

Far Too Socially Distant: Trafficking in Persons Policy Responses for Governments in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

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Far Too Socially Distant: Trafficking in Persons Policy Responses for Governments in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

There are few places on earth nor facets of human life that the COVID-19 pandemic has not touched. From the empty, ghost town-like streets of Toronto's financial district to the shuttered kibbeling stands in the Grote Markt of Amsterdam to the world's largest airport, Beijing Daxing International, now quiet with its few masked passengers moving silently in huge, eerily empty terminals meant to hold thousands – all have been impacted by COVID-19. Yet, as with all negative world phenomena, not all groups are affected equally.

In a time where the world's population is encouraged to remain isolated from one another, victims of trafficking in persons, and those who are vulnerable to becoming victims, are far too socially distant.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, trafficking was an already significant issue, with increasing numbers of victims detected over the past 15 years.¹ In February 2021, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released its global biennial report stating that nearly 50,000 victims of trafficking in persons were detected in 135 countries during the reporting period of 2016-2018.² And, due to the underreported, under-detected, and under-prosecuted nature of the crime, this figure is likely much larger.³ To illustrate, in 2016, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that 40.3 million people actively live situations of trafficking.⁴ Furthermore, due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number and profile of victims and the accompanying lack of detections are expected to increase and change in different ways.

Shifting trafficking flows have created gaps in identification of victims, allowing offenders to act with more impunity. Moreover, the pan-

demic has placed millions around the world at risk for becoming victims of trafficking, placed those already identified and rescued at risk of revictimization, and exacerbated the exploitation that current victims already face. As a result, it is likely that countries around the world can expect both rising numbers of new and re-exploited victims.

For the purposes of this paper, trafficking in persons, under the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, is defined as “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.”⁵ Forms of exploitation are generally discussed, with particular analysis on certain forms, where relevant.

This paper discusses the various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (hereinafter referred to as “the pandemic”) on trafficking flows, victims, offenders, social services providers, and law enforcement and how national governments can better respond to these impacts, both in the short and long terms.

A Brief History of the Pandemic

The spread of the pandemic was caused by unavoidable human migration. The world at large officially became aware of COVID-19, a new, highly contagious variant of coronavirus, on January 9, 2020, when the World Health

Organization (WHO) announced the presence of a mysterious coronavirus-related pneumonia in Wuhan, China.⁶ By March 11, 2020, when the WHO designated the spread of the virus as a pandemic, thousands had been infected by the respiratory illness and many had died.⁷ From January 2020 onwards, countries around the world responded in unique ways, with most establishing various protective restrictions on their populations, from mask-wearing mandates to mandatory curfews. Borders worldwide were largely closed, nonessential travel banned. All in all, the pandemic has disrupted human life on an historic scale.

Global Overview of Trafficking in Persons

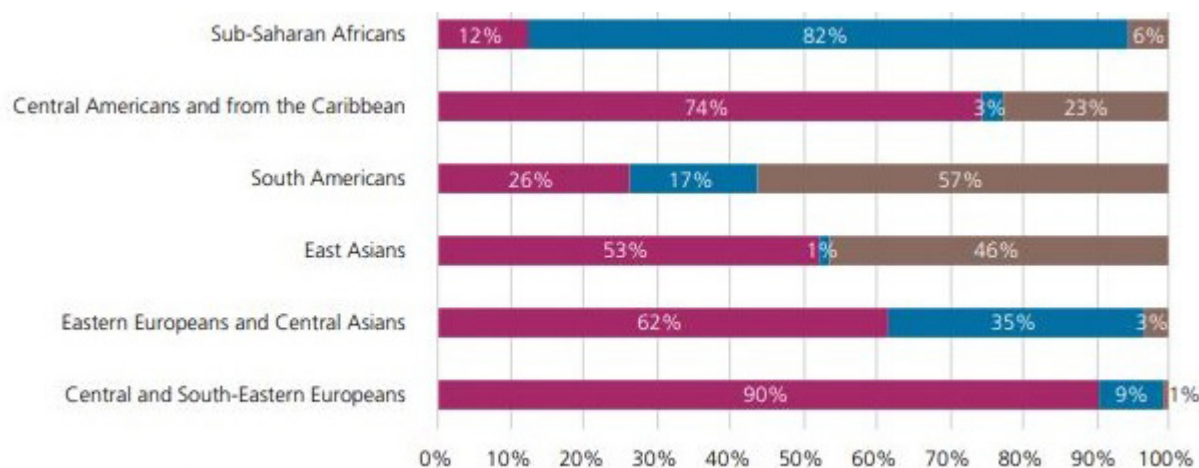
As mentioned above, trafficking has been a growing issue worldwide over the past 15 years. In conceptualizing trafficking, there are four separate areas of focus: the flows, the victims, the offenders, and the criminal justice response. In this section, the basic components of understanding trafficking in persons as a whole based on established trends, and not in terms of its existence during the pandemic, are discussed.

