

An Economy without Human Trafficking

The International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking 2021 brings into the spotlight one of the main causes of human trafficking: the dominant economic model of our time.

Human trafficking is an integral part of “this economy”: victims of trafficking are as “commodities” falling into the mechanisms of a globalization ruled by financial speculation and competition spurred by below-cost pricing. Hence the need for a “structural and global” perspective of human trafficking so as to dismantle those wicked mechanisms that fuel the supply and demand of “people to exploit”, because the very heart of the economy is sick.

An aphorism attributed to Oscar Wilde states that the cynic is a man who ***knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing***, this economy seems dominated by cynicism: not only does the market fix the price of commodities, services and persons, but also what is even more appalling is that the price sets their value. Businesses themselves are victim of this, because financial markets rank them based on their share price, not on the added value produced by their human capital.

Human trafficking is only the tip of an iceberg, the magnifying lens of distress caused by the dominating neoliberalism that relies on a (false) idea of economic freedom that considers any ethical, social and political circumstance as irrelevant and a hurdle.

However, the opposite is true, in fact, an economy without human trafficking is an economy that values and cares for the human being and nature, is inclusive and does not exploit the most vulnerable.

This perspective has led the International Committee of the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking to take part in “The economy of Francesco”: a large movement of young economists, entrepreneurs and change-makers convened by Pope Francis from all over the world to share ideas and plan initiatives for promoting integral and sustainable human development in the spirit of Francis.

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Some economic data

- **150.2** billion dollars are the annual profits of human trafficking in the world, two thirds of which derive from sexual exploitation.¹
- **21.800** dollars are the annual profits per sexually exploited victim of trafficking, 4.800 in the building, manufacturing, mining and utilities sectors, 2.500 in farming, and 2.300 in domestic work.²
- **34.800** dollars are the annual profits per victim of trafficking in advanced economies, 15.000 dollars in the Middle East, 7.500 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5.000 in Asia Pacific, and 3.900 in Africa.³
- **50%** of exploited workers carry out forced labour to pay off a debt (peonage).⁴
- **337.462** euros was the economic, social and human cost per victim in Europe (UE27) in 2016 (latest available data).⁵
- 200.000 dollars is the economic return for an organ transplant in Western Europe against payment of 10.000 dollars to a “donor” living in extreme poverty in Central America.⁶

¹ *Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour*, International Labour Organization, 2014.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery*, International Labour Organization and Walk Free Foundation, 2017.

⁵ *Study on the economic, social and human costs of trafficking in human beings within the EU*, European Commission, 2020. According to the European Commission, for each of the 8.027 victims in the European Union in 2016, an estimated cost of 2.949 euros for coordination and prevention activities, 105.827 euros for law enforcement activities, 11.355 euros for registration services, initial and material support and counselling, 21.785 euros for health and social services, 59.795 euros for the loss of the victim’s potential contribution to the legal economy and 135.751 euros for the lost quality of life was calculated.

⁶ *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018