Anti-Human Trafficking Policy in Israel: Success Story?

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ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING POLICY IN ISRAEL: SUCCESS STORY?

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Background

During 1990s:

- Collapse of Soviet Union led to massive immigration wave, which included elements of transnational organized crime networks, bringing in women for the local sex industry.
- Palestinian uprising led to growing dependency on temporary migrant workers for low-skilled jobs.
- 1997 - First NGO report on “Trafficking of Women to Israel and Forced Prostitution.”
Anti-trafficking Policy Timeline

The graph shows the number of newspaper articles over the years from 1998 to 2010. The number of articles fluctuates with peaks in 2000, 2005, and 2009, and a dip in 2001 and 2004.
Anti-trafficking Policy Timeline

Sex trafficking criminalized
Anti-trafficking Policy Timeline

Sex trafficking criminalized
Usage of TIP Report by NGOs and Elected Officials

“Best available tool” for putting pressure on policymakers to:

- Recognize the problem (discussion starter).
- Include NGOs in the policy-making process (door opener).
- Support and promote legislation.
- Change perception of trafficked women from illegal aliens to victims.
Anti-trafficking Policy Timeline

- Sex trafficking criminalized
- All types of trafficking criminalized

[Graph showing timeline with data points for sex trafficking and all types of trafficking]
Anti-trafficking Policy Timeline

Sex trafficking criminalized

All types of trafficking criminalized
Additional Policy Measures

- Free legal representation for trafficking victims in civil suits - since 2003 for sex trafficking, 2006 for labor trafficking.
- Short-term work permits for trafficked undocumented migrants - since 2006 for sex trafficking, 2008 for labor trafficking.
- Shelters for trafficking victims - 2004 for sex trafficking (with U.S. dollars), 2009 for labor trafficking victims.
- Government-sponsored awareness-raising campaigns and training for public officials.
Anti-trafficking Policy Timeline

- Awareness raising
- Policy formulation
- Policy implementation
Success Story!

- Police official (2007): “In 2003 we used to find women who were being raped, incarcerated and suffering violence. In 2007, the situation is completely different - they get paid in most cases and the conditions that they're in are much more humane.”

- Former judge (2008): “Today there is no trafficking in women in Israel. […] This thing is over.”
Success Story?

- Success in curbing sex trafficking of non-Israeli women does indicate that a determined, multi-agency effort can work.

- However, this success is of limited scope:
  - Excludes Israeli citizens from being recognized as victims (including minors in the sex industry).
  - Labor trafficking of still unaffected – very few investigations and prosecutions.
  - It has become increasingly difficult to continue pressuring policymakers into action.
Reasons for Stagnation

- Difficulty to conceptualize internal sex trafficking. Anti-trafficking changed discourse on local prostitution.
- No political will to deal with labor trafficking.
- Perception that problem is solved drove issue off the agenda.
Backlash against NGOs

- Minister of the Interior Shitrit about the Awareness Center (2007): “With all due respect, don’t grade us or I would start grading you. I don’t want to say what you’re doing abroad... [turns to committee chair] They’re constantly attacking the State, they need to stop this thing, stop this slandering…”

- Minister of the Interior Yishai about the Hotline for Migrant Workers (2009): “The current administration will enforce the policies aimed at reducing the numbers of illegal workers in Israel and stand firm against anti-Jewish Trojan horses.”