

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY
OF PRAYER AND AWARENESS
AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING



XIII EDITION THE INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF PRAYER AND AWARENESS
AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING –
FEBRUARY 8, 2027

CONCEPT PAPER

Safeguarding Human Dignity: Protecting Children and Young People on a Pilgrimage of Hope and Peace.

Background

The International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking (IDPAAHT), observed annually on the **Feast of St. Josephine Bakhita (8 February)**, is a global movement of prayer, reflection, and commitment to ending human trafficking¹. Inspired by the witness of St. Josephine Bakhita and guided by the spirit of *Magnifica Humanitas* of **His Holiness Pope Leo XIV**, this initiative calls for renewed commitment to safeguarding human dignity, especially for children and young people, who remain most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Theme Focus

The theme for the 13th edition of IDPAAHT 2027, "**Safeguarding Human Dignity: Protecting Children and Young People on a Pilgrimage of Hope and Peace**," inspired from Pope Leo XIV, is outlined in his first encyclical on *Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*. It emphasizes how social justice must begin with the most vulnerable, notably "the poor, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, victims of violence and people living in urban or existential peripheries."²

This journey highlights safeguarding human dignity as the foundation of all action against trafficking. It calls for a shared commitment to creating spaces of **hope and peace**, where children and young people are protected, valued, and able to flourish in freedom and safety.

¹ The Day is coordinated by Talitha Kum International in collaboration with Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Dicastery for Communication, Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, Caritas Internationalis, CoatNet, Focolare Movement, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), World Union of Catholic Women Organizations (WUCWO), JPIC - Anti-Trafficking Working Group (UISG/USG), The Clewer Initiative, Association of the Community of Pope John XXIII, International Federation of Catholic Action, Italian Catholic Guides and Scouts Association (Agesci), Santa Marta Group, Community of Sant'Egidio, USMI (Union of Major Superiors of Italy).

² Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica Humanitas* (78).

<https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/encyclicals/documents/20260515-magnifica-humanitas.html>

Rationale

Human trafficking is a “crime against humanity”, as Pope Leo XIV described it in February 2026³. It is one of the deepest wounds of our time. It turns children into commodities, women into objects, migrants into prey, and the hopes of young people into instruments of profit. Behind every statistic is a face, a name, and a story known and loved by God.

It is a form of modern slavery that affects more than **50 million people worldwide**.⁴ It involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons through force, coercion, deception, or abuse of vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation. Victims are subjected to sexual exploitation, forced labor, domestic servitude, child labor, forced begging, and organ removal.

Women, children and youth are disproportionately affected due to poverty, unemployment, lack of education, gender inequality, displacement, and weak law enforcement systems. Increased **wars and conflicts**, dangerous routes for migrants and refugees, and digital technologies have created new opportunities for traffickers to exploit vulnerable people. **Digital technology** is being used by traffickers to purchase, recruit and groom individuals, particularly children, through various digital tools including social media platforms, gaming and messaging applications.

Despite national laws and international conventions, many communities remain unaware of trafficking indicators. Survivors often lack access to support services, and prosecution rates remain low. As a result, many victims remain **undetected** and unsupported, while traffickers operate with relative impunity.

A coordinated, community-centered approach is therefore essential to prevent trafficking, protect victims and survivors, and strengthen justice systems.

Focusing on children and young people, it includes realities such as:

- A girl groomed online by someone she believes is a friend.
- A boy forced to mine minerals used in the batteries that power our phones and AI systems.
- A young migrant trapped in sexual exploitation after fleeing war.
- A young mother coerced into selling her baby.

These are not isolated tragedies. They reflect a global economy and culture that too often values efficiency over **dignity** and profit over **human life**.

Today, **trafficking networks are evolving rapidly**. The internet has become a primary tool for recruitment, with social media, gaming platforms, encrypted messaging, cryptocurrency, and **AI-generated content** used to groom, deceive, blackmail, and exploit

³ Pope Leo XIV, 8 February 2026. *Message for the 12th World Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking*. <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/pont-messages/2026/documents/20260129-messaggio-contro-trafficking.html>

⁴ International Labour Organization, 2022. *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-estimates-modern-slavery-forced-labour-and-forced-marriage>

children and young people. Even highly educated and digitally skilled youth are targeted through fraudulent job offers and deceptive recruitment schemes.

