



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**LIBERTY SHARED**



**Practices in TIP  
Data: Assumptions  
and Misconceptions**

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# INTRODUCTION

The lack of human trafficking data has long been identified as a top concern for the anti-trafficking field [link, link]. ILO estimated in 2016 that there are 40 million people in modern slavery at any given time, yet the [US State Department's official number](#) of victims identified globally in 2019 was just 118,932. This means that only 0.2% of victims are officially identified annually, demonstrating that the lack of available data in modern slavery and human trafficking is still a huge problem in the anti-trafficking community.

Nevertheless, in recent years, various anti-trafficking stakeholders have more demands for human trafficking data. Law and policymakers are under pressure to develop evidence-based policies to counter-trafficking, which means they need up-to-date data about trafficking cases [link]. With newer technologies and more techniques in modeling and machine learning, there is a lot of discussion of “disruptive” data-driven approaches [link], which also means more researchers are looking for novel, primary data sources to conduct research [link]. Donors have also increased the demand for metrics and evaluations for their grants to better reflect impact, though their data demands are generally different from the other data stakeholders.

The Victim Case Management System (VCMS) project provides a Salesforce-based case management system for frontline organizations that provides services to trafficking survivors in various countries. Due to the [global nature of the project](#), VCMS partners can vary in their approaches, services, and their definition of trafficking. As expected, these difficulties create downstream concerns for analyses, such as being able to easily compare data across organizations or regions.

*“In this report, we wanted to collect these assumptions to clarify the difficulties surrounding the collection of trafficking case data. We hope this report will demonstrate that even basic assumptions cannot be taken for granted.”*

We have noticed that there are several recurring assumptions held by stakeholders who do not work directly in data collection. Often, these assumptions can result in misleading conclusions about trafficking.

In this report, we wanted to collect these assumptions to clarify the difficulties surrounding the collection of trafficking case data. We hope this report will demonstrate that even basic assumptions cannot be taken for granted. In the area of data collection in trafficking, we believe the field is still at its nascent stage in terms of capacity, especially for frontline organizations. Consequently, we may not have robust enough data to support the data-based initiatives that we would all like to see unless the field is given the resources to grow its foundational data capabilities.

This report will not go into any details about the various techniques that one can use to work with trafficking data [link, link, link]. The themes we seek to explore here are more fundamental, such as whether trafficking data is really about what we think it is about. We believe that the issues discussed here will have implications on higher-level research and policy questions, and hope that any interested readers working on higher-level questions will build from our work.

## ASSUMPTIONS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

### Assumption 1 - It is Easy to Identify Trafficking Victims in Person or in Data

Many issues plague the practice of victim identification in trafficking, such as inconsistent application of indicators, translation of international standards into local laws, lack of self-identification, and socio-cultural understanding of coercion for different groups of victims [link, link]. Unsurprisingly, the same issues also exist in data about potential victims and survivors. While it may be easier to overlook a number as representative of the severity of trafficking, uncluttered by the complexity of the underlying cases, we are talking about people from vulnerable backgrounds, going through extended periods of trauma, crossing paths with NGOs who have limited time and resources in interacting with them. To add to the complexity, some NGOs may be asked to help in trafficking cases but are not trafficking specialists, or some NGOs may be sex trafficking specialists but must assist in forced labor cases. Victim identification is not easy for frontline organizations, and even more difficult to infer from frontline data.

The frontline caseworker then has to decipher that complexity in a short amount of time to make sense of which triage service is most likely to help their client. Highlighting the complex nature of trafficking

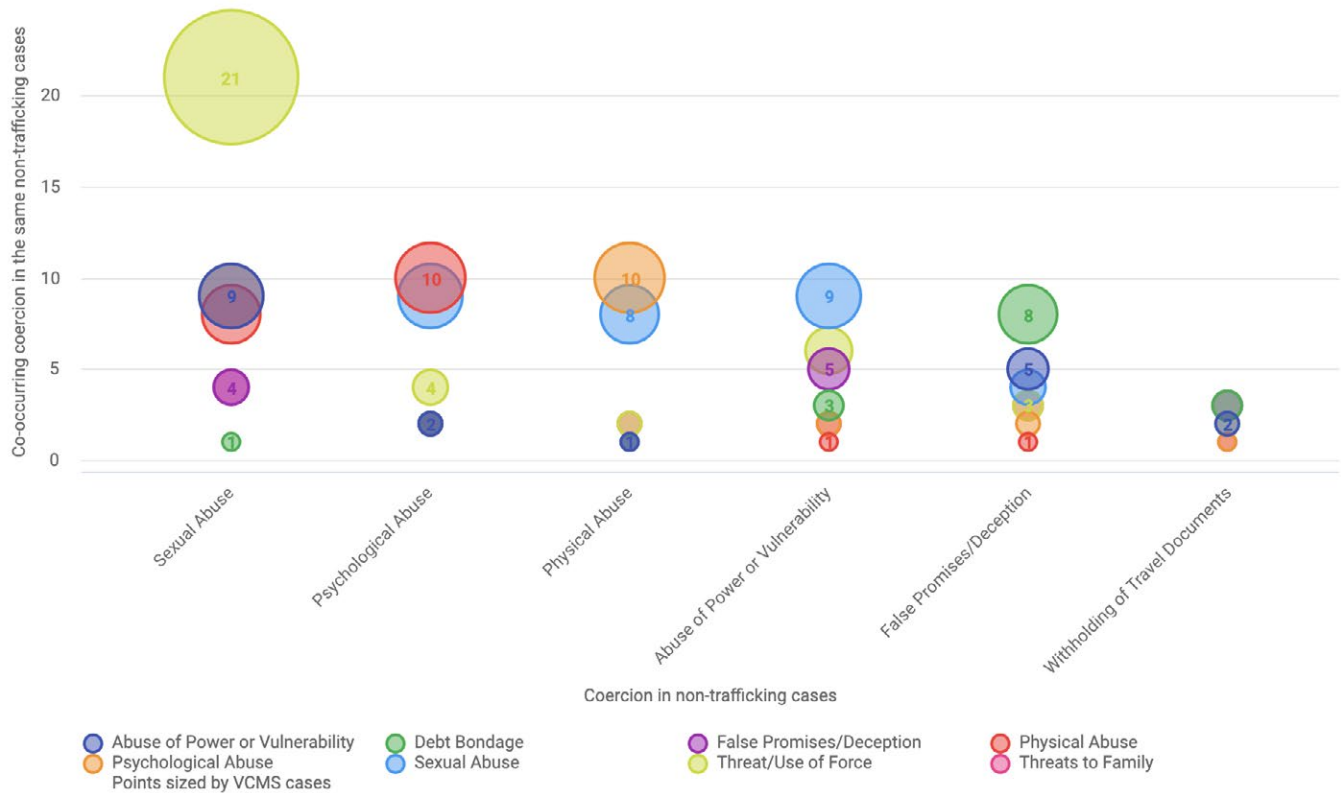
cases, in a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study, one case manager in the US remarked “[m]y one trafficking victim requires more of my time than 25 of my domestic violence cases”; this time constraint leads to caseworkers being under-resourced. In another HHS study, researchers concluded that the uneven and inconsistent training for frontline workers victims means that “[identifying victims of human trafficking is difficult. Even with a legal definition of the crime and its victims, applying this definition and identifying victims is not without challenges.](#)” With these limitations placed on caseworkers, the slippage between the conceptual clarity of counting victims and the messy reality of what it means to be exploited and trafficked must be recognized.

