

Domestic Workers: The Backbone and Modern-Day Slaves of The United States

In every corner of the world, hidden in plain sight, exists an entire universe of modern-day slaves disguised as domestic workers. You have likely passed some shopping at a grocery outlet or minding a family of children at a children's park. While these cases are often overlooked when considering only the most egregious forms of human trafficking, domestic trafficking takes up more than a quarter of all human trafficking cases in the United States and contains the second-highest number of human trafficking cases in the US. Not only are domestic trafficking cases secluded and often disguised and fair work, but “behind closed doors, domestic slavery entails unrestrained physical, psychological, and sexual abuse” (Bales 20). These factors make the lack of reporting on this issue utterly baffling. What makes it worse, a vast majority of these cases are informal positions with no written contracts or employer regulations established, similarly to the two billion workers in “precarious and informal jobs without social protection,” stated in goal number eight of the Sustainment Development Goals by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. A blatant opposition to the SDG of “promot[ing] sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all,” domestic trafficking needs to finally be forcefully and effectively mitigated. Further, in the interconnected and interdependent society that we live in, these cases of domestic servitude have gone too far unrecognized or rather disregarded by local or state government officials—it is time for my generation to step up to the plate and finally address this global issue. Because while it proves easy to turn a blind eye to this global concern as the generation who have not first-hand abetted in this crime, we are the generation that has largely been impacted by this form of slavery; one of the first generations to be raised by nannies or a daycare.

Though domestic trafficking occurs in virtually every corner of the world, its hotspots are located in wealthier more affluent nations such as the United States and Saudi Arabia, and more

specifically in isolated homes and businesses (Agbeyegbe). In these affluent countries, industries are run like tight ships and efficiency is valued above all else. Furthermore, "wages stay low in the United States due to both the organization of work and the availability of low-cost labor" (Duffy). These spots are almost always filled by immigrants who lack a full understanding of their rights or fair expectations as domestic workers. Consequently, immigrants are often the prime targets for this form of trafficking. Moreover, acts and laws such as the National Labor Relations Act have caveats that exclude household workers in their definition of 'employees,' and this, "in combination with an immigration policy that ties the domestic to her employer via her visa, works in the slaveholder's favor and places in jeopardy any domestic who tries to escape" (Bales 22). Immigrants, as the most susceptible demographic of domestic trafficking, are heavily disadvantaged by their immigration status; a discrepancy in equality that the Sustainment Development Goal number ten strives to reduce. Thus, a step for immigrant domestic workers in the world is a step towards a more well-rounded future for the world.

Many efforts have been pushed to combat domestic trafficking especially in the United States, but many have significant pitfalls or caveats that dilute their intended impact such as the aforementioned National Labor Relations Act. Further examples include the "Know your responsibilities pamphlet" distributed to every immigrant entering the United States per The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (Agbeyegbe) that poorly held victims responsible for their victimization or the Fair Labor Standards Act that holds minimum wage and employment record-keeping requirements for domestic workers but excludes them from the FLSA's over-time provisions (Human Rights Watch). Thus, an act should be implemented that enforces regulations such as these while removing responsibility from the victims and rather providing them support before, during, and after they have been victimized. This way, victims can quickly receive help and guidance for their situation. Additionally, legislatures should diversify by adding domestic

worker unions to their board and new laws and acts revolving around rights and protections of domestic workers should be reviewed by these partisans'. This would ensure that legislatures are equitable and thus in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. Finally, education requirements should be appended to the instructions for all employers of domestic workers to ensure they have accepted full responsibility for protecting their employees and that exploitation of these workers becomes scarcer.

World leaders such as those working for the United Nations and specifically the Sustainable Development sector of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs can aid in this effort towards a brighter and more promising future for domestic workers around the world in a few key ways. For one, diversifying their parties with all generations and types of workers regardless of political experience or education. This would ensure that these large populations are given voices to air their grievances with governments and lawmakers. Finally, the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations could be slightly modified to include the expenditure of domestic labor along with the consumption and production patterns of corporations. This slight redress would make a massive difference to the perspective of sustainable consumption as the second or even third-party consumers of these services have just as significant of an impact on the industry of domestic trafficking as the offenders themselves. Ultimately, a change can and will begin with this shift in perspective—all it takes is the effort of a generation and the support from a few global leaders. Who will be those few?

Works Cited

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