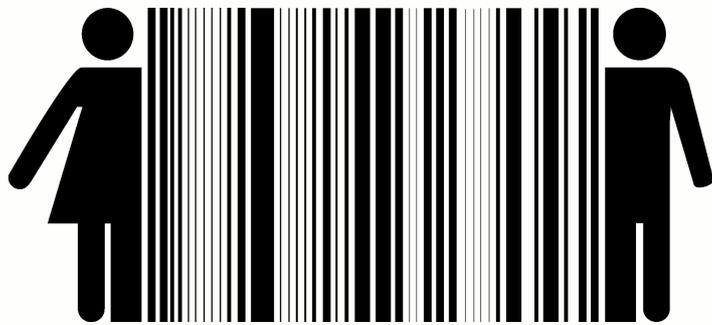


HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN MEXICO:

A CRITICAL ISSUE FOR FUNDERS

HIP

HISPANICS IN PHILANTHROPY
The Power of Giving and Connecting



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INTRODUCTION

Miranda was 14, relaxing in a park in the small Mexican city of Tenancingo, when Rodolfo introduced himself. Soon he would **kidnap her**, bring her to the U.S., and force her into prostitution in Queens, New York. Soon, she would be seeing 60 men a day for \$35 each.

Miranda's story is more common than you would think.

Human trafficking is a global pandemic; there are approximately **20.9 million victims** worldwide. It's also happening across the U.S.—and not just in New York. Probably in your own community.

Many of the trafficking victims that wind up here originate from our neighbor to the south, Mexico. Mexico is one of the world's trafficking hot spots; a crucial point of origin, transit, destination, and return of victims. According to the U.S. State Department, Miranda's home town, Tenancingo, is the largest source of sex trafficking victims sent to the U.S.

And what are U.S. foundations doing about it? There's little information about philanthropic investment in human trafficking, which suggests that it's not enough.

This is, in some ways, understandable. Human trafficking is a complex issue. It transcends borders, operates hand-in-hand with organized crime, and affects a wide array of people. It defies easy categorization or clear strategy.

And yet, it touches on issues that many in philanthropy already address, from human rights to gender equality to labor rights.

This is a critical moment in combating one of the most egregious human rights issues of our time, and philanthropy is a crucial actor. We must not turn away.

But what can we do?

To begin answering that question, Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP) decided to take a closer look. With support from the Oak Foundation, we commissioned a study to assess the state of human trafficking in Mexico, from the perspective of those most familiar with combating it: the small nonprofits that, throughout the country, are on the front lines. During the first half of 2017, we interviewed more than 70 nonprofits that are spearheading prevention, providing direct services, and accompanying victims in their social reintegration.

Here's what we found, and how philanthropy can help.

MEXICO: A THORNY TERRAIN

While Mexico has made important strides in formally recognizing and combating human trafficking, the country faces enormous challenges to adequately deal with this grave human rights violation. Several factors—including high levels of poverty, especially among indigenous populations; significant migration from Central America; organized crime; and high levels of impunity—make it especially difficult to combat.

Since Mexico's first Federal Anti-Trafficking Law in 2007, the government response in areas of prevention, protection, and prosecution has been uneven, uncoordinated, and divided. In response, nonprofits across the country are scrambling to meet the needs of victims—but they lack the adequate resources and capacity. And, because human trafficking is widely underreported and difficult to monitor, government and nonprofit

efforts to combat the crime operate largely in the dark.

HIP's recent report from May 2017, "A Look at Human Trafficking in Mexico from the Perspective of Nonprofits" (published in Spanish as "[Una mirada desde las organizaciones de la sociedad civil a la trata de personas en México](#)") sheds light on regional and national trends in human trafficking so that philanthropy, nonprofits, and government can better work together.

Across the nation, we identified several eye-opening trends:

1. MEXICAN AUTHORITIES ARE COLLUDING WITH TRAFFICKERS.

Nonprofits across Mexico reported an increase in cases where Mexican public officials are colluding with human traffickers. For example, in the central states of Hidalgo and Puebla, several nonprofits reported that municipal authorities had helped recruiters trick desperate workers into taking jobs in Baja California picking grapes, tomatoes, and strawberries under slave-like working conditions.

