



**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

## **Global Report On Trafficking In Persons**

### **Executive Summary**

**February 2009**

## A knowledge crisis about a crime that shames us all

The term *trafficking in persons* can be misleading: it places emphasis on the transaction aspects of a crime that is more accurately described as enslavement. Exploitation of people, day after day. For years on end.

After much neglect and indifference, the world is waking up to the reality of a modern form of slavery. The public and the media are becoming aware that humans prey upon humans for money. Parliaments are passing appropriately severe laws. The judiciary is facing its anti-slavery responsibility, with more prosecutions and convictions. Civil society and (to a lesser extent) the private sector are mobilizing good-will and resources to assist victims.

Hearing this wake-up call, politicians as well as ordinary people ask me two sets of questions. First, they want to know how big the crime of human trafficking really is: how many victims are there? Who are the traffickers, what are their routes and their gains? What are the trends, namely is the problem getting ever more severe? Why and where?

Second, people want to know what to do, individually and collectively. Why aren't governments and the United Nations, why aren't we all, doing more? Some people are even willing to mobilize personal resources to fight this crime: but for whom and how?

The first set of questions needs to be answered as a matter of priority. Only by understanding the depth, breadth and scope of the problem can we address the second issue, namely, how to counter it. So far we have not attained much knowledge and therefore initiatives have been inadequate and disjointed. Policy can be effective if it is evidence-based, and so far the evidence has been scanty.

UNODC first attempted to identify human trafficking patterns in April 2006. This second report goes a step further, cataloguing and analysing the world's response, based on criminal justice and victim assistance data from 155 countries. A few observations stand out, in lieu of conclusions.

First, over the past few years, the number of countries that have taken steps to implement the foremost international agreement in this area - the UN Protocol against Trafficking in Persons - has doubled. However, there are still many countries, particularly in Africa, that lack the necessary legal instruments.

Second, the number of convictions is increasing, but not proportionately to the growing awareness (and probably, size) of the problem. Most convictions still take place in only a few countries. While these countries may have human trafficking problems more serious than others, they are doing something about them. On the other hand, as of 2007/08, two out of every five countries covered by this report had not recorded a single conviction. Either they are blind to the problem, or they are ill-equipped to deal with it. I urge governments and other stakeholders to call on UNODC expertise, including the recently published Toolkit to Combat Trafficking in Persons, to show their commitment.

Third, sexual exploitation is by far the most commonly identified form of human trafficking (79%), followed by forced labour (18%). This may be the result of statistical bias. By and large the exploitation of women tends to be visible, in city centres, or along highways. Because it is more frequently reported, sexual exploitation has become the most documented type of trafficking in aggregate statistics. In comparison, other forms of exploitation are under-reported: forced or bonded labour; domestic servitude and forced marriage; organ removal; and the exploitation of children in begging, the sex trade, and warfare.

Fourth, a disproportionate number of women are involved in human trafficking, not only as victims (which we knew), but also as traffickers (first documented here). Female offenders have a more prominent role in present-day slavery than in most other forms of crime. This fact needs to be addressed, especially the cases where former victims have become perpetrators.

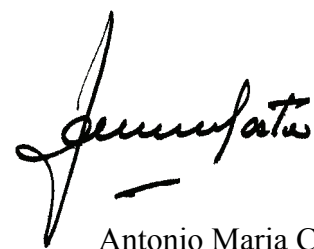
Fifth, most trafficking is national or regional, carried out by people whose nationality is the same as that of their victims. There are also notable cases of long-distance trafficking. Europe is the destination for victims from the widest range of origins, while victims from Asia are trafficked to the widest range of destinations. The Americas are prominent both as the origin and destination of victims in the human trade.

This report increases our partial understanding of the forces at play in modern slave markets. Yet internationally standardized data are still not available, a limitation that hampers the sharing of information between and among states, and with the UNODC. Aggregated statistics cannot be put together, neither at geographic nor thematic levels.


As a consequence, we still lack a global understanding of the subject, and of how its components interact to make the whole. Think of illicit drugs, the most heavily documented subject at UNODC. Drug control policies take into account data concerning the entire value-added chain (production, consumption, trade, etc.) of all drugs (opium, cocaine, amphetamines, etc.), in all markets (Afghanistan, Colombia, US, EU, Iran, etc.) Drug information is organized in multidimensional data bases, so that policies can target the whole, and any of its parts (from therapy of addicts, to seizures of drugs, to conversion of cultures).

