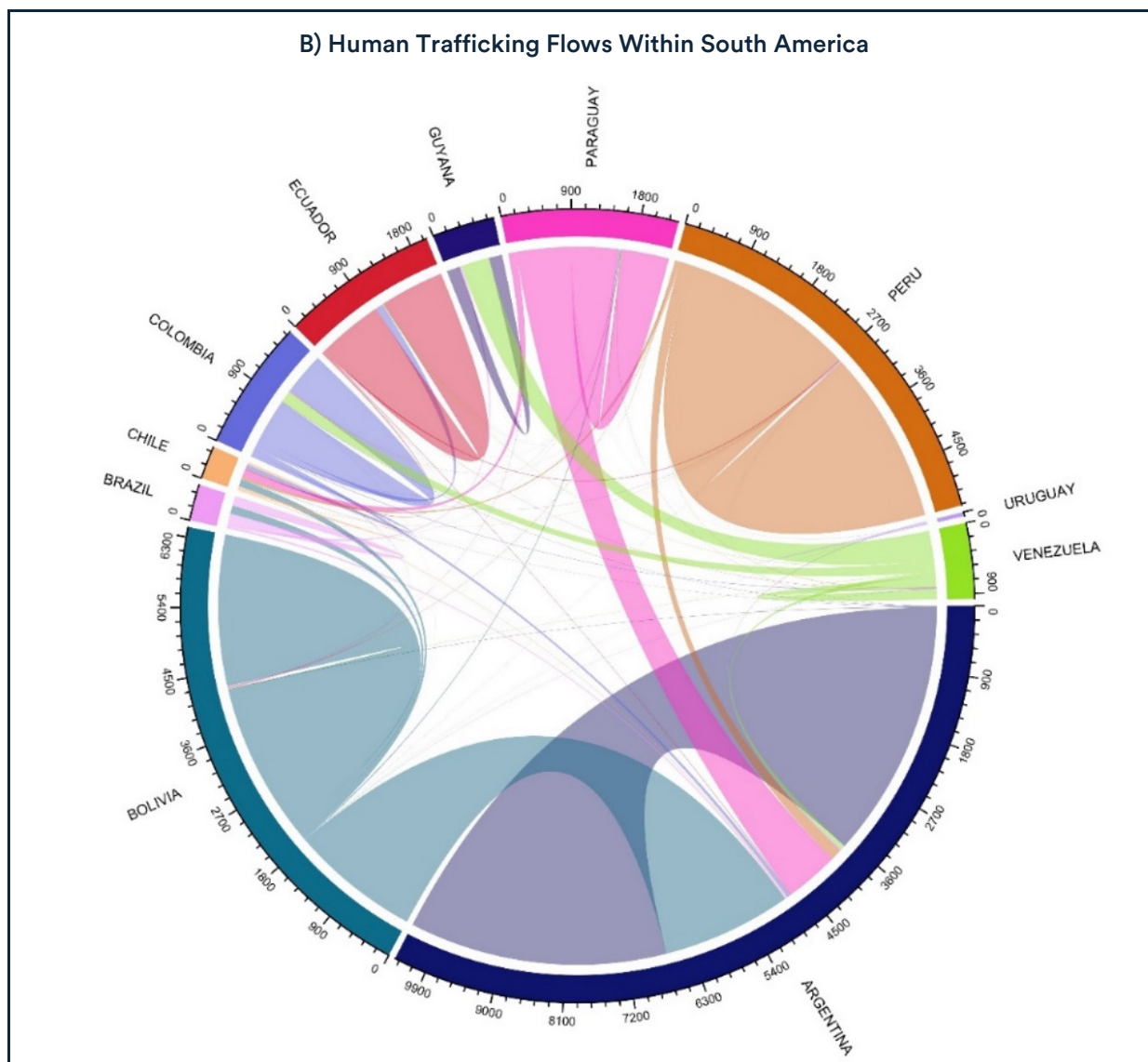
The UNODC does not possess microdata concerning the categories of exploitation (whether it involves sexual or labour exploitation) or demographic details such as age and gender, due to privacy and anonymity considerations. Despite indicating on their website that microdata requests are possible under ethical terms and conditions, upon analysis, a response was received stating that no microdata is available for access. Consequently, the data presented below are concatenated based on the information provided on the site. It is essential to highlight that these datasets include a substantial number of missing values, potentially leading to an incomplete representation of the actual proportion of identified victims due to the absence of detailed microdata.

Microdata refers to data at a detailed, individual level. In this context, microdata contains information about the form of exploitation, citizenship, where individuals were exploited, sex and age group. With microdata, it should be possible to identify if a survivor exploited in Argentina came from Bolivia, if he was a man over 18 and if he was exploited in forced labour. The way data is presented by UNODC, due to anonymisation, information is sometimes provided about the total quantity corresponding to a specific year for that form of exploitation, age, and/or sex. However, in some years, only the total quantity is available.

Another notable challenge is that the data utilised is based on citizenship. For instance, Suriname is listed in the database as a repatriation country, but not as a citizenship country. Consequently, it was excluded from the analysis. This limitation is further exacerbated by the unavailability of microdata from the region.

Considering this, Figure 1A) highlights Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia as the countries that rescued and reported the highest number of survivors of human trafficking in the region. As depicted in Figure 1A), a significant proportion of the survivors in each country were citizens of that same country.

For instance, Argentina accounted for the highest percentage, rescuing 43.17% (6,628 individuals) (UNODC, 2023). In Argentina, among the identified victims for whom age, gender, and type of exploitation were reported, forced labour and sexual exploitation reveal concerning statistics. For forced labour, the prevalence is significant, particularly among males aged 18 and over, accounting for 38.93%, for females 11.21%. Additionally, sexual exploitation is alarmingly high, with females aged 18 and over representing 40.25%. These figures highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to address these issues and protect vulnerable populations.

Moreover, Peru represented a substantial 16.41% of the total South American rescues, with 2,519 individuals liberated. In Peru, among the identified victims for whom age, gender, and type of exploitation were reported, forced labour and sexual exploitation pose significant challenges, with striking percentages in certain demographics. Forced labour is most prevalent among females aged 0 to 17 (2.67%), while sexual exploitation affects females aged 0 to 17 and 18 and over significantly, making up 9.42% and 7.13%, respectively. Combatting these issues demands targeted interventions to protect vulnerable populations and ensure their wellbeing.

Guyana contributed approximately 4.03% to the total rescues in South America, rescuing 620 individuals. Among the identified victims for whom age, gender, and type of exploitation were reported, sexual exploitation presents a significant concern in Guyana, with an overall prevalence of 14.03%.

Nonetheless, for the remaining countries in this analysis, the identified victims for whom age, gender, and type of exploitation were reported are limited. Therefore, specific figures for these countries are not presented here due to the lack of relevance to the overall sample. The dataset has significant missing data, and the existing sample is already constrained by the challenges of hidden populations and anonymisation.

Despite these limitations, notable contributions to regional rescue efforts are evident. Bolivia, for instance, played a significant role, representing 14.33% (2,200 individuals) of total rescues. Brazil contributed 1.65% (254 individuals) to overall rescues in South America. Chile contributed 2.38%, rescuing 365 individuals, while Colombia accounted for 5.22% of the total rescues, with 801 individuals liberated. Ecuador made up approximately 6.77% of the regional rescues, liberating 1,041 individuals. Paraguay accounted for around 4.68% of the total rescues, with 720 individuals liberated. Uruguay contributed around 0.12% to the regional rescue efforts, rescuing 18 individuals. Venezuela accounted for approximately 1.18% of the total South American rescues, rescuing 182 individuals.

Despite the limited available data on the victim's profile for these countries, the analysis still highlights that they face challenges related to forced labour and sexual exploitation to some extent.

Based on the ILO et al. (2022) estimation for global modern slavery table 1: 35% of the victims are subjected to forced labour, with 67% of these being men; 13% are ensnared in sexual exploitation, predominantly women at 75%; 8% endure forced labour imposed by the state, with 80% being men; and 44% find themselves entangled in forced marriages, primarily women at 69%. Overall, women slightly outnumber men, comprising 54% of modern slavery victims.

The report (*ibidem*) also posits that in the Americas, the prevalence of forced marriage is comparatively low. Instead of the 2.8 per thousand people in forced marriage globally, we observe a prevalence of 1.5 individuals in forced marriages per thousand inhabitants in the Americas. If we assume this estimate to be accurate and acknowledge that no instances of forced marriage were reported to UNODC, it implies an additional 30% of forced marriage victims who are not rescued in South America. This data discrepancy may be attributed to anonymisation, where the category does not appear even when victims are reported, or it may indicate a genuine absence of recorded rescues in the case of forced marriages.

Graph 1: Detected victims per year within South America (UNODC 2007-2021)
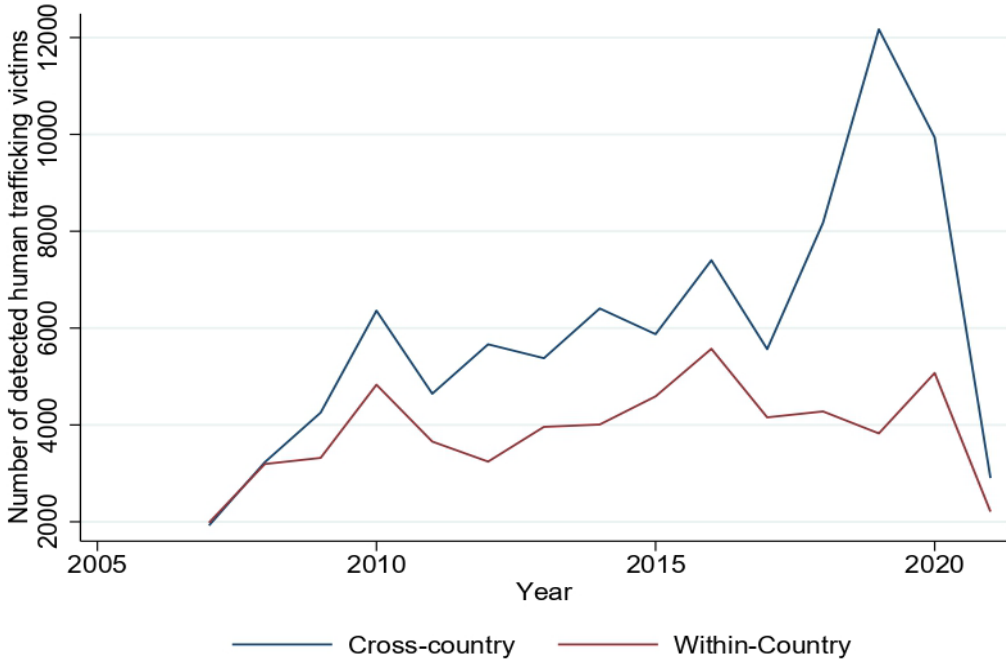
In Graph 1, the observed trend illustrates the number of identified victims annually within South America, both within countries and across borders. The initial reports of victims from South American countries to the UNODC surfaced in 2007. Subsequently, with the launch of the inaugural GLOTIP[1] report in 2009, nations commenced more comprehensive identification and reporting of cases to the UNODC, thereby enriching the robustness of the database.

A discernible pattern emerges, indicating a rising trajectory in the detection of victims, both domestically and internationally. Recent years reflect a notable surge in the cross-border rescue of victims, reaching its peak in 2019, followed by a successive decline in 2020-2021 coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This decline does not necessarily signify a reduction in human trafficking; rather, it may signify a shift towards more concealed manifestations, such as webcam-mediated sexual exploitation, trafficker-supplied

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[1] Retrieved from: <https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf> Accessed on the 15th of November of 2023.

accommodations, clients' private residences, as elucidated in the GLOTIP 2022 [2] report. Furthermore, the decline could be attributed to diminished investigative activities during this period, coupled with the closure of borders.

The deliberate exclusion of internal human trafficking victims from the analysis presented in Figure 2 and the estimation provided in equation 2 is rooted in the acknowledgment of distinct regional dynamics associated with internal trafficking. This nuanced understanding has been derived from in-depth interviews and an extensive literature review, as detailed in Annex 2. Notably, countries such as Argentina and Brazil exhibit a pattern where victims predominantly originate from the northern regions characterised by lower economic dynamism and heightened levels of poverty, as substantiated by sources like IBGE (2023) and Bolsi et al. (2005). The upcoming Country Profile section will delve into comprehensive insights into the dynamics of other countries.

Focusing on cross-country trafficking within South America post-2009, the data presented in Figure 2 and the regression analysis have been designed for robustness, as explained earlier. To uphold confidentiality, the data utilises the placeholder "<5," indicating values within the 1 to 4 range. For clarity, instances where "<5" is denoted have been replaced with the value of 2. The meticulous pairing of countries is based on the "Citizenship" interpreted as "origin" and destination is the country where the victim was reported.

A notable observation in the analysis is the discernible distinction in roles, with Argentina, Chile, and Guyana emerging predominantly as destination countries, while Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela assume the role of origin countries.

Graph 2: Detected victims cross-country within South America (UNODC 2009-2021)

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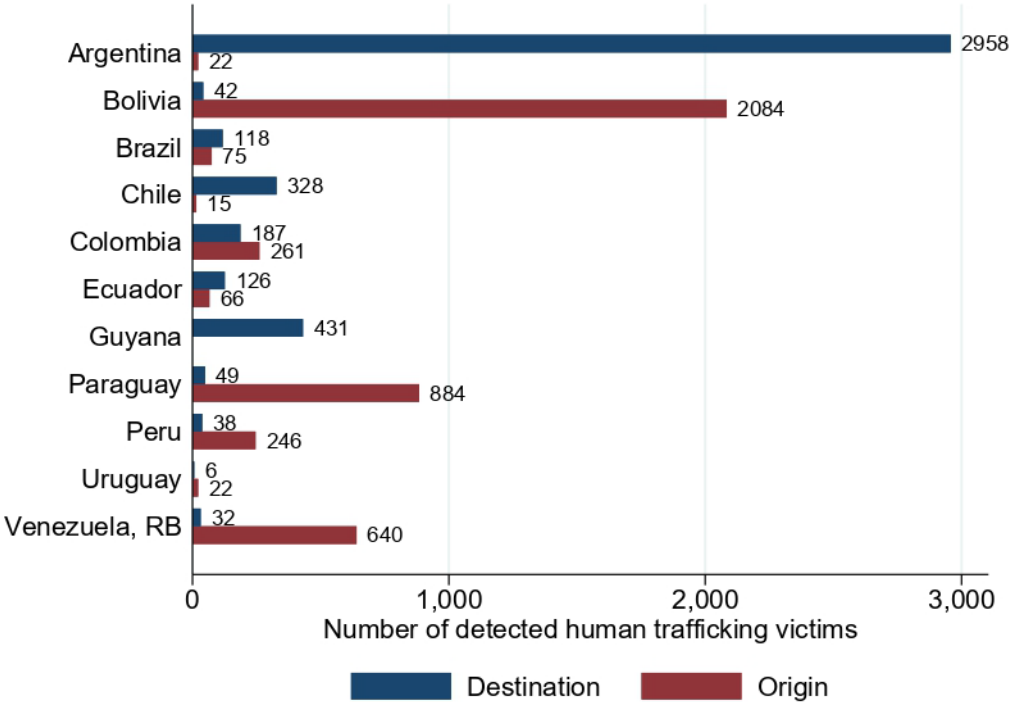
[2] Accessed on the 15th of November of 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2022/GLOTiP_2022_web.pdf >.