We have heard similar experiences from VCMS partners. Many of them are in more resource-constrained environments than the U.S., exacerbating the problems. Our partners will often have to juggle between definitions of trafficking from the Palermo Protocol, ILO indicators, or their own local or national legal definitions. Some partners have also noted that the process of identification may need to take place over many interviews. before the survivor is comfortable

enough to disclose information that would allow a caseworker to make a determination. At the same time, there are no hard rules about what combinations of indicators or types of exploitation necessarily determine if trafficking has occurred. International standards often differ from domestic versions of trafficking laws [[link](#), [link](#), [link](#)], all of which put more burden on the caseworker to decipher these various layers while also trying to best serve their clients. Hence, it should not be surprising that this data capture process generates data about trafficking experiences that may be difficult to decipher.

As the platform provider of VCMS, we allow organizations working in disparate countries to use their definitions to determine whether someone has been trafficked because we recognize that all organizations cannot realistically use the same definition. In [Graph 1](#)'s example, we take a subset of VCMS case data and look specifically at some cases that are explicitly rejected as trafficking cases. VCMS users categorized these cases as prevention cases for at-risk clients, or cases of interception before trafficking has occurred, or cases of exploitation and abuse that are not trafficking, such as [sexual exploitation and abuse](#).

**GRAPH 1: FORMS OF COERCION EXPERIENCED IN NON-TRAFFICKING CASES.**



Non-trafficking Cases: On the x-axis, this graph shows forms of coercion experienced in non-trafficking cases. On the y-axis, it shows co-occurring forms of coercion in the same cases. For example, for clients experiencing sexual abuse, they are also experiencing threat/use of force, abuse of power, or deception, and so on.

As demonstrated by this subset of case data, elements of trafficking are still observed in these non-trafficking cases. Clients in these cases experience multiple forms of coercion concurrently, such as deception and debt bondage. There may be a variety of reasons why the caseworker determined that a specific case did not arise to meet the definition of trafficking. One can also easily imagine another caseworker would mark some of these cases as trafficking cases. This is similar to issues that arise from a study of the U.S. law enforcement and prosecutors' victim identification process[link]. The study noted that ["each law enforcement agent or prosecutor has her view of what constitutes a trafficking victim, resulting in disparate designations in cases of similar victims."](#)

Given the wide-ranging [users and countries VCMS serves](#), differences in definitions and concepts are expected. However, those who would like to use data sets like this to make more straightforward conclusions or pronouncements about trafficking may find the data shakier than they would like when it comes to even basic definitions of trafficking. Trafficking victim identification is not as straightforward as a medical test for a disease.

Consequently, if the counter-trafficking community hopes to implement advanced techniques of analysis and prediction, like using machine learning to predict trends and patterns of trafficking, the usefulness of

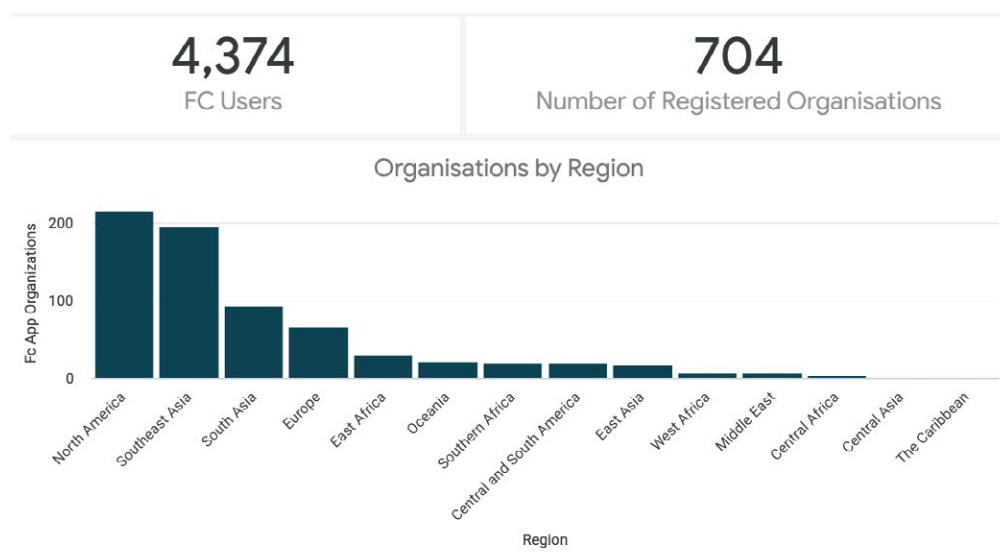
these techniques will be constrained by the training data, which is fraught with difficulties. We hear these concerns everywhere we have worked, and we understand that this is not a problem unique to VCMS partners.

## Assumption 2 - NGOs are Likely to Assist a Wide Variety of Trafficking Victims

The VCMS team is often asked for data to show the comparative prevalence of one type of trafficking versus another type of trafficking, or across two different regions. Since we have partners in those areas, we are expected to make some conclusions about relative prevalence, vulnerable populations, and even trafficking routes and trends. We have always pushed back against those requests because there is the underlying assumption that our users, and NGOs in general, are likely to assist a wide variety of trafficking victims or even a representative array of victims, proportional to the scale of the problem. Even setting aside the fact that there are a lot of cultural and social reasons why certain types of victims are more likely to be identified than others [link], there is also the factor that NGOs' existences are distorted by a variety of social, cultural, and structural factors as well.

The VCMS team is fortunate to be able to work in many countries and interact with many ecosystems of organizations in each region, and our sister project [Freedom Collaborative](#) also allows us to see what type of organizations work across the globe on this issue [Graph 2]. Based on our experiences, we have noted that NGOs are not equally distributed around the world based on need, but more likely to be distributed based on funding and ease/feasibility of setting up nonprofits to provide services in that country.