Nothing of this sort is possible today in the domain of human trafficking. We do not have as yet the logical categories needed to establish multidimensional data bases. We should be, but we are not, able to segment today's slave markets into their components (demand, supply, trafficking, and related prices). We must, but cannot, catalogue (for lack of data) the different types of slavery: exploitation through child-begging in Europe is different from what goes on in a brothel, or on a street corner in Australia. Preventive measures must also be adapted to take into account that an Asian father sells his under-age daughter under circumstances different from what forces an African teenager into a rag-tag army of killers, or what pushes an illegal immigrant into a sweat shop in the Americas. Measures to rescue victims and punish criminals must vary accordingly.

I plead with social scientists in academia, and especially in governments, to work more intensively with UNODC to generate the logical categories and the statistical information needed for evidence-based, anti-slavery policy. The crisis we face of fragmented knowledge and disjointed responses intensifies a crime that shames us all.



Antonio Maria Costa  
Executive Director  
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



## Executive summary

In 2007, UNODC conducted, in the framework of the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT), a study on the state of the world's response to the crime of human trafficking. This report offers an unprecedented view of the available information on the state of the world's response to human trafficking, including near-comprehensive data on national legislative and enforcement activity. Over the course of a few months in 2007 and 2008, UNODC gathered information concerning 155 countries and territories. With a few notable exceptions, nearly all of the larger states participated. This report summarizes this information, starting with a discussion of the global and regional figures and closing with country profiles for participating nations.

Of course, data on the response of states to human trafficking are only indirect indicators of the nature of the underlying problem. Countries with well-resourced criminal justice agencies may show a great deal of activity even when human trafficking is relatively rare, while countries with larger problems but less capacity may be unable to muster a proportionate response. But the material gathered here does illustrate that, in a remarkably short time, tremendous progress has been made in combating a crime that was only recently widely acknowledged. It also demonstrates that sharing human trafficking data on a global basis is possible and can yield valuable insights, despite the inherent limitations of the criminal justice figures.

### The response to trafficking in persons

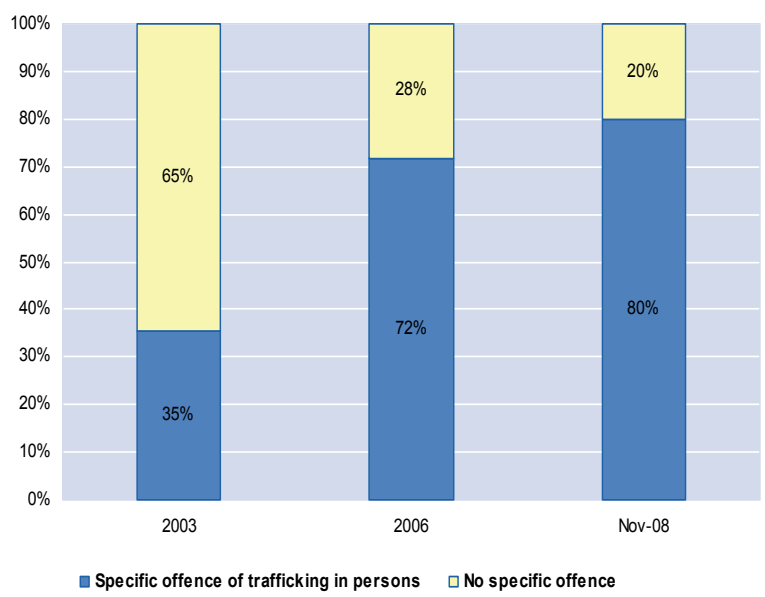
The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons only came into effect in December 2003, but it has inspired widespread legislative response. As of November 2008, 63% of the 155 countries and territories that provided information for this report had passed laws against trafficking in persons addressing the major forms of trafficking<sup>1</sup>. Another 16% had passed anti-trafficking laws that cover only certain elements of the Protocol definition.<sup>2</sup> In 2003, only one third of the countries covered by this report had legislation against human trafficking; at the end of 2008, four-fifths did. The number of countries having anti-trafficking legislation more than doubled between 2003 and 2008 in response to the passage of the Protocol. In addition, 54% of responding countries have established a special anti-human trafficking police unit, and more than half have developed a national action plan to deal with this issue.

