

Labour Trafficking Among the Timorese: The Case Study of Timorese Female Migrant Domestic Workers

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Abstract

Labour trafficking is a situation where victims are forced to work against their own will, under the threat of violence, other forms of punishment, or death. About 27.6 million people are found in forced, bonded, or child labour and sexual servitude globally. One group that is often victimized in this illegal trade are migrant domestic workers. This study examines the causes and factors of labour trafficking among Timorese female migrant domestic workers and what recommendations are possible to eradicate the problem in Timor-Leste. Semi-structured interviews were employed with 8 participants to collect the necessary information. There are three main factors that caused the labour trafficking situation of the Timorese female migrant domestic workers. The first cause is the ongoing high cost of living in Timor-Leste which serves as the primary push factor for migration. The second cause is the lack of domestic employment opportunities for women who are already in a tight competition with the available male workforce, and the last one is the lack of awareness and education among the Timorese population about the nature of labour trafficking and their vulnerability against persuasive traffickers. This study proposes three recommendations. The first is to encourage livelihood and skills training programs for locals and former migrant workers. The second is to create more domestic jobs through investment with local businesses and international or multi-national companies. The third and final recommendation is to intensify information drive campaigns in localities and boost training among law enforcement authorities to effectively discharge their duty.

Keywords: *Labour Trafficking, Human Trafficking, Timorese Female Migrant Domestic Workers, Trafficking in Persons*

1. Introduction

Labour Trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of people through force, fraud, or deception, to exploit them for profit (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023a). Forms of labour trafficking include domestic servitude, agricultural labour, factory work, janitorial, service industry, and also mendicancy. Victims of labour trafficking are usually young children, teenagers, men, and women. The traffickers often use violence or fraudulent employment agencies and deceitful practices with the promise of education and/or employment to trick and coerce the victims into accepting such offers (Hawbaker, 2023). Traffickers often target vulnerable populations such as foster children, the homeless, foreign nationals, and individuals living in poverty (Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center, 2023).

About 27.6 million people are found in forced labour, bonded labour, child labour, and sexual servitude worldwide. A total of 11.8 million of these victims are women and girls. More than 3.3 million (12 percent) of all those in forced labour situations are children, and more than half of them are exploited in the commercial sex industry. In geographical terms, 15.1 million forced labourers are found in the Asia-Pacific and Arabian regions (International Labour Organization, 2022a).

On gender statistics, about 70 percent of women serve as domestic workers and approximately 11 million of these women are migrants (International Labour Organization, 2021). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020), women and girls together represent 69 percent of detected victims of trafficking in persons globally, with adult women representing 50 percent of detected victims and girls representing 19 percent. The two most common forms of exploitation are sexual exploitation, accounting for 50 percent of total detected cases, and labour exploitation, accounting for 38 percent. However, when forced labour revolves around domestic service, women and girls are the predominant victims (UN Women, 2023).

Domestic workers are those who perform care and maintenance of the household of a local or foreign employer. Their work may include tasks such as cleaning the house, cooking, washing and ironing clothes, taking care of children, elderly, or sick members of the family, gardening, guarding the house, driving, and even caring for household pets (U.S. Immigration, 2023). Of the 75.6 million migrant domestic workers worldwide, 76.2 percent are women. Domestic service is an important source of employment among female workers compared to

men (International Labour Organization, 2023a). Synthesizing the information above, it implies that female workers are the most victimized group in labour and human trafficking and that women are most commonly found in domestic work. Furthermore, domestic work bears a migratory character, entailing that such services are not limited within the country of origin of the female worker, instead they are almost exclusively in countries of labor importation.

According to the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report in 2021, the country has become a host supply of trafficked persons. The majority of these victims are women and girls, reflecting the current statistics mentioned above. Many women and girls are vulnerable due to the lack of legal protection from the time they are in school until adulthood. The Timorese Ministry of Finance and the Secretariat for Vocational Training and Employment launched a survey in 2021 to determine the labour trafficking situation of the country. The results revealed that women ranked higher than men in terms of the number of victims. The survey was based on a sample of 7,275 households around 13 municipalities in Timor-Leste, from a population of 1.3 million people. Those of working age are about 62.9 percent of the sum figure (Ministry of Finance and Secretariat for Vocational Training and Employment of Timor-Leste, 2021). For further illustration, Table 1 is provided below:

Table 1 Timor-Leste Labour Trafficking Status in 2021

Timor-Leste	Employed	Unemployed	Outside the labour trafficking	Total
Male	142.0	6.8	254.7	403.6
Female	92.3	5.8	307.7	405.8
Total	234.3	12.7	562.4	809.3
Urban				
Male	61.9	1.3	94.8	157.9
Female	39.4	1.4	122.1	162.9
Total	101.3	2.7	216.8	320.8
Rural				
Male	80.2	5.6	159.9	245.7
Female	52.9	4.4	185.6	242.9
Total	133.0	10.0	345.5	488.6

Source: Ministry of Finance and Secretariat for Vocational Training and Employment of Timor-Leste (2021)

Poor economic conditions and limited educational opportunities create trafficking vulnerabilities for Timorese nationals, according to the U.S. Department of State in their Trafficking in Persons Report for 2021. The country indeed is facing one of the toughest challenges a state has to resolve which is creating jobs for a rapidly growing population. The past 10 years of Timor-Leste has shown that poverty (United Nations Development Programme, 2023) and joblessness (O'Neill, 2023) has been constantly plaguing the island country and as such, citizens have grown restless and opted to look for greener pastures, even if it means working abroad. Having only regained sovereignty and self-governance 22 years ago, Timor-Leste still has a long way to go in terms of improving state affairs and economic and diplomatic policies, including migration and migrant employment. The country's lack of a relatively mature migration and migrant employment system has served to the advantage of trafficking groups and syndicates in luring citizens and non-Timorese nationals into labour and human trafficking activities operating in and outside of Timor-Leste. A few notable cases of Timorese domestic workers identified from the countries of Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates can be seen as an example of this problem.

In Malaysia, Timorese female migrant domestic workers were deceived by fraudulent recruitment agencies to work in Malaysia without a legal employment permit (Vicente, 2022). The victims were transported through the Indonesian-Timorese borders and then sent onwards to Malaysia bearing only a 30-day tourist visa. In the case of the United Arab Emirates, Sanchez (2022) reports the experience of 7 Timorese female migrant workers sent to Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The victims were approached and lured with promises of better employment and education prospects, opportunities to pay off debts, and earning a significantly larger income in US Dollars. It was found that the seven individuals were instead forced to work without an official contract and were locked in confining rooms to prevent them from escaping. The company only paid 200 Dirhams or 54 US

Dollars for all seven workers per day to complete some paperwork that they did not understand. One of the Timorese government's key officials, Fidelis Magalhães, sought the assistance of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Dili for the immediate repatriation of the 7 female victims in Dubai. Through thorough diplomatic cooperation, all 7 victims were eventually returned home safe in Timor-Leste (Radio and Television of Timor-Leste Online Livestreaming, 2022).

The U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Reports from 2003-2023 indicated that Timor-Leste has consistently remained under Tier 2 status. Tier 2 means countries are not fully compliant with the minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance. When COVID-19 struck the country in 2020-2021, the status went even further down from the Tier 2 Watchlist. This means that the concerned state requires special scrutiny because of an alarming spike in the number of victims along with the failure to provide evidence of increased efforts to combat the problem (U.S. Department of State, 2005). Understandably, the loss of economic resources and health uncertainties plunged the population into destitution, forcing many to bite into sketchy offers from traffickers about working abroad for better pay. However, since the decline of the pandemic, the human trafficking situation in Timor-Leste has not vastly improved and remains under-compliant to the minimum standards to prevent the illegal trade, compelling the need to closer examine the situation and understand the causes and factors as to why Timorese citizens continue to be entrapped in labour and human trafficking.

