

# Human Trafficking: An Asian Perspective

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**Abstract--** Human trafficking is a major global issue. Statistics reflect a growing trend, especially with a similar trend in corruption. The collaborative nature of both these negative phenomena is alarming, even with the incomplete statistics and records. ASEAN member countries are at high risk and need to enforce stronger penalties and corrective action to fight against human trafficking. The economic and social gap within the countries and region add to the issue of human trafficking. This research was assessed using secondary data from various credible international agencies. Two major factors that impacted human trafficking is from the World Governance Indicators – Government Effectiveness and Control of Corruption. Therefore, this implies that effective leadership and cooperation from the ASEAN member countries would mutually benefit the citizens of these countries.

**Keywords--** Human Trafficking, Control of Corruption, Government Effectiveness

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## I. INTRODUCTION

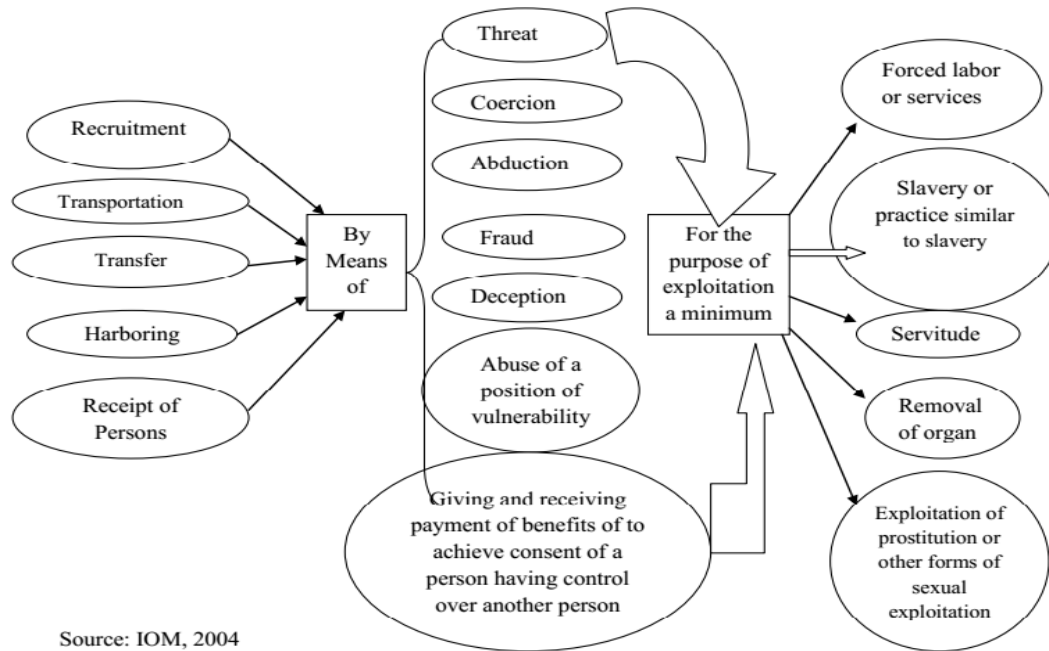
Human trafficking is a social issue of growing concern across the globe. The estimated number of individuals affected by human trafficking worldwide is 20.9 million people (**Hemmings, 2016**). Trafficking is a complex development issue with different dimensions; it is an economic problem as the vast majority of men and women seeking to escape poverty are lured into trafficking by the false promise of economic gain, a health problem as trafficked women and children are most at risk of HIV infection, it is a gender problem as unequal power relations reinforce women's secondary status in society and it is a legal problem as its victims are stripped of their human rights (**UNDP, 2007**).

Human trafficking is defined as all acts involved in recruiting, harbouring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled service or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion (**CdeBaca&Sigmon, 2014**) mirrored from the UN Protocol on Trafficking in Person usually referred to as "Palermo Protocol":

*"Trafficking in person shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons. By means of the threat or use of force or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation, of the prostitution of other or forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, servitude or the removal of organs(UN, 2000)"*

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Source: IOM, 2004

**Figure 1:** Elements of the Palermo Protocol’s definition of Trafficking Threat (Source: IOM, 2004)

Human trafficking impedes socio-economic development and undermines the security of the nation, region and most importantly, individuals. Victims face abuse through intimidation, double dealing or power that occurs in their nations of origin or abroad. In this era of technology and globalization, it is disappointing to note the growth of this disgraceful phenomenon. Although globalization cannot be held directly accountable for this growth in negative human dealing, it has to a certain extent added to the development and intensification of human trafficking (Emmers, 2019).

