The Washington, DC metropolitan area, one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse in the country, is known for its sex trafficking of domestic minors; the role of Central American gangs in trafficking; and the latent problem of domestic servitude among diplomats and international officials. Apart from these distinctive features, Washington, DC and the surrounding metro areas of northern Virginia and Maryland have a full range of human trafficking offenses, touching almost every racial, social, and ethnic group within this region. Over the last decade, a large and varied NGO sector has emerged that operates both locally and nationally, addressing trafficking within these diverse communities. NGOs cooperate with local law enforcement; state level task forces against human trafficking; and in some cases, advising the U.S. Congress on best practices against human trafficking. Prosecutors employed technology innovatively to infiltrate gangs engaged in human trafficking, rescuing numerous victims and sentencing offenders.

In 2004, the FBI and the Washington, DC Metropolitan Police Department partnered with victim service providers and NGOs to form the first Washington, DC Human Trafficking Task Force funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. The Northern Virginia region also has a task force formed in the same year and has recently received $1 million from the federal government to more effectively conduct crime analysis, and provide victim service delivery. The Maryland-Human Trafficking Task Force was formed in 2007. It serves as an umbrella organization of local, state, and federal agencies and private organizations designed to work collaboratively to identify and assist victims of human trafficking while investigating and prosecuting offenders. It also serves as the Maryland subunit of the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, a national hotline and website service designed to provide crisis intervention and technical assistance. Apart from this larger NGO, there are many NGOs that focus exclusively on human trafficking victims or provide assistance to victims along with other services. Many of the most successful organizations focus on specific at-risk youth groups within the trafficking population; such as Ayuda that serves the Hispanic community and Courtney’s House which provides crisis intervention and services to sex trafficking victims. In addition, Blue Project, a national non-profit, works with Vietnamese immigrants through legal assistance, emergency housing, education, and medical services. The Polaris Project operates the largest of which is the Polaris Project. Polaris Project, What We Do, 2014

The main efforts against human trafficking include coordination of local society and federal, state and local law enforcement through task forces; the presence of an active civil society effort; and an active law enforcement response.

II. Task Forces

Since the passage of human trafficking legislation in the United States, federal resources have become available since 2004 to develop regional trafficking task forces. Task forces now exist in Northern Virginia, DC, and Maryland although there is not adequate coordination among these task forces at the different jurisdictions of the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

The Washington, DC Metropolitan Police Department has recently received $1 million from the federal government to improve their trafficking task force, which has become available since 2013. The Justice. The Northern Virginia area has recently received $1 million from the federal government to support their ongoing trafficking task force. These efforts have become available since 2010. The Polaris Project has been created through the innovative use of technology to understand the mechanisms of trafficking organizations and their networks. This experience has been shared with other jurisdictions.

CONCLUSION

In Washington, DC, and in other large and diverse metropolitan areas, human trafficking can best be tackled using both integrating resources and expertise that represent a varied geographical urban territory. This type of regional approach would be a critical step towards addressing, combating, and impacting trafficking in larger urban areas in the United States and globally.
Prosecutors employed technology innovatively to infiltrate gangs engaged in human trafficking, rescuing numerous victims and sentencing offenders.

Sources:
Kay Chernush for the U.S. State Department

24 federal cases against 57 defendants engaged in human trafficking in northern Virginia from 2011–2013

51 million received by The Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force to train detectives, conduct crime analysis, and provide victim service delivery

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