This research paper is divided into seven sections. The first section defines labour trafficking, its scale in both the global and national level, relevant government policies of Timor-Leste to combat labour and human trafficking, and model countries for the management and resolution of labour trafficking issues. The main research objectives are provided in the second section. The third section focuses on the methodology by describing the instrument to collect data and the profile of the participants of the research. The fourth section exhibits the findings of the study while the fifth section discusses the problems identified in the research in relation to the current literature and what possible recommendations are available to resolve the problem of labour trafficking. The sixth section provides the conclusion and the seventh and last section introduces the final recommendations of the research.

1.1 Labour trafficking around the world

According to the International Labour Organization (2022a), global estimates indicate that there are 50 million people who may be exposed to situations of modern slavery on any given day. The Global Victim of Trafficking Database (VoTD), the largest database on human trafficking, reported that there is a total of 49,032 million trafficking victims registered between 2002-mid to 2018. This figure represents more than 144 nationalities with incidence of trafficking to more than 170 destination countries. Nearly complete records exist for approximately 30,000 individuals, and 26,067 records provide information individuals reported being exploited (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). Women and girls together represent 69 percent of detected victims of trafficking in persons globally, with adult women representing 50 percent of detected victims and girls representing 19 percent (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020).

According to UN Women (2023), the two most common forms of human exploitation are sexual exploitation, accounting for 50 percent of their total detected cases, and labour exploitation, accounting for 38 percent. However, where forced labour revolves around domestic service, women and girls are the predominant victims (UN Women, 2023). In many ways, an unsafe form of migration is akin to human trafficking (Smit, 2004; as cited in Ullah, Yusof, & D'Aria, 2016). The risk of migration is also gendered due to women being historically exposed to gender discrimination and having less access to education and jobs (Ullah et al., 2016). Young girls mostly from Asia and the Pacific region create the majority of victims worldwide (SHARP, 2008:6, as cited in Ullah et al., 2016).

For example, Southeast Asia is known as an important hub for global trafficking networks and is particularly known as a transit region, significant source, and origin of trafficked people (Ullah, & Hossain, 2011). Most victims are trafficked as migrant workers, domestic slaves, sex workers, and sweatshop workers. Thailand is a major source, transit, and destination country for women subjected to sex and labour trafficking especially from neighboring countries of Lao PDR, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, and even littoral states such as Indonesia. A study of 94 migrant women revealed that they were lured abroad by false promises of traffickers offering them well-paid jobs as dancers, waitstaff, and domestic workers in Thailand. Many of them were unable to escape their situation due to debt bondage and their travel documents being confiscated and sold to their employers. Traffickers exploit these women's weaknesses being born in impoverished households, trapped in state conflicts such as those

in Myanmar, growing job competition in the homeland, ethnic vulnerability, and social isolation. Trafficking became possible due to geographic proximity of involved states, with the exemption of Indonesia requiring a sea voyage through Singapore. The study also noted that some border guards and police were complicit to acts of trafficking which allowed greater mobility for syndicates and groups to transport victims from one border to another (Ullah, & Hossain, 2011).

Women migrants originating from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal also experience exploitative and unsafe conditions. Lack of domestic income opportunities, natural disasters, and income differences between Arab and South Asian countries were identified to be among the push factors for women to migrate. Millions of these short-term, low-skilled women migrant workers bound for Arab countries fly to work as domestic helpers and garment workers. A study of 162 South Asian women reported their documents confiscated, 87 percent were confined in their employer's residence, 76 percent had their wages withheld, 73 percent suffered psychological abuse, 61 percent underwent physical abuse, and 50 percent were overworked (McCormack, Larsen, and Abul Husn, 2015, as cited in ElDidi et al., 2022). Tamkeen (2015, as cited in ElDidi et al., 2022) also reported around 70,000 female domestic workers from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines experienced various forms of abuses from Jordanian employers. Many of these female migrant workers are trapped in abusive conditions because migrating abroad requires a vast amount of funding which would place women in debt situations. Coupled with the Kafala system of the Arab countries, it breeds the perfect conditions for trafficking and debt bondage (ElDidi et al., 2022).

In the United States, a migrant's status is used as one of the biggest tools of control by perpetrators of labour trafficking. International recruiters promise visas and employment opportunities in the United States to unknowing victims and their families. This requires exorbitant amounts of money to finance their travel which traps them in debt and renders them powerless to escape their plight. Such cases are those employed in the agriculture and food service industries where the victims were brought illegally to the country and were forced to work on farms across the country that serve massive food distribution chains and stores (Goodman et al., 2021). Living conditions were poor and congregated, wages were scarce, and workplaces were deemed unhealthy. Domestic workers, on the other hand, are falsely promised to obtain an education in the United States. But soon find themselves manipulated and used as slaves with little to no pay, deplorable living conditions, and restricted access to the outside world. The United States Federal Government has estimated about 14,500 – 18,000 individuals are trafficked annually. Despite increased number of reports, the government is still struggling to detect and act on labour trafficking cases due to a gap in awareness and training of authorities, and victims who are dealing with trauma, fear of employer reprisal, and unfamiliarity of employee rights (Goodman et al., 2021). The clandestine nature of human trafficking is undoubtedly also a huge factor for the difficulty of prosecuting those responsible for such crimes (Ullah, & Hossain, 2011).

1.2 Labour trafficking in Timor-Leste

According to the Shareef (2023), Timor-Leste is a source, transit and destination country for trafficking. More than two-thirds of trafficking cases involve a Timorese being trafficked outside of the country, while the remaining one-third belong to trafficking within the country. Many of the victims are subjected to sexual exploitation and forced labour. Employers often withhold victims' passports and wages to keep them from running away. The victims themselves also lacked awareness of their labour rights, including trafficking and labour laws, and grievance channels to seek assistance and report the crime. Roughly around 40 percent of Timor-Leste's population live below the poverty line (Viera, 2022). According to the Asian Development Bank (2023), the 2023 forecast of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rate of Timor-Leste in 2023 is only at 2.8 percent, the lowest together with Myanmar. The government does not have enough jobs to recruit everyone for civil service, and there are not sufficient manufacturing industries and factories that can employ locals in massive numbers (Neves, 2019).

Addressing the growing unemployment for a rapidly young population has been a key priority in the government's economic policy goals since the early stages of independence. As evidenced by the Timor-Leste Labour Force Survey of 2021, more than half a million of Timorese nationals aged 15 and above are outside the labour force, with women exceeding men. The survey also reported that women are less likely to be engaged in wage-based employment which provides more job security and better working conditions. Women were more likely to be self-employed or work as a contributing family worker only, two types of employment categories regarded as vulnerable employment. This underlines that women have greater obstacles in accessing decent work (Ministry of Finance and Secretariat for Vocational Training and Employment of Timor-Leste, 2021). Table 2 provides further detail about the working age population of Timor-Leste outside the work force:

Table 2 Working Age Population Outside the Labour Force by Age and Gender – Timor-Leste 2021

Population Outside the Labour Force	Male	Female	Total
Aged 15+ years	254,700	307,700	562,400
By Age Group			
15-24	124,100	122,200	246,300
25-46	105,100	157,400	262,500
65+	25,600	28,000	53,600

Source: Ministry of Finance and Secretariat for Vocational Training and Employment of Timor-Leste (2021)

To remedy the ever-growing issue of joblessness, the government has opted for overseas employment opportunities. However, preparation for overseas work require at least 3-6 months of training before deployment. This has become a major problem for some Timorese nationals who wish to work immediately. Thus, fraudulent recruiters and manning agencies seized the opportunity of marketing quicker options to lure the victims into trafficking.

