UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons and responses to the challenges

A global study of emerging evidence

Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected countries and people globally; it has also exacerbated existing disadvantages, poverty and vulnerabilities. The initial measures to contain the health crisis have not always considered those most vulnerable and affected by violence and exploitation. This report seeks to bring to the forefront the challenges for anti-trafficking during the pandemic and share promising practices and lessons learned in order to prepare for a more inclusive crisis-response in the future, leaving no one behind.

In particular, the report explores the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on (1) the scale and characteristics of trafficking in persons; (2) victims of trafficking; and (3) frontline organizations (law enforcement, prosecution services, the judiciary and the protection and reintegration services provided by non-government organizations (NGOs)). The report also examines the different initiatives developed in response to the challenges created by COVID-19 and identifies promising practices.

Effects of the covid-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons

The report identifies that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, trafficking in persons went even further underground, making any reliable estimates of the scale of trafficking in persons more difficult. However, in some regions and countries domestic trafficking has reportedly increased, especially local recruitment and exploitation. Loss of livelihoods and restrictions on movement have led to traffickers recruiting victims in their local areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has created larger pools of vulnerable persons who, due to their worsened economic situation, were recruited for labor or sexual exploitation in their local area.

Women, children and migrants have been identified by survey and interview participants as particularly vulnerable to recruitment and exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women and girls have been recruited, often locally or online, for sexual exploitation, especially in private apartments. Children have been particularly affected – out of school and needing to support parents who have lost their livelihoods, children have been increasingly targeted by traffickers at the local level and online. They have been trafficked for sexual purposes, forced marriage, forced begging and for forced criminality. There is clear evidence of increased demand for child sexual exploitation materials (CSEM), which has exacerbated the exploitation of children around the world. Migrants have been affected by the pandemic in a number of ways – many have lost their employment in the destination country and have been unable to return to their home. Some of them ended up in an irregular status in destination countries after being unable to renew their residence and/or work permits. Others have been forced to stay in inadequate accommodation with limited COVID-19 safety measures in place. The families of migrants have also suffered through the loss of much needed remittances. Survey and interview respondents highlighted the plight, in particular, of migrant domestic workers who have been confined to private homes and exploited by abusive employers.

Traffickers adapted to the 'new normal'

Capitalizing on people's loss of livelihoods during the pandemic and the increasing amount of time both adults and children were spending on the Internet, traffickers utilized social media and other online platforms to recruit new victims. Thirty-seven per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported that the recruitment of victims has moved online during the pandemic. Traffickers have responded to the closure of bars, clubs and massage parlors (due to lockdowns, curfews and other measures to control the spread of COVID-19) by moving the sexual exploitation of adults and children to private homes and apartments. In some countries, traffickers have also capitalized on social distancing measures to transport victims across national borders, knowing that law enforcement have, at times, been unable to carefully inspect vehicles.

Effects of the covid-19 pandemic on victims of trafficking

Victims have been more exposed to COVID-19 and social stigma

Trafficking victims, due to their working and living conditions, have faced heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19. Victims exploited in certain industries, such as the sex industry, construction and manufacturing, faced challenges in remaining socially distant from other victims and their exploiters. Some victims have been unable to access personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks and hand sanitizer. Survey and interview respondents reported that in some regions and countries trafficking victims, particularly victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, have been blamed for the spread of COVID-19 in local communities. This has led to ostracism and reintegration problems.

Victims have been abandoned without means for survival and suffered more violence

Survey and interview respondents reported that trafficking victims were abandoned by their traffickers at the start of the pandemic because there was reduced demand for their labor during lockdowns. Traffickers who lost profit due to factories, farms, or brothels closing, simply abandoned victims on the streets. On the other hand, some victims have faced confinement in destination countries and cities in private homes, factories, construction sites and other locations and increased control and violence at the hands of their traffickers.

Rescued victims could not return home, receive assistance or generate income

Many trafficking victims have been forced to remain in shelters in destination countries as a result of national borders closing. In some regions and countries, victims have languished in shelters for months, not knowing when they might be able to return home. Furthermore, like millions of people around the world, many trafficking victims lost their livelihoods at the start of the pandemic. Lockdowns and other measures introduced to curb the spread of COVID-19 led to the closure of businesses, leaving many victims who had established their own businesses or secured jobs, unemployed and destitute. Due to ongoing economic insecurity, many of these victims have not been able to access new livelihood opportunities and became reliant on NGOs and available State services for financial and other support.

Concurrently, trafficking victims in many regions and countries have faced increased challenges in accessing key services, such as shelter, health services, legal aid and basic needs. The increased number of people needing social assistance and support during the pandemic, coupled with travel restrictions and lack of technology and reliable Internet in many parts of the world meant that trafficking victims have been unable, in some countries and regions and at different times in the pandemic, to access essential services. Victims living in the community or accommodated in shelters have also faced reduced access to education and training opportunities.

The effects of the covid-19 pandemic on frontline organizations

Funding shortages

Stakeholders reported that lack of financial resources was one of the key challenges faced by NGOs that provide protection and reintegration support to trafficking victims during the pandemic. NGOs also faced increasing costs for supporting more victims and vulnerable persons, paying for victims' quarantine accommodation, COVID-19 tests, PPE, purchasing tablets and Internet for victims to access services that moved online and providing emergency cash and food packages.

Frontline organizations have experienced planning and coordination challenges

Few frontline organizations had plans in place to continue anti-trafficking activities during a global pandemic. The lack of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), guidelines and a lead State agency for coordination of the pandemic response have left many frontline organizations confused about national-level anti-trafficking operations and responsibilities during the pandemic. This has resulted in both domestic and cross-border coordination challenges. There have also been obstacles for frontline organizations in continuing normal coordination activities with partner organizations in other countries. Anti-trafficking meetings, seminars and other events quickly moved online; however, in many countries lack of equipment and reliable Internet meant that remote communication and coordination has been challenging.

Reduced staff capacity to prevent and combat trafficking and protect victims

In some regions and countries, law enforcement personnel were called to support the country's COVID-19 response. This meant that police and investigation units specialized in anti-trafficking responses were re-assigned from their normal duties to the national-level effort to curb the spread of COVID-19 such as investigating breaches of COVID-19 restrictions, shutting down non-compliant businesses, monitoring physical movement and responding to reports of people breaking lockdown and curfew rules. Some regions and countries have also experienced reduced anti-trafficking law enforcement personnel because officers were infected with COVID-19 or were forced to isolate because one of their family members contracted the disease. Similarly, prosecution services, the judiciary and NGOs all experienced similar problems of reduced staff due to COVID-19 illness and staff having to isolate at home.

Staff exhaustion and burn-out

Across law enforcement, prosecution services, the judiciary and NGOs providing support services to trafficking victims, staff have experienced increased workloads. Coupled with the reality that there is a reduced number of staff able to work, frontline organization staff have experienced burn-out. This has particularly been the case for NGO personnel who reported increased demands for assistance and reduced staff capacity to respond to the demands for assistance. The research collected several testimonials of NGO personnel continuing to work long hours even when sick with COVID-19.

Access to justice hindered

Due to emergency measures imposed by governments in response to the pandemic, there have been changes in court procedures and delays and postponements in administrative, criminal and civil cases. These delays have created significant backlogs in trafficking in persons cases and negatively affected trafficking victims' access to protection services, justice and redress. Experts reported that the main impact of the pandemic on the judiciary has been the suspension of court hearings and appearances. Where courts remained open, there have still been problems, for example, witnesses and defendants not being able to travel to court due to travel restrictions. Remote trials and hearings have in many regions and countries eased the back log of court cases; however, a lack of training on the use of equipment, as well as technology and Internet challenges have meant that remote trials are not always without complications.

Responses and promising practices

Despite the many and varied challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, law enforcement, prosecution services, the judiciary and NGOs have continued many trafficking prevention, prosecution and protection activities. The study identified a number of innovative practices by frontline organizations to respond to the COVID-19 challenges, including but not limited to:

Prevention and training activities moved online. Frontline organizations continued providing awareness messages to communities by reaching individuals in online trafficking in persons awareness sessions. Workshops, seminars and other training events have also been conducted online since the start of the pandemic to ensure continued information sharing and coordination on anti-trafficking efforts.

E-justice mechanisms established or strengthened. In many regions and countries, prosecution services and the judiciary responded to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by developing and/or strengthening e-justice mechanisms. They provided facilities for judicial actors to, for example, submit motions and petitions online and request official copies of documents online. Remote trials have enabled trafficking in persons trials and hearings to continue and for backlogs in cases to start to be at least partially cleared. In addition, remote victim and witness testimonies were enabled during the pandemic and identified as a promising practice that should be established and maintained beyond this period.

Planning and coordination efforts have been strengthened. In some regions and countries protocols and guidelines have been developed to guide the COVID-19 response, including trafficking in persons responsibilities and activities during the pandemic. For example, in some countries, protocols have been developed and/or amended for shelters for trafficking in persons victims, which provide guidance on the provision of health-related matters for victims and shelter staff. Protocols have also been developed for managing child protection cases during the pandemic. Anti-trafficking coordination has actually increased in many places, with frontline organizations capitalizing on the convenient set-up of online meetings to have more frequent meetings with counterparts. This has meant that anti-trafficking personnel have been able to coordinate effectively on, for example, cross-border investigations and victim repatriations.

Frontline organizations have effectively fundraised to provide support to an increased number of vulnerable persons. Realizing the need to provide financial and other basic support to an increased number of people, NGOs focused on purchasing technology, Internet packages and emergency food packages for trafficking victims and their families. Recognizing that children were out of school for protracted periods, with no technology or Internet at home in order to access online education, NGOs provided laptops or tablets to children so that they could continue learning. The study identified many positive examples of donors being flexible with their funding to enable NGOs to divert existing or planned funds to the provision of emergency aid to victims and their families.

Survivors have been provided with key services through online methods. Organizations that provide support to victims of trafficking such as psychosocial therapy, legal aid and livelihood skills training continued support provision where possible through online methods. This meant that trafficking survivors living in communities as well as those accommodated in shelters could continue to receive support, advice and training during lockdowns, including those in remote areas.

Frontline organizations have supported trafficking victims' COVID-19 health needs. Trafficking victims have at times required COVID-19 testing and quarantine accommodation during the pandemic. NGOs have paid for the accommodation and COVID-19 tests for victims. The study identified that in at least one country,

trafficking victims have been prioritized for the COVID-19 vaccines, which were provided free of charge to the victims.

Looking ahead: recommendations

At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all countries around the world for well over a year. Similar crises will likely occur in the future and it is essential that the international community is prepared this time. The report provides a series of recommendations based on the lessons learned shared by experts for strengthening the anti-trafficking response during crises, including:

Regularly monitor the effect of wide-range public measures to mitigate emergencies. Responses developed to respond to the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable persons, victims and organizations should be continuously monitored. Lessons learned and promising practices, as well as challenges, should be widely shared, with this report contributing to this knowledge exchange to build a strong evidence-base. Monitoring and evaluation should consider, inter alia, the effects the measures have had on different aspects of the anti-trafficking response; the effects the measures have had on adults, children and migrants; and whether the measures should be continued, or even expanded in the future.

Conduct research to inform measures to address trafficking in persons during the pandemic. Relevant frontline organizations, with support from professional research bodies, should conduct additional primary research on the effects of the pandemic on trafficking in persons in different regions and countries. Such research should consider the dynamics of trafficking in persons during the pandemic, i.e. shifts in the modi operandi of traffickers, migration dynamics and heightened vulnerabilities of certain groups. Relevant agencies should also fully implement existing UN recommendations to collect, analyze and publish all relevant and disaggregated data on trafficking in persons cases. Data collection efforts should prioritize victims' safety, privacy and confidentiality and respect the key principle of doing no harm.

Develop clear messages to the public. Official messages from health, criminal justice and protection agencies should indicate that trafficking in persons victims are exempt from COVID-19 movement restriction measures such as lockdowns and curfews when they seek help and want to report their victimization. Public messages should make it clear that trafficking victims, alongside other victims and vulnerable persons such as victims of intimate partner violence or physical or psychological violence experienced in their homes, are allowed to leave the home and access support without being apprehended for breaking lockdown rules.

Coordinate efforts at all levels. Existing working groups should continue to meet using online methods regularly. Where gaps in capacity or expertise are identified, new cross-sectoral groups should be established to discuss and collaborate on ways and means to address existing trafficking prevention and protection gaps.

Develop plans and strategies. In the context of planning for future crises, SOPs should be developed so that there is clear guidance for all frontline organizations on the division of anti-trafficking roles and responsibilities. It is important that one Ministry leads the effort to respond to the crisis, to avoid confusion, overlap or gaps in responses to trafficking in persons during the crisis. Contingency plans must ensure the availability of a minimum package of services to victims to meet their immediate needs during the period of reduced possibilities for referral, protection, investigation and judicial proceedings.

Strengthen national legal frameworks. States that have not yet ratified, or acceded to the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, or have yet to incorporate the provisions of the Protocol into national anti-trafficking legislation, should do so without further delay. States should ensure that they have robust national legislation to address all forms of trafficking, most notably online child sexual exploitation and other forms of online recruitment

and exploitation, and that relevant authorities are trained in the scope and practical application of the legislation, particularly regarding collecting and securing digital evidence.

Develop effective prevention activities. Efforts to prevent trafficking in persons should be strengthened through various measures and strategies, including, but not limited to: widely disseminating information about trafficking in persons, such as hotlines and services in multiple languages, through television and social media; setting up mobile investigation teams with full PPE; developing and implementing online Internet safety programs for parents and children; and ensuring that schools as places providing protection and often food to children remain open, with COVID-19 health precautions in place.

Strengthen protection measures for trafficking victims. Shelters should develop plans for receiving new referrals and ensuring the victims' safe quarantine in a separate wing of the shelter. Activities and trainings for victims in shelters should continue uninterrupted through online methods, with consideration of language and literacy needs of victims. Shelters should, where possible, purchase technology so that victims accommodated in shelters can access psychosocial support, legal aid and education online.

Strengthen e-justice mechanisms. The use of e-justice mechanisms should be carefully planned to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place. This requires an assessment in each country of the advisability of implementing such mechanisms, with consideration of issues of technology access by victims and witnesses, as well as safety and security. Criminal justice actors, including law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, court staff and interpreters should have access to training in using e-justice mechanisms in trafficking in persons and other important crime cases, especially how to accommodate vulnerable witnesses who have experienced trauma.

Budgeting. While the priority of States during the pandemic remains public health, governments around the world should continue to keep the issue of trafficking in persons at the top of the agenda and set aside adequate budget and resources for preventing trafficking in persons and protecting victims. Budget should be set aside for extra law enforcement and judiciary resources (e.g. e-justice mechanisms, night courts, mobile investigation units), as well as extra protection and reintegration resources (e.g. hotline staff, legal aid, psychosocial therapists, emergency food aid, health care needs and cash transfers for victims). Donors should be flexible with their funding and swift to respond to requests from NGOs to provide additional funding, or to redirect existing funding to other activities and human resourcing requirements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought immense challenges to the anti-trafficking field. This study explores the various challenges and obstacles faced by frontline organizations during the pandemic and highlights how frontline organizations have risen to the challenges in order to continue providing protection, support and access to justice to victims of trafficking in persons. The coming years will show if we will be able to strengthen sustainable responses to trafficking in persons, learning from each other and recognizing new trends in trafficking in persons cases, identifying victims and their needs for assistance in a victim-centered, age- and gender-sensitive as well as trauma-informed way.

List of acronyms

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019; SARS-CoV-2
CSEM	Child sexual exploitation materials
CSO	Civil society organization
EGM	Expert group meeting
Europol	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
GBV	Gender based violence
GBVAW	Gender based violence against women
GBVH	Gender based violence and harassment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFEMS	Global Fund to End Modern Slavery
HTMSS	UNODC Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section
ICAT	Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons
IDWF	International Domestic Workers Federation
IJM	International Justice Mission
ILO	International Labour Organization
INTERPOL	The International Criminal Police Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IT	Information technology
NGO	Non-government organization
NPA	National plan of action
ODIHR	Organization for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe
OSR CTHB	Office of the Special Representative and Co-Ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings
PPE	Personal protective equipment
PTSD	Post traumatic stress disorder

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REDTRAM	Ibero-American network of specialized prosecutors on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
URSW	United Registered Social Workers (Philippines)
USD	United States Dollar
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter 1:
Introduction

Background

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was first identified in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a public health emergency in January 2020. In March 2020, it was declared a pandemic. This research report, drafted in June 2021, provides an overview of the emerging evidence on what has happened over the last year in terms of the effects of the pandemic on trafficking in persons and frontline organizations'[1] responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic. The study represents one of the first attempts to understand and document the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons globally and map responses by frontline organizations to mitigate the challenges. The research report also endeavors to look forward and consider what should be done to further mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on trafficking in persons and to be prepared for potential other times of crisis.

Previous more localized epidemics such as H1N1, Dengue fever or Ebola have not been utilized in a way to record the effects on trafficking in persons and share lessons learned for future preparedness on a global level.[2] The global reach and impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic dictate that we collect the lessons learned and promising practices developed this time in order to prepare for future challenges in a human-rights based, gender and age-responsive, trauma-informed and inclusive way.

Across the world, States have developed and implemented measures to stem the spread of the disease, prevent health care systems from collapsing and protect citizens and residents from sickness and death. Measures have included lockdowns, restrictions on movement and social distancing. The measures have been implemented in different parts of the world, at different times in 2020 and 2021, with varying degrees of strictness. At the time of writing this report in June 2021, some countries were experiencing a second, or even third wave of the pandemic and strict lockdowns were being implemented again. At the same time, in some countries, vaccine rollouts were occurring, slowly in some regions and at speed in others, with States keen to resume normal economic and social activity.

Lockdowns, restrictions on mobility and other measures introduced to curb the spread of the virus had, at the forefront, the health of citizens and residents in mind; however, the restrictions continue to create various challenges for frontline organizations responsible for preventing and prosecuting trafficking in persons and protecting vulnerable persons, victims and survivors of trafficking in persons.[3]

Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to understand and document the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons (for example, the scale of trafficking and the modi operandi of traffickers), on trafficking victims and on frontline organizations, particularly police, prosecution services, the judiciary and non-government organizations (NGOs) providing protection and rehabilitation support to victims. A further aim of the study was to document the innovative responses adopted by frontline organizations during the pandemic, which might inform future responses. The study has been undertaken from a mostly qualitative perspective, focusing on emerging evidence on the challenges posed by the

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[1] For the purpose of this report, the term 'frontline organization' refers to all organizations working to prevent and/or combat trafficking in persons (for example, law enforcement, prosecution and the judiciary) and provide services to victims and vulnerable persons (primarily non-government organizations).

[2] This might have taken place on a local level but it has not informed the preparedness of frontline organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[3] This report uses the terms 'victims' and 'survivors'. The term 'victims' is used in line with the Palermo Protocol language; in this report it broadly refers to trafficked persons that have been identified by law enforcement agencies or other first responders. The term 'survivors' is broadly used to discuss trafficked persons who are receiving support from victim support services.

pandemic on victims and frontline organizations and responses adopted by frontline organizations and the professionals working within those agencies to mitigate the challenges. The research report does not aim to compare responses between regions or countries, or to evaluate any individual country's response to the pandemic.

Methodology

Considering the broad scope of the study, the significant amount of secondary sources available and the available time, the research methodology combined the use of diverse qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to obtain the broadest possible overview of the effects the pandemic is having on the crime of trafficking in persons, on victims and on frontline organizations and of the responses introduced to address the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Throughout this report, trafficking in persons refers to the definition set forth in Article 3 of the United Nations (UN) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Trafficking in Persons Protocol):

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons;

By means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person;

For the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Common forms of exploitation of adults and children include:

Sexual exploitation   Forced labour   Debt bondage   Domestic servitude

Organ removal   Forced begging   Child soldiers   Forced marriage

The study is illustrative of the most serious challenges faced by trafficking victims and frontline organizations, as well as the measures adopted to respond to the COVID-19 challenges, as they relate to

trafficking in persons. The study aimed to be balanced in its geographic focus; to that end, survey respondents and interview respondents from over 40 countries, in different regions of the world, provided data for this report. Survey and interview data were triangulated in addition through an extensive review of the academic literature, reports published by international organizations and civil society and select media reports published between March 2020 and March 2021.

The research methods used included:

Two online surveys

(1) UNODC field office survey: An online survey (in English) was sent to UNODC field offices in January 2021, which collected information from UNODC field staff on the effects of the pandemic on trafficking in persons and responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic in their respective regions of work. 12 responses were received from UNODC field offices in South America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The information was based on their experience and information shared with them by their counterparts.

(2) Stakeholder survey: An online survey (in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish) was sent initially to approximately 450 stakeholders who previously participated in UNODC activities in 2019 and 2020. In addition, the link to the online survey was shared with Permanent Missions to the United Nations in Vienna and field offices and was subsequently snowballed until its closure in the end of March 2021. The survey collected qualitative and quantitative information from law enforcement, prosecution services, the judiciary and victim support NGOs on: the effects of the pandemic on trafficking in persons, on trafficking victims and on frontline organizations and on the mitigating measures put in place by frontline organizations in order to maintain their responses to trafficking in persons. The survey included multiple choice and open questions. The survey included a main questions section, as well as dedicated thematic sections targeted at practitioners from law enforcement, prosecution services, the judiciary and victim support services. Survey respondents could choose to respond to select parts of the survey, or the entire survey. All responses were collected in an anonymized and confidential manner. No identifying information will be mentioned in the report.

One hundred and twenty-one responses were received from stakeholders (frontline practitioners) in 16 regions and 46 countries. Most respondents (30%) indicated that they have a law enforcement background (police, immigration, border control), followed by victim support providers (26%), professionals in policy development and implementation (26%) and government agencies (19%). Additional respondents came from the professional fields of the judiciary (17%), NGOs (15%) and prosecution services (14%).[4]

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[4] The percentages add up to more than 100% because some survey respondents selected more than one option for 'field of work', e.g. indicating expertise in law enforcement and victim support at the same time. In general, it was possible to choose several options and reply to more than one section of the questionnaire. Thus, percentages add up to more than 100%.

