

Stop Trafficking!

Awareness Advocacy Action

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FOCUS: This month's newsletter summarizes the findings of the 2022 UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons.

The 2022 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Global Report on Trafficking in Persons is the seventh mandated by the General Assembly through the 2010 United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. This edition of the Global Report provides a snapshot of the trafficking patterns and flows detected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report covers 141 countries and provides an overview of the response to the trafficking in persons at global, regional, and national levels using data from trafficking cases detected between 2018 and 2021. The analysis of 800 court case summaries and detailed suggestions to policymakers to formulate effective responses help inform the Report.

The report focuses on trends of detections and convictions that show essential changes compared to historical trends since UNODC started to collect data in 2003. Managing reliable data and data analysis is crucial to identify emerging trends and to develop evidence-based policies, especially in crime areas, which generally are underreported.

A key finding of the report is that fewer victims of trafficking in persons are being identified even as the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises increase vulnerabilities to exploitation.

The United Nations Protocol against Trafficking in Persons entered into force in 2003. The report shows that in the past few years, the number of Member States seriously implementing the Protocol has more than doubled, from 54 to 125 out of the 155 states covered. However, many countries still lack the necessary legal instruments or political will to combat human trafficking.

The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons is mandated to inform an effective response to this crime and place it within the context of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda.

Detection of Human Trafficking Victims

A surprising finding of the 2022 report indicates that the number of detected victims fell for the first time in 20 years. Fewer cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation were detected during the pandemic as public spaces were closed, and related restrictions may have pushed this form of trafficking into more concealed and less safe locations. Moreover, the pandemic may have weakened law enforcement's capacity to detect victims.

The number of victims detected globally fell by 11 percent in 2020 from the previous year, with 50,000 detected victims in 2019 to just under 47,000 in 2020. The 2022 United States TIP report shows that this trend continued into 2021. Fewer detections in low- and medium-income countries drive this decline. In East Asia and the Pacific, detection fell by 59%, while there was a 40% reduction in North Africa and the Middle East. A decrease in the detection of cross-border trafficking may also represent a transitory trend due to the pandemic.

In 2004, when UNODC started monitoring incidences of human trafficking, most cases involved women and girls. The current report indicates an increased number of boys and men are victims as victim detection overall has decreased. In addition, more males have been identified as trafficked for forced criminality and mixed forms of exploitation.

Another finding is that female victims are subject to physical or extreme violence by traffickers. Female victims are three times more likely to suffer violent forms of trafficking, while child victims suffer 1.7 times more than adults. The UNODC reporting norms and stereotypes around gender, gender roles, and expected behaviors affect how anti-trafficking responses have been shaped and who is most at risk. Stakeholders must consider these effects and consequences of gender norms and stereotypes when building their anti-trafficking responses.



Awareness

Victims Self Rescue

Another surprising finding is that a large number of victims self-rescue. Court case analysis featured in the report shows that trafficking victims, when identified, escape from traffickers on their own and are, in effect, 'self-rescued.' There are more cases of victims escaping and reporting to authorities of their own initiative (41 percent) than cases where victims were located by law enforcement (28 percent), members of the community, and civil society (11 percent). This trend in self-reporting is especially alarming, considering many victims of trafficking may not identify themselves as victims or may be too afraid of their exploiters to attempt to escape.



Organized Crime

The report finds that only 10 percent of traffickers work individually. Twenty-one percent of traffickers are opportunistic associations that are not organized, while 23 percent are government-associated organized crime groups. Finally, 46 percent of traffickers are part of a business-like type of organized crime group.

More organized traffickers exploit more victims with more violence and for more extended periods.

Organized crime groups are the mechanism behind long-distance trafficking and are responsible for only about 5 percent of domestic trafficking. Conversely, individual traffickers are responsible for approximately 60 percent of those trafficked domestically.

Impact of Climate Change

Climate change is multiplying trafficking risks. In 2021, 23.7 million people were internally displaced by weather-induced natural disasters, while many others crossed borders to escape climate-induced poverty.

As documented in the report, environmental disasters in the Philippines, Ghana, in the Caribbean islands have eradicated social structures and left people homeless and without resources.