The National Directorate of Foreign Workers reports that Timor-Leste annually sends more than a hundred workers overseas since 2009 (Sanchez, 2022). However, according to the United Nations, at least around 500 victims of human trafficking are from Timor-Leste every year (European Centre for Law and Justice, 2023). This only means that the majority of the victims of human and labour trafficking are people who did not undergo through government channels when applying for jobs abroad. The majority of these victims are women and girls who are already vulnerable due to the lack of legal protection from the time they are in school until adulthood (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

1.3 Timorese government policies against labour trafficking

There are two essential laws enacted by the Timorese government to address human and labour trafficking. The first one is Law No. 9/2021 which refers to the establishment of the Commission to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons, otherwise known as Komisaun Luta Anti Traffico Humano (KLATU) in the Timorese language (Government of Timor-Leste, 2021). The commission aims to ensure that there is coordinated action between various stakeholders involved in the fight against human trafficking and define the necessary policies and strategies for effective prevention and combat against human traffickers. The commission is also duty-bound to promote and secure cooperation with foreign partners and bodies to properly respond to the transnational nature of the crime. Finally, the commission is tasked to also monitor the implementation of international conventions the government has ratified or will ratify in the field of human trafficking (Government of Timor-Leste, 2021).

Another statute in effect in Timor-Leste is Law No. 3/2017 otherwise known as Law on Prevention Against Trafficking in Persons and the Fourth Revised Penal Code. Article 2 provides the definition of human trafficking, while Article 163 provides the penalties and coverage of these penalties. Another power enshrined within Law No. 3/2017 includes the provision on non-discrimination, non-participation, criminal liability, forfeiture of property to the State, protection of victims and witnesses, exclusion of publicity of the judicial process, information on values and funds, lifting of secrecy, bank account control and secrecy obligations (Miranda Alliance, 2017).

Timor-Leste's Law on Prevention Against Trafficking in Persons demonstrated an impact only during the first few years of its implementation. From 2018 to 2019, there is an observed increase of investigative action to counter human traffickers and syndicates. According to the Trafficking in Persons Report of 2018 by the U.S. Department of State (2018), the Timorese government investigated 267 unconfirmed victims of trafficking, an increase of 91 cases from 2016. 9 of these are identified as genuine trafficking cases, which was strikingly a decrease from 79 in 2016. By 2019, the investigated cases scaled down to 65, with 5 of these cases confirmed as trafficking. From 2013-2019, Timor-Leste was under Tier 2 status, which meant that the state was not fully compliant with the minimum standards but were making significant efforts to bring itself into compliance. The Timorese government reported it did not have the capacity, expertise, or financial resources to train law enforcement on trafficking laws and victim identification, and relied on international organizations and foreign governments for training (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

From 2020-2021, Timor-Leste dropped further down the Tier 2 watchlist which meant that the island state requires special scrutiny because of an alarming spike in the number of victims along with the failure to provide evidence of increased efforts to combat the problem (U.S. Department of State, 2005). The lack of

expertise in understanding trafficking crimes, data collection methods, clear leadership roles among ministries, and devoted budget further decreased the government's capacity to combat the problem (U.S. Department of State, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic also hindered mobilization of government authorities and training (U.S. Department of State, 2022a). By 2022 and 2023, Timor-Leste regained its Tier 2 status, but nonetheless, is still not fully compliant to the standards. Drawing on these reports, it can be said that Law No. 3/2017 of Timor-Leste is not fully effective in curbing the incidence of human and labour trafficking.

Law No. 9/2021 which established the Commission to Combat Trafficking in Persons (KLATU) is still too early to be assessed for its efficiency. Currently, the Commission is still on its way to complete the draft for its National Action Plan (NAP) for 2022-2026. However, the U.S. Department of State (2022a) reported that the government did not conduct research to assess the human trafficking problem in the country, nor did it have a systematic approach in monitoring its anti-trafficking actions. In addition, Shareef (2023) added that the NAP is responsible in assigning each agency's roles and responsibilities in countering trafficking. But as of 2023, the NAP remains pending due to insufficient funding to establish a secretariat with the necessary budget to disseminate the draft NAP (U.S. Department of State, 2023a). There is also the issue of a low capacity of law enforcement and human resources to formulate a comprehensive response to combatting trafficking in persons. Drawing on these reports, the efficiency of Law No. 9/2021 remains questionable unless financial constraints have been addressed, and a proper methodical and systematic approach in understanding the scale and depth of human and labour trafficking has been established.

1.4 Model country for labour trafficking management and resolution

According to the International Labour Standards on Migrant Workers (ILMS) from 2016-2018, Indonesia scored the highest completion rate with at least one data entry for 18 out of 21 tables of indicators (International Labour Organization, 2022b). The government of Indonesia did this by establishing a government-monitored recruitment framework for the safe employment of Indonesian workers to major labor-importing countries such as Malaysia. The said framework or mechanism is called the One Channel System (OCS) program. Malaysia is one of the key labour-import destinations of Indonesia that experienced a spike of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers in 2021. This resulted to a mass repatriation to reduce the incidence of undocumented migration (Carvalho, Tang, & Zainal, 2022). To prevent the rise of undocumented migrant workers going forward, both governments engaged in significant diplomatic work to create the OCS program.

The OCS has 5 basic rules to guarantee migrant worker rights which includes, 1) zero registration fees, 2) minimum salary of 1,500 MYR (500 USD), 3) one day off policy for every week, 4) 8 hours of regular work in a day with the exemption of overtime duty, and 5) maximum of 6-person family unit per domestic worker. The OCS facilitates recruitment, departure and return of the migrant workers through authorized agencies recognized by both the Indonesian and Malaysian governments. Moreover, the government of Indonesia conducts regular evaluations and monitors the situations of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia every three months to ensure their safety and security (CNBC Indonesia, 2021).

The Philippines is also another notable country for anti-trafficking management and resolution. The country has been ranked Tier 1 by the U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons for 8 consecutive years since 2016 (Philippine Embassy in Washington D.C., 2023). The main agency tasked to address the problem of trafficking in persons is the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) which is composed of 9 government ministries and 3 non-governmental organizations representing women, children, and overseas workers. Prosecution efforts include expanding the anti-trafficking laws of the country, invest in training and capacity building of police officers, prosecutors, judges, and social workers. This has led to an increase in convictions in the past 5 years (British Institute of International and Comparative Law, 2022). Non-government organizations and civil society groups in partnership with the government provided immediate protection services such as shelter and financial support to victims of rescue operations. National government funds, although available, are too slow for the kind of urgency posed by anti-trafficking operations. Thus, IACAT is effective in the sense that it includes non-State actors' expertise and participation in the effort to fight trafficking in persons. IACAT also has regional offices to help local government units in improving trafficking prevention efforts such as training community stakeholders at the village level to be aware of human trafficking and various modus operandi employed by perpetrators. Local police are also capacitated to investigate trafficking cases, handle victims carefully, and forward cases appropriately to the prosecution authorities (British Institute of International and Comparative Law, 2022).

2. Objectives

- 1) To examine causes and factors related to labour trafficking among Timorese female migrant domestic workers.
- 2) To propose recommendations to the Timorese government to prevent labour trafficking of Timorese female migrant domestic workers.

3. Methods

This research used semi-structured interviews to gather information from the victims of labour trafficking as well as the representatives of the government who are concentrated on human trafficking. Semi-structured interviews allow the participants to elaborate more on their different stories and experiences about migrant worker life and the trafficking experience itself. While the semi-structured interviewing method has a few questions that are predetermined, the others may come as unplanned (George, 2023).

Selection of Timorese female migrant worker participants were considered based on the following criteria: 1) they experienced trafficking through recruitment from illegal agencies, 2) they did not possess a valid work permit upon employment, 3) they were forced to render work without payment, and 4) they were forced to render work under threat. In addition to this, the participants were also considered as no longer trafficked or were no longer under rehabilitation and protection of the Commission on the Fight Against Human Trafficking. This approach is essential to the study so that the participants can share their experiences without triggering much sensitivity and trauma on the issue at hand.