Flows

In terms of flows, trafficking may either be cross-border, also referred to as international trafficking, or domestic – trafficking that occurs wholly within a country’s national borders. Flows are generally established by the recording of both a victim’s country of origin (citizenship) and the country or place of detection. In 2020, UNODC reported that it had detected 534 different trafficking flows worldwide, with more than 120 countries having detected victims from more than 140 different countries of origin.⁸

While many think of the majority of victims as being trafficked across great distances, the opposite is true. The dominant pattern globally is that victims are typically trafficked within geographically close areas with most detected victims being citizens of the countries where they are detected.⁹ This means that most victims are cross-border trafficked either within the same region/subregion or are trafficked domestically (*see*, Figure 1). To understand the dominating pattern of geographically close trafficking, there must first be an understanding of what regional and subregional

Figure 1. Shares of Victims of Trafficking Who Were Repatriated to Their Country of Origin, by Area of Repatriation (2017-2018)*



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) elaboration of national data.

*For detailed sources, explanations, and notes for all figures, *see*, Annex 1.

cross-border trafficking means. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa is considered to be a region while West Africa is a subregion of Sub-Saharan Africa. In presenting a hypothetical trafficking situation for the purposes of explanation, a victim may be trafficked from Nigeria to Burkina Faso, which would result in a classification of cross-border subregional trafficking. However, if that same victim was trafficked to Botswana, a country that is considered to be in the Southern Africa subregion, this would result in cross-border regional trafficking across a still relatively short distance.

While this is the general global pattern, there is some regional variation. Some regions do detect victims from a wide range of origins, some from regions geographically quite far away. For instance, when data on detection and repatriation is considered together, it shows that Europe, the Middle East, North America, and some countries in East Asia and the Pacific are destinations for trafficking victims from a wide range of origins.¹⁰ To illustrate, between 2017 and 2018, countries in Western and Southern Europe detected victims of 125 different citizenships.¹¹

In addition, there are variations in the forms of exploitation recorded in cross-border versus domestic trafficking. As a large amount of cross-border trafficking flows are from poorer countries to richer countries, it is useful to look at the picture in high-income countries.¹² In these countries, domestic trafficking tends to be overwhelmingly for the purpose of sexual exploitation while cross-border trafficking is more diverse, with significant shares of cases recorded for both forced labor and other forms.¹³

Victims

Meanwhile, the victim profile is composed of sex, age, and form(s) of exploitation. First, the majority of detected victims globally are females, particularly women. In 2021, UNODC reported that for every 10 victims detected globally in 2018, about five were women.¹⁴ However, over the past few years, the number of detected men, boys, and girls has increased more than women, so the profile of the victims detected has changed: the share of adult women fell from more than 70 percent in 2016 to less than 50 percent in 2018 (*see*, Figure 2).¹⁵ Yet, similar to flows, while overall globally women still dominate the victim age and sex profiles, regional variation exists. For example, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa tend to detect more children than adults while countries in North Africa and the Middle East detect more men than any other profile.¹⁶

Figure 2. Trends in Age and Sex Profiles of Detected Victims of Trafficking (Selected Years)



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) elaboration of national data.

