Nepal’s Human Trafficking Problem Is a Result of Poverty

Barbara Gunnell

Barbara Gunnell is a writer and editor. In the following viewpoint, she asserts that Nepal’s failing economy has resulted in a rise in the sex trafficking of young women and girls, often forced into brothels in foreign cities. Gunnell argues that with many of Nepal’s young people eager to leave their impoverished country and find work elsewhere, women are particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous employment agencies and shady acquaintances who will sell them into servitude. She urges British citizens to acknowledge the problem and recognize their attitudes toward migrants in general.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. According to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, what is the difference between trafficking victims and “consenting migrants”?

2. According to the International Labour Organization, how many women and children are trafficked every year from Nepal?

3. What does Gunnell assert are the annual profits from human trafficking?

“Do you have people-trafficking in Britain?” Ambika Acharya asked. We were in Melamchi village in Sindhupalchok, a district of eastern Nepal considered particularly vulnerable to trafficking of women and girls for prostitution. Neither of us knew it until the following day but, as she was posing the question, the tragedy of the Chinese cockle-pickers was unfolding in Morecambe.

I answered Acharya’s question with a story, published in the *New Statesman* last August [2003], about Chinese labourers working on farms in Norfolk. They were bound to their gangmasters by the debts they had incurred for their illegal passage to England. If they failed to repay the debts in full, reprisals would be taken against their families back in China.

Acharya and the other members of Mank, Melamchi’s anti-trafficking group, would have identified with almost every element of the Chinese migrant workers’ tale, from the slave-labour conditions to the bondage of debt and the threat to families. The group campaigns in a region with a history of forced prostitution, one where, even a few decades ago, ruling families exercised droit du seigneur [feudal law] over local girls.