Chapter I

Global Overview
Dramatic shifts and accelerated trends

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching implications for trafficking in persons and the efforts to counter it. It appears to have affected not only the level of detection but the characteristics of trafficking. This overview seeks to give a comprehensive picture of trafficking and counter-trafficking trends during the volatile first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will highlight key shifts in the trafficking patterns that appeared in 2020. Further, it provides insights into those who were convicted for such crimes, as well as into their organized criminal groups. Finally, this section will turn attention to the global slowdown in the criminal justice response to trafficking, a trend that worsened in 2020.

In 2020, for the first time since UNODC has been collecting data, the number of victims detected globally decreased by 11 per cent compared to 2019. This shift takes place after a steady increase in the number of victims detected globally. This decline in detection of trafficking victims is most evident in low- and medium-income countries. The most significant drops in detection were recorded in trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (down by 24 per cent) and in cross-border trafficking (down by 21 per cent).

For the first time since UNODC started collecting data on trafficking in persons, detection of trafficking for forced labour in 2020 was equal to that of trafficking for sexual exploitation, at just under 40 per cent each.
The profile of detected victims is changing. In 2020, along with the drastically fewer victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation identified by authorities, the share of women as detected victims of all forms of trafficking continues to fall. The number of victims trafficked for criminal activity detected continues to rise, though. And while there is general decline of detected cross-border trafficking, victims from Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia continue to be increasingly detected throughout the rest of the world.

Criminal justice responses are falling short. The global decrease in the number of victims identified is largely driven by the fall in numbers reported by low- and medium-income countries. Further, the capacity to adjudicate trafficking cases seems to have deteriorated globally over the last few years and has worsened during the pandemic.

More impunity, more victims: Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are convicting fewer traffickers and detecting fewer victims than rest of the world. At the same time, victims from these regions are identified in more destination countries than people from elsewhere, suggesting a weak criminal justice response may be incentivizing traffickers to operate nationally and transnationally from these regions.

Conflicts have increased vulnerability to trafficking in and outside of conflict areas. Forced to flee and often in economic need, displaced populations are easily targeted by traffickers. Analysis shows a relationship between the people forced to flee Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 as a result of the conflict in the eastern part of the country, and increased detection of trafficking in persons from Ukraine to Western and Central Europe in the following years. With the regular migration scheme offered by the EU to Ukrainian citizens in the current conflict, the vulnerability to trafficking may be reduced as compared to 2014. Nonetheless the risk that the current conflict in Ukraine could generate an unprecedented number of victims remains, if mitigation measures are not put in place (see box, War: An opportunity for traffickers). Other on-going conflicts, for example in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, have also placed people at higher risk of trafficking. Convicted traffickers often operate in small groups, loosely connected through business-type arrangements, as well as acting individually or in pairs. However, an analysis of convictions in recent years shows that, when large criminal organizations with territorial control engage in trafficking in persons, they are more violent and traffic more victims, for longer periods of time and farther distances compared to less organized criminals.

Climate change is increasing the vulnerability of some people to trafficking. In 2021, 23.7 million people were internally displaced by disasters, while many crossed borders to escape climate-induced poverty. While a systematic global analysis of the impact of climate change on trafficking in persons is missing, community level studies in different parts of the world point at weather induced disasters as root causes for trafficking in persons (see box Climate change: Affecting communities and increasing risks for trafficking in persons).

One noteworthy finding of the Report is that most victims identified in adjudicated cases are “self-rescued” suggesting that proactive identification remains limited in scope and effectiveness – a review of court cases found that the majority of cases are brought to authorities by victims who manage to exit exploitation and come forward on their own.

The Report also found that female and children victims are at higher risk of experiencing physical violence during trafficking as compared to men, respectively. Girls and women are three times more likely to suffer explicit or extreme violence compared to boys and men, while for children this risk is about two times higher than adults. On the other hand, when investigated and brought to trial, women are more frequently convicted compared to men who have been investigated and prosecuted.
Global trends emerging during the COVID-19 pandemic

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<th>Infographic 1</th>
<th>Trafficking in persons emerging trends in 2020</th>
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<td>Decreasing trends compared to 2019</td>
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<td>Total victims of trafficking in persons detected (per 100,000p)</td>
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<td>Cross-border trafficking victims detected (per 100,000p)</td>
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<td>Victims trafficked for sexual exploitation detected (per 100,000p)</td>
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<td>Victims’ profiles 8</td>
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<td>Persons convicted for trafficking in persons:</td>
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4 Based on information on total victims detected in 2019 and in 2020, collected from 105 countries: 60 countries reporting a decreasing trend in the detection of victims; 33 countries reporting an increasing trend; and 12 countries reporting a stable number of detections over these two years.
5 Based on information on total victims detected in 2019 and in 2020, collected from 73 countries.
6 Based on information on total victims detected in 2019 and in 2020, collected from 89 countries.
7 “Other forms” of exploitation refers to those forms not falling within the “sexual exploitation”, “forced labour” or “organ removal” categories.
8 Based on information on total victims detected in 2019 and in 2020, collected from 99 countries.
9 Based on information on total number of individuals convicted in 2019 and in 2020, collected from 85 countries.
The global decline in detection of trafficking victims, in 2020 compared to 2019, was largely driven by smaller victim counts in low- and medium-income countries. Countries in Central and South America reported a significant reduction in the number of identified victims in 2020. Sub-Saharan Africa and the East Asia and Pacific regions also saw a decline. Member States in these regions have attributed these lower detections to reduced law enforcement engagement in anti-trafficking activities, as pandemic preventive measures absorbed most of each state’s capacity. Countries in Europe and North America still recorded a small increase in the number of victims detected in 2020.

Data for 2021 is still very limited, but on the basis of information from 20 countries, it appears that some countries in South-East Asia, and Central America and the Caribbean, have reported a further reduction in 2021. Some others, mainly in Europe and the Americas, have reported higher numbers compared to 2020 (see figure 6 below).

Globally, detected forms of cross-border trafficking also fell considerably in 2020, as most regions identified over 20 percent fewer victims from abroad than the year before. Some national reports suggest mobility restrictions resulting from COVID-19 containment measures may have contributed to this trend. For example, Uganda Police forces reported that the downward trend in the number of trafficking cases was the results of, “restriction of cross-border movement due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of transport within and outside the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic”. The number of transnational cases reported by the police in Uganda fell from 233 in 2019 to 93 in 2020. At the same time, the recorded number of Ugandan nationals trafficked within Uganda rose from 19 in 2019 to 118 in 2020. Similarly, authorities in the Netherlands reported a drastic decline in the number of victims of cross-border sexual exploitation and forced criminality, from 668 victims in 2019 to 289 in 2020. This aligned with the restriction on travel put in place because of COVID-19 pandemic. Similar statements were reported by a number of national authorities in different parts of the world.

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In 2020, a drastic drop in the detection of trafficking for sexual exploitation was recorded in most of the world. The only exception was North America, where the detection of victims of this form of trafficking continued to increase in 2020 at the same growth rate recorded in previous years.
After a decade of consistent increases, in 2020 the detection of trafficking for sexual exploitation fell by some 24 per cent, decreasing in one year the increase recorded in the previous five. As reported above, important reductions were recorded in Asia, Central and South America, in North Africa and the Middle East, as well as in Western and Southern Europe. Research worldwide suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has either resulted in a reduction of trafficking for sexual exploitation and/or in a reduction of the capacity to detect this form of crime. One hypothesis behind the reduced detection of victims facing sexual exploitation is that lockdown measures pushed exploitation into less visible locations. This likely hindered authorities’ identification of victims and made protection and support by community members and social services even more difficult to reach. Some countries did report victims of domestic trafficking for sexual exploitation becoming “less visible”, going “unnoticed” by authorities. Dutch authorities, for example, reported an emerging concern that these victims have “not been able to find their way to support”, as anonymous calls on behalf of victims of sexual exploitation increased compared to 2019. Along the same lines, a 2021 annual report published by the German Federal Police highlights that sexual exploitation is continuing to move from streets and brothels to private apartments.

For the first time since UNODC started collecting data on trafficking in persons, detection of trafficking for forced labour in 2020 was equal to that of trafficking for sexual exploitation, at just under 40 per cent each.
**Infographic 2** Detected victims of trafficking, by form of exploitation, 2020 (or most recent)

- 0.2% Trafficking for removal of organs
- 0.3% Trafficking for illegal adoption
- 0.7% Trafficking for exploitative begging
- 0.9% Trafficking for forced marriages
- 10.2% Trafficking for forced criminal activity
- 10.3% Mixed forms of exploitation
- 38.7% Trafficking for sexual exploitation
- 38.8% Trafficking for forced labour

Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.
*Based on a total of 36,488 victims detected in 86 countries in 2020.
Fig. 6 Change in the number of detected victims, per 100,000 population, comparison from 2019 to 2020, from 2020 to 2021 and from 2019 to 2021 in selected countries

Countries not affected in 2020 and in 2021

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<tr>
<td>Türkiye</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<td>Tajikistan</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Uruguay</td>
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<td>Azerbaijan</td>
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<td>Guatemala</td>
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<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>Albania</td>
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<td>Colombia</td>
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<td>Nigeria</td>
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<td>Republic of Moldova</td>
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<td>Panama</td>
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<td>Costa Rica</td>
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<td>Dominican Rep.</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>-83%</td>
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Countries affected in 2020 and recovering in 2021

Source: UNODC elaboration of national data
Women and children face more violent exploitation  

Female victims (women and girls) account for 60 per cent of the total number of detected victims in 2020. The marked reduction in the detection of sexual exploitation drives the reduction in the number of female victims detected per 100,000 population (a decline of 11 per cent in one year). Despite this drop, women and girls remain more detected as victims of trafficking than men and boys. But a longer historical trend towards identifying more male victims seems to have accelerated in 2020.

Analysis of the case summaries collected by UNODC suggests that traffickers use more violence with women and child victims, especially girls. Female victims, of any age described in these cases, are three-times more likely to suffer physical or extreme violence (including sexual violence) during trafficking than males. The same dataset shows that children (girls and boys) are 1.7 times more likely to suffer physical or extreme violence than adults (men and women), and girls are 1.5 times more likely to suffer violence than women. This holds true in all regions of origin, regardless of the type of criminality involved or form of exploitation.