---

<sup>1</sup> These laws criminalize, at the very least, sexual exploitation and forced labour and have no restriction regarding the age or gender of the victim.

<sup>2</sup> For example, laws that are limited to sexual exploitation or only apply to female or child victims.

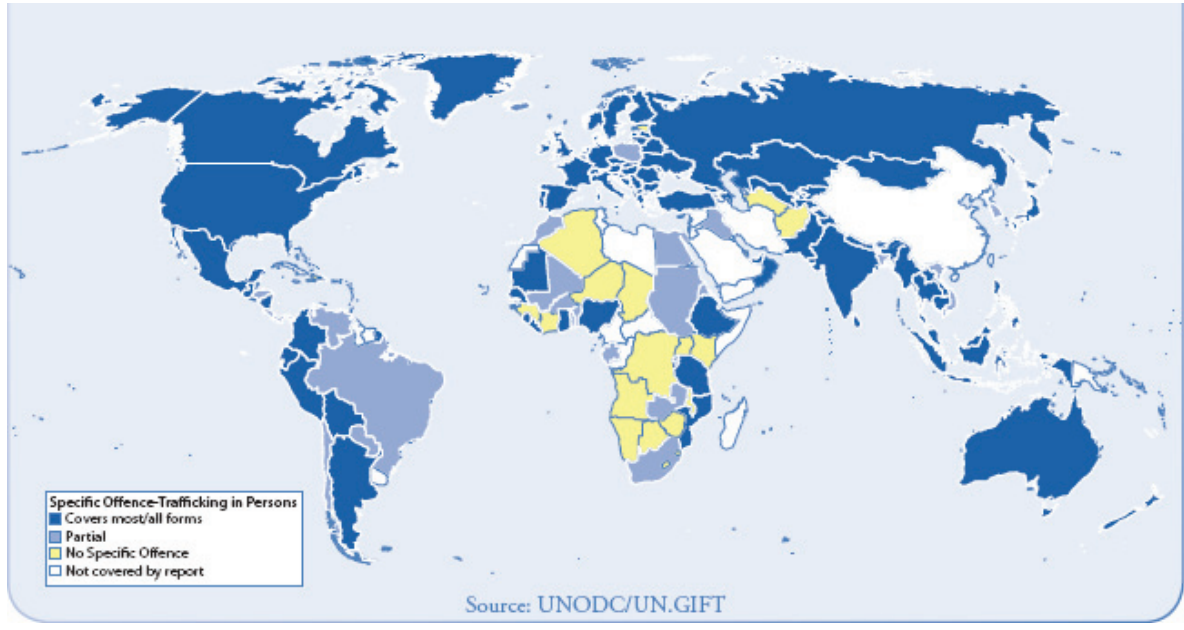
**Percentage of countries covered by this report that have introduced a specific offence on trafficking in persons into their legislation**



Source: UNODC/UN.GIFT

Given that this legislative framework is very new, it is remarkable that 91 countries (57% of the reporting countries) reported at least one human trafficking prosecution, and 73 countries reported at least one conviction. A core of 47 countries reported making at least 10 convictions per year, with 15 making at least five times this number.