Meanwhile, the selection of Timorese government representatives was considered based on the following criteria: 1) they must be incumbent government officers and 2) have at least 10 years worth of experience in the work against human trafficking. The study was able to seek the expertise of two government officers. The first participant is the Chief of the Commission on the Fight Against Human Trafficking or KLATU in Timor-Leste. The second participant is the General Director of the Scientific Police and Criminal Investigation and Head of the International Police and Special Police Forensic Investigation unit of Timor-Leste.

The six female migrant worker participants were labeled accordingly as Participants A, B, C, D, E, and F to protect their privacy and to ensure the utmost confidentiality of their identities. The government representative participants, meanwhile, gave their full consent to use their legal names to be published in this research.

3.1 Participant Information

Table 3 Participant Information

No.	Participant	Gender	Work Experience	Location	Year Employed/Hired
1	A	Female	Migrant Domestic worker	United Kingdom	2021
2	B	Female	Migrant Domestic Worker	United Kingdom	2020
3	C	Female	Migrant Domestic Worker	Portugal	2020
4	D	Female	Migrant Domestic Worker	Portugal	2020
5	E	Female	Migrant Domestic Worker	Timor-Leste	2019
6	F	Female	Migrant Domestic Worker	Timor-Leste	2016
7	Mr. Vicente Brito	Male	Director-General of Scientific Police and Criminal Investigation (PCIC)	Timor-Leste	2002 – Ongoing
8	Mrs. Sandra S. Luzira	Female	Chief of Anti-Human Trafficking Commission (KLATU)	Timor-Leste	2010 – Ongoing

4. Findings

This section is divided into three parts. The first part will present the causes and factors of labour trafficking in Timor-Leste. The second part will exhibit the proposed solutions of the government officials of Timor-Leste. Finally, the third part will showcase the recommendations from the participants of the study.

4.1 Causes and factors of labour trafficking in Timor-Leste

There were three common causes of labour trafficking revealed during the interviews. The first problem was the high cost of living in Timor-Leste. The second problem refers to the lack of domestic employment, and the third and final factor is the lack of awareness and education among the Timorese population.

Participant A reported that the economic and financial situation in their country is difficult and that even a public servant salary is not enough to meet daily necessities. Participant A added more information to this in the following statement:

The economic situation in Timor-Leste is uncertain, a mess, and the cost of living is so high. Every member needs to help their family with daily necessities, school expenses, building a house, and having a better life after the war and civil war. Even the public servant receives a very low salary that is not even enough for their daily life. Therefore, most Timorese people women and men decide to work abroad as migrant workers and send back the money to help their families in Timor-Leste. (Participant A, Personal Communication, July 29 2023).

Participant B also cited that the higher income of a migrant domestic worker was a principal motivation for her to resolve their family's poor economic situation. Participant B (Personal Communication, August 01, 2023) said, "The poor economic situation in Timor-Leste and the family's financial situation are the main reasons forcing me to work as a migrant worker to find high-income work to cover family necessities"

The second factor identified in the study is that there is an apparent lack of domestic jobs available in Timor-Leste, especially with the vacant female workforce. Participant C explained that women experience more difficulties in landing a job because competition with the male workforce is already tight in Timor-Leste. She elaborated more on this point by stating:

There is no work for Timorese women in Timor-Leste that can accommodate me to work as a female labour worker. The competition to get a job in Timor-Leste was tight and the living cost was very expensive. It drives me as a housewife to take the initiative to find work overseas to earn money and to support my family's financial situation in my home country (Participant C, Personal communication, August 09, 2023)

Mr. Vicente Brito, Director of the Scientific Police and Criminal Investigation (PCIC) office also recognized joblessness as a major push factor for the identified victims to enter the circle of trafficking. Mr. Brito explained the following situation:

Joblessness is considered a principal motivation for the victims to enter the circle of trafficking mode for operation. They were easy to be tricked because they had one target to reach that is to find a job without thinking about the risk (Mr. Vicente Brito, Director of PCIC, August 28, 2023).

The third and final cause of the ongoing labour trafficking situation in Timor-Leste was the lack of education and awareness among the Timorese population, especially the female migrant domestic workers. Due to their status as under- or uneducated, or as non-speakers of the English or Portuguese language, many of the workers were quick to trust the information spewed by the traffickers and their friends without hesitation. This was the case of Participant F, who naively trusted a friend's offer, and reported the following experience:

I was getting this information from my friend who works for her a Chinese female boss in Dili. My friend told me the Chinese lady was looking for a female Timorese to be a domestic worker in her house. My friend called me and offered this job to me. The Chinese woman told us to prepare our passports and that she would provide us with the ticket, visa, and all the necessary documents. She also convinced us for not to worry and that everything will be handled by her (Participant F, Personal Communication, August 12, 2023).

In the case of Participant E, she was entrapped in the circle of labour trafficking through an enticing offer in the social media platform, Facebook. Participant E detailed more of this scenario in the following statement:

I read the available information in the company's social media profile regarding their services, and some job descriptions, which made me interested to try. I pressed the like button on their advertisement, and they quickly sent me a message about their program. They convinced me and told me of the responsibilities of the job which made me believe in its authenticity. So, I applied for the job and sent my documents to them. They put me through an interview, and I passed the test. After that, they processed my application and eventually my ticket to Thailand (Participant E, Personal Communication, August 1, 2023).

4.2 Proposed Solutions of the government of Timor-Leste to combat labour and human trafficking

There are four solutions proposed by Mr. Vicente Brito of the Scientific Police and Criminal Investigation (PCIC) office and Ms. Sandra Carvalho Salgueiro of the Commission to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons (KLATU). The four proposed solutions are as follows: 1) conduct information campaigns in the localities, 2) conduct investigations on reports related to trafficking obtained from victims and concerned citizens, 3) punishment of traffickers through policy measures and criminal prosecution, and 4) engage in international cooperation to combat the transnational nature of labour and human trafficking.

The first solution aims to educate the citizens of Timor-Leste, especially those in high-risk communities or far-flung areas of the island country to help them detect any potential trafficking activity and make an informed decision about job opportunities abroad. Ms. Sandra Carvalho Salgueiro elaborated this point on the following statement:

KLATU and PCIC will educate them on how to protect themselves and prevent any incident that may lead them to become victims of human trafficking. PCIC also tries to explain to the population what should they do if they suspect something or someone engaged in this illicit activity or has gotten trapped as a victim of human trafficking (Sandra Carvalho Salgueiro, Personal Communication, August 15, 2023)

The second solution is to conduct investigations on reports related to human and labour trafficking which are obtained from both victims and members of the communities in Timor-Leste. Ms. Sandra Carvalho Salgueiro further explained the process by sharing:

PCIC cannot do anything without information from the victims or the victim's family. Through the report from the victim or family, PCIC can start opening the process, submit the case to the General Prosecutor's Office, and request to open the investigation (Sandra Carvalho Salgueiro, Personal Communication, August 15, 2023).

The third solution proposed in the study was through criminal prosecution of identified traffickers through Law No. 3/2017 which stipulates the crime of human trafficking and the penalties associated with the illegal activity. This includes subjecting guilty persons to 8-20 years of imprisonment. Ms. Sandra Carvalho Salgueiro reported the following explanation:

Timor-Leste adopted Law No. 3 of 2017 which defines the act of human trafficking and also Article 163 of the Penal Code citing human trafficking as a criminal act. Transporting people, turning them into modern slaves, deceiving and taking advantage of a person's economic destitution is a crime. Timor-Leste adopted this law to fight against human trafficking issues in the country to protect its citizens and avoid becoming victims.