**GRAPH 2: FREEDOM COLLABORTIVE USERS AND ORGANIZATIONS BY REGION.**

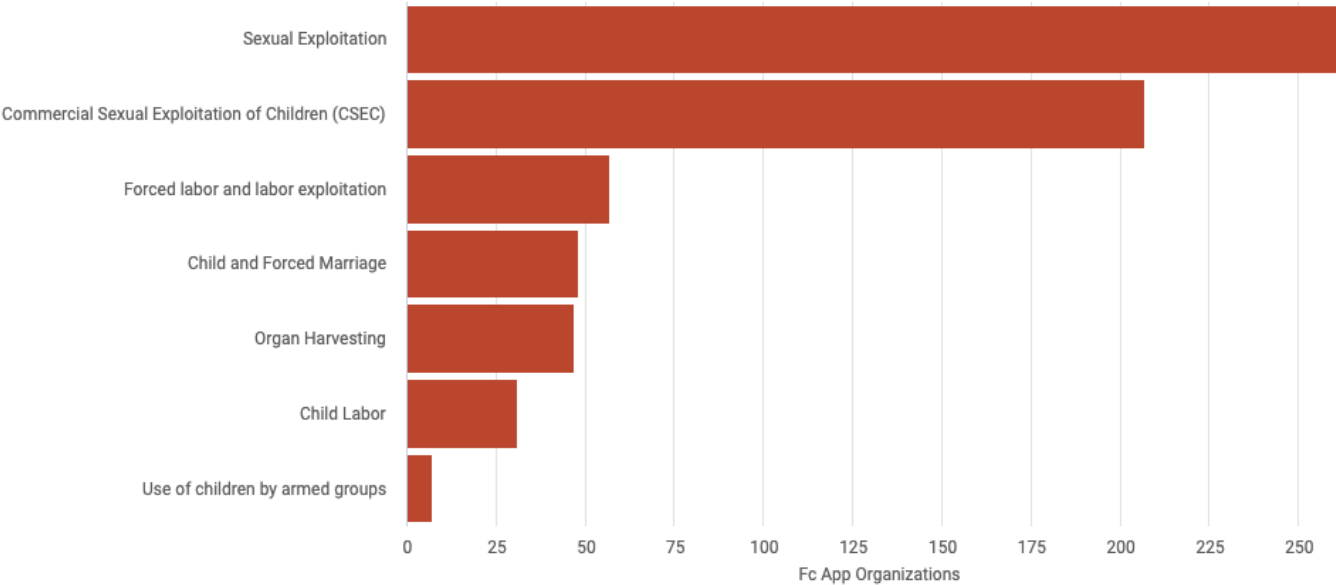


Given that our programs started in Southeast Asia, and we have not spent the same amount of effort or resources on recruiting North American partners. Nonetheless, North America is the number one region for Freedom Collaborative organizations. This is because there are more organizations in North America in general working on human trafficking issues. Even within regions, inequalities exist, where some countries may have very few NGOs because the government is more restrictive to foreign and domestic residents from setting up nonprofits, while a neighboring country may be more permissive, and many organizations can establish a presence there.

Funding is also a major factor in determining how many and what kind of NGOs can survive. In Freedom Collaborative, organizations are asked to indicate which forms of exploitation they focus on, and they can indicate multiple forms of exploitation.

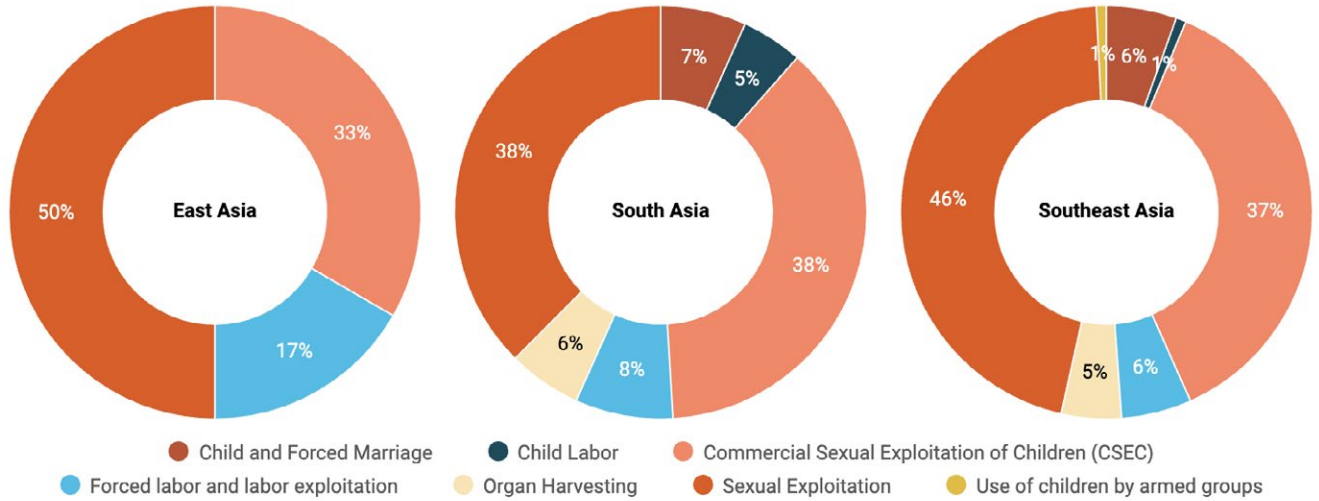
This data, shown in Graph 3, gives us a good idea of the kind of issues that Freedom Collaborative organizations work on, even though of course they are still not necessarily representative of all anti-trafficking organizations worldwide. We can see that most organizations focus on sexual exploitation and commercial sexual exploitation of children as their focus, with fewer organizations focusing on forced labor. This stands in contrast with the global estimate that 60% to 80% of trafficking is labor exploitation [\[link\]](#). Anecdotally, our partners often tell us there are many more sources of funding for helping children and women, especially in sex trafficking, than for helping men and those in labor trafficking. Organization focus is therefore both an indication of the directors' passions and interests, but also how donors prioritize funding. Either way, it is not a reflection of the severity of the different forms of exploitation in any given region.