Figure 1: Stakeholder survey respondents' field of work
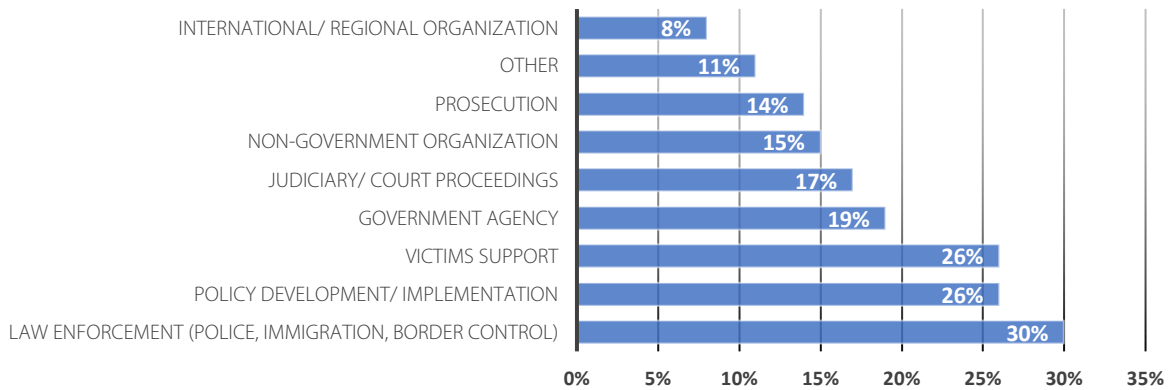
As shown in figure 2 below, most survey respondents chose to fill out the sections on 'investigations' and 'victim support'. Fifty-five per cent completed the section on investigations; 25 per cent on prosecution; 22 per cent on the judiciary; and 38 per cent on victim support.

Figure 2: Stakeholder survey distribution of survey section responses
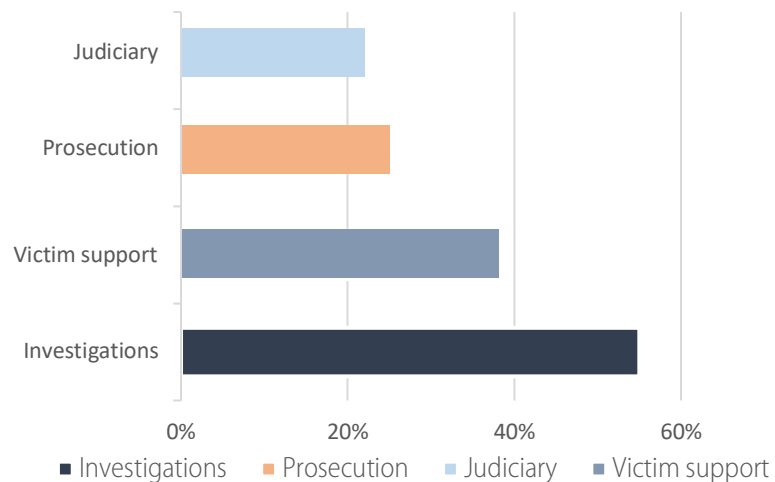
Semi-structured interviews

Twenty-four remote (Microsoft Teams) semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants working in law enforcement, prosecution, the judiciary and victim support, to explore interview respondents' experiences of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in their field of anti-trafficking and/or victim protection work. The interviews were conducted in English and Spanish (the latter with interpretation services) in March and April 2021. A balance was sought in the professional background of experts included in the semi-structured interviews, as well as geographic balance. Interviews were conducted with: two judges, six prosecutors, five anti-trafficking police and anti-trafficking committee/council members, eight victim rehabilitation service providers, two international organizations staff and one other expert. The interview respondents were from the following regions:

East Africa, West Africa, the Caribbean, South America, Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Western Europe.

Expert Group meeting
An EGM was held on 12 May 2021. The remote EGM was an opportunity for invited experts to consolidate the key findings of the study, further discuss lessons learned and promising practices as well as to share their comments on the findings and recommendations of the draft report.

Limitations

Due to the limited time available to conduct this research and the resources available, this study is not exhaustive. Although all effort was made to collect and review literature and media reports on the subject of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons published between March 2020 and March 2021, the search was limited to documents published in English. Thus, some important reports and articles published in languages other than English have not been included in the analysis. Moreover, the sheer volume of reports published by international organizations and civil society and policy statements on the subject meant that not all relevant material could be included. Secondary sources are primarily used in the report to support the findings from the primary data collection.

As noted in previous paragraphs, 24 interviews were conducted for the study and 121 stakeholder survey responses were received. While there was an adequate balance between responses across different regions of the world and across sectors, fewer respondents completed the survey sections on prosecution services and the judiciary. However, data on the challenges the pandemic has posed on prosecution services and the judiciary were collected in the semi-structured interviews; in other words, the surveys and interviews were complementary and ensured a balanced representation across the different sectors.
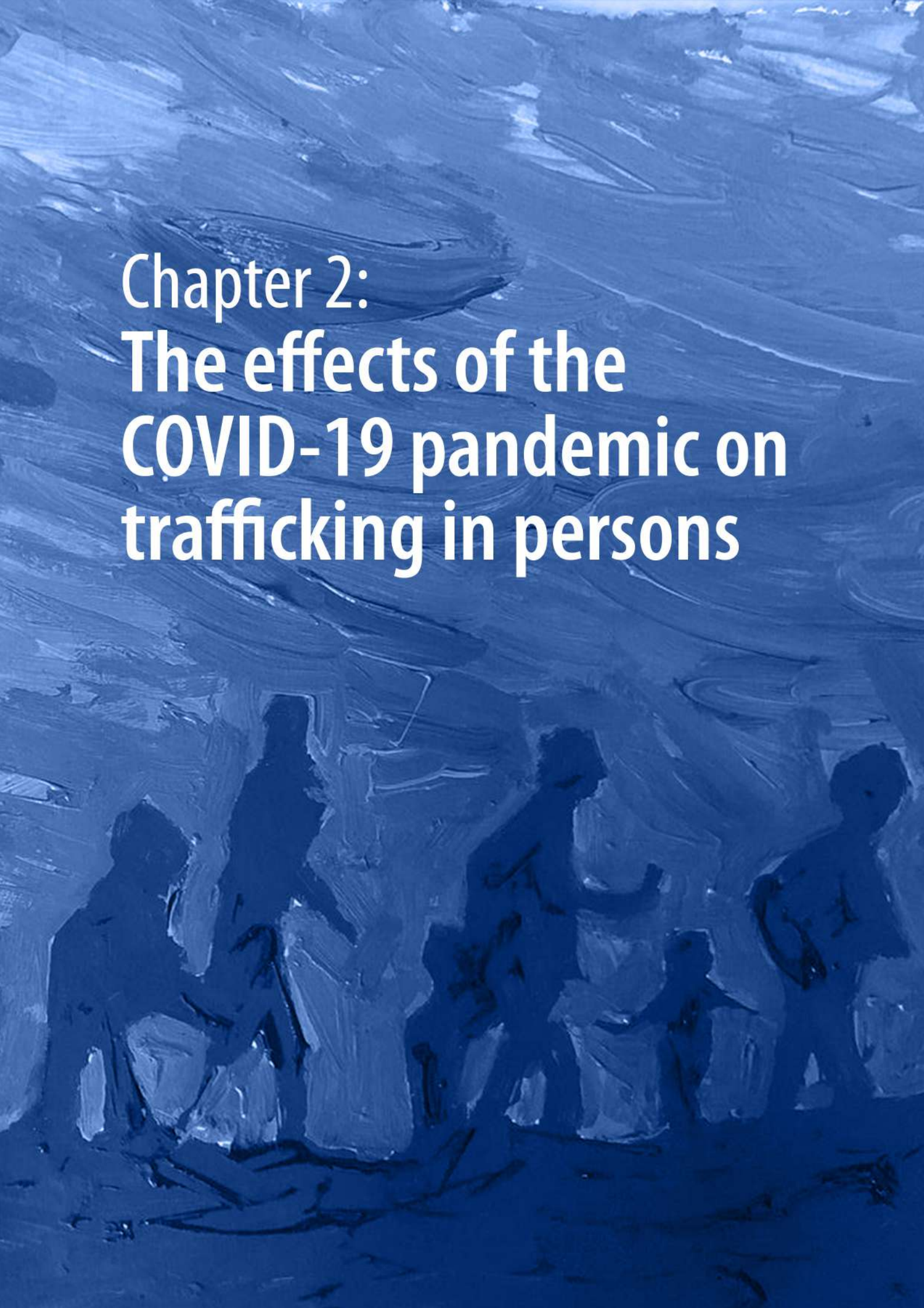
Collection of data was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some planned interviews needed to be postponed due to experts or their family members having contracted the disease.

There are inherent challenges in describing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on various regions and countries and describing the effects on different populations and at different points in time. UNODC acknowledges that different countries and populations have suffered more or less severely than others in different countries and at different times. However, to avoid assessing any individual country, or attempting to compare challenges and responses in any region or country, the report presents findings thematically and does not seek to highlight responses by individual countries at a national level.

Report structure

Most of the information gathered in this study considers the first year of the pandemic and, accordingly, the challenges that the pandemic has posed for frontline organizations in combating trafficking in persons. The study endeavors to consider not only the effects the pandemic is having on victims and frontline organizations but also look ahead and deliberate on lessons learned and potential measures to mitigate a future health crisis.

Chapters 2 to 5 present the findings, based on the two online surveys and the semi-structured interview responses. Where relevant, findings from academic literature, reports published by international

Chapter 2:
The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons

In April 2020, the UNODC Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section (HTMSS) published a policy brief (see text box 1 below), which provided preliminary findings and messages on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons. The brief emphasized that the pandemic is most likely exacerbating the economic and societal inequalities that are among the root causes of trafficking in persons.[5] The UNODC Research and Analysis Branch also published a chapter dedicated to the socio-economic factors and risks of COVID-19 recession and its expected impact on trafficking in persons as part of its 2020 global report on trafficking in persons (see text box 2 below).[6] The policy brief outlined that COVID-19 measures may disproportionately affect certain categories of people, such as undocumented migrants, seasonal workers, women and children. In addition, COVID-19 has affected the ability of governments, intergovernmental organizations and NGOs to prevent trafficking in persons, provide essential services to vulnerable persons and to identified victims and repatriate and reintegrate victims.[7] The UNODC brief and various other reports published since March 2020, highlight the vulnerabilities of various groups of people to trafficking in persons as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Migrants, daily wage earners, women and children are frequently highlighted in reports published by international organizations and civil society and media reports as particularly vulnerable during the pandemic due to unemployment, debt and, for women and girls, gender discrimination and violence against women and girls (VAWG). Many of the findings and predictions presented in the April 2020 UNODC brief (see text box 1 below), were later confirmed by various reports as well as the findings of this study. Traffickers have adjusted to the 'new normal' by capitalizing on communication technologies to recruit and exploit victims, targeting people made vulnerable by the pandemic due to unemployment, poverty and hunger.

Text box 1: Summary of key messages in the 2020 UNODC brief [8] on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons

In April 2020 UNODC published a research brief that presented some preliminary findings on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons. In the brief, attention was drawn to the fact that, in the first phase of the pandemic, referral mechanisms for trafficking victims were negatively affected. Access to shelters was severely hampered, with psychosocial counselling and legal assistance reduced to a minimum. Shelters had to close or partially suspend services to victims, leaving some victims unprotected. The brief further posited that border closures might prevent victims from being repatriated to their home countries while affecting all migration flows and keeping some migrants in precarious situations in transit countries. The brief specifically warned about the risks regarding children – with the closure of schools, many children have spent significantly more time online for education as well as social networking and are more vulnerable to online recruitment and exploitation.

The fact that victims were less visible during the pandemic made crime detection and investigations more challenging, a problem that was further compounded by the reduction in criminal justice operations. A lack of personal protective equipment was a key factor preventing law enforcement, as well as frontline service providers, from safely carrying out their normal work in preventing trafficking in persons and identifying and protecting victims. International cooperation of law enforcement officials was also hampered.

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[5] UNODC (2020) Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons: Preliminary findings and messaging based on rapid stocktaking: https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS_Thematic_Brief_on_COVID-19.pdf

[6] https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_Chapter2.pdf

[7] UNODC (2020) Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons: Preliminary findings and messaging based on rapid stocktaking: https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS_Thematic_Brief_on_COVID-19.pdf

[8] Ibid.

UNODC recommended that relevant stakeholders should monitor the effects of COVID-19 responses on vulnerable groups, ensuring that anti-trafficking efforts continue to be based on the rule of law and human rights considerations. UNODC called upon national governments, law enforcement, the judiciary and service providers to remain alert to shifts in trafficking in persons while also showing flexibility in adapting to the pandemic's challenges. It further emphasized the need for systematic data collection and analysis on effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons.

Text box 2: Summary of socio-economic factors and risks of COVID-19 recession as reported in the UNODC 2020 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons[9]

Drawing from a micro and macro-economic analysis, the 2020 UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons shed light on the effects that the COVID-19-induced recession is likely to have on trafficking in persons.

At a micro level, economic determinants – such as poverty, unemployment and lower income levels – have been identified as the factors that most influence victims' vulnerability to trafficking in persons. People in economic need coming from disadvantaged population groups may be more exposed to trafficking in persons. In the recruitment phase, the combination of economic need and structural disadvantages results in a level of vulnerability that allows traffickers to recruit victims by simply abusing that position of vulnerability, without needing to resort to deception. Victims may feel that they have no other alternatives to meet their economic needs and may be more likely to take risks in the hope of improving their economic situation. At a macro level, lower Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and increased unemployment rates due to COVID-19 not only resulted in more people in economic need but may have also increased the outflow of migrant workers. Lessons learned from the global financial crisis of 2007-2010 and the recent developments in Venezuela, have shown how labor migration flows tend to overlap with trafficking in persons flows.

The *Global Report* predictions highlight how labor market disruptions caused by COVID-19 will likely increase the numbers of persons at risk of being targeted by traffickers.

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[9] UNODC (2020) Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf

Effects of the pandemic on the scale and characteristics of trafficking in persons

The pandemic has pushed trafficking in persons further underground, making any reliable estimation of shifts in the scale of trafficking in persons during the pandemic extremely difficult.[10] Many interview and survey respondents emphasized that it has been extremely difficult to measure any shifts in the scale of trafficking in persons because of the challenges the pandemic has posed on law enforcement personnel. Normal police and immigration activities such as investigations, labor inspections and border monitoring – which are already challenging in 'normal' times – have slowed or stalled for periods of time, meaning that traffickers may be continuing or even increasing their activities, but law enforcement have not been alerted by the public to the crimes. Reporting of suspected trafficking in persons cases by the public has decreased in many regions of the world during the pandemic, with people largely remaining in their homes during lockdowns and common places of exploitation, such as construction sites, factories and brothels, bars and massage parlors being forced to close. Thirty-nine per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported that it has been more difficult during the pandemic for first responders to detect victims of trafficking.

"There were different moments within the pandemic. We had at the beginning a total shutdown so we can't move. Then of course things began to open. Now we're in a different situation than the beginning. Trying to make a global assessment of the obstacles is challenging."[11]

"The impacts, it's difficult to see already. How it's affected the whole area of trafficking in persons. It's still a bit early. You can still see the immediate effects like the closing of shelters. Perhaps we see the trend in online abuse, we also see that in [country] but it's difficult to assess the impact yet."[12]

Figure 3: Stakeholder survey responses on the effects of the pandemic on trafficking in persons

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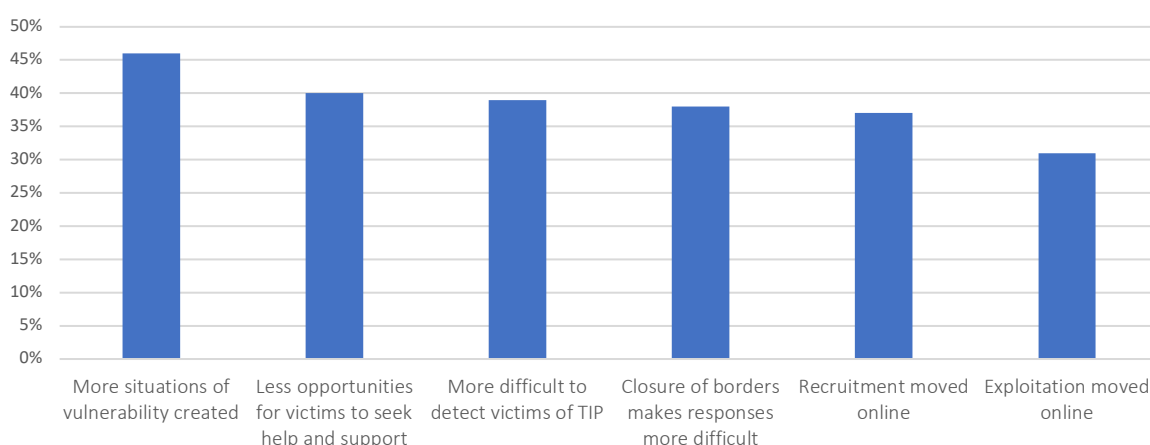
[10] This section and analysis are based on the impressions and experiences shared by frontline organizations interviewed and surveyed as part of this study. This section does not provide statistical analysis of officially detected and reported trafficking in persons numbers by governments.
[11] Interview with a prosecutor.
[12] Interview with a law enforcement expert.

Despite the difficulties in identifying victims, investigating suspected trafficking cases and collecting data, some interview and survey respondents reported suspected or real changes in the scale of cross-border and/or domestic trafficking since the start of the pandemic.

Cross-border trafficking

In some regions and countries study participants reported decreases in reported trafficking cases, largely due to the fact that national borders closed, at least for certain periods of time and mobility was restricted. Both survey and interview respondents emphasized, however, that any decrease in the scale of trafficking in persons needs to be considered in light of the challenges posed by the pandemic for law enforcement – lockdowns and other restrictions have meant that fewer suspected trafficking cases are reported to law enforcement by the public and this has had a clear effect on the number of identified trafficking cases in 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. In other regions and countries interview and survey respondents reported increases in the scale of cross-border trafficking, due to traffickers using new routes and methods of transport. For example, survey and interview respondents in various countries in South America reported increases in the number of Venezuelans trafficked in their countries. It was further reported that forced begging increased in some countries, with adults and children trafficked across national borders for forced begging.

Domestic trafficking

Interview and survey respondents reported increases, in some regions and countries, in the scale of domestic trafficking in persons. In some countries calls to national hotlines increased significantly since the start of the pandemic; many calls were to report exploitation or request assistance to escape trafficking situations. Loss of employment as a result of the pandemic and the inability of many people to access government social services, combined with the need to support larger households after migrant family members returned home, meant that many people became more vulnerable to trafficking in persons. According to interview and survey respondents, trafficking in persons became more localized during the pandemic, with traffickers simply recruiting people in their local area for exploitative work in factories, construction sites, or to be sexually exploited in private apartments. Study participants in some regions and countries reported that there have been increases, in particular, in domestic child trafficking. With children out of school and needing to support their parents who have lost their livelihoods, children have been more susceptible to recruitment and labor exploitation by traffickers.

"Over the last year, [COVID-19] had a great impact on trafficking in persons especially people vulnerable to trafficking, children on the street, poor families, women in rural areas, subject to domestic violence. I'm speaking on a local level."[13]

"[Traffickers] are playing on the vulnerabilities because people are in distressed conditions here – they have lost jobs, they have no money. So people can be lured into such work. So local recruitment. We are concerned about the local recruitment because that creates a demand."[14]

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[13] Interview with a victim support provider.
[14] Interview with a victim support provider.

Groups most affected by trafficking in persons during the pandemic

Twenty-five per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported that the pandemic has disproportionately affected certain groups. Those groups are women, children and migrants.

> *"Women were affected more than any other part of the population. And children were also affected. And foreign workers. Those were the main groups."*[15]

Women

Twenty-one per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported that women have been particularly affected by the pandemic. An untold number of women lost their livelihoods as a result of the pandemic and some have been trafficked for labor or sexual exploitation.

Women and girls have been recruited, often locally or online, for sexual exploitation, particularly for exploitation in private apartments. While it is not known what percentage of the women were trafficked, interview and survey respondents suggested that many were forced and have been unable to leave the place of exploitation, or be rescued, due to ongoing pandemic lockdowns. It is important to note that in 'normal' times, most reported cases of trafficking are of women and girls.

Text box 3: The effects of the pandemic on women and girls

Experience from previous natural and man-made disasters shows that women are often the most affected group during crises. Migrant status, ethnicity and disability, as well as overall socio-economic status are some of the characteristics that, combined with gender, have the potential to exacerbate women's vulnerability during emergencies,[16] including global health pandemics such as COVID-19. In addition, women and girls are usually also more affected by trafficking in persons, especially sexual exploitation, according to the global data on officially detected trafficking cases.[17] The negative effects of COVID-19 might create additional situations of risks for women and girls, including risks for trafficking in persons.

Women have suffered from the effects of the recession, which has been triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, 114 million people lost their jobs; the majority of those who lost their livelihoods were women.[18] Women's employment is reportedly 19 per cent more at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic than men's employment.[19] This difference in employment loss is due to occupational segregation by gender, which causes women to be working predominantly in those sectors that have been hit hardest, such as the garment sector.[20]

The closure of schools during the pandemic has meant that children around the world are deprived of an education and have taken on additional family care responsibilities. The consequences are potentially more severe for girls. There is already lower interest in many societies in providing girls with education. The lack of

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[15] Interview with an anti-trafficking coordination expert.

[16] UNGA (07.08.2020) Trafficking in women and girls: Report of the Secretary General. UN Doc. A/75/289, para. 19 and 20.

[17] UNODC (2020) Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020

[18] ILO (2021) ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Seventh edition Updated estimates and analysis: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767028.pdf

[19] UN Women (2020) Op-ed: Women working on the front line: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/12/op-ed-ed-phumzile-women-working-on-the-front-line

[20] ILO (2020) ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Third edition Updated estimates and analysis: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf;

access to education during the COVID-19 pandemic increases the risk that girls will drop out of education permanently and are forced to marry and bear children early. The resulting lack of formal education is detrimental not only in the short term, but shapes the life-long opportunities of these girls, thus widening the gender gap.[21]

The health of women is also more at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally women make up 70 per cent of the work force that is on the frontline of the pandemic – they are the nurses, midwives, cleaners or laundry workers at the forefront of the pandemic response. When they go home, they are still responsible for care and domestic duties.[22]

The measures implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19 have inadvertently exposed women to increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV).[23] Restriction on movement, school closures and financial constraints may cause households additional stress, triggering higher levels of substance abuse, which may lead to more violence towards intimate partners and children. The nexus between gender-based violence against women and trafficking in persons should be noted. The two crimes are closely intertwined as some of the factors of vulnerability of victims are similar and they involve comparable control techniques and show analogous barriers to reporting. Furthermore, GBV can enhance women's vulnerability to being trafficked – violence can be used as a means of coercion and control or might be used at different stages of the trafficking process.[24] In addition, certain forms of trafficking in persons such as sexual exploitation of women and girls can be defined as forms of GBV.