Human trafficking drivers in South America

The econometric strategy, employed by Akee et al. (2014), involves analysing destination and origin pairs, considering the quantity of rescued victims as the dependent variable in the model. This approach is analogous to the bilateral trade model that utilises the gravity equation (Bacchetta et al., 2012).

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the origin and destination countries, the existence of a common border, and a shared language are key variables often examined in trade economics (Bacchetta *et al.*, 2012; Beck, 2020). Various studies, including those referenced by Cho (2015), consider additional factors such as rule of law, sexual violence, and poverty. However, in our analysis, these supplementary variables were excluded from the model due to multicollinearity.

This correlation issue emerges when two or more independent variables in a regression model exhibit high correlation, introducing challenges in terms of interpretation and reliability. Another potential factor contributing to this situation is the exclusion of variables due to a limited number of data points. For instance, the absence of data for the rule of law variable in Venezuela and Uruguay may have led to their exclusion from the analysis. In our case, variables like rule of law, sexual violence, other crime and institutional variables, and poverty were found to be highly correlated with the existing variables in the model, indicating that the information they bring is essentially captured by the variables already included. As a result, including them in the model could lead to bias in coefficient estimates, inflated standard errors, and challenges in distinguishing the unique effects of each variable. This analysis is not aimed at computing a causal effect but rather at offering evidence on how macro trends influence the detection of bilateral victims.

The presented model is a random effects[34] panel that explores the dynamics between pairs of origin and destination countries concerning human trafficking victims over time. Due to potential heterogeneity across country pairs and temporal variations (as highlighted by Graph 1) and changes in official reporting practices, it is advisable to employ a random effects model. Unlike fixed effects, where we assume the characteristics of the pair remain constant over time (which may not be true, as indicated by the Hausman test), random effects acknowledge that covariates can have a different effect for each pair. This variability is evident in Graph 2, where some countries exclusively receive victims while others solely "export", emphasising the need for a model that accommodates such nuances.

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[3] The Hausman test evaluates the hypothesis that differences in coefficients are not systematic between models. The computed test statistic, chi2(4), yielded a value of 7.38, with a corresponding p-value (Prob > chi2) of 0.1171. Since the p-value exceeds the conventional significance level of 0.05, we do not reject the null hypothesis, indicating no systematic difference in coefficients between the compared models. This suggests that the random effects model is more suitable for this analysis. The decision is reinforced by the efficiency of the random effects model, given the assumption that unobserved individual-specific effects are uncorrelated with observed variables. Consequently, the adoption of the Random Effects model is justified in light of its efficiency compared to the fixed effects model in this specific context.

[4] The estimated standard deviation of group-specific random effects (σ_u) is 0.6164, denoting variability among groups unexplained by observed factors. The standard deviation of individual-specific random effects (σ_e) is 0.7346, indicating unobserved heterogeneity at the individual level. The correlation coefficient (ρ) between group-specific and individual-specific random effects is 0.4132, reflecting their degree of association. Model fit statistics, including R-squared values for within-group (0.2491), between-group (0.2150), and overall (0.2642) variations, provide insights into explained variance. The Wald chi-squared test with 4 degrees of freedom is statistically significant (29.99, p-value 0.0000), underscoring the model's overall significance and contributing to a comprehensive assessment of its performance and the distribution of effects.

Specifically, it investigates the relationship between detected victims in the destination country (d) and their origin (o), examining how the socio-economic characteristics of both the origin and destination countries impact the quantity of identified victims during the specified time period, denoted as t.

$$\ln detected\_vict_t^{d,o} = -53 - 0{,}12 Self\_emp_t^d - 4{,}99 \ln GDP_t^d - 1{,}42\, Lit_t^o + 9\, lnHI\_GDP_t$$

- Eq. (1)

Where:

$\ln detected\_vict_t^{d,o}$ – is the logarithm of the number of detected victims of human trafficking in destination country, d, from the origin country, o, in year t , UNODC (2023).

$Self\_emp_t^d$ – is the percentage of female self-employed in destination country, d, in year t (World Bank, 2023)

$\ln GDP_t^d$ – is the logarithm of GDP per capita constant prices of 2017 in destination country, d, in year t (World Bank, 2023)

Lit_t^o – is literacy rate among youth (people ages 15-24) in origin country, o, in year t (World Bank, 2023)

$lnHI\_GDP_t$ – is logarithm of high-income economies' GDP per capita in year t (World Bank, 2023)

To illustrate, consider a scenario in which a specific number of detected victims in Peru (destination country, denoted as "d") were trafficked from Ecuador (origin country, denoted as "o") in the given year, denoted as "t". As per Equation 1, an upswing in the percentage of female self-employment in Peru corresponds to a reduction in the number of detected victims from Ecuador. Similarly, an increase in Peru's GDP results in a decrease of 5% in the number of detected victims from Ecuador. Additionally, a rise in the literacy rate among young people in Ecuador leads to a decrease in the number of detected victims in Peru. On the contrary, if the GDP of high-income economies experiences an increase, it leads to a 9% rise in the number of detected victims in Peru, all within the specified time period "t". Importantly, all coefficients exhibit statistical significance at the 5% level, with the exception of the constant term $\beta_0 = -53$. This analytical framework can be applied to any pair of countries reported by UNODC in Annex 1, providing a versatile approach for understanding the dynamics of human trafficking between different origin and destination country pairs.

The adverse impact of the percentage of female self-employment in the destination country on the number of detected trafficking victims can be elucidated by the potentially improved economic opportunities for female-headed households. Numerous interviews highlighted the prevalence of poverty and the role of women as heads of families or single mothers among those vulnerable to sexual exploitation. In the absence of sufficient job prospects in their origin countries, women might be compelled to accept employment opportunities in the destination country, only to find themselves exploited in the process. This underscores the intricate interplay between economic conditions, gender dynamics, and the heightened risk of exploitation faced by vulnerable individuals seeking livelihoods.

The GDP in destination country also affected the number of detected victims negatively, this might also be related to more job opportunities for those vulnerable people in destination country, that instead of accepting any kind of work to subsist, they could choose amongst better jobs.

The negative correlation between GDP in the destination country and the number of detected victims suggests that more robust economic conditions may provide better job opportunities for vulnerable individuals. Instead of being compelled to accept any form of work for subsistence, individuals in the destination country may have the opportunity to choose among more favourable job options, reducing their susceptibility to exploitation. This emphasises the crucial role of economic factors in influencing the vulnerabilities and choices of individuals at risk of trafficking.

The correlation between education and labour exploitation, as delineated by Rangel and Lima (2023), illustrates that an increase in individuals' educational attainment corresponds to a diminished likelihood of falling victim to contemporary slavery. Conversely, the susceptibility to manipulation is heightened in environments characterised by lower educational levels, where trust in false employment contracts prevails. In their study, the authors (ibid) scrutinised the municipal determinants of slavery, discovering a negative correlation with the education indicator. This implies that municipalities with more robust average education levels tend to witness a lower incidence of rescued individuals. Notably, these municipalities, while exhibiting education averages below the national mean, surpass the national average in variables related to inequality, poverty, and unemployment. This dynamic underscores the pivotal role of education in preventing labour exploitation, underscoring that municipalities with superior educational indicators generally contend with fewer instances of modern slavery. Similarly, the negative effect of literacy rate among youth (people ages 15-24) in origin country decreases the number of detected victims in destination country, by the same reasons.

The negative impact of the literacy rate among youth (aged 15-24) in the origin country on the number of detected victims in the destination country aligns with the same rationale. A higher literacy rate among the youth population in the origin country serves as a protective factor, diminishing the vulnerability of individuals to exploitation in the destination country. Educated youth are not only equipped to discern and resist deceptive employment practices but are also more likely to pursue better job opportunities, reducing the necessity to accept precarious or exploitative work abroad. This dual effect contributes significantly to a decreased incidence of human trafficking. It reinforces the interconnectedness of education and resilience against exploitation, underscoring the critical role that literacy and education play in shaping the outcomes of individuals at risk. These findings underscore the importance of implementing targeted educational interventions not only to empower vulnerable populations but also to enhance economic opportunities for young people, creating a more robust defence against the scourge of modern slavery.

The observed correlation between the increase in high-income economies' GDP per capita in year t and a rise in the number of detected victims in the destination country suggests several plausible explanations. One hypothesis revolves around the potential availability of increased public and private resources dedicated to investigating cases of modern slavery in the destination country, potentially facilitated by higher levels of donations or funding. However, it is essential to highlight that this hypothesis necessitates empirical testing to substantiate its validity. Another conceivable contributing factor to this trend is the higher influx of tourists from high-income economies to these destination countries, particularly for sex tourism, as frequently mentioned in interviews. This phenomenon may contribute to the elevated incidence of detected trafficking victims. Further research and in-depth analyses are imperative to thoroughly explore and validate the potential drivers behind the observed correlation of this variable, which consistently demonstrated high significance in every estimation tested throughout this econometric analysis.

Stakeholders' perception of exploitation in South America

For the country profiles, data gathered through interviews with stakeholders, information extracted from a systematic review, and UNODC (2023) data were comprehensively analysed. This multi-faceted approach aimed to elucidate the profile of human trafficking victims, understand the socioeconomic factors at play, and delineate the dynamics of human trafficking flows within South America (refer to Annex 1).

During the interview stage conducted in September and October 2023, 95 stakeholders were actively contacted. These stakeholders—representing NGOs, religious institutions, and government bodies—provided valuable responses to a semi-structured questionnaire.

Outreach spanned across all 13 South American countries. From this pool, interviews with 21 stakeholders were conducted (see Annex 1), covering a diverse range of insights from 9 countries in the region. Regrettably, despite our outreach efforts, we faced challenges securing interviews in specific countries: Paraguay, where we engaged with 11 stakeholders; Guyana, with 9 contacted; Suriname, where 10 were engaged; and French Guiana and France, where 4 stakeholders were approached. In each of these contexts interviews were not secured.

Mining, sexual exploitation, and indigenous tribes

Interviewees emphasised the issue of labour and sexual exploitation in the mines of Guyana, French Guiana, Suriname, and Venezuela. An issue linked to modern slavery and mining is the exploitation of indigenous labour and lands. Indigenous peoples and communities within the Strategic Development Zone of the Orinoco Mining Arc (Venezuela) are forced to relocate from their original spaces due to environmental impact and instances of violence in the region. This migration makes them vulnerable to slavery, as detailed in the Venezuela section. The discussion centres around the challenges of mining, including the occupation of indigenous territories, water pollution with mercury (as witnessed in the humanitarian crisis with the Yanomami[5] indigenous people in Brazil), and the use of child labour in smaller pits, as well as sexual exploitation of women in brothels for miners and rural work on farms.

Although the interviewees were not specifically questioned about the exploitation of indigenous communities, all of them discussed the vulnerability experienced by indigenous peoples in their respective countries. For instance, Ximena Cabrera, from the Urban Mobility Mechanism in Ecuador, reported that indigenous girls were found unaccompanied or with adults who were not their parents, engaged in street work, including domestic work, etc. Cuesta et al (2015) (Colombia) emphasise that indigenous children, girls, and women are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking for various purposes, such as domestic labour (exacerbated by rural-to-urban migrations that indigenous communities are compelled to undertake), sexual exploitation, organ trafficking, and forced labour, among others.

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[5]Retrieved from: <https://mapadeconflitos.ensp.fiocruz.br/conflito/rr-invasao-de-posseiros-e-garimpeiros-em-terra-yanomami/> Accessed on the 15th of November of 2023.

This correlation between labour exploitation in mining and the sexual exploitation of women is reflected not only in real-life situations but also in popular songs from mining states, like Pará in Brazil. Julio Nascimento's lyrics[6] vividly capture the everyday experiences, shedding light on a relationship documented in literature and underscored by stakeholders, notably the issue of alcoholism and modern slavery:

> *"I went to the mine and left my wife; She gave her love to whoever wants (...) down at the cabaret; I drink, I really drink, I just keep on drinking; Oh, and with my friends, I drink with pleasure; When I get home and look for my wife; The neighbour tells me she went to the cabaret (...); Because my salary is low, she went to earn money for us to survive.."*

Modern slavery and alcoholism and drug addiction

In Prado's (2008) account, the death of an enslaved worker is portrayed where, during the funeral, a glass of *cachaça* was placed near the worker's coffin. This act symbolised the belief that the worker perished because of a fondness for a lively lifestyle and was branded as an alcoholic. Simões (2010) recounts an incident involving a brothel manager who admitted resorting to physical measures to prevent a prostitute from using cocaine, a habit he himself indulged in.

Additional research, conducted in collaboration between Universidade Federal do Mato Grosso and the University of Strathclyde, involved interviews with labour inspectors in Brazil. These inspectors reported that employers actively encourage workers to consume alcohol, under the premise that it improves work performance and contributes to a more cheerful atmosphere, likened to an anaesthetic.

Similar to Miguel Infante from Bolivia, the representative of Hermanas Adoratrices also highlighted the connection between exploitation and drugs, citing drug trafficking as a significant factor of vulnerability.

Cultural *machismo*

Like Carla Marroquin, the representative from Hermanas Adoratrices emphasised cultural *machismo* as a factor that normalises sexual and labour exploitation of women. *Machismo* normalises sexual abuse and relegates women's domestic work to an inherent form of labour. The interviewee highlighted an invisible case of rural sexual abuse, underscored by the common phrase "o primeiro bocado é do pai" (the first bite belongs to the father), signifying that a girl's initial sexual encounter is with her father.

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[6] In Portuguese, the lyrics are: "Eu fui ao garimpo e deixei a minha mulher; Ela entregou o amor pra quem quiser (...) lá no cabaré; Bebo eu bebo mesmo, eu boto é pra beber; Ah, e com meus amigos, eu bebo com prazer; Quando eu chego em casa que procuro a minha mulher ; Quem me fala é o vizinho: ela saiu lá pra o cabaré (...); Porque o meu salário é pouco, ela foi ganhar dinheiro prá nós sobreviver" Retrieved from: <https://www.letras.com/julio-nascimento/466787/> and < https://www.letras.com/julio-nascimento/1006481/> Accessed on the 18th of November 2023.

