

Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime Working Group on the Smuggling of Migrants-

World Health Organization statement

World Health Organization (WHO) wants to draw your attention to the pressing issue of health risks associated with human smuggling and trafficking. This issue extends across multiple phases of the victims' journey, from the pre-journey, through the migratory process, and into the arrival phase. Moreover, the added threat of epidemics and pandemics further exacerbates the vulnerabilities faced by these individuals, increasing the risk of exploitation and trafficking.

However, a significant challenge we face is the scarcity of data regarding the health status and specific healthcare needs of smuggled migrants and victims of trafficking. The World Health Organization's 2022 report highlighted this alarming gap in our understanding. Gathering health information for these hard-to-reach populations is incredibly complex.

When we do manage to glimpse into the health outcomes for smuggled migrants, the picture is grim. Many of these individuals suffer from poor physical and mental health, enduring occupational hazards along the way. It is crucial to note that the majority of those being smuggled are men and boys who frequently experience violence and forced labour. The abuse they endure comes from a range of actors, including smugglers, non-state armed groups, and state authorities. Moreover, the enforcement of certain policies, such as the detention of irregular migrants, often results in insanitary and dangerous conditions, food and water deprivation, and limited access to social services, all contributing to poor health outcomes.

Mental health is a significant concern. Fear of traffickers, a lack of support during immigration detention, and the looming threat of re-trafficking following escape are linked to severe mental health disorders. Without access to care, these symptoms can worsen over time. Furthermore, recipient countries may also incur additional health issues due to the burden of noncontagious diseases associated with human trafficking.

To move forward, we need systematic research to gain a deeper understanding of risks and health needs. Trauma-informed, culturally appropriate care and mental health interventions should be our guiding principle.

In conclusion, investments in migrant-friendly health services, evidence-informed policies, competency-building for the healthcare workforce, and research on culturally appropriate care are crucial steps in responding to the health needs and rights of survivors of human trafficking.

We must prioritize the well-being of those affected by human smuggling and trafficking, ensuring their access to adequate healthcare and support. This is not just a health issue but a matter of human rights and dignity that deserves our immediate attention and action.

Thank you.