**Criminalization of trafficking in persons – status of national legislation, by country (November 2008)**

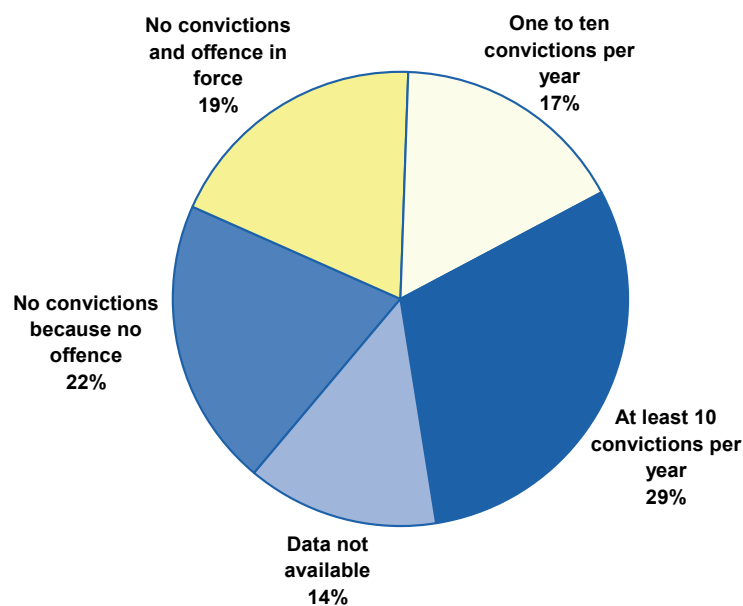


**Covers most/all forms:** Countries where the specific offence of trafficking in persons is in force, criminalizing at a minimum sexual exploitation and forced labour, with no restrictions concerning the profile of the victim.

**Partial:** Countries where the specific offence of trafficking in persons is in force, but legislation does not criminalize all or most forms listed in Article 3 of the UN Trafficking Protocol or does not define trafficking in persons.

**No specific offence:** Countries where forms of trafficking in persons are criminalized through other offences due to the absence of a specific trafficking in persons offence.

### **Distribution of all countries according to the number of convictions recorded for the specific offence of trafficking in persons during the reporting period**



Source: UNODC/UN.GIFT

There is, of course, considerable regional variation in compliance to standards. Many African countries still do not have legislation on human trafficking, or they have laws that criminalize only some aspects of human trafficking (such as child trafficking). And not all high income countries have comprehensive legislation, either. In addition, most of the human trafficking convictions come from just a few countries, some of which are wealthy and some of which are not. This suggests that progress against human trafficking is not necessarily determined by income levels but is essentially a product of individual national initiative.

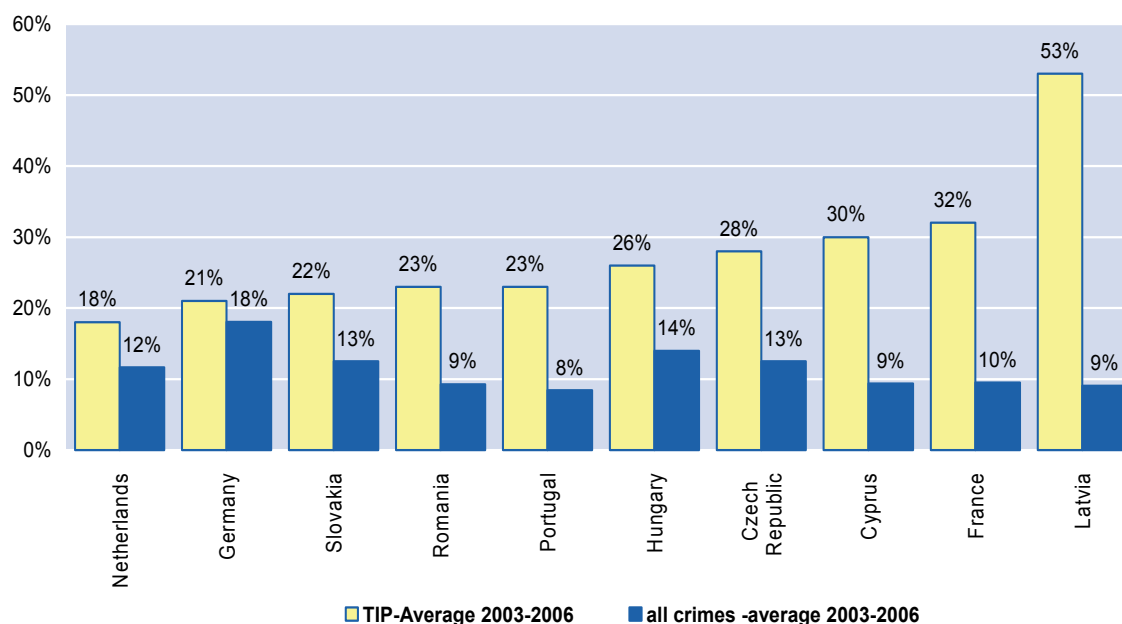
This research project was aimed at gathering information on legislative, institutional and criminal justice responses, not at assessing the scale or the nature of the human trafficking problem. It remains unclear what share of human trafficking cases come to the attention of the authorities and whether the cases detected are representative of the underlying activity. Each incident presents a case study of the way human trafficking is conducted in a given country, but there may be reasons why other types of cases remain undetected. On the other hand, a large number of case studies can provide some interesting insights when compared across a range of countries and across time. The following sections discuss some of these insights.