Social and protective networks have been disrupted during the pandemic and victims of GBV and trafficking in persons are facing greater barriers in accessing protection services.[25] A recent UNODC study on the impact of COVID-19 on the criminal justice system responses to gender-based violence against women has found that the number of women reporting violence to dedicated hotlines has increased by up to 770 per cent in some cases. Those are all women who spoke out about the abuses they endured despite the mentioned barriers and the generally low reporting rates to the police for these crime types.[26]

Women's rights organizations have stepped in to address the current gaps in service provision for women affected by COVID-19. They have shifted priorities to meet the emerging needs of women, thus buffering the lack of State support, which is apparent in some countries.[27] At the same time, there has been increased advocacy on the importance of women being at the center of the COVID-19 response, starting from a greater female inclusion in decision-making processes. Women's equal and meaningful representation in governmental and executive bodies has been recognized as pivotal to ensure that the interests and needs of women are taken into account in the relevant fora, including and especially, during emergencies.[28] The UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security,[29] and the other resolutions on the issue that

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[21] World Bank Group (2020) Gender dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic:
http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/618731587147227244/pdf/Gender-Dimensions-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic.pdf

[22] UN Women (2020) Op-ed: Women working on the front line: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/12/op-ed-ed-phumzile-women-working-on-the-front-line

[23] UNGA (07.08.2020) Trafficking in women and girls: Report of the Secretary General. UN Doc. A/75/289, para. 19 and 20.

[24] UNODC (2020) Female victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation as defendants: A case law analysis:
https://www.unodc.org/documents/humantrafficking/2020/final_Female_victims_of_trafficking_for_sexual_exploitation_as_defendants.pdf; UNGA, Trafficking in women and girls, para. 24, highlights how increased forms of abuse and violence from traffickers can derive also from the inability of victims/victims to generate profits through exploitation during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

[25] UNODC (2020) Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) response – UNODC Thematic Brief on gender-based violence against women and girls (2020):
https://www.unodc.org/documents/Gender/Thematic_Gender_Briefs_English/GBVAW_and_UNODC_in_COVID19_final_7Apr2020.pdf

[26] UNODC (2021) The impact of COVID-19 on criminal justice responses to gender-based violence against women: A global review of emerging evidence:
https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Assessment_COVID-19_and_CJS_responses_to_GBVAW_23Mar2021.pdf

[27] Un Women (2020) COVID-19 and women's rights organizations: bridging response gaps and demanding a more just future, Policy Brief no. 20:
https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/03/policy-brief-covid-19-and-womens-rights-organizations

[28] UN News (05.2021) COVID-19 has exposed endemic gender inequality, Guterres tells UN: https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087392

[29] UNSC, Res. 1325 (31 October 2000) UN Doc. S/RES/1325 (2000).

followed, pointed out how in conflict situations women are often the bonding agent that keeps society together and yet their voices might not be heard in peace processes and post-conflict situations. As stressed by the UN Secretary-General, the pandemic recovery can serve as a great opportunity to put forward more just and inclusive alternatives to the current economic and social models that treat women and girls unequally.[30]

Children

Stakeholder survey respondents reported that children are particularly affected by the pandemic: 20 per cent of survey respondents reported that girls are particularly impacted and an additional 14 per cent reported that boys are particularly affected. Interview and survey respondents highlighted the increased vulnerabilities of children to trafficking in persons as a direct result of the pandemic. Across many countries, government responses to the pandemic included closing schools. For many children, learning moved online and children have continued their education from home. For other children, particularly those without the financial means to purchase laptops or tablets and without home Internet, the closure of schools left children deprived of an education. Some of these children have searched for local employment to support their families, especially children from households where parents had lost their livelihoods.

The effects of the pandemic on children have been far-reaching, with children trafficked for sexual exploitation, labor, forced marriage, forced begging and for forced criminality. Based on findings from online surveys with survivors of trafficking in persons and frontline stakeholders conducted in the beginning of the global pandemic by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Organization for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and UN Women, during the COVID-19 pandemic girls have increasingly been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation online and for forced marriage. Boys are increasingly trafficked for the purpose of criminal activities and for forced begging.[31]

"Some children weren't participating in school. Some of them resorted to going out to work. So you had 14 year old children going out to work. This is the local population. So children have become more vulnerable, especially children of school age."[32]

Experts highlighted that online child sexual exploitation has significantly increased since the start of the pandemic. According to an August 2020 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report,[33] online child exploitation risks can manifest in the form of sextortion (a type of exploitation whereby the perpetrator threatens to expose or share a sexual image to blackmail the victim into doing something), trafficking for sexual exploitation or cyber grooming, among others. With more adults being isolated at home during pandemic-related lockdowns, there has been a growing demand

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[30] UN News (16.03.2021) Women must be 'front and centre' of pandemic recovery, UN chief says: https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087502

[31] OSCE ODIHR and UN Women (2020) Guidance: Addressing emerging human trafficking trends and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/guidance-addressing-emerging-human-trafficking-trends-and-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic

[32] Interview with a government stakeholder.

[33] OECD (2020) Combating COVID-19's effect on children: http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/combatting-covid-19-s-effect-on-children-2e1f3b2f/

for child sexual exploitation materials (CSEM) both through open networks and over the Dark Web and peer-to-peer networks.[34]

The available evidence suggests that the increased demand for CSEM[35] is exacerbating the sexual exploitation of children. During the period of COVID-19 emergency measures, there has been an increased number of reports of child abuse, including new ways to sexually exploit and abuse children, such as live-streaming child sexual abuse or the establishment of new easily-accessible locations for exploitation.[36]

Available information from Europol indicates an exponential growth in demand for CSEM and growth of CSEM and online child exploitation, especially through the use of livestreams since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.[37] A number of European countries have reported an increase in reports of online CSEM during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as attempts to access illegal materials online.[38] In the United Kingdom, there were nearly nine million attempts in April 2020 to access child sexual abuse websites, which had been previously blocked by the Internet Watch Foundation. Demand for abuse imagery also rapidly increased in Australia, where Australian police reported that downloading child sex abuse images increased by 86 per cent in the three weeks after the 21 March lockdown in Australia. In the Philippines officials reported that online child sexual exploitation material has significantly increased from approximately 59,000 reports in February to more than 101,000 in March, the month that the COVID-19 lockdown began in the country.[39]

In Mali, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) suggested that conflict, insecurity, COVID-19 and deteriorating economic conditions have led to a rise in the trafficking of children, forced labor and forced recruitment by armed groups.[40] According to a report by the UNHCR-led Global Protection Cluster, a network of UN agencies and NGOs providing protection to people affected by humanitarian crises, more cases of child recruitment in Mali were documented in the first half of 2020 (230 cases) than the whole of 2019 (215 cases). These cases refer to armed groups that exploit children for labor in gold mines, using profits from their exploitation to enrich combatants, fuel the arms trade and finance the violence.

In the United Kingdom, thousands of children are being used to carry drugs from rural areas of England into urban areas in the so called 'county lines' drug trade, a practice that has further increased with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these children are trapped in debt bondage and threatened with physical and sexual violence. Approximately 379 such county lines cases were identified between

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[34] OECD (2020) Combating COVID-19's effect on children: http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/combatting-covid-19-s-effect-on-children-2e1f3b2f/; ECPAT International (07.04.2020) Why children are at risk of sexual exploitation during COVID-19:
https://ecpat.exposure.co/covid19?fbclid=IwAR3Z7DgyDZ8NeKwfaN6fkB6zwXdFYnQ-Ouk5D8A55S-t_cN1x2igwPpfkzo

[35] The production of child sexual exploitation materials does not systematically fall under trafficking in persons offences.

[36] UN News (06.05.2020) COVID-19 crisis putting human trafficking victims at risk of further exploitation, experts warn:
https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063342 . At present there is no definition of what sexual exploitation 'drive-thru services' means. It is expected that the term refers to adult child sex abusers driving to a certain location where a child is deposited in the vehicle for the purpose of their sexual exploitation, then left in the same or a different location.

[37] See Europol (19.06.2020) Exploiting Isolation: Offenders and victims of online child sexual abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic; Europol (27.03.2020), Pandemic Profiteering: How Criminals Exploit the COVID-19 Crisis.

[38] Wager & Hoang (2020) Aggravating circumstances: How coronavirus impacts human trafficking. Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime; Sen and Chatterjee (18.04.2020) Lockdown provokes bad memories for trafficking victims: https://www.rediff.com/news/column/how-trafficking-victims-deal-with-the-lockdown/20200418.htm

[39] Thomson, M. (29.05.2020) Online child abuse rising during lockdown warn police. BBC: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-52773344

[40] UNHCR (01.12.2020) Child-trafficking in Mali increasing because of conflict and COVID-19:
https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/press/2020/12/5fc62ead4/child-trafficking-mali-increasing-conflict-covid-19.html

April and June 2020, a quarterly record and a further 362 cases were identified between July and September 2020.[41]

Text box 4: The effects of the pandemic on children

Children's lives are being negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in multiple ways. These considerations are relevant to the current study because experts have shared their concerns and experience that due to the negative pandemic effects on children, children have been increasingly targeted and exploited by traffickers. COVID-19 has caused 150 million additional children to live in multidimensional poverty, with limited access to education, health services, water, sanitation, nutrition and housing. The pandemic is intensifying pre-existing inequalities; its effects are more severe on children in the poorest countries and on those already experiencing situations of disadvantage.[42]

Children have been acutely affected by school closures. At least one in three children globally has been unable to access remote learning during the pandemic.[43] The closure of schools has also meant that many children no longer benefit from school feeding programs.[44] Furthermore, for children living in communities characterized by abuse and violence, schools represent a place of shelter and security. The closure of schools threatens the safety of children at a time when they need greater protection.[45]

Education disruption coupled with economic distress (further exacerbated by the loss of school meals) is likely to result in an increase in forced child labor and child marriage as these are seen as ways to alleviate financial pressure on families. It is estimated that in the next 10 years, up to 10 million more girls will be vulnerable to becoming child brides as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.[46] With lower household incomes and schools closed, children are expected to contribute to the household financially even if they are below the minimum legal age to work. Children may be sent to work far from their home, placing them at heightened risk of exploitation.[47] The UN Secretary-General has called on countries to prioritize children's education, food, health and safety amid the COVID-19 pandemic.[48]

There is also evidence that child marriage has increased as a result of the pandemic. In Cambodia, the trafficking of Cambodian 'brides' reportedly increased significantly in 2020 with mass job losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic driving more young women and girls abroad to support their families. The NGO, Chab Dai, in Cambodia received reports of a new child marriage case every three days on average in 2020 - double the caseload of previous years. Some of the victims are as young as 14 years.[49] In Brazil

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[41] Reuters (06.11.2020) England's COVID-19 lockdown feared fuelling child trafficking by drug gangs:
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-coronavirus-slavery-drugs-trf-idUSKBN27M1N2
[42] UNICEF (2020) COVID-19 and children. UNICEF data hub: https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/?utm_source=UNICEF%20Data&utm_medium=homepage&utm_campaign=COVID19-hub-unicef-data-hero-image
[43] UNICEF (2020) COVID-19 and children. UNICEF data hub: https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/?utm_source=UNICEF%20Data&utm_medium=homepage&utm_campaign=COVID19-hub-unicef-data-hero-image
[44] UNICEF (2020) Beyond Masks. Societal impacts of COVID-19 and accelerated solutions for children and adolescents: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/UNICEF-Beyond-Masks-Report-Societal-impacts-of-COVID-19.pdf.
[45] UNICEF (2020) COVID-19 and children; UNICEF, Protecting Children from Violence in the Time of COVID-19: Disruptions in prevention and response services: https://www.unicef.org/reports/protecting-children-from-violence-covid-19-disruptions-in-prevention-and-response-services-2020.
[46] UNICEF (2020) COVID-19 and children. UNICEF data hub: https://data.unicef.org/covid-19-and-children/?utm_source=UNICEF%20Data&utm_medium=homepage&utm_campaign=COVID19-hub-unicef-data-hero-image
[47] ILO, UNICEF (2020) COVID-19 and child labour: A time of crisis, a time to act: https://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_747421/lang--en/index.htm
[48] UNICEF (nd) Response to the UN Secretary-General's Call on Countries to Prioritize Children's Education, Food, Health and Safety amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: https://www.unicef.org/sdgs/protect-our-children-during-covid-19
[49] Reuters (11.12.2020) Pandemic seen fuelling Cambodian 'bride trafficking' to China: https://www.reuters.com/article/cambodia-china-trafficking/pandemic-seen-fuelling-cambodian-bride-trafficking-to-china-idUSL8N2IQ2MF

and Nepal there have also been reports of increases of child marriage.[50] Similarly in Southern India, there have been reports of increases in child marriage caused by a mix of economic desperation and opportunity.[51]

Finally, interview respondents reported that in some regions there has been an increase in the number of children who have become orphans due to their parents dying from COVID-19. Concurrently, an increase in the number of illegal adoptions was noted during the expert meeting discussions.

Migrants

Study participants highlighted the deteriorating situation for migrants as a result of the pandemic. According to interview and survey respondents, in the Latin American region traffickers have increasingly targeted vulnerable Venezuelan migrants, particularly young girls, since the start of the pandemic. This finding is supported by an International Organization for Migration (IOM) report, which stated that in Colombia, the first four months of 2020 accounted for a 20 per cent increase in the number of victims of trafficking in Colombia compared to the entire year 2019, with the majority being Venezuelan migrants.[52]

There has also been increased internal migration in some countries as many people lost their livelihoods and have been forced to migrate to other towns in search of employment. In addition, there has been significant domestic migration to home communities after loss of employment and the need to return home to avoid paying rent in large cities. Throughout March to June 2020 the world witnessed, via regular media reports, the plight of daily wage earners in India attempting to travel hundreds of kilometers to their home communities after lockdown was implemented in India and millions of daily wage earners were left without an income.[53] Between March and June 2020, around 250,000 Bangladeshis reportedly returned to Bangladesh from various countries in the Middle East, Asia and other regions. Many of these returning migrants have faced unemployment since their return. A rapid assessment by IOM found that approximately 70 per cent of surveyed migrants who returned to Bangladesh from abroad during the period February to June 2020, were unemployed after their return home.[54] While it is difficult to say whether many of these domestic migrants have been trafficked during the pandemic, it may be argued that the pandemic has increased migrants' vulnerability to trafficking.

Interview and survey respondents emphasized the negative effects of the pandemic on migrants. Many of those in destination countries have been unable to return home and have ended up in an irregular status after being unable to renew visas and residence permits. Some have been forced to stay in inadequate accommodation where they cannot be socially distant from other migrant workers. Many migrants have faced challenges in accessing health care in destination countries, with national health systems overwhelmed by the need to provide care for COVID-19 patients. Quarantine measures for migrants have potentially placed them at heightened risk of trafficking in persons. For example, concerns

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[50] The Freedom Fund (2020) Global pandemic, local devastation: Frontline efforts to support the most vulnerable: https://freedomfund.org/wp-content/uploads/ERF_report.pdf

[51] The Freedom Fund (2020) Global pandemic, local devastation: Frontline efforts to support the most vulnerable: https://freedomfund.org/wp-content/uploads/ERF_report.pdf

[52] IOM (2020) COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #59: Human trafficking Update: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19_analytical_snapshot_59_human_trafficking_update.pdf

[53] See, for example, S. Sharma (26.03.2020) India's migrant workers face long walk home amid coronavirus lockdown. Reuters: https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-india-migrant-labo/indias-migrant-workers-face-long-walk-home-amid-coronavirus-lockdown-idUKKBN21D2NB

[54] The Daily Star (06.02.2021) 70% of migrants returning to Bangladesh struggle to find employment: IOM: https://www.thedailystar.net/country/news/70-migrants-returning-bangladesh-struggle-find-employment-iom-1943801

were raised during interviews conducted for this study that the quarantine ships for new arrivals of migrants by sea may place vulnerable persons in an enclosed space with traffickers. With limited access to support services, these migrants are exceptionally vulnerable.

Study participants further identified the impact of the pandemic on the family members of migrants in the country of origin. After losing regular remittances many families became destitute and this, for example, led to more children being forced to find local employment and thus becoming vulnerable to trafficking.

Migrant domestic workers

Interview and survey respondents highlighted the particular plight of domestic workers who have been confined to households during pandemic-related lockdowns with abusive employers. While it is currently difficult to measure how many domestic workers have been trafficked, survey and interview respondents reported that many female domestic workers have been subjected to physical and sexual abuse by employers denied payment, confined to their home or forced to work longer hours and take on additional duties. Escape or rescue has been extremely difficult for exploited domestic workers, particularly those in an irregular situation in the destination country who fear detention and deportation. In South Africa, a study conducted during the pandemic found that domestic workers experienced increased gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in the place of work, particularly by the heads of households who hired them. Employers exposed themselves, displayed pornography, demanded sexual favors and sexually assaulted and raped domestic workers at higher rates.[55] Domestic workers reported being fired when they refused demands for sex by their male employers, with nowhere to go in the midst of the pandemic.[56] Similarly, in the Middle East and the Americas a study involving surveys of live-in domestic workers found that psychological, physical and sexual violence increased during the pandemic.[57]

Shifts in the modi operandi of traffickers

Interview and survey respondents reported that traffickers have adapted to the 'new normal' of the pandemic and have even capitalized on the pandemic to introduce new methods of recruitment and new ways to generate profits from the exploitation of adults and children.

"Traffickers change their modi operandi very fast. Online was their modus operandi in 2019 too but they're very flexible to the new situation, more than us. People from the government are very rigid, they need years to change practices."[58]

Since the start of the pandemic, traffickers have moved recruitment of adult and child victims to online methods. Cognizant of the increased amount of time that people, especially children, spent on the Internet, traffickers have advertised false jobs on social media. Thirty-seven per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported that recruitment of victims has moved online since the start of the pandemic. This finding is supported by recent research – the OSCE ODIHR and UN Women study found that one in three surveyed victims reported having been targeted, since the start of the pandemic, with at least one offer

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[55] International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) (05.2020) Gender-based violence and harassment against domestic workers: Case stories from Asia: https://idwfed.org/en/resources/gender-based-violence-and-harassment-against-domestic-workers-case-stories-from-asia

[56] IZWI (09.2020) Domestic Workers Alliance and HLANGASIA, Institute for Development in South Africa, Domestic workers vulnerabilities to (and experience of) GBV in the workplace, isolated and vulnerable: The story of domestic workers and GBV: http://www.hlanganisa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Domestic_Workers___GBV_Research_Report.pdf

[57] IDWF (2020) Domestic workers at the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis in the Middle East and Gulf countries: "Corona is not the virus."

[58] Interview with a victim support provider.

that was directly or potentially related to possible exploitation. These offers included sexual exploitation and in most cases, they were made online.[59]

Due to brothels, bars and massage parlors closing in response to the pandemic, traffickers shifted sexual exploitation further underground. Survey and interview respondents across various regions of the world reported women and girls increasingly being exploited in private apartments. Exploitation has also moved online - 31 per cent of survey respondents reported that exploitation of victims has shifted to online methods.

Traffickers have further capitalized on the pandemic by opening up new trafficking routes and transport methods. Study participants emphasized that in many cases these routes are more complex, longer and more dangerous than routes used before the pandemic. Furthermore, some interview respondents reported that traffickers have increasingly used land travel to transfer trafficked adults and children, aware that, due to the pandemic, police and immigration officers would not check vehicles or drivers' identification documents.

Conclusion

While it is too early to measure concrete increases or decreases in the scale of trafficking in persons during the pandemic, there have been clear reports by experts that domestic trafficking has increased and that traffickers have responded to the 'new normal' by diversifying recruitment tactics and shifting operations further underground. It has been described that online recruitment and online sexual exploitation have increased as a result of the pandemic. Experts and several reports outlined that the demand for child sexual exploitation materials (CSEM) increased significantly since the start of the pandemic – children around the world have been recruited and sexually exploited to meet the demand. Child marriage has also increased in some parts of the world. Conflicts in some parts of the world did not cease because of the pandemic and people have continued to move. This has provided groups of vulnerable persons for traffickers to target. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the ability of law enforcement personnel to investigate trafficking in persons crimes has been reduced and this has had a significant impact on the ability of victims to be identified and rescued and for perpetrators to be brought to justice. Furthermore, it has skewed trafficking in persons statistics of officially detected cases. Figures suggesting a downward trend in trafficking in persons may hide the reality of the trafficking in persons situation during the pandemic – the scale of trafficking may, in fact, have increased, but the inability of the public to report suspected cases and the additional difficulties law enforcement face to investigate trafficking cases, may be temporarily hiding the reality of the situation.

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[59] OSCE ODIHR and UN Women (2020) Guidance: Addressing emerging human trafficking trends and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/guidance-addressing-emerging-human-trafficking-trends-and-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic

Chapter 3:
The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons victims

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a range of significant negative effects on trafficking in persons victims. Existing vulnerabilities, such as gender discrimination, unemployment and underemployment, lack of education, lack of access to State social services and stigma, have been worsened. In tandem, the agencies that support vulnerable migrants, women and children and trafficking victims faced significant increases in demands for assistance, but many have lost funding and staff have faced challenges in performing their normal victim support work. Combined, these factors have meant that many trafficking victims have experienced challenges in accessing essential services as a result of the pandemic.

"We've seen a number of delays for victims of trafficking. For the victims that need to be repatriated, they don't have support. So they go back and they lack housing, water, food, electricity. So they want to go back to the way they were, even if they were mistreated. They are a fertile ground for being re-trafficked." [60]

Heightened risk of exposure to the virus

Interview and survey respondents reported that trafficking victims, due to their exploitative working and living conditions, are at heightened risk of contracting COVID-19. In some countries and in some industries, such as construction, manufacturing, agriculture and the sex industry, exploitative labor has continued during the pandemic, often despite government lockdown rules. For trafficking victims exploited in these and other sectors, adequate social distancing measures have likely not been implemented, or individuals provided with PPE. Furthermore, accommodation for trafficked persons in industrial, agricultural and other sites often involves exploited laborers sleeping in dormitories with shared communal spaces.[61] Social distancing measures are difficult to implement in such environments, increasing the risk of COVID-19 spreading rapidly in these industries.