A testimony from a survivor to the NGO Só Direito[7] reported:

> *I feel angry, disgusted. I feel humiliated for selling my body to earn 20, 30 reais. We are sluts. There is always discrimination against women. Women have to be on the edge of the stove for men. I feel angry because I can't do what they (men) can. Just because they are men? They are sexist, racist. This is discrimination.*

Dysfunctional family

Jorgelina Burgos from Dignitate Brazil, Fiorella Rojas from Fundación Renacer – Colombia, Marie Henriqueta Cavalcante from Brazil (Religious Institution), and Estefanía Mendoza from Venezuela (NGO Mulier) all addressed the challenges faced by single and economically disadvantaged mothers. These women, lacking support from their children's fathers, seek employment to sustain themselves and their children, rendering them vulnerable to exploitation, particularly in the form of sexual exploitation.

A statement from another survivor to the NGO Só Direito [8] reported a mother, who systematically beat her, and sexual abuse by her stepfather, from the age of six to 14.

> *"My mother never had love for her children. I was given to others and they beat me a lot. My stepfather used me since I was six years old", she says. At 14, she ran away from home. She later married her first husband (at age 14). "He drank a lot, he was very violent and I hit him a lot," she adds. "It was hell. I had to do a program even when I was sick to pay for housing, food and cleaning. I knew I was going to go to a club to work as a prostitute, but I didn't know what I was going to pay inside, that I was going to hand over my passport, be arrested".*

This report highlights the abduction of women and girls in the interior of Pará who are forced into prostitution.

New profile of victims

Jorgelina Burgos of NGO Dignitate Brazil has highlighted a known profile of victims, revealing that not all are economically vulnerable. Amid the early stages of the pandemic, middle-class young girls from households with working professionals became involved in prostitution networks. This unexpected trend suggests that emotional vulnerabilities, rather than purely economic factors, may be driving their involvement.

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[7] Retrieved from: <https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2009/08/rotas-da-exploracao-sexual-por-que-muitas-mulheres-da-amazonia-seguem-esse-caminho/> Accessed on the 15th of November of 2023. Original statement in Portuguese: *"Eu sinto raiva, nojo. Me sinto humilhada por vender meu corpo para ganhar 20, 30 reais. Nós somos vagabunda. Sempre existe uma discriminalidade contra a mulher. A mulher tem que estar na beira do fogão para os homens. Eu me sinto revoltada porque eu não posso fazer o que eles (homens) podem. Só porque são homens? São machistas, racistas. Isso é discriminação"*

[8] Retrieved from: <https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2009/08/rotas-da-exploracao-sexual-por-que-muitas-mulheres-da-amazonia-seguem-esse-caminho/> Accessed on the 15th of November of 2023. Original statement in Portuguese: "Minha mãe nunca teve amor pelos filhos. Fui dada para os outros e me batiam muito. Meu padrasto se servia de mim desde os meus seis anos". "Ele (o marido) bebia muito, era muito violento e me batia demais". "Foi um inferno. Fazia programa até doente para pagar habitação, comida e limpeza. Eu sabia que ia para um clube trabalhar como prostituta, mas eu não sabia o que ia pagar lá dentro, que ia entregar meu passaporte, ficar presa".

Many of these individuals, granted significant autonomy from a young age, harbour a profound desire for recognition, love, and consideration, potentially contributing to their susceptibility to exploitative situations.

Social media and the dream of a better life

A concern emphasised by the representative of Hermanas Adoratrices is the striking contrast between the harsh realities of poverty and the seemingly perfect and affluent lifestyles showcased on social media. This stark difference makes individuals susceptible to exploitation, stemming from the aspiration for possessions and lifestyles portrayed online, in contrast to the poverty and limited economic opportunities they actually confront. This sentiment was echoed by Carla Marroquin from the Protect Me Project.

Sexual exploitation through the production of webcam-based sexual videos

Estefanía Mendoza from Venezuela (NGO Mulier), Ximena Cabrera from the Urban Mobility Mechanism in Ecuador, and Fiorella Rojas from Fundación Renacer – Colombia affirmed that the use of webcams for strip-tease videos is perceived as something easy and lucrative. Digital influencers advertise it as profitable. However, what can happens is that these girls start performing on webcams in their rooms, using someone else's equipment, and individuals knowledgeable about which websites to sell this content. These individuals claim that it is not recorded, but live. Later, these girls are charged for internet usage, room rent, and are blackmailed with the videos recorded of them, ending up forced into prostitution and subjected to sexual exploitation. Yauli et al (2022) report that new crimes committed through electronic means are significantly proliferating, with sexual contact with minors under eighteen being the crime with the highest number of cases in the province of Tungurahua (Ecuador).

Am I a victim?

Regarding the difficulty victims encounter in recognising themselves as enslaved individuals, Frei Xavier Plassat from the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) in Brazil mentioned survivors of forced labour reporting: "*I was treated worse than an animal.*" Jorgelina Burgos from Dignitate Brazil also reported that survivors struggle to identify their sexual exploitation, stating:

> *One thing that I always compare this to is a classical dancer. They hurt their feet so that they can adapt to a pointe, standing position on their toes - and we were not created to use our feet this way. But they will make an effort, and spend hours and hours and hours every day, to be able to achieve this position where, the entire skeleton, will reform in a way for which it was not made. Our spine and the entire body, not only the tip of the foot, will be in pain, pain that will go to the back of the neck. As time goes by, it's not that they don't feel more pain, they get used to the pain. And with the passage of time, the spine becomes much more accustomed to them standing on tiptoes than walking with the sole of the foot glued to the ground.*
>
> *Victims of any kind of violence will have this as a form of defence for the mind, they will gradually become accustomed to that violence, this totally toxic life, where they will be worn down and hurt in such a way that they will try to think that this is natural and normal. To the point that you will see victims, for example, of trafficking for sexual exploitation, who will have a minimum of double personality - borderline is the minimum you will have.*

Because you need to a have a real life: "I am Juana and I was born in Medellín and I am being prostituted in Spain." At the same time, when she enters the brothel, she is Melanie, the girl who laughs loudly, who approaches men as if she likes the environment, who drinks alcohol in large quantities, who takes drugs and all that stuff. There comes a time when the actress that she has created, that she has prepared to be able to defend herself, begins to get confused inside her mind and she doesn't know which of the two she is. And there, that is when they begin to make this diffusion, this destruction of what their personality is, because it's the only way they can live. There is no other way. That is why you will see many cases that, if you see the level of suffering, it will be a level of suffering that has already led to suicide in others. And you see that they strive to live, to stand. This is why their minds fight daily to stay alive."

Returning home after experiencing exploitation

An anonymous representative from the religious institution Hermanas Adoratrices shared insights into the struggles of individuals who embark on journeys in search of better employment, only to face the humiliation of returning home empty-handed, unable to fulfil their dreams of supporting their families. In some cases, this leads to involvement in prostitution, driven by the belief that success is a prerequisite for returning home—a situation reminiscent of the itinerant worker who, having been exploited and left penniless, never returns home (Figueira, 2004).

Marie Henriqueta Cavalcante from Brazil, representing a religious institution, and Dr. Sebastián Salubrista from Chile, a Ph.D. candidate in Social Sciences at Flacso, highlighted the lack of community support and the abandonment experienced by victims, who are often unjustly blamed for their exploitation. Communities may perceive these individuals as enjoying themselves in another country without comprehending the exploitation they have endured.

Similarly echoing Sebastian's observations, Prado (2008) explores the challenges faced by families in comprehending exploitation and delves into the lives of wives of enslaved men. These women articulate that their circumstances are even more demanding than those of men. They persist at home, caring for the *babassu* plantation, and bear the weight of supporting the family. On occasion, when the men return, they bring no money home, betraying their wives by diverting funds toward other women and alcohol.

Impacts on health due to exploitation

The representative from Hermanas Adoratrices shed light on the gruelling and harsh hours and lifestyle associated with prostitution. This included instances of heart attacks and deaths among brothel and motel owners who had expressed fatigue from working night shifts, poor nutrition, and prolonged absence of sunlight in the weeks preceding their unfortunate incidents. There exists a correlation between the violence in sexual relations within prostitution, health conditions such as fibroids and a high incidence of cancer, along with infections in the mouth and genital areas, and unwanted pregnancies resulting from clients insisting on unprotected intercourse, leading to the evident risk of HIV.
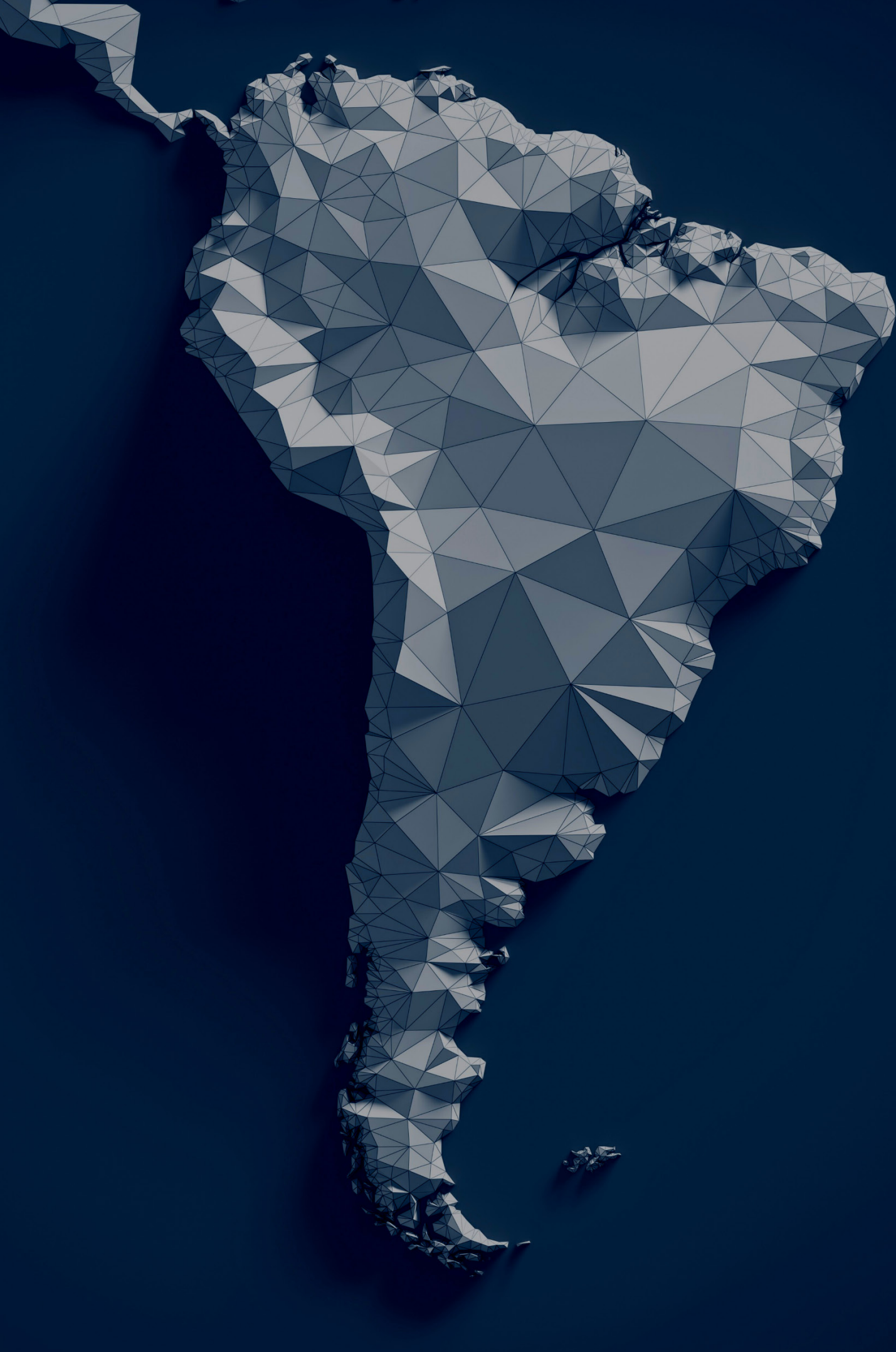
Country profiles

The country profiles were crafted by integrating insights gathered through interviews, UNODC (2023) data, and predominantly from a comprehensive systematic review. The systematic review, following PRISMA guidelines[9], aimed to analyse open-access, peer-reviewed studies in Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French from 2003-2023 regarding human trafficking in South America. The search, conducted on June 23, 2023, sought relevant sources from Web of Science, Scopus, and Scielo databases. The authors independently screened articles, considering specified keywords and applying eligibility criteria aligned with the Palermo Protocol (2003). Only open-access articles in scientific journals discussing South American countries and published within the specified timeframe were included.

The research questions focused on understanding the dynamics of human trafficking in South America and how different types of exploitation contribute to this dynamic. The screening process prioritised empirical studies exploring practical aspects, migration dynamics, and the influence of internal legislation on victim identification and rescue efforts. Conceptual analyses and articles discussing slavery or trafficking during the colonial period were excluded. Out of the initial pool of 210 articles, 55 met the inclusion criteria, while 155 were excluded throughout the process.

Argentina

Argentina stands out as the country with the highest number of identified human trafficking cases in South America—nearly three thousand victims from the region excluding cases of internal trafficking (see Annex 1). The victims identified from South America encompass nationalities from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela, with 62% of them originating from Bolivia and 26% from Paraguay. Notably, interviews and articles align with the data reported by Argentina to the UNODC, suggesting a commendable antislavery effort. While this success does not imply the absence of victims from other regions or those of the same nine nationalities who may remain unrecovered, the consistent mention across the three sources—UNODC, stakeholders, and research papers—signals that the countries of origin of trafficked individuals are being effectively identified and reported in Argentina and to the UNODC (Annex 1).

Legal status

Grbavac (2016) mentions a reform in Argentine legislation related to the adoption of the Swedish model for the regulation of the sale of sexual services. Specifically, the reform introduced Article 125 of the Penal Code of 2012, which establishes penalties for promoting or facilitating the prostitution of a person, as well as the victim's consent, with a prison sentence of four to six years. For the author, this represented a significant change in the country's legislation regarding the fight against internal trafficking.

Moreno (2019) highlights that the majority of domestic trafficking originates in the northern provinces of the country and has destinations in the southern provinces of Buenos Aires. Sommer's study (2017) identifies a significant challenge in the effective enforcement of legislation and emphasises the importance of respecting the autonomy of victims during

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[9]Retrieved from: < http://www.prisma-statement.org/documents/PRISMA_2020_checklist.pdf> Access date: 14th of November 2023.

assistance. The research addresses human trafficking in Argentina, emphasising both sexual and labour exploitation. The author points out that the country plays a crucial role, acting as the origin, transit, and destination for victims. Many of these victims come from rural areas and live in situations of social vulnerability. Labour exploitation occurs in textiles and the poultry industry, while sexual exploitation is predominantly carried out by foreign women, mostly from Paraguay and Brazil.

