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New Report Reveals Causes of Human Trafficking Pipeline from Mexico to NYC

*Mexican Survivors of Human Trafficking Speak About Forced Prostitution in
New York City*

*Report Says More Must be Done, both in Mexico and U.S., to Combat
Human Trafficking Scourge*

New York, NY – For generations, women have been trafficked from the small town of San Miguel Tenancingo, Tlaxcala in Mexico, and hundreds of them end up forced into prostitution in New York City. A new report from the [Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center](#) offers an in-depth analysis of this pipeline and the wider phenomenon of trafficking from Mexico. As re-authorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act [flounders in Congress](#), this report shows that trafficking is an egregious problem, and offers policy recommendations to NGOs and government agencies in both countries who must take steps to combat this epidemic.

The report, [The Road North: The Role of Gender, Poverty and Violence in Trafficking from Mexico to the U.S.](#), highlights the experiences of 37 individuals who were trafficked from Mexico to the U.S. Data was collected from affidavits and interviews between 2005-2012. *The Road North* identifies root causes of this trafficking pipeline, alongside first-hand accounts that illustrate the findings:

- **Victims are most often introduced to their trafficker through a family member or friend.** A minority of victims were trafficked by strangers, despite popular belief – in fact, nearly 70% of victims met the person who trafficked them through a family member, friend or neighbor, contributing to their initial trust of the trafficker.

“I met [trafficker] when he was 17 years old and I was 14 years old. There was a carnival in my hometown and my friend, who is [trafficker’s] aunt, introduced us there. [Trafficker’s] aunt lived nearby and I was familiar with her because she was a friend of my mother’s,” said Inez, a survivor of trafficking who met her trafficker through a family friend near her hometown.

- **Experiences with violence prior to trafficking increase vulnerability to trafficking.** 54% of affiants described a violent experience prior to trafficking,

including witnessing domestic violence, being a victim of physical or sexual abuse, or witnessing a murder. For many victims, violence in their homes influenced their desire to leave and go with the trafficker. Transgender victims experienced the highest rates of violence.

“I was 16 to 18 and I needed to leave there because I was suffering a lot of trauma based on the way they were treating me...I didn’t feel well there, I didn’t feel calm, my uncle kept bothering me and I couldn’t say anything cause I was afraid...And [then] this man appeared, an acquaintance of my aunt, I went out with him and left the house with him. He said I’m going to take you to my aunt’s and she can give you a job and you can live there. I thought that was a really good idea, but it wasn’t like that,” said Meena, a trafficking survivor who experienced sexual abuse in her home.

- **Poverty is likely to contribute to trafficking vulnerability.** 75% of victims describe serious fiscal hardship during their childhood, and almost all victims had limited schooling due to financial reasons. Poverty in Mexico, the report claims, has been exacerbated by U.S. policy.

“My family was very poor, even compared to other families in the village. My parents worked as farmers on other people’s lands. They traveled to other states to find work, and they took us with them. I worked alongside my parents starting when I was eight years old. I tried to also go to school, but had to stop after 6th grade because I missed so much school in order to work,” said Camilla, a survivor of trafficking who had to stop school to help her family earn money.

The report makes specific policy recommendations for the Mexican and U.S. governments, who must engage in bi-national efforts to combat the trafficking epidemic. It also recommends action steps for Mexican NGOs, who should use the report’s findings to inform their work on trafficking prevention and providing survivor resources. Among the recommendations are:

- **The U.S. government should discontinue the requirement that survivors of trafficking cooperate with law enforcement in order to lawfully remain in the United States.** Victims face ongoing danger from traffickers if they cooperate with law enforcement, because of common familial relationships with traffickers and manipulation of children by traffickers. The requirement puts victims at great risk and deters them from seeking help.
- **The U.S. government should offer accessible routes to immigration status for survivors of human trafficking.** The majority of victims of trafficking cannot return to their country of origin because they have no supportive family or community to return to, and because of real danger of re-trafficking, violence, or persecution.

- **The Mexican government should take action to address violence, including violence against women, and to investigate human trafficking.** Few prosecutions have been undertaken against traffickers in Mexico using pre-existing statutes or the new anti-trafficking law.
- **The Mexican government should support organizations to provide services for trafficked persons in Mexico,** including women and children who are alienated from their marital families and families of origin. They should provide support to organizations to develop campaigns for awareness within families about trafficking and domestic violence, including child abuse and child sexual abuse, particularly in impoverished and isolated communities.
- **NGOs in Mexico should provide counseling and safety services for people who have suffered violence,** which may help individuals recover from trauma, and become more resistant to future trafficking situations. They should promote discussion of trafficking and abuse within families, as recommended by survivors of trafficking as one thing that could have helped them avoid being trafficked.

The report was released today at an event in Mexico City, Mexico done in conjunction with Mexican NGO, El Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración (IMUMI). Speakers included Mexican activists working to prevent human trafficking in high-risk regions, as well as survivors of human trafficking. Read the full report [HERE](#).

“The Sex Workers Project’s goal is to share the information we’ve gathered in *The Road North* with NGOs doing prevention work on the ground in Mexico, so we can help stop this abuse before it happens, and to share it with Mexican and American government officials, so that they can advocate for policy change that benefits survivors and prevents future trafficking,” said **Sienna Baskin, Co-Director of the Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center**.

"The report identifies factors that made the victims more vulnerable to human trafficking, and provides information regarding prevention needs in Mexico that will be useful to both government and civil society," said **Gretchen Kuhner, El Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, (IMUMI)**

ABOUT THE SEX WORKERS PROJECT:

The Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center provides client-centered legal and social services to individuals who engage in sex work, regardless of whether they do so by choice, circumstance, or coercion. One of the first programs in the nation to assist survivors of human trafficking, the Sex Workers Project has pioneered an approach to

service grounded in human rights, harm reduction and in the real life experiences of our clients. Their professional service providers are multi-lingual, non-judgmental and bring more than ten years of experience.

As the only US organization meeting the needs of both sex workers and trafficking victims, the Sex Workers Project serves a marginalized community that few others reach. SWP engages in [policy](#) and [media advocacy](#), community education and [human rights documentation](#), working to create a world that is safe for sex workers and where human trafficking does not exist.

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