Efforts to mitigate human trafficking can be traced back to the Paris Conference (1895), White Slavery (1904), The International Convention for the Concealment of White Slave Dealing (1910), The Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Women & Children (1921) and the United Nations (UN) Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949) amongst the first few initiatives.

A key factor that aids human trafficking and undermines the efforts to curb human trafficking is corruption. In 2014, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) correlated the United States (US) Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report with the Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perception Index (CPI) to report the interrelation of corruption and human trafficking. Corruption enables the crime of human trafficking to remain imperceptible, with the debasement and defilement of the human person rooted in the structure of the society and leaving the victims of these exploitations helpless and unable to seek assistance from the law or other establishments.

## II. HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is made out of eleven nations of great assorted variety in religion, culture and history which are Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and Timor Leste. It is likewise a standout amongst the most powerful zones of the world financially, a factor which generally represents its developing global hugeness. However, due to lack of database for the Timor Leste country, it has been voided from the research as the total number of country been chosen will be 10 countries.

Studies have shown that human trafficking is linked to issues such as socio-economic, corruption, migration and also human development which is strongly reflected in the global economic disparity between the ten Southeast Asia countries; Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Singapore and Brunei (UNODC, 2016).

The uneven financial advancement of ASEAN has enhanced the demand and supply of the system. Countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei have economically excelled over the years, creating a gap with the other countries. Hence, at the same time, the remaining countries required to expand their workforce, hence creating the perfect platform for human trafficking. The ASEAN member countries can be classified according to destination countries (Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand) and source countries (Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines and Vietnam).

To battle human trafficking, the ASEAN government signed the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act in 2007. Before 2007, there was no particular law to condemn dealing in people in every one of the nations. Subsequently, the Act is the nation's essential strategy that controls the usage measures in fighting human dealing. It covers, among others, indictments, injured individual distinguishing proof, assurance and counteractive action measures (Raymond, 2002).



Figure 2: Southeast Asia Trafficking Report (Source: Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report 2018)

The Trafficking in Persons Report or TIP Report is an annual report issued by the US State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. The report ranks governments based on the perceived efforts to combat human trafficking and compliance with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) 2000. There are four tiers; Tier 1 being countries which fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards, Tier 2 being countries which do not fully comply with the minimum standards but significant efforts are noted, Tier 2 Watchlist with similar conditions as Tier 2, but with a noted increase in the number of victims and lesser effort as per previous periods and finally Tier 3, for countries that do not comply with the minimum standards and have not made any significant efforts to do so.

Referring to Figure 2, TIP (2018) acknowledges Philippines as the sole ASEAN country in Tier 1. Philippines moved up to Tier 1 from Tier 2 as an acknowledgement of its human dealing initiatives. An estimated 10 million Philippines nationals work abroad, with many being exposed to sex and discriminative dealings by means of obligation subjugation in the Middle East and Asia (*UNODC, 2008*). The Philippines has since expanded security measures for casualties of dealing, including the expansion of legislature, increased social welfare to assist exploited persons and increased administration watch.

Thailand has also been upgraded from the Tier 2 Watch List to Tier 2. In 2018, Thailand increased its financing to counteract this human trafficking from US\$ 98.2 million in 2017 to US\$110.4 million in 2018. Thailand remains a popular destination for dealers, especially in relation to sex dealings, not only for local victims but also victims from other parts of ASEAN and Africa.

Malaysia is classified as a destination for human for human trafficking victims who are exposed to different types of dealing from sexual abuse to constrained work (*UNICEF, 2017*). Malaysia is home to 4.1 million vagrants, out of which 2.1 million are legitimate and 2 million are unlawful (*Maierbrugger, 2013*). The figures have since increased. According to the TIP report (2018), Malaysia was downgraded from Tier 2 to Tier 2 Watch List. The report mentioned that the Malaysian government had identified fewer victims compared to previous years, authorities also had investigated and prosecuted fewer cases and that victim protection efforts remained inadequate. References to mass graves would also have contributed to the downgrade. An example would be the 139 mass graves in 28 detainment camps found in the northern province of Perlis in 2015, where the unfortunate casualties were accepted to be Rohingya displaced people. The report also highlighted the need for making public the results on investigations on corrupt officials. Malaysia's lack of apparent political will has seen Malaysia being classified as Tier 2 Watch List nine times between 2006 and 2018.

In line with the Rohingya issue as well, Myanmar also was downgraded to Tier 3. Classified as "ethnic cleansing", the displacement of the Rohingya's have made them vulnerable to traffickers, especially women. The TIP report reflected that many of the victims were exposed to abuse or transported to different nations with the end goal of sex dealing.