**GRAPH 3: FREEDOM COLLABORATIVE ORGANIZATIONS' EXPLOITATION FOCUS.**

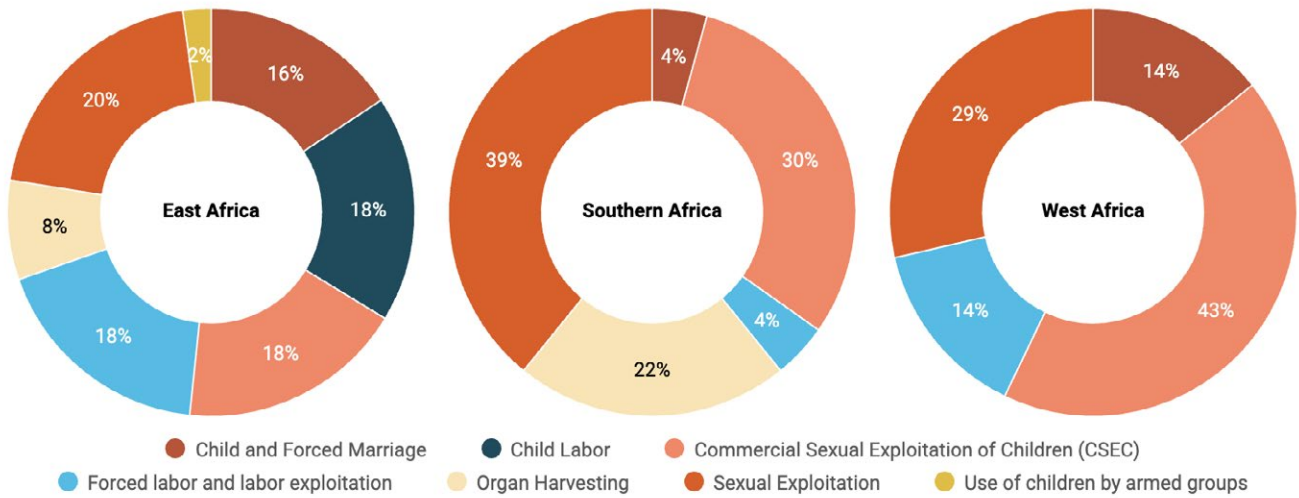


If we look at organizations' focuses by region, Graph 4 uses the colors in red/orange tones to represent organizations focusing on forms of sexual exploitation while blue tones represent those focusing on forms of labor exploitation. For all regions, the red slices make up a much greater proportion of organizations than blue. That means that organizations in general are more able to provide services to victims of sex trafficking than labor trafficking across all regions. This means they are also more likely to identify victims of sex trafficking since most identification is done by frontline organizations in the process of providing care, rather than by the victim themselves [\[link\]](#).

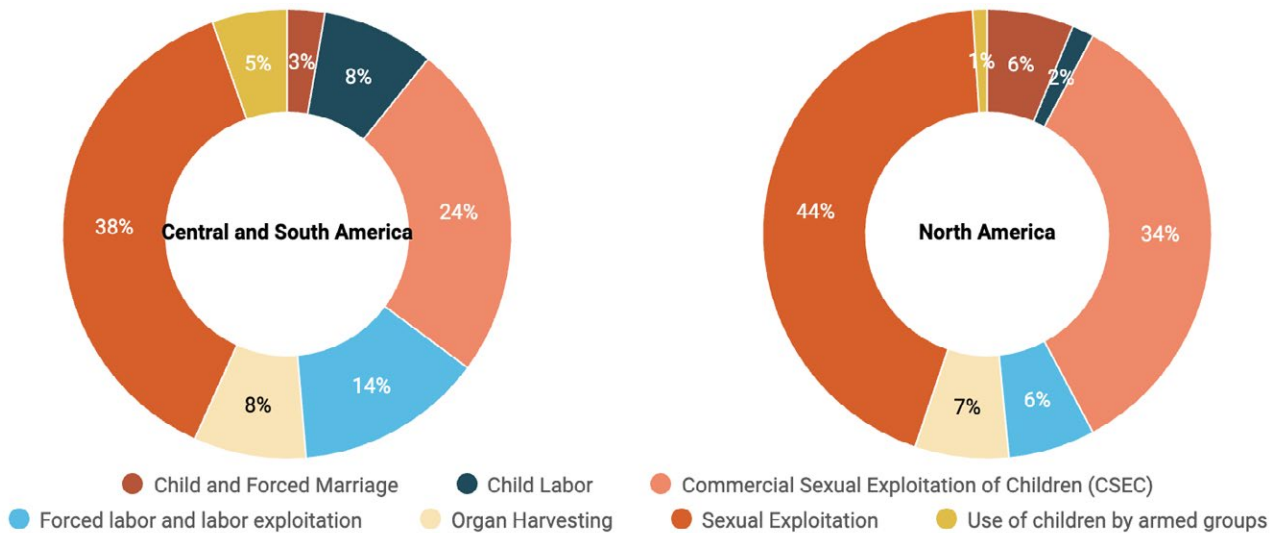
**GRAPH 4: FREEDOM COLLABORATIVE ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR TRAFFICKING FOCUS.**



**Asia: Freedom Collaborative Organizations and Their Trafficking Focus.**

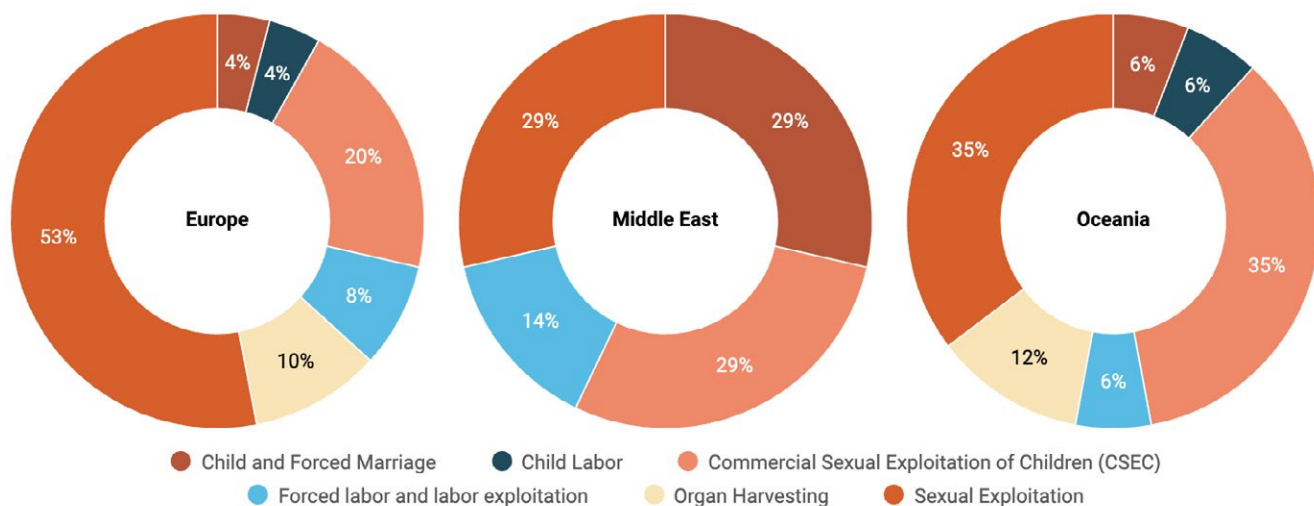


**Africa: Freedom Collaborative Organizations and Their Trafficking Focus.**



**Americas: Freedom Collaborative Organizations and Their Trafficking Focus.**





**Europe, Middle East, Oceania: Freedom Collaborative Organizations and Their Trafficking Focus.**

For these reasons, it is therefore unwise to conclude that NGOs are interacting with or providing services to a representative set of trafficking victims. Their knowledge is still powerful, and their data is still informative, but they are not necessarily a good representation of the scope of the trafficking problem because nonprofits are neither set up nor funded in any planned, proportional fashion to the overall problem. Relying on what data exist from current NGOs about trafficking will only bias us further in reinforcing existing distortions in the anti-trafficking field.