Human trafficking always impacts the most vulnerable, and those experiencing climate and environmental disasters are among the most vulnerable people on earth.

Number of Convictions Continues to Fall

The pandemic may have undermined the capacity to rescue victims and bring criminals to justice. Globally, the number of convictions for trafficking offenses fell by 27 percent in 2020 from the previous year – with sharper decreases registered in South Asia (56 percent), Central America and the Caribbean (54 percent), and South America (46 percent) – accelerating a longer-term trend registered by UNODC since 2017. Two of every five countries covered by the UNODC Report had not recorded a conviction.

A reason proposed for this decrease in the number of convictions is that in many countries, courts were closed for six months or more due to the pandemic, which would impact the ability of cases to move through the law enforcement systems.

Meanwhile, even though countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are convicting fewer traffickers, victims from these countries are increasingly found in a wide range of other countries compared to victims from other regions.

The report indicates that women investigated for trafficking in persons are significantly more likely to be convicted than men. This suggests that the justice system may discriminate against women and that the role of women in trafficking networks may increase the likelihood that they are convicted of the crime.

War and Conflict Increase Vulnerability

The report details how war and conflict offer opportunities for traffickers to exploit potential victims. It shows that the war in Ukraine elevates trafficking risks for the displaced population. Most victims resulting from conflict originate in and are trafficked to African and Middle Eastern countries. Seventy-three percent of victims identified originating from a conflict zone were from Sub-Saharan Africa.

The report outlines steps the Member States can take to alleviate the vulnerability of potential victims due to conflict and war. They urge safe access to humanitarian help and essential services for those impacted by war and to extend protective measures to populations fleeing the country in conflict.

Another pertinent finding is that in 2015 there was a strong relationship between the number of citizens from Ukraine applying for asylum and the number of trafficking victims from Ukraine found in Western and Central Europe. Data collection on the connection between the present war in Ukraine and human trafficking is ongoing.

Advocacy

The report included statistics highlighting the internet's role in human trafficking. For example, in 2017, 84.3 percent of active trafficking for sexual exploitation cases was "internet-based commercial sex" in the United States. In Austria, the internet was used for recruitment by perpetrators in 74 percent of human trafficking cases.

The misuse of technology was found to increase sexual exploitation online, including the production of sexually exploitative material, live streaming, and child sexual abuse material. In addition, the frequency of this type of crime increased significantly during the pandemic as lockdown measures increased the economic vulnerability of women and children.

Technology played an important role in increasing profits for perpetrators during the period analyzed, hinting at developments in online monetary exchange and banking. Advancements in encryption, online anonymity, and virtual assets created more challenges for anti-trafficking and cybercrime authorities and stakeholders.

The report also documented the way technology and digital tools can be used to counter trafficking, including to produce evidence and criminal detection. This includes tracking victims by managing supply chains, education, and data trends.

The UNODC calls on the private sector to play a role in the fight against trafficking, mainly when exploitation occurs in either business supply chains, operations, or their downstream value chain. Of the organizations developing counter-trafficking tools, the private sector was the most active group, responsible for 40% of identified tools, with NGOs responsible for 33%.

The UNODC also called for policies to stop using online platforms to support human trafficking. The report cites a lack of industry standards, particularly in high-risk sectors such as pornography, sexual services, and short-term job seeking, contributing to exploitation and human trafficking.



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Advocacy

Trends in Tracking Exploitation



North America

In 2020, a drastic drop in the detection of tracking 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. There was, however, a 35 percent drop in the number of convictions in North America during 2020.

About 8 percent of victims in the United States were trafficked for both sex and labor, most of them being females. Two percent of victims trafficked in the United States for sexual exploitation are transgender persons. In 2021, 32 percent of victims self-reported, while a family member reported 19 percent.

In North America, most of the sexual exploitation occurs in closed settings, such as brothels that are not socially registered, apartments, or hotels. The vast majority of traffickers who are prosecuted and convicted are men. North American countries recorded the highest share of people convicted among people investigated across all regions.

South America

Countries in South America reported a significant reduction in the number of identified victims in 2020.

Victims are usually exploited in public locations, such as bars and nightclubs. About 15 percent of victims detected in South America are trafficked across borders within South America, and 75 percent are victims of domestic trafficking.