Second, if all sex and age profiles are considered, victims are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation most commonly worldwide (50 percent). However, overall, sexual exploitation is only slightly more prevalent than forced labor (38 percent).¹⁷ The remaining share of trafficking (12 percent) is comprised of other forms, including, but not limited to trafficking for the purposes of forced criminal activity, forced begging, forced marriage, baby selling, removal of organs, and mixed forms.¹⁸ Unlike with age and sex profiles, the exploitation profile has not changed drastically over the past few years.¹⁹ However, the most common form of exploitation for women and girls is overwhelmingly sexual exploitation (77 percent and 72 percent, respectively), while the most common form for men and boys is forced labor (67 percent and 66 percent, respectively).²⁰ Regarding regional variations, North and Central America detect trafficking for sexual exploitation far more than any other form

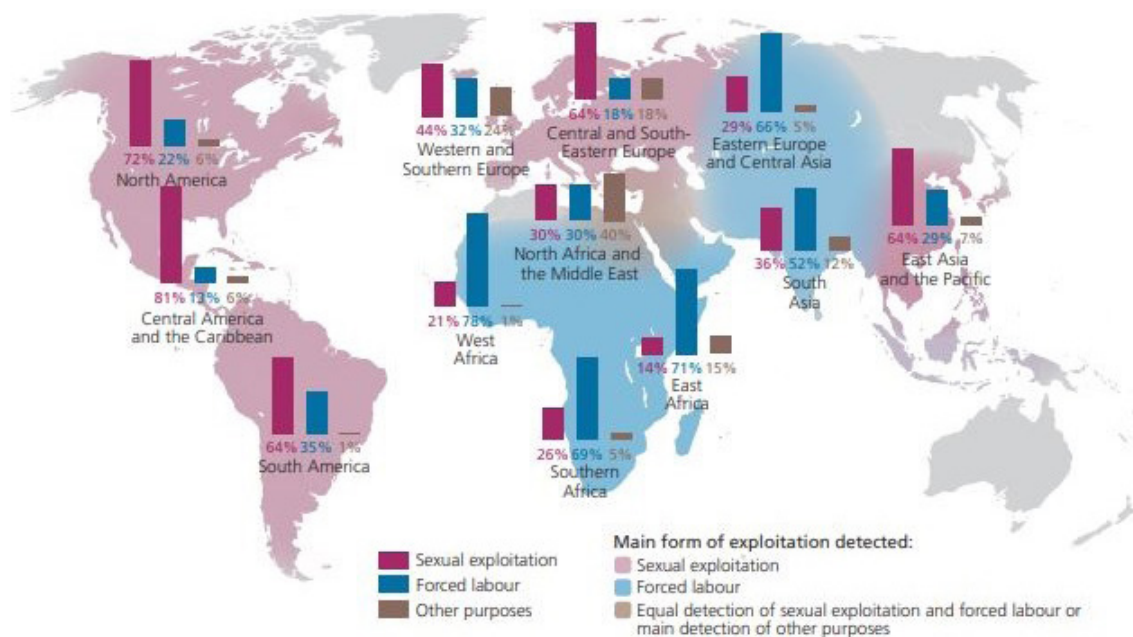
while in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the same is true for forced labor (see, Figure 3).²¹

Offenders

The third component of conceptualizing trafficking is to understand the profile of offenders and how they operate. Here, the descriptive categories include sex, citizenship, and type of criminal.

First, over 60 percent of persons investigated or arrested, prosecuted, and/or convicted of trafficking in persons globally are men.²² This is the general pattern except for in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and East Asia and the Pacific, where more women are convicted than men.²³ Second, in terms of citizenship, most traffickers convicted in 2018 were citizens of the country of conviction with around one fourth of those convicted foreigners, generally from the same region.²⁴ However, typically, countries of origin generally convict

Figure 3. Shares of Detected Victims of Trafficking, by Form of Exploitation and Subregion of Detection (2018, or most recent)*



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) elaboration of national data.

*The boundaries and names shown and the destinations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations nor the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI).

