

## **Sex Trafficking: Combating the Issue In Hotels and Businesses**

According to the International Labour Organization, human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of adults and children is the fastest growing “lucrative” crime in the world, recently having surpassed even the drug trade. Ten years ago it was estimated to be a \$20 billion a year criminal industry. In 2014, the International Labor Organization (ILO) found that sex trafficking now generates illegal profits of approximately \$99 billion.<sup>1</sup>

The primary locations where sex is purchased are hotels and motels, suggesting that the hospitality industry has a social responsibility to take steps to prevent the exploitation of women and children within the hospitality businesses. With few exceptions, most sex trafficking prosecution involves an entity within the hospitality industry.

Comprehensive laws are in place to protect against the sexual exploitation of women and children, creating a level of vulnerability and possible liability for companies that fail to take appropriate action. Ignoring the problem or failing to take action is an unacceptable option for hospitality executives. The risk is transferred to the investors who will come to question a company's anti-trafficking policies and activities. And there is a risk to brand equity; one case of trafficking made public could have a serious impact on the reputation of a hospitality business.

Conversely, implementing anti-trafficking measures can protect a company's brand and even build an organization to be viewed widely as socially responsible. In addition, empowered employees, who have been trained on the correct procedures, will have a higher morale and respect for the organization.

The Guardian Group, in collaboration with Petra Risk Solutions, has proposed training specifically to inform and equip hospitality staff on understanding and responding to suspected incidents of human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of both adults and children. The outcome of this training will provide the hospitality business with:

- Skilled employees who are aware of the how to identify trafficking issues. (Training will be specific to the various groups of employees such as front line staff, managers, cleaning staff.)
- Managers who understand the legal boundaries for their hospitality business.

Ultimately, the goal of the training is to ensure a better consumer experience at the hospitality business and to protect the business from inherent risks if and when an incident of human trafficking occurs at their business. The goal is NOT to make hospitality business staff carry the responsibility of the police. Rather, the goal is to give them the training and tools necessary to help identify high-risk scenarios and take the appropriate actions, when necessary.

Today, human trafficking is misunderstood and often unrecognized and overlooked by hospitality industry staff. This will change with the implementation of Guardian Group's Hospitality Training on Human Trafficking.

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<sup>1</sup> Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labor, ILO, May 2014.