### Assumption 3 - Trafficking is a Global Problem, So We Can Compare Data Across Contexts for Comparative Analysis

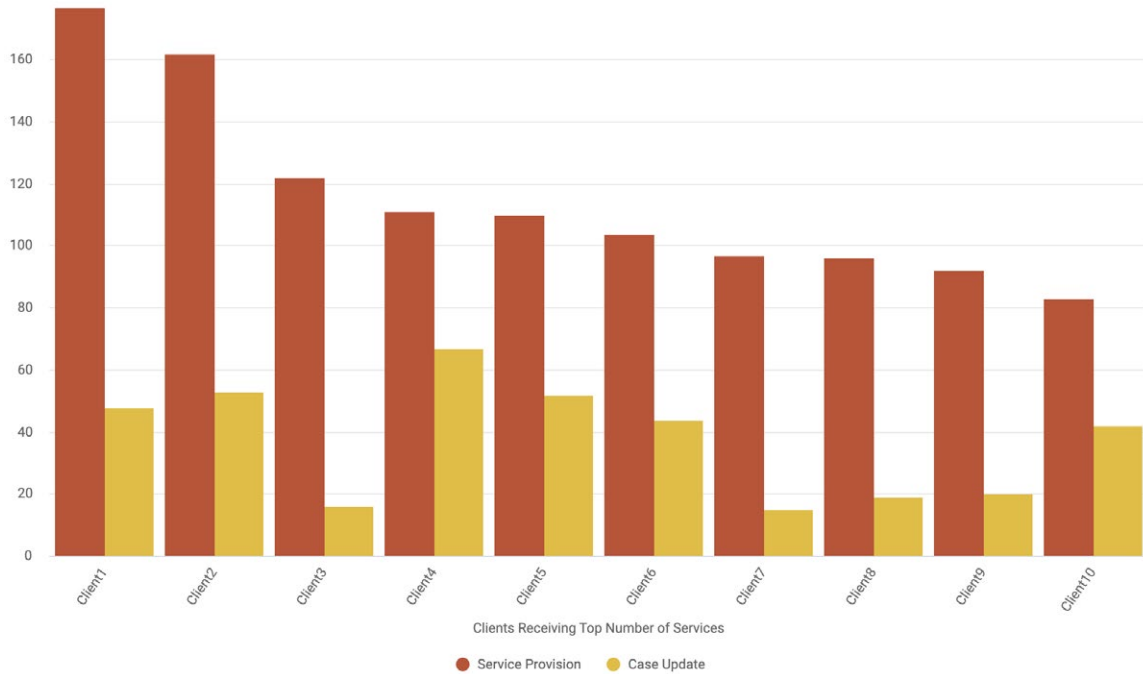
Intuitively, we all know that exploitation and trafficking are global problems. There is not a region we can think of where commercial sexual exploitation, child trafficking, and supply chain abuses are not an issue. The allure of quantitative data is that it allows us to flatten regional and contextual differences inherent in the data generation process to put everything together for counting, comparing, and analysis. Some flattening is always inevitable for quantitative analyses and generally, we hope that the insight gained is worth losing the context of the data.

In trafficking, for all the difficulties we have covered about the data generating process, we believe it is more difficult to argue that trafficking data can be divorced from their context. Even before we can compare across widely disparate international contexts, it is not necessarily a given that trafficking cases served

by the same organization are comparable. Trafficking cases as we have established are often a complex combination of vulnerability and traumatic, exploitative events. The forms of trafficking, the method of coercion, the duration of the trauma vary widely from case to case.

In an analysis of VCMS service data, we look at service provisions and case updates cases in VCMS. Service provision records track services provided during the case, such as counseling, healthcare, or education services. Case update records are more flexible. They allow caseworkers to attach an update about a case. For example, if a case goes to trial and there are numerous court-related appointments, updates, and filings, case updates would be the appropriate place to store that information. Not all VCMS partners use service provision and case update records. Some caseworkers may choose to keep those records outside of VCMS and only use VCMS to track case overview data. In Graph 5, we can see the top ten clients with the most complex cases requiring a great number of service provisions.

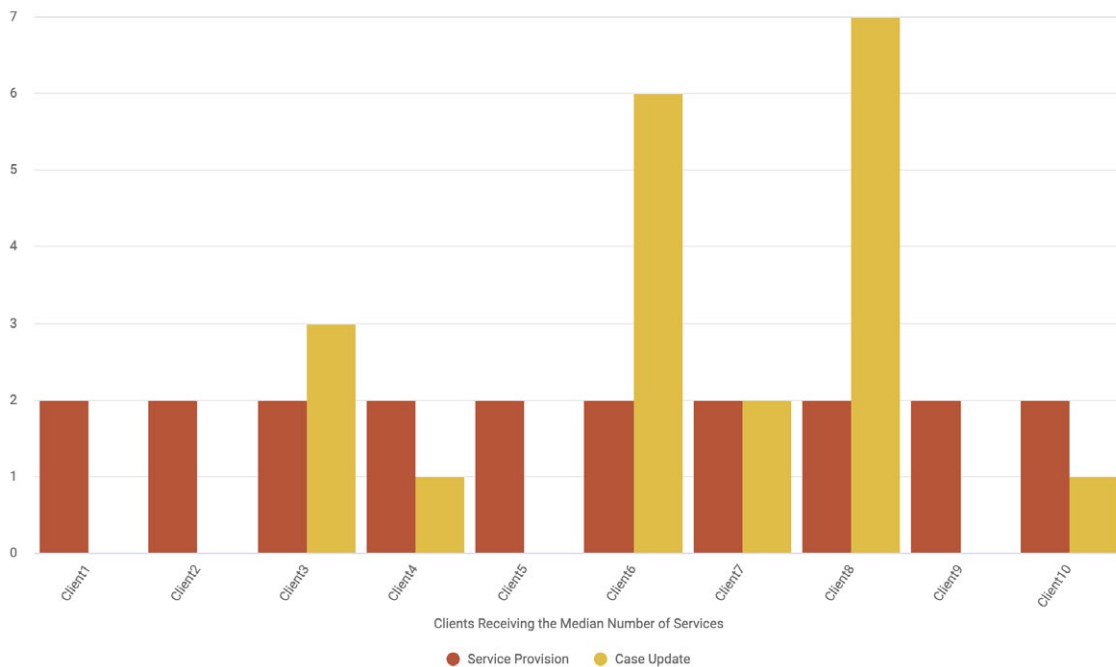
**GRAPH 5: CLIENTS RECEIVING THE TOP NUMBER OF SERVICES.**



Clients with top number of service provision records per trafficking case, with the number of case updates.