Indeed, in its most recent 2016 [Trafficking in Persons Report](#), the U.S. State Department reported that corruption among Mexican law enforcement and immigration officials and in the judicial system are “a significant concern.” Moreover, officials “accept bribes from traffickers; facilitate movement of victims across borders; operate or patronize brothels where victims are exploited; or fail to respond to

trafficking crimes, including in commercial sex locations.”

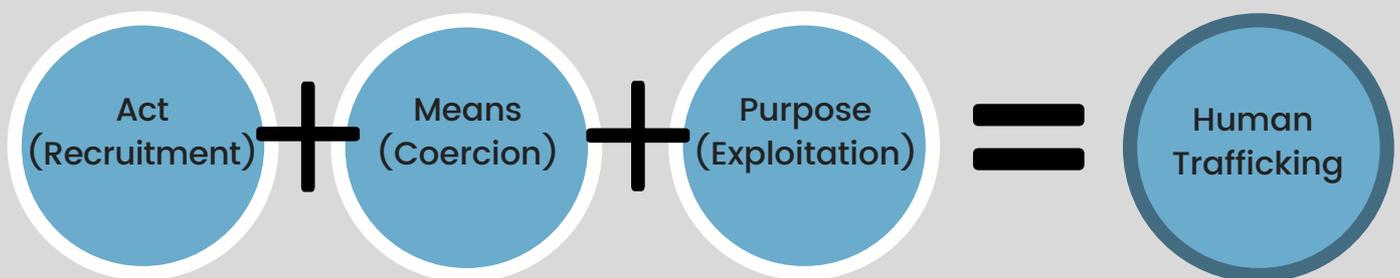
To make matters worse, often neither nonprofits nor trafficking victims report cases of trafficking or abuse by the authorities; it’s simply too dangerous. Many of the nonprofits we contacted for our report declined to be interviewed or have their name published, for fear of being identified and targeted by criminal networks or government officials.

2. THE UNCLEAR LEGAL DEFINITION CAUSES POOR ENFORCEMENT.

Aside from life-threatening risk, there's also serious legal risk involved in combatting human trafficking in Mexico. Why? It hinges on the unclear legal definition of trafficking.

The story of Alejandra Gil, a Mexican sex worker rights activist, illustrates this issue. Gil was arrested in 2014, “accused of engaging in human trafficking activities.” Her crime? Running an organization that provided sex workers in Mexico City with health services for a sliding-scale fee.

Mexico's current Federal Anti-Trafficking Law contains an overly-broad definition of human trafficking that confuses trafficking and exploitation. This particularly affects sex workers, because anyone deemed to profit from sex work can be considered a trafficker (as happened in Gil's case). This has a serious negative impact: real trafficking victims are not identified and helped, and individuals who are not involved in trafficking are penalized.



In 2012 Mexico reformed its Federal Anti-Trafficking Law and removed the second element of “means,” eliminating a crucial factor in determining whether a situation is human trafficking or exploitation: is the person in the situation of exploitation against their will, or not?

As a result, anti-trafficking operations in Mexico tend to sweep up cases of exploitation, which ultimately harms

the livelihoods and wellbeing of certain groups of vulnerable workers who are wrongly identified as trafficking victims, or even traffickers. This is especially true for sex workers.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Mexico's National Human Rights Commission, and the U.S. Department of State have all recommended that Mexico (re)adopt the international definition.

3. THE VULNERABLE ARE MOST SUSCEPTIBLE.

The most vulnerable people in Mexico are also those most likely to be trafficked. At the top of the list are indigenous communities and migrants—both those who are migrating within Mexico and those who traverse the country from Central America to the U.S. Among victims, there are various other common threads: poverty, limited education, lack of professional opportunities, generalized community violence, and domestic violence.

Globally, 55% of people trafficked are women and girls, according to the [International Labour Organization](#).