Infographic 3: Detected victims of trafficking, by age group and sex, 2020 (or most recent)*

Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

*Based on a total of 51,675 victims detected in 166 countries in 2020 (or most recent).
Within these global trends, there are wide regional differences in the profiles of detected victims. While countries in North, Central America and the Caribbean, most often detect women and girl victims trafficked for sexual exploitation, countries in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa detect more males, especially men, trafficked for forced labour, and boys for forced criminal activity.

Other regional variations exist in the most common victim profiles detected. In Sub-Saharan Africa child trafficking is most prevalent, mainly for the purpose of forced labour. South Asian countries detect female and male victims about equally. They are trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation, and to a lesser degree, for forced marriage. In Western and Southern Europe, a large proportion of detected victims are trafficked and exploited in criminal activity or mixed forms of trafficking. Finally, countries in Central America and the Caribbean detect a large number of girls trafficked for sexual exploitation.
The court case summaries involving children suggest that the average age of detected child victims ranges around 14-15 years of age, for all forms of exploitation. In general, adult victims of trafficking for forced labour are older than those who are trafficked for sexual exploitation. The limited number of cases involving trafficking for the purpose of forced begging suggests that victims of this form of exploitation might be much older than other trafficked victims, as some victims reported in these cases were above 50 years old.

18 For child victims of trafficking for forced labour reported in the collection of case summaries, the median age is 17, average age is 15. For those in sexual exploitation, median age is 16 and average is 15. Based on 335 reported cases of trafficking involving 343 child victims and 222 adult victims that concluded with a conviction between 2012 and 2020.

19 For victims of trafficking for forced labour reported in the collection of case summaries, the median age is 21, average age is 31. Based on 335 reported cases of trafficking involving 343 child victims and 222 adult victims that concluded with a conviction between 2012 and 2020.

20 For victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation reported in the collection of case summaries, the median age is 18, average age is 22.
Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022

**Generation 30 Research on Trafficking in Persons**

Generation 30 is an initiative of the UNODC Research and Analysis Branch featuring contributions from young and early-career researchers who want to make a global difference with their research on trafficking in persons. Contributions were collected through an open call and selected on the basis of the quality of the empirical research and relevance of the topic.

**The social suffering of trafficked men**

*Author: P. Smiragina-Ingelstrom, University of Stockholm.*

An increasing number of male victims of trafficking in persons has been detected globally since 2003. In 2020, men accounted for some 20 per cent of the detected victims. However, men seem to be disproportionately underreported, as few studies conducted at local level have shown. In the city of Madrid, for example, an estimated 9.2 men go undetected for each detected adult male victim, compared with 2.5 women for each woman victim detected and 5.7 children for each child victim.

While more attention is being given to the trafficking of men, social and health services as well as legal and advocacy frameworks still predominantly focus on female victims of sexual exploitation. The misperceptions around the vulnerability and possible victimhood of men leave many unidentified and unassisted.

This study is based on participant observations (28 days), interviews with anti-trafficking actors (n=36), and individual in-depth interviews with potential men victims of trafficking in persons (n=22). The interviews were examined alongside a documentary analysis (national and international legislation) including the analysis of two video-interviews with men identified as potential victims of trafficking and conducted by NGO staff. The focus of this excerpt is the story of Aleksandr. The analysis of his story is based on a video interview, where he conveys his experience to a representative from an NGO operating in Eastern Europe. Its purpose is not to inform about the size of the problem related to the trafficking of men but rather to delve into the lived experiences of trafficked men and provide an account of how the invisibility of trafficked men is experienced.

**Aleksandr’s story**

Aleksandr came from a town in Eastern Europe. His exploitation was preceded by the death of his wife, his recent release from prison and unemployment. These three factors resulted in economic instability and pushed him to travel to his capital in search of work. According to NGO representatives interviewed as part of this study, Aleksandr’s recruitment was typical for men victims; Aleksandr was recruited at a train station, where he was looking for a job and place to stay. After having his documents and money stolen, Aleksandr was approached by a recruiter who offered him a meal. The trafficker gained Aleksandr’s trust through friendly conversation, empathy and promises to fix his problems. Aleksandr recollected, “I didn’t have a place to live or a job, he [recruiter] started promising me mountains of gold.”

After eating, Aleksandr felt disoriented, and he later suspected that his food was likely laced with sedatives. He was transported, unconscious, by car to a distant region with three others who had also been promised work. One of the NGO representatives interviewed for this study explained, “for every such person they receive approximately […] 200-250 US dol-

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23 See more in box: Estimating the dark figure of trafficking in persons in the Autonomous Community of Madrid using MSE on p. XX of this report


25 The participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling, where the selection was strategic to ensure the sample’s relevance to the aim of the study. This was followed by snowball sampling. Two groups of participants were selected: anti-trafficking actors and potential (men) victims of human trafficking. The data was collected using multi-sited ethnography, where the behavior of potential victims and anti-trafficking actors was observed across different locations.
Upon arrival, Aleksandr was told that they owed the recruiters for transportation and, having no money, his only option was to work. One month after working without pay, Aleksandr was told that he had accumulated more debt by eating the traffickers’ food and smoking their cigarettes. Aleksandr was never able to work off his debt and suffered five years in exploitation. During this period, he attempted several escapes, but was intercepted and resold to perform different forms of forced labour, from brick production to tending cattle. He worked 16-hour shifts, lived in very poor conditions, suffered violence, sleep deprivation and malnutrition.

During his final escape, he avoided big roads and moved at night. One night he slipped into a pond and this accident caused a serious injury that left him unable to move his legs. He crawled to a train station, where some strangers found him and called an ambulance. Both his legs were amputated. An NGO helped him return home, but he did not survive post-surgery complications and died soon after.

Like Aleksandr, according to key informants, many trafficking victims suffer some form of hardship preceding a decision to move. Many experts and victims interviewed in this research reported recruitment at transport hubs in large cities where the victims had voluntarily come to look for jobs. Most often, victims had experienced illness, substance abuse, a family death, unemployment and/or recent release from prison. This social suffering prior to exploitation made the men easy targets, allowing traffickers to abuse their vulnerability and lure them into exploitative labour.

Gendering of exploitation

Gender norms and masculine stereotypes hinder identification of male trafficking victims.27 Men tend to perceive themselves, and to be perceived by others, as victims of unfortunate circumstances rather than trafficking. The assumed breadwinner role and socially ascribed masculine qualities of strength and control contradict the victim status.28 Those who possess characteristics incongruent with victimhood may struggle to access justice, as they may never be identified as victims. While at the same time men are often targeted precisely because they are perceived to pose certain physical qualities that are often associated with masculinity. One NGO representative interviewed for this study said:

“They [traffickers] are interested in able-bodied [people]. [People] who are capable to work because the work […] that they are forced to do, […] requires […] adequate health, adequate […] strength.”

Another significant means mentioned by key informants is the abuse of a position of vulnerability linked to substance abuse. Alcohol, for example, was used as a mean to facilitate recruitment, and dependence on alcohol kept trafficked men in exploitative situations. As one victim said,

“…They will pour you some booze. You will drink it. Your consciousness will become foggy… you will start thinking at night, that you are all alone so you will go and drink some more booze, and it seems better. And then it happens all over again the next day.”

Physical and psychological violence, including sexual violence, can accompany various forms of exploitation.29 However, experiences of violence were rarely discussed by the male victims directly. Culturally rooted gender expectations may shape the

26 The hardships that the men experienced prior to exploitation are consistent with the notion of social suffering, which entails the various social aspects that affect the socially marginalized groups. For more, see Bourdieu, P., Accardo, A., et al., The weight of the world: Social suffering in contemporary society. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).


social suffering of trafficked men and contribute to their exploitation. Many men interviewed for this study showed resistance in disclosing their experience of victimization. Most interviewed victims preferred to either take a neutral stance toward their experience or expressed success in overcoming hardship.\(^{30}\)

Comparative studies of men's, women's and children's trafficking experiences would make a significant contribution to understanding the gendering of exploitation, as well as fostering deeper awareness of the post-trafficking needs of all victims.

### Generation 30 Research on Trafficking in Persons

Generation 30 is an initiative of the UNODC Research and Analysis Branch featuring contributions from young and early-career researchers who want to make a global difference with their research on trafficking in persons. Contributions were collected through an open call and selected on the basis of the quality of the empirical research and relevance of the topic.

### Can multisector approaches improve victim identification?\(^{31}\)

**Authors:**

B.R. Young, Department of Health Behavior, Gillings School of Global Public Health, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and UNC Injury Prevention Research Center.

M. Chua, Injury and Violence Prevention, UNC Injury Prevention Research Center.

It has been twenty years since the entry into force of the UN Trafficking Protocol, and new generations of researchers are investigating which policies and practices may contribute to increasing detection of trafficking victims.

By focusing on the anti-trafficking efforts of the international community, this study looks at the international instruments and commitments that are shaping the international instruments and norms that most victims are identified worldwide. First, a mapping of the international instruments that are driving global efforts against trafficking in persons is provided and discussed, on the basis of existing literature. Second, a structural equation modeling (Latent Class Analysis – LCA) is used to analyze the relations between higher levels of detection and progress made toward these international commitments.\(^{32}\) It concludes that victims’ identification is higher in normative environments where anti-trafficking strategies are implemented along with migration policies and labour rights.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{30}\) The interviews were semi-structured. All participants were asked if and how they experienced difficulties. Some men were explicitly asked about experiences of verbal and/or physical violence others were not. This was conditional to whether the potential victims felt discomfort or distress during the interviews.

\(^{31}\) Based on work by: Young B., Department of Health Behavior, Gillings School of Global Public Health, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and M. Meghan Chua, Injury Prevention Research Center, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

\(^{32}\) LCA is an empirical method for identifying similar subgroups based on categorical indicators. See, Bauer D, Steeney D. Latent, “Class/cluster analysis and mixture modeling workshop”, oral presentation at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 1-5, 2020; Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Muthen B, Muthen LK. Integrating Person-Centered and Variable-Centered Analyses: Growth Mixture Modeling With Latent Trajectory Classes. Alcoholism, clinical and experimental research. 2000;24:882-891. doi: 10.1111/j.1530-2727.2000.tb02070. Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) and significance testing were used to select the best fitting class solution. After running the LCA, the best-fitting class solution with a distal outcome (trafficking in persons detection rates) we modelled using the Bolck; Croon, and Hagenaars (BCH) (2004) 3 step approach. The BCH approach is robust against the presence of additional variables in a model, thus, the addition of an outcome variable will not alter the classes found in the LCA. Victim detection counts were transformed into rates by dividing detection count by state population size. Modelling the distal outcome allows us to understand the relationship between the UN Member States classes (i.e., subgroups) of structural determinants and trafficking victim detection rates. See Bolck A, Croon M, & Hagenaars J. “Estimating latent structure models with categorical variables: One-step versus three-step estimators”, Political Analysis, 2004, 12(1), pp. 3–27.