## Gender, citizenship and forms of victimization

Crime, organized crime in particular, is typically a male activity. Men make up over 90% of the prison populations of most countries and are particularly over-represented as perpetrators of violent crime. It might be assumed that human trafficking, where violence and threats are keys to the business, would likewise be overwhelmingly male dominated. But, surprisingly, the data on the gender of those convicted for trafficking in persons do not support this premise.

The data gathered on the gender of offenders in 46 countries suggest that women play a key role as perpetrators of human trafficking. In Europe, for example, women make up a larger share of those convicted for human trafficking offences than for most other forms of crime.

### Proportion of females in convictions for trafficking in persons and for all crimes combined in Europe



Source: UNODC/UN.GIFT

The criminal justice figures also shed light on the nature of the transnational networks involved. To date, it has remained unclear whether human trafficking enterprises were driven primarily by networks situated in the source countries or in the destination countries. Based on the data collected for this report, most of the offenders were citizens of the country where they were arrested. This suggests that local criminal networks acquire the victims and sell them to criminal networks based in destination countries. This stands to reason since many source countries are relatively poor with small foreign populations. Offenders often endeavour to win the trust of the victims and use their local connections to threaten retaliation against family members if victims resist. Local people are better situated to acquire and control victims.

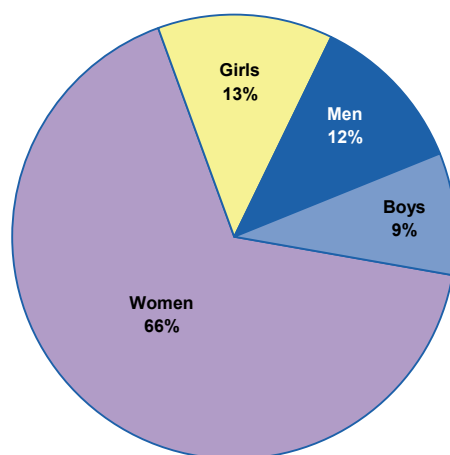
However, in cases where the arrest took place in a high-income destination country, the offenders were more likely to be foreign than when the arrest took place in a source country. In many instances, diaspora populations from source regions may be used as a conduit for moving victims into the countries where they will be exploited. This phenomenon also is seen in other forms of transnational trafficking.

The data also can give some tentative insights into the profile of the victims. Victims of human trafficking were identified through the criminal justice process and through victims' assistance organizations. Over 21,400 victims were identified in 2006 among the 111 countries reporting victim data for that year. As with



the offenders, the profile of the victims is highly influenced by local laws and priorities, which often focus on child victims and victims of sexual exploitation (usually women). With this caveat in mind, in the 61 countries where the gender and age of the victim were specified, two thirds of the identified victims were women and 13% were girls.

**Profile of victims identified by State authorities in 61 countries where information was collected, aggregated for 2006**



Source: UNODC/UN.GIFT

In the 52 countries where the form of exploitation was specified, 79% of the victims were subjected to sexual exploitation. While it remains likely that labour exploitation and male victims are relatively under-detected, the over-representation of sexually exploited women is true across regions, even in countries where other forms of trafficking are routinely detected.

**Human trafficking flows**

Criminal justice data alone cannot give a sense of the scale of human trafficking flows, but it can give some idea about source and destination countries. Victims and perpetrators may be detected in source, transit or destination countries. The criminal justice data therefore provide several independent sources of information on where victims are being acquired and where they are being transported.

In most of the reported cases, victims were moved across international borders. Domestic trafficking, or the exploitation of citizens in their home country, was reported by 32 countries but is likely under-detected due to restrictive definitions of trafficking or the greater visibility of foreign victims. Even in countries reporting domestic trafficking, foreign victims were almost always more numerous.