The trend toward higher detection of trafficking in persons in South America seems to have been hampered by the pandemic. In 2020, the detection of most victim categories fell drastically. Detection of female adults, as well as foreigners trafficked for any form of exploitation, showed marked drops. On the other hand, there was a growth in detecting child victims. Few crimes were prosecuted, again, probably due to the pandemic. The number of people convicted in the area was 46 percent lower than before 2019.

Women victims continue to be the majority of victims detected in South America.

In 2020, the most common form of exploitation experienced by detected victims of trafficking was forced labor, accounting for nearly two-thirds, and sexual exploitation, over a third. This is a significant change compared to the past when, in 2018, two-thirds of victims detected had been trafficked for sexual exploitation.

Central America and Caribbean

While countries in North and Central America and the Caribbean most often detect women and girl victims trafficked for sexual exploitation, European countries, the Middle East, and North Africa detect more males, especially men, trafficked for forced labor and boys for forced criminal activity. Furthermore, concerning the age profile of the victims, Central America and the Caribbean detect more children trafficked into forced labor.

The countries in Central America and the Caribbean detected drastically fewer victims of tracking in persons (-36 percent). There was also a significant drop in convictions. Fifty-four percent fewer people were convicted in 2020 compared to the previous year.

Girls are the majority of the victims of trafficking in persons detected in Central America and the Caribbean. Trafficking for sexual exploitation remains the primary form of this crime detected.

In Central America, women represent nearly half the people prosecuted and convicted for trafficking in persons. This follows the general pattern of higher detection of women's involvement in the trafficking business reported in countries of origin compared to counties of destination. The level of trafficking convictions in Central America and the Caribbean is relatively high compared to most regions of the world.

Europe

In Europe, there were increases in the detection of victims, particularly in the detection of labor exploitation of men.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the number of victims detected increased by about 9 percent. A drop in the identification of female victims trafficked for sexual exploitation accounted for the most significant proportion of this decrease. Compared to 2019, and against this decreasing trend, more male victims and more victims in forced labor were identified in 2020. In Eastern Europe, the victims were 63% male and 24% female.

In Central and South-Eastern Europe, a continued increase was also noted in the detection of victims. In 2020, most were trafficked for forced labor. Moreover, compared to the year before, a higher prevalence of foreigners and men and boys were detected as victims.

In Western and Southern Europe, increased detection of domestic trafficking was noted as decreased prosecutions and convictions. While the detection of victims increased, there was a relative decline in the proportion of cases of trafficking for sexual exploitation identified, compared to trafficking for labor exploitation. More victims were trafficked for forced criminality and mixed forms of exploitation. For the first time, more male victims were detected than women and girls; an increased share of the victims identified were children. Children accounted for more than 40 percent of the total victims detected. While the number of investigations reported during this period was higher than in previous years, fewer prosecutions and convictions occurred in this region in 2020 than in the previous three years.

Action

United Nations Office on Drug and Crime Data Portal

The [UNODC data portal](#) is the largest existing dataset on trafficking in persons. It contains the data collected by UNODC since the first edition of the Global Report in 2009, with information on more than 450,000 victims and 300,000 (suspected) offenders detected worldwide between 2003 and 2021.



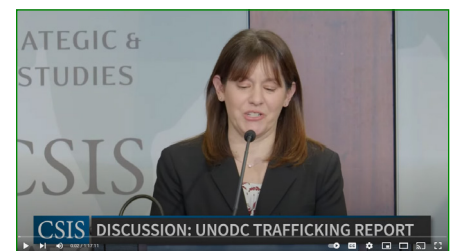
Please click [here](#) to view a short YouTube video on the UNODC Trafficking in Persons Report organized by the UNODC.

What would you do?

Please click [here](#) and scroll down to view this brief YouTube video on a few common trafficking scenarios to be aware of and approaches to intervene.

The Global Report on the Trafficking of Persons

To access the full 2022 report from the UNODC, please click [here](#).



Please click [here](#) to view a YouTube video organized by the Center for Strategic and International studies on the 2022 UNODC Trafficking in Persons Report.

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