In Mexico, the same trend holds true; women and girls are

disproportionately affected, and often forced into prostitution and sexual exploitation.

While forced sexual exploitation is the most widely-recognized form of human trafficking among the general public and even the authorities, people are trafficked in a variety of situations, the majority of which are cases of labor trafficking. Based on our interviews, the most common include domestic work, agriculture, construction, mining, tourism, forced begging, and organized crime. Our interviews also documented other situations that are considered human trafficking: forced marriage and organ extraction.

4. REGIONAL DIFFERENCES REQUIRE TAILORED APPROACHES.

While our research identified certain national themes, human trafficking takes on unique forms in each region of Mexico:

NORTHERN REGION



NORTHERN REGION

BAJA CALIFORNIA, BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR, CHIHUAHUA, COAHUILA, DURANGO, NUEVO LEÓN, SONORA, SINALOA, AND TAMAULIPAS

TRENDS:

- Shares a border with the U.S. A highly complex region for South–North and North–South migration with documented links to human trafficking cases
- Strong presence of organized crime that trafficks individuals (usually migrants, and, more recently, returning migrants) into their networks, forcing them to carry out criminal activities
- Labor exploitation and trafficking found in large–scale agriculture and inside *maquilas* (factories)
- Link between cases of human trafficking and femicide (the murder of women based on their gender)
- Overrepresentation of women and girls in migration and cases linked to sex trafficking

SOUTHWEST REGION (BAJÍO)



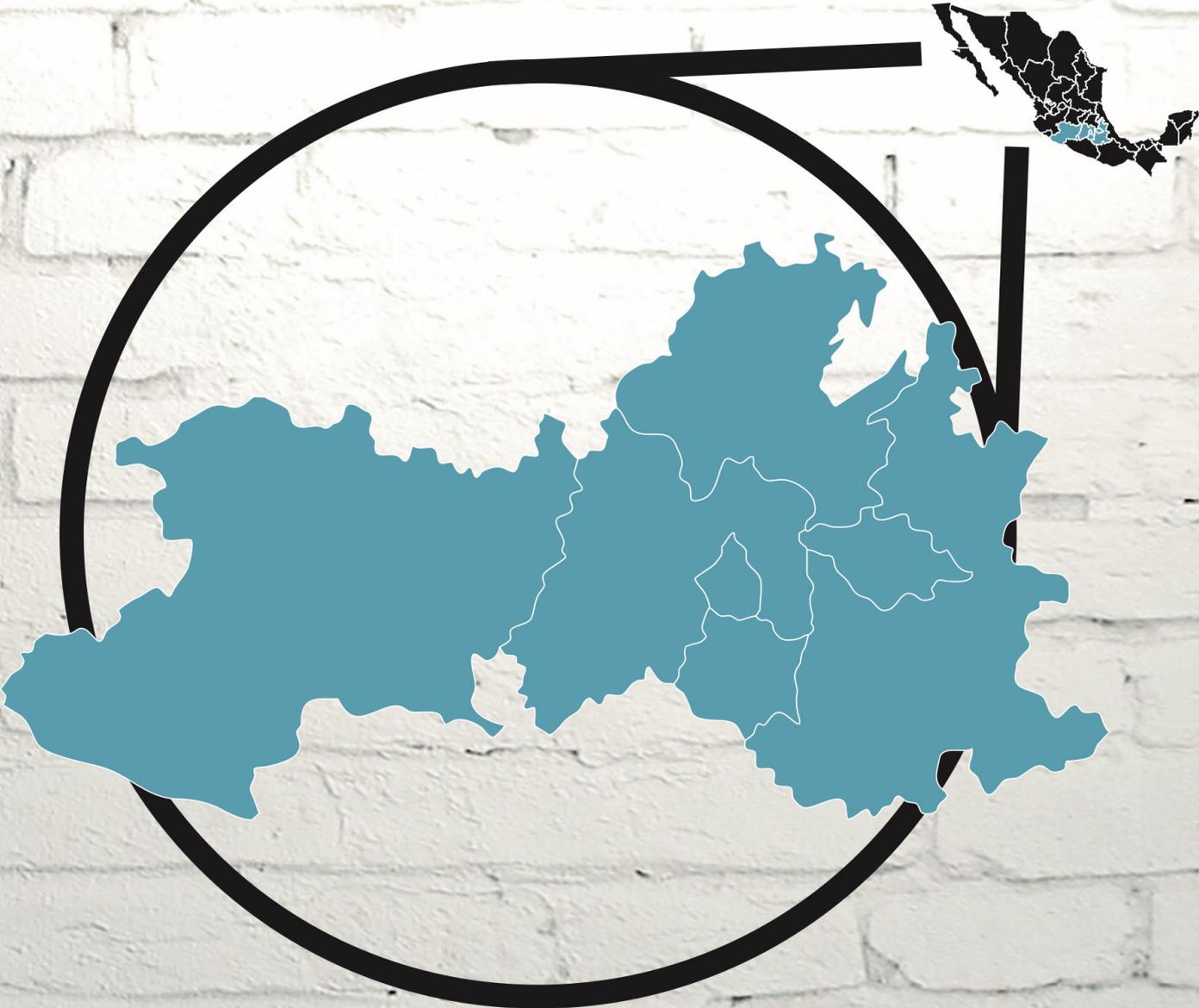
SOUTHWEST REGION (BAJÍO)