Sommer (2017) also notes that, to attract Bolivians, offers of entrepreneurship are presented in native languages such as Aymara and Quechua, which are the predominant languages among indigenous peoples in Bolivia, totalling around 3.5 million people. In addition to technical offices, labour trafficking is observed in sectors such as the poultry industry, vegetable production, and activities known as "brick cutters", involving the handmade production of construction materials. The author emphasises that victims of trafficking often include entire families, with the head of the family receiving payment, and all family members encouraged to work to increase productivity. This practice is particularly problematic in rural areas, where state supervision is generally more fragile.

Labour exploitation in sewing workshops

Goldberg's study (2014) examines the living conditions of Bolivian immigrants in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with a focus on sewing workshops. The study describes that in this environment, Bolivian immigrant workers eat, live, and work for long days ranging from 12 to 18 hours, often with minimal breaks. Usually, they have only 15 minutes for a quick lunch, which is often taken while sitting at sewing machines. The author emphasises that sewing workshops are often managed by Bolivians who migrated to Argentina, primarily in the 1990s. These owners of sewing workshops frequently verbally hire other Bolivian immigrants. Additionally, there are also Korean immigrants and descendants of Korean or Argentine immigrants involved in the sector. Sommer (2017), Grbavac (2016), and Montero (2014) corroborate this finding, providing evidence that exploiters are often of the same nationality as those who are exploited.

Gender

Goldberg (2016) highlights a trend of feminisation in migratory flows, with an increase in young women migrating with their families. In such families, women often perform the role of breadwinners, working as seamstresses or assistants while simultaneously taking on unpaid responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning. These tasks are often perceived as a natural obligation for women, adding to their workload. These working conditions are exhausting and contribute to the exploitation faced by these immigrants in sewing workshops in Argentina, emphasising the urgency of measures to ensure their rights and well-being.

Means of coercion

Goldberg (2014) reveals that owners of sewing workshops employ various means of coercion to keep workers in exploitative conditions. Many of these workers incur debts with the owners from the moment they are transferred from their homeland to Argentina. Owners advance the costs of the transfer and provide accommodation and employment upon arrival, thus creating a relationship of economic dependence. This system of debts is used as a means of pressure to force workers to learn quickly and accept exploitative conditions.

Goldberg (2014) describes physical restrictions: workers are kept in enclosed spaces and chained outside, with the keys controlled by the workshop owners. This practice is particularly concerning as it restricts the freedom of movement for workers, effectively confining them to their working conditions. The only means of evacuation is closed and chained from the outside, locked by the workshop owner. On March 30, 2006, the death of six people, including five minors, was recorded in a garment workshop located at 1269 Luis Viale Street, CABA. All individuals had Bolivian nationality.

Motives for the exploitation of immigrants in the textile industry

Montero (2014) sought to identify the justifications used by companies in the textile industry that exploited immigrant workers in urban sewing workshops. To do so, the study analysed the industries in Prato, Italy, with approximately 3.5 thousand factories and a predominance of Chinese workers, and in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with around 5,000 clothing factories and about 30,000 exploited Bolivian immigrants. In conclusion, there are three justifications for companies to continue exploiting workers: 1) the growing increase in the global market and the consequent competition with Asian imports, the protection of the textile industry in both countries, fear, and the argument to justify salary reductions, as well as requesting subsidies through financial support from state authorities and industry protection; 2) the production cadence of the industry, which extends over different parts of the city and is an argument for companies to ensure they can control the exploitation of workers, marked by subcontracting; and 3) offices managed by small immigrant businesses that exploit their own and other immigrant communities, responsible for the existence of conditions of extreme exploitation. The arguments here involve "cultural customs" and "self-exploitation" by immigrants, something confirmed by labour inspection authorities in both cities.

Living and health conditions

Goldberg (2014) describes the precarious living conditions of Bolivian immigrants in sewing workshops and the areas where they live. Buildings are often partially or completely deteriorated, with issues such as foundation problems, walls with detached plaster, and floors with holes due to the lack of bricks or broken pipes. In the case of those living in improvised shantytowns, they often lack access to basic water and gas services, although they have electricity, which is essential for sewing production. Overcrowding and unsanitary conditions are common, posing serious health risks. An increase in the incidence of tuberculosis has been observed in the last seven years, related to lifestyle, work, and housing. In addition to tuberculosis, the study reports a range of other health conditions faced by workers. This includes vision and hearing problems, neck and posture issues, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, hysterectomy, chronic stress, and complications during pregnancy such as anaemia, among others. These health conditions are often exacerbated by harsh working conditions and restrictions on access to medical care, making the lives of workers even more precarious and challenging.

Support policies for victims

Sommer (2017) and Grbavac (2016) emphasise the importance of the advancement of Argentine legislation by eliminating the need for consent for victims of all ages and introducing various post-rescue care instruments, such as physical and mental health assistance, as well as reintegration into society. However, the lack of government funding has resulted in the predominance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in providing this crucial support.

Sommer (2017) points out that in the province of Córdoba, Argentina, there has been a State Secretariat for Assistance and Prevention of Human Trafficking since 2012. The "8 de marzo" shelter plays a fundamental role in providing support to victims of sexual trafficking in situations of vulnerability. Over time, this shelter has assisted a total of 1,513 victims, with 68% of them being Argentine and 32% foreigners, from countries such as Bolivia, Colombia, and Brazil.

Sommer (2017) also emphasises that the majority of the 4,602 women rescued by "8 de marzo" are mothers with multiple children and often lack the support of partners or family members for their subsistence. This makes them targets for trafficking networks for sexual exploitation. In addition, victims of sexual exploitation face the challenge of dissociation, a process by which they disconnect from their emotional and physical reality to deal with the context surrounding them.

Regarding the age range of victims, Sommer (2017) mentions that it varies between twelve and 35 years old, and of the 2,130 people rescued, 52% were subjected to sexual exploitation, 45% to labour exploitation, and in 3% of cases, the nature of the exploitation was not specified.

Finally, Goldberg (2016) highlights the presence of the textile cooperative "20 de Diciembre La Alameda", which provides an alternative life for some immigrants. However, housing remains a challenge due to high costs and exclusion from the real estate market. This cooperative is dedicated to the production of ethical clothing, in contrast to slave labour exploitation in the textile industry. It represents an essential effort in the fight against injustices faced by Bolivian immigrants in the AMBA (Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires).

Bolivia

Bolivia reported 42 cases of human trafficking from South America to the UNODC between 2009 and 2021, involving victims from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. These countries of origin are consistently referenced in research papers and interviews, as detailed in Annex 1. Figure 2 illustrates that Bolivia is predominantly recognised as a country of origin rather than a destination.

Within the context of exploitation in Bolivia, Reyna Cachi, representing Fundacion Munasim Kullakit, highlighted the pervasive issue of godparents as a form of child exploitation. This occurs when adopting families, ostensibly supporting a child's education, subject the child to sexual abuse and exploitation within domestic service.

Miguel Gallegos, also from Bolivia and affiliated with Infante-Promoción Integral de la Mujer y la Infancia, emphasised the role of drug trafficking, poverty, and social networks as contributing factors to exploitation and vulnerability. Gallegos addressed the sub-representation of adult victims of sexual exploitation in Bolivia, emphasising the need for health care and disease prevention, given that prostitution is not considered a crime. Furthermore, he highlighted the underrepresentation of men in forced labour operations, despite facing conditions akin to slavery and lacking proper remuneration.

According to Murillejo (2015), the most vulnerable groups in Bolivia include children aged 8 to 12, teenagers aged 13 to 18, and young adults aged 19 to 25, with women being particularly susceptible. The predominant reported cases involve commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour, with El Alto, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, and La Paz having the highest number of reported cases.

In the context of international trafficking, Murillejo (2015) notes that approximately 10% of the victims from Bolivia were traced to Brazil and Paraguay for sexual exploitation. Notably, cases involving underage individuals from La Paz and Santa Cruz for sexual exploitation were documented.

Brazil

Brazil did not report to the UNODC the case of human trafficking from Paraguay to Brazil for labour and sexual exploitation, as highlighted in the Paraguay section. The officially reported countries of origin were limited to Bolivia and Peru (UNODC, 2023). However, interviews and articles (see Annex 1) have brought to light that individuals from Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Venezuela were also trafficked to Brazil. Unfortunately, this crucial information is underrepresented in the existing database. While recognising the existence of human trafficking flows between Brazil and these seven countries, the exact number of victims within this dynamic remains elusive, with estimates ranging from potentially one victim per country to an unknown scale of victims between 2009 and 2021 (UNODC, 2023). This research offers valuable insights into countries where human trafficking occurs but has not been officially reported.

For instance, an anonymous interviewee disclosed that men in Brazil, particularly those from the Brazilian army stationed in Tabatinga near the Colombian border, constitute the primary clientele of brothels housing victims trafficked from Colombia for sexual exploitation.

Brazil has implemented a strong policy to combat forced labour, resulting in almost 60,000 rescues since 1995-2022[10]. However, its efforts to address the sexual exploitation of both nationals and foreigners are notably lacking. Additionally, there is a failure to report rescue cases documented in the Labor Public Prosecutor's database, as they do not contribute to a unified human trafficking database in Brazil. This deficiency in unification becomes apparent in Brazil's reports[11] on human trafficking.

Legal status

According to Rangel and Schwarz (2023), Brazil is considered a global leader in the fight against contemporary slavery. In addition to signing major international agreements, Brazil has enacted inclusive domestic legislation. However, according to Figueira et al. (2017), the laws are not proving sufficient. On one hand, for employers, the imposed penalties do not prevent them from engaging in forced labour again. On the other hand, the lack of survival alternatives sometimes leads individuals to once again face the risks associated with contemporary slave labour.

The most important Brazilian domestic legislation regarding human trafficking is Law No. 13,344 of 2016. It is based on three pillars: prevention, repression of the practice, and protection of the victim (Marques & de Faria, 2017).

Santos & Vale (2017) believe that a significant contribution of the law was the possibility for law enforcement to request telecommunications service providers to provide the technical means for locating victims and/or suspects of human trafficking crimes.

There are significant criticisms in the application of the aforementioned law. Marques and de Faria (2017) interpret the evolution of human trafficking legislation in Brazil by analysing the operation called "Salve Jorge," which took place in the Amazon in 2016. In this operation, the Federal Police thwarted a criminal organisation accused of involvement in international human trafficking, specifically a group of dancers bound for South Korea. According to the authors, in addition to the extreme vulnerability of the victims, the complexity of combatting international trafficking lies in the cooperation, or lack thereof, between countries in addressing such crimes.

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[10]Retrieved from: < https://www.prt20.mpt.mp.br/informe-se/noticias-do-mpt-se/1139-cerca-de-60-mil-foram-resgatados-do-trabalho-escravo-de-1995-a-2022-aponta-sistema-do-mpt-e-da-oit > Accessed on the 18th of November 2023.

[11]Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.br/mj/pt-br/assuntos/sua-protecao/trafico-de-pessoas/Dados%20e%20estatisticas/trafico-de-pessoas-em-numeros > Accessed on the 16th of November 2023.

Venson (2014) agrees and warns that the definition of trafficking was aimed at combatting organised crime within the context of concerns such as border control, but not necessarily promoting human rights.

Blanchette & Silva (2018) highlight the paradox existing in human trafficking legislation, using language in defence of human rights while simultaneously encouraging actions that contribute to unjustly repressing the very people the law claims to protect. The study showed a report from the Federal Police in 2015 in Boa Vista, Roraima, where 20 women between 19 and 20 years old, 16 of them Venezuelan, were found. Initially considered victims of trafficking, they were later treated as irregular immigrants by the police, given the understanding of the law. Venson (2014) stated that some staff from governmental institutions such as those in legal, governmental, and law enforcement roles have a formed understanding that "victims do not recognised themselves as victims." The author deems this complicit in a colonising discourse that denies them the position of authors of their choices, reducing them to objects without the possibility of being heard.

According to Marques and de Faria (2017), the South American continent is a conducive territory for international human trafficking practices, given its diversity of social problems and vast territory that complicates the fight. Brazil is both the origin and destination of trafficked individuals. Brazilian sex slaves can be found in neighbouring countries such as Venezuela, Suriname, and French Guiana. Frequently, they are found in other continents, especially in Europe, with countries like Portugal (Minga, 2020; Zúquete et al., 2016), Spain (Piscitelli. 2012; Piscitelli, 2022), and Italy (Teixeira, 2008) being major destinations. On the other hand, foreign workers in Brazil, often from Bolivia, are concentrated in traditional industries in major urban centres, such as São Paulo (Araújo et al., 2015).

Modern slavery and race

McGrath (2013) highlights an underrepresentation of white workers and an overrepresentation of black workers among those liberated from modern slavery in Brazil. Additionally, only 27% of the forms contained responses to the question about race, in contrast to other variables such as age, gender, and marital status, for which more responses were available. This scenario suggests the existence of a constructed silence around racial issues in the context of modern slavery. This denial of racial inquiries, which is unique, is profoundly problematic, as in Brazil, roots, regional origin, poverty, and inequality are intrinsically interconnected.

Forced labour

The study by Figueira et al. (2017) addresses the Brazilian state and civil society regarding contemporary labour. It utilised 767 accounts of workers who escaped or were released from farms or charcoal kilns in the Amazon region, in the state of Pará, between 1995 and 2010. This period spans two different presidents: Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1955 – 2022) and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010). In both governments, workers from all five regions of the country, but mostly from the economically deprived regions, such as the Northeast, were deposited by those who fled or were detained. They faced threats, submission, degrading conditions, the presence of unsuitable animals, unsanitary housing, spoiled food, physical or psychological abuse, humiliations, and families forced to work to sustain their lives.

Work in the Amazon region requires a specific profile of workers. Costa (2008) emphasised the male and young profile, prevalent in the agricultural scenario. Generally, workers are employed in non-specialised tasks, such as clearing native vegetation. In this context, women's role is to endure the hardships of slave labour, often without news about the whereabouts of the young boys who have left. Due to cultural reasons, the family is central in the life of a rural worker, seen as a mission through which the family is sustained. This aspect is particularly important for family leaders. However, the process of constructing masculinity is disrupted by contemporary slavery, leading to dehumanisation. The study also pointed out that the main characteristic of internal trafficking in Brazil is debt slavery.