Stigma

Study participants reported that in some regions and countries, trafficking victims, especially those who were exploited for sexual purposes, have been blamed for spreading COVID-19. The media has reported that in India victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation have been blamed for spreading COVID-19.[62] In some regions and countries, pre-COVID-19, victims already faced stigma and ostracism from their community. The pandemic has served to increase the stigma faced by victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Tighter control

Study participants reported that while some trafficking victims have been abandoned by their traffickers, others have suffered tighter control from traffickers during the pandemic. With reduced options to return home, victims have faced confinement and isolation in private homes, factories, construction sites and other locations. They have experienced increased control from their traffickers who have not let them leave the place of work. This finding is supported by research conducted in 2020 by OSCE ODIHR and UN Women. According to the OSCE ODIHR and UN Women report, survey respondents noted that the emergency measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries presented a

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[60] Interview with a representative of an anti-trafficking network.

[61] IOM. (2020, March 26). COVID-19 places migrant workers in highly vulnerable situations, https://crest.iom.int/news/covid-19-places-migrant-workers-highly-vulnerable-situations%C2%A0

[62] Hindustan Times (30.04.2020) Covid-19 update: HIV+, stigmatised, GB Road sex workers stare at an uncertain future: https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/hiv-stigmatised-gb-road-sex-workers-stare-at-an-uncertain-future-amid-covid-pandemic/story-LzXgI2yjkgINzl7Iff6dlJ.html

number of increased risks for trafficking victims, including intensification of control, violence and isolation by their exploiters.[63]

According to experts and practitioners that participated in surveys or interviews for this report, some trafficking victims have been subjected to increased pressure and violence by their traffickers. Victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation have increasingly been exploited in private domiciles or other places. In general, protection, including from sexually transmitted diseases is lacking in the context of sexual exploitation and in this specific context of a pandemic this includes access to PPE to protect them against COVID-19.

Trapped in private homes during lockdowns, with limited ability to flee situations of exploitation and return to their home countries, many domestic migrant workers have been forced to work even longer hours and have faced increased risks of physical and sexual violence.[64]

Abandonment by traffickers

Interview and survey respondents reported that trafficking victims have been abandoned by their traffickers during the pandemic, because there was decreased demand for their work during lockdowns. While this could provide an opportunity for victims to flee situations of exploitation, it also puts them at risk of extreme poverty, starvation, illness, injury, violence and discrimination. This finding is echoed in some media reports. For example, an April 2020 media article reported that in Kenya the police were called to rescue trafficking victims abandoned by their traffickers. The women had been held by the traffickers for a fortnight then swiftly abandoned following the COVID-19 outbreak.[65] In Italy, victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation were reportedly left to starve by their traffickers.[66] In India, the Arise Foundation reported that trafficked domestic migrants working in tea gardens, brick kilns and as domestic workers were abandoned by their employers. Their wages were not paid and they were left destitute.[67]

Reduced access to services

Consulted experts highlighted the fact that the pandemic has resulted in reduced access to services for trafficking survivors. Fifty-four per cent of stakeholder survey respondents (victim support services survey section) reported that a major challenge posed by the pandemic was the reduction of services for survivors of trafficking. The majority of frontline service providers who participated in the study reported reduced accessibility of various services for survivors across many essential services including, but not limited to, shelter, legal aid, health care (including psychosocial care), employment support, education and interpretation services.

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[63] OSCE ODIHR and UN Women (2020) Guidance: Addressing emerging human trafficking trends and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/guidance-addressing-emerging-human-trafficking-trends-and-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic

[64] The Guardian (23.03.2021) Alone in Oman: Covid worsens abuse for trafficked women: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/mar/23/alone-oman-covid-worsens-abuse-trafficked-women-africa?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

[65] Capital News (02.04.2020) Agony of human trafficking victims trapped in countries over coronavirus: https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2020/04/agony-of-human-trafficking-victims-trapped-in-countries-over-coronavirus/

[66] The Guardian (10.07.2020) Sex traffickers left thousands of women to starve during Italy lockdown : https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jul/10/sex-traffickers-left-thousands-of-women-to-starve-during-italy-lockdown-coronavirus

[67] Forbes (11.05.2020) The hidden victims of COVID-19: Human trafficking and modern day slavery: https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2020/05/11/the-hidden-victims-of-covid19-human-trafficking-and-modern-day-slavery/?sh=328efa751d2b

Shelter

Frontline organizations reported that many survivors have been unable to find safe and secure accommodation during the pandemic. In some regions and countries there is a lack of shelter space available for trafficking survivors in normal times; during the pandemic the lack of shelter available for survivors was even more problematic as existing shelters for trafficking victims were forced to close to new referrals. This meant that police or NGOs had to find suitable quarantine accommodation for the rescued victims before they could be transferred to a shelter. This finding is supported by other recent research. For example, a report by La Strada noted that during the pandemic shelter capacity is limited and many shelters have had to restrict access to new arrivals due to COVID-19 safety measures. Some shelters reported COVID-19 infections and had to close, so as not to put other people staying in the shelters at a higher risk of catching the virus.[68]

A small number of survey respondents reported that, despite concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19 in shelters for trafficking victims, shelter managers were sometimes put in a position that they had no choice but to take in new referrals without the new referrals receiving a negative COVID-19 test prior to arriving and having no quarantine space available at the shelter.

Health and psychosocial services

The pandemic is also exacerbating the challenges that trafficking victims and survivors already face in accessing health care. In normal times trafficking victims often cannot leave the place of exploitation; during the pandemic it is even more difficult for trafficking victims to leave the place of exploitation to access COVID-19 testing and health care. Interview and survey respondents reported that some victims have been reluctant to seek COVID-19 testing and medical support due to the fear that they will be detained and deported and also fear that they will catch the virus while attending health clinics. According to survey and interview participants, some survivors have also been reluctant to seek medical assistance because they are aware that national health systems are overwhelmed with the COVID-19 response and have prioritized COVID-19 patients over persons with other health concerns.

In a number of countries, routine and even some urgent health procedures have been delayed or cancelled as doctors and nurses have been called onto the COVID-19 response. The challenges of accessing medical support during the pandemic have been acute for some trafficking survivors, particularly those who were recently rescued from exploitation and required emergency surgery to treat injuries or diseases or who are suffering from addiction.

Interview and survey respondents further reported that in some countries, trafficking survivors have faced longer wait times for psychosocial counselling support, as counsellors have faced significant increases in requests for mental health support. Furthermore, some survivors have been unable to access psychosocial counselling during the pandemic, due to a lack of technical equipment and Internet in their home in order to receive online counselling. In addition, some rescued victims have not been able to access psychosocial counselling due to a lack of a private space in the home to speak to their counsellor without abusive partners or others listening to the calls.

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[68] La Strada (2020) The impact of COVID-19 on the protection of rights of trafficked and exploited persons: https://lastradainternational.org/news-publications/la-strada-international-statement-on-coronavirus

Legal aid and justice

Similarly to the challenges rescued victims have faced in accessing psychosocial services, survivors have also faced challenges in accessing legal aid through remote methods during the pandemic. Face to face interaction between legal aid providers and survivors has not been possible during lockdowns, curfews and other pandemic-related measures. As outlined above, some trafficking survivors did not have the required technical equipment and Internet to speak to solicitors and legal aid providers online. Other survivors did not have a private space in the home to speak to their solicitor by phone or online, as abusive partners or family members lived in the same household. Due to lockdowns, curfews, or other COVID-19 measures, they could not leave the home to speak privately to their solicitor or other legal support persons. Survivors also faced challenges in accessing interpreters to assist with legal advice and proceedings. Some NGOs that provide legal aid have experienced reduced funding during the pandemic, further affecting rescued victims' ability to access free legal aid.

> "*Access to justice initiatives of case intervention and prosecution,*
> *they're all pending… So victims aren't able to access justice.*"[69]

The study further identified that in some regions and countries, judicial processes slowed, or stalled entirely for periods of time during the pandemic. This resulted in rescued trafficking victims being forced to stay in the destination country for extended periods of time, awaiting their trial date. At the time of writing, many countries were still processing backlogs in court cases, including trafficking in persons cases. The Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT) has highlighted the problem of reduced access to justice for trafficking survivors, noting that access to justice has been seriously impeded by the restrictions in place to control the COVID-19 pandemic, as services are reduced and legal proceedings halted.[70] For survivors already engaged in legal procedures, long-awaited court procedures that might offer justice have been put on hold, sometimes leading to prolonged detention of trafficked persons.[71] Delayed judicial processes may also result in delayed financial compensation and delayed repatriation and family reunification.

Basic needs

Study participants reported that some rescued trafficking survivors, especially those living in the community, faced challenges in accessing food, water and other essentials during the pandemic. Some survivors did not have the funds to purchase food and other essentials. Thus, survivors became completely dependent on NGOs during lockdowns to deliver food packages and other essentials. Interview respondents reported that confinement to the home and the inability to secure basic needs, created situations of immense stress and anxiety for many survivors.

Challenges accessing services that moved online

In the early phase of the pandemic, service providers quickly attempted to move key services for survivors online. Recent UNODC research found that victims of gender based violence against women (GBVAW) in

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[69] Interview with a victim support provider.

[70] Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons (02.10.2020) COVID-19 limits road to justice for human trafficking victims: http://icat.network/events/covid-19-limits-road-justice-victims-human-trafficking

[71] La Strada (2020) The impact of COVID-19 on the protection of rights of trafficked and exploited persons: https://lastradainternational.org/news-publications/la-strada-international-statement-on-coronavirus

particular, have faced challenges during the pandemic in accessing equipment and online services.[72] As noted in previous sections, not all trafficking survivors could easily access online services during the pandemic, because they did not have access to the technical equipment required to receive online support (e.g. a laptop, tablet or mobile phone), or lacked Internet in the home. Some survivors also lack the literacy skills to access online services.

"We had to make calls for donations of equipment and support. For many of them [victims] we had to buy this equipment. For example, children were doing online lessons and they needed this support. Also to get the other services like counselling. Then we had to train them and help them logistically. It was challenging. We needed to learn by ourselves and support them."[73]

Thirty-nine per cent of stakeholder survey respondents (section on victim support services) reported that survivors experienced difficulties accessing services that moved online during the pandemic. This finding is supported by a 2020 study by Refugee Women Connect and the University of Birmingham (looking at the United Kingdom, Tunisia, Turkey, Sweden and Australia), which identified that when many NGO services moved online, a significant number of trafficking survivors lacked the basic digital resources and Internet, necessary to make contact with service providers.[74] These challenges might be even more exacerbated in remote and rural areas.

Loss of livelihoods

One of the most significant consequences of the pandemic for trafficking survivors, as well as many other people, has been that of the loss of livelihoods. Lockdown measures introduced to stem the spread of COVID-19 have led to the closure of businesses, particularly in the tourism and hospitality industries, leaving many trafficking survivors unemployed. Interview and survey respondents who work in the field of victim reintegration and livelihood support reported that many of their beneficiaries lost their livelihoods at the start of the pandemic. For example, one NGO reported during the interview that 78 per cent of the trafficking survivors it supports lost their livelihoods as a direct result of the pandemic.[75] Many have been unable to find employment since that time, while others have found employment, but in the informal sector, in jobs with poor working conditions and inadequate pay. The financial effects of survivors' loss of livelihoods have been acute for some – survivors have been unable to purchase food, water and other essentials and have been reliant on NGOs and State agencies to provide basic aid.

Interview and survey respondents reported that the ongoing situations of unemployment experienced by trafficking survivors are placing them at risk of re-trafficking. Ongoing situations of unemployment have also had negative effects on the psychological well-being of some survivors. Stress about their financial situation, concern about finding employment and high levels of uncertainty about the future have triggered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in some survivors.

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[72] UNODC (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on criminal justice system responses to gender-based violence against women: https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Assessment_COVID-19_and_CJS_responses_to_GBVAW_23Mar2021.pdf
[73] Interview with a victim support provider.
[74] The Conversation (19.05.2020) 'I feel that all the doors have been closed': lockdowns are making life even harder for migrant victims of sexual violence: https://theconversation.com/i-feel-that-all-the-doors-have-been-closed-lockdowns-are-making-life-even-harder-for-migrant-victims-of-sexual-violence-138856
[75] Interview with a victim support provider.

Repatriation and visa renewal challenges

The closure of national borders meant that in some regions and countries rescued trafficking victims were forced to remain in the destination country for months longer than expected. Interview respondents in some countries noted stories of victims being transported to the airport to be repatriated home, only to find that flights had been cancelled as national borders had closed and the victims having to be taken back to shelters for an indefinite time. At the time of writing, many countries are still working through significant backlogs of repatriations, with victims in some countries now having spent one year awaiting repatriation home.

Many rescued victims experienced problems in renewing visas and other residence permits during lockdowns. This placed many victims in an irregular situation in the destination country, potentially increasing their vulnerability to poverty (due to potential challenges in accessing State social and economic support) and to re-trafficking.

Rescued trafficking victims who were being temporarily accommodated in State or NGO shelters at the start of the pandemic have faced protracted stays in shelters, as investigations and judicial processes slowed or stalled and repatriations similarly stalled due to closed national borders. During lockdowns, rescued victims experienced reduced access to services, with support providers who usually visited shelters to provide health and other support services, or educational and livelihood activities unable to visit the shelters. Interview and survey respondents reported that some survivors suffered a decline in their mental well-being during the pandemic because they faced long periods of uncertainty, with judicial processes postponed, reduced access to services and lack of access to educational or other activities. Survivors were also unable to socialize with anyone outside the shelter. Some study participants reported that confinement in shelters has triggered some survivors' memories of their previous captivity, leading to psychological trauma.

THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS VICTIMS

Victims haven't had access to personal protective equipment – they are more at risk of getting COVID-19.

It's been more difficult for survivors to access services (such as psychosocial services, health services, legal aid, shelter).

Survivors' basic needs haven't been met (e.g. they have had difficulties getting food, paying their rent).

Survivors have faced challenges in accessing services through online methods due to a lack of Internet.

Survivors have had to remain in destination countries because they couldn't be repatriated to their home countries.

Victims have faced tighter control at the hands of traffickers (worse confinement to properties; physical and sexual abuse etc).

Conclusion

The pandemic has had a range of negative effects on trafficking victims and survivors. Some trafficking victims have experienced heightened violence and abuse at the hands of traffickers who are less able to make a profit from them due to labor market disruptions. Some trafficking victims have had limited ability to self-isolate or socially distance themselves from others, especially if they are forced to provide sexual services or labor. Their irregular status in the destination country is making some victims reluctant to seek medical assistance. Some survivors have struggled to access key support services during the pandemic, including access to health support, including psychosocial support and legal support. Loss of livelihoods, the lack of decent employment options available to them during the pandemic, limited access to services and confinement to the home have combined to create situations of acute stress for survivors.

Chapter 4:
The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on frontline organizations

Frontline organizations have experienced significant challenges in conducting their normal activities during the pandemic due to additional barriers in co-ordination and co-operation; reduced financial resources; difficulties travelling to conduct investigations and collect evidence; lack of information on trafficking dynamics during the pandemic; difficulties in reaching vulnerable groups and trafficking victims; suspension or postponement of planned trafficking prevention and awareness raising activities; and increased needs of vulnerable persons and victims for support services. The pandemic has also negatively affected the functioning of referral mechanisms and national child protection systems. These challenges have had negative effects on frontline organizations' ability to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, protect vulnerable persons and victims and prosecute traffickers.

Funding challenges

One of the key challenges faced by frontline victim support service providers has been reduced funding. Sixty-three per cent of stakeholder survey respondents (section on victim support services) reported that a lack of financial resources during the pandemic was one of the major challenges that frontline organizations faced.

> *"Funding was already strained. The [NGOs] having to pay from their own pockets to pay for meals for returnees. The vicarious trauma that they experience as a result of the pandemic, trying to do the work that they were doing, being understaffed, the tensions of governments cutting funding and staff but increasing the amount of work. A lot of stress. Increase in blood pressure. Their own mental strain."[76]*

Victim support service providers in some regions and countries noted in the surveys and interviews that they lost significant amounts of funding as a result of the pandemic. For instance, some donors – government and private (including individual) donors – decided to re-direct promised funding to other programs, such as emergency COVID-19 health projects. This meant that NGOs had reduced funding to conduct their normal activities, such as providing direct support to trafficking victims, running shelters for victims, supporting survivors' livelihoods, training and conducting community outreach, awareness raising and rescue activities and operations. Victim support agencies interviewed for the study highlighted the fact that the pandemic increased their workload, as more people needed their support, but that the pandemic reduced the budget available to conduct this important work in addition to the negative consequences to human resources due to the health crisis.

Frontline victim support service providers interviewed for the study also highlighted the increased costs that they have faced because of the pandemic. For example, some NGOs have had to pay for COVID-19 tests for rescued victims at private clinics, as well as accommodation in private hotels for victims who could not be accommodated in State or NGO shelters due to quarantine rules. Some NGOs also reported during the surveys and interviews that they needed to purchase laptops or tablets and other equipment for trafficked adults and children, as well as the children of trafficking victims, so that survivors could access services and children could continue to learn at home while schools remained closed.

The issue of NGO funding challenges during the pandemic is supported by other recent research. According to Unseen UK many European NGOs that operate victim helplines, safe-houses and outreach services for victims, have lost significant amounts of funding.[77] Financial challenges were raised as a

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[76] Interview with a victim service provider.
[77] Unseen UK (2020) The coronavirus crisis means Unseen has lost huge amounts of funding and the future is uncertain: https://www.unseenuk.org/covid-19-crisis-appeal

concern by over one third of NGO participants in the Tech Against Trafficking's COVID-19 Impact survey.[78] According to the report by OSCE ODIHR and UN Women, NGOs from 102 countries during the pandemic reported struggling to provide trafficking victims with basic services and support.[79] The study further found that only 24 per cent of surveyed anti-trafficking organizations said they would be able to remain fully operational without extra funding in the next 12 months.[80]

Some NGOs that participated in this study noted during interviews that while some donors were flexible and provided additional funding to, for example, provide direct support to rescued trafficking victims during the pandemic, the funding bodies often did not allow NGOs to hire more staff to conduct additional work. Thus, while NGOs shifted their attention to organizing and delivering emergency food and other aid to trafficking victims during the pandemic, they had to perform this work with the same number of personnel. NGOs noted that, in some countries, they had to work at night to prepare food packages for victims, then travel long distances by road during the day to deliver the emergency aid packages. This placed a significant burden on staff and reduced their ability to conduct their normal victim support activities, albeit remotely during lockdowns.

A similar challenge for the judiciary in some countries was that they lacked the funds to purchase the technical equipment required to utilize e-justice mechanisms. Moving judicial processes online required the purchase, in some countries, of laptops and video cameras and hiring Information Technology (IT) personnel to set up equipment, create e-justice databases, mechanisms and processes and train law enforcement, prosecutors and the judiciary in how to use the e-justice mechanisms and video conferencing equipment. In some countries, funding for the judiciary had already been reduced to prioritize emergency health spending.

Planning and coordination challenges

Interview and survey respondents in all regions of the world emphasized the coordination challenges posed by the pandemic. Many prosecutors and judges were forced to work at home for various periods during the pandemic. Cross-border meetings with police and prosecutors in other countries and with police and prosecutor counterparts within countries were curtailed. Coordination moved online in many regions and countries of the world during the first few months of the pandemic; however, Internet challenges have meant that coordination, both cross-border and within individual countries, has been problematic in some instances. Moreover, a lack of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and guidelines has left many agencies confused about operations during the pandemic and this resulted in further internal and cross-border coordination challenges.

NGOs that participated in surveys and interviews for this study reported that, especially during the first wave of the pandemic, they experienced significant challenges in liaising with government partners on planning and coordination. In some regions and countries, NGOs reported that government COVID-19 planning was slow, with SOPs and guidelines developed only in late 2020. Some interview respondents

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[78] Tech Against Trafficking (16.04.2020) The effect of COVID-19: Five impacts on human trafficking: https://www.techuk.org/insights/opinions/item/17329-guest-blog-the-effect-of-covid-19-five-impacts-on-human-trafficking

[79] OSCE ODIHR and UN Women (2020) Guidance: Addressing emerging human trafficking trends and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/guidance-addressing-emerging-human-trafficking-trends-and-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic

[80] OSCE ODIHR and UN Women (2020) Guidance: Addressing emerging human trafficking trends and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/guidance-addressing-emerging-human-trafficking-trends-and-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic

also reported conflicting information from different government entities. For example, guidance for the conduct of shelters for rescued trafficking victims during the pandemic was coming from the Ministry of Health, as well as one or two other government ministries, resulting in confusion for NGO frontline service providers on what they were supposed to do to adapt the shelter to meet government pandemic guidelines. This meant that NGO frontline workers were operating in a vacuum in the early months of the pandemic, doing their utmost to support all trafficking victims and vulnerable persons needing their assistance, but lacking guidance on what they were allowed to do.

" We've seen a decline in victim support by frontline organizations. Most organizations don't have funding to do their day to day work. Shelters have closed because of lack of funding. We know that, working from home, how do we intercept people. We can't do that from home. There need to be people to intercept and in court. Witnesses need to go to court. We can't do everything online. This work is offline." [81]

Reduced ability of frontline organizations to perform normal activities

Lack of measures to protect health of frontline organization staff

Study participants reported that in some regions and countries, police, prosecutors and the judiciary lacked PPE, which resulted in investigations, prosecutions and judicial processes slowing or stalling for periods of time. Twenty-three per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported a lack of PPE as a key challenge. In the first few months of the pandemic law enforcement, prosecution and the judiciary in most parts of the world did not have stocks of PPE available for all personnel. Processes and procedures for using PPE to protect personnel, as well as processes for meeting face to face with victims, the accused and the public had not yet been established. Although data are not yet available, interview and survey respondents reported that many police contracted COVID-19 during the first wave of the pandemic as they attempted to do their normal investigation work without appropriate PPE.

