Innovations for Poverty Action

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Reducing Human Trafficking and Protecting Survivors: How the Development of a Research and Learning Agenda Is Helping IPA Identify Knowledge Gaps and Prioritize Future Research

Around the world, it is estimated that a staggering 28 million people were victims of human

trafficking in 2021 (ILO, Walk Free Foundation, and IOM 2022). Human trafficking can take many forms, such as online sexual exploitation, forced labor in supply chains, forced begging, or child domestic work. Governments, donors, and nonprofit organizations have put considerable resources into programs that aim to reduce people's vulnerability to trafficking, increase prosecution rates, and support victims of trafficking. However, more than 20 years after the passage of the Palermo Protocol, the counter-trafficking community is still searching for answers to the question "What works?" to effectively combat trafficking.

IPA's Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI) examined the body of evidence to date with a focus on rigorous qualitative and quantitative research to develop the **Research and Learning Agenda.** While the body of qualitative and descriptive literature focused on human trafficking has grown over the past 20+ years, much more needs to be done to establish a strong research evidence base that is both rigorous and accessible to human trafficking practitioners. **Randomized evaluations** in particular are an important tool in the social science research toolbox–they provide us with a credible and reliable way to attribute changes to a program or intervention, rather than external or unobserved factors.

Through awards provided under the **HTRI Competitive Research Fund**, IPA is supporting pilot studies and full randomized evaluations that seek to assess the effectiveness of counter-trafficking interventions. All research supported under the Competitive Fund is guided by **HTRI's five priority learning questions,** which are organized around the "4P" framework for combatting human trafficking–Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership:

1. How can counter-trafficking actors disrupt behaviors and social norms that normalize or promote human trafficking and related forms of exploitation?
2. How can counter-trafficking actors most effectively support trafficking victims and improve short- and long-term outcomes for trafficking survivors?
3. How can governments improve judicial effectiveness, combat corruption, and disrupt criminal networks and systems that allow trafficking to continue?
4. How can the private sector strengthen its actions and accountability to eliminate human trafficking in global supply chains?
5. How can all counter-trafficking actors leverage technological advancements to combat trafficking?

These priority learning questions include detailed sub-questions that summarize the **current state of the evidence in each area, knowledge gaps, and proposed research and learning activities** and methods to address knowledge gaps. As new research results are released and knowledge gaps are filled, IPA will publish updates to the Research and Learning Agenda to capture the new learning. The latest update from June 2022 includes engagement of low- and middle-income country researchers and people with lived experiences. Future updates will include findings from HTRI-funded pilot projects and randomized evaluations such as a prevention education program in schools in Northeastern Brazil, a safe migration information campaign in Nigeria, the use of microloans for micro-contractors to reduce labor trafficking in India's construction sector, and a two-way information counseling intervention for refugees and asylum-seekers in Greece.

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For more information about the HTRI Competitive Fund and to apply for future funding rounds, such as our next seed grant opportunity in early 2023, please click here.

Photo: © 2009 Claire Bernard. An enumerator, father, and child during an interview for a household survey in rural Morocco. Does not depict confirmed instances of human trafficking.

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