QUERÉTARO, GUANAJUATO, SAN LUIS POTOSÍ, JALISCO, ZACATECAS, AGUASCALIENTES, COLIMA, AND NAYARIT

TRENDS:

- A zone with high rates of migrants leaving for the U.S. and Canada. Also an important region through which Central American migrants travel on their way to the U.S.
- Labor exploitation and trafficking documented in large-scale agriculture and logging
- Link between cases of human trafficking and the disappearances of women
- Strong presence of organized crime that trafficks individuals into its networks, forcing them to carry out criminal activities as well as forcing women into prostitution
- Documented cases of forced begging
- Documented cases of forced servitude among the local indigenous population
- Links between forced displacement due to mega-infrastructure projects and human trafficking

CENTRAL REGION



CENTRAL REGION

MEXICO CITY, PUEBLA, TLAXCALA, MORELOS, STATE OF MEXICO, MICHOACÁN, AND HIDALGO

TRENDS:

- A densely-populated region comprised of large urban centers including the capital of Mexico
- Mexico City is an important site for all aspects of human trafficking (capture/recruitment, coercion, and exploitation)
- A violent zone with high numbers of kidnapping, extortion, murder, robbing gas pipelines, and forced disappearances
- Internal migration from border states (Guerrero, Veracruz, and Jalisco) to Puebla, especially in the construction industry
- Labor exploitation and trafficking documented in the apparel industry
- Documented cases of kidnapped youth being tested for compatibility for organ trafficking
- Links between human trafficking and illegal activity routes including drugs and weapons
- High levels of forced displacement linked to lack of jobs, mega projects, mining, and generalized violence
- The area known as “Tierra Caliente,” which includes Michoacán, is infamous for the presence of drug cartels and clandestine amphetamine labs with observed links to human trafficking

SOUTHERN REGION



SOUTHERN REGION

CAMPECHE, CHIAPAS, TABASCO, VERACRUZ, YUCATÁN, QUINTANA ROO, OAXACA, AND GUERRERO

TRENDS:

- The largest indigenous population in the country, which is particularly marginalized and vulnerable to exploitative working conditions, human trafficking, and forced marriage
- High levels of alcoholism within the local population linked to sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of women
- Contains Mexico's southern border with Guatemala, a complex region with international migration from Central America
- Presence of the Mexican military is linked to higher numbers of cases of sex trafficking
- An important tourism industry, especially Mexico's beaches, is responsible for heavy flows of internal migration for economic opportunities and is infamous for exploitative working conditions and linked to cases of human trafficking
- There is a large LGBTQI community active in the sex and tourism industries; they are considered extremely vulnerable to human trafficking
- Links between organized crime, drug production, and human trafficking

HOW PHILANTHROPY CAN HELP

Nonprofits in Mexico are undertaking heroic efforts to prevent human trafficking and protect, rescue, and reintegrate victims back into society. But they're largely operating without government support, with very limited resources, and with little-to-no training on the crime or its implications.

