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Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking



# **Anti-human trafficking manual for criminal justice practitioners**

Module 2



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME  
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Module 2:  
Indicators of trafficking in persons



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# Module 2:

## Indicators of trafficking in persons

### Objectives

On completing this module users will be able to:

- Explain how trafficking in persons may be identified by criminal justice practitioners;
- List the general indicators of trafficking in persons;
- State why corroboration of trafficking in persons indicators is required.

### Introduction

This module is intended for use by those who by virtue of their work first come in contact with victims of trafficking and need to know the indicators of trafficking in persons and what kind of actions may help uncover those indicators to allow victims to be rescued and investigations to be started.

The first part outlines some methods that may be used to identify trafficking in persons. The second part of the document explains some of the general indicators found that are associated with victims of trafficking. The third part gives details of some specific indicators that can be printed as an information leaflet or used as the basis of your own information leaflet for frontline criminal justice practitioners and those of partner organizations and agencies.

To be effective, identification must be multidisciplinary in approach. Organizations must share as much information as possible if they are to maximize identification, corroborate accounts and ultimately, discern trafficking with a view to rescuing the victims and punish, the offenders. Many organizations involved have different objectives in performing their respective roles. For example, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may only wish to rescue victims and provide safe housing, counselling and other support. They may have no objective to support law enforcement investigations. To achieve the required cooperation there must be an acknowledgement of the objectives of each other's role, ideally through the establishment of some form of written agreement e.g Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), Terms of Reference or NGO-Law Enforcement cooperative guidelines.

Identifying trafficking in persons is not a simple process. Traffickers go to considerable lengths to make sure their activities are difficult to detect. It is not possible that all trafficking cases are the same. Indicators of trafficking will most likely be different from case to case.

### **United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)**

Using effective identification measures helps States satisfy the requirement of article 27 (1)(b) (i) which states:

“States Parties shall cooperate closely with one another, consistent with their respective domestic legal and administrative systems, to enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement action to combat the offences covered by this Convention. Each State Party shall, in particular, adopt effective measures:

(a)...

(b) To cooperate with other States Parties in conducting inquiries with respect to offences covered by this Convention concerning:

(i) The identity, whereabouts and activities of persons suspected of involvement in such offences or the location of other persons concerned”

### **Indicators—not proof**

It is important to remember that the indicators referred to in this module are only indicators. They are not by themselves proof that trafficking in persons has taken place. Observing an indicator should be the starting point for further enquiries.

## **Situations where one is likely to encounter trafficking in persons**

Identification of trafficking in persons may be a long-term process. An incident could give a direct immediate indication that trafficking in persons is taking place, but in many cases there may just be one or two indicators of trafficking. Commonly, there is very little concrete information or obvious sign of human trafficking. Often, there is little more than a nagging feeling that you are seeing trafficking. Trafficking in persons can easily be confused with other forms of criminality such as smuggling of migrants, sexual or simple assaults. The effect of traumatization on trafficking victims is such that they may not make any kind of disclosure of their situation for weeks or even months.

### **Direct reporting by victims and other people**

A victim may directly approach a police patrol or police station to report his/her situation. Other organizations may and have referred large numbers of victims to law enforcement agencies throughout the world. Many of these referrals have come from NGOs, often those with a specific anti-human trafficking remit.

In cases of trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation, “client rescues” have been seen. An example of a client rescue is where a man pays for sex with a woman and she tells him she has been trafficked. The client may take the woman with him to the police or other agency or leave by himself and report the matter.

Other members of the public who are not clients have also “rescued” victims and brought them to the attention of the police or other agencies.

## **Routine police activity**

Routine police activities such as attending incidents that are not directly related to trafficking e.g., burglaries, road traffic accidents and reports of public order disturbances are opportunities to identify trafficking in persons. Specific examples include:

- Routine activity at border crossings and standing checkpoints;
- Reports where trafficking victims are potential witnesses;
- Reports where trafficking victims have committed a crime;
- Reports where trafficking victims are the victim of another crime;
- Police and other law enforcement activity, such as stopping people and vehicles to check documents or for general inquiries;
- Routine visits to premises where victims are likely to be exploited, for example brothels, factories or agricultural locations;
- Routine scan of adverts in the media, including the Internet;
- Community policing;
- Routine activity in embassies and consuls;
- Enquiries into missing children.