Similarly, in the first few months of the pandemic, in some countries frontline workers employed within NGOs lacked PPE and this affected their ability to engage face to face with vulnerable persons and trafficking victims. NGOs quickly rectified this situation by purchasing PPE for staff, as well as for partner agencies. Some NGOs that participated in surveys and interviews noted that they purchased PPE to deliver to vulnerable persons, trafficking victims, as well as police and court officials. International organizations, including UNODC, have also supported their counterparts by providing PPE so that they can continue to deliver services to at-risk-communities.[82]

NGO representatives that participated in interviews for this study further noted that, despite being frontline workers, NGO staff have not been prioritized in many countries for the COVID-19 vaccine. This has meant that NGO frontline workers are still attempting to work remotely, providing support to victims online and many are still falling ill with the COVID-19 disease due to their work in visiting communities and vulnerable individuals.

Reduced reporting by the public

Law enforcement survey and interview respondents highlighted the significant decrease in reporting of suspected trafficking in persons cases by the public during the pandemic. Stakeholder survey

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[81] Interview with an anti-trafficking coordination expert.
[82] UNODC (2020) In response to the COVID-19 crisis, UNODC distributes health and food kits to victims of trafficking in Côte d'Ivoire:
https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/2020-12-10-health-and-food-kits-tipsom-cote-divoire.html

respondents reported a main concern regarding their ability to investigate trafficking in persons cases was the decrease in reporting incidents (44 per cent of respondents reported this as their main concern). Law enforcement interview and survey respondents noted that the consequence of this situation is that they have been unable to identify trafficking trends during the pandemic; a lack of information about what is happening has significantly hindered their ability to conduct investigations.

Figure 4: Stakeholder survey respondents' reported challenges for law enforcement activities
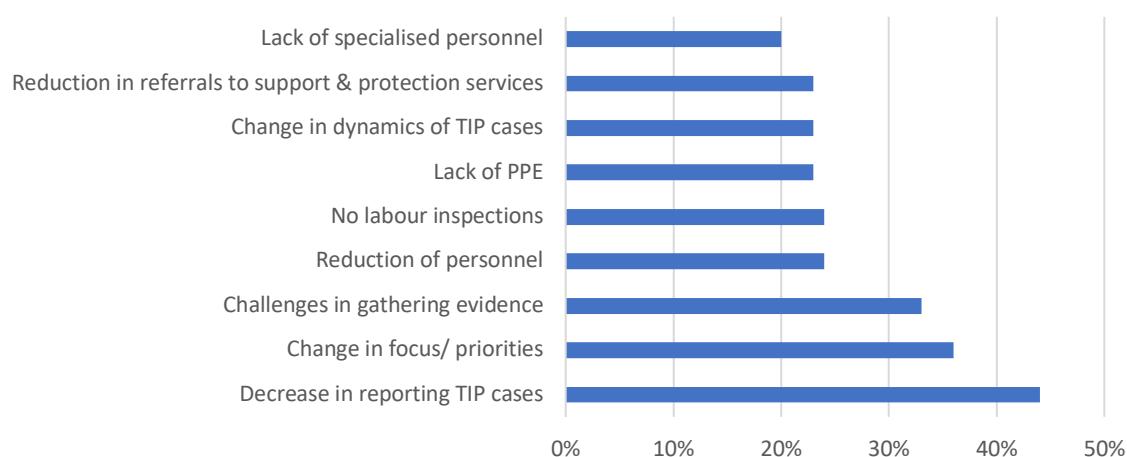
Difficulties gathering evidence

The pandemic has resulted in a reduced capacity and reduced resources of law enforcement authorities to respond to reported trafficking in persons cases. In addition to the above-mentioned problems of a lack of reporting and trafficking moving even further underground, law enforcement personnel have faced challenges in travelling to conduct trafficking in persons investigations. Proactive investigations have, in particular, been significantly curtailed during the pandemic. Due to lockdowns and social distancing measures, law enforcement have faced difficulties in travelling to collect evidence and to interview witnesses. Thirty-three per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported that they faced additional challenges in gathering evidence as part of their normal investigation work. Mobile law enforcement teams have been forced to cease their normal labor inspection and raids of places suspected of using forced labor. Twenty-four per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported that labor inspections have not taken place during the pandemic.

The consequence has been delayed investigations and prosecutions. Interview and survey respondents highlighted the fact that while investigations have slowed as a result of the pandemic, victims have been exploited for protracted periods and unable to escape situations of exploitation. Traffickers, on the other hand, have been able to continue to conduct their normal activities, capitalizing on the chaotic situation created by the pandemic and knowing that they would not be brought to justice immediately as policing and prosecution activities were reduced or stalled.

> *"They are completely stopped. [Cross-border] investigations have not happened properly. Police coming from the source to do the destination, it's stopped. Inter-state coordination has stopped. Courts aren't working so prosecution services have been hit. Victims' access to justice, compensation, protection, it's all suffered."* [83]

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[83] Interview with a victim support provider.

Reduced staff capacity

Interview and survey respondents highlighted the fact that there has also been reduced law enforcement personnel available to investigate trafficking in persons cases. In many regions and countries, law enforcement personnel were called in to manage the pandemic response – investigating breaches of government-imposed COVID-19 rules and regulations, shutting down non-compliant businesses and monitoring the streets for people breaking lockdown and curfew rules. Thirty-six per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported that law enforcement had been called to the pandemic response. This finding is supported by other recent research. For example, the 2020 OSCE ODIHR and UN Women study reported that some anti-trafficking staff had been reassigned to pandemic-related responses, which posed an additional challenge in interagency co-operation with NGOs, international organizations and governmental institutions.[84]

"No the problem is the identification, it's decreased. We're very concerned about this. Especially identification from law enforcement. They paid more attention to managing the pandemic than to investigating crimes or identify cases."[85]

Text box 5: Experience of a law enforcement specialist

A law enforcement specialist described the particular challenge of identifying victims during the COVID-19 outbreak in accordance with other experts from the field as follows:

The challenge of timely and accurate identification and referral of trafficking victims was connected to the general focus on implementing and policing national health measures. This became for instance particularly apparent in the area of forced begging and the responsibility of the police to control the public sphere in relation to measures implemented to address the spread of COVID-19.

Challenges in bilateral relations and collaborations for investigating cross-border trafficking in persons cases were also highlighted. Due to the pandemic these mechanisms became more complicated or stalled during the first period of measures to address the health crisis.

The expert further outlined the increased vulnerabilities of women working in the sex industry due to services moving underground and becoming even more hidden. The expert suspected an increase in the demand for sexual services and due to the more hidden nature, also led to an increase in sexual exploitation.

The expert concluded that a core, specialized team should be kept in order to continue identifying vulnerable persons, particularly victims of trafficking in persons.

In many regions and countries, a significant number of law enforcement personnel were infected by COVID-19 and were forced to isolate at home while they recovered. Twenty-four per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported that there had been an overall reduction in law enforcement personnel during the pandemic due to illness and other factors. One interview respondent noted that at one point

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[84] OSCE ODIHR and UN Women (2020) Guidance: Addressing emerging human trafficking trends and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/guidance-addressing-emerging-human-trafficking-trends-and-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic
[85] Interview with a victim support provider.

in time during the pandemic 50 per cent of the police personnel in one station contracted COVID-19 and were either self-isolating or recovering.[86] Police from a nearby city had to be called in to replace the ill and quarantined personnel.

> "*The challenge was when we attend to a case and when we find out that some of the victims tested positive. The whole team that worked on the case would have to undergo quarantine as well. And get tested. Even if they tested negative they would still have to be kept under self-quarantine at home. There was this one police station that had to be closed down because 50 per cent of the police officers tested positive. They had to find personnel from other stations to come and cover for that station. And a small number of their family members staying in the barracks they also tested positive. So you imagine the challenge the head of the police station had to face at that time.*"[87]

NGO representatives that participated in surveys and interviews for this study reported that many frontline staff became ill with COVID-19 during the pandemic, and thus were forced to cover and quarantine at home. This meant that NGOs in some regions and countries were operating throughout 2020 and the first quarter of 2021 with a reduced workforce, but with increased work demands. Thirty-nine per cent of stakeholder survey respondents (section on victim support services) reported that they experienced a reduction of personnel, including specialized personnel during the pandemic. NGO study participants noted, however, that even while ill with COVID-19, NGO staff continued to work remotely to coordinate victim support, conduct remote trainings and coordinate with partners.

Hindered justice mechanisms

Interview and survey respondents highlighted slow cooperation between law enforcement and the judiciary as a key reason for judicial processes slowing. Moreover, due to emergency measures imposed by governments in response to the pandemic, there have been changes in court procedures and delays and postponements in administrative, criminal and civil cases. These delays have created significant backlogs in trafficking in persons and other cases and have negatively affected trafficking victims' access to protection, justice and redress.

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[86] Interview with a law enforcement agency representative.
[87] Interview with a law enforcement agency representative.

Figure 5: Effects of the pandemic on the judiciary
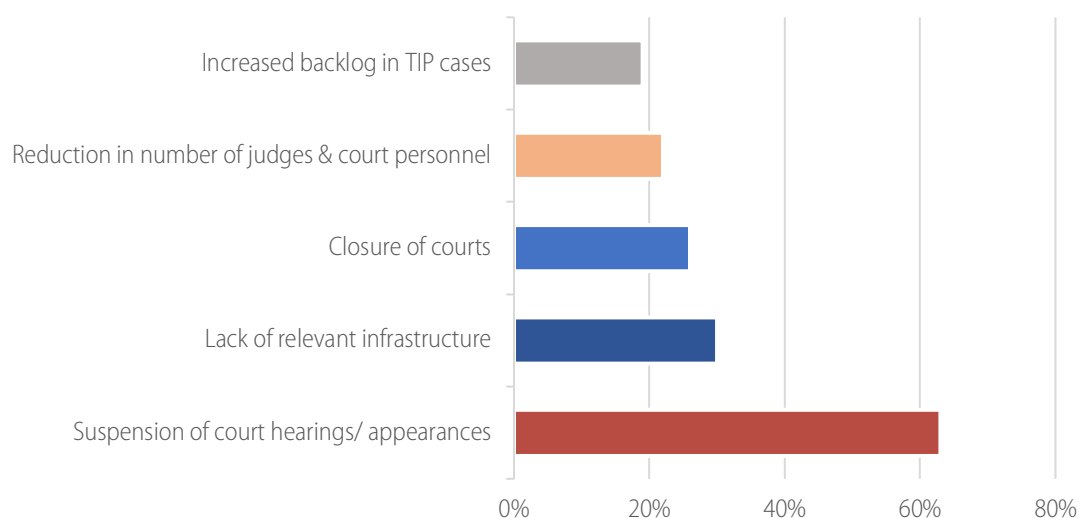
Judicial authorities and criminal justice practitioners who responded to surveys and interviews for this study reported that the first few months of the pandemic were the most difficult, with most courts closed and judicial procedures postponed. Sixty-three per cent of stakeholder survey respondents (response to the section on the judiciary) reported that the main impact of the pandemic on the judiciary has been the suspension of court hearings and appearances. Steps to move towards e-justice mechanisms and remote trials were only taken in mid-2020 in many countries; by that time a significant backlog in cases had already occurred. While e-justice mechanisms have proved helpful in many countries during the pandemic, previous research has identified that there are obstacles and concerns regarding the use of technical equipment in judicial proceedings. For example, a 2018 article cites concerns around online court systems, especially the lack of investment into appropriate legal research, assumptions regarding the approval process and questions about the effect of virtual hearings on the fundamental principles of due process.[88]

Text box 6: Experience of a prosecutor

A prosecutor described the challenges that they faced during the pandemic in performing their normal work. At the start of the pandemic, there was a strict lockdown, with prosecutors and other frontline organization personnel instructed to work from home. The prosecutor reported that during the first phase of the pandemic, there was a lack of police and prosecutors available, due to COVID-19 infection, to investigate trafficking in persons cases. Police and prosecutors were further limited in their ability to perform their normal work due to travel restrictions. Repatriations of trafficking victims stalled for periods of time.

Existing coordination mechanisms were used to prepare the logistics to repatriate victims; however, there were significant challenges in organizing transportation, particularly in cross-border repatriation contexts.

Video trials were organized and this meant that trials could continue and court backlogs could slowly be cleared. There were challenges in some parts of the country in setting up and utilizing the equipment, as well as Internet challenges.

[88] Gerry, F et al (2018) The drive for virtual (online) courts and the failure to consider obligations to combat human trafficking – A short note of concern on identification, protection and privacy of victims: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0267364918302401

International collaboration between prosecutors continued unabated. Regular remote meetings were established to ensure ongoing coordination on cross-border prosecutions, as well as information sharing on trafficking in persons cases and trends.

Finally, regarding presumed trafficking victims already engaged in asylum procedures, in some regions and countries, where court procedures have been put on hold, the lack of recognition of their status has sometimes led to prolonged detention.[89]

Inability of witnesses, victims and the accused to travel to court

Where courts have remained open, witnesses and trafficking victims have sometimes been unable to travel to court because of government-imposed lockdowns and restrictions on movement. There have also been challenges in transferring accused traffickers to court. This has resulted in further obstacles and delays to judicial processes and further backlogs.

Text box 7: Experience of a judge

A judge described during an interview the challenges that they faced during the pandemic. According to the judge, the COVID-19 pandemic led to significant changes in judicial practices. During the first phase of the pandemic all judicial activities in the country were suspended, including all trafficking in persons trials and hearings.

"On judicial work, it [the COVID-19 pandemic] was a nightmare." [90]

After the initial strict lockdown ended, judicial activities were resumed through remote procedures and e-justice mechanisms. There were challenges associated with the use of e-justice mechanisms. Interpreters were not always available for remote trials and hearings. Not all relevant judicial actors were happy with the situation of having to participate in remote trials. Some remote trials were interrupted due to unreliable Internet.

The judge emphasized that there were, however, various benefits to the increased use of e-justice mechanisms. Remote trials allowed victims and witnesses to participate in trials in safe settings, far away from traffickers. The remote trials also meant that judges, prosecutors, defendants and victims and witnesses did not have to travel long distances during the pandemic to attend trials and hearings.

Text box 8: Effects of the pandemic on suspected and convicted human traffickers

Study participants highlighted some negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on suspected and convicted traffickers. Due to measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, in some regions and countries suspected traffickers have been held in pre-trial detention for long periods of time.

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[89] La Strada International (2020) The impact of COVID-19 on the protection of the rights of trafficked and exploited persons: http://lastradainternational.org/dynamic/images/3351-LSI%20statement%20- %20Impact%20of%20COVID-19%20on%20the%20protection%20of%20rights%20of%20trafficked%20and%20exploited%20persons.pdf
[90] Interview with a judge.

There have been minimal provisions put in place in some prisons for preventing detainees from contracting COVID-19. Around the world a number of detainees have contracted COVID-19 and faced challenges in accessing health care.

While data are lacking on the number of traffickers who have been released from prison early, some study participants noted concern that governments are releasing traffickers from prison to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread within prisons. In the upheaval caused by the pandemic, there are further concerns that victims are not informed of the traffickers' early release.

In some regions and countries the use of e-justice mechanisms has meant that suspected human traffickers could attend hearings and trials virtually. However, prosecutors and judges interviewed for this study highlighted the problem of some prisons not having IT equipment and good Internet. Nonetheless e-justice mechanisms have helped to clear back logs in trials.

Technical equipment and Internet challenges

Technical equipment and Internet challenges have affected all frontline organizations. The pandemic forced police, prosecutors and the judiciary to move swiftly to remote working, including remote or video trials, in order to keep justice processes moving.

In response to the backlog of court cases that resulted from the pandemic, e-justice procedures and remote trials were introduced in many regions and countries in mid to late 2020. In some regions and countries, e-justice mechanisms and video trial technology were already in place, though not used on a regular basis, or to a wide extent. A key challenge faced by police, prosecutors and the judiciary in many countries was that key personnel were not necessarily cognizant of how to use the e-justice systems, or how to use video technology to conduct remote trials.

"The situation forced people to use technology." [91]

Poor Internet in areas of some countries was another challenge experienced by law enforcement, prosecutors and the judiciary in moving court processes online. Twenty-four per cent of stakeholder survey respondents (law enforcement section of the survey) reported that lack of technology and equipment was a major challenge during the pandemic; 30 per cent of stakeholder survey respondents (judiciary section of the survey) reported the same challenges. Twenty-three per cent of survey respondents (law enforcement section of the survey) reported that unreliable Internet was a challenge, while 19 per cent of survey respondents (judiciary section of the survey) reported that Internet was a key challenge faced by the judiciary.

While many NGOs were swift to move support services for trafficking victims to remote methods, NGO representatives that participated in surveys and interviews for this study noted technology, Internet and related challenges. Forty-three per cent of stakeholder survey respondents (section on victim support services) reported that technology challenges, including a lack of technical equipment, was a major challenge for frontline victim service providers during the pandemic.

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[91] Interview with a judicial expert.

"We had to transfer services online. It's not the same of course. We needed the technology skills and resources. Online counselling sessions. We needed to get them equipment. All this was very difficult. And needed financial resources." [92]

NGOs that participated in interviews for this study reported that they accessed emergency funds, or appealed to donors, including private donors, in order to purchase technical equipment for staff and victims under their care. Technical equipment also had to be installed for some victims. This required purchasing devices, delivering the devices to the homes of victims and calling their mobile phones to assist with device installation, set up and usage. Many victims, especially those living in more rural areas of countries, also lacked reliable Internet, thus NGOs had to purchase Internet packages and send them to the mobile phones of victims so that they could have Internet at home in order to access online services. In addition, services moving online may restrict access based on literacy abilities.

Another challenge for NGOs was that not all staff were trained in the use of new technology. The use of technical equipment (for example, laptops, tablets, cameras) for online meetings with partner agencies and victims, while helpful in ensuring ongoing coordination and service delivery, posed an additional burden on NGO staff who had to learn how to set up new devices, coordinate online meetings, set up online working groups and group chats on various Apps. Some NGOs also supported victims with their participation in remote trials.

Legislation challenges

Interview and survey respondents noted the challenges faced in some countries by the lack of legislation on online sexual exploitation. While online sexual exploitation was not a new crime at the start of the pandemic, the rapid increase in the online recruitment and online sexual exploitation of adults and children around the world has left police and prosecutors frustrated by their inability to investigate and prosecute online sexual exploitation of adults and children. This is because in many countries there are, at present, no robust national legislative frameworks on online sexual exploitation of adults and children and no legal authority to investigate live streaming for evidence of abuse.

Some interview respondents further highlighted the problem of the lack of national legislation for performing aspects of investigative work online.

"And for online trafficking in persons they lack the investigation skills to do online. We lack even the legislation for this." [93]

Reduced access to victims

Government-imposed lockdowns, curfews and other COVID-19 measures have significantly affected non-government victim support agencies in some regions and countries, particularly in the first wave of the pandemic in the first half of 2020. Victim support NGOs reported in the surveys and interviews that NGO offices were forced to close, with most staff working from home. Shelters for trafficking victims were forced to close to all outsiders. In some cases, key frontline personnel such as social workers were exempt from mobility restrictions and allowed to travel for work purposes in many countries; however, they often

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[92] Interview with a victim support provider.
[93] Interview with a victim support provider.

required permission from the State to do so. This meant applying for travel permits, for each trip, which created a significant administrative burden on already stressed frontline workers.

Face to face interaction between NGOs and vulnerable persons and victims of trafficking has been significantly reduced, for the purpose of protecting the health of victims, as well as frontline staff. This has meant that most, if not all, communication with vulnerable persons and trafficking victims has had to be conducted using remote (e.g. mobile phone, online) methods.

Victim support NGOs that shared their experiences for this study also reported that anti-trafficking prevention activities have largely stalled during the pandemic. Lockdowns and other restrictions on mobility have meant that NGO staff can no longer travel to communities to provide key messages on trafficking in persons and identify potential victims. This finding is supported by other recent research. For example, a 2020 report by Anti-Slavery International noted that anti-trafficking prevention programs that rely on community mobilization have been severely disrupted during the pandemic with grassroots organizations forced to restrict their activities, particularly those activities that require travel or community gatherings in countries where lockdowns and social distancing measures are in place.[94]

Increased demand for assistance

A common thread across the surveys and interviews conducted for this study was that victim support NGOs experienced significant increases in requests for assistance during the pandemic. Hotline calls significantly increased in some countries, with the majority of calls from victims, as well as vulnerable persons, asking for emergency food or cash aid and other assistance.

"One reason is that victims were calling more because they were disturbed psychologically because we had an emergency situation and were under lockdown for several months. The second reason is because institutions were not working at all. They were in a real situation of need. And they were potentially victims of trafficking because they were so desperate, they couldn't feed their family. And the good thing is they called. They recognize us as someone who can help them."[95]

Many survivors lost their livelihoods at the start of the pandemic and with little to no savings, these victims approached NGOs for financial support and assistance with accessing basic needs. Due to increased stress and anxiety, many victims also required increased psychosocial assistance, placing a greater burden on counsellors. Victim support experts interviewed for the study highlighted the fact that despite their best efforts, they have not been able to support all people asking for their assistance. In some regions and countries NGOs have not been able to provide cash transfers and emergency food packages to all trafficking victims, due to a lack of funding.

Staff burn out

NGO representatives that participated in the study noted that many staff experienced burn out during the pandemic. NGOs operated on reduced budgets, with fewer staff – because some staff became ill with

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[94] Anti-Slavery International (05.04.2020) Leaving no-one behind: Guidance for policymakers, donors and business leaders to ensure that responses to Covid-19 reach victims of modern slavery and people vulnerable to slavery: https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ASI_Leaving-noone-behind-April-2020-1.pdf

[95] Interview with a victim support provider.

COVID-19 – and increased responsibilities and demands for support from vulnerable persons and victims. In addition to their normal responsibilities, NGO staff were doing a significant amount more travel (where permitted) to provide support to victims; organizing and delivering emergency food and other aid to rescued victims; answering hotline calls; remotely helping victims to set up technical equipment in their homes; supporting victims at court (where court cases continued through virtual methods); and providing support to partner agencies. Some NGO workers who contracted COVID-19 were compelled – due to their dedication to their beneficiaries – to continue working even while ill. Healthy staff continued to work, shouldering increased responsibilities and with fewer human resources available to share the workload. Psychosocial therapists also experienced burn out. Faced with significant increases in demands for psychosocial therapy, due to pandemic-related stress and isolation, for much of 2020 and into the first quarter of 2021 counsellors have worked extremely long hours to try to meet the demand for psychosocial therapy from trafficking survivors and other vulnerable persons.