These top cases are, of course, not representative of all trafficking cases. In contrast, the median number of services provided in VCMS is two. To compare with Graph 5, Graph 6 shows 10 cases with the median number of service provision records that one might consider more “typical”. If we think about the lived experiences behind these different cases, the trafficking situation experienced by one client must have been dramatically and substantially different than that experienced by another. This may seem like an obvious point, but we often see in funding reports and metrics and evaluation reports that the number of survivors is a main reporting metric for donors to compare programs across the world. From the perspective of the NGOs facing those types of reporting pressures, it is not beneficial for them to take on complex cases since they “count” the same as a simpler case.

**GRAPH 6: 10 CLIENTS RECEIVING THE MEDIAN NUMBER (2) OF SERVICES.**



10 Clients with the median number of service provision records per trafficking case, with the number of case updates. These 10 clients were selected at random from the total pool of cases with the median number of service provisions.

Even if we do not just reduce trafficking to a simple headcount, it is hard to imagine what kind of global policy, prevention, or intervention conclusions can be usefully deduced from forcing vastly different trafficking experiences into comparable numbers just for the sake of “big” data analysis. This is especially difficult to imagine when these cases are unfolding over disparate countries and social systems.

Many partner frontline organizations are still struggling with harmonizing the concept of trafficking from their domestic contexts with the international context. Just because we can recognize exploitation as a universal problem does not mean that the counter-trafficking sector is equipped with translating that recognition into the ability to capture the problem in data.

#### Assumption 4 - We Can Easily Gauge the Amount of Trafficking Over Time Through Observing TIP Data

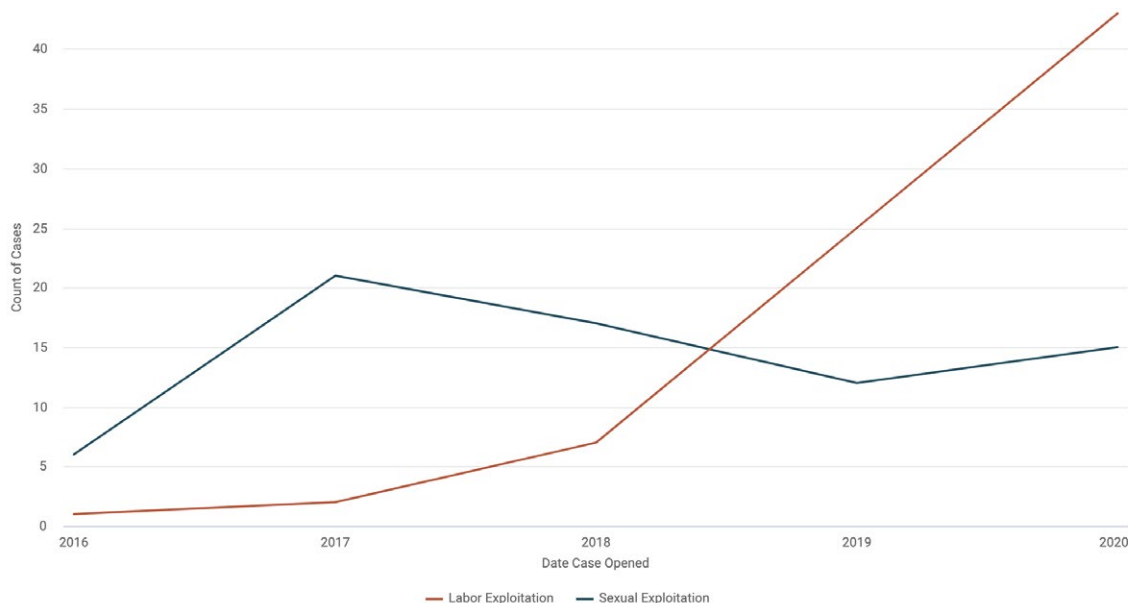
In the trafficking field, many dynamics are changing constantly which impacts our ability to observe trafficking through data. The most powerful factors that influence trafficking data is something that we may not be able to observe at all explicitly. For example, local laws and government regimes may change, geopolitical dynamics may shift which affects migration and funding, all the way to frontline organiza-

tion’s ability and funding to handle volume and type of cases. This problem is called [drift](#) and it is always an issue in longitudinal, observational data. Especially in machine learning, it is an extremely important problem because it can vastly affect the quality of predictions [\[link\]](#). Similarly, many times we want to examine trafficking data over time and ask questions about longitudinal shifts in trafficking trends and patterns, particularly to understand if new vulnerable populations or forms of trafficking are emerging.

Trafficking data that are captured are a small percentage of actual trafficking cases that occur [\[link\]](#), so the few cases that are captured become much more important in influencing our understanding of the problem. Additionally, because data capture is dependent on frontline organizations, drifts within organizations themselves can vastly affect the nature of the data.

To help our users adapt VCMS to their needs, the VCMS team often gets to know our partner organizations and their programs very well. We will also often be asked to help them retool certain parts of their case forms to better reflect their changing programs. In [Graph 7](#)’s example, a partner organization was working on more sexual exploitation cases a few years ago, when they started using VCMS. Around 2018, there was a donor that started to invest in more labor trafficking grants and programs in the region. As a recipient of one of the grants, our partner was then able to work with more labor trafficking cases. Proportionally, based on their case data, the number of labor exploitation cases overtook the number of sex exploitation cases in 2018 and after.

GRAPH 7: EXAMPLE OF DRIFT – ONE ORGANIZATION’S CASE COUNT BY CASE TYPE OVER TIME.



Note: this data is a subset of this organization's cases such that we excluded cases involving both labor and sexual exploitation, or other types of cases not related to either.

If we did not know the story behind the graph, we may conclude that in the NGO's service area, there had been an uptick of labor exploitation cases. In actuality, the trend was more driven by changes in this organization's grant portfolio. Given there is a surplus of people seeking services in the regions, it is not surprising that the organization very quickly took on many more labor cases than they had previously, once they had funding.

It would be difficult to disentangle the change of trafficking over time from the changes in the context of how the data was generated. As an aside, we only knew about the changes in this organization's funding because it came up in conversation during VCMS training and troubleshooting. Often, these changes are unobservable by the VCMS team or other external parties, making the interpretation of the organization's data by outsiders nearly impossible.