## **Impact of routine activity on traffickers’ behaviour**

In a number of jurisdictions it has been found that traffickers do not necessarily change their methods, locations or transport used because of routine law enforcement activity (or what appears to be routine activity), even where that activity leads to arrests.

## **Proactive activity**

Proactive operations, often led by intelligence, have proved successful in the identification and recovery of victims of trafficking. Examples include:

- Targeted raids on suspected premises and locations such as factories, mines, brothels and agricultural operations;
- Accompanying other agencies such as labour and health and safety inspectors on their proactive operations to observe conditions and identify who is present;
- Identification of routes used and planning operations at transport facilities and other suspected “nexus” points;

- Test purchasing operations (where permissible under your legislation) to determine what is happening and who is involved in a particular activity;
- Surveillance and other proactive investigation techniques;
- Planned border operations.



### Case example

Indian law enforcement became aware that a significant number of people were being trafficked across its borders from a neighbouring country. The border crossing involved leaving a bus on one side of the border, crossing through control on foot and getting in another bus on the other side.

Police and other agencies, including NGOs, established a joint advice centre at the border crossing. Advice was given on issues such as labour rights and entitlements in India. Going into the centre was entirely voluntary.

Staff of the centre were given guidance on identifying possible victims of trafficking and how to conduct screening interviews of suspected victims.

## Corroborating indicators of trafficking

Corroborating the indicators can be done in a number of ways according to the circumstances of the case. It may involve specific enquiries, overt or covert. It could be as simple as asking a person questions.

The result of those enquiries should lead to a decision about what further action will be taken. Actions will vary according to the nature of the trafficking, risks to victims and others and the information available.

The same basic process applies whether it is a large-scale intelligence-led case or a simple routine check by an officer.

The time this process takes will vary according to the circumstances. Large-scale operations may take weeks, although they could uncover information that requires immediate action. A routine check may start with one indicator, quickly find more indicators and move to a decision on action within minutes. In some cases, for example a victim presenting him or her to a police station or patrol, a decision on action will be required immediately.



### Self-assessment

Why is corroboration of indicators required in trafficking in persons cases?



## General indicators that a person may have been trafficked

These indicators outline some of the factors that may make it more likely that a person is a victim of trafficking. It must be emphasised that they are general in nature and may not all apply in every case of trafficking.

Different types of trafficking in persons produce different victim profiles. Even the same general type of trafficking in persons activity will have significant differences between locations.

These indicators should be used with the best available intelligence to create a profile specific to your local context. If you do not have any information/intelligence on trafficking in persons, some of these indicators may help identify a new or emerging trafficking problem.

### Age

The typical age range of persons suspected to be victims in a given location depends on the nature of trafficking and demands at the point of exploitation. With some exceptions, the older the person is, the less likely it is that the case involves trafficking. This is particularly so in sexual exploitation cases. Traffickers will not normally traffic older people for sexual exploitation because there is little “client demand” for them. Exceptions have been seen where older people of a particular ethnicity are regarded as looking young by the “client” market.

The same general rule can be applied to labour exploitation because the older the person is the less productive they may be in conditions of arduous or slave labour. There are exceptions to this; trafficking older people to beg is an example.

Children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking as they may be compliant and can be exploited in a variety of ways: in the sex industry, illegal labour markets, including begging and pickpocketing, as domestic “slaves” and for their organs.

### Gender

Sex trafficking predominantly affects females. There is substantial evidence of trafficking for heterosexual exploitation in some form in virtually every country in the world.

Male trafficking for the purposes of prostitution, particularly of teenage and younger boys, has been found to exist, but research and knowledge in this area is limited.

Trafficking in persons for forced labour exploitation affects both males and females. The proportions vary according to the form of the labour and prevailing gender roles at the location.

## Location of origin

The supply chain of victims relies on exploitation of a combination of factors including relative poverty, discrimination and lack of opportunity. Many victims come from developing countries or countries in transition where opportunities are limited.

