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Trafficking Victims Benefited Little From Landmark Treaty, Says Rights Group

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in the 15 years since a global treaty to combat human trafficking was adopted, and some nations have passed laws or policies that do more harm than good, a rights group said on Wednesday.

To date, 166 countries have ratified the 2000 U.N. protocol designed to prevent trafficking, protect victims and prosecute offenders involved in the multi-billion dollar trade.

But progress has been hindered by inadequate laws to protect workers, restrictive migration policies and victims' inability to bring their traffickers to justice, campaigners say.

"The Trafficking Protocol may represent an important moment in global anti-trafficking work, however 15 years of legislation and programming have not done enough to protect the human rights of trafficked people," said Bandana Pattanaik, international coordinator of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), a network of 120 groups.

"Rather, governments have sought to protect their borders and criminalize sex work in the name of ending trafficking and to the detriment of migrant workers and people who have been trafficked," she said in a statement.

The concerns were raised in the latest edition of the Anti-Trafficking Review, a journal produced by GAATW, which featured case studies from Singapore, Brazil and India among others.

One article found that by equating sex work with trafficking, the Indian government had used the U.N. protocol to target sex workers. Another concluded that anti-trafficking measures in Singapore had failed to address labor exploitation.

Around 21 million people are victims of forced labor, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) - exploited for prostitution, domestic work, agriculture, petty crime or even organ transplants.

The ILO estimates that forced labor generates \$150 billion in profits for the private sector alone.

Despite the scale of the problem, there have been few convictions, partly because of the hidden nature of the crime, victims' fear of testifying against their traffickers, corruption and a lack of specialist police and prosecutors.

About 40 percent of countries have had fewer than 10 or no convictions between 2010 and 2012, said Kristiina Kangaspunta of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, writing in the journal.

The journal's editor, Rebecca Napier-Moore, said there must be a push in the next 15 years for "better labor protections" and access to justice for migrant workers.

"All countries need to keep doing more (to) focus outside the sex industry," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The GAATW said it was a mistake that development targets (SDGs) due to replace the expiring Millennium Development Goals mentioned trafficking only in relation to women and children.

"While all genders are recognized in the Trafficking Protocol, the SDGs are taking a big step backward in not recognizing men who are trafficked," it said.