Through iterative analyses, the research identified the optimal number of classes for the population by comparing model information criteria (e.g., BIC, p-value) across different numbers of classes. A three-class solution was deemed to best fit the data based on smaller BIC, smaller adjusted BIC, and a significant p-value (p<0.030). After selecting the optimal unconditional latent class model, the model was rerun including trafficking victimization rates as an auxiliary (i.e., outcome) variable using the BCH approach.

\(^{33}\) Two main limitations were identified within the framework for this study: first, the identification of State policies and practices was informed by the most recent literature, and even if saturation was reached, it is possible that peer-reviewed articles or UN reports describing additional State policies and practices may have been missed; Second, the trafficking detection data may not reflect the actual number of detected victims in all Member States due to different capacity to report. Using the Wald test of the equality of means, it was found that the distal outcome (trafficking in persons victim detection) means were significantly different (p=0.05) across all classes. See, Goździiak, E. M., Goździiak, E. M., & Bump, M. N., New immigrants, changing communities: Best practices for a better America, (The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group: 2008). See, World Health Organization “A conceptual framework for action on the social determinants of health”, 2010; Massey “Chapter 1: How stratification works”. In: Massey DS. Categorically Unequal: The American Stratification System. (Russell Sage Foundation; 2007). United Nations on Drugs and Crime [UNODC]. 2020. Chapter 2: Socio-economic factors and risks of COVID-19 recession. In: UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.20.IV.3).
Mapping international counter-trafficking instruments
The anti-trafficking literature identifies a number of structural factors, including legislation, policies and practices, that affect the capacity to detect trafficking in persons. They extend over different domains, including migration and refugee law, criminal law, labour standards, and measures aiming at preventing gender-based violence and child protection, among many others. These structural factors relate to five main international instruments and commitments, which have been driving international efforts in those areas.

International instruments and commitments shaping global efforts against trafficking in persons

(1) the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons especially women and children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and four targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted;
(2) the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees;
(3) the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;
(4) SDG Target 10.7: Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies; and
(5) SDG Target 8.8: Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

Assessing progress in the fight against trafficking
Few studies within the anti-trafficking field have explored the impact of these instruments, especially in terms of the actual capacity to detect trafficking victims. In recent years, however, the Agenda 2030 has led to an unprecedented wealth of information on states’ policies and practices promoting the achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDG data was used to assess Member States’ progress toward the implementation of these international instruments.

Among the instruments analysed, the UN Trafficking Protocol presented the highest level of endorsement, both at the level of ratification/accession and alignment of the national legislation. With 172 parties and 131 Member States presenting fully compliant legislation (72 percent of the sample) the UN Trafficking Protocol emerged as the key instrument driving international efforts against this crime. On the other hand, progress toward SDG Target 8.8 entails 76 Member States (59 percent of the sample) presenting a good level of national compliance with labour rights, including freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Drivers of victims’ identification
The LCA analysis also provided an indication of the characteristics of those countries that identify and report a higher number of victims. According to UNODC data for 2020, the countries that reported the highest number of victims detected in their population (two victims detected per 100,000 people in the population in 2020) were those self-reporting higher levels of adherence to all five international instruments, with criminalization of trafficking in

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37 The following three datasets and repositories were used to map and assess compliance to international commitments: (1) United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division and International Organization for Migration (UNDESA and IOM) (2019). SDG indicator 10.7.2. Number of countries with migration policies to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, Country data; (2) United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database, Target 8.8.2. Level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status. 2018 data; and (3) United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, Country Profiles. The outcome variable – trafficking victim detection was derived from a UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (GLOTiP) dataset.
38 As reported in United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Indicators Database, Target 8.8.2. Level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on ILO textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status. 2018 data.
persons accompanied by compliance with labour rights, fair recruitment policies for foreign workers, and refugee protection schemes.

This group included 167 Member States (accounting for 87 percent of the sample), all compliant with all international instruments and reporting 2 victims detected per 100,000 people in the population in 2020.\textsuperscript{39}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Normative environments in Member States detecting most victims of trafficking} \\
\hline
\textbullet\ National legislation criminalising all forms of trafficking in persons foreseen by the UN Trafficking Protocol; \\
\textbullet\ Formal strategies to address trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants; \\
\textbullet\ Compliance with labour rights, including freedom of association and collective bargaining; \\
\textbullet\ Policies aimed at promoting fair and ethical recruitment of migrant workers; \\
\textbullet\ System for receiving, processing and identifying those forced to flee across international borders; \\
\textbullet\ Measures that grant permission for temporary stay or protection for refugees and asylum seekers; \\
\textbullet\ An inter-ministerial coordination mechanism on migration; \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

The LCA analysis shows that Member States who have adopted the UN Trafficking Protocol and established formal strategies to address trafficking in persons but do not have a mechanism for refugee protection or a national law on temporary stay and are not fully compliant with international commitments on labour rights have a more limited capacity to identify and protect victims. These 12 UN Member States (accounting for 6 per cent of the sample) identified only one victim per 100,000 people in the population on average in 2020.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{39} These included: (1) the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; (2) the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons especially women and children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; and (3) SDG Target 10.7 “Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”. Of note, classes 2 and 3 only overlap in their compliance with State inter-ministerial coordination for orderly and safe migration.

\textsuperscript{40} These included (1) the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, (2) SDG Target 8.2 “Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment”, and (3) SDG Target 10.7 “Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”.

The lowest level of detection capacity was recorded by those countries that are not a party to the UN Trafficking Protocol and do not have legislation or policies promoting fair and ethical recruitment of migrant workers (as per SDG 10.7: Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies). This included 12 UN Member States (seven percent of the sample) that detected less than one person per 100,000 people in the population in 2020.\textsuperscript{40}
**Global Overview — Forms of exploitation**

**Targets, types and venues for sexual exploitation**
Female victims continue to be the most detected among those trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Nearly two-thirds of detected **victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are women** and another 27 per cent are girls.

Around 10 per cent of the detected victims of sexual exploitation are **males**, **either boys or men**. Men and boys trafficked for sexual exploitation are more frequently reported in South-East Asia. They account for a full third of victims who experience sexual exploitation detected in that region.

Transgender persons (including transgender women, girls, men, boys and non-binary persons) accounted for two per cent of detected victims who endure trafficking for sexual exploitation, in the nine countries in the Americas and Western and Southern Europe that reported data to UNODC for 2020 or most recent.

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**Infographic 4**
Detected victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, by age group and sex, 2020 (or most recent)*

Not all countries record information concerning transgender and/or non-binary persons. Globally, 12 Member States have provided data to UNODC that included numbers of transgender victims of trafficking in persons detected.41

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41 Of the reporting countries, six countries are in Western and Southern Europe, three in Central America, two in South America and one in North America. Ninety-five per cent of these non-binary victims (“other” gender category) were reported as “transgender” by the national authorities of the United States of America, Argentina and Honduras.
Infographic 4.1  Detected victims of trafficking, by age group and gender, in the countries reporting transgender victims, 2020 (or most recent)*

Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.
* Based on a total of 7638 victims detected in 9 countries in the Americas and Western and Southern Europe in 2020 (or most recent).

Infographic 6  Victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation by intermediaries or by venues where exploitation took place, as reported in case narrative, (2012-2020)*

Source: GLDTIP collection of court case summaries and Sherloc Case Law Database.
* Based on information involving 2,127 victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation reported in 351 cases that concluded with a conviction between 2012 and 2020.

Infographic 5  Detected transgender victims of trafficking in persons, by form of exploitation, 2017-2020*

Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.
* Based on 675 transgender adult and 120 transgender child victims reported in 12 countries in the Americas and Western and Southern Europe between 2017 and 2020.
The court case summaries collected and analysed by UN-ODC show **victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are detected in many venues**: outdoor and indoor; public places and hidden locations; from night clubs to private homes; and from street corners to brothels.

Notably, a bit more than half of the victims reported in these court cases were exploited in public venues, such as bars and clubs or outdoors. The other half of the victims were exploited in locations that are typically out of sight, such as apartments or hotels. In these places, however, trafficking is certainly more difficult to detect, and victims exploited behind closed doors are probably more underreported than those exploited in visible locations.

Analysis of the cases disaggregated according to regions unveils wide differences in the venues where victims are sexually exploited. Cases collected from **Western and Southern Europe**, for instance, show that detected victims are typically exploited in **visible venues**, such as street prostitution or brothels. The pandemic, however, may have contributed to a shift in sexual exploitation from indoor public venues to outdoor and private venues, as reported by authorities in Germany and the Netherlands.42

**Countries in the Middle East and North Africa region** report cases where victims are sexually exploited in **private apartments**. In **South America and in East Asia**, victims are exploited in public locations. In South America, most victims seem to be exploited in **bars and night clubs**, while in East Asia more cases report victims having been exploited in tourist locations, such as **karaoke bars, hotels or sauna/massage parlours**.

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**Fig. 10** Locations where sexual exploitation took place, as reported in case narratives, by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Private and hidden venues</th>
<th>Public places indoor</th>
<th>Outdoor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western and Southern Europe</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa and the Middle East</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries and Sherloc Case Law Database.

* Based on court cases involving: 584 victims reported in Western and Southern Europe; 86 victims reported in the Middle East and North Africa; 457 victims reported in East Asia and the Pacific; and 311 victims reported in South America.

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Evolving forms of detected trafficking

Trafficking in persons for forced labour has been increasingly detected over the last decade. In 2020, about the same number of detected victims of trafficking for forced labour per 100,000 population was recorded globally. However, since the overall number of victims detected decreased, in terms of share, trafficking for forced labour accounted for 39 per cent of total victims detected in 2020, a bigger share than ever before seen.