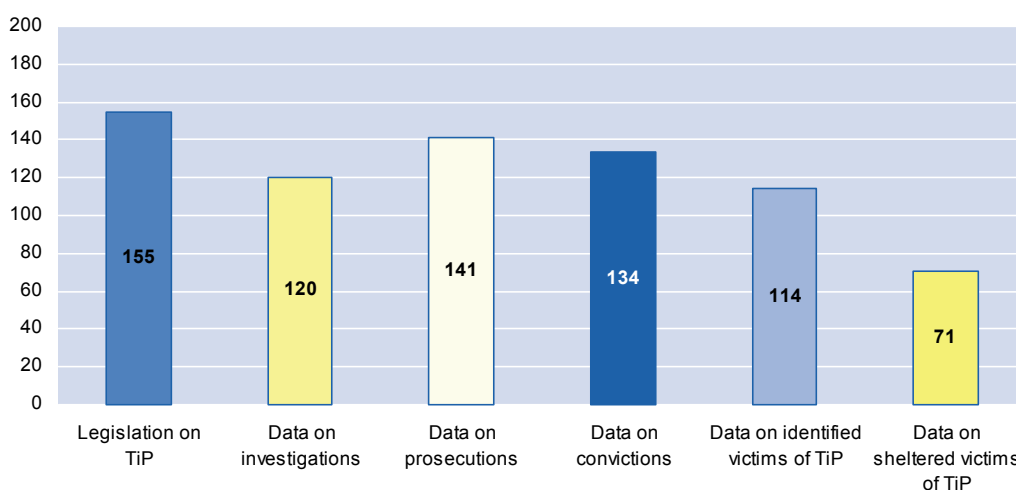
Cross-border flows are not necessarily long distance flows. Much of the cross-border trafficking activity was between countries of the same general region, particularly between neighbouring countries. But there was also evidence of intercontinental trafficking. Most remarkably, victims from East Asia were detected in more than 20 countries in regions throughout the world, including Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa. This suggests that the trafficking of East Asians is a bit of a phenomenon in itself and worthy of detailed study. Other long distance flows include the trafficking of African victims to locations in Europe and North America; the trafficking of Latin American victims to North America and Europe; the trafficking of Central European, Eastern European and Central Asian victims to Europe and the Middle East; and the trafficking of South Asian victims to the Middle East.



## The need for continued monitoring

Aside from these insights, the primary value of this report has been to assess the information available, to highlight what is not known and to suggest how information-gathering systems could be improved. Looking at the data received, there is a clear need for an international standardization of definitions along the lines suggested by the Protocol. Too often, even similarly situated countries with compatible legal systems are counting different things. There is also a need to encourage Member States to collect more and better information on the state of human trafficking in their countries. Some countries could cite the number of victims or offenders, for example, but had no data on the gender, age or citizenship of these people. Domestic crimes that are tantamount to trafficking are not being tallied in national totals. By setting the accounting agenda, it is possible that lagging states could be encouraged to meet their obligations to pass appropriate laws and in thinking about the human trafficking problem strategically.

### Number of countries making data available to UNODC by topic



Source: UNODC/UN.GIFT

One of the key unanswered questions remains: Just how big is the human trafficking problem globally? Without a sense of the magnitude of the problem, it is impossible to prioritize human trafficking as an issue relative to other local or transnational threats, and it is difficult to assess whether any particular intervention is having effect. While coming to an estimation based on the present data would be premature, it is incumbent on the international community to gather the information necessary to fill this gap. Far more knowledge is needed before the true size of the market for human beings can be estimated, but this information could be gathered through a sustained programme of data sharing.

This report has demonstrated that international monitoring of human trafficking trends and patterns is possible and that a surprising wealth of information is available. But it remains a pilot for a project, one with much greater potential to track the global phenomenon of human trafficking and our collective efforts to address it. An international mechanism to monitor trends and patterns of trafficking in persons needs to be established with the object of continuing data collection of the sort gathered in the present survey (data on legal and institutional frameworks; criminal justice statistics; and victim service information). Such a mechanism also could work toward gathering more information on the market context for these crimes, including data on price and demand. Coordinated efforts require collective information systems, and the global struggle against trafficking in persons needs knowledge to inform strategic interventions.