### **Assumption 5 - If We Have Enough Victim Assistance or Prosecution Data, We Will Know the Trends and Patterns For Successful Intervention**

We hope it is clear by now why our existing victim assistance data, given their limitations, should not be relied on solely to extrapolate interventions. There is no frontline capacity to identify a large enough or representative enough sample of trafficking victims for the resulting data to be meaningful in supporting forceful actions by those in power. To summarize the issues so far – the identification process is highly context-dependent and the context itself is hard to observe; victims of trafficking rarely self-identify and relies on frontline organizations to surface the problem; the frontline itself is skewed towards certain type of trafficking offenses, types of victims, and geographies.

What other data sources can interested stakeholders use to plan their interventions? We may turn to "official data", which is information that flows from government sources or actions. Unfortunately, in trafficking, even official prosecution and crime data, such as those cited in the State Department's annual TIP report, is limited and not representative enough of the problem to draw scalable conclusions.

First, only a very small number of trafficking cases end up in the criminal justice system, and hence the number of perpetrators and victims identified offi-

cially is very low relative to the size of the problem. Even jurisdictions that do have enforcement capacity may choose to selectively prosecute certain types of trafficking crimes. For example, [Liberty Shared's legal gap analysis of Hong Kong law](#) concluded that

Hong Kong law adopts a very narrow definition of human trafficking compared with the Palermo Protocol by only recognizing a person as a victim of human trafficking if he/she is moved into or out of Hong Kong for the purpose of prostitution. Certain other activities which would constitute human trafficking under the Palermo Protocol, are criminalized elsewhere in Hong Kong, albeit not comprehensively (for example, forced labour, which is a major aspect of human trafficking under the Palermo Protocol, is not a criminal offence under any legislation in Hong Kong).

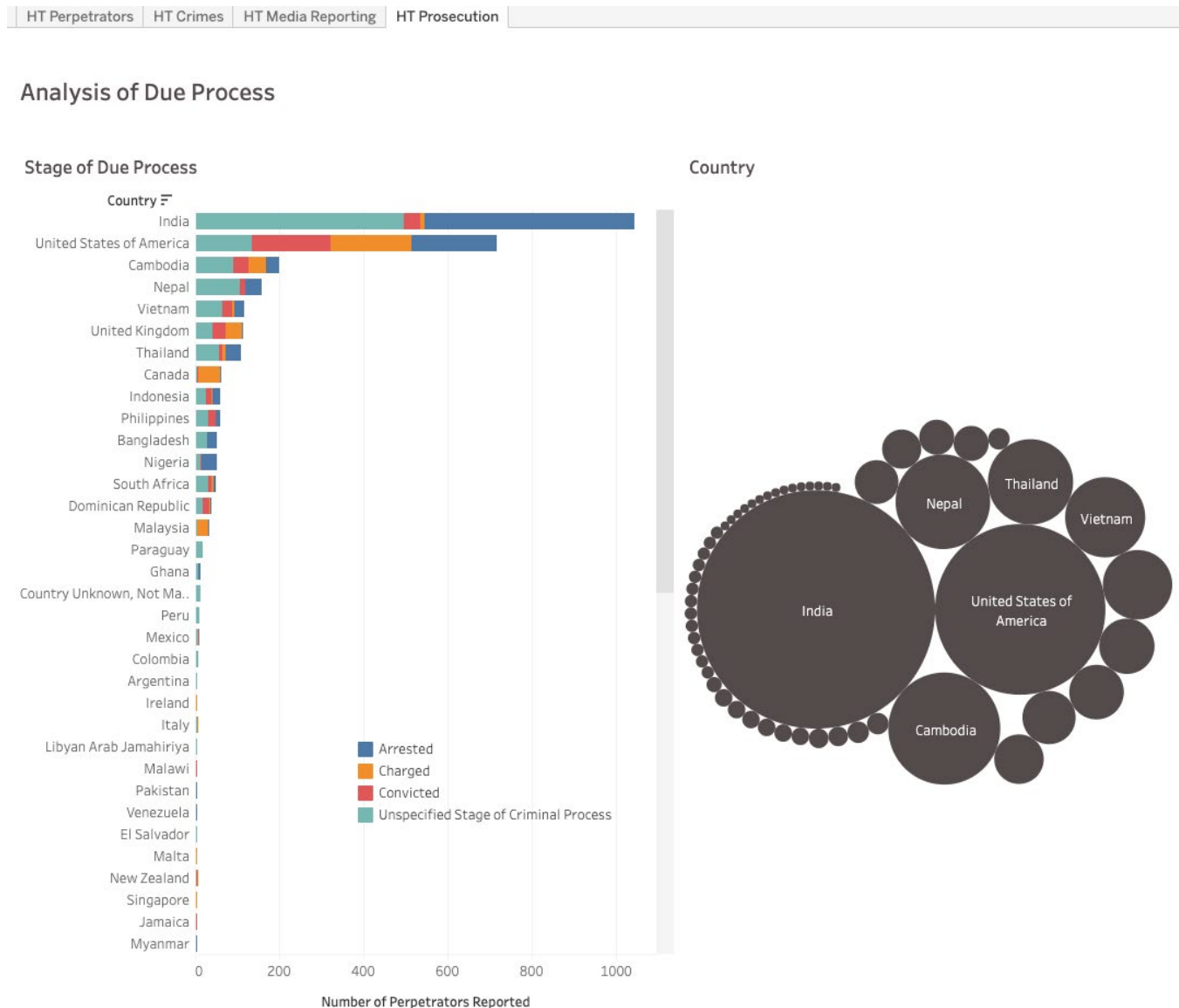
This resulted in the no prosecution of forced labor cases in Hong Kong, even though it has a large migrant labor force that has been under scrutiny for abuse for years [\[link, link\]](#). In 2020, a survivor's five-year legal pursuit to introduce forced labor legislation ended in defeat [\[link\]](#). Therefore, the official trafficking prosecution and victim data from Hong Kong may paint a misleading picture that labor trafficking does not exist there, even though there are official trafficking case statistics.

Second, the reporting of official prosecution data is not equal across jurisdictions. Some VCMS partners struggle with working in jurisdictions where the government prosecution information is not digitized nor well kept, making it easy for the perpetrator to escape accountability; and if the case records are not digitized, those cases are largely invisible to the rest of the world. Another way these cases become known to the public is through news reports. One of Liberty Shared's projects is media monitoring of trafficking cases and perpetrators mentioned in local news media. This data can then be used by due diligence data providers to prevent traffickers from gaining access to services that allow them to perpetrate more abuse [\[link\]](#). This data set exclusively pertains to official prosecutions because newspapers can only identify perpetrators once they are charged or convicted in the local criminal justice system. This is a very different dataset from social care data. Prosecution data is centered on the perpetrators and their crimes, whereas VCMS data, like other human services data, is centered on the client/survivor's care.