Frontline victim support service providers interviewed for this study reported that they faced challenges in hiring additional staff, where budgets permitted, during the pandemic. Even during normal times, it is difficult in some countries to find victim support staff with extensive experience supporting rescued trafficked persons. The pandemic posed additional challenges in hiring and training qualified staff to alleviate the work burdens experienced by existing personnel and ensure that victims were well protected and supported during the pandemic.

Text box 9: Experience of a victim support NGO

An NGO representative interviewed discussed the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed for the organization's anti-trafficking, victim support work, as well as the organization's responses to those challenges.

The first wave of the pandemic in the country led to the NGO's shelter for trafficking victims having to close to all new referrals. At the same time, repatriations stalled completely. This meant that rescued victims could not leave the shelter and no new referrals could be transferred to the shelter. Concurrently, the NGO witnessed a spike in calls to the organization's hotline – from survivors of trafficking living in the community and other vulnerable persons – asking for the NGO's assistance. Assistance was requested to pay for rent and for the purchase of groceries and other essential items. A number of victims also requested psychosocial assistance, as the pandemic and confinement to the home, caused the victims anxiety.

In the first wave of the pandemic the NGO fundraised intensely. Staff approached existing donors and reached out to private donors in the community to request funds and donations of technical equipment. The NGO collaborated with the anti-trafficking police to organize travel permits and organized joint travel ventures with the police into communities to deliver emergency food and other aid to victims and vulnerable persons. The NGO organized the purchase and distribution of technical equipment (e.g. tablets) to the homes of victims; Internet packages were delivered to victims' mobile phones.

While the efforts of the NGO meant that many victims received support during the pandemic, the NGO representative that participated in an interview for the study emphasized that, despite their best efforts, they could not help everyone who needed their assistance. They lacked the funds to purchase technical equipment and Internet packages for everyone who needed it. Travelling to the homes of victims was extremely difficult during lockdowns. They lacked the staff to provide psychosocial therapy to all people who requested it. Some donors were flexible with their funding, but did not permit the NGO to use additional funds to hire staff to handle the additional workload. Existing staff experienced burn out; others became sick with COVID-19 and could not work. The NGO's experience demonstrates frontline victim support NGOs' efforts during the pandemic, but also highlights many of the challenges that NGOs face, which could be mitigated in the event

of a future pandemic – donors need to be flexible; emergency budget should be set aside; collaboration with the police and other agencies is paramount; and services should move online, but this requires that victims have technical equipment and Internet to access services that moved online.

Challenges for shelters

NGOs that participated in surveys and interviews for this study reported that shelters for trafficking victims faced significant challenges during the pandemic. Shelters in many regions and countries were forced to close to outsiders during the first wave of the pandemic, in the first half of 2020, and many remained closed for most of 2020. This meant that the shelters could not receive new referrals unless a quarantine wing was established, to avoid new referrals mixing with people already accommodated in the shelter. Non-government shelters were thus obliged to re-organize shelters, where possible, to establish a quarantine ward, or to close to new referrals. This finding is supported by other recent research. For example, the OSCE ODIHR and UN Women study found that a quarter of survey respondents indicated that shelters, despite having sufficient spaces, have not been allowed to accept new beneficiaries as a precaution against the spread of the virus, and that this may pose additional risks of secondary victimization of victims, as it leads to decreased accessibility of safe accommodation.[96] In March 2020, the Polaris Project in the United States of America conducted a survey of service providers to which the organization actively refers crisis cases, to assess their expectations of service impact as a result of COVID-19. Of the 80 providers that responded before the start of April 2020, 50 per cent were either considering or had already implemented measures that would limit receiving referrals, and another four per cent had already stopped accepting any new referrals.[97]

Victim support experts that participated in surveys and interviews for this study also reported that, because they were closed to outsiders during lockdowns, educational, vocational training, medical and psychosocial support service providers had to cease visiting the shelters to provide support to victims. Some support agencies were able to continue to provide victims with support through remote methods. However, some shelters were unable to continue to provide rescued victims with educational and vocational training opportunities during lockdowns due to, inter alia, a lack of technical equipment, unreliable Internet, or service providers temporarily suspending their operations and activities.

Challenges in supporting survivors' livelihoods

NGOs that participated in surveys and interviews for this study reported that most survivors that they support lost their livelihoods at the start of the pandemic. NGOs were forced to provide additional support to these survivors, including emergency cash transfers to pay for rent and other essentials, and emergency food packages delivered to the survivors' homes. Furthermore, NGOs that provide employment programs to former victims were forced to diversify their business models during the pandemic so that some victims could continue to generate income. For example, NGOs that run shops that sell clothing, jewelry and other objects produced by trafficking survivors needed to adapt their business models so that sales could continue online rather than in-store. This required setting up websites and secure online payment systems. NGOs that participated in interviews for this study reported

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[96] OSCE ODIHR and UN Women (2020) Guidance: Addressing emerging human trafficking trends and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/guidance-addressing-emerging-human-trafficking-trends-and-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic

[97] Polaris Project (04.2020) Crisis in human trafficking during the pandemic: A snapshot April 2020: https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Crisis-in-Human-Trafficking-During-the-Pandemic.pdf

that they did not always have the IT expertise required to set up such online sales platforms and needed to hire web and other IT experts. Some NGOs reported that they had volunteers with IT skills who were able to assist the NGOs with moving survivor business activities online in order to continue supporting the survivors' reintegration.

THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON FRONTLINE ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING ON POLICE, PROSECUTORS, THE JUDICIARY, AND NGOs

Shared challenges include:

Lack of budget.

Internet and technology challenges.

Need for personal protective equipment to do normal work.

Reduced ability to have face to face interaction with victims.

Reduced human resources (due to staff getting sick with COVID or having to isolate because family members are sick).
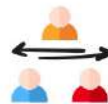
Challenges around planning and coordination on trafficking in persons during the pandemic.

Conclusion

There is clear evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant negative effects on police, prosecution services, the judiciary and victim support NGOs in many regions and countries. Many of the challenges reported by police, prosecution services, the judiciary and NGOs are similar – funding challenges, coordination challenges, challenges in accessing personal protective equipment (PPE) and technical equipment and Internet challenges, amongst others. It could, however, be argued that NGOs have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. NGOs have faced significant increases in demand for their assistance, often with reduced funding. They have been required to perform extra tasks, such as organizing emergency cash transfers and emergency food packages for victims and deliver emergency aid to victims, often with reduced staff and no additional budget.

The pandemic has highlighted existing challenges and deficiencies across law enforcement, prosecution services and the judiciary. For example, challenges around investigations, funding, technology and coordination existed before the pandemic; the COVID-19 pandemic has simply shone a light on these obstacles and challenges.

"It [the pandemic] has shown that it is all set up on in ad hoc manner and COVID-19 has played out the inabilities of the system and it has started to collapse." [98]

Better preparation for crises may alleviate some of these challenges and obstacles in the future. For example, few countries have in place standard operating procedures (SOPs) and guidelines for continuing anti-trafficking investigations, prosecutions and judicial processes during a crisis – this gap

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[98] Interview with an anti-trafficking expert.

could be addressed through States developing SOPs to improve the country's response to a similar crisis. Technology for remote trials was already stockpiled in some countries, but not set up for use – training on how to use technology for remote trials could remedy this problem. National Referral mechanisms (NRMs) have not yet been fully developed in many countries – States, with support from NGOs, could move towards the development of NRMs. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted existing problems and challenges; preparing for a future pandemic or crisis will require addressing existing shortcomings in order to improve mechanisms for identifying victims, conducting investigations and prosecutions and supporting victims. Despite the challenges and shortfalls discussed in this Chapter, frontline organizations have developed a variety of creative responses to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic. These positive responses and promising practices are discussed in the next Chapter.

Chapter 5:
Responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic and promising practices

Frontline organizations have developed creative strategies, mechanisms and activities to respond to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure that trafficking in persons investigations, prosecutions and trials continue, and that vulnerable persons and victims continue to receive essential services. These responses have included, *inter alia*, moving activities and services online; deploying additional human resources; developing e-justice mechanisms; utilizing video and other technology for remote trials; remote planning and coordination activities; encouraging donor flexibility; developing new business models; and implementing emergency measures to protect trafficking victims. It is important to note that some of the responses have not addressed trafficking in persons specifically, but have aimed to, for example, reduce vulnerability to trafficking.

While these strategies and mechanisms have not yet been vigorously monitored or evaluated, and thus it is difficult to determine whether the measures have been effective, some promising practices in terms of frontline organization responses to the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons can be identified. With the caveat that the mechanisms and activities have not yet been evaluated to determine their effectiveness, law enforcement, prosecution services, the judiciary and NGO victim support services could consider applying some of these measures in the event of a future pandemic or similar crisis.

Prevention activities

Study participants reported that while face to face trafficking in persons prevention activities slowed or stalled altogether during the pandemic, some frontline organizations were swift to move prevention activities to online and other methods to ensure the continuation of key awareness messages to communities.

Promising practice: *REDTRAM, the Ibero-American network of prosecutors against trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, prepared a Declaration, which develops the risks of trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling migrants in the context of the current migratory situation and the measures adopted in the region to face the pandemic.*[99]

Promising practice: *In Nigeria, an NGO established a 'buddy program' to prevent trafficking and re-trafficking. Women who had been identified to be particularly vulnerable to trafficking were coupled with trafficking survivors who provided them with relevant information. This approach not only assisted those women potentially vulnerable to trafficking but also made survivors feel more empowered and prevented them from being re-trafficked.*

Promising practice: *UNODC*[100] *follows a two-pronged approach in addressing cyber-trafficking: (1) Capacity building workshops for law enforcement, prosecutors and judges include sessions on cyber-enabled trafficking, with a special focus on online child exploitation. UNODC experts support criminal justice actors as well as child protection advocates in understanding 'what is next' when they learn of such cases through, for example, calls to hotlines. (2) UNODC also conducts awareness raising campaigns for the general public, informing people about the dangers of being targeted by criminals online,* including data theft, scams,

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[99] Interview with a prosecutor.
[100] UNODC Global Programme on Cybercrime

sextortion and online recruitment by traffickers. These campaigns also target children and their safety online and are available in local languages.[101]

Text box 10: 'Back to School' Campaigns – preventing child trafficking in Vietnam

In the wake of COVID-19, Blue Dragon Children's Foundation in Viet Nam became aware that a very high number of poor, ethnic minority children were dropping out of school due to economic pressures on their families. Their investigation showed that more girls than boys were dropping out, and that they dropped out on average three years/grades earlier than their male peers.

As part of an overall approach to trafficking in persons 'Early Warning Systems' in vulnerable communities, Blue Dragon responded by introducing 'Back to School' campaigns. Early Warning Systems are different to many 'awareness raising' campaigns in that they ensure specific initiatives for identification and intervention for high risk individuals and establish a reporting mechanism for potential trafficking cases.

In the 'Back to School' campaigns Blue Dragon facilitates teachers to visit the families of children who drop out or do not return to school after holidays. The teachers try to convince the family to return the child to school, and if there is a suspected trafficking or child labor case the teachers report it to the relevant authorities. For families who are unable to support the financial costs of returning the children to school, Blue Dragon and government authorities provide direct support such as supporting education fees or helping students get fee waivers, providing bicycles, or school equipment. In some cases, Blue Dragon provides livelihoods assistance to families to ensure a sustainable source of income in the future. Support is provided after an assessment by Blue Dragon staff and local government officials and is tailored to the individual needs of each family.

Initial impact: After three campaigns during 2020 and 2021, the model has proven successful. Of 780 children who dropped out, 511 (65.5%) returned to school. The majority did not require additional assistance to return; Blue Dragon supported 237 children and families (46%) of returnees with financial assistance for school or livelihoods development.

Training

While face to face training activities have been postponed or cancelled during the pandemic, police, prosecutors, the judiciary and victim support service providers have been swift to ensure that training continued using remote methods. Workshops, seminars and other training events have been conducted online since the start of the pandemic to ensure continued sharing of information and networking.

Promising practice: In Colombia, UNODC developed a virtual course to train local authorities on trafficking prevention approaches and mechanisms. A series of four webinars was conducted, covering the different impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable persons in Colombia.[102]

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[101] See, for example, UNODC (2020) Senegal launches CYBER October: Cyber Karangué*, let's adopt cyber barrier gestures during COVID-19: https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/2020-10-16-cyber-october-senegal.html; UNODC (2020) UNODC combats cybercrime to keep children safe online during the COVID 19 pandemic: https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/2020-10-07-october-cyber-crime-awareness.html

[102] Field office survey response.

Case referral moved online

In some countries, law enforcement and protection agencies developed online mechanisms for police and civil society organizations (CSOs) to report trafficking in persons cases. Relevant persons could access the online platforms where they could submit reports on suspected trafficking cases. The same platforms could be used to refer suspected victims to shelter and victim support services.

Donations of PPE to law enforcement

Interview and survey respondents reported that in some regions and countries, international organizations, NGOs and private donors have assisted law enforcement by donating PPE, including masks and hand sanitizer.

Promising practice: In Malawi, UNODC provided PPE to law enforcement agencies to enable their continued operation during COVID-19.[103]

Promising practice: International Justice Mission (IJM) has donated PPE to police in South Asia and other regions, to assist police to continue rescues and investigations.[104]

Police transferred from other areas to deal with low capacity

In response to the problem of law enforcement personnel falling sick with COVID-19 and personnel being forced to quarantine at home because family members were sick, in some countries policing agencies deployed law enforcement personnel from other parts of the country to strengthen the capacity of offices with few staff. This ensured that police stations had an adequate number of staff to continue working on trafficking in persons investigations.

Development of e-justice mechanisms

In many countries, prosecution services and the judiciary responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic by developing or strengthening e-justice mechanisms. E-justice mechanisms were described by survey and interview respondents as including electronic judicial platforms (web pages for carrying out various procedural acts); identification and authentication systems for relevant parties (electronic signatures, secure verification codes); electronic notifications; electronic judicial files; digital case management; and videoconferencing for hearings and trials. E-justice platforms have provided facilities for relevant judicial actors to submit documents online such as requests for bail, as well as other motions and petitions and request official copies of documents. Relevant authorities can also approve and process requests online using e-justice mechanisms.

> *"If there's progress in the case they are notified. It's totally new. We try not to leave anybody behind. It's not just because of the pandemic. It's something we want to do."[105]*

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[103] Field office survey response.
[104] IJM (2021) Meet the urgent needs of people vulnerable to violence during COVID-19: https://www.ijm.org/covid-19-urgent-needs
[105] Interview with a judicial expert.

Most interview and survey respondents reported that they would like e-justice mechanisms to continue to be used when the pandemic ends as the mechanisms facilitate and speed up judicial processes and strengthen the accessibility and transparency of justice mechanisms.

"The procedures have become more agile. A year ago we had processes fraught with formalities, today it's all done through our computer system. Procedures are now easier to fulfil and with less paperwork." [106]

Use of remote/video trials

Interview and survey respondents reported that the introduction of remote trials has been a positive strategy to respond to the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons court cases. It is important to note that fair trial and due process principles must be upheld in trials held by remote methods. In some regions and countries, remote trial technology was already in place and used on occasion, as required. In other regions and countries, the technology had to be purchased and set up and judicial personnel trained in conducting video trials. Remote trials have enabled trafficking in persons trials to continue and for backlogs in cases to start to be cleared. Remote trials have further enabled prosecutors, the judiciary, witnesses, victims and defendants to attend trials from different locations (including prisons) and for victims and witnesses to avoid the difficult situation of sitting in the same courtroom as traffickers. Most interview and survey respondents reported that they would like remote trials to continue for the duration of the pandemic and would like to see remote trials remain in place and used widely, when the pandemic ends because they are easier for relevant parties to join than in-court trials and they allow victims and witnesses to remain in safe locations, far away from traffickers. Interview respondents further noted that remote trials enable victims to provide testimony in a much more stress-free environment than the court. The only limitation noted with regards to remote trials was that Internet in some parts of countries is unreliable and this may frustrate judges and others involved.

"The introduction of the virtual courts is a plus plus plus for our country. People were advocating for many years for this. The pandemic forced us to go that way. It's more convenient." [107]

Courts adapted in order to open with COVID-19 safety measures in place

In some regions and countries, courts remained open throughout the pandemic for important criminal cases, including trafficking in persons cases. Procedures were introduced to keep the judiciary, prosecutors, victims and witnesses, defendants and members of the public safe from COVID-19. These measures included limiting the number of people allowed to enter the court; providing PPE for all persons entering the court; and using e-justice mechanisms for some activities to limit the number of court sittings involved in each case. In some countries, night courts were opened during the pandemic to deal with the backlog in trafficking in persons and other cases that was occurring because of the closure of courts. Night courts required judges agreeing to work extra hours for an over-time fee; prosecutors and lawyers also had to consent to have the case heard at a night court. Interview participants reported that night courts were a helpful strategy for ensuring that trafficking in persons trials continued during the pandemic and that the backlog of cases was cleared. Interview participants

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[106] Interview with a prosecutor.
[107] Interview with a government stakeholder.

further explained that clearing the backlog in cases was important so that victims could receive justice and be repatriated to their home countries after providing testimony.

Promising practice: In Thailand, the decision was made by the judiciary to open night courts to deal with the backlog in court cases, including trafficking in persons cases. Judges who agreed to work over-time were paid an overtime fee. Lawyers could agree to have cases heard at the night court if they wanted to speed up the trial and not wait for a normal day time court to hear their case.[108]

Planning

Interview and survey respondents reported that planning to prevent and respond to the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons was paramount in developing efficient responses. Strategic COVID-19 planning has largely been the responsibility of States, with relevant Ministries, government departments and agencies responsible for developing strategic plans to, inter alia, ensure that trafficking in persons investigations and prosecutions continued, that vulnerable persons and victims continued to receive essential services and to provide a roadmap for coordination between relevant State and non-State agencies during the pandemic. Interview and survey respondents stressed that planning to respond to trafficking in persons during the pandemic has required ensuring that the issue of trafficking in persons remains at the top of the State agenda and that counter-trafficking activities are allowed to continue during lockdowns. Interview respondents reported lobbying their governments to ensure that States prioritized the trafficking in persons issue and that key services for victims, such as shelter, continued without significant interruption.

In some regions and countries planning has resulted in the development of various protocols and guidelines. For example, in some countries protocols have been developed on the procedures to be amended in shelters for victims of trafficking to ensure the protection of the health of victims as well as shelter staff during the pandemic. Protocols have also been developed for managing child protection cases during the pandemic.

Promising practice: In Albania, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection approved a 'Protocol on the functioning of public and non-public residential centers providing housing services for victims/victims of domestic violence and for victims/victims of trafficking in the COVID-19 pandemic situation'. The aim of this Protocol is to assist the service providers (shelters) to function as effectively as possible in accordance with the COVID-19 restrictions. It provides "the required guidelines related to the necessary services for victims/victims of domestic violence and trafficking without compromising their health and lives, or the lives of shelter residents, their families and community in general."[109]

Coordination and collaboration

Normal anti-trafficking in persons coordination activities, such as seminars, workshops, strategic meetings and cross-border collaboration on investigations and victim repatriations, were severely disrupted in the early phase of the pandemic in 2020. However, interview and survey respondents stressed that while the pandemic continues to pose a challenge for face to face coordination meetings, frontline organizations were swift to continue coordinating on the trafficking in persons issue through

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[108] Interview with a judge.
[109] UNDP (2020) COVID-19 global gender response tracker: https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/ ; Council of Europe (2020) Promoting and protecting women's rights at national level: https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/promoting-and-protecting-women-s-rights#%7B%2263001324%22:%5B0%5D%7D

remote meetings. Study participants noted that, in the context of coordination, the pandemic has not only posed coordination challenges, but also coordination opportunities. Coordination meetings between States or regions that used to take place once or twice a year have been conducted in some regions monthly or even more frequently. Frontline organizations have saved some time by not having to travel on planes or by road to meetings; this has enabled agencies to dedicate time for more frequent collaboration and engagement with partners.

"The situation has forced people to use technology more [to collaborate and coordinate]." [110]

Promising practice: in South America, REDTRAM, the Ibero-American network of specialized prosecutors on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, has prioritized online coordination and cooperation with investigations teams during the pandemic. On site meetings have been replaced with online meetings, which interview respondents described as "faster, more efficient and allow for more rapid information exchange" and "made possible more efficient requests for information and receipt of information" on trafficking in persons cases.[111]

Frontline victim support agencies prioritized the development of coordinated responses to supporting victims during the pandemic. Understanding that no one agency in a country could meet the needs of all vulnerable persons and victims, frontline victim support agencies worked closely with police and other NGO counterparts to provide a collective response to meeting victim needs.

Promising practice: In a number of regions and countries, NGOs have collaborated with the anti-trafficking police to coordinate emergency food package delivery to victims. Online working groups have been set up to discuss victim needs and the division of agency responsibilities for responding to those needs.[112]

Donor flexibility and fundraising

Interviewed and surveyed experts and practitioners reported that, in response to the pandemic, some international (including States in the frame of bilateral and multilateral co-operation), private sector and individual donors were flexible and supportive in providing additional funds or agreeing to divert existing funds to emergency activities. For example, donors provided additional funds in some countries so that NGO victim support agencies could purchase food and other essentials for trafficking victims during the pandemic and provide victims with emergency cash transfers. Interview and survey respondents noted the positive response of some private sector agencies and individuals that donated tablets, smart phones and other devices so that victims and their dependent children could continue to access essential services and education from home during lockdowns and school closures.

Promising practice: In Israel and other countries, the state budget allocated additional funds for regular psychosocial therapy to trafficking victims and others requiring mental health support.