Women and children remain among those most at risk, particularly when displaced by conflict, persecution, poverty, or climate-related disasters. Children separated from their families are especially vulnerable to traffickers. Online child sexual exploitation has reached unprecedented levels, while criminal exploitation is increasing, with children and young people being coerced into **organized criminal activities**.

The scale of the crisis is alarming. Nearly **one in three** identified people subjected to human trafficking is a **child**.⁵ More than **117 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide**, around **39 percent of them children**.⁶ An estimated **138 million children**⁷ are engaged in child labour, including in mining the critical minerals that power smartphones, electric vehicles, and emerging technologies. Yet the moral challenge cannot be measured by numbers alone.

While there has been an increase in the detection of child victims, many fall through the cracks and remain invisible due to systemic failures such as the lack of prioritization of child safeguarding, unclear definitions of children as victims, hostile immigration policies, criminalization of children, and stigma associated with reporting.

The IDPAAHT goal is to reduce the incidence of human trafficking through **prevention, protection, rehabilitation, and strengthened multi-sectoral collaboration**.

Objectives

1. To increase awareness of human trafficking through the **voices of survivors**, both globally and locally, among vulnerable communities.
2. To promote **safeguarding of human dignity** as the foundation of anti-trafficking efforts
3. To **protect children and young people** from trafficking, exploitation, and violence
4. To mobilize **young leaders** in advocacy for dignity, hope, and peace
5. To prepare young leaders for active participation in **WYD 2027 in Seoul**
6. To uphold human dignity, strengthen survivor-centered and peace-oriented **systemic transformation**
7. To strengthen **coordination and referral systems** among relevant Church organisations and other institutions of goodwill involved in anti-trafficking.

IDPAAHT 2027

To mark the 2027 observance of the International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, a week of global events will take place from **4–8 February 2027 in Rome** and other parts of the world.

⁵ UNODC, 2024. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html>

⁶ UNHCR, 2025. *Global Trends Report*. <https://www.unhcr.org/hk/en/about-unhcr/overview/figures-glance>

⁷ ILO & UNICEF, 2024. *Child Labor Global Estimates*.

<https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/2024%20Global%20Estimates%20of%20Child%20Labour%20Report.pdf>

The program will bring together Church leaders, survivors, young people, civil society partners, and advocates through prayer, Eucharistic celebrations, workshops, school programs, conferences, exhibitions, and local awareness initiatives. The week campaign will include a Vigil of Prayer in Rome (Taize Prayer), an online prayer pilgrimage enabling global participation, and will culminate with a significant audience with the Holy Father, Pope Leo (TBC), as a moment of listening, encouragement, and renewed commitment to the shared mission of combating human trafficking.

In continuity with the journey toward **World Youth Day (WYD) 2027** in Seoul, this campaign proposes a **Pilgrimage of Hope and Peace from Rome to South Korea**, engaging young people as key actors in safeguarding, prevention, awareness-raising, and solidarity with survivors of human trafficking. The campaign will unite prayer, education, advocacy, and youth leadership to raise awareness of human trafficking –including online recruitment, child trafficking, sexual exploitation, and child labor in global supply chains. It seeks to empower young people to become leaders in protecting human dignity and ensuring that no child and no vulnerable person is ever treated as a commodity.

The **IDPAAHT 2027** campaign envisions a world where migrants are welcomed, children are protected, survivors are accompanied, and systems of exploitation are challenged. It calls Catholics and all people of goodwill to recognize that trafficking is not an inevitable consequence of globalization, but a moral failure that can be overcome through solidarity, justice, and faith. In standing with the trafficked, the displaced, and the exploited, the **Church** bears witness to the heart of the **Gospel**: that every person is precious, every child is sacred, and no one is for sale.

*Even just one child matters.
Even just one life is worth every effort.
Even just one act of welcome can become a sign of God's kingdom.*

Conclusion

Human trafficking undermines human dignity, safety, and development. This concept paper presents a holistic approach combining **prevention, protection, rehabilitation, and partnership** to address both the root causes and consequences of trafficking. With adequate support and collaboration, the initiative will empower vulnerable communities, protect those affected, and contribute to the elimination of human trafficking, especially among **children** and **young people**, who are often unheard and may experience the effects of such harm for many years, including across generations.

This initiative transforms the **International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking** into a **Pilgrimage of Hope and Peace**. From **Rome** to **South Korea**, young people journey together as witnesses and builders of a more just world, committed to safeguarding human dignity, protecting children and young people, and fostering cultures of hope and peace, culminating in **World Youth Day 2027 in Seoul**.