The fourth and final solution is to engage in international cooperation with other states. Mr. Vicente Brito of the Scientific Police and Criminal Investigation emphasized the need for international linkages and support to fight human trafficking. The transnational nature of human trafficking requires a balanced coordination on both national and international levels. Mr Vicente Brito gave more detail on this by reporting:

PCIC and the National Police alone cannot solve the problem of labour trafficking. To conclude, it needs conditions or measures to enforce such as 1) Prevention, 2) Investigation, 3) Protection for the victims, 4) Punishment, 5) Cooperation and Coordination with the National Police, and 6) Cooperation and Coordination with international partners. Because labour trafficking is an organized and serious crime, it is then complicated and can operate on a trans-national level (Vicente Brito, Personal Communication, August 28, 2023)

4.1.3 Recommendations from Timorese female migrant domestic workers regarding labour trafficking

There are three main recommendations suggested by the participants to resolve and escape labour trafficking. The first recommendation is to build or secure personal linkages at home and abroad in cases of emergency. This is exemplified in the experience of Participant B when she reported the following scenario:

I did not call the embassy because my family and my friend promised to find a lawyer for me, the other reason was told by a friend, that if the embassy is contacted, the only solution is to send me back to Timor Leste. I cannot go home because all the money was used to pay the agency for the ticket and everything was from a personal loan from my family, therefore I have to work in the UK so I can pay it back. The only way is to pay for the lawyer and a friend of mine has loaned me the money to pay for the services. I have to repay my friend for 1,800 GBP which can only be done if work in the UK. (Participant B, Personal Communication, July 28, 2023).

The second recommendation is to have further government intervention and representation. During her time working overseas in Portugal, Participant C noticed an increasing population of undocumented Timorese citizens sleeping in outdoor recreational facilities in places such as Lisbon. The situation reached the attention of the Timorese and Portuguese government which Participant C reports in the following passage:

At that time, the President of Portugal personally visited the jobless Timorese migrant workers in the parks of Lisbon to observe the difficulties faced by the workers. President of Timor-Leste, Jose Ramos Horta, immediately visited us in Portugal and aided us in the form of repatriation and proper documentation. With the help of IOM, we were given the option to return home with free flights or to find employment in Portugal. I decided to stay in Portugal and eventually received a permit to work legally. (Participant C, Personal Communication, August 09, 2023).

Participant A also sought the government's representation when she was fighting for her compensation of her unpaid labour. Participant A shared more of this information by stating:

We tried to seek help from the Consulate of Timor-Leste in Darwin so we can get our salary back, because it's already been three months and the agency never paid us... The consulate then sought the services of Attorney Carla Chung to hear our case and make representations to the company. After hearing all the information and evidence from us, Ms. Chung together with a representative of the consulate negotiated with the agency and company to address our problems. Finally, the agency gave back all our money after working for three months (Participant A, Personal Communication, July 29, 2023).

The third and final recommendation was in the form of assistance from external groups and individuals. These groups can be either from civil society or non-government organizations or simply private citizens who can extend humanitarian and compassionate assistance to victims. An example of this is with the case of Participant D when she reported the following situation:

After knowing that we were deceived by the agency and the company, we stopped working and we did not even have the chance to claim our salary. We did not have a proper working visa, therefore a legal way to sue the company will not work. Moreover, there is not enough money to pay for legal services at that time... The only help we got was from some activists in Portugal

who offered us free lunch and dinner, we were homeless. Some people also offer a camp to stay in to avoid rain and cold. The government was only able to help us when the mass repatriation happened (Participant D, Personal Communication, August 09, 2023).

Participant F, on the other hand, was able to escape her labour trafficking situation through the help of a private Timorese-Chinese couple who rescued her from her employer's residence. Participant F shared more of this in detail:

After speaking with one of the female migrant workers, she connected me to a married couple in China. A Timorese woman married to a Chinese man came to my place immediately. I was wondering how they found my location, and they said that they knew my address from the friend whom I called last time and they heard that I was in trouble. So, that time they took me immediately to the Embassy of Timor-Leste China. I did not bring any clothes, not even my passport because the Chinese Lady did not want to give my passport back to me, because she did not want me to leave. They took me away and now I am free (Participant F, Personal Communication, August 12, 2023).

5. Discussion

This section involves two parts. The first part will provide the analysis of the findings in connection with the recent literature to extract the main problems of the study. The second part will feature the possible recommendations to the Timorese government to prevent labour trafficking.

5.1 Current situation of labour trafficking among Timorese female migrant domestic workers

The study identified four main problems related to the persistence of human and labour trafficking in Timor-Leste which are 1) poverty, 2) unemployment, 3) lack of awareness and education, and the 4) lack of enforcement of the laws.

The first problem is the high cost of living and poverty in Timor-Leste. According to the European Centre for Law and Justice (2023), 42 percent of Timor-Leste's population live below the poverty line and human traffickers can entice their victims through false promises of employment and education opportunities. In addition to this, the Asian Development Bank (2023) released a 2023 forecast of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rate of Timor-Leste in 2023 is only at 2.8 percent, the lowest together with Myanmar's 2.8 percent. In 2018, the World Bank (2018) reported that the average cost of meeting basic needs grew from 25.14 USD to 46.37 USD per person, with Dili, the most urbanized district, experiencing the highest spike in poverty.

The United Nations Development Programme (2023) also released the 2023 Multidimensional Poverty Index of Timor-Leste. The multidimensional Poverty Index or MPI measures each person's overlapping deprivations across 10 indicators in three equally weighted dimensions: health, education, and standard of living. For better illustration, Figure 1 is provided below:

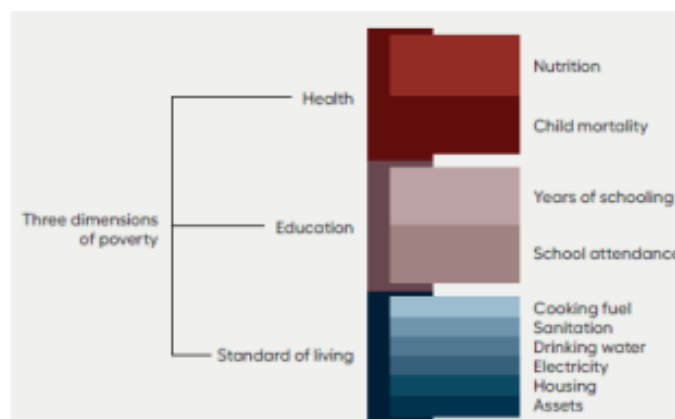


Figure 1 Structure of the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index
Source: UNDP (2023)

Based on the analysis of the data available, 48.3 percent or 637,000 people as of 2021 in Timor-Leste are multidimensionally poor while an additional 26.8 percent or 354,000 people as of 2021 are classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. The intensity of deprivations in Timor-Leste, which is the average score among people living in multidimensional poverty is 45.9 percent. In terms of comparing multidimensional poverty with monetary poverty, the headcount of the incidence of multidimensional poverty is 29.3 percent higher than the incidence of monetary poverty. This implies that individuals living above the monetary poverty line may still suffer deprivations in health, education, and/or standard of living. For further illustration, Table 4 is provided below to show the percentage difference of Timor-Leste versus the Philippines, Indonesia, and the rest of East Asia and the Pacific.

Table 4 The most recent MPI for Timor-Leste relative to selected countries and regions

	Survey year	MPI value	Head count (%)	Intensity of deprivations	Population share (%)			Contribution of deprivation in dimension to overall multidimensional poverty (%)		
					Vulnerable to multi-dime-sional poverty	In severe multi-dimen-sional poverty	Below the income poverty line	Health	Edu-cation	Standard of living
Timor-Leste	2016	0.222	48.3	45.9	26.8	17.4	24.4	29.3	23.1	47.6
Indonesia	2017	0.014	3.6	38.7	4.7	0.4	3.5	34.7	26.8	38.5
Philippines	2017	0.024	5.8	41.8	7.3	1.3	3.0	20.3	31.0	48.7
East Asia and the Pacific	-	0.022	5.1	42.4	14.4	0.9	0.8	28.1	35.8	36.1

Source: From “Global Multidimensional Poverty Index” by UNDP 2023, Timor-Leste Human Development Report, pg.2.