From monitoring this data source, we have learned a few things about the nature of this data. In [Liberty Shared's media monitoring data analysis](#), reproduced in Graph 7, we see that India was the top perpetrator country of origin and country of reporting. The sim-

ple, prima facie conclusion may be that there are more trafficking cases in India, or that Indian law enforcement is more effective going after perpetrators. However, there are several sources of potential bias that we need to take into consideration. There are, of course, limits in our observation process, because we are not able to monitor news in every country completely. There are also law enforcement differences as discussed above which are nearly impossible to fully observe. There are also huge population differences between countries where India's large population would result in more cases even if the rates are the same.

**GRAPH 8: LIBERTY SHARED'S MEDIA MONITORING DATA ANALYSIS.**



[Click to view the full interactive graph.](#)

Lastly, there is also the nature of news media in each country itself. This facet is often easily overlooked when looking at news data. Newspapers are in decline in many countries as the consumption of news shifts online or to social media, which handicaps their ability to cover basic beats like court reports. In India, however, newspapers are a thriving industry with the world's largest number of paid newspapers [\[link\]](#). It is therefore not so surprising that Indian newspapers are also doing more comprehensive reporting of court cases, including trafficking cases. After taking into consideration all the various biases in generating official cases and reports of official cases, stakeholders seeking to make informed decisions by examining such datasets may find that this type of data is on similarly shaky ground as victim assistance data for drawing any sweeping conclusions. Unfortunately, neither victim assistance data nor prosecution data offer the broad-based, representative dataset that would be ideal for those seeking a key to plan an effective intervention.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Is it all bad news in the arena of trafficking data? Of course not. The point of this report is to clarify the data generation process in trafficking data which should empower us to utilize the data in more accurate and targeted ways. In other words, once we understand how a certain dataset came into existence, then we can ask better questions. For example, while official case data may not tell us the actual prevalence of trafficking in a country, it does tell us something about how law enforcement in that country is tackling the crime of trafficking. And while media reports of those cases may not tell us about trafficking trends, they do tell us about the media landscape in that country and how they are covering trafficking cases. This is understandably a little disappointing. The big questions we would like data to answer are seemingly out of reach, and we are restricted to much narrower questions. To improve our outlook, we would like to make three recommendations for how to better our data landscape.

## **Recommendation 1: Invest in Record Keeping and Frontline Workers as a Part of Data Infrastructure**

Even though frontline organizations in civil society are not addressing every part of the trafficking issue, they are still our most comprehensive and wide-reaching data sources. They are also often the sole provider of services that survivors and communities need, so investment in civil society is a must. As part of our work at VCMS, we are asked to train caseworkers about data structure, data management, and other record-keeping minutiae that they often never have time to properly learn or do on the job. The public and donors alike do not like to see their money spent on things like 'administration' and 'overhead'. There is the belief that civil society should spend as much time as possible on direct assistance to victims and survivors. We must realize that administration also includes activities like record keeping and managing organizational data. This is a constant struggle for the VCMS team when we encounter partner caseworkers who are so stretched by demands on their time to not perform 'administration' that training and technology alone are not sufficient to solve the issue of poor record keeping. Furthermore, caseworkers and case managers should also be given sufficient resources and training to maintain and improve their data quality. Caseworkers often tell us they cannot go back to check that fields are updated correctly, or to double-check against data entry errors, because they simply do not have the time. For VCMS partners, we train case managers to run data reports to check data quality for their team, but case managers are often also constrained by a lack of time to perform data integrity tasks. If we underinvest in frontline workers as part of the data infrastructure, we then cannot demand that they should also have volumes of pristine trafficking data. We should invest in their training and time for doing administrative tasks like record keeping and data management because it is the foundation of better governance and hence better data.

## **Recommendation 2: Invest in More Data Collection**

In the last few years, we have noticed that there have been more projects on analyzing trafficking data. Often these projects are funded to find and bring together existing sources of data so analyses can be done. We are often approached because VCMS is one of the primary data sources of case data. [CTDC](#) is another source and project by IOM, to which VCMS also contributes. Most times, we have to disappoint researchers because the kind of data they are looking for simply does not exist in VCMS, nor anywhere in the world, because no one has had the resources to collect such data. As much as we would like to claim otherwise, the case data in VCMS tend to be much more bare-bones than people assume because as we outlined above, caseworkers are spending the bulk of their time on delivering services with very little resources dedicated to record keeping. For those funded to research trafficking, we highly recommend devoting resources to primary data collection because the field is very much in need of more data coverage, not maneuvering the same data around in different configurations. To make data collection impactful, thoughts should be given to maximizing downstream impact, such as sharing the data to bolster accountability or remuneration for victims. These data collection efforts should also adhere to recording cases using international standards, such as using [ILO's operational trafficking indicators](#) to define trafficking, so data collected by different efforts are comparable. Furthermore, sufficient investment and attention in data collection projects should be devoted to ensuring data quality, completeness, and accuracy. As in Recommendation 1, this comes down to making sure frontline data collectors have enough time to enter, re-verify, and update records.

### **Recommendation 3: Use Other Approaches to Think About the Trafficking Problem**

We want to emphasize that while we wait for data availability to improve, it does not mean that those seeking to make impactful interventions in the policy, industry, or law enforcement sectors must work blind or wait until data improves. In a lot of current data approaches, we get stuck in thinking that a grounded, data-driven, inferential statistical method is the only way to be evidence-based. The fact is that we do know a lot about trafficking already, even if quantitative data is not yet sufficient. We understand many of the drivers that make individuals and communities vulnerable to trafficking. We know that people are almost exclusively trafficked so others can make a profit. There is already extensive research on modern supply chains, global trade, migration, and exploitation. One approach we advocate for those seeking to intervene effectively is to think about the problem more holistically, for example by using a [systems approach](#), to put forth a theory of change that would address the environment of exploitation that has allowed trafficking to thrive. By pulling from research more broadly about systems of production, we can use theoretical scaffolding to help with some of the data gaps. At Liberty Shared, some of our work involves targeting segments and industries for accountability and changing the calculus of liabilities of those involved in exploitation; this is because our underlying theory is that much of trafficking is driven by how easy and risk-free it is to profit from victims' labor. We did not come to this conclusion through a specific dataset, and we may never see such quantitative data given the nature of our question. Even if the theory we are working from is incomplete, it is less incomplete than relying on the existing spotty case data. Therefore, we recommend encouraging more diverse intellectual approaches towards evidence-based thinking.



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