Gender

While slavery in Brazil is predominantly male, the work of Rangel & Schwarz (2023) questions whether women are not enslaved in the same proportion as men in Brazil or if Brazil's anti-slavery efforts are failing to recognise and support women subjected to exploitation. It is crucial to note that this phenomenon is not unique to Brazil but is observed worldwide, where women constitute the majority of victims, including in South America, where the rate of female victims is higher than the global figure. In Brazil, females represent only 5% of the over 35,000 people rescued from slave labour between 2003 and 2018. As a result, the study concluded that anti-slavery efforts in the country are lacking, leading to the underreporting of sexual exploitation, domestic work, and forced marriages. This might be associated with the fact that rescues in Brazil typically target economic sectors that are traditionally dominated by men over those typically dominated by women.

Zimmerman (2009) reports that individuals trafficked domestically for agricultural work may be exposed to toxic chemicals or pesticides, repetitive activities, heat or cold exposure, iron or heavy machinery, and long working hours. Living conditions can be overcrowded, with poor hygiene and few opportunities for rest or sanitation. Work-related conditions can lead to musculoskeletal disorders, pesticide poisoning, skin damage, dehydration, or freezing, and exhaustion. Physical abuse and punishment can be perpetrated by owners or managers to enforce obedience or increase productivity. Women may be subjected to sexual violence.

McGrath (2013) discusses how contemporary education is linked to ethanol production, as farms that plant crops for ethanol can employ slave labour during harvest. The same state that supports the sugarcane-alcohol sector has also shown a more active role in combatting forced labour through labour ministry inspections that have changed working conditions.

Sexual exploitation

Women enslaved in Brazil are closely associated with sexual exploitation. Marques and de Faria (2017) state that there is virtually no human trafficking for any other purpose than prostitution. Faria (2008) reflects on how women are perceived in the world of crime and the difference between family heads and women in sex trafficking. The former is responsible for criminal rights, both for women and victims, and when they are in the position of traffic agents, they are in a victimised situation. Blanchette and Silva (2018) analyse anti-trafficking campaigns with images of human trafficking presented by some of the major campaigns in Brazil and conclude that, despite anti-trafficking groups acknowledging that the crime involves much more than trafficking for sexual purposes, the vast majority of Brazilian campaigns focus on the image of "women in distress."

When sexual exploitation is not internal, Europe is the main destination for Brazilian women. According to Teixeira (2008), Europe holds great allure in this universe, attracting individuals in pursuit of dreams. The works of Minga (2020) and Zúquete et al. (2016) analysed the trafficking of Brazilian women for sexual exploitation in Portugal. Both assert that Portugal is a significant hub for the prostitution of Brazilian immigrants, forming a predominant part of the local market. Zúquete et al. (2016) conducted an exploratory qualitative study in Brazil and Portugal with the aim of identifying institutional discourses related to social representations and finding evidence of stereotypes associated with a sexualised image of Brazilian women, particularly poor and black. This conclusion aligns with Minga (2020), who relies on journalistic texts on the subject and concludes that the pursuit of trafficking and exploitation takes a backseat to the stereotyping of Brazilian immigrants, which is associated with cultural relations between countries and even harks back to the colonial and classical periods. This destination ends up encompassing the issue of human trafficking.

Piscitelli (2012) conducted ethnographic research at different times between 2004 and 2012, and later, Piscitelli (2022) monitored anti-trafficking regimes in Spain between 2004 and 2015, considering the insertion of Brazilian workers, especially in the sex industry. The author criticises anti-trafficking policies, which, despite the rhetoric of protecting human rights, are based on a criminal and repressive structure that varies from country to country. In Spain, the policy's aim is to punish and expel immigrants constructed as irregular. Teixeira (2008) warned that prostitution of Brazilians in Europe almost exclusively involves women. The author addressed the circulation of Brazilian transgender individuals in Italy, where, as in Brazil, practicing prostitution is not considered a crime. Analysing everyday texts, the author concludes that there is an absence of public policies to protect victims, who often face violence in Italy.

Internationally, Zimmerman (2009) observed that Brazilian women were trafficked to Spain, the Netherlands, Venezuela, Italy, Portugal, Paraguay, Switzerland, the United States, Germany, and Suriname. Adult victims are usually young black women or those with mystical roots (under 24 years old) with low education levels. They are not commonly single and often live on the outskirts of cities with other family members.

Zimmerman (2009) also states that there is some evidence suggesting that women from the North and Northeast regions of Brazil are more vulnerable to trafficking than those in other parts of the country. These regions have lower average indicators of income, education, and employment in the country. Additionally, the growth of sex tourism, especially from Europe to the northeastern coast of Brazil, has promoted an increase in trafficking opportunities through connections with common destination countries.

Ferreira (2018) highlights human trafficking of LGBTQ+ community members for commercial sexual exploitation, supporting a significant movement of individuals from the northern and northeastern regions of Brazil to the southeastern part of the country, as well as to destinations in Europe. She emphasises that this issue is often neglected, lacking in-depth discussions.

Brazil enslaves neighbours

Human trafficking between Brazil and the rest of the world is not limited to sexual exploitation: Araújo et al. (2015) analyse the growing migration flow of Bolivians to Brazil in the Puerto Quijarro (Bolivia)/Corumbá (Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil) corridor, which is just an entry point to the city, as São Paulo is a destination for 85% of these individuals. In 2013 alone, 8,200 Bolivian immigrants entered Brazil through this corridor. The research, based on documented and bibliographical data, included four semi-structured interviews with Federal Police agents who work on the border and Bolivian immigrants at the border.

Data collection focused on aspects such as age, reasons for migration, destination, length of stay, and migration goals. The study concluded that, while spontaneously seeking better living conditions, the reality means precarious working conditions, low wages, and many hours in clothing manufacturing, subjecting themselves to various human rights violations. The desire to return to the place of origin persists, even among those who establish families in Brazil.

Worker health

Garreto et al. (2021, a) compare the food and water supply conditions of 19th-century slaves with contemporary slave-like workers. For the first group, the analysis was performed through a literature review, and for the second group, the study used a sample of 648 workers recruited by authorities between 2007 and 2017 in rural areas of different geographical regions of Brazil. In no contemporary food study was any information related to the amount of food provided for 57.4% of the sample found. For the remaining, the amount of food was considered sufficient for only 21.6%. In all samples (100%), there was an indication of consuming inadequate quality food. Additionally, the diet was almost always the same, leading to digestive system-related diseases.

Regarding water intake, only 3.3% of the samples had access to chlorinated treated water. Over the past year, 96.7% did not provide any treatment for drinking. As a conclusion for both periods compared, it was possible to identify parameters allowing the explicit identification of conditions analogous to slavery. The available data point to an energy deficit in both compared periods.

Garreto et al. (2021, b) analysed the focus on occupational health and safety conditions of 392 rural workers characterised as experiencing slave-like labour. Serious health and safety problems were found among workers.

Leão & Ribeiro (2021) address the knowledge and practices of social movements confronting contemporary slave labour. The origin of social movements is religious, as many workers who fled exploitation and violence on farms only had the Church to seek help. Reception of workers involves a cycle of activities, with stages ranging from welcome with comfort and safety to reporting to the police. According to two workers, there were descriptions of various symptoms of diseases contracted at the workplace. The authors believe that this is complementary work to the Brazilian public health system (Sistema Único de Saúde - SUS), which, while addressing health issues, fails to capture the reality of enslaved individuals. Today, social movements have actions for inspecting workplaces, preventing new cases, strengthening vulnerable communities and victims of slavery, organising networks and collective action forums, and producing information. Leão et al. (2021) identified some challenges regarding the health of victimised workers.

Chile

Chile reported 328 foreign victims of human trafficking from South America to the UNODC between 2009 and 2021. The victims represent diverse nationalities, with 30% from Argentina, 19% from Bolivia, 9% from Brazil, 30% from Colombia, 12% from Paraguay, and additional cases from Peru and Venezuela. Significantly, interviews and articles in Annex 1 closely align with the data communicated by Chile to the UNODC.

According to Acevedo (2021), the increased economic development in Chile has made it an attractive destination for Latin American migrants. The movement of people across the borders of Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru has increased in the context of regular and legal migratory movements, mainly originating from Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. The study also observed the presence of individuals from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and other countries such as Syria, Africa, and the Middle East.

According to Acevedo (2021), 60% of the victims are trafficked for labour exploitation, and 40% for sexual exploitation. In total, 34% were Bolivians, 29% Paraguayans, 17% Colombians, 6% Ecuadorians, 6% Argentinians, 4% Dominicans, and 4% Peruvians.

Bolivians constitute the majority of rescued victims. Tapia and Rodríguez (2022) report an emblematic case of a 12-year-old Bolivian girl who was handed over by her grandparents to a Chilean family. There, she was subjected to slavery, forced to start cooking at 4 a.m. and sell food on the street. Upon returning, she was forced to work within the household, resulting in a 20-hour workday.

On the other hand, Acevedo (2021) describes how traffickers operate by combining two situations: facilitating border crossing and offering work that results in forced labour or labour exploitation. A Peruvian reported receiving the promise of "a daily payment of US$30, in addition to transportation, accommodation, and meals" to work in plum harvesting. The other 42 compatriots, all from Tacna (Peru), travelled to Chile but found deplorable conditions, including the cold. The company that hired the Peruvians was sentenced to three years of suspended imprisonment and a fine for migrant smuggling.

Ideal victim in criminal justice

Tapia and Rodríguez (2022) note that about 40% of human trafficking cases that the criminal system manages to detect are dismissed, indicating that the judicial decisions in these cases were strongly influenced by the image the judiciary expects to see, especially in cases of sex trafficking. They anticipate an image of a young, innocent, and virginal victim, contrasting the stereotype of prostitution. They further highlight a case of Korean women taken with the promise of being models in Chile, who ended up working as waitresses in sensual attire and prostitutes. The authors criticise the judge's decision that they were not enslaved and sexually exploited because one of them rejected a client.

Regarding trafficking for labour exploitation, for Tapia and Rodríguez (2022), Chilean legislation focuses on the most severe forms of exploitation, perpetuating the image of a naive victim. However, literature shows that victims of labour exploitation trafficking often exert themselves to confront exploitation to protect themselves, other victims, or their families, pressuring traffickers for autonomy, payment, medical assistance, and other needs. This may result in an image of a "bad victim," one who does not see themselves as figuratively "enslaved" but recognises the abuse and injustice of the situation, beyond the conceptual exploitation.

The same authors analysed sentences and reveal that some "rescued" individuals were previously sanctioned for violating Chilean immigration law. In most trafficking cases, victims were exposed to the crime by acquaintances of their own nationality, raising questions about the influence of an "ideal trafficker" when the system processes trafficking cases.

Colombia

87% of the 187 victims reported by Colombia to the UNODC between 2009 and 2021 are from Venezuela. The remaining victims come from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru. Interviews consistently underscore the predominant flow from Venezuela to Colombia, as highlighted by five different interviewees (see Annex 1).

Luz Nagle, a human rights consultant, pointed to a notable increase in tourists from the USA engaging in sexual tourism in Cartagena. This surge is attributed to the availability of low-cost flights from the USA to Colombia, contributing to a rise in sexual exploitation.

Fiorella Rojas, representing the Renacer Foundation in Colombia, also shed light on sexual tourism in the country. She emphasised the diverse origins of individuals who frequently travel to Colombia for sexual activities, including people from Germany, England, and various other countries attending conferences. Rojas describes a pattern where individuals participate in conferences during the day and exploit Colombian women sexually in brothels at night. Additionally, she highlights the concerning lack of rescue efforts:

> And here almost no rescues are made. Here investigation and prosecution organisations very rarely make a rescue. In other words, the victims are here because they've reported it, because there is a scandal in the media, because some civil society organisation, like ours, has done something for international cooperation. But here the authorities almost never make these rescues.

Hurtado and Pereira-Villa (2012) focused their study on Pereira, Colombia, as the point of origin, with Hong Kong and Singapore as the destinations. These destinations were chosen because they represented the origin and destination in 60% of the examined cases. While these destinations might not be the primary hubs for the illicit trade of Colombian victims, they serve as indicative examples, as they align with cases that have come to the attention of Colombian authorities over the past five years in the context of transnational trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The study by Hurtado and Pereira-Villa (2012) highlighted several key factors, including a significant young population aged 10-19 years, a high homicide rate, and a notably lower GDP per capita at the origin compared to the destination. For instance, the city of Pereira – a city of origin of victims trafficked to Singapore and Hong-Kong – has an annual GDP per capita of approximately US$2.2 billion, while Colombia's GDP per capita stands at around US$5,400. In contrast, Singapore had a GDP per capita of US$36,537 in 2009, and Hong Kong boasted one of US$29,000. This substantial disparity in purchasing power underscores the economic contrast between the points of origin and the destinations for trafficking victims.

Hurtado and Pereira-Villa (2012) affirmed that as time progresses, traffickers find it increasingly difficult to argue that the same amount is owed by the victims. In this context, the network's income cannot be maximised in the same manner. Consequently, these networks closely monitor their victims and frequently replace them with others to reduce the cost associated with each exploited victim.

Murillejo (2015) identified Colombia as a country deeply affected by human trafficking, serving as a source, transit, and destination for this illicit trade. Human trafficking in Colombia takes several distressing forms, encompassing sexual and labour exploitation, forced marriages, and the recruitment of minors for criminal activities. These issues are most prevalent in the Coffee Axis and Cauca regions.

In the Coffee Axis, Murillejo (2015) highlighted that minors are coerced into prostitution, often by their own family members, including mothers, fathers, grandparents, or step-parents. These family members perceive it as an economic opportunity, turning these young individuals into commodities for commercial gain. In Cauca, the exploitation takes a different form, with community leaders or gang leaders exploiting minors for financial profit.

Regarding criminal activities, Murillejo (2015) acknowledged that young males are frequently used as couriers to transport weapons or drugs. The traffickers manipulate them, often inducing addiction to maintain control. Simultaneously, girls and adolescents are lured into trafficking through relationships they establish with intermediaries operating at a mid-level within the trafficking networks.

Adult women also fall victim to human trafficking, often through forced marriages with men they meet online, many of whom are tourists from foreign countries. Tragically, a significant number of these women go missing, and their families, who report their disappearances, later discover their deceased bodies (Murillejo 2015).

Murillejo (2015) described that indigenous and rural women face labour exploitation, particularly in the form of domestic servitude in Cali, located in the Valle del Cauca region. They accept promises of education and housing in exchange for their services, which ultimately lead to exploitative working conditions.

Cuesta et al. (2015) discovered that human trafficking is intertwined with various other criminal activities, including extortion, kidnapping, drug trafficking, sexual violence, and more. These crimes often co-occur with human trafficking, and several social factors such as poverty, internal conflict, drug trade, cultural practices, and permissive discourses contribute to the prevalence of this issue. The study reiterated that most victims are women, and the majority of traffickers are men. Human trafficking primarily revolves around sexual exploitation, including the exploitation of children and the practice of sex tourism.