The issue of poverty was conveyed by both Participants A and E. Participant A stated that the economic situation in Timor-Leste is a mess and the cost of living is very high. Every member of the family needed to bring in some money to help meet the daily necessities such as food, utilities, education, and shelter. Participant E added that the poor economic situation in Timor-Leste and her own family's financial troubles are the main reasons that forced her and other female Timorese citizens to find higher income abroad.

This problem resonated in the study of Nath (2019) wherein 20 percent of the population in Bangladesh live in extreme poverty. Bangladesh is also the second most affected country in South Asia in terms of income poverty with 18.5 percent of the population living below the international poverty line (Deyshappriya, 2018). Women needed to become migrant domestic workers to find money and send remittances to pay off necessities such as food and clothing to survive. More specifically, poverty is the main cause of the migration of Bangladeshi women. Poverty is also identified as a key driving factor in the study of Fabbri et al. (2023) among victims of labour trafficking. From a dataset of 50,000 victims from 2002 to June 2018, women made up of the majority of the sample and nearly 90 percent self-identified themselves as poor. EIDidi et al. (2022) also mentioned that for India, poverty is the most important push factor for short-term migration work. Providing a better future for their families and continuing to stay away due to greater gains abroad are also pointed out as reasons for many women to pursue migrant domestic work (Moors, Jureidini, Özbay, & Sabban, 2009). Wilson (2013) also recognized that poverty is a central driver of human trafficking in Indonesia, citing 32 million Indonesians living below the poverty line.

The second problem is that there is a massive scarcity of domestic jobs available for female workers in Timor-Leste. This is reflected in Timor-Leste's Labour Force Survey Report of 2021, citing unemployment reaching 12,700 in population, leading to an overall unemployment rate of 5.1 percent. Female job seekers had a higher unemployment rate of 5.9 percent compared to their male counterparts at 4.6 percent (Ministry of Finance and Secretariat of State for Vocational Training and Employment of Timor-Leste, 2021). As conveyed by Participant C, there is no opportunity available for Timorese women in the employment sector. The competition to get a job in Timor-Leste is already tight among the stronger male workers. This problem was also mentioned

by Mr. Vicente Brito of the Scientific Police and Criminal Investigation, stating that joblessness is considered as a principal motivation for the victims to wander into the trafficking ring.

Fabbri et al. (2023) also reported that 90 percent of the dataset of labour and human trafficking victims in IOM's VoTD indicated that they migrated from poor countries to find better employment opportunities. EIDidi, et al. (2022) also cited that the lack of domestic income generation opportunities is also a considerable push factor for the short-term migration of South Asian women to West Asia. Even among those who may have had the opportunity to work locally, many women would still engage in migrant domestic work as they can earn ten times what they can make presently in their country of origin. This is true with the case of South and Southeast Asian women (Moors et al., 2009). In 2016, the Timorese government announced that unemployment has reached 11 percent since private sector work in the capital is limited (Wigglesworth, & Boxer, 2017).

The unemployment history of Timor-Leste for the past 20 years demonstrates that only a year after its independence from Indonesia, it consistently moved in an upward trend beginning in 2010. The unemployment rate experienced a slight drop at 4.45 percent in 2019 before shooting up an all-time high of 4.97 percent in 2021 during COVID-19. As of 2022, the unemployment rate sloped down to 4.86 percent (O'Neill, 2023). For better illustration, Figure 2 is shown below:

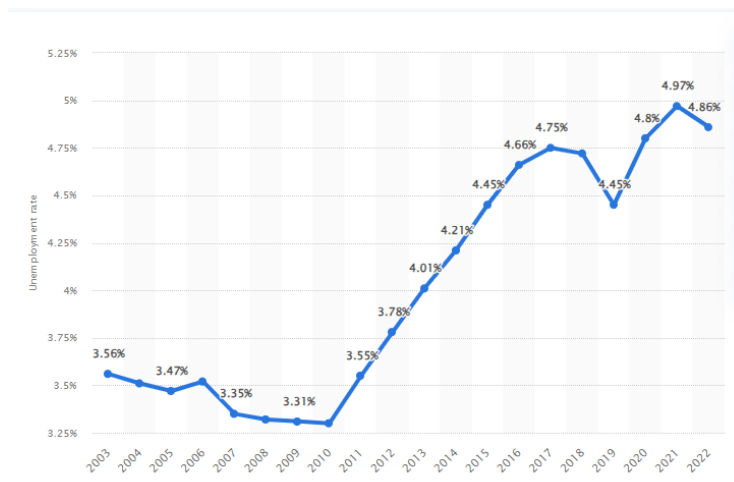


Figure 2 Timor-Leste: Unemployment Rate from 2003 to 2022
Source: O'Neill (2023)

The third problem is the lack of education among Timorese female domestic workers. Participant D, E, and F had no higher education experience or keen awareness of trafficking and relied only on a recruiter's eloquence in marketing, the internet, and word-of-mouth referrals to accept unscrupulous job offers.

According to the Trafficking in Persons Report from 2023 and 2022 in Timor-Leste, limited educational opportunities create trafficking vulnerabilities for Timorese nationals, particularly women and girls from rural areas (U.S. Department of State, 2023a; U.S. Department of State, 2022a). The United States Agency for International Development (2022) also underscored the lack of educational opportunity as one of the drivers for human trafficking in Timor-Leste. Out of 100 Timorese adults, only 36 percent know how to protect themselves from human trafficking and only 19 out of 100 Timorese children know how to do the same.

A similar situation was also witnessed among Indonesian migrant workers who became victims due to lack of awareness and education. Data from BP3TKI or The Indonesian Migrant Worker Placement and Protection Service Center reported that most Indonesian female migrant domestic workers were found as illegal workers and victims due to their lack of education and knowledge about the government's programs and centers for migrant protection (Mahardika, & Wicaksono, 2020). In addition to this, Vijayarasa (2016) added that in trafficking discourse, a widely accepted assumption is that there exists a relationship between levels of education and migratory decisions that can lead to unsafe and exploitative work. Those who are better-educated are more likely to leave under safer conditions than their less-educated peers. Therefore, victims of trafficking are presumed to have a lower capacity to assess the risks associated with entering a transaction or signing a contract.

The International Monetary Fund (2022) published a report about Timor-Leste's Human Development Index from 2000 to 2019. Human Development Index or HDI is the composite measurement of a nation's longevity, income, and educational growth (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Based on this report, Timor-Leste's HDI has improved steadily until the mid-2010s but has witnessed a decline onwards until 2019. Figure 3 below shows a comparison of Timor-Leste to East Asia and the Pacific Region and the rest of the world:

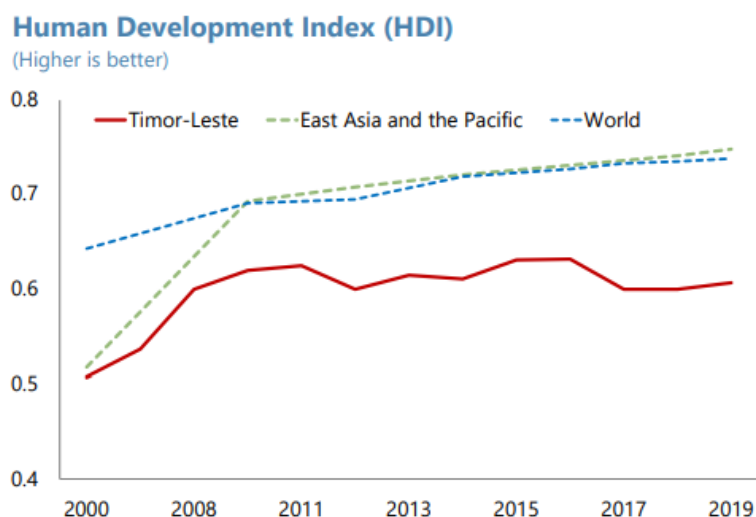


Figure 3 Human Development Index of Timor-Leste

Source: From "Human Development Report" by IMF Human Development Report, 2020, Pg.25.