Victims of trafficking for forced labour are found to be exploited in a wide variety of economic activities. UNODC’s analysis of the collected court case summaries shows that large numbers are detected in the food supply chain, including agriculture and the fishing industry, which presumably did not stop working during the pandemic.

The majority of victims exploited for forced labour are men. Women and girls make up one third of victims trafficked for forced labour. The type of industry where victims are exploited is directly related to victim profiles, where gender plays a role.

As far as the sex of victims trafficked into forced labour, according to the cases collected by UNODC, female victims seem to be largely trafficked for domestic servitude. Females are also trafficked for street selling, as well as to work in catering and in agriculture. Men are typically trafficked into the fishing industry, agriculture and the construction sector. Boys are trafficked for street selling and domestic servitude. In the Middle East and North Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, North and Central America between 40 and 50 per cent of the detected trafficking victims in forced labour are females.

Concerning the age profile of the victims, South Asia, Central America and the Caribbean detect more children trafficked into forced labour. In both regions, more girls than boys are detected.
Victims trafficked who face other forms of exploitation are mainly detected in mixed labour and sexual exploitation situations. This subset of victims is increasing in share worldwide. Whereas two per cent of all detected victims underwent mixed forced labour and sexual exploitation in 2018, ten per cent did in 2020.

For example, more than 21 per cent of the total trafficking victims detected in the United Kingdom are victims of forced labour and sexual exploitation, two-thirds of whom were females and one-third male. More than eight per cent of total victims detected in the United States of America underwent this type of mixed exploitation with most victims being females.

In some of the court case summaries shared with UNODC that ended in conviction for mixed forms of trafficking, women were trafficked into domestic servitude and then sexually exploited by the men of the household. Other cases involved women exploited to serve in bars and forced to have sexual relations with clients. Finally, a third group of mixed exploitation concerned women exploited in forced labour, often agriculture, and forced to have sex with their employers or third parties after working hours.

Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries and Sherloc Case Law Database.

* Based on 890 victims of trafficking for forced labour reported in 89 cases that concluded with a conviction between 2012 and 2020.

43 See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 9, case 73, case 323, case 344, case 488 and case 606, and UNODC, SHERLOC Case Law Database, case UGA003.
44 See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 5, case 287 and case 289.
45 See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, and case 262. See also Giammarinaro M.G., Palumbo, 2022, Le condizioni di lavoro e di vita delle lavoratrici agricole, VI Rapporto Agromafie e Caporalato, Ediesse, Futura.
The profile of victims of trafficking facing mixed forms of exploitation typically shifts according to the type of mixed exploitation. Other examples of mixed forms include victims exploited in forced labour and also forced criminal activity. In these cases, according to data from the United Kingdom, victims are mostly males. Victims facing mixed sexual and forced criminality, in that same data, are mostly children.

The share of detected victims trafficked to be exploited for forced criminal activity has been increasing, too – what was one per cent in 2016 and six per cent in 2018 was 10 per cent of the total detected victims in 2020. Between 2017 and 2020, this form of exploitation was reported by countries in almost every region: in Western Europe, in South-Eastern Europe, in Eastern Europe, in South Asia and North Africa and the Middle East. Cases were also reported in East Asia and the Pacific, as well as Central and North America.
Detected victims who experience this form of trafficking are overwhelmingly males, especially boys at 68 per cent. The case summaries analysed by UNODC involving trafficking for forced criminality included shoplifting\(^46\), pickpocketing\(^47\) and other theft\(^48\) of cars, petrol or jewellery, as well as drug trafficking and fraud in different forms\(^49\).

Among the other forms of exploitation, exploitative begging accounts for about one per cent of the victims globally detected in 2020. According to the case summaries collected by UNODC since 2012, victims forced into begging can be adults with physical disabilities\(^50\), children exploited by their own parents in connection with harmful social practices\(^51\), homeless children with no parental care\(^52\), or families in extreme poverty\(^53\).

Another one per cent of detected trafficking victims in 2020 were trafficked for the purpose of forced marriage. This crime takes different forms, as described in court case summaries reported to UNODC. One type exploits women trafficked and forced to marry foreign men who can then gain legal rights to enter and stay in the victim’s country – so called sham marriages. This type of trafficking has been detected in European Union countries.\(^54\) Other forms of trafficking for forced marriage concerns girls forced to marry in the context of harmful social practices. This has been reported in South-Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East.\(^55\) Finally, another form of trafficking for forced marriages involves young women traded to men for marriage, which mainly has been reported in South-East Asia.\(^56\)

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\(^{46}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 60, case 61, case 136, case 341, case 481, case 560 and case 588.

\(^{47}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 267, case 311, case 404, case 415 and case 518.

\(^{48}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 308, case 439, case 470, case 541 and case 589.

\(^{49}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 222, case 265, case 268, case 588 and case 621.

\(^{50}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 187, case 205, case 227, case 402, case 425, case 614, case 652, case 659 and case 685.

\(^{51}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 61, case 471, case 175, case 267, case 595, case 661, case 670, and Sherloc Case Law Database, case ITA004.

\(^{52}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 219, case 261, case 564 and case 605.

\(^{53}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 259, case 298, case 300, case 557, case 623, and Sherloc Case Law Database, case LBN001.

\(^{54}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 411, case 412, case 414, case 480, case 585 and case 665.

\(^{55}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 120, case 147, case 613, case 681, and Sherloc Case Law Database, case MWH14 and ZAF011.

\(^{56}\) See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 155, case 157, case 207, case 447, case 448, case 450, case 596, case 597 and case 598.
Estimating the dark figure of Trafficking in Persons in the Autonomous Community of Madrid using Multiple Systems Estimation (MSE)

Despite many efforts by government institutions to collect information on trafficking in persons, global data on this topic is still scarce and often of poor quality. National data systems to record and disseminate data on detected victims are slowly improving worldwide, but data on numbers and profiles of non-detected victims remain largely unknown. This hampers the development of effective and sustainable policies for preventing and protecting victims of trafficking in persons. Untold numbers of individuals who have not been detected and, thus, are not included in official statistics, are part of what is known as the “dark figure of trafficking in persons”.

Over the last decade, the research community has implemented and experimented with a practicable method for estimating how many victims of trafficking in persons there are at local and international levels. The Multiple Systems Estimation (MSE) is a method applied to lists of victims detected and recorded by different local authorities. The analysis conducted on the combination of these different lists is used to estimate those victims that are never detected and extrapolate a number for the entire victim population in that country.

In 2016, UNODC conducted a first MSE in the Netherlands, followed by other estimates in other countries in the following years. In 2022, with the support of the best experts on this method, UNODC published a United Nations manual on measuring trafficking in persons prevalence through MSE58. The manual provides practical guidance on how to apply this statistical technique to generate better estimates of the levels of human trafficking through extrapolation from administrative data of recorded cases. It is meant for a mixed audience of policymakers and practitioners in the field of anti-trafficking committed to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16.2.

The implementation of the MSE methodology in the Autonomous Community of Madrid provides an example of how this methodology can be successfully implemented, The University Institute for Migration Studies (Comillas Pontifical University), with the support of UNICEF Spanish Committee, undertook a project Data Culture in Human Trafficking. One of the objectives of this project was to estimate how many victims of trafficking in persons remained invisible to the authorities in the Autonomous Community of Madrid between 2015 and 2019. A multidisciplinary team applied the MSE to estimate the prevalence of trafficking in persons there.59

There are two preconditions to apply MSE successfully. One is to have a confined and homogeneous population and the second is to have at least three independent lists of recorded victims of trafficking in persons. When these preconditions exist, a dark figure can be estimated through a tested statistical methodology.

Assembling the data required to apply MSE is never an easy task as it requires researchers to collect and integrate data on detected victims from different sources and stakeholders. Notwithstanding this challenge, the team collected eight lists from non-governmental organizations, government entities and national authorities, which made it possible to conduct a MSE using robust and reliable data.

The results revealed that the undetected or “dark figure” of victims of trafficking in persons within the Autonomous Community of Madrid from 2015 to 2019 was 2,805 persons while the number of detected victims was only 975. Thus, the total number of victims of trafficking in persons in the city for that period was 3,780.

In other words, only 26 per cent of victims were being detected. For each victim identified, three others remain hidden or invisible to organizations, authorities, and society at large. As for the estimated detection ratios for different population groups, the teams observed that:

- For each detected female victim, there are 2.5 undetected.
- For each detected boy or girl victim, that there are 5.7 undetected.
- For every detected male victim, that there are 9.20 undetected.

The following graph shows the annual trends of detected (blue) and estimated (orange) victims of trafficking in persons in the Autonomous Community of Madrid between 2015 and 2019. Between 2017 and 2019 as more victims were detected, it also shows a widening gap between the number of identified victims and the estimated total number of victims, detected and non-detected.

Bringing to light Trafficking in Persons through statistics

These results are similar to the results of MSE applied in Australia (2016/2017) and60, The Netherlands (2014/2015)61 both resulting in four victims estimated for one detected. Likewise, results in Romania (2015), Ireland (2016) and Slovakia (2016) resulting in two victims for every one detected.62

While available data on detected victims of trafficking in persons is only the tip of the iceberg, these statistics can be useful to measure the dark figure of victims of trafficking in persons. However, assembling available data on detected victims can be challenging as there are often no common concepts, variables and methodologies that are applied across national data systems on trafficking in persons. Typically, each institution or organization collects information for different purposes and uses different methods to do so.63 For instance, in Spain, data on trafficking in persons can be found in different institutions but in different formats. the Spanish Intelligence Center for Counterterrorism and Organized Crime (CITCO) collects data from a set of specific indicators for purely statistical purposes, while the Public Prosecutor Office collects data to follow-up proceedings and for prosecution purposes, while non-government organizations collect data about the support that they provide to victims.

Applying MSE to the number of victims of trafficking in persons in the Autonomous Community of Madrid supported the creation of standardized definitions and data collection methods across different sources and institutions that can be maintained in the future.

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**Trafficking flows**

**Sub-Saharan African victims increasingly detected in transnational trafficking flows**

Cross-border trafficking has been increasingly detected since 2017, particularly as part of the longest-distance flows. In 2020, however, a reduction in cross border trafficking by over a fifth was recorded globally.