In the southern region of the country, human trafficking is closely associated with forced servile marriages and the coerced recruitment of individuals. Additionally, there have been distressing reports of forced recruitment of young indigenous people, a situation that includes allegations involving the Colombian Army. Indigenous children, girls, and women are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, subject to various forms of exploitation, such as domestic labour, which is exacerbated by the forced migration of indigenous communities from rural to urban areas, as well as sexual exploitation, organ trafficking, and forced labour, among other nefarious practices. Cuesta et al. (2015) also highlighted the link between human trafficking and forced servile marriages and recruitment in the southern part of the country.

Botero (2015) conducted an analysis of newspaper reports on human trafficking and identified that Colombian and Brazilian women are victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in Spain. The study also highlighted cases of Colombian women being trafficked to Greece and later to the Netherlands. Additionally, it shed light on the trafficking of Colombian women for sexual exploitation in Japan. Spain—identified as the second most common destination for trafficked Colombian women—was the subject of several newspaper articles. Most of these articles focused on cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation, with one addressing instances of exploitation related to domestic labour.

Commercial sexual exploitation of minors

In their study focused on Bogotá, Colombia, Díaz-Cruz and Rodríguez-Lizarralde (2022) highlighted the approach of one international organisation that suggests treating human trafficking as an illicit business to effectively deter it. This approach emphasises financial sanctions and asset seizure as key strategies. The study underlines the importance of addressing illicit flows stemming from various criminal activities since leaving criminal profits untouched provides no incentive for perpetrators to cease their unlawful actions.

Díaz-Cruz and Rodríguez-Lizarralde (2022) also identified several risk factors recognised by organisations in their research. These include familial exploitation, the proximity of educational institutions to red-light districts, increased online risks during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the vulnerabilities faced by migrants. Of particular note is a national organisation, comprising students from various educational institutions, which has made significant progress in their prevention efforts.

Palacio and Otero (2021) highlight that, despite well-documented cases of child sexual exploitation, the conviction rate in Colombia for these offenses remains alarmingly low at only 7%. Moreover, they shed light on a troubling issue where Venezuelan minors are being exploited by adults for the purpose of begging. This practice is a clear violation of Colombian law, which categorises it as human trafficking and stipulates penalties ranging from 13 to 23 years of imprisonment. Unfortunately, the Colombian justice system has struggled to effectively address and combat this crime.

Law enforcement

Hurtado and Pereira-Villa (2012) analysed cases of 142 identified victims, with forty-two directly linked to legal proceedings while the remaining one hundred were mentioned in testimonies. Concerning the traffickers, 44 were identified, including exploiters and intermediaries. It was found that eight sentences were issued. Most of the leaders of these networks remain unpunished, with some having international arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), such as two Colombians operating in Singapore and Hong Kong.

Child soldiers

Hurtado et al. (2023) explored the complex factors driving children to leave their homes and join illegal armed groups in Colombia. These factors include structural conditions such as unemployment, poverty, limited access to education, social exclusion, and a lack of prospects. Additionally, the allure of guns and military life, family backgrounds, and exposure to political violence play significant roles in making children vulnerable to joining armed groups.

On the other side, Hurtado et al. (2023) examined the demand for child recruits by illegal armed groups. These groups seek cheap, long-term labour, viewing children as easily approachable, obedient, manipulable, and skilled in performing specific tasks. It is crucial to note that many Colombian children join these groups due to a lack of other economic opportunities.

Hurtado et al. (2023) shed light on the grim economic prospects for Colombian children, leaving them with limited, often undesirable employment choices. The situation is further exacerbated by the influence of illegal armed groups, which provide jobs, a semblance of justice, and security in certain regions. The study also highlighted the exploitative and abusive nature of child recruitment, where children are subjected to physically demanding tasks, violence, and sexual exploitation. While some exit strategies, such as political negotiations or demobilisation, exist, the authors stressed the need to address the root causes of child recruitment. This involves improving living conditions and providing empowering labour alternatives.

Antislavery measures: prevention and rescue

Aceros et al. (2021, 2017) addressed key aspects related to human trafficking and public perceptions. In terms of potential actions against human trafficking, it was noted that the general population is not entirely unaware of the available courses of action but tends to prioritise the investigation and prosecution of traffickers over victim assistance. This inclination may be influenced by media coverage, which often emphasises the criminal aspects rather than the protection of human rights.

Aceros et al. (2021, 2017) stressed the importance of involving and informing the general population in the fight against human trafficking, not just relying on experts. They recommend creating informational materials that educate individuals on how to respond if they become victims or acquire knowledge about a case. Furthermore, they highlight the need to raise awareness about the institutions responsible for assisting and protecting victims.

Díaz-Cruz and Rodríguez-Lizarralde (2022) noted that organisations face significant challenges in sustaining their prevention strategies due to resource constraints and insufficient cooperation in addressing illegal economic activities. Public institutions occasionally rely on these organisations' initiatives for their anti-trafficking campaigns, and tackling human trafficking remains a daunting task, often requiring trust-building and mental health support to overcome associated fear

Ecuador

Ecuador reported 126 victims of human trafficking from South America to the UNODC between 2009 and 2021. The majority of victims—87%—were of Colombian nationality. Other countries of origin include Peru and Venezuela. Interviews and articles highlight these same countries of origin, along with the mention of Brazil (Annex 1).

This suggests a notable underrepresentation of Brazilian victims exploited in Ecuador in official identification data; Brazilian nationals exploited in Ecuador may not be adequately reflected in the reports submitted to the UNODC (2023).

Although Muriel (2023) does not specifically employ the terminology of human trafficking, the described employment relationships in many cases are categorised as human trafficking, as the author herself notes. This includes domestic and international migration, embroidery, and bars that withhold part or their total payments, , false promises of employment, and long working hours mentioned by the interviewees. Muriel (2023) reports that experiences of violence affecting sex workers and irregular migrants in El Oro worsened after the pandemic. She states that 13% faced some form of coercion or pressure in their work experiences in Ecuador. A significant group, 51% of women and 48% of men, received deceptive commercial offers. These offers included companies with low wages and long working hours, which differed from the initial agreement between the interviewees and employers.

Muriel (2023) reported that Venezuelan women are desperate because there is nothing to eat. While it is not known that they were prostitutes in their home countries, some migrants will turn to sex work to survive due to job loss and income reduction. One account is of a Venezuelan woman who arrived in Ecuador in March 2019 when there were no visa restrictions; however, the border was closed due to a large number of Venezuelans trying to cross. Thus, she crossed through an informal crossing with a friend by paying $20 each to a man. She stated that it was scary as they were transported in a crowded truck through difficult paths. In Machala (Ecuador), she immediately started working in bars and brothels. It was the first time she engaged in prostitution because there were no other options for foreign women in irregular situations, and she needed to send money to her children and mother. She mentions that with the pandemic, everything got worse as she lost her job and money; she was living with the help of NGOs. Muriel (2023) asserts that the government is focused on controls and restrictions.

Abuse and commercial sexual exploitation of children

Yauli et al (2022) emphasised that Ecuador's Childhood and Adolescence Code incorporates in its text norms for the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents, establishing responsibilities for the State, society, and families in pursuit of the integral development of young people.

Yauli et al (2022) revealed that in 2021, 60% of sexual crimes were committed by people close to the victims, such as stepfathers, uncles, aunts, brothers, and cousins. The age group between twelve and seventeen years represents 37.5% of two records of sexual exploitation crimes, including forced prostitution, sex tourism, and child pornography. Additionally, the age groups of 0-11 years and 18-21 years correspond to 25% each of the two cases of sexual exploitation. However, many sexual crimes go unreported as victims choose to remain silent out of fear of revictimisation by the perpetrators.

Muriel (2023) mentions cases of economically exploited children in forced begging and migrant women involved in non-sex work and sexual exploitation for survival. Due to the connection between begging and prostitution with the social and legal definitions of human trafficking, these situations were considered as trafficking cases.

Yauli et al (2022) reported that new electronic crimes are significantly proliferating, with contact with minors under ten years old for sexual purposes or crime having the highest number of operations in the Tungurahua province, if not in Ecuador

French Guiana

Stakeholders that asked to be anonymous for safety reasons reported that Germans, English, French and other Europeans go to French Guiana and sexually exploit women girls because they do not need a visa or any other passport. It is considered a lawless land by those who have been working there. Although French Guiana is part of France, that is, the law in France is the same as that in French Guiana, it is considered a lawless land because the application of law in French Guiana is not the same as in France. One of the interviewees (see Annex 1 and Annex 2) said that she preferred to be anonymous when talking about French Guiana for security reasons. She highlighted that French Guiana is considered a lawless land because there is no law enforcement, and therefore becomes a paradise for Europeans seeking sexual exploration without punishment.

The report from stakeholders[12] portrays French Guiana as a hotspot for sexual exploitation and forced labour. Issues include human trafficking, sexual exploitation of women and girls, and forced labour in clandestine mines. On the border of the Oiapoque River, which separates Brazil from French Guiana, has become a playground for affluent French citizens who engage in exploitative practices within Brazilian territory, tolerated by local authorities. The influx of men from French Guiana leads to financial incentives for young women and adolescents. Nightclubs also contribute to exploitative situations. Public institutions and the police are criticised for failing to identify and address cases of sexual exploitation and human trafficking, resulting in the criminalisation of victims.

Stakeholders assert that public institutions and the police fail to identify cases that could be characterised as sexual exploitation and human trafficking. This normalisation of these crimes leads to the criminalisation of the victims by a society that legitimises such situations.

There are the women[13] who fall victim to sexual exploitation in the Brazilian city of Oiapoque, subsequently becoming part of international human trafficking networks. This journey involves illegal mines in French Guiana and Suriname before, from Cayenne, the capital of French Guiana, they are transported to Europe. This results in a significant underreporting of victims in the French territory of Guiana and in mainland Europe.

The fact that France does not identify French Guiana in UNODC reports may indicate a lack of institutional effort to acknowledge the need for stricter law enforcement in French Guiana. Numerous testimonies from NGOs and religious institutions attest to labour exploitation, especially in mines, and the sexual exploitation of Brazilian women by European French citizens at the border of French Guiana and Brazil, as well as the sexual exploitation of women from various South American countries in French Guiana. Moreover, French Guiana serves as a transit point to Europe, acting as a stopover in the trafficking route.

The underreporting of trafficking crimes in French Guiana contributes to a lack of recognition and law enforcement efforts. The region's absence from UNODC reports suggests institutional reluctance to acknowledge the need for stricter enforcement. This underscores the urgent need for attention to combat exploitation in French Guiana.

While French Guiana is an integral part of France, sharing an identical legal framework, the application of law within the territory is subject to nuanced considerations, contributing to its perception as a region with distinctive challenges in law enforcement. Despite the alignment of legal

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[12]Retrieved from: <https://www.ihu.unisinos.br/categorias/186-noticias-2017/569995-a-Guyana-francesa-paraiso-da-exploracao-sexual-e-do-trabalho-escravo> Accessed on the 16th of November 2023.

[13]Retrieved from: <https://www.ihu.unisinos.br/categorias/186-noticias-2017/569995-a-Guyana-francesa-paraiso-da-exploracao-sexual-e-do-trabalho-escravo> Accessed on the 16th of November 2023.

principles with those of mainland France, there exists a discernible variance in the practical implementation and enforcement of these laws in French Guiana. A participant in interview, choosing to remain anonymous, raised security concerns while discussing the region. This underscores a pervasive sense of apprehension regarding safety, primarily due to the existence of a highly profitable sexual exploitation network. The region's appeal to certain Europeans for endeavours such as sexual exploration may be influenced by perceived leniency or an impression of lax enforcement within the legal landscape.

The omission of French Guiana in UNODC reports by France may imply a lack of institutional commitment to acknowledging the pressing need for more stringent law enforcement in the region. Numerous accounts from NGOs and religious institutions highlight instances of labour exploitation, particularly in mines, as well as the sexual exploitation of Brazilian women by European individuals of French nationality along the border between French Guiana and Brazil. Additionally, reports indicate the sexual exploitation of women from various South American countries in French Guiana. The region is not only a hotspot for such exploitative practices but also serves as a gateway to Europe, functioning as a crucial stopover in the trafficking network.

Guyana

According to Laing (2019), Guyana has been governed by socialist leaders since gaining independence, and they have intermittently halted large-scale mining operations by taking over production. The author highlights that the mining industry in the country is primarily small-scale, characterised by numerous small producers, and it is closely connected to human trafficking, particularly for sexual exploitation. This sector has given rise to various issues, including prostitution, human trafficking, and an array of crimes, especially in remote mining regions. It is noteworthy that artisanal and small-scale miners account for 6.4% of Guyana's rural population and 10.8% of Suriname's population. These statistics suggest a potential link between mining activities and sexual exploitation in both countries.

It is important to emphasise that despite the absence of interviews with stakeholders from Guyana and a lack of academic literature on the region, Graph 2 and Figure 1b indicate detected victims in Guyana from Venezuela and Brazil.

For example, a JusBrasil[14] report brought attention to a human trafficking operation involving women from the Amazon who were exploited in British Guyana. This operation came to light through a collaborative investigation conducted by the Federal Public Ministry in the Amazon and the Federal Police—both Brazilian institutions—known as Operation Golden Lady in 2010. As a result of this operation, two women have been convicted by the Federal Court in the Amazon for their involvement in international human trafficking. The group responsible for luring Brazilian women in Manaus and transporting them to British Guyana faced legal consequences, as these young women became victims of sexual exploitation within the confines of a nightclub.

Paraguay

As delineated in Annex 2 and Figure 1b), Paraguay emerges more prominently as a country of origin for human trafficking than as a destination. Despite the absence of Paraguayan articles in the systematic review, the country reported 49 victims spanning seven nationalities from 2009 to 2021, with 37% of them being of Bolivian nationality. Paraguay also stands out as the primary country of origin for victims among seven out of the thirteen South American nations.

[14]Retrieved from: <https://www.jusbrasil.com.br/noticias/mpf-am-condenadas-acusadas-por-trafico-internacional-de-pessoas/190168894> Accessed on the 16th of November 2023.

Illustratively, close to 40 men, along with one woman and a 5-year-old boy from Paraguay[15], were liberated from human trafficking for forced labour in Brazil. Furthermore, an 18-year-old Paraguayan [16] victim of human trafficking for prostitution was rescued in Brazil, having been deceitfully brought under the false promise of domestic employment.

Peru

Peru has documented a limited number of rescues and reports regarding victims of human trafficking from South America to the UNODC between 2009 and 2021, as depicted in Figure 2, which outlines the country of origin based on the reported data. The primary nationalities of the victims include Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, and Paraguay. A substantial majority of recorded trafficking victims in Peru—58%—originate from Ecuador. Despite this, interviews with various individuals (totalling seven) emphasised Venezuela as a noteworthy source of victims (see Annex 1), information that went unreported to the UNODC. This discrepancy indicates a significant underrepresentation of Venezuelan victims exploited in Peru, a facet not adequately reflected in the reports submitted to the UNODC in 2023.