fewer foreigners in comparison to countries of destination.²⁵

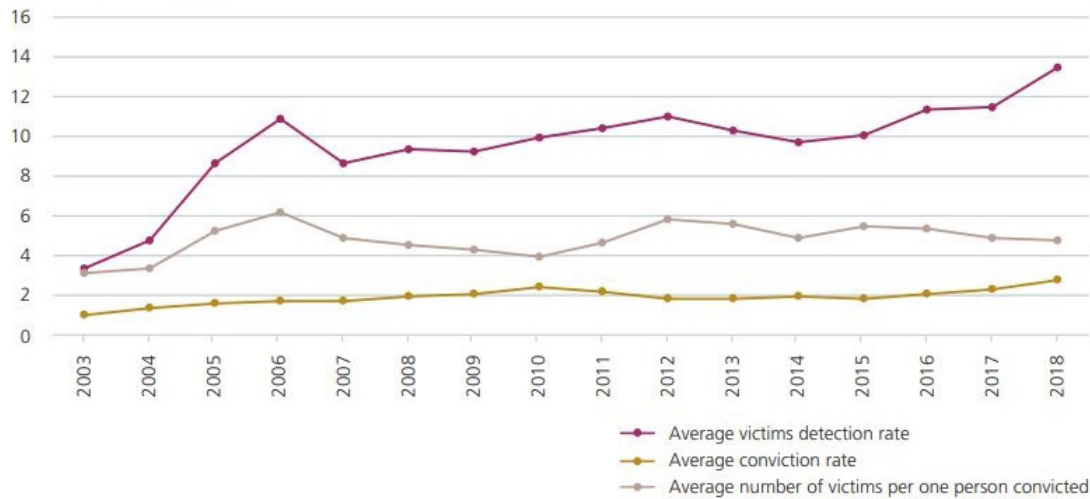
Third, in considering offenders, it is important to note that a wide variety of individuals and groups are involved in trafficking. Understanding traffickers' structure(s) and the way they operate allows for a proper criminal justice response. In general, these varying types of criminals may be divided into four groups: individual traffickers, one-time opportunistic associations of two or more traffickers, business-enterprise-type organized criminal groups (such as mafias), and governance-type organized criminal groups (such as cartels and gangs).²⁶ Based on a sampling of around 400 cases collected by UNODC, trafficking by governance-type organized criminal groups is the rarest, with most trafficking being split more or less equally among the other three types.²⁷ Yet, even though highly organized criminal groups are less commonly involved in trafficking than amateur criminals, they are able to traffic more victims across greater distances for longer

periods of time with more violent means, making their impact significant.²⁸

Criminal Justice Response

The final component in understanding the global picture of trafficking is the overall criminal justice response. As of August 2020, 169 countries have legislation in place that criminalizes trafficking in persons broadly in line with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.²⁹ However, unlike with flows, victims, and offenders, the criminal justice response can vary widely based on region, and in many countries, it is quite weak. Conviction rates are generally low in comparison to detected victims (see, Figure 4). In terms of regional variation, Europe and Central Asia record the highest conviction rates while Africa and the Middle East, the lowest. Overall, though, the number of convictions does not align with the number of victims.

Figure 4. Average Number of Victims per One Person Convicted of Trafficking in Persons (2003-2018)



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) elaboration of national data.

Impact on Trafficking Flows

Now that the main global trends of trafficking over the past few years have been established, the pandemic's impact on trafficking may be better understood. Overall, the pandemic has had unprecedented effects on migration flows in general across the world. The pandemic has produced immense disruptions resulting in an almost complete global standstill in human movement, both across borders and domestically, albeit on different scales. Travel and entry restrictions are present in a majority of countries (see, Figure 5) while domestically, governments have restricted movement in varying degrees. More people are in lockdown globally (2.6 billion) than were alive during World War II (1939-1945).³⁰ In order to better understand how trafficking flows are impacted by the pandemic, its impact on migration more generally must be appreciated. In this section, the changes in international migration patterns are discussed using information from different sources to extrapolate how trafficking flows are likely affected by the pandemic and give three related policy responses for governments in this area.

Legal immigration processes can aid in understanding the magnitude of the global disruption in cross-border migration flows. For example, the 37 member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental economic organization, recorded that issuances of new visas and residence permits plummeted by 46 percent in the first half of 2020 compared with the same period in 2019 – the largest drop ever recorded (see, Figure 6).³¹ In the second quarter, the decline increased to 72 percent.³²

Despite the stricter border restrictions, not all migration has come to a complete halt. While diminished, detections of illegal border crossings can also contribute to an understanding of cross-border migration during the pandemic.