Trafficking takes place in developed countries for various purposes. For example girls are groomed for sex by “boyfriends” and then moved within the country or between countries for sexual exploitation. Recent research and cases have shown that victims from developed countries are trafficked also for purposes of labour exploitation. However, even in these cases victims tend to come from the disadvantaged and vulnerable populations.



### Case example

In the recent North European case, the defendant was an EU citizen. He was indicted and convicted for subjecting four victims, including two EU nationals, to forced labour. The indictment was that, prior to August 2007, the defendant together with his brother recruited several persons in the EU. These people were in a vulnerable situation because they were either homeless, mentally disabled, without work or income. The defendant exploited them through the use of a very strict regime and utilized violence and threats to force the victims to perform work in the form of asphaltting and stone laying. The victims did not have any real and acceptable opportunity to terminate the employment relationship. The work was exceedingly badly paid, wherein the victims received less pay than originally agreed, were obliged to live under wretched conditions, had sometimes extremely long workdays, and were under constant surveillance and told or given the impression that if they failed to perform the work or ran away, they would be fetched back, beaten or killed.

## Documentation

A person presenting another person’s identity and travel documentation at a border crossing or other checkpoint is a general indicator of trafficking in persons at all phases/locations in the process. In addition, the lack of documentation or travel documents on a suspected victim and fraudulent identity or travel documentation are also strong indicators of trafficking.

## Last location

The location where the victim was found immediately prior to coming to the attention of law enforcement officers will always be significant: a brothel, call-girl agency or lap dancing club, place of labour exploitation such as a “sweatshop”, restaurant kitchens, mines, quarries or agricultural sites may all be indicators of potential exploitation.

In origin or transit locations the last locations that victims were found, including premises such as bars where recruiting takes place or transport hubs associated previously with trafficking in persons, may be significant.

The last location could also be the country or district the suspected victim came from, where existing intelligence suggests that the particular location is a endemic origin or transit location for trafficking in persons.

## **Transport**

How a person has been (or is being) transported may indicate trafficking. Some characteristics of transport in trafficking cases are very similar to those found in smuggling of migrants but there are a number of potential differences.

For example, traffickers will often attempt to control all aspects of transport from origin location through transit to destination because they will only realize their investment at the destination location/exploitation phase. Smugglers, by contrast, may have received at least part of their fees from the smuggled migrants before they leave the origin location.

Other indicators of trafficking transport include evidence that an individual being moved across borders is constantly under escort; a small number of victims are being led by a relatively large numbers of escorts and increasing levels of supervision the nearer they get to an identified destination/exploitation location. This increasing supervision may be required in cases where it was relatively easy to deceive potential victims in a location of origin and traffickers fear that as the group nears the destination, the victims will realize they are to be exploited. The increasing supervision acts as a control mechanism in situations such as this.

Law enforcement officers in some locations around the world have observed that traffickers frequently stay with one transport route for a prolonged period of time. The reason for this may be that arranging transport over a number of countries can be complex, particularly if the main traffickers have limited local contacts. It is therefore important for regular or known transport routes to be continuously and routinely monitored.

## **Circumstances of referral**

Trafficked victims may come to the attention of law enforcement officers through a referral from NGOs or clients who have used their services (client rescue).

The circumstances leading up to the referral will always be a key indicator; circumstances such as removal from brothels by police, client rescue or identification and rescue by NGO partners.

## **Evidence of abuse**

Any signs of physical injury to the victim can be an indicator of trafficking; victims are subjected to abuse by their traffickers and clients.

However, do not assume a person has not been trafficked if there is no sign of injury or physical abuse. Other equally or more effective control measures may have been used including the threat of abuse or confiscation of documentation.

## Assessment of the referring agency

If the case has been referred to the law enforcement agency from an NGO, the opinion of the referring persons working in this area will always be relevant to the identification process and should be included in the overall assessment.

### Current knowledge

Compare all of the indicators above with what your intelligence is telling you about the current trafficking situation in your area of responsibility. Do the above categories of indicators apply to the situation in your area of responsibility? What is the trafficking modus operandi in your area?

### A word of warning

You may not have any intelligence about trafficking at all or you may not have intelligence about the particular form of trafficking a certain victim has been subject to. Be particularly aware of circumstances where there are a number of indicators present, but they don't fit into a known pattern. This should trigger further enquiries to establish a possible trafficking problem you were not aware of.