In the context of forced labour, the interviewee Edgardo Balbin, Peru noted that socioeconomic conditions wield significant influence. For instances involving human trafficking and sexual exploitation, family dynamics, coupled with poverty, become pivotal. While certain sectors contribute to environmental degradation, the lack of adequate attention in rural areas results in minimal rescues. Notably, forced labour in mining often intertwines with sexual exploitation. Edgardo specifically cites gold mining and illegal logging as examples. Corruption pervades all levels, particularly in the realm of gold exploitation.

The need for extensive prevention efforts is evident, given the limited awareness within civil society regarding human trafficking and forced labour. Edgardo underscores that although legislation pertaining to trafficking and slavery exists, its effective implementation and local commitment are lacking. There is a perception that these initiatives are externally driven, addressing exploitation from abroad rather than emanating from internal consciousness.

Flows

Dammert-Guardia et al (2020) identified human trafficking routes between Peru, Bolivia, and Peru-Ecuador; these routes can serve as a stage of a journey that may originate from Colombia to Ecuador and then proceed to Peru. There are also routes used by Haitians heading to Brazil through Ecuador and Peru. Additionally, there are routes for internal trafficking within regions, routes to and from Bolivia, and routes from Bolivia-Peru to Chile. These routes are categorised into three levels. The first level, with low complexity, involves recruiting vulnerable victims based on their socioeconomic status, gender, or ethnic origin, to be exploited by perpetrators in loosely specialised arrangements, usually in close proximity to the recruitment area. The second level, entails the displacement of victims and the disruption of their immediate support networks, along with a higher degree of specialisation among the perpetrators. Finally, the third level is highly complex and specialised, involving the breakdown of the support associated with belonging to a nation-state by incorporating migration as a core element in perpetuating vulnerability, thereby facilitating the recruitment and retention of victims. At this highest level of complexity, the link between human trafficking and migrant smuggling becomes more central.

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[15]Retrieved from: <https://theexodusroad.com/pt/operation-farmland/> Accessed on the 16th of November 2023.

[16]Retrieved from: <https://g1.globo.com/sc/santa-catarina/noticia/2022/07/11/paraguaia-vitima-de-trafico-pessoas-para-prostituicao-e-resgatada-em-sc.ghtml> Accessed on the 16th of November 2023.

Dammert-Guardia et al (2020) presented several notable insights into human trafficking in border regions. Their research underscores the role of these areas as hotspots for illegal activities, showcasing distinct patterns along the Peru-Ecuador and Peru-Bolivia borders. The Peru-Ecuador border witnesses the exploitation of increased human mobility and thriving commerce, which provides a fertile environment for human trafficking and the proliferation of exploitation networks at local, national, and regional levels. In contrast, the Peru-Bolivia border reveals a complex interplay between illegal mining, logging activities, and human trafficking, adding intricacy to the dynamics of this region. Moreover, borders transform victims' vulnerability by incorporating migration, rendering them more susceptible to recruitment and forced retention. The study highlights the global interconnectedness of human trafficking circuits, with various border areas assuming similar or distinct roles within the same network, underscoring the multifaceted and interlinked nature of this issue.

Blanco and Marinelli (2017) discuss the challenges of accurately documenting cases of human trafficking with foreign victims in the Puno region of Peru, which shares a border with Bolivia. While official police records show relatively low numbers of human trafficking cases in Puno, further analysis reveals that the region serves as a transit area for human trafficking from Bolivia to other parts of Peru. Despite the limited recorded cases, Puno plays a significant role in transnational human trafficking routes. The discrepancy in reported cases highlights the complexities of addressing human trafficking and the need for more comprehensive data collection and cooperation between countries in the region.

Commercial sexual exploitation of children

Mujica and Cavagnoud (2011) delve into the issue of prostitution of children and adolescents in the region of the river port of Pucallpa, a region where jobs are mostly male, such as sawmill, fishing, agriculture, livestock, and logging. The restaurants in the region are run by women who ask their daughters, nieces, or goddaughters aged 12-17 to help serve the table at the same time that they are sexually exploited by offering, along with the sale of food, their company as a euphemism for commercial sexual exploitation. The authors make it clear that this is not seen as exploitation due to the degree of kinship they have with these pimps. The main activity is not the commercial sexual exploitation, but the sale of food and beverages, while children would be an attraction for men to buy locally. "Cafetinas" are not seen as madams, mostly because they are related or have a relationship of care and guardianship with the victims. The issue is treated so naturally that it is as if it were helping the children involved—one of the victims reported that the madam takes care of her, gives her food and other things, and in return she helps in the restaurant and other things, as a euphemism for commercial sexual exploitation. The situation is known by the Peruvian authorities, but nothing is done.

Legal system

In Tuesta's comprehensive study from 2018, the author explores the daunting challenges faced by prosecutors and legal professionals in their fight against human trafficking in Peru's Madre de Dios region, a well-known area for small-scale gold mining. These challenges predominantly stem from the stringent burden of proof imposed by human trafficking laws, resulting in resource-intensive and time-consuming legal proceedings. Consequently, some prosecutors opt for lesser charges to alleviate their caseload.

Tuesta (2018) also emphasises the prevalent portrayal of the ideal human trafficking victim as a young, innocent individual coerced into sexual exploitation, potentially leading to the exclusion of numerous victims and the risk of re-victimisation within the justice system. Furthermore, Tuesta (2018) highlights the complexities involved in distinguishing human trafficking cases from other offenses. The lack of medical and legal support for investigating crime scenes, along with the heavy reliance on victim testimonies, makes these cases vulnerable to rejection by judges.

Vivanco (2016) reinforces the role of ideal victimhood for convictions. In some cases, acquittal is rooted in a Supreme Court ruling that suggests exempting individuals from criminal liability in cases involving alleged sexual relations with minors aged 14 to 18, provided there is consent. The Supreme Court argues that individuals within the 14 to 18 age group have the capacity to make choices about their sexuality based on their own convictions. However, this approach faces criticism for not prioritising an assessment of potential exploitation or risks. The Supreme Court's primary emphasis on the validity of consent often results in reclassifying these cases as lesser offenses rather than categorising them as human trafficking. Vivanco (2016) underscores the importance of first evaluating the objective circumstances of the victims before delving into the methods employed and collecting evidence to understand their statements, silences, or contradictions.

Notably, prosecutors remain steadfastly committed to their mission, often using their own income to fund operations. This dedication may arise from their pride in their work and their high-ranking position within the justice system. Tuesta (2018) implies that the criminalisation of human trafficking, particularly involving minors, exists alongside leniency toward adult trafficking and sex work in mining, revealing a selective application of the law. Rangel and Schwarz (2022) have also identified a similar phenomenon occurring in Brazil.

Tuesta (2018) highlights the rapid expansion of mining territory, coupled with geographical constraints and inadequate resources, which present formidable obstacles for prosecutors operating in remote regions. This situation forces them to prioritise cases in accessible areas, further limiting their reach. In such scenarios, prosecutors often have to finance operations themselves, discouraging interventions in remote locations.

Uruguay

Uruguay documented a mere 6 cases of human trafficking victims from South America reported to the UNODC between 2009 and 2021. Among these, two victims each hailed from Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru, as highlighted in Annex 1. Interestingly, interviews indicated that Brazil and Venezuela were countries of origin, though these details were not included in the reports to the UNODC. This disparity underscores a notable underrepresentation of victims from Venezuela and Brazil who have been exploited in Uruguay, a crucial aspect that is not adequately conveyed in the reports submitted to the UNODC in 2023.

Sandra Peroni, interviewee from El Paso, Uruguay, asserted that there are no rescues for men, whether in cases of sexual exploitation or labour exploitation. She highlighted instances of exploitation on Asian fishing boats operating in the waters near Uruguay. Sandra stressed the significance of intensifying investigations into labour exploitation, emphasising the need for training to identify instances of forced labour and slavery within the workforce.

Guerra (2016) presented findings regarding the knowledge and opinions of sex workers in Uruguay concerning child prostitution. According to the data gathered from interviews, 52.5% of the participants claimed to have no awareness of child prostitution cases, while 47.5% reported the opposite, with cases observed both within their workplaces (28.5%) and outside of them (19%). Notably, a higher level of knowledge was observed among those operating within the "call girls" system (35%) and street workers (44.8%).

The majority of participants (76.8%) expressed a negative opinion about the phenomenon, although 7.7% remained neutral, and 15.5% held contradictory or positive assessments. An analysis of opinions in relation to the age at which participants began their involvement in prostitution revealed that those who initiated at a younger age exhibited a lower rate of rejection of child prostitution. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasise the vulnerability of certain groups, particularly children and adolescents, to sexual exploitation.

Addressing the sexual exploitation of children in prostitution necessitates a unified stance, as underscored by Piperno (2021), who detailed the recruitment of victims through Facebook pages named "Help Cubans in Uruguay" and "Cubans in Uruguay." These pages were used to seek Cuban girls for employment in clandestine brothels, where victims endured harsh living conditions and persistent debts.

Despite the alarming statistics, Piperno (2021) notes that no traffickers have faced convictions in the last six years. Out of a total of 43 investigations and 52 prosecutions, the government has only secured convictions for 5 traffickers (U.S. Embassy Montevideo, 2019). This highlights the urgent need for comprehensive and effective measures to combat child prostitution and protect vulnerable individuals.

Suriname

Suriname has not reported any victims of human trafficking to the UNODC. However, interviews and articles (see Annex 1) have uncovered instances of human trafficking from Ecuador and Brazil to Suriname. A report by the Brazilian[17] government investigating human trafficking from Brazil to Suriname reveals that in Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname, Brazilian community networks consist of traders, miners, and prostitutes. Another report[18] narrates the story of a woman who escaped from a nightclub and reported sexual exploitation in Suriname.

Additionally, a separate report[19], grounded in research, unveils routes originating from states such as Pará, Amazonas, and Amapá, Brazilian states, leading to South American countries like Suriname and Bolivia, and even reaching Spain and Germany. According to the account, women follow the development flow in the Amazon, migrating alongside male labour to construction sites and farms, providing support as cooks or prostitutes. However, after attracting migrants, there is also their expulsion when they are no longer useful to these economic projects, as if they were disposable. The report further highlights the challenges faced by indigenous people in accessing social services, making them increasingly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

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[17] Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.br/mj/pt-br/assuntos/sua-protecao/trafico-de-pessoas/publicacoes/projetos-de-prevencao/relato_sodireitos.pdf> Accessed on the 15th of November of 2023.

[18] Retrieved from: <https://lpmnews.com/mulher-foge-de-casa-noturna-e-denuncia-exploracao-sexual-no-suriname-cinco-estao-presos/> Accessed on the 15th of November of 2023.

[19] Retrieved from: <https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2009/08/rotas-da-exploracao-sexual-por-que-muitas-mulheres-da-amazonia-seguem-esse-caminho/> Accessed on the 15th of November of 2023.

Venezuela

From 2009 to 2021, Venezuela reported 39 cases of human trafficking to the UNODC (2023), involving victims from Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, with 41% of them being of Colombian nationality. However, interviews and articles (see Annex 1 and 2) brought to light the existence of human trafficking flows from Brazil to Venezuela. This indicates a potential underrepresentation of this particular trafficking route in the UNODC database.

A briefing by the NGO Centro de Derechos Humanos UCAB[20] highlighted the presence of modern slavery in indigenous towns and communities in the state of Bolívar. The economic and social dynamics in Bolívar have created a context that marginalises individuals from the system, particularly those who, amidst neglect, struggle to develop adaptability and survival strategies. Indigenous peoples and communities within the confines of the Strategic Development Zone of the Orinoco Mining Arc are compelled to migrate from their original spaces due to the environmental impact and instances of violence in the region.

Similarly affected are those who, not situated in extractives areas, lack personal resources or governmental support to meet their needs in a manner aligned with their cultural practices. The number of indigenous individuals ensnared in the dynamics of modern slavery exceeds 2510[21].

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[20]Retrieved from: <https://cdh.ucab.edu.ve/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2022-02-17.-ESCLAVITUD-MODERNA-EN-PUEBLOS-Y-COMUNIDADES-INDIGENAS-EN-EL-ESTADO-BOLIVAR..pdf> Accessed on the 15th of November of 2023.

[21] Retrieved from: <https://cdh.ucab.edu.ve/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2022-02-17.-ESCLAVITUD-MODERNA-EN-PUEBLOS-Y-COMUNIDADES-INDIGENAS-EN-EL-ESTADO-BOLIVAR..pdf> Accessed on the 15th of November of 2023.

Conclusion

The econometric analysis reveals key correlations in human trafficking dynamics within South America. Notably, improved economic opportunities for females (indicated by a higher percentage of female self-employment in the destination country) are associated with a reduction in the number of detected trafficking victims. The GDP in the destination country also plays a significant role, with stronger economic conditions correlating with fewer victims, emphasising the impact of economic factors on vulnerability.

Educational attainment in the origin country emerges as a protective factor, with higher levels correlating with a diminished likelihood of falling victim to contemporary slavery in the destination country. This underscores the importance of education in preventing labour exploitation and enhancing resilience among vulnerable populations.

The correlation between the increase in GDP per capita in high-income economies and a rise in the number of detected victims in the destination country suggests potential drivers such as increased resources for investigations or higher levels of tourism, particularly for sex tourism. However, further research is needed to validate these hypotheses and gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing this correlation. Overall, these findings provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of socio-economic factors in shaping the landscape of human trafficking.

Many of the selected papers in the systematic review from all countries highlight the successes of local legislation and the efforts each country has made to address human trafficking. However, the studies also point out significant challenges for greater effectiveness in the practical implementation of laws, especially concerning sexual exploitation.

Vulnerability is a key factor underpinning human trafficking and is present in many of the studies. It is observed that it is impossible to dissociate from the social, economic, and cultural problems of each country. For example, texts from Colombia connect sexual exploitation and forced labour to drug trafficking. In Brazil, the prevalence of internal trafficking is notable, primarily driven by the demands of agricultural production activities. However, a significant challenge arises as these cases are often not legally recognised in Brazil as human trafficking, leading to a lack of reporting to the UNODC (2023). Remarkably, there exists a substantial database[22] documenting instances of forced labour in Brazil, encompassing nearly 60,000 rescues from 1995-2023. Another characteristic is that locations of sexual exploitation are often associated with some other economic activity, such as mining in Guyana.

Although the studies indicate a flow in human trafficking to other parts of the globe, especially to richer regions, such as the flow of Brazilian women for the sex trade in Europe, the flow of human trafficking within the region is more common. This is particularly evident with regard to Bolivians, who are exploited in the textile industries in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. Many studies address the suffering of Bolivians who leave for neighbouring countries in search of better living conditions but encounter environments that are completely hostile. Interestingly, even in other countries, their exploiters are often fellow Bolivians.