Promising practice: In April 2020 the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking, managed by UNODC, acknowledged the growing impact of COVID-19 on victims of trafficking in persons

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[110] Interview with a victim support provider.
[111] Interview with a prosecutor.
[112] Interviews with frontline NGOs in several countries.

globally and established its first ever emergency response window, which will support 10 new NGOs across the following world regions: West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, South Asia and Western Asia.[113]

Promising practice: The Freedom Fund set up an Emergency Response Fund to help mitigate some of the worst effects of the pandemic. The agency raised United States Dollar (USD) 2 million and, by early August 2020, had disbursed over USD 1.4 million in 144 small, flexible grants to frontline civil society partners and community groups in Thailand, Myanmar, India, Nepal, Ethiopia and Brazil. The grants have been used to provide small cash payments and relief supplies – food, soap, PPE – as well as supporting NGO staff to advocate to their local and national authorities on behalf of marginalized communities.[114]

Facilitation of travel to ensure access to victims

It has been essential during the pandemic that frontline victim support agency staff are able to travel to provide emergency aid and essential services to trafficking victims and other vulnerable persons. Interview and survey respondents reported that, to ensure ongoing mobility of victim support services staff during the pandemic, NGOs collaborated with national police and other relevant agencies to ensure that the application of travel permits was streamlined, so that frontline personnel could continue to access victims. In some countries, anti-trafficking police have supported frontline victim support agencies by driving NGO staff to the homes of victims to, for example, deliver emergency food packages to victims' doorsteps.

Emergency food, cash and other aid for victims and vulnerable persons

Interview and survey respondents reported that a positive practice implemented by many frontline organizations around the world is that of emergency cash, food and other aid for trafficking victims. Forty-eight per cent of survey respondents (section on victim support services) reported that a key response to the negative effects of the pandemic was the organization of emergency aid, including food packages for rescued victims.

As noted in previous sections, some donors were flexible in providing additional funds, or allowing existing funds to be diverted to the purchase of emergency aid packages for trafficking victims, which frontline protection agencies and anti-trafficking police delivered to the doorsteps of victims' homes. These packages were crucial for rescued victims who could not leave home to travel to a grocery store, or who lacked the funds – due to loss of livelihoods and/or inability to access government social welfare schemes – to purchase food and other essentials. Some frontline organizations also provided food vouchers, which victims and vulnerable persons could use to purchase groceries and other essentials. In some countries frontline organizations have also provided cash transfers to trafficking victims. Emergency cash has been sent to victims' mobile phones and this has enabled victims to purchase food and other important items themselves. According to survey and interview respondents, these cash transfers were essential for ensuring that victims were not vulnerable to homelessness, hunger and re-trafficking.

Promising practice: In India the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has supported the development of social protection monitoring mechanisms to ensure that social assistance and cash transfers being provided by governments reach vulnerable families, such as families of migrant workers

113 UNODC (2020) UN Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking, managed by UNODC, responds to COVID-19 through support to 10 NGOs: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2020/April/un-trust-fund-for-victims-of-human-trafficking--managed-by-unodc--responds-to-covid-19-through-support-to-10-ngos.html?testme

[114] The Freedom Fund (2020) COVID-19 emergency fund: https://freedomfund.org/about/covid-19-emergency-response-fund/

and other vulnerable daily-wage earners. Support has included cash transfers for students and girls to prevent child marriage and child trafficking. UNICEF has also supported migrant workers and laborers in Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. More than 200,000 laborers received 1,000 Indian Rupees (around USD14) through bank transfers.[115]

Promising practice: In Malaysia, Ethical Trade Initiative has been distributing food parcels to vulnerable migrant workers who may be unemployed, unable to claim wages and unable to access state support schemes.[116]

COVID-19 quarantine accommodation, tests, vaccinations and PPE

Despite the challenges faced by law enforcement during the pandemic, police continued to investigate trafficking in persons cases and identify potential victims. These victims often required temporary shelter; however, shelters could not accept new referrals without the victim first spending two weeks in quarantine. Frontline victim support agencies in some countries organized and paid for, the quarantine of victims in government-approved quarantine hotels or other suitable facilities.

Promising practice: In Georgia, the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking, restructured the model of service provision for all ten state-run crisis centers and shelters. In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the new referees were temporarily accommodated in separate spaces. Some of the services were provided remotely and staff have been regularly supplied with PPE.[117]

Some victims fell ill with COVID-19, or family members contracted COVID-19 and victims had to be tested. In some countries, COVID-19 testing has not been cost free. Frontline victim support in some countries organized and paid for, the COVID-19 testing of trafficking victims.

Some countries have prioritized the vaccination of frontline personnel and trafficking victims. In some countries, victims have already received the COVID-19 vaccination.

Promising practice: In Israel, trafficking victims accommodated in shelters were prioritized for the COVID-19 vaccine and those who wished to be vaccinated received the vaccine free of charge.[118]

In some regions and countries victims living in shelters and the community have also been provided with PPE. Thirty-seven per cent of stakeholder survey respondents (section on victim support services) reported that the provision of PPE to victims was one of the most useful responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

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[115] See UNICEF (2020) Situation Report No. 1: https://www.unicef.org/india/documents/unicef-india-covid-19-situation-report-no-1
[116] HM Government (2020) 2020 UK annual report on modern slavery:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/927111/FINAL-_2020_Modern_Slavery_Report_14-10-20.pdf
[117] UNDP (2020) COVID-19 global tender response tracker: https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/
[118] Interview with a frontline organization representative.

Promising practice: Belgium, Finland, France, Portugal, the United Kingdom and other countries announced that all people in their territory including undocumented migrants will be able to access COVID-19 vaccines.[119]

Access to health services and COVID-19 tests for irregular migrants

In some countries, as a public health measure, health care has been made available for all migrants in the territory, including irregular migrants. This has meant that vulnerable migrants have been able to present themselves at hospitals and clinics for medical assistance, without the fear of being reported, detained, punished, or deported.

Promising practice: In March 2020 Portugal granted residency status to all asylum seekers and migrants who applied for it (initially until 30 June 2020) to ensure their full access to health care during the crisis.[120]

Promising practice: Ireland granted safe access to health care to undocumented migrants, ensuring that no data is shared with immigration authorities.[121]

Some States have encouraged irregular migrants to come forward for COVID-19 tests, offering the tests free of charge and promising that the migrants will not be reported, detained or deported.

Promising practice: Malaysian officials said that they would not punish people who come forward for COVID-19 testing, irrespective of their citizenship status.[122]

Services for survivors moved online

Survey and interview respondents in many regions and countries reported that essential services for trafficking survivors have continued during the pandemic through online methods. Psychosocial counselling, for example, has been provided to survivors by phone or online.

Forty-one per cent of stakeholder survey respondents (section on victim support) reported that a positive response to the challenges posed by the pandemic was that services for survivors moved to phone and online methods.

Frontline victim support agency interview respondents reported that, in some countries, lawyers and others stepped up to offer pro bono legal aid and other essential support to rescued victims during the pandemic. This support has been largely provided through remote methods – telephone and online.

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[119] PICUM (21.03.2021) The COVID-19 vaccines and undocumented migrants: What are European countries doing?: https://picum.org/covid-19-vaccines-undocumented-migrants-europe/

[120] See CNN (31.03.2020) Portugal gives migrants and asylum-seekers full citizenship rights during coronavirus outbreak:
 https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/30/europe/portugal-migrants-citizenship-rights-coronavirus-intl/index.html?utm_content=2020-03-

[121] PICUM (2020) What's happening to undocumented people during the COVID-19 pandemic: https://picum.org/whats-happening-to-undocumented-people-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR2HHqMQLf5Uf0XyUnhtkYIvTp0f7NQXYwNuR18TFGB4-R3ZdwQ-tJOpV5A

[122] New Strait Times (22.03.2020) Don't worry about being detained just come forward for COVID-19 testing, please:
https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/03/577004/dont-worry-about-being-detained-just-come-forward-covid-19-testing-please

"We could for the first time talk with women hundreds of kilometers away just by giving them a phone and Internet. It wasn't the case before. We also didn't believe in the concept but now when we had to, we started with that. With some of them it was really successful." [123]

Purchase of technical equipment and Internet for survivors to access services online

Frontline victim support agencies in some countries purchased tablets and/or smart phones for survivors and their dependent children, so that they could access services and education online. The agencies remotely assisted survivors, where required, in setting up the devices and in their utilization. Frontline victim support agencies further provided COVID-19 health information, in multiple languages, to survivors online, through text messages, emails and information on agency websites.

In some regions and countries, frontline victim support service providers also purchased regular (e.g. monthly) Internet packages for survivors and their dependent children so that victims and their dependent children could access services and education that moved online. These Internet packages have been delivered to survivors' mobile phones.

Promising practice: During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, British Telecom donated smart phones, SIM cards and data bundles to up to 100 people who are receiving support from the NGO, Unseen UK.[124]

Developing new business models to support survivor livelihoods

Many trafficking survivors lost their livelihoods at the start of the pandemic. With little to no savings and significantly reduced opportunity to find new employment during the pandemic, many survivors became financially stressed, increasing their vulnerability to re-trafficking. Some frontline victim support agencies that supported survivor livelihoods, for example through the sale of clothing, jewelry and other items produced by survivors, diversified their business models during the pandemic. For example, frontline organizations that sold clothing and other materials created by survivors in shops, created websites to promote and sell the goods. Interview respondents noted that NGO volunteers with skills in marketing and website design assisted the NGOs in setting up websites and online payment systems to facilitate the online sale of the items and promoted the businesses through social media. Furthermore, the NGOs trained survivors in different business activities to help them switch to new entrepreneurship activities.

Conclusion

As emphasized by study participants, the COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing situation and it is potentially too early to understand and document all the challenges the pandemic has posed for frontline organizations and agency responses to those challenges. However, it is possible to identify some examples of positive responses introduced by law enforcement, prosecution services, the judiciary and victim support services to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on trafficking in persons and

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[123] Interview with a victim support provider.
[124] NIHR (2020) The impact of providing mobile phones to victims of modern slavery and human trafficking during the COVID-19 pandemic: https://arc-w.nihr.ac.uk/research/projects/the-impact-of-providing-mobile-phones-to-victims-of-modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/

ensure the continuation of anti-trafficking efforts. Some promising practices are already emerging, which demonstrate creativity and ingenuity in the face of adversity – some of these practices could be adopted in the event of a future pandemic or crisis to better respond to the negative effects of the pandemic or crisis on trafficking in persons and ensure that victims continue to be supported.

Chapter 6:
Conclusion and recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic is, as at June 2021, an ongoing situation. At the time of writing, vaccine rollouts are occurring in some regions and countries. Some parts of the world are experiencing second or third COVID-19 waves, with countries less affected by the pandemic in the first half of 2020 now significantly more affected by the second or third wave. Frontline organizations have, on the whole, not yet been able to monitor and evaluate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the trafficking in persons crime, or the effects of the pandemic on victims of trafficking and on frontline organizations. This is why UNODC, with this report, seeks to provide a first preliminary assessment one year onwards on lessons learned and promising practices.

Looking back at the last 16 months there is clear evidence that the pandemic has affected trafficking in persons. Some countries have reported increases or decreases in the detected scale of trafficking in persons, both domestic and cross-border trafficking, increased vulnerabilities of certain groups (e.g. women, children and migrants) to trafficking and shifts in the modi operandi of human traffickers. There was consensus in the interviews and surveys conducted for this study that traffickers are capitalizing on the chaos created by the pandemic to recruit victims online or in the local area and exploit victims in new locations, for example, in private apartments. Online sexual exploitation has been reported to have increased exponentially. Traffickers have capitalized on the fact that law enforcement efforts have been diverted to the pandemic response and that social distancing rules have meant that police are less able to inspect vehicles, homes, farms, factories and other locations to identify potential victims.

There is also evidence that the pandemic has negatively affected trafficking in persons victims. Rescued victims in shelters have been confined to shelters with reduced access to services and activities. Repatriations have slowed or stalled in many parts of the world, as have judicial processes, meaning that victims have languished for months in shelters; many of these victims have no right to work, or access to government social welfare systems in the destination country and are thus completely dependent on victim support service providers. Many trafficking survivors lost their livelihoods at the start of the pandemic and, with reduced opportunities to find new employment, have suffered financially, as well as mentally. The pandemic has had a negative toll on the mental health of many survivors who were starting to rebuild their lives when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The pandemic has made many trafficking survivors vulnerable to re-trafficking – faced with loss of livelihoods, limited or no access to government social welfare schemes and reduced access to psychosocial, legal aid and other critical services, survivors are at heightened risk of returning to situations of exploitation.

Finally, there is clear evidence that the pandemic has had far reaching negative effects on frontline organizations. Police in many regions and countries have faced challenges in conducting their normal anti-trafficking work – investigations have slowed, travel to inspect suspected locations of exploitation has been hampered and police have faced challenges in accessing private homes and other locations to investigate suspected trafficking cases. Prosecutors and the judiciary have been forced to postpone trials at certain points during the pandemic; remote trials have eased the pressure on prosecutors and the judiciary and served to reduce trial backlogs; however remote trials have not been without their challenges, such as unreliable Internet. NGO victim support services have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. These frontline organizations have faced significant increases in demands for support, from trafficking victims, as well as adults, children and migrants who are vulnerable to trafficking. Many NGO victim support services have lost funding that was needed to provide critical support to trafficking victims. Other NGOs have received increased funding, but have been unable to hire additional staff to relieve the work stress on existing staff. NGO staff have worked extremely long hours during the pandemic performing their normal work, as well as preparing and delivering emergency food packages and other aid to victims, organizing cash transfers, organizing COVID-19 tests and quarantine for victims,

moving essential services online, developing new business models to support survivors' livelihoods and providing support to law enforcement. NGO staff have experienced burn out and many have become infected with COVID-19 during the course of their duties.

In response to the challenges posed by the pandemic, frontline organizations have developed innovative mechanisms and strategies to limit the negative effects of the pandemic and ensure that anti-trafficking and victim protection work continues without significant interruption. Examples of these strategies and measures are abundant. Trafficking prevention activities have continued through online methods. E-justice mechanisms have been strengthened or newly developed and remote trials have been used. Services for survivors have moved online and survivors have been provided with tablets, mobile phones and other technology to enable them access to services that moved online. Emergency food packages and cash transfers have been organized and delivered to survivors. Shelters have developed quarantine processes and organized COVID-19 tests for victims. Training, planning and coordination, within countries and across national borders, have moved online, with stakeholders capitalizing on reduced travel time to conduct more regular meetings and strengthen existing relationships with counterparts in other agencies and countries.

Looking forward, the pandemic will continue to pose challenges for trafficked persons and frontline organizations for some time to come. There is an ongoing need for additional financial and human resources to ensure that police, prosecutors, the judiciary and victim support agencies are able to continue their fundamental anti-trafficking and victim protection work. As more people around the world lose their livelihoods, trafficking in persons prevention efforts become even more crucial. Backlogs in trafficking in persons trials need to be cleared, perpetrators brought to justice and victims compensated and, where victims wish to return home, repatriated. Planning is still in a nascent stage – relevant agencies need to collaborate to plan for, inter alia, the continuation of trafficking prevention activities, legislative and other efforts to combat online child sexual exploitation, quarantine measures for shelters, programs for the protection of children and for the protection and repatriation of migrants. Frontline organizations also need to continue to fight to keep trafficking in persons at the top of government and international organization agendas and ensure that governments set aside sufficient budget for all anti-trafficking activities. Finally, frontline organizations need to monitor and evaluate strategies and measures adopted since the start of the pandemic to understand what mechanisms have been effective and to share lessons learned with counterparts across the world.

The following recommendations – based on the lessons learned shared by experts in the interviews and surveys – are addressed to Member States, particularly law enforcement, criminal justice and victim support agencies, with a view to improving agency responses to trafficking in persons during the pandemic and to prepare for possible future emergencies that could result in similar circumstances. Measures that improve criminal justice responses to trafficking in persons and ensure improved access to quality support services for victims, should be made permanent. It should be noted that while some recommendations may be implemented immediately, others may require longer term efforts to achieve; however, steps can be taken in the short term to work towards achieving them.

"We can't just postpone things every crisis. I don't have a clear answer for you yet. But I can tell you – we can't live like this. We have to have something in place to keep functioning and not leave anybody behind."[125]

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[125] Interview with a judicial expert.

Data collection, monitoring and evidenced-based policies

Conduct assessments and monitor responses to trafficking in persons during the COVID-19 pandemic

Interview and survey respondents highlighted the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing situation and that responses developed by States to respond to the health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic should be regularly monitored. Interview and survey respondents further emphasized that responses developed to respond to the health aspects of the pandemic may unintentionally negatively impact vulnerable groups, such as women, migrants and trafficking victims. Where monitoring activities determine that COVID-19 controls (lockdowns, curfews and other measures) negatively impact vulnerable persons, adjustments must be made to minimize harm and to ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups are adequately addressed.

Responses developed by frontline organizations to address the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable persons, victims and organizations should also be continuously monitored. In many regions and countries, the measures discussed in this report are, at the time of writing, still in place and many may stay in place post-pandemic, in 'normal times'. Since measures were implemented with little planning and in short time frames, their effectiveness should be monitored and evaluated. Lessons learned and positive practices, as well as challenges, should be widely shared.

Monitoring and evaluation should consider, inter alia, the effects the measures have had on different aspects of the anti-trafficking response; the effects the measures have had on adults, children and migrants; and whether the measures should be continued, or even expanded in the future. Monitoring and evaluation of measures introduced since the start of the pandemic should also consider the views and feedback of the beneficiaries – surveys and/or interviews with trafficking victims should be conducted to understand whether measures adopted have had positive or negative effects on victims.

Conduct research to inform measures to address trafficking in persons during the COVID-19 pandemic

At the time of writing very little primary research had been published on the subject of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons. Many opinion pieces, blogs and media articles have been published, but there is very limited quality research involving primary data collection, e.g. surveys or interviews with frontline organizations, vulnerable persons and trafficking victims. Survey and interview respondents highlighted the need for more research on the subject of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons.

Relevant frontline organizations, with support from professional research bodies, should conduct primary research on the effects of the pandemic on trafficking in persons in different regions and countries. Such research should consider the dynamics of trafficking in persons during the pandemic, i.e. shifts in the modi operandi of traffickers, migration dynamics and heightened vulnerabilities of certain groups. Such research should include the voices of victims – surveys and interviews should be conducted with victims trafficked during the pandemic to increase the evidence base on recruitment methods, trafficking routes and sectors of exploitation. Research should also be conducted on victims' experiences of identification, referral to protection agencies and access to services, including shelter and legal aid during the pandemic and victims' thoughts on gaps and obstacles to be remedied.

Implement existing UN recommendations on data collection, research and evaluation concerning crime prevention and criminal justice responses to trafficking in persons

Relevant agencies should fully implement existing UN recommendations to collect, analyze and publish all relevant and disaggregated data on trafficking in persons cases.[126] Priority should be given to the collection of data on forms of exploitation that might be increasing (e.g. online sexual exploitation) during the current context, as well as the collection of data on particularly affected groups, such as women, children and migrants and, finally, intersecting forms of discrimination and exploitation. Data collection efforts should prioritize victims' safety, privacy and confidentiality and respect the key principle of doing no harm.

A general exception to restrictions at all levels in cases of trafficking in persons

Develop clear official messages to the public

Survey and interview respondents recommended that official messages from health authorities, criminal justice agencies and protection agencies, should indicate that reporting trafficking in persons cases and accessing essential services, are exempt from movement restriction measures such as lockdowns and curfews. Messages around the need to stay at home during lockdowns, which have been widely used around the world since the start of the pandemic, should be accompanied by the clear message that trafficking victims can leave the house or place of exploitation without being punished by the authorities for breaking lockdown and other population control measures.[127]

Survey and interview respondents further emphasized that awareness raising campaigns to promote policies and activities in the context of trafficking in persons prevention and victim protection, should be introduced and/or strengthened. Trafficking hotline numbers should be widely publicized and messages around the availability of victim support services for vulnerable persons and trafficking victims should be widely disseminated through a range of media including television and social media.

Strengthen the anti-trafficking response

Coordinate efforts at all levels

A frequently mentioned recommendation across the surveys and interviews conducted for this study was that anti-trafficking coordination efforts, within countries and in international contexts, should continue to be strengthened. Existing working groups should continue to meet using online methods regularly. Where gaps in capacity or expertise are identified, new cross-sectoral groups should be established to discuss and collaborate on ways and means to address existing trafficking prevention and protection gaps.

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[126] See, for example, ICAT, 2016, Pivoting toward the Evidence: Building effective counter-trafficking responses using accumulated knowledge and a shared approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning: https://www.unodc.org/documents/mexicoandcentralamerica/publications/CrimenOrganizado/16-10259_Ebook.pdf

[127] Such messages are already being disseminated in some regions and countries in the context of crime, broadly. Thus, messages that trafficking victims can leave the house could be incorporated into existing messaging around gender-based violence and related crimes.

"It's important to continue to keep communicating between different countries and regions. It's the only way to get to know the trafficking routes. It's important to analyze the different crimes with regards to trafficking in persons. Permanent communication with police is essential." [128]

Efforts to establish NRMs for referring victims to victim support services should be developed and/or strengthened. From the point of identification, potential victims should be promptly referred to adequate shelter, legal aid, psychosocial support and other key services. No one agency can provide all the support that a victim needs, thus inter-agency collaboration and streamlined referral and victim support is paramount in achieving a coordinated and comprehensive program of victim identification, victim support.

NRMs or equivalent victim referral mechanisms should also be updated to respond to new or emerging trafficking in persons trends identified during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the increase in online recruitment of adults and children and the increases in online child sexual exploitation and exploitation of women and girls in private domiciles.

Develop plans and strategies

Survey and interview respondents stressed that the pandemic has highlighted the current lack of adequate plans and strategies for implementing anti-trafficking mechanisms in crisis situations. It is essential that States address this situation by developing sound strategies for operating in different crisis scenarios, including contingency planning to ensure functionality of the anti-trafficking system in emergency conditions. Contingency plans must ensure the availability of a minimum package of services to victims to meet their immediate needs during the period of reduced possibilities for referral, protection, investigation and judicial proceedings.

In the context of planning for future crises, SOPs should be developed so that there is clear guidance for all frontline organizations on the division of anti-trafficking roles and responsibilities. It is important that one Ministry leads the effort to respond to the crisis, to avoid confusion, overlap or gaps in responses to trafficking in persons during the crisis.

"The pandemic is like a natural calamity. The government should have a policy on natural calamities. And the government should focus on social security issues… On having structures in place for how to respond to pandemics and how to prevent people getting into situations of vulnerability." [129]

States should develop or update their national strategies and/or National Plans of Action (NPAs) to address new or emerging forms of trafficking in persons; new at-risk groups because of the pandemic; and new mechanisms developed for identifying and referring victims to victim support services during the pandemic. Further, States should include the development of an emergency protocol into current national strategies and NPAs to ensure that anti-trafficking in persons and victim protection activities are incorporated into broader national socio-economic plans.

