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The Link Between Extractive Industries and Sex Trafficking

FACT SHEET

OFFICE TO MONITOR AND COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

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Extractive industries involve the removal of non-renewable raw materials such as oil, gas, metals, and minerals from the earth. Although communities can benefit from such industries by using these natural resources for sustainable development, their extraction has also “triggered violent conflicts, degraded the environment, worsened gender and other inequalities, displaced communities, and undermined democratic governance,” according to the UN Development Program. Furthermore, mining, drilling, and quarrying activities often occur in relatively remote areas with minimal infrastructure and limited rule of law, leading to the development of makeshift communities, such as mining “boom towns,” that are vulnerable to crime.

Forced labor in extractive industries has been well-documented; however, the link between these industries and sex trafficking is increasingly an issue of grave concern among governments and advocates alike. Bolivian and Peruvian girls are subjected to sex trafficking in mining areas in

Peru, and women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking near gold mines in Suriname and Guyana. In Madagascar, the government and NGOs have reported increasing commercial sexual exploitation of children related to mining sectors. In other areas, this type of exploitation involves organized crime. For example, in Colombia, NGOs report organized criminal groups control sex trafficking in some mining areas.

Discovery of raw materials will necessarily lead to a large influx of workers and other individuals, some of whom create a demand for commercial sex. In Senegal, a gold rush resulted in rapid migration from across West Africa; some of these migrants are women and children exploited in sex trafficking. Likewise, in the oil industry, individuals are sometimes recruited with false promises of work opportunities, but instead are exploited in commercial sex. Service providers in areas near camps surrounding large-scale oil extraction facilities, such as the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota in the United States, have reported that sex traffickers have exploited women in the area, including Native American women.

Sex trafficking related to extractive industries often occurs with impunity. Areas where extraction activities occur are usually remote and may be difficult to access, meaning that workers are isolated from government oversight and community support and may have less access to protective services, legal advocates, and law enforcement personnel. Information on victim identification and law enforcement efforts in mining areas can be difficult to obtain or verify.

Traffickers take advantage of work settings that are culturally isolated or physically remote to compel adults and children to work in unsafe and often abusive situations and exploit them in sex trafficking. Anti-trafficking strategies should address the unique risks workers face in settings that are isolated from the public, from law enforcement, and from traditional support networks.

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