Compared to other regions of origin of cross-border trafficking, victims from Sub-Saharan Africa are detected in a growing number of countries, both within that region and further afield. Trafficking of African victims represents the most substantial transregional flow detected in 2020 at the global level. Trafficking of Asian victims, out of both South and East Asia, also represents a large flow with a global dimension, while European victims are mainly detected in the European sub-regions.

![ Detected victims, by region of detection, 2017-2020* ](source: UNODC elaboration of national data. * Based on 34,667 victims of trafficking in persons detected in 2020; 38,042 of trafficking in persons detected in 2019; 29,525 victims of trafficking in persons detected in 2018; and 49,201 victims of trafficking in persons detected in 2017 whose citizenship was reported.)
Number of destination countries where victims originating within and outside of the region were detected, 2017-2020

Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

Map 3
Share of Sub-Saharan African victims among total victims detected in destination regions, 2008-2020

Sources: UNODC elaboration of national data.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
Map. 4  Share of East Asian victims among total victims detected in destination regions, 2008-2020

Map. 5  Share of South Asian victims among total victims detected in destination regions, 2008-2020

Sources: UNODC elaboration of national data.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
Outflows of East Asian victims remain a global concern as well, as most regions detect victims from this part of the world. This flow, however, appears to be decreasing in many parts of the world, except in the Middle East, where victims from different countries in South-East Asia are being increasingly detected.

Another sizable global trafficking flow involves victims trafficked out of South Asia. This flow appears to increasingly find a destination in Western Europe and East Asia and the Pacific, while fewer victims are detected in the Middle East and in the Americas.

While flows of Asian and African victims seem to have a global dimension, most trafficking in person flows remain regional. Most victims of cross-border trafficking are detected in neighbouring countries within the region of origin or nearby. Regional flows continue to show victims move from lower income to higher income countries, even when destination countries are low-income countries, victims are most often trafficked from neighbouring countries with lower GDP.

- About a quarter of victims detected in Western and Southern Europe are citizens of countries in Central and South-Eastern Europe or Eastern Europe and 35 per cent are victims of domestic trafficking.

- About 82 per cent of victims detected in East Asia are East Asian citizens, either victims of cross border trafficking or they are trafficked domestically.

- About 15 per cent of victims detected in South America are trafficked across borders within South America and 75 per cent are victims of domestic trafficking.

- About 15 per cent of victims detected in Sub-Saharan Africa are trafficked across borders from another Sub-Saharan Africa country, while the other full 85 per cent of victims are domestically trafficked.
This same principle holds true with domestic trafficking, as well. Victims who are trafficked within their home countries often travel from low-income areas of the country, such as rural areas or small villages, to the main towns or economic centres. Analysis of the narrative of the trafficking cases collected by UNODC suggests that exploitation patterns of victims of domestic trafficking may overlap with internal migration. This applies to all forms of trafficking flows considered.

Victims can also be recruited and exploited within the same geographical areas, within the same city or community. In these cases, no significant geographical movement happens but the crime of trafficking still takes place.

Trafficking flows are clearly connected with the level of organization of trafficking networks. The longer the distance victims travel, more likely is the involvement of organized crime in the trafficking.64

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64 According to the court cases reported to UNODC, increasing flows distance record higher odds of engagement of criminal organizations, while domestic and short-range trafficking flows are less likely to involve criminal organizations. A logistic regression analysis on 3,249 victims of trafficking in persons, as reported by the court case summaries collected by UNODC, was performed. The analysis considered a dependent 0-1 binary variable defining 0 when there was no involvement of Business type of Organized Crime and 1 when there was. The independent variables considered in the model were the region of origin and destination of the victims, the forms of exploitation (sexual or forced labour), the number of offenders, and the distance between origin and destination countries (domestic/short/medium/long distance). The model result was significant (LR test 3472.61, p-value 0.000) and the goodness of fit index satisfied pseudo R-squared 0.887). The analysis was carried by Prof. Daria Mendola from the University of Palermo in cooperation with UNODC Researchers.
**Fig. 27** Share of victims of trafficking, by geographical reach and traffickers’ structure, as reported in case narratives, 2012-2020*

... by governance type of organized criminal groups

- Domestic trafficking (27) 5%
- Nearby region (37) 6%
- Within same region (198) 32%
- Other regions (349) 57%

... by business-type of organized criminal groups

- Domestic trafficking (476) 23%
- Within same region (813) 39%
- Other regions (451) 22%
- Nearby region (343) 16%

... by opportunistic association, not organized crime

- Domestic trafficking 49%
- Within same region 27%
- Other regions 22%
- Nearby region 2%

... by individual traffickers

- Domestic trafficking (298) 59%
- Within same region (121) 24%
- Other regions (45) 9%
- Nearby region (42) 8%

Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries and Sherloc Case Law Database.

* Based on cases concluding with a conviction between 2012 and 2020. They involved: 618 victims trafficked by governance-type traffickers reported in 55 cases; 1,963 victims trafficked by business-type traffickers reported in 228 cases; 520 victims trafficked by lone traffickers reported in 207 cases; and 677 victims trafficked by opportunistic associations of traffickers reported in 196 cases.
Definitions of trafficking structures

Trafficking in persons is perpetrated by actors with different levels of sophistication within their organizational structures. According to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) “Organized criminal group” shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit;” (Article 2).

Within this Report, some categories of traffickers have been defined. Two broad categories include groups that meet the definition of organized criminal group, as well as opportunistic traffickers, who operate alone or enter in ad-hoc cooperation with others for a single criminal act.

Organized criminal groups include:
“Governance type of organized criminal groups” who wield security governance in a community or territory by means of fear and violence and may be involved in multiple illicit markets.65 “Business-like type organized criminal groups”, involving three or more traffickers systematically working together to traffic persons as a core component of their criminal activities.

Opportunistic traffickers include:
“Opportunistic associations of traffickers” working together, where two traffickers operate together, or more than two traffickers do not systematically work together beyond a single criminal act; and “Individual traffickers” who typically operate on their own.

65 When the narrative of the court cases referred to criminal groups making use of violence, intimidation and fear to ensure social control over a community or a territory, these were categorized as governance-type organized criminal group. For more on this see Varese, F. “What is Organized Crime?” In Varese, F. (ed.), Organized Crime: Critical Concepts in Criminology. London: Routledge, 2010 pp.1-33.
Trafficking organizations

Trafficking in persons is mostly organized

In court cases collected by UNODC, the business-like type of organized crime seems to account for the majority of convicted offenders and detected victims of trafficking in persons.

Confirming the findings of the previous report, with double the number of case summaries collected and analysed by UNODC, analysis of the court case summaries collected by UNODC shows criminal organizations traffic more people, for longer periods of time and in more violent manners than non-organized crime traffickers. They are generally able to operate with more people in multiple locations compared to less structured and organized traffickers.
Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022

All trafficking organization types are found behind all forms of exploitation in the court case summaries collected by UNODC. There are some differences, however. Trafficking for forced labour is more likely to be carried out by organized crime groups compared to trafficking for sexual exploitation.66 Business-like type trafficking networks mostly engaged in forced labour, with traffickers operating as different actors in business relationships with each other or even operating under the façade of legal recruitment agencies.67 Finally, the case summaries showed that, more than other actors, individual traffickers are convicted for the sexual exploitation of children under the age of 14, including the production of child sexual abuse material.68

The limited sample of reported cases of trafficking for the purpose of forced criminality suggests that organized crime traffickers are relatively more involved in this type of trafficking crime compared to less organized traffickers. The analyzed court case summaries show that these organized actors are almost exclusively convicted for perpetrating this form of trafficking.

66 An analysis of the case summaries collected by UNODC on the presence or absence of organized crime in the trafficking cases suggests that trafficking for forced labour has higher odds of being carried out by organized crime groups compared to trafficking for sexual exploitation. A logistic regression analysis was performed on 3,249 victims of trafficking in persons reported by the court case summaries collected by UNODC considered a dependent 0-1 binary variable defining 0 the victims reported in the cases where there was no involvement of organized crime (No-OC) and 1 the victims reported in the cases where there was involvement of organized crime (Yes-OC). The independent variables considered in the model are the region of origins and destinations of the victims, the forms of exploitation (sexual exploitation or forced labour), the number of offenders, and the distance between origin and destination. The model result was significant (LR test 3472.61, p-value 0.000) and the goodness of fit index satisfactory (pseudo R-squared 0.887). The analysis was carried by Prof. Daria Mendola from the University of Palermo in cooperation with UNODC Researchers.

67 See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 285, case 116, case 93, case 236 and case 307; and UNODC, SHERLOC Case Law Database, case THA011 and IRB037.

68 See UNODC, GLOTIP Court Case Summaries, case 37, case 174, case 436, case 540, case 164, case 288, case 438, case 576 and UNODC, SHERLOC Case Law Database, case PH058.
The results related to the level of sophistication of criminal organizations are based on the elaboration of a three-level scale of traffickers: Minimum, when one or two individuals operate in one or two locations; medium, when three to seven traffickers operate in three or four locations; and high, when more than seven traffickers operate in many locations.

This information was reported in 570 court cases of a total of 800 collected by UNODC that concluded with a conviction between 2012 and 2020.

The level of violence suffered by the victims was reported in 601 court cases of a total of 800 collected by UNODC that concluded with a conviction between 2012 and 2020. Some 51 cases involved governance type of organized crime, 185 cases involved business-like type of organized crime, 188 cases involved opportunistic associations of two and/or three traffickers and 177 to lone traffickers.
War: An Opportunity for Traffickers

In 2020, 56 state-based conflicts took place around the globe, bringing about an increasing number of fatalities. The UN estimates about two billion people live in conflict-affected countries and 274 million in need of humanitarian assistance. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, most of the active armed conflicts occurring between 2020 and 2022 are happening in Sub-Saharan Africa, followed by North Africa and the Middle East, Asia, the Americas and Europe.

In March 2022, the United Nations Secretary-General stated, “for predators and human traffickers, war is not a tragedy – it is an opportunity”. Previous UNODC research has shown that conflict settings increase the vulnerability of people to become victims of trafficking in persons. This vulnerability is also evident in the profile of victims detected globally. In 2020, before the escalation of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Ukraine, about 12 per cent of the total victims of trafficking in persons detected globally originated from a country affected by conflict. Not all these victims were trafficked as a direct result of an armed conflict but understanding how and where conflict plays a role on trafficking in persons globally is critical.