### Self-assessment

What are the general indicators of trafficking in persons?



### Self-assessment

Read the indicators of different types of exploitation.

Which of these are relevant to your work?

How might you use these lists of indicators in a practical way where you work?

Are you aware of any more indicators of trafficking in persons from previous experience?

## Human trafficking indicators

Not all the indicators listed below are present in all situations involving trafficking in persons. Although the presence or absence of any of the indicators neither proves nor disproves that human trafficking is taking place, their presence should lead to further enquiries or investigation.

Victims of trafficking in persons can be found in a variety of situations. You can play a role in identifying such victims.

### People who have been trafficked may:

- Believe that they must work against their will;
- Be unable to leave their work environment;
- Show signs that their movements are being controlled;
- Feel that they cannot leave;
- Show fear or anxiety;
- Be subjected to violence or threats of violence against themselves or against their family members and loved ones;
- Suffer injuries that appear to be the result of an assault;
- Suffer injuries or impairments typical of certain jobs or control measures;
- Suffer injuries that appear to be the result of the application of control measures;
- Be distrustful of the authorities;
- Be threatened with being handed over to the authorities;
- Be afraid of revealing their immigration status;
- Not be in possession of their passports or other travel or identity documents, as those documents are being held by someone else;
- Have false identity or travel documents;
- Be found in or connected to a type of location likely to be used for exploiting people;
- Be unfamiliar with the local language;
- Not know their home or work address;
- Allow others to speak for them when addressed directly;
- Act as if they were instructed by someone else;
- Be forced to work under certain conditions;
- Be disciplined through punishment;
- Be unable to negotiate working conditions;
- Receive little or no payment;
- Have no access to their earnings;
- Work excessively long hours over long periods;
- Not have any days off;

- Live in poor or substandard accommodation;
- Have no access to medical care;
- Have limited or no social interaction;
- Have limited contact with their families or with people outside of their immediate environment;
- Be unable to communicate freely with others;
- Be under the perception that they are bonded by debt;
- Be in a situation of dependence;
- Come from a place known to be a source of human trafficking;
- Have had the fees for their transport to the country of destination paid for by facilitators, whom they must pay back by working or providing services in the destination;
- Have acted on the basis of false promises.

**Children who have been trafficked may:**

- Have no access to their parents or guardians;
- Look intimidated and behave in a way that does not correspond with behaviour typical of children their age;
- Have no friends of their own age outside of work;
- Have no access to education;
- Have no time for playing;
- Live apart from other children and in substandard accommodations;
- Eat apart from other members of the “family”;
- Be given only leftovers to eat;
- Be engaged in work that is not suitable for children;
- Travel unaccompanied by adults;
- Travel in groups with persons who are not relatives.

**The following might also indicate that children have been trafficked:**

- The presence of child-sized clothing typically worn for doing manual or sex work;
- The presence of toys, beds and children’s clothing in inappropriate places such as brothels and factories;
- The claim made by an adult that he or she has “found” an unaccompanied child;
- The finding of unaccompanied children carrying telephone numbers for calling taxis;
- The discovery of cases involving illegal adoption.

**People who have been trafficked for the purpose of domestic servitude may:**

- Live with a family;
- Not eat with the rest of the family;

- Have no private space;
- Sleep in a shared or inappropriate space;
- Be reported missing by their employer even though they are still living in their employer's house;
- Never or rarely leave the house for social reasons;
- Never leave the house without their employer;
- Be given only leftovers to eat;
- Be subjected to insults, abuse, threats or violence.

**People who have been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation may:**

- Be of any age, although the age may vary according to the location and the market;
- Move from one brothel to the next or work in various locations;
- Be escorted whenever they go to and return from work and other outside activities;
- Have tattoos or other marks indicating "ownership" by their exploiters;
- Work long hours or have few if any days off;
- Sleep where they work;
- Live or travel in a group, sometimes with other women who do not speak the same language;
- Have very few items of clothing;
- Have clothes that are mostly the kind typically worn for doing sex work;
- Only know how to say sex-related words in the local language or in the language of the client group;
- Have no cash of their own;
- Be unable to show an identity document.
- There is evidence that suspected victims have had unprotected and/or violent sex;
- There is evidence that suspected victims cannot refuse unprotected and/or violent sex;
- There is evidence that a person has been bought and sold;
- There is evidence that groups of women are under the control of others;
- Advertisements are placed for brothels or similar places offering the services of women of a particular ethnicity or nationality;
- It is reported that sex workers provide services to a clientele of a particular ethnicity or nationality;
- It is reported by clients that sex workers do not smile.

