

Factsheet: Child Trafficking in the Philippines

The island of Mindanao has become one of the trafficking hotspots because of armed conflict. Children are trafficked to major cities and neighboring countries, particularly Malaysia.

Trafficking victims are promised jobs such as domestic helpers or entertainers. Unaware of the dangers ahead, children often have their own aspirations of wanting to see the big cities, helping their siblings and family, acquiring material gains, going to Japan as “entertainers”, and improving their physical appearance.

Children are commonly trafficked for exploitation in the sex trade - an estimated 60,000 to 100,000 children in the Philippines are involved in prostitution rings. There is a high incidence of child prostitution in tourist areas. An undetermined number of children are forced into exploitative labor operations.

Among the main causes of child trafficking in the Philippines are poverty, low economic development in communities of origin, gender inequalities, limited employment opportunities, existence of and access to public infrastructure (roads, schools, health centers, etc), large family sizes, inadequate awareness among families, and sex tourism.

The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act was enacted by the Philippine legislative in May 2003. The law mandates the establishment of the National Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking in Persons, which is now charting the national course to combat trafficking. The establishment of similar councils at the provincial and city levels is ongoing.

UNICEF’s Role

UNICEF’s efforts to combat child trafficking in the Philippines include:

- Strengthening data collection and monitoring systems to better track and document this largely under-reported phenomenon.
- Sensitizing parents and communities to change values, attitudes, practices and behaviour that lead to child abuse and exploitation.
- Training social workers, police, prosecutors, judges, church workers and other extension workers on anti-trafficking law.
- Supporting surveillance, rescue and recovery efforts.
- Educating communities on the dangers of trafficking. To date more than 500 communities have been reached and are mobilized against child trafficking.

The UNICEF-assisted project against child trafficking mobilizes and trains the port community to raise awareness and levels of understanding of port workers and officials. It has also established the Multi-Sectoral Network Against Trafficking in Persons, a national civil society-led initiative that aims to provide direct action, build capacities of partners, advocate for policy reforms and network. It also advocates in source communities and transit routes through special campaigns.