Most detected victims of trafficking originating from countries affected by ongoing conflict are African nationals and they are mostly detected within Africa and in the Middle East.

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72 Victims of trafficking from Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Palestine, Libya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen. It can be assumed that not all these victims originated from an area of the country directly affected by the conflict.
Additionally in 2020, the UN documented that about 5,000 children were recruited by armed groups. Most of these children were recorded in countries affected by conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa (including Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Mali), in North Africa and the Middle East (including Libya, Syria and Yemen) and in Asia (including Afghanistan and Myanmar).

Traffickers find new opportunities to operate in conflicts in different ways. Two broad categories can be defined: (1) trafficking operated by armed groups within conflict areas; and (2) traffickers taking advantage of people fleeing conflict areas.

**Children recruited and exploited during conflict**
Children recruited by armed groups account for many of the victims of trafficking that have been documented in conflict areas. The recruitment of children leads to their involvement in armed violence, including acts of terrorism and war crimes and for this, may not always be recognised as victims of trafficking.

Most documented victims are boys, but girls can also be recruited by armed groups. Children are typically used as combatants, to carry explosives or other material in support of troops. Older children are typically recruited into armed units to take active part in hostilities, while younger children are used for other tasks. For instance, in Yemen in 2019 and 2020, two-thirds of the documented children recruited by armed groups were trained, armed and used in active combat. About 19 per cent of these children were between 10 and 15 years old. The remaining children, often younger, were assigned to guard military checkpoints and handle mines or used in other roles. Girls were used as spies, to carry out intelligence gathering in their communities or to attract other combatants. Similarly, in 2020 the UN documented the recruitment of 232 children to be used as combatants in the Central African Republic, 578 children were used in support roles such as bodyguards, mansing checkpoints, spies, messengers, porters and carrying out domestic tasks. Similar patterns are documented in the Middle East, East Asia and in other conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Sex of children recruited by armed groups in conflict areas, as documented by the United Nations, 2020**

73 According to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, the recruitment and use of children associated with armed groups nearly always constitutes trafficking in persons; United Nations Human Rights Council, Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, A/HRC/37/47, paras 15-16.
77 International Criminal Court, Trial Chamber I, Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the Case of the Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, case no.: ICC-01/04-01/06, paras 759-760, 851.
According to UN data, about eight per cent of children recruited in conflict areas in the year 2020 were trafficked by governmental official forces, such as national armies or police forces. The majority, however, were recruited by non-official militias or armed groups who either oppose or support government forces. Children are not only exploited to increase the military power of armed groups. They are also victims of sexual exploitation, as a part of diffused gender-based violence exacerbated in conflict areas. In 2020, the United Nations documented sexual assaults on more than 1,200 children worldwide in direct connection with conflicts. Most of these victims are girls, but boys are raped and assaulted as well. Women and girls who live in conflict environments are at risk of gender-based violence of many forms, including trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Forced marriages and sexual slavery of children perpetrated by people in the armed forces operating in conflict zones, both governmental and non-governmental, have also been documented by the UN. The trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation, is often part of the systematic sexual violence perpetrated against civilians during and after conflicts.

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### Groups recruiting children in conflict areas, as documented by the United Nations, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Militia/Armed group against or pro-government</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police forces</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official National Army</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children in Armed Conflict.

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**Armed groups recruit or abduct children to use them as combatants.**

Children are found in villages, urban areas and in refugee camps. Thousands of victims have been documented in different conflicts, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

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In conflict zones, armed groups recruit or abduct women and girls for forced marriages, domestic work and sexual slavery. Similarly, they recruit or abduct men and boys for forced labour, for instance, in the exploitation of natural resources, as soldiers or for slavery.

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**Refugees escaping wars and persecution are easily targeted by traffickers who leverage their desperation to deceive them into exploitation.**

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The presence of large numbers of troops creates demand for labour and sexual services. In connection with degraded rule of law and weak institutions, this demand generates trafficking flows into the conflict or post-conflict zones.

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Groups recruiting children to be sexually assaulted by armed groups in conflict areas, as documented by the United Nations, 2020

- by Official National Army: 25%
- by Police forces: 9%
- by Militia/Armed group against or pro-government: 66%

Source: Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children in Armed Conflict.

International troops have also in the past been involved in sexual violence against civilian populations.

In addition, exploitation of migrant workers trafficked into countries in conflict for the purpose of forced labour in military bases has been documented. This often happens with the engagement of recruitment agents and their intermediaries in countries of origin. Victims are deceived about their country of destination, the nature of the work and/or their working and living conditions.

Victims Displaced and trafficked outside conflict but as result of conflict

People forced to flee leave homes, families and friends can quickly turn into easy targets for traffickers. A typical modus operandi for a trafficker operating in conflict settings is to exploit refugees’ urgent need to move to safe countries. Refugees often have no better option than to trust offers of passage across borders and some may eventually be coerced into exploitative conditions at their destination or during travel.

UNHCR has estimated 89.3 million people had been forcibly displaced at the end 2021. This includes people fleeing from conflicts, persecution and human rights violations. In 2021 alone, about 900,000 new displacements were recorded due to conflict in Afghanistan, nearly three-million individuals were displaced from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (most returned home within the year), a half-million people from Central African Republic, several million people were displaced from Myanmar and about 400,000 from South and Central Asia.

At the moment of the writing, UNCHR reported about 5.6 million individual refugees from Ukraine record ed across Europe since 24 February and 7.1 million internally displaced in Ukraine.

The vulnerability to trafficking in persons of people fleeing conflicts is exacerbated when movement of people is sudden and leaves them off-guard. Civilians are usually forced to leave everything they have behind. In North-East Nigeria, for example, during one week in August 2022, more than 1,500 civilians were displaced from conflict in Afghanistan, nearly three-million individuals were displaced from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (most returned home within the year), a half-million people from Central African Republic, several million people were displaced from Myanmar and about 400,000 from South and Central Asia.

In one day only, IOM recorded 435 displaced individuals as a result of an armed attack in Liwa (Central African Republic). They may flee in foot, lacking food, water and shelter, as documented in Chad.

Massive movements of people also provide opportunities to traffickers, as seen for example in the


89 IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix – Chad Emergency Tracking Tool (ETT), displacement in the Lac provinces, 4-8 August 2022.
number of Afghan migrants and refugees recorded moving towards Europe following the intensification of the conflict and regime change in Afghanistan in 2021. Already in 2020, Afghan victims of trafficking in persons were detected in many parts of the world, including Australia and Western and Southern Europe.

Another example of a massive movement of people feeling conflict that has increased the risk of trafficking in persons relates to the conflict in Ukraine. In 2022 through August, the conflict in Ukraine has resulted in more than seven million people displaced within the country and over 5.6 million refugees outside the country. Of the internal displaced population in Ukraine, as of July 2022, 64 per cent are females and 32 per cent between the age 18 and 35. Seventy-eight per cent of the internally displaced population reports being in immediate need of cash or financial support, an indicator that has rapidly escalated since March 2022 (49 per cent at that time). Economic need is also recorded as prevalent among Ukrainian refugees hosted in Central European countries. Being in economic need is the first risk factor for people to be targeted by traffickers.

Prior to the escalation of conflict in 2022, Ukraine was already a significant origin of human trafficking. Between 2017 and 2021 victims trafficked outside Ukraine were detected in 40 countries in Central Europe, Southern Europe and Eastern Europe. Victims are also trafficked to the Middle East and to a minor extent, to the Americas and East Asia.

Analysis based on data emerging from the 2014 conflict that took place in the Eastern part of the country suggests that trafficking as result of the broader 2022 conflict is likely to increase. Trafficking victims out of Ukraine increased in the aftermath of the beginning of the armed conflict in certain districts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014. A first wave of displaced population from Ukraine to Western and Central Europe was recorded in the second half of the decade. This wave eventually resulted in an uptick in Ukrainian trafficking victims detected in Western and Central Europe in 2015 suggesting a clear relationship between the displacement of the Ukrainian population and the detection of Ukrainian trafficking victims in Western and Central Europe a year later (see figure below).

As a much larger number of Ukrainian people were displaced in 2022 – about 5.6 million in temporary protection across Europe, compared to the peak of 16,000 recorded in 2015. The statistical model inferred on the base of the numbers recorded between 2007 and 2020 would suggest such a number of displaced populations would theoretically result into more than 100,000 victims from Ukraine to Europe only. There are some differences compared to the past, however, as many countries receiving refugees from Ukraine have put in place measures to mitigate individual vulnerabilities, such as temporary protection and residence permits in EU States, coupled with a number of benefits.

On the other hand, the large number of people displaced should keep the international community on alert, as an unprecedented number of Ukrainians could fall victims of trafficking if specific counter trafficking measures are not quickly considered in the emergency response.

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93 Linear Regression: independent variable the number of Ukrainian asylum applications recorded in countries in Western and Central Europe recorded between 2007 and 2021; Dependent variable is the share of Ukrainian victims of trafficking to total detected victims in Western and Central Europe between 2007 and 2020. Results: R-Square 0.578, Adj. R-Squared 0.54 (Sig. 0.0026). Standardized Coeff Beta 0.760 (Sig. 0.003).

94 This number is calculated by applying the ratio of 5 victims trafficked for every 1 victim detected that is broadly the ratio resulting from Multiple System Estimates method in European countries. See UNODC, Monitoring human trafficking prevalence through multiple system estimation 2022.
Relationship between Ukrainian asylum applications and detection of Ukrainian trafficking victims, in Western and Central Europe, 2009-2021

Source: UNODC elaboration of national data and UNHCR data.
Most convicted traffickers globally are men, while women account for a significant 40 per cent of the people convicted of trafficking in persons in 2020.

The typical sex profile of convicted traffickers also differs by region. Countries of origin tend to convict more females, both women and girls, than countries of destination. A possible explanation for this disparity is the role females play in the recruitment phase of trafficking as well as in specific activities at high risk of detection (such as collecting money) during the exploitation phase of trafficking for sexual exploitation.95

Looking at the court cases collected by UNODC, the sex profile of traffickers changes according to the type of criminal organization involved in the crime. Female traffickers account for 43 per cent of the traffickers operating in pairs (typically with intimate partners), and 37 per cent of traffickers involved in cases operated by business-like type organizations are women. The participation of women in structured criminal organizations involved in trafficking crime seems less frequent—their involvement is run predominantly by men, and less than 30 per cent of convicted traffickers of this type are women. The most reported profile of convicted individual traffickers involves young men exploiting their female partners (women and girls).