In these studies, gender also plays a prominent role: women are central figures when it comes to sexual exploitation, exploitation in textile industries, and in agricultural areas they often perform unpaid activities such as cooking and cleaning. These responsibilities are frequently regarded as an intrinsic obligation for women within the local culture, a perception that was consistently reinforced by stakeholders who acknowledged the role of cultural *machismo* as a tool for the exploitation of women. Regarding gender, efforts against slavery in Brazil tend to underreport sexual exploitation.

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[22]Retrieved from: < https://www.prt20.mpt.mp.br/informe-se/noticias-do-mpt-se/1139-cerca-de-60-mil-foram-resgatados-do-trabalho-escravo-de-1995-a-2022-aponta-sistema-do-mpt-e-da-oit > Accessed on the 18th of November 2023.

All countries analysed had not reported domestic work or forced marriage to the UNODC (2023) database as discussed in the Human Trafficking Trends section.

The majority of studies are predominantly centred on Brazil and Argentina. Despite Brazil having numerous papers and a significant number of reported victims in its national slave labour database. The scope of the problem is underestimated in UNODC data (2023), a point emphasised by Annex 1—interviews and articles brought to light that individuals from Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Venezuela were also trafficked to Brazil and not reported. Unfortunately, this crucial information is underrepresented in the existing database. There is a crucial need for a consolidated dataset on modern slavery and human trafficking. Such a dataset would facilitate the reporting of both domestic and international flows to UNODC, which is currently underreported. This gap is highlighted by Rangel and Schwarz (2023), who also acknowledge the legal and practical implications associated with the unification of these datasets.

Annex 1 underscores the underrepresentation of Brazilian victims in Ecuador, Venezuela, and French Guiana, necessitating separate reporting distinct from France. Peru has underreported flows from Venezuela, and Suriname has yet to report any victims of human trafficking to the UNODC. Nevertheless, interviews and articles (as referenced in Annex 1) have brought to light instances of human trafficking from Ecuador and Brazil to Suriname.

In the case of Uruguay, there is an underestimation indicated by interviews that Brazil and Venezuela were countries of origin, though these details were not included in the reports to the UNODC. As pointed out by Sandra Peroni, an interviewee from El Paso, Uruguay, there are no rescues for men, whether in cases of sexual exploitation or labour exploitation. She highlighted instances of exploitation on Asian fishing boats operating in the waters near Uruguay. Peroni stressed the importance of intensifying investigations into labour exploitation, emphasising the need for training to identify instances of forced labour and slavery within the workforce.

A limitation of this research is precisely the low number of studies on the topic about countries such as Bolivia and Guyana. Another characteristic of the research is the predominance of qualitative studies, justifying a limitation in terms of numbers and statistics on the subject in the region.

This limitation can be addressed by conducting a targeted investigation into articles from each country. Additionally, a thorough search for country-specific reports on human trafficking and modern slavery, along with newspaper articles in Portuguese, Spanish, English, French, and Dutch, is essential. This investigation should not only focus on South America but also encompass the broader Latin American context, considering the migration flows from Haiti and the Dominican Republic to the region. It should also consider movements, particularly the migration from Venezuela to Mexico and close islands where individuals are reported to "set sail on boats" to neighbouring countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao, where they often fall victim to enslavement, primarily orchestrated by human traffickers recruiting individuals from various regions of the country, as reported by Victoria Capriles, lawyer and human rights advocate, Venezuela.

Although South American states have committed to effectively combatting modern slavery and human trafficking in various international frameworks, this study has revealed significant shortcomings in efforts to translate these commitments into practice. In particular, the study aligns with SDG Target 5.2, with a focus on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, encompassing trafficking and exploitation. It supports SDG Target 8.7, which aims to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and eliminate the worst forms of child labour by the year 2025. It further aligns with Target 16.2, which seeks to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. In each of these areas, the report highlights key areas for improvement if South American states are to meet these pledges. The study further reveals widespread research, information, and data gaps related to human trafficking within South America. These evidence gaps must also be addressed to meet commitments to addressing modern slavery and human trafficking.

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Annex 1: Comparative human trafficking flows

Destination	Origin	Pair mentioned by stakeholders*	Pair mentioned in papers**	Detected Victims per pair UNODC	Years of Pair Appearance UNODC	% of Total Victims UNODC
Argentina	Bolivia	2	2	1842	12	42.69%
	Brazil	2	3	25	7	0.58%
	Chile	1		13	5	0.30%
	Colombia	1	1	53	6	1.23%
	Ecuador	2		11	4	0.25%
	Paraguay	1	2	772	12	17.89%
	Peru	1	3	164	9	3.80%
	Uruguay			22	6	0.51%
	Venezuela	2		56	5	1.30%
Bolivia	Argentina	1		6	3	0.14%
	Brazil	2	2	8	4	0.19%
	Colombia	1		8	4	0.19%
	Paraguay		1	6	3	0.14%
	Peru	1		8	4	0.19%
	Venezuela			6	3	0.14%
Brazil	Argentina	1				
	Bolivia	2	2	116	4	2.69%
	Colombia	1				
	Ecuador	1				
	Paraguay	1				
	Peru	1		2	1	0.05%
	Venezuela	4	1			
Chile	Argentina	2	1	4	2	0.09%
	Bolivia	3	3	98	7	2.27%
	Brazil		1	2	1	0.05%
	Colombia	1	2	63	6	1.46%

	Ecuador	2	1	19	7	0.44%
	Paraguay	1	1	100	5	2.32%
	Peru	2	2	40	7	0.93%
	Venezuela	2		2	1	0.05%
Colombia	Argentina			6	3	0.14%
	Bolivia			2	1	0.05%
	Brazil	1		2	1	0.05%
	Chile			2	1	0.05%
	Ecuador	1		4	2	0.09%
	Paraguay			2	1	0.05%
	Peru			6	3	0.14%
	Venezuela	5	1	163	6	3.78%
Ecuador	Brazil	1				
	Colombia	1	1	110	11	2.55%
	Peru		2	6	3	0.14%
	Venezuela	3	1	10	2	0.23%
French Guyan	Brazil	1	1			
Guyana	Brazil			30	2	0.70%
	Venezuela			401	6	9.29%
Paraguay	Argentina	1		4	2	0.09%
	Bolivia			18	2	0.42%
	Brazil		1	6	3	0.14%
	Colombia			6	3	0.14%
	Ecuador			4	2	0.09%
	Peru			9	2	0.21%
	Venezuela			2	1	0.05%
Peru	Argentina	1		2	1	0.05%
	Bolivia		3	2	1	0.05%
	Brazil	2	1	2	1	0.05%
	Colombia	5	2	8	4	0.19%

	Ecuador	2	2	22	5	0.51%
	Paraguay			2	1	0.05%
	Venezuela	7				
Surinam	Brazil	1				
	Ecuador	1	1			
Uruguay	Bolivia	1		2	1	0.0%
	Brazil	1				
	Paraguay			2	1	0.0%
	Peru			2	1	0.0%
	Venezuela	2				
Venezuela	Bolivia			4	2	0.1%
	Brazil	1	1			
	Colombia			13	3	0.3%
	Ecuador			6	3	0.1%
	Peru			9	1	0.2%

Source:

UNODC (2023). * Stakeholders: Reyna Cachi, Bolivia, FUNDACION MUNASIM KULLAKIT; Miguel Gonzales Gallegos, Bolivia, Infante-Promoción Integral de la Mujer y la Infancia; Edgardo Balbin, Peru, Observatorio de Migración de la Universidad de Brazilia - UnB; Jorgelina Burgos- Dignitate Brazil; Dr(C). Sebastián Salubrista, Chile, Doctorando en Ciencias Sociales Flacso Argentina; Estefanía Mendoza, Venezuela, NGO Mulier; Religous Institution Hermanas Adoratrices; Fiorella Rojas, Fundación Renacer – Colombia; Sandra Perroni, Uruguay, NGO El Paso; Heloisa Greco, Uruguay, NGO El Paso; Belén Zabala, Argentina, Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos de la Nación; Viviana Caminos presidenta RATT Argentina; Xavier Plassat, Comissão Pastoral da Terra – CPT, Brazil; Marie Henriqueta Cavalcante, Brazil, Religious Institution; Mercedes Arce Huanca, Capital Humano y Social Alternativo (CHS Alternativo - Peru); Victoria Capriles, abogada y defensora de derechos humanos, Venezuela; Luz Nagle, Venezuela, Stetson University College of Law, consultora de las Naciones Unidas, USAID; Yohama Calderón, Analista de la Dirección Contra la Trata de Personas y Tráfico Ilícito de Migrantes, Ecuador; Carla Marroquin, Protect Me Project; Ximena Cabrera, Ecuador, Directora del Mecanismo de Movilidad Humana de la DPE . **Papers quoted in Annex 2 and References.

Annex 2: International and domestic human trafficking flows reported by the accepted papers

International human trafficking flows

Authors	Origin country	Transit	Destination Country
Goldberg, 2014	Bolivia		Argentina
Sommer, 2017	Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Peru, Colombia		Argentina
Moreno, 2019	Perú, Bolivia, Paraguay and Dominican Republic		Argentina
Lazzarino, 2013 Commercial sexual exploitation(CSE)	São Paulo, Goías e Minas Gerais, States in Brazil.		Spain
Zimmerman, 2009	Brazil		(Adult victims are generally black or mixed race young women (less than 24-years old), and come from low-income and educational backgrounds) Spain, Netherlands, Venezuela, Italy, Portugal, Paraguay, Switzerland, United States, Germany and Suriname, Venezuela, French Guyana, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina and Chile
Zimmerman, 2009	Bolivia, Korea		Brazil
Zimmerman, 2009	Brazil		(Trafficking of minor 18) Suriname, Venezuela, French Guyana, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina and Chile.
Acevedo (2021)	Argentina, (Cochabamba) Bolivia, Paraguay, (Tacna) Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Dominican Republic		Chile
Tapia and Rodríguez (2022)	Korea, Bolivia		Chile
Muriel (2023)	Venezuela		Ecuador (El Oro)
Piperno (2021)	Cuba		Uruguay

Authors	Origin country	Transit	Destination Country
Murillejo (2015)	Brazil and Paraguay		Bolivia
Dammert-Guardia et al (2020)	Colombia	Ecuador	Peru
	Haiti	Ecuador and Peru	Brazil
	Bolivia	Peru	Chile
	Bolivia		Peru
	Ecuador		Peru
Vivanco (2016)	Peru		Ecuador, Argentina (CSE)
	Peru		Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, USA (Forced Labour)
	Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia		Peru (CSE)
Blanco and Marinelli (2017)	Bolivia		Peru
Hurtado and Pereira-Villa (2012)	(Pereira-Bogotá) Colombia	(Paris) France	Singapore
	(Medellín, Barranquilla, Pasto, Cúcuta y Buenaventura) Colombia		Japan, Barbados, Panama, Ecuador, and Chile.
	(Pereira-Bogotá) Colombia	(São Paulo) Brazil - (Johannesburg) South Africa	Hong Kong
Cuesta et al (2015)	Colombia (Valle del Cauca, Nariño, Antioquia, Risaralda, and Caldas)		Europe (especially Spain), North America, and Asia (especially Japan and China)
Botero (2015)	Colombia, Brazil		Spain
	Colombia	Greece	Netherlands
	Colombia		Japan
	Venezuela		Colombia
Cannella, 2011 Forced Labour (FL)	Etiópia, Somália	1: Djibouti City, Djibouti; 2 : Dubai, United Arab Emirates; 3 : Moscow, Russia; 4: Havana, Cuba; 5 : Quito, Ecuador). Letter 6: indicates suspected site of encounter with sand flies. 7: final destination, San Diego, California	EUA

Authors	Origin country	Transit	Destination Country
Teixeira, Flávia do Bonsucesso. 2008 CSE	Brazil		Itália
Minga, EAD, 2020 CSE	Brazil		Portugal
Zuquete, JGPED; de Souza, ER; Deslandes, SF, 2016 CSE	Brazil		Portugal
Piscitelli, Adriana, 2022 CSE	Brazil		Espanha
Zuquete, JGPED; de Souza, ER; Deslandes, SF, 2016 CSE	Brazil		Portugal
Araujo, Ana Paula Correia de; Filartigas, Danilo Magno Espíndola; Carvalho, Luciani Coimbra de, 2015 FL	Bolívia	Corumbá (Mato Grosso do Sul, Brasil)	(São Paulo) Brazil
Marques, Fernando Tadeu; Caldas Lopes de Faria, Suzana, 2019 CSE	Brasil		Coreia do Sul
Blanchette T.G.; da Silva A.P., 2018 CSE	Venezuela		Boa Vista in Roraima (Brazil)

Domestic human trafficking flows

Authors	Origin	Transit	Destination
Sommer, 2017	Misiones, Tucumán, Jujuy, Salta, Santiago del Estero, Corrientes, Chaco y Santa Fe (North of Argentina)		Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Mendoza y Santa Cruz (South of Argentina)
Moreno, 2019 Flows within Argentina	Salta	Santiago del Estero	Córdoba
	Jujuy	Salta, Catamarca, La Rioja and San Juan	Mendonza
	Tucumán		Catamarca
	Santa Fe		Buenos Aires

Authors	Origin	Transit	Destination
	Santa Fe	Córdoba, San Luis, La Pampa, Río Negro and Chuchut	Santa Cruz
	Santa Fe		Córdoba
	Santa Fe	Córdoba, San Luis, La Pampa and Río Negro	Chubut
	Santa Fe		
	Santiago del Estero	Córdoba and Santa Fe	Buenos Aires
	Misiones	through Paraguay	Corrientes
	within Buenos Aires		
	within Santa Fe		
	within Salta		
Moreno, 2019	Paraguay	Jujuy, Salta, Tucumán, Santiago del Estero, Córdoba and Santa Fe (Argentina)	Buenos Aires (Argentina)
	Bolivia	Jujuy, Salta, Tucumán, Catamarca, La Rioja, San Luis, Mendoza, La Pampa, Neuquén and Río Negro (Argentina)	Chubut (Argentina)
	Bolivia	Jujuy, Salta and Santiago del Estero (Argentina)	Córdoba (Argentina)
	Bolivia	Salta and Chaco (Argentina)	Santa Fe (Argentina)
Ferreira 2018 CSE of travesties	North and Northeast of Brazil		Southeast of Brazil
Blanco; Marinelli, 2017	Puno e Madre de Díos (Peru)		Cusco (Peru)
	Bolivian cities	Desaguero (Peru and Bolívia border)	Madre de Díos y Cusco (Peru)

Source:

Data from DDH was available from 2011, despite its governmental organisation in 2003.

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