In this environment, philanthropic intervention is critical. Here are a few strategic ways funders can invest:

1. INCREASE LOCAL CAPACITY

There's a great need to train nonprofits to be able to adequately address this very complex crime. First, and most basic, is training on human trafficking itself—what it is, how to identify it, how to interact with victims, where to refer cases, etc.

Nonprofits have already started pushing for a reframed legal definition of trafficking, but they need more training on advocacy so

they can effectively argue for a human rights-based approach to Mexico's anti-trafficking legal framework and public policy.

Finally, there is also a need for increased institutional capacity so that nonprofits are on more solid footing, including fundraising, communications, monitoring and evaluation, and digital capacity.

2. STRENGTHEN AND SPREAD EFFECTIVE PREVENTION

Existing government efforts to combat trafficking tend to be centralized in Mexico City and lack the perspective of local contexts, where trafficking takes a nuanced form. However, local nonprofits across the country are doing prevention work at the community level, where they address trafficking

as a complex crime that takes on many different forms according to the local context and population.

These locally-savvy efforts should be supported and the lessons should be widely shared, not just in the nonprofit community but also throughout the government and civil society.

3. BOLSTER VICTIM-CENTERED DIRECT SERVICES

Human trafficking victims have limited access to quality and coordinated direct services that don't revictimize them in the process of getting help. Nonprofits need adequate resources to provide holistic services based on the needs and priorities of trafficking victims, including safe spaces such as shelters and transition homes, long-term psychological support, social reintegration, and economic empowerment.

These services must also address the diverse populations and backgrounds of the victims.

While the government has a primary responsibility to support and fund those services, nonprofits are filling an important void. Philanthropy should help equip nonprofits to improve and scale their efforts, while also supporting their advocacy efforts demanding State responsibility and action.

4. PROMOTE CROSS-MOVEMENT BUILDING

Human trafficking does not operate in a silo; it's interconnected with the work many funders and nonprofits already undertake in human rights and the rights of women, sex workers, laborers, and the LGBTQI population.

Philanthropy can promote learning and collaboration across these movements that would strengthen them all while, at the same time, contributing to a broader base of support in the anti-trafficking movement.

TAKING TRAFFICKING OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Human trafficking is something that largely goes unseen. And yet it impacts millions and violates our most closely-held ideals about the human right to freedom.

If we want to eradicate trafficking at home, we need to look to the source. Many of the trafficking victims in the U.S. come from or pass through Mexico.

By shedding light on how this crime operates in our neighboring community, we hope to build awareness that leads to action. Let's get started.

If you're interested in learning more about human trafficking in Mexico, or collaborating with HIP to address this issue, please reach out to Dana Preston, manager for gender-focused initiatives, at dana.preston@hiponline.org.

ABOUT HIP

Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP), a nonprofit with more than 33 years of experience, strengthens Latino leadership, equity, and voice by leveraging philanthropic resources. HIP partners with a transnational network of foundations to make impactful investments in the Latino community, and we help Latino nonprofits access funds and develop their leadership so they can effectively address the most pressing issues.

In Mexico, HIP collaborates with various strategic allies to combat one of the gravest abuses of human rights: trafficking. In collaboration with the Oak Foundation, HIP addresses this issue on two fronts. The first is capacity building for nonprofits that work on the issue. The second is education and awareness building to achieve greater commitment from diverse actors.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is an abridged version of a more in-depth report on human trafficking in Mexico that HIP published in May 2017: "Una mirada desde las organizaciones de la sociedad civil a la trata de personas en México." For that report, HIP interviewed 70 nonprofits in strategic locations throughout Mexico, allowing us to build a picture of the national and regional context.

We are grateful for the involvement of several critical individuals:

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