In the court cases collected, there was no noted difference in the sex profile of offenders whether they engaged in sexual exploitation or forced labour (about 38 per cent of offenders convicted were female in both categories). People convicted for trafficking for the purpose of crime and/or begging were more frequently males (only a quarter of offenders were female) compared to other forms of exploitation.

According to the information reported in the case summaries collected, there is a wide span in traffickers’ ages from below 18 to above 70 years old. Most traffickers reported in analysed cases were aged between 23 and 36 when convicted (median 28, average 37). Children are rarely found to be involved in trafficking in persons as offenders. Very few of those convicted worldwide are under the age of 18 (boys and girls).
In the analysed court cases, traffickers engaged in sexual exploitation and forced labour tend to be about the same age, in their mid-thirties. Interestingly, though, traffickers involved in other forms of exploitation, from crime to begging and mixed forms tend to be younger than other traffickers.96

96 The recorded median age for traffickers convicted and reported in the court case summaries was age 35 for traffickers in sexual exploitation, 36 for those in forced labour, 28 for those in other forms of exploitation. The recorded average age was 37 for sexual exploitation, 39 for forced labour and 32 for other forms of exploitation.

Fig. 38   Persons convicted, by age group and form of exploitation, as reported in case narratives, 2012-2020*

Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries and Sherloc Case Law Database.
* Based on 399 traffickers reported in 179 cases that concluded with a conviction between 2012 and 2020.
Climate change: Affecting communities and increasing risks for Trafficking in Persons

The widespread and intensifying impacts of climate change are heightening vulnerabilities to trafficking in persons. Raising and shifting temperatures and weather patterns are disproportionately affecting poor communities relying on the primary economic sector, including agriculture and the extraction of natural resources. Economic hardship and other challenges put more people at direct risk of being trafficked while increasing the incentives for others to engage in trafficking activities.

Over the last two decades, climate-related disasters have doubled in frequency, leading to loss of livelihoods and increasing displacement. In 2021 alone, more than 23.7 million people were displaced by such disasters. As regions of the world become increasingly uninhabitable, people on the move will face high risk of exploitation along migration routes. “Slow-onset climate change impacts” could force an estimated 216 million people to migrate within their own countries by 2050.

While understanding the impact of climate change on trafficking in persons still requires comprehensive research, some examples show how weather-induced natural disasters can expose communities reliant on fishing, farming and agriculture to higher risk of trafficking. This box provides an overview of emerging trends in a selected number of countries for which information was available.

Typhoons in the Philippines

Cases of trafficking in persons increased in 2013, after Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines, causing approximately 6,300 deaths and displacing 4.4 million people. The Eastern Visayas region was particularly affected. At the time, one in four migrant workers employed in the area were already living at the poverty line. Many of the agricultural and fishing industries, which employ the most vulnerable segments of society in the Visayas, were destroyed. An estimated 21,000 families lost their livelihoods due to the damage. Between 2013 and 2015, national authorities recorded about 670 cases of trafficking in persons in the regions affected by the typhoon alone, and key informants in government and NGOs reported that these cases increased after the disaster.

More recently, Typhoon Rai in 2021 caused displacement of more than 590,000 people in the Philippines. The International Labour Organization estimates that 2.2 million workers were directly affected and became at immediate risk of exploitation.

Cyclones and storms in Bangladesh

Trafficking in persons has been commonly detected in the Sundarbans – the world’s largest contiguous mangrove forest. Situated at the border between

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97 Climate change refers to a change in the state of the climate that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. It may be due to natural internal processes, external forces, or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use. It includes both sudden-onset events as well as slow-onset processes, such as changes in global temperatures, “intense droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity”; from United Nations, “What is Climate Change?”, available at: https://www.un.org/esa/sustainability/climatechange/what-is-climate-change.


104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

106 International Displacement Monitoring Center (2022) and Center for research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (2022).

107 Ibid.

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Global Overview

India and Bangladesh, it is considered a hotspot for climate change-related catastrophes.\(^\text{108}\)

In the Bangladesh Sundarbans, damage to property and crop failures during frequent floods and cyclones has pushed a large section of the population (43 per cent) below the national poverty line in 2014.\(^\text{109}\) Forced and debt-bonded labour has been documented in fisheries and factories in the region, which often employ children as part of their workforce. The prevalence of these exploitative practices show that traffickers take advantage of the economic need of the population who struggle to cope with reduced access to income-generating activities.\(^\text{110}\)

The significant number of vulnerable individuals in this disaster-prone region allows traffickers to organize large recruitment campaigns. They operate as both private businesses and more complex criminal networks that traffic people internationally.\(^\text{111}\) Furthermore, those who migrate from disaster-affected areas to Dhaka or Kolkata in search of better living conditions can find themselves with no resources or social networks, making them vulnerable to be targeted by recruitment agents who trap them in exploitative bonded labour schemes.\(^\text{112}\)

Droughts and floods in Ghana

Droughts and floods in Ghana are forcing many to migrate,\(^\text{113}\) with cases of trafficking of children for forced marriage or labour exploitation being increasingly documented. Reports of trafficking have also been associated with the migratory movements of men and boys who relocate from north to central and southern parts of Ghana to find employment on farms or in mines in combination with labour intensive and unregulated industries.\(^\text{114}\)

Women and children leaving farming communities devastated by droughts and floods in northern Ghana also become vulnerable to trafficking when they move to urban areas in the south. There, they may end up working as kayayie (porters), becoming fully dependent on their low-paid and commission-based jobs to meet basic needs such as food and accommodation. Intermediaries, or so-called “agents”, who recruited them may never pay them, meanwhile only increasing their debt. They are instead forced to work in difficult conditions as manual labourers or porters, becoming easy targets for traffickers who take advantage of their basic needs for food and shelter.\(^\text{115}\)

Hurricanes and rising sea levels in the Caribbean Islands

The geographical location of the Caribbean islands en route from South to North America, together with loss of employment opportunities due to intense tropical storms and cyclones, rising sea levels and biodiversity degradation, expose coast communities to the risk of being trafficked or engaging in trafficking activities.\(^\text{116}\)

Those who have lost or experienced greatly diminishing returns on their fishing livelihoods and are unable or unwilling to leave have greater incentives to turn to trafficking and smuggling to generate income.\(^\text{117}\) Some of those who had worked in the fishing industry have resorted to using their boats to transport smuggled migrants and victims of trafficking for organized criminal groups, a phenomenon also observed in other similar settings.\(^\text{118}\)

With their livelihoods, homes and health negatively affected, many in the region migrate to North America and Europe for better economic opportunities and may fall into the hands of traffickers on these dangerous journeys.\(^\text{119}\)

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\(^{110}\) Ibid.

\(^{111}\) Ibid.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.


\(^{114}\) Bharadwaj et al., p. 23.

\(^{115}\) Ibid, p. 24.


\(^{118}\) Ibid., p. 7.

\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 6.
Criminal Justice Response
Most countries record fewer convictions

In 2020, a drop of 27 per cent in the number of individuals convicted was recorded globally from 2019.120 At the same time, a five per cent decrease in the number of people brought to court for prosecutions was recorded, while the number of individuals investigated remained more stable (only a two per cent decrease). It appears the first year of the pandemic had a greater impact on the trial phase than the investigative phase of combating trafficking crime. Some regions, i.e., South Asia, Latin America and Western and Southern Europe, seem to have suffered more than others.

Globally, there was a greater slowdown in the conviction phase compared to prosecutions or investigations. This, however, may have been part of a phenomenon only accelerated by the pandemic. In 2019, a similar drop of 23 per cent compared to 2017 was recorded. Overall, the number of convictions recorded globally has declined by about 44 per cent since 2017.

This drop in convictions for trafficking in persons, though, seems to be part of a broader phenomenon in all criminal justice efforts. Convictions for homicide and drug trafficking seem to follow the same trends (see Figure 42 below).

Likewise, conviction trends by region show that most countries recorded an accelerated fall in convictions from 2019 to 2020.

120 Based on the total number of individuals convicted in 2019 and in 2020 in data collected from 85 countries.
Europe recorded the highest number of convictions for trafficking in persons per 100,000 population. This is particularly true of countries in Central and South-Eastern Europe, the only region that recorded an increase in convictions in 2020. South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are the regions where the fewest convictions took place.

When convictions rates are considered with victim detection, two opposite situations emerge. While countries in Europe and in the Americas detect more victims and convict more traffickers compared to the global average, countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East are found on the other side of the spectrum compared to the rest of the World, as they detect fewer victims and convict fewer traffickers compared to the global average.
Fig. 43  Conviction rates per 100,000 population, by region, 2020 (or most recent)*

* Based on 105 countries where information on convictions was available, including: 18 countries in Western and Southern Europe; 18 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa; 15 in Central and South-Eastern Europe; 15 countries in East Asia and the Pacific; nine in North Africa and the Middle East; eight in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, eight in South America; three in North America; and three in South Asia.

Fig. 44  Persons prosecuted and persons convicted of total persons investigated, by region, average from 2017 to 2020

Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.
A detailed analysis of this data disaggregated by sex shows that females investigated for trafficking in persons are more likely to be convicted than males who are investigated.\textsuperscript{124} This may be the result of several factors, including reduced access to justice for women compared to men during trafficking in persons prosecutions.\textsuperscript{125} Also, the role that women may play in the trafficking business could impact their likelihood of conviction. The rate of prosecution compared to investigation for trafficking is about 49 per cent for men, while for women it is about 56 per cent. The share of people convicted among those investigated for trafficking is 13 per cent for men, but about 17 per cent for women. As a consequence, the share of females involved in criminal proceedings increases throughout the criminal justice process from investigations (28 per cent of which focus on women) to convictions (41 per cent).

A similar pattern is found regarding convictions for drug offences; According to UNODC research, the proportion of women sentenced for drug-related offences is higher than that of men.\textsuperscript{126}

The likelihood that a trafficking investigation results in a conviction seems to have deteriorated over the last decade. On average, between 2017 and 2020, the number of people prosecuted is 50 per cent of the number of people investigated for trafficking in persons during the previous two years.\textsuperscript{122} The number of people convicted, however, is only 24 per cent of the number of people prosecuted for trafficking in persons during the previous two years.\textsuperscript{123} So, between 2017 and 2020, the number of people convicted for trafficking accounts for 12 per cent of individuals who are investigated for trafficking. This is a lower level of conviction than a similar analysis carried for the period between 2008 and 2012 when the share of convictions among investigations was 24 per cent.