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[128] Interview with a prosecutor.
[129] Interview with a victim support provider.

Strengthen legal frameworks

Strong national legal frameworks are paramount for effectively addressing the immediate, as well as the longer-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons. States that have not yet ratified or acceded to the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and incorporated the provisions of the Protocol into national legislation, should do so as quickly as possible. Strong anti-trafficking in persons national legislation is essential for the criminalization and prosecution, of trafficking in persons crimes, as well as ensuring adequate assistance to victims.

It has been reported that since the start of the pandemic online sexual exploitation of women and children has increased exponentially. Some survey and interview respondents recommended that states should ensure that they have robust national legislation to address online child sexual exploitation and that relevant authorities are trained in the scope and practical application of the legislation.

Develop effective prevention activities

The pandemic has highlighted the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies in preventing and responding to trafficking in persons during a global health crisis. Survey and interview respondents recommended that law enforcement agencies remain vigilant in addressing new and evolving trafficker activities and adapt law enforcement responses to prevent human traffickers from acting with impunity during the pandemic and future crises. This will include developing proactive and evidence-based investigation strategies to address new emerging forms of trafficking in persons as well as changed modi operandi of traffickers.

Efforts to prevent trafficking in persons should be strengthened through various measures and strategies, including, but not limited to: Widely disseminating information about trafficking in persons hotlines and services in multiple languages, through television and social media; setting up mobile investigation teams with full PPE; developing and implementing online Internet safety programs for parents and children; and ensuring that schools remain open, with COVID-19 health precautions in place.[130] Health information activities can be capitalized on to also share trafficking in persons information, for example, flyers with information on COVID-19 prevention measures could be used to publicize trafficking in persons hotline numbers and share the message that trafficking victims can leave the home to seek help during lockdowns.

Strengthen protection measures for trafficking victims and vulnerable groups

The pandemic has highlighted the need for frontline organizations to better plan for the protection of trafficking victims and other vulnerable persons during the COVID-19 pandemic. Survey and interview respondents recommended that, moving forward, certain measures should be adopted and/or strengthened to ensure that rescued victims, as well as vulnerable persons, have access to safe and adequate shelter, legal aid, medical support, livelihood support and other essential services and support during and after the pandemic.

Survey and interview respondents further recommended that social protection systems with a gender-responsive focus should be strengthened in order to ensure that the different realities of men, women

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[130] UNODC acknowledges the various debates regarding the subject of keeping schools open during the pandemic. This recommendation is couched in a protection perspective – schools in some regions and countries are, for some children, places of safety; many children need access not only to education, but also to the protective space that schools provide, as well as regular school meals.

and children are properly channeled. These schemes should include equal access of citizens and non-citizens to quality healthcare and income and social security.

Shelters should develop plans for receiving new referrals and ensuring the rescued victims' safe quarantine in a separate wing of the shelter. PPE should be stocked and provided to all shelter staff, as well as victims accommodated in shelter. Plans should also be developed to ensure, where possible, that victims needing medical aid are prioritized for receiving medical services in hospitals and clinics.

Activities and trainings for survivors in shelters should continue uninterrupted. Mechanisms to provide survivors with access to essential services online should be strengthened. Shelters should, where possible, purchase technical equipment so that victims accommodated in shelters can access psychosocial support, legal aid and education online. Service providers should also fundraise to purchase tablets, mobile phones or other devices so that survivors living in the community can access services from home. Service providers should regularly contact survivors living in the community to assess and address their safety.

> *"Shelters need to be a lot more proactive in terms of being able to occupy the clients at the shelters. Keep them engaged in activities so they don't become frustrated at not being allowed to leave the compound."* [131]

Where possible, frontline service providers should also develop remote vocational training initiatives, as well as develop new business models to support survivor livelihoods, linked to new technologies. Survivors should be supported, when they are unable to work, or have lost their livelihoods, with cash transfers and other emergency aid to assist them to pay for rent, food and other essentials.

Special provisions should be made for the care of trafficking victims who are unable to be repatriated. Where possible, victims should be granted temporary residence permits so that they can leave shelters and live in the community while they await repatriation to their home country, without fear of being detained or punished.

Special provisions for women and girls should be made. There should be increased investment in evidence-based women's and girls' economic empowerment programs, which may reduce vulnerability to trafficking. Comprehensive measures should be introduced to realize women's and girls' economic and social rights, including decent work and education.

Finally, frontline organizations providing socio-economic support to rescued trafficking victims should strengthen follow-up mechanisms. After leaving the shelter and/or 'exiting' the support program, follow up should be maintained through regular (e.g. quarterly) face to face visits or phone calls to monitor the survivor's and their family's well-being. Ongoing support services should be offered to reduce the risk of re-trafficking.

Strengthen e-justice mechanisms in trafficking in persons cases

Planning

The use of e-justice mechanisms should be carefully planned to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is in place. This would require, inter alia, an assessment in each county of the advisability of implementing

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[131] Interview with a government representative.

such mechanisms, with consideration of issues of information and communication technology access by victims and witnesses. Similarly, planning needs to take into consideration whether prison and detention facilities have adequate infrastructure in place to make video trials available to the accused.

The reliability of equipment and systems used for remote justice proceedings should be in line with international human rights standards and norms and conform with adequate privacy protections.

Finally, technical support personnel should be available to monitor and resolve connectivity problems, software and hardware compatibility issues and interruptions.

Adaptation of legislative frameworks

Legislative frameworks should be adapted to include key provisions, including:
- The types of hearings or procedures that may take place remotely;
- The categories of people that can participate in remote criminal justice proceedings (e.g. the accused, prosecution and defense attorneys, victims, witnesses, judges, court staff and members of the public);
- Guarantees to ensure key rights, including the right to a fair trial; and
- Protection of confidential information and documents.

Purchase technical equipment

Criminal justice agencies should have access to the equipment necessary for staff to continue their work during the COVID-19 pandemic and future crises. Survey and interview respondents recommended that budget be set aside for the purchase of computers, laptops and cameras required for remote working and for effective e-justice mechanisms, including remote trials.

Training in e-justice

Survey and interview respondents recommended that criminal justice actors, including law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, court staff and interpreters should have access to training in using e-justice mechanisms in trafficking in persons and other important crime cases. Training should focus on:
- The set up and usage of e-justice mechanisms, including databases and remote (video) trials;
- Rules and procedures on the use of e-justice mechanisms;
- Mitigating victims' and witnesses' vulnerabilities and concerns during online hearings and other court procedures and reducing any possibility of secondary victimization;
- Supporting victims and witnesses who are providing evidence in remote trials; and
- Interviewing and questioning techniques via remote methods.

Budgeting

A frequently mentioned recommendation in the surveys and interviews was that, despite the economic challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed for States around the world, countries must continue supporting frontline organizations' anti-trafficking work and adapt their assistance programmes to the new and extraordinary circumstances created by the pandemic and its aftermath.

While the priority of States at the current time remains public health, governments around the world should continue to keep the issue of trafficking in persons at the top of the agenda and set aside adequate

budget and resources for preventing trafficking in persons and protecting victims. Budget should be set aside for extra law enforcement and judiciary resources (e.g. e-justice mechanisms, night courts, mobile investigation units), as well as extra victim support resources (e.g. hotline staff, legal aid, psychosocial therapists, emergency food aid, COVID-19 tests and cash transfers for victims). Budget should also be set aside for the protection of vulnerable persons during the pandemic and future crises. Access to State financial support during crises should be set aside, where possible, for all citizens and non-citizens in the territory.

"Proper social budgeting is important." [132]

Donors should be flexible with their funding. In times of crisis, donors should be swift to respond to requests from NGOs to provide additional funding, or to redirect existing funding to other projects. Donors should allow NGOs to hire, in the short to medium term, new staff to ensure that programme beneficiaries receive ongoing protection and support. Donors should, where possible, allow NGOs to make decisions about where funding is spent.

"Good donor coordination is important. Donors should think about, when referring extra money, that it's not just packages of food and clothes for victims but also extra staff . . . and not just make staff work after hours." [133]

It is important to conduct risk assessments and develop mitigation plans to proactively think through how to adjust activities quickly and effectively in order to respond to needs on the ground.

COVID-19 is, at the time of writing, an ongoing situation. Frontline organizations working to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and protect victims have, across the world, been adversely affected by the pandemic. This report has presented the available evidence on the challenges that frontline organizations have faced since March 2020, as well as mapped the responses, to date, to the challenges. Promising and innovative practices have been highlighted – these examples demonstrate resilience and innovation in the face of crisis; some of the examples could be adopted in the event of a future pandemic or crisis in order to ensure uninterrupted efforts to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and protect and support trafficking victims.

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[132] Interview with a victim support provider.
[133] Interview with a victim support provider.

Annex

Examples of trafficking in persons information collection/dissemination activities

The following list is not meant to be exhaustive but seeks to provide useful examples of responses to challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic. These examples have been compiled under the limitations outlined in chapter 1.

Country / organization	Description	Date	Source
Council of Europe	A joint OSCE-Council of Europe meeting was held in November 2020 with leaders and experts from over 50 countries to discuss COVID-19 impacts on trafficking in persons and best practices in responding.	5 November 2020	https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/-/covid-19-creating-risks-for-human-trafficking-crisis-say-anti-trafficking-leaders-from-over-50-countries-in-joint-osce-council-of-europe-meeting
Council of Europe GRETA	GRETA issued a statement: In time of emergency the rights and safety of trafficking victims must be respected and protected.	2 April 2020	https://rm.coe.int/greta-statement-covid19-en/16809e126a
International Organization for Migration (IOM)	IOM's Corporate Responsibility in Eliminating Slavery and Trafficking in Asia (CREST) program mobilized a rapid assessment with recruiters in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.		https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/iom_roap_covid-19_achievements-nov_2020-hi_res.pdf
IOM (Lao PDR)	IOM Lao PDR conducted research involving interviews with 40 trafficking victims to determine the impacts COVID-19 has had on this vulnerable group.		https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/roap_covid_response_sitrep_21.pdf
IOM (Sri Lanka)	IOM Sri Lanka did a rapid assessment to look at how unethical recruitment practices can lead to trafficking in persons and how lockdowns, border closures and travel restrictions during COVID-19 may impact these trends.		https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/roap_covid_response_sitrep_21.pdf
IOM and Frontex	Frontex and IOM held a webinar on countering trafficking and smuggling of children in the European Union and the Middle East and North Africa region. The webinar was the first in a series of joint activities organized by Frontex and IOM to counter people smuggling and trafficking in the MENA region.	15 October 2020	https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-and-iom-hold-webinar-on-countering-trafficking-and-smuggling-of-children-in-the-eu-and-the-mena-region-LOEMTJ

International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	ILO and UNICEF developed a simulation model to look at the impact of COVID-19 on child labor globally.	12 June 2020	https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_747583/lang--en/index.htm
INTERPOL	INTERPOL updated its guidelines, drawing on the lessons learned and best practices developed around the world to help police identify and address crimes impacted by COVID-19, including domestic violence, child abuse and cybercrime.	17 November 2020	https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2020/COVID-19-crime-INTERPOL-issues-new-guidelines-for-law-enforcement
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)	160 representatives of the OSCE participating States, experts, civil society, academics and the media gathered to address emerging challenges in the area of trafficking in persons at an event organized by the Office of the Special Representative and Co-Ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (OSR/CTHB) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).	3 December 2020	https://reliefweb.int/report/world/we-must-support-trafficking-victims-times-crisis-especially-women-and-children-urge
Business and Human Rights Resource Centre	The organization created a COVID-19 webpage, which presents news and resources to aid businesses to counter labor abuses during the pandemic.		https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/big-issues/covid-19-coronavirus-outbreak/
Freedom Collaborative	Freedom Collaborative brought together experts and practitioners working on frontlines around the world to share their experiences and insights on the impacts of COVID-19 on trafficking in persons. Discussions ranged from trends and developments in anti-human-trafficking, to programmatic advice, available resources for organizations and industry conversations.		https://freedomcollaborative.org/webinars
Polaris Project (United States of America)	Polaris tracked the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on victims of sex and labor trafficking. As part of this effort, Polaris undertook a systematic examination of relevant data from the Polaris-operated U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline.		https://polarisproject.org/data-and-research/
Winrock International	Winrock International created a learning product - 'How to build cross-sectional	November 2020	https://winrock.org/document/how-to-build-cross-sectoral-collaboration-

	collaboration to protect workers in the age of COVID-19'. The learning product explores four categories of the pandemic's impacts on supply chains and workers. It puts forward strategies, examples and new concepts for how NGOs, donors, foundations and projects focused on countering trafficking in persons can work with the private sector to protect workers and advance more ethical supply chains in the wake of COVID-19.		to-protect-workers-in-the-age-of-covid-19/

Examples of trafficking in persons prevention activities

Country / organization	Description	Date	Source
IOM (Bangladesh)	IOM Bangladesh provided support to 384 children and 192 caregivers in Cox's Bazar and distributed the 'My Hero is You' storybook to raise awareness on COVID-19. IOM also reached 1,297 individuals in 196 sessions on COVID-19 prevention, as well as the risks of trafficking during the pandemic.	27 June 2020	https://www.iom.int/news/trafficking-victims-join-fight-against-covid-19-azerbaijan
UNICEF (India)	UNICEF implemented a national-level public advocacy campaign to address prevailing stigma and discrimination, including supporting helplines to address negative attitudes, misinformation and violence against women and girls.		https://www.unicef.org/india/documents/unicef-india-covid-19-situation-report-no-1
Peru	During Peru's COVID-19 state of emergency, leading anti-trafficking civil organization CHS implemented a short-term social media communication campaign to prevent trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation of children and other forms of gender-based violence.	August 2020	https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/USG_COVID-19_Peru_fact_sheet_Aug_2020.pdf

Examples of protection activities for trafficking victims and other vulnerable groups

Country / organization	Description	Date	Source
IOM	IOM developed the resource – 'Guidance for Employers and Businesses on Protection of Migrant Workers During the COVID-19 Crisis' - to help employers protect the rights of workers and to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.		https://iris.iom.int/covid-19-response
IOM (Tunisia)	IOM Tunisia diversified its risk communication and community engagement activities to include in-person outreach, toll-free tele-counselling for persons impacted by COVID-19 and online social media activities via Facebook to communicate information, education and communication materials on COVID-19.		https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/iom_covid-19_sitrep_18_mena_31_december_2020_eng.pdf
IOM (Tunisia)	In Tunisia, IOM continued to offer a range of legal counselling and services to migrants in needs, in particular in the light of the socioeconomic repercussions of COVID-19 pandemic that led to the loss of jobs and incomes of many migrants.		https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/iom_covid-19_sitrep_18_mena_31_december_2020_eng.pdf
UNICEF (India)	UNICEF supported the development of social protection monitoring mechanisms to ensure that social assistance and cash transfers being provided by governments reach vulnerable families, such as families of migrant workers and other vulnerable daily-wage earners.		https://www.unicef.org/india/documents/unicef-india-covid-19-situation-report-no-1
UNICEF (Myanmar)	UNICEF developed a Guidance Note for service providers working with victims of trafficking in persons during COVID-19 in Myanmar.		https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/media/5846/file/Working%20with%20Victims%20of%20Human%20Trafficking%20during%20COVID-19%20in%20Myanmar.pdf
UNICEF	UNICEF created a 'Quick Tips on COVID-19 and Migrant, Refugee and Internally Displaced Children (Children on the Move)' report, which has been regularly	27 April 2020	https://www.unicef.org/media/67221/file

	updated. The Quick tips are aimed at State entities and highlight best practices in the protection of children on the move during the pandemic.		
UNICEF	UNICEF created a technical note for UNICEF and partners on 'Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and Its Implications for Protecting Children Online'.	April 2020	https://www.unicef.org/documents/covid-19-and-implications-protecting-children-online
Ethical Trade Initiative (Malaysia)	Ethical Trade Initiative distributed food parcels to vulnerable migrant workers in Malaysia.		https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/927111/FINAL-_2020_Modern_Slavery_Report_14-10-20.pdf
Freedom Fund (India)	In an effort to intercept and provide assistance to trafficked child laborers who were being sent back home on trains, Freedom Fund staff and partners used a variety of advocacy strategies and civil society pressure to ensure the Bihar child rights watchdog directed stakeholders to screen trains with returning migrants for child laborers and provide them with protection.	8 April 2020	https://freedomfund.org/blog/covid-19-emergency-response-fund/
Global Fund to End Modern Slavery (GFEMS)	GFEMS has endeavored to address urgent needs on the ground and look ahead to prepare for risks of increased exploitation and modern slavery through its Response and Recovery Fund. Activities: have included: Emergency rescues and rehabilitation services for trafficking victims; Provision of emergency financial support for families who have lost their income; Distribution of essential safety materials and PPE; Distribution of food packages; Awareness campaigns to help prevent spread of the virus.		https://www.gfems.org/covid-19
International Justice Mission (Ghana)	As Ghana moved into lockdown against COVID-19, IJM's aftercare team delivered essential supplies to victims' families and partner care homes to support rescued children and families.		https://www.ijmuk.org/stories/7-ways-covid-19-has-affected-ijms-work

International Justice Mission (India)	IJM's Bangalore team worked with partner organizations and local government officials to support 27 victims of bonded labor who had been stranded in Udupi.		https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/4356/pdf/
Felix Project (United Kingdom)	Victims of trafficking in persons have been developing new cooking skills during the coronavirus lockdown with food supplies from The Felix Project.	24 May 2020	https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/help-hungry-volunteers-modern-slavery-cooking-skills-food-a9530571.html
Unseen UK (United Kingdom)	During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, British Telecom donated smartphones, SIM cards and data bundles to up to 100 people who are receiving support from Unseen.		https://arc-w.nihr.ac.uk/research/projects/the-impact-of-providing-mobile-phones-to-survivors-of-modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/
United Registered Social Workers (Philippines)	URSW, a collective of volunteer social work practitioners, was formed in response to the pandemic, as thousands of workers lost their jobs or were placed under lockdown conditions with little aid available. URSW provided round-the-clock assistance, over the phone, to anyone needing psychological or psychosocial support, including migrant workers and other vulnerable persons.	14 April 2021	https://mailchi.mp/61f1887d9ec5/when-covid-19-forced-overseas-filipino-workers-to-return-home-a-collective-of-volunteer-social-workers-became-their-lifeline?e=3c35433099
Willow International (Uganda)	Trafficking victims have been provided by Willow International with online counseling, medical care, basic life skills training and an online follow-up session. The program shifted to meet immediate needs, such as the provision of food and medical care for graduates who are now unable to work and victims in the community-based care program.	15 June 2020	https://freedomcollaborative.org/newsletter-archive/how-anti-trafficking-organizations-are-mobilizing-during-covid-19

Examples of trafficking victim rescues and investigations

Country / organization	Description	Date	Source
International Justice Mission (South Asia)	In May 2020, a rescue operation led by IJM and government partners freed 360 children, women and men from brutal bonded labor slavery in South Asia. These migrant workers had been		https://www.ijmuk.org/stories/a-new-and-old-pandemic-covid-19-and-modern-slavery

	stranded due to COVID-19 lockdowns and forced to work.		
INTERPOL	In April 2020 INTEROL led an operation with law enforcement from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines that deployed along a known terrorist route in South-East Asia. The operation resulted in the rescue of over than 130 victims of trafficking in persons and the arrest of more than 180 individuals.	16 November 2020	https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19_analytical_snapshot_59_human_trafficking_update.pdf

Examples of health support for trafficking victims and vulnerable groups

Country / organization	Description	Date	Source
IOM (Thailand)	In September 2020 IOM distributed PPE to 50 boys in shelters for migrants and trafficked persons in Thailand.	October 2020	https://thailand.iom.int/sites/default/files/COVID19Response/IOM%20Thailand%20COVID-19%20Newsletter%20%28September%20-%20October%29.pdf
HAART (Kenya)	HAART Kenya community mobilizers have been actively engaged in providing support services to communities in responding to the COVID 19 pandemic. The mobilizers have helped with disinfecting public spaces and issuing protective packages (face masks, hand sanitizers and handwashing soaps) to community members.		https://freedomcollaborative.org/newsletter-archive/how-anti-trafficking-organizations-are-mobilizing-during-covid-19

Examples of PPE donations to frontline organizations

Country / organization	Description	Date	Source
International Justice Mission (South Asia)	IJM provided PPE to police in South Asia and other regions, to assist police to continue rescues and investigations.		https://www.ijm.org/covid-19-urgent-needs
IOM (Guyana)	IOM donated PPE to aid frontline officers from the Guyana Police Force's Trafficking in Persons Unit and other departments that are actively involved in the fight against trafficking in persons.	11 August 2020	https://guyanachronicle.com/2020/08/11/436968/
Hope for Justice (Ethiopia)	Hope for Justice provided 5,000 face masks, 10,000 soaps, a water tank and hand sanitizer to three partners that are responding to trafficking in persons in Ethiopia.		https://hopeforjustice.org/news/2020/09/thousands-benefit-from-ppe-in-ethiopia-as-hope-for-justice-tackles-slavery/

Examples of fundraising for trafficking in persons activities

Country / organization	Description	Date	Source
Arise (India)	Established an emergency COVID-19 response fund to allocate microgrants to their frontline network. Arise reported that their networks requested funding, not for sanitizer, masks or medicine, but for food.	11 May 2020	https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2020/05/11/the-hidden-victims-of-covid19-human-trafficking-and-modern-day-slavery/?sh=48323afb1d2b
Freedom Fund	In April 2020, the Freedom Fund set up an Emergency Response Fund to help mitigate some of the worst effects of the crisis. The organization raised USD2million and, by early August, had disbursed over USD1.4million in 144 small, flexible grants to frontline civil society partners and community groups in Thailand, Myanmar, India, Nepal, Ethiopia and Brazil. The grants have been used to provide small cash payments and relief supplies – food, soap, PPE – as well as supporting NGO staff to advocate to their local and national authorities on behalf of marginalized communities.	8 April 2020	https://freedomfund.org/blog/covid-19-emergency-response-fund/
Apne Aap (India)	To finance Apne Aap's food distribution program, a fundraising campaign was launched on social media, called #1MillionMeals - the meals are for victims of sex trafficking and children.		https://www.1millionmeals.org