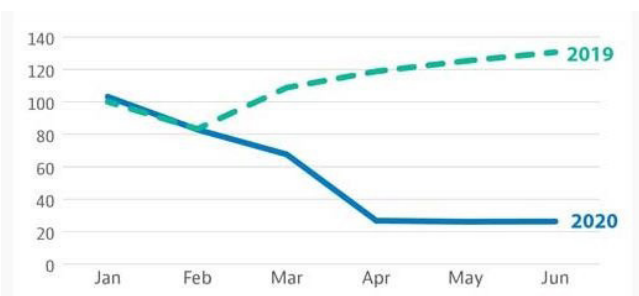
Figure 5. Travel Restrictions, Percentage of CTA to CTA Travel Restrictions Imposed by Type (January 2020)*



Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM).

*CTA – Country/Territory/Area

Figure 6. Residence Permits Issued in OECD Member States (2019 vs. 2020)*



Source: The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

*OECD member states include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

While in many regions illegal border crossings largely go underreported, they occur on a great scale globally.³³ Due to the pandemic, in regions that do detect irregular migration patterns, a marked decrease has been recorded, but the figures are still significant. For instance, the number of detections of illegal border crossings along the European Union's

(EU) external borders fell 13 percent in 2020, in large part due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions put in place by various countries, according to figures collected by Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (*see*, Figure 7).³⁴ However, it remains a significant phenomenon at 124,000 detections.³⁵

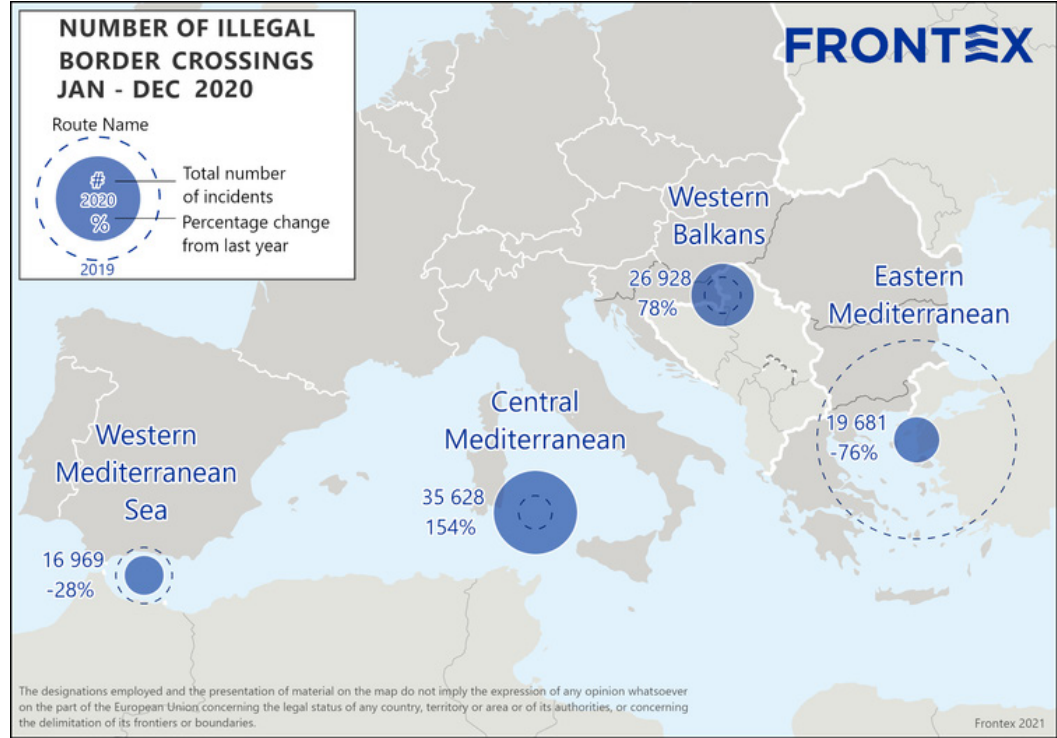
Economic indicators can also aid in giving a reasonably clear picture of cross-border migration flows as human mobility is often tied to livelihood: people often travel abroad to seek employment opportunities.

Remittance flows, loosely defined as the money and/or goods that migrants send back to families and friends in origin countries, are often the most direct and well-known links between migration and development.³⁶ As such, to understand the reduction in cross-border migration, it can be helpful to analyze global remittance trends. At the time of publication of this paper, the World Bank estimated a decline

in remittance flows in 2020 across all regions: Europe and Central Asia (-16 percent); Sub-Saharan Africa (-8.8 percent); South Asia (-4 percent); the Middle East and North Africa (-8 percent); Latin America and the Caribbean (-0.2 percent); and East Asia and the Pacific (-10.5 percent).³⁷ While only a partial picture, as these percentages also take into account decreased income, declines in remittances indicate a substantial decline in cross-border migration flows.