**People who have been trafficked for the purpose of labour exploitation are typically made to work in sectors such as the following: agriculture, construction, entertainment, service industry and manufacturing (in sweatshops). People who have been trafficked for labour exploitation may:**

- Live in groups in the same place where they work and leave those premises infrequently, if at all;
- Live in degraded, unsuitable places, such as in agricultural or industrial buildings;
- Not be dressed adequately for the work they do: for example, they may lack protective equipment or warm clothing;
- Be given only leftovers to eat;
- Have no access to their earnings;
- Have no labour contract;
- Work excessively long hours;
- Depend on their employer for a number of services, including work, transportation and accommodation;
- Have no choice of accommodation;
- Never leave the work premises without their employer;
- Be unable to move freely;
- Be subject to security measures designed to keep them on the work premises;
- Be disciplined through fines;
- Be subjected to insults, abuse, threats or violence;
- Lack basic training and professional licences.

**The following might also indicate that people have been trafficked for labour exploitation:**

- Notices have been posted in languages other than the local language;
- There are no health and safety notices;
- The employer or manager is unable to show the documents required for employing workers from other countries;
- The employer or manager is unable to show records of wages paid to workers;
- The health and safety equipment is of poor quality or is missing;
- Equipment is designed or has been modified so that it can be operated by children;
- There is evidence that labour laws are being breached;
- There is evidence that workers must pay for tools, food or accommodation or that those costs are being deducted from their wages.



**People who have been trafficked for the purpose of begging or committing petty crimes may:**

- Be children, elderly persons or disabled migrants who tend to beg in public places and on public transport;
- Be children carrying and/or selling illicit drugs;
- Have physical impairments that appear to be the result of mutilation;
- Be children of the same nationality or ethnicity who move in large groups with only a few adults;
- Be unaccompanied minors who have been “found” by an adult of the same nationality or ethnicity;
- Move in groups while traveling on public transport: for example, they may walk up and down the length of trains;
- Participate in the activities of organized criminal gangs;
- Be part of large groups of children who have the same adult guardian;
- Be punished if they do not collect or steal enough;
- Live with members of their gang;
- Travel with members of their gang to the country of destination;
- Live, as gang members, with adults who are not their parents;
- Move daily in large groups and over considerable distances.

**The following might also indicate that people have been trafficked for begging or for committing petty crimes:**

- New forms of gang-related crime appear;
- There is evidence that the group of suspected victims has moved, over a period of time, through a number of countries;
- There is evidence that suspected victims have been involved in begging or in committing petty crimes in another country.

## Summary

Indicators are not proof of trafficking in persons; they are the starting point for investigation.

Trafficking in persons may be identified by:

- Direct reporting by victims and other people;
- Reactive investigations;
- Proactive investigations.

Efforts should be made to corroborate indicators of trafficking by looking beneath the surface.

General indicators that a person may be a victim of trafficking include:

- Age—generally younger people of both genders are prone to be trafficked for all purposes;
- Gender—in sexual exploitation mainly female. In other forms of trafficking, victim types vary according to nature of exploitation etc.;
- Location of origin—developing economies, locations in crisis or transition;
- Documentation—travel or identity documents held by others;
- Last location—location associated with exploitation of commercial trafficking processes;
- Transport—escorted travel even for short distances;
- Circumstances of referral—referred after recovery by NGO, client rescue, self-referral, etc.;
- Evidence of abuse—physical signs, but look for more subtle forms of control;
- Assessment of the referring agency—any information supplied to agency that indicates trafficking in persons;
- Current knowledge—existing information intelligence about trafficking in persons but do not forget you may be seeing indicators of something you have no previous information/intelligence about.





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