The Timorese government also acknowledged that the lack of financial resources to facilitate re-education and training for law enforcement authorities to get them familiarized with various forms of trafficking, categorize trafficking cases, and properly identify victims, stalled the government's full capacity to attack the problem (U.S. Department of State, 2018 - 2022). Pandemic-related restrictions and delayed passage of federal budgets also hindered the government's anti-trafficking training for personnel and the public (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Furthermore, Timorese law enforcement bodies lacked training, data management systems, and IT infrastructure to conduct investigative research in trafficking cases (U.S. Department of State, 2023a).

Law No. 3 of 2017 and Law No. 9 of 2021 could have made a stronger impact in terms of raising the level of awareness among the citizens and equipping authorities involved in trafficking intervention with sufficient training in handling trafficking and gathering and managing data obtained in such operations. Disseminating information to the wider public and conducting a countrywide anti-trafficking awareness campaign has been greatly restrained due to budget limitations, lack of necessary training and knowledge development of law enforcement authorities, absence of 24-hour anti-trafficking contact lines, and linguistic impediments in mastering and understanding Portuguese, a language from which all laws in Timor-Leste are required to be published from (U.S. Department of State, 2023a; U.S. Department of State, 2022).

Lastly, the research identified the lack of enforcement of anti-trafficking laws as the fourth problem. At present, the paradigm through which the Timorese government operates its laws and response in trafficking in persons is through the 3P principle: prevention, protection, and prosecution. In context, this translates largely to depending on reports raised by concerned citizens and/or victims of trafficking and their families. Following the provisions of Law No. 3/2017, once a report is received, the Scientific Police and Criminal Investigation Office will file a request to the Public Prosecution Office to open an investigation of the report. Without information from victims or concerned citizens, PCIC cannot act independently. Once a case is opened, PCIC investigates and detains the perpetrators, reports to the Public Prosecution Office, and waits for a court decision on the case. PCIC will also issue a suspension notice to erring agencies, and if proven guilty by the court, will be shut down and criminalized subsequently as part of its protection process. As for the prevention process, this is mostly achieved through community interaction with locals and providing information campaigns to raise awareness of human trafficking, and encouraging residents to report any suspicious activity to authorities.

The current laws of Timor-Leste on trafficking in persons display a serious consequence to violators and criminals with 8-20 years of imprisonment (Miranda Alliance, 2017). However, to say that the law is ineffective would be incorrect as the contents of the law appear to not be the problem, however, the budget is not sufficient to support, implement and maintain these laws (Shareef, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2019). In the prevention front, insufficient funding resulted in law enforcement authorities lacking the expertise in victim identification, categorizing trafficking cases from non-trafficking ones, and having a thorough understanding of trafficking policies and processes in anti-trafficking operations and what to do next once a victim has been rescued. Information campaigns in remote and high-risk areas were sparsely conducted due to logistical costs. Additionally, what available funds leftover were not directed towards research (U.S. Department of State, 2022a) to assess the depth of human and labour trafficking in the country and understand the problem in a bigger picture. Insufficient funds also play a role in launching a database to systemize the management of trafficking cases (U.S. Department of State, 2022a).

On the protection front, financial constraints resulted in a lower number of active law enforcement figures, judges, prosecutors, and administrative personnel to render the required protection services of the government and enforce anti-trafficking laws. The human resource budget and the cost to erect and maintain protection facilities and services such as food and shelter, psychological counseling, and reintegration projects all of which are essential, are all under-supported, if not pending, for additional budget allocation. The National Action Plan itself, which is implemented and assessed every 5 years, also remains pending due to budgetary issues in establishing a Secretariat and dissemination of the plan to stakeholders and involved government agencies (U.S. Department of State, 2023a).

Prosecution efforts are likewise affected by financial restrictions. Judicial authorities also require extensive training and re-education to expand their understanding of human trafficking and help interpret the current laws to deliver true justice to survivors and recommend necessary amendments or modifications on the current laws in order for the country to adapt and respond to the ever-evolving nature of trafficking operations. Witness protection programs also need to be strengthened to assure citizens that reporting cases of trafficking will guarantee their safety and encourage them to actively participate in the fight against trafficking since the PCIC at present cannot act without tips or intelligence from citizens to be submitted to the public prosecutor's office for investigation. Without substantial financial support, judicial figures cannot keep abreast on the situation of human trafficking and learn from other judicial systems and practices in other countries to apply in Timor-Leste.

The laws of Timor-Leste contain the 3P principle of anti-human trafficking response and has reasonably strong criminal consequences on traffickers and guilty persons. Unless the political will of the government to increase its budget for anti-trafficking intervention and the responses are changed, the laws will remain ineffective no matter how many years of imprisonment and fines are stipulated as consequences of the crime. Without supporting the people who will implement and mobilize the law, the law policy will only be in effect on paper. Investing on capacity-building opportunities for law enforcement authorities and auxiliary units, research and investigation on trafficking, information dissemination are all segmented but inter-connected efforts essential to fortify and reinforce the whole system of anti-trafficking mechanism available in the country.

5.2 Possible recommendations to the Timorese government to prevent labour trafficking among female migrant domestic workers

There are two possible recommendations that this research suggests to address labour trafficking among Timorese female migrant domestic workers. These are 1) to increase the capacity of law enforcement authorities through additional training and budget, and 2) to create livelihood and skills training program to address poverty and lack of income opportunities.

The first recommendation is to increase the capacity of law enforcement authorities through additional training and budget. Timor-Leste already has existing laws related for the combat against human trafficking. However, full enforcement of the law is hampered by budget issues and lack of expertise of government authorities in the field (Shareef, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2021; U.S. Department of State, 2019). Thus, policy change may not be the best remedy since any law, no matter how well thought out, would be futile without the financial backbone to support it and mobilize its law enforcers. According to the British Institute of International and Comparative Law (2022), genuine political will in fighting human trafficking involves prioritization of the issue and laying aside budget and funding. Without proper budget support, information drive campaigns in communities, mobilization of investigators, setting up database systems for a more orderly archival and management of records,

and learning and development for law enforcement authorities, all crucial to the success of a policy, will keep the law from exercising its fullest potential.

The Timorese government must place the issue of human trafficking as a priority agenda and allocate the necessary budget for its law enforcers to effectively respond to the problem of human and labour trafficking. A good example of this is with the Thai government and their efforts to suppress human trafficking. The Thai government increased its budget allocation to 10.69 percent in 2021, totaling to 4,460.55 million THB or 135.17 million USD. The purpose was to ensure continuing, systematic and effective efforts to fight human trafficking, proactively prosecuting offenders and complicit officials, and providing necessary protection and assistance to victims and vulnerable groups (Royal Thai Government, 2021). In terms of prosecution, results showed that in 2021, a total of 182 human trafficking cases were initiated, increasing the number to 133 cases or 36.84 percent in 2022. In the protection front, the length of stay of a victim in shelters decreased from 158 days in 2020 to 143 days in 2021 due to a more effective prosecution process and periodic reassessment of victim's readiness for reintegration. The courts also ordered greater financial remedies and compensation to victims with a 123.9 percent increase compared to year 2020. As a labor destination, preventive efforts of the Thai government included extending a foreign worker's permit to work and stay and ensure access to protection services and legal benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic. This benefited 2,328,409 migrant workers to reduce their vulnerability to human trafficking (Royal Thai Government, 2021).