Domestic migration flows are more difficult to ascertain, as many countries do not record the free movement of people within their borders. Even in the time of the pandemic, many countries are unable or unwilling to place the same levels of stringent restrictions on domestic movement as they have with cross-border entries. One example is the United States, where, due to its federal, decentralized system, each state is responsible for establishing

Figure 7. Number of Illegal Border Crossings Detected by Frontex into Europe, by Route (2019 vs. 2020)



Source: Frontex.

its own lockdown and movement rules.³⁸ As a result, movement within and between states is largely unhindered, as evidenced by the rapid spread of the disease in comparison to countries more able to impose national lockdowns.³⁹ On the other hand, countries like Australia imposed restrictions on domestic travel in March 2020, with all states and territories imposing partial or complete domestic border closures.⁴⁰ As such, given the disparate state of restrictions, it can be said that cross-border migration – both legal and unregulated – is much more severely impacted than domestic movement.

But the question remains: how do such significant changes in migration as a result of the pandemic impact trafficking flows? First, the picture of trafficking flows prior to the pandemic must be taken into account before assessing how the changes in migration have impacted these established trends.

As discussed above, most trafficking occurs within a victim's region/subregion or within their own country. While there are some regional differences, it is clear that prior to the pandemic, overall, the majority of trafficking occurred proximal to the victim's origin with a significant portion of the crime occurring domestically. In 2018, over half of victims whose citizenship was reported to UNODC were detected in their own countries.⁴¹ This is an upward trend, as, since 2010, there has been a significant and steady increase in the share of domestic trafficking victims. The share of identified domestic victims has more than doubled over the last few years, from 27 percent to 58 percent in 2016 to 65 percent in 2018.⁴²

Therefore, taking into consideration the migration patterns discussed above, the realities of lockdown, and previous patterns of trafficking flows, it is likely that three main changes in trafficking flows may have developed as a result of the pandemic's impacts.

Trafficking Flow Impact #1. More migrants seeking smuggling services equals more at risk for trafficking.

First, while illegal border crossings have diminished, they are still significant globally. In terms of trafficking in persons, their significance is important as trafficking is often interwoven with illegal border crossings, often facilitated by smuggling. From a conceptual point of view, there is a marked difference between smuggling of migrants and irregular (illegal) migration: smuggling of migrants describes the conduct of persons who facilitate irregular forms of migration for a financial or other material benefit, while irregular migration describes the conduct (and status) of the migrants themselves.⁴³ Not every illegal border crossing is facilitated by smuggling, but every occasion of smuggling involves an illegal border crossing. Moreover, smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons are distinct from one another. Trafficking is either a cross-border or domestic occurrence accompanied by a lack of consent on the part of the victim(s) for the purpose of exploiting them. Meanwhile, smuggling is always a cross-border occurrence accompanied by consent on the part of the migrant(s) for the purpose of the facilitation of irregular entry or stay of a person in a country in which he or she is not a national or a permanent resident in order to obtain a financial or other material benefit.⁴⁴

However, relevant to this discussion, trafficking often occurs within the context of smuggling. Migrant smugglers commonly exercise a high level of control over the migrants, including, but not limited to, controlling their free movement, travel documents, outside communications, and their financial assets.⁴⁵ Further, migrants are dependent on smugglers for guidance, safety, food, and shelter.⁴⁶ Such vulnerability and lack of autonomy during migration often lends itself to smuggling turning into trafficking. According to UNODC,

In real life, it is difficult to have all the elements to make clear distinctions between smuggling and trafficking cases. Migrants who are believed to be smuggled might be deceived or coerced into situations of exploitation at some point of their movement, which may change the nature of the crime from smuggling to trafficking or result in both offenses being committed at the same time.⁴⁷

Instances of exploitation in the context of smuggling are not uncommon. In an International Organization for Migration (IOM) study of Afghan and Syrian migration to Canada, all migrants interviewed said they experienced some form of extortion or violence