\textsuperscript{124} Based on information from 26 countries reporting on 2,843 males and 2,124 females investigated in 2017 and 2019; 1,295 males and 1,184 females prosecuted in 2018 and 2019; 330 males and 352 females convicted in 2019 and 2020.


UNODC, “Female Victims of Trafficking in Persons for sexual exploitation” in The Bangkok Rules, Fourth Review Conference of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Geneva, 12–16 June 2017. According to UNODC, the proportion of females is 49 per cent compared to 46 per cent for males.

UNODC, “Female victims of trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation” in The Bangkok Rules, Fourth Review Conference of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Geneva, 12–16 June 2017. According to UNODC, the proportion of females is 49 per cent compared to 46 per cent for males.

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Victims get too little help from institutions and communities

Analysis of the court case summaries collected by UNODC shows that most cases come to authorities’ attention as a result of the victim’s action. In most cases, the investigation started when the victim managed to exit exploitation and self-reported to authorities. Less than one case in three is solved by proactive police activity, including operations targeting trafficking in persons, but also related to other offences, such as drug trafficking or irregular migration. Academic literature has showed that trafficking victims rarely identify as such, as a consequence of psychological mechanisms such as denial or repression, narrow definitions of victimization, limited awareness of their rights and acceptance of the situation of exploitation as a consequence of their irregular migration status.127

In a smaller group of cases, the victim’s family, such as parents or siblings, took action and reported the disappearance of their relative. Finally, a limited number of cases emerge because of actions by other non-law enforcement institutions, such as hospitals, schools, labour inspectorates or NGOs; or as a result of actions taken by the community, such as neighbours, clients of the trafficked victim or ordinary people noticing something strange and reporting it to the authorities.

These results are comparable to findings of a study carried out by national authorities in Panama on 23 convictions for trafficking in persons recorded between 2013-2021. This research found that 56 per cent of the cases started with a report by the victim, a quarter started with the proactive police work and less than 10 per cent were based initially on anonymous calls. Similarly, according to studies in the United States128, 31 per cent of the trafficking cases referred to law enforcement in 2021 involved a victim reporting and 19 per cent were initiated by a family member.

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Fig. 48  Discovery patterns, as reported in case narratives, 2012-2020*

- 41% Initial action by victim
- 28% Initial action by law enforcement institutions (police, border guards etc.)
- 11% Initial action by community/strangers
- 10% Initial action by victim’s family
- 9% Initial action by other institutions or civil society
- 1% Other actions

Source: GLOTIP collection of court case summaries and Sherloc Case Law Database.
* Based on information reported in 387 court cases (involving 2,497 victims) out of a total of 800 collected by UNODC that concluded with a conviction between 2012 and 2020.
Cyberspace: The Frontier for Trafficking and Counter Trafficking Efforts

Contribution by Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)\textsuperscript{129}

Traffickers misuse technology during all the stages of trafficking in persons and for all forms of exploitation: sexual exploitation; forced labour; and organ removal, among others. In 2017 in the United States, for example, the primary business model in 84.3 per cent of active trafficking for sexual exploitation cases was, "Internet-based commercial sex".\textsuperscript{130} In Austria, in the same year, the Internet was used as the most common criminal infrastructure by perpetrators in 74 per cent of human trafficking cases.\textsuperscript{131} In its report on Criminal Networks Involved in the Trafficking and Exploitation of Underage Victims in the EU, Europol concludes that, "the online advertisement of sexual services is an increasing phenomenon relating to trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation, with children being advertised as adults".\textsuperscript{132}

The COVID-19 pandemic recently provided a grim case study in how traffickers misuse technology at great scale and adapt strategies based on societal developments. Online recruitment, child grooming and exploitation were widely used by traffickers during the pandemic. According to OSCE and UN Women, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation online, including sexual exploitation material, live streaming and Child Sexual Abuse Material, increased significantly during the pandemic as lockdown measures and economic instability resulted in increased vulnerability among women and children.\textsuperscript{133}

There are potentially many benefits for criminals in using technology to exploit people but the most important ones are the increase in criminal proceeds, as well as lowering the risks of being identified and prosecuted.\textsuperscript{134} Moreover, advancement toward encryption, strengthening online anonymity, and increasing use of virtual assets are likely to provide further incentives to traffickers to invest in misusing technology, while creating more challenges for anti-trafficking and cybercrime stakeholders.

Digital tools to prevent and combat trafficking in persons

While human traffickers are becoming more tech-savvy and are able to use technology successfully to their advantage, technology can also become an enhancing tool for the criminal justice system to detect, investigate and prosecute traffickers and child sexual abuse producers.

The landscape of innovation related to the development of tech tools to prevent and combat trafficking in persons has seen dynamic development in recent years. The report, "Leveraging innovation to fight trafficking in human beings: A comprehensive analysis of technology tools", published in 2020 by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Tech Against Trafficking\textsuperscript{135} (TAT), identified 305 technology tools and initiatives currently being used worldwide to support the fight against trafficking. The identified tools vary in the scale of their applicability, as well as complexity of their design and functionality.

The publication classifies the 305 tech tools identified by the OSCE and TAT according to their primary goals, namely: Victim/trafficker identification (26 per cent); awareness-raising, education, collaboration...
tion (16 per cent); supply chain management (14 per cent); data trends and mapping (13 per cent); corporate risk identification (10 per cent); worker engagement and empowerment (nine per cent); victim case management and support (six per cent); and other (six per cent). In terms of user groups and beneficiaries of the tools, businesses account for a fifth of the total target users, as a quarter of the identified tools address supply chain management and corporate risk identification. This also highlights the important role that the private sector plays in the fight against trafficking in persons, especially when exploitation occurs either in business supply chains, impacting operations and leading to reputational or legal risks, or “through” the private sector by using business services or products as facilitators. NGOs and law enforcement make up another quarter of users, as do victims and potential victims, which shows that there is fairly even distribution among different categories of tools.

Analysis of the organizations that are behind the development of these tech tools to combat trafficking in persons shows that the private sector was the most active, developing 40 per cent of identified tools. NGOs also play an important role in the development of technological tools to combat trafficking in persons, developing 33 per cent of the tools identified. Governments are behind the development of only nine per cent of the tech tools and initiatives identified in the study.

Three quarters of these are aimed at countering trafficking for forced labour and sexual exploitation, whereas only a fifth of the tools are aimed at other types of trafficking, such as trafficking for the purpose of organ removal, conducting illicit activity and petty crimes, begging, or child soldiers.

The OSCE and TAT research concluded that a wide range of tech tools are already available to anti-trafficking stakeholders and, looking forward, the main priority should be investing in the implementation and evaluation of existing tools in day-to-day work, rather than development of new tools.\textsuperscript{136}

\textbf{The role of online platforms in policy context}

Experience and research indicate that policies and legislation can be improved to better address the misuse of technology by criminals. Policy and law can also ensure that technology companies take the necessary measures to enhance the online safety of users, as well as enabling anti-trafficking stakeholders to use technology more efficiently in their work to amplify national responses.\textsuperscript{137}

A major role in contrasting on-line facilitation of trafficking is played by online platforms that knowingly or unknowingly – facilitate the misuse of their IT infrastructure and services for the exploitation of people. Online platforms in most countries do not have legal liability if their services are misused for the exploitation of victims.\textsuperscript{138} Yet, it is precisely these services that are being abused by traffickers at every stage of the crime.

According to the OSCE\textsuperscript{139} across the globe, policymakers and lawmakers have intentionally adopted approaches to incentivize the development of Internet and technology innovation by allowing

\textsuperscript{136} There are several promising partnership initiatives in this field at the international level. For example, as noted above, the OSCE has partnered with TAT, a private sector initiative established in early 2018 to “work with civil society, law enforcement, academia, and survivors to identify and create technology solutions that disrupt and reduce human trafficking and that support survivors through innovation, collaboration, guidance and shared resources.” Within this partnership, the OSCE contributes with advice and expertise to TAT’s strategic direction, as well as its flagship accelerator project that focuses on improving and scaling-up promising technology tools to combat human trafficking. The OSCE and TAT also conducted research into mainstreaming innovation in anti-trafficking work in the abovementioned joint report. In parallel, the OSCE cooperates with technology companies on other research projects. For example, some of the biggest technology companies have contributed to the development of the OSCE report, “Policy Responses to Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings: Analysis of Current Approaches and Considerations for Moving Forward”. The OSCE greatly values its cooperation with the technology industry, as without its expertise and knowledge there cannot be a systemic response to technology-facilitated human trafficking.


\textsuperscript{138} OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Policy Responses to Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings: Analysis of Current Approaches and Considerations for Moving Forward (Vienna, OSCE, March 2022).

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
technology companies to self-regulate.\textsuperscript{140} Self-regulation has also been encouraged by international instruments and many technology companies have also strongly advocated for self-regulation, as a principle that allows them to better innovate and protect users in the online space. Increasingly, however, negative features of self-regulation vis-à-vis addressing technology-facilitated trafficking in persons have become apparent. These include: limited or non-existent industry standards; inconsistent and inadequate adoption and application of voluntary principles; and slow responses to documented abuse, failure to report abuse, and/or active complicity in facilitating exploitation from certain segments of the industry, particularly higher risk sectors like pornography, sexual services, and short-term job seeking. This has resulted in abuse and exploitation accelerating dramatically, while the industry’s response, as a whole, has not kept pace, which is indicated by the growing volume of technology-facilitated exploitation.

**Future work to counter online trafficking**

New developments in technology, such as enhanced encryption of communications, messaging apps and platforms; mainstreaming of virtual assets; upgrades in infrastructure; and an increase in the number of device users; in combination with lack of prevention, understanding of the digital evidence cycle, adequate legislation and cooperation channels will only incentivize traffickers to invest more in technology to facilitate victims’ exploitation.

\textsuperscript{140} Self-regulation should be understood as the possibility for economic operators to adopt, among themselves and for themselves, common guidelines.