Singapore is another destination point apart from Malaysia, but in Tier 2. Criminal syndicates misuse Singapore's alluring financial conditions to cheat scores of individuals with false occupational offers and superior life for their families and themselves. Today, there are roughly 1.37 million foreign specialists in Singapore

enhancing the nation's labor needs, out of which, nearly 1 million low-wage vagrant specialists are among the most powerless (*Hagar, 2018*).

Brunei falls within the Tier 2 rank. Citizens of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, China, and Thailand relocate to Brunei for work purposes, and there have been reports of workers facing suppression such as debt bondage, non-payment of wages, passport confiscation, confinement to the home, working for extended period of time without rest and contract switching factors that may contribute to trafficking (*UNODC, 2010*).

Cambodia is also in Tier 2, and is one of the most influenced countries dealing with human dealing mainly because the nation's slacking monetary advancement and history of civil clashes. The country is somewhat healing, with its culture and foundation returning. It must be remembered that this country has seen starvation, rampant poverty and political brutality. The longer term effect of a generally undereducated population, combined with a highly corrupt government has further aggravated this issue. In terms of the human trafficking, many researchers have contributed the sex trafficking issue towards UN forces, stating that this is an unintended effect of UN relationship in the nation.

Another country in the Tier 2 list is Indonesia. Due to its size, geography, and economic inequality, Indonesia face several challenges to mitigate human trafficking. Indonesia has been influenced by both work and sex dealing, however the quantity of individuals abused through work dealing far outperforms the quantity of unfortunate casualties constrained into sexual slavery (*Akhsan, 2010*). The Indonesian government has largely focused on sex trafficking, and hence this has contributed to a less successful contribution to combat human trafficking. Some of the key factors that have influenced the human trafficking statistics in Indonesia include the lack of lawful documentation amongst its citizens, the large of Indonesia with the many islands make it a good trafficking platform combined with the weak enforcement due to corruption.

Lao PDR is primarily a source, but also transit and destination country for trafficked women, children, and men (*ECPAT, 2016*). The main drivers of trafficking include income inequality, increased economic development and a lack of resources to control border areas. Similar to Cambodia, poverty and a lack of educational opportunity are prevalent in Laos, leading more girls and women out of the country where they commonly fall into commercial sex labour. While the demography of trafficking victims is diverse, they are mostly rural migrants, specifically from the Lao Tai ethnic group and lowland Lao regions (*Marshall, 2018*). Trafficking victims are often migrants seeking better opportunities outside of the country who experience labour or sexual exploitation (*UN, 2000*). Many of the victims are taken to Thailand, Malaysia or China, with approximately 90% of Lao trafficking victims going to Thailand (*UNODC, 2017*), with some being sold as brides to China and many being used for plantations etc.

Similarly, Vietnamese also face the same sexual and work misuse in countries such as Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea, Laos, China, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom, etc. One difference is that the Vietnamese are normally managed through state-associated and private work trade organizations that charge about \$10,000 and manipulate them to sign contracts that they do not understand. Vietnamese ladies are forced into false relational unions in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and South Korea, and are along these lines

exposed to states of constrained work (counting as residential hirelings), constrained prostitution, or both (*UNODC, 2012*). Likewise, contributing factors also include imbalance and neediness, absence of knowledge and familiarity, economic and social issues.

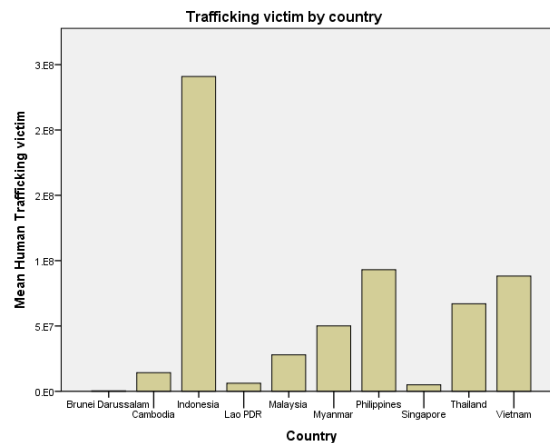
### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Channel Methodology developed by (*Tavares, 2010*) is applied to examine the indirect relationship of how human trafficking can significantly impact in Southeast-Asia through different mechanisms such as socio-economic, corruption, migration and human development. The secondary data collected from various reliable sources such as World Bank, World Governance, IOM Global and United Nations is listed in Table 1 below