The Philippines is also another country recognized for its efforts in combatting human trafficking. The U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons has ranked the country as Tier 1 for 8 years in a row since 2016 (Philippine Embassy in Washington D.C., 2023). One of its key developments includes the substantial funding of its anti-trafficking body, the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking. On the prevention front, the government allocated 68.4 million PHP (1.34 million USD) to the IACAT Secretariat's budget for 2021 from 65.2 million PHP in 2020. This created 76 permanent staff positions to increase IACAT's manpower and services (U.S. Department of State, 2022b). The increased budget also enabled the government to provide further protection services to 1,802 victims from 1,534 in 2020. In addition, the government's Department of Foreign Affairs also dispersed 62.8 million PHP to aid overseas Filipino workers in distress with airfare, meal allowance, shelter, medical care, and other needs. The funding also went to 431 potential victims of human trafficking identified in 9 Philippine foreign service posts (U.S. Department of State, 2022b). Prosecution efforts slowed down due to pandemic-related issues such as delayed in-person law enforcement action brought about by personnel shortages, increased health protocols, and mandatory quarantines (U.S. Department of State, 2022b). However, the government in the following year extended its efforts and added 33 new prosecutors as task force members for IACAT-led prosecution operations, increasing the total number to 433. Additionally, the government also amended the anti-trafficking law with the adoption of anti-online sexual abuse or exploitation of children (OSAEC) and anti-child sexual abuse or exploitation materials (CSAEM) act (U.S. Department of State, 2023b).

At present, the annual budget of the Timorese government to address trafficking in persons for 2022 and 2023 is 475,000 USD (U.S. Department of State, 2023a). Only a portion of which is allocated to KLATU, resulting in a standstill of the National Action Plan due to the lack of budget to establish a Secretariat and dissemination of its draft. The scarcity of funds also contributed to limited action of law enforcement authorities in investigating reports, prosecuting suspects, conducting information campaigns, and equipping police officers, judges, and prosecutors with the necessary training and knowledge to expand their expertise on the subject. Partnerships with international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other non-governmental organizations currently help bridge this gap (Shareef, 2023). While partnerships with these institutions matter and should continue, moving forward, the government should take serious consideration in increasing the budget for human trafficking response as demonstrated by fellow ASEAN countries of Thailand and the Philippines. International aid from developed countries, such as between Australia and the Philippines (British Institute of International and Comparative Law, 2022), is also a welcome reinforcement to bolster anti-trafficking efforts. While this is not a one-size-fits-all solution, a solid financial backbone can greatly improve the conditions of anti-trafficking response in Timor-Leste and equip the state and the public with the necessary tools and knowledge to counter such crimes.

The second recommendation is to alleviate conditions of impoverished households and unemployment through livelihood and skills training programs among Timorese families. Participant E recommended that there should be livelihood training programs from the government aside from resorting to overseas employment only. Sandra Carvalho Salgueiro, Chief of the Commission on the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons (KLATU), also suggested about creating livelihood or entrepreneurial training programs for women to reduce their risks of

becoming victims and provide them income-generating opportunities. The Chief also added that this livelihood and entrepreneurial initiative can be an opportunity for reintegration as well for the victims.

An example of using livelihood and skills training program to alleviate poverty and unemployment is exemplified in India, which includes the critical role of the private sector. The Indian government and the Apparel and Export Promotion Council of India (AEPC) launched a training center, taking in 30 young men and women ranging from 22-25 years old who are considered vulnerable to trafficking and taught skills on apparel tailoring. The initiative also allows the participants to learn the various dimensions of the enterprise from production, plant and machinery maintenance, and marketing. (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023b).

The same approach is seen in Thailand wherein the national government, through the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS), launched 8 Women and Family Developing Learning Centers. These centers conducted vocational skill development courses among 5,130 women at risk. The said program benefitted 7,035 women and allowed support and networking amongst themselves (Royal Thai Government, 2018). Non-governmental organizations such as Blue Dragon Children's Foundation in Northern Vietnam also provided skills training to vulnerable groups. The results yielded that 88 percent of reintegration support recipients were found to have a sustainable livelihood source and are no longer at risk of re-trafficking (Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, 2021). The Sustainable Hospitality Alliance meanwhile supported 12 at-risk youths and 2 trafficking survivors in its vocational training program. 57 percent of the participants successfully graduated from the training program and 68 percent secured full-time employment in the hospitality sector (Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, 2021).

The Timorese government may do the same in their country by partnering with international and local non-governmental organizations in creating livelihood projects and skills development programs to equip poor households with income-generating opportunities and knowledge on particular job areas such as hospitality, fabric and the apparel-making industry, jewelry-making, cooking, etc. The government can also create free or subsidized vocational training scholarship programs through its Ministry of Labour or equivalent office that will allow citizens, both local and former migrants, to learn how to make and do trade. The Timorese government could also boost its training centers and skills development programs through bilateral agreements with the vocational institutions of other governments such as in fellow Portuguese-speaking countries of Brazil and Portugal. These more mature countries can impart knowledge and skills of particular trade and industry they are known for to help the much younger country of Timor-Leste improve its capacity building and standard of living.

6. Conclusion

This research aims to achieve two objectives. The first one is to examine the causes and factors of labour trafficking among Timorese female Migrant domestic workers. The second one is to provide possible recommendations to the Timorese government to prevent labour trafficking of Timorese Female Migrant Domestic Workers. By interviewing Timorese female migrant domestic workers, the following summarizes the challenges found and what recommendations are applicable to these problems.

6.1 The current situation of Labour Trafficking among Timorese female migrant domestic workers

There are 3 problems identified in examining the situation of Timorese female migrant domestic workers who were victims of labour trafficking. The first problem is rooted in the poverty situation in Timor-Leste. This has become one of the main reasons for Timorese female migrant domestic workers to find jobs abroad. The second problem indicates the lack of domestic jobs for the Timorese population. Without local job opportunities in the country, Timorese female workers were compelled to venture abroad to find a job that would secure their needs and ultimately, their survival. The last problem is the lack of decent and proper education. Most of the Timorese female workers were uneducated or were undereducated before entering the migrant labour industry. Because of this lack of information and formal education, all of the victims were unable to detect the signs of human trafficking and deflect traffickers and syndicates. Without knowing the proper process of migrant employment, the Timorese female migrant workers placed their trust in these illegal agencies and companies which brought them into labour trafficking.

6.2 Possible recommendations to the Timorese government to prevent labour trafficking

The participants gave three main recommendations to resolve the problem of labour trafficking. The first recommendation is to promote livelihood and skills training program for locals and former migrant workers. The second recommendation is to create more local jobs through investment of local businesses and invitation of

international and multi-national companies. The third and final recommendation is to intensify information drive campaigns to the localities and boost training among law enforcement authorities.

7. Recommendations

This final section is divided into two parts. The first part provides recommendations to the Timorese government in combating labour and human trafficking. The second part is dedicated to the Timorese female migrant domestic workers.

7.1 Recommendation for the Timorese Government

1. The Timorese government is recommended to place the issue of human trafficking as a top priority agenda and allocate the necessary budget for its law enforcers to effectively respond to the problem of human and labour trafficking. This includes extensive research on the ground, training of police officers, judges, prosecutors, and administrative personnel on their role against human trafficking, widespread information dissemination in communities, and investment of technological tools that can systemize the collection, storage, and management of data pertinent to human and labour trafficking.
2. The Timorese government is also recommended to generate programs or build partnerships with developed countries, international and local non-governmental organizations to create livelihood projects and skills development programs to equip poor households with income-generating opportunities and industry-specific skills. This would help address the situation of poverty and unemployment in the island-country. The government may also subsidize or invest on small and micro enterprises already present in the country to expand its operations and possibly generate additional jobs for the locals.

7.2 Recommendation for the Timorese Female Migrant Domestic Workers.

1. The Timorese Female workers are encouraged to do thorough research and have a better understanding of human trafficking by joining information drive campaigns and developing critical thinking skills to avoid online scams and word-of-mouth information.
2. The Timorese female workers should cooperate with the Timorese government in following the legal process of migrant work and report any suspicious human trafficking activities they know.
3. The study also recommends that the Timorese female migrant workers develop an interest in learning entrepreneurial skills whether through personal research, participation in non-government organization activities, and/or availing the programs from the government itself.

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