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ADDRESSING DEMAND: A USEFUL CONCEPT IN THE CONTEXT OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS?

by Albert Kraler and Madalina Rogoz

18 October 2016 was the 10th EU Anti-Trafficking Day. In a three-part blog series, ICMPD analysed challenges and future priorities for the EU and its Member States in combating trafficking in human beings. In view of the forthcoming EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy, we're looking at current anti-trafficking efforts in the context of global migration trends and policies, asking the question of how current debates might shape anti-trafficking in the coming years.

An unclear legal obligation

In policy debates on combating trafficking in human beings (THB), “addressing demand” and “demand-side measures” are often used more as buzzwords than as consistent or coherent concepts. Article 18 of the [EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) makes it a legal obligation for states to discourage and reduce “the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation related to trafficking in human beings”. Yet how “demand” should be understood is not expanded upon further, nor is any suggestion provided for how it is to be addressed. Unsurprisingly, given this lack of legal guidance, few EU countries have explicitly defined demand or developed specific policies to address it. This is among the findings of research conducted within the ICMPD-led project “[Addressing Demand in Anti-Trafficking Efforts and Policies](#)” (DemandAT), funded by the EU’s [7th Framework Programme for Research](#).

In this article, we argue that a coherent conceptual understanding of demand-side measures is a necessary precondition for effective and targeted interventions. Reference to demand in the context of different forms of trafficking should be as clear as possible, specifying how addressing demand in a particular market is expected to address trafficking or related exploitation.

What does "demand" actually mean?

In expert debates, there is little consensus around the meaning of demand in the context of trafficking. One line of thinking links it to core economic market logics of supply and demand, basically understanding it to refer to the demand side of a market. Yet it is often left unclear

which particular market is the focus of the analysis and certain social actors are then systematically attributed in a blanket fashion to either the demand side or the supply side, without considering what is actually being traded, who is demanding a particular good or service and who is supplying it.

Alternatively, demand is often used vaguely as a metaphor to denote broader “root causes” of trafficking, such as social norms and values, including prejudice and racism. These are seen as making it acceptable for individuals to exploit others or to accept exploitative practices by others. Furthermore, because of divergent views on how to best conceptualise demand, “demand-side measures” is used as a loosely-defined label for interventions targeting a diverse group of actors. This group may include exploiters and traffickers, firms - both as employers and as purchasers of goods and services that may be produced under conditions of THB, notably within supply chains - consumers and the wider public. This approach was taken for example by a recent [Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons \(ICAT\)](#) paper on “[Preventing trafficking by addressing demand](#)”.

The usefulness of a demand-side analysis

These differing approaches and uses of “demand” raise questions about the usefulness of the concept. So what, if any, is its added value? First, a demand-side analysis can potentially expand the focus from covering only trafficked people to include other actors with varying degrees of responsibility for trafficking, such as companies or consumers. Second, if used as a clearly defined concept, the notion of demand can indeed help to formulate policies that may reduce the incidence of THB and/or exploitation more generally. Demand-side measures are therefore best viewed as indirect measures that complement rather than replace other areas of intervention, such as victim protection, building the resilience of vulnerable people and criminal justice.

Policies addressing demand also move beyond the traditional confines of anti-trafficking. Indeed, when demand-side policies in selected EU and non-EU countries were mapped in the framework of the DemandAT project, it emerged that most existing demand-side policies have a broader scope than just combating THB, and tend to focus more generally on an exploitative purpose.

Addressing demand in the context of labour exploitation: influencing the behaviour of consumers and clients

The DemandAT study posits an [economic understanding of demand](#), and recommends a more targeted use of the concept: demand-side policies should be understood as policies that aim to influence the behaviour of consumers in a particular market, including private firms and the public sector purchasing goods or services. Narrowing our understanding to interventions targeting consumers of goods and clients of services will make policies more coherent and effective. It also highlights the potential of policy approaches that use non-coercive means and market incentives to change undesirable behaviours. For example, a number of policy measures and initiatives can already be identified that may discourage trafficking for labour exploitation, by influencing consumer behaviour in a specific market setting.

In addition to more traditional “command and control” policies that impose sanctions for non-compliance, the behaviour of consumers or clients can also be influenced by positive incentives to take certain actions. Examples of incentive-based policies include: tax breaks; educating the general public on labour exploitation; the use of licensing as a regulatory measure; certification schemes and related supply chain initiatives; the inclusion of criteria on compliance with decent work standards in procurement rules for public and private entities; and restricting access to a particular good or service in such a way that only goods and services produced under conditions of decent work are available.

“Smart” regulation, combined with the cooperation of relevant stakeholders in specific contexts and sectors prone to trafficking and labour exploitation, is also an effective approach to addressing the demand-side of trafficking. Examples of such initiatives include the [Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition](#) and the [Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ Fair Food Programme](#). Often, as in the case of the Fair Food Programme, such initiatives also closely cooperate with law enforcement and thus are embedded in traditional criminal justice approaches.

The future of addressing the demand side of trafficking

Looking to the future, a number of key points should be taken into account. A demand-side approach can effectively contribute to the fight against trafficking in human beings. However, in order to achieve the desired results, policy makers must:

- Promote and apply a clear and coherent concept of demand and demand-side policies in the context of trafficking, including by specifying how exactly particular measures will address demand in the context of THB;
- Clearly specify which forms of exploitation and which markets are being targeted when attempting to reduce demand for goods or services involving trafficking;

- Set out concrete guidelines for policies addressing demand for goods or services involving trafficking, including an overview of the various legislative, regulatory and voluntary measures available.

Find the most recent publications on this topic at: <http://demandat.eu/blog> and <http://demandat.eu/publicationsnew>.

Contact Information

For more information please contact:

Policy Unit

International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
Gonzagagasse 1, 5th floor
1010 Vienna, Austria

Email: Policy_Unit@icmpd.org

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