**Table 1:** Description of dimension, variable and source of secondary data

Dimension	Variable	Source
Human Trafficking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trafficking victims</li> </ul>	CTDC data
Socio-Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economy &amp; Growth</li> <li>Gender</li> </ul>	World Bank
Corruption Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Voice &amp; Accountability</li> <li>Government Effectiveness</li> <li>Control of Corruption</li> </ul>	World Governance
Migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International Migrant stock</li> </ul>	IOM Global
Human Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primary education</li> <li>Gross National Income (GNI)</li> </ul>	United Nations

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION



**Figure 3:** Trafficking victim by country

Figure 3 reports that Indonesia has the highest number of trafficking victims, followed by Philippines and Vietnam. Meanwhile, Brunei has the lowest ranking of trafficking among the other countries in Southeast Asia. It's because Brunei is the country has lesser extent for neither forced labour nor force prostitution since people used to migrate as domestic labour.

**Table 2:** Results based on p-value regression test

Dependent Variable	P-Value	Conclusion
Socio-economic (GDP)	0.476	Insignificant
Labour force (Female)	0.001	Significant
Voice and Accountability	0.000	Significant
Governance effectiveness	0.031	Significant
Control of corruption	0.005	Significant
International Migrant Stock	0.094	Insignificant
Primary Education	0.000	Significant
Gross National Income	0.000	Significant

The p-value of Labour force, Voice & Accountability, Government effectiveness, Control of corruption, Primary education and Gross national income is significant. In conclusion, the GDP per capita and International migrant stock are insignificant to the human trafficking meanwhile the Labour force, Voice & accountability, Government effectiveness, Control of corruption, Primary education and Gross national income are significant to the human trafficking.

**Table 3:** Summary of rank based on variables

<i>HT.Victim</i>	<i>GDP</i>	<i>L.F (f)</i>	<i>V &amp; A</i>	<i>G. E</i>	<i>COC</i>	<i>IMS</i>	<i>P.E</i>	<i>GNI</i>
Indonesia	Myanmar	Cambodia	Singapore	Singapore	Singapore	Thailand	Indonesia	Brunei
Philippines	Cambodia	Laos	Philippines	Malaysia	Brunei	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore
Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnam	Indonesia	Brunei	Malaysia	Singapore	Vietnam	Myanmar
Thailand	Laos	Thailand	Thailand	Thailand	Thailand	Indonesia	Thailand	Thailand
Myanmar	Singapore	Brunei	Malaysia	Philippines	Philippines	Cambodia	Myanmar	Cambodia
Malaysia	Indonesia	Singapore	Brunei	Vietnam	Vietnam	Myanmar	Malaysia	Philippines
Cambodia	Thailand	Myanmar	Cambodia	Myanmar	Indonesia	Philippine	Cambodia	Laos
Laos	Malaysia	Indonesia	Vietnam	Cambodia	Cambodia	Brunei	Laos	Malaysia
Singapore	Philippines	Philippines	Laos	Laos	Laos	Vietnam	Singapore	Indonesia
Brunei	Brunei	Malaysia	Myanmar	Indonesia	Myanmar	Laos	Brunei	Vietnam

The top three countries with high Voice & Accountability is Singapore, Philippines and Indonesia. In terms of government effectiveness, the top three score is Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei, with Indonesia in the last position. The same is reflected for the control of corruption, with Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia holding the top three positions. This could explain why Singapore and Brunei score the lowest for human trafficking and why Indonesia is in the lead.

The deepening gap in ASEAN is adding to the current statistics, whether economically or socially. Although ASEAN is moving forward as a region, more needs to be done to control corruption and improve governance. There are many studies and cases not just revolving around human trafficking but also wildlife trafficking which use the same modus operandi and routes. These seem to be perpetrated by organized criminal groups, working hand in hand with border patrols and other relevant enforcement and regulatory officials.

## V. CONCLUSION

ASEAN needs to wake up to the human trafficking critical statistics. Its nations seem to be drowning in corruption and discriminative practises. Although the destinations may not necessary be within the local region, the first point of exit is within ASEAN. Laws may exist, but as long as corruption and weak enforcement go hand in hand, this problem would never go away. The cases raised are horrifying, yet these are the ones reported or surfaced. There are many others who are silently suffering or have been wiped out as anonymous victims due to improper or false identification. Stricter and more humane cross country efforts need to be put in place soon. This research also faced limitations with the lack of studies and statistics in this area. More efforts need to be put in place to understand the depth of this disaster, whether in terms of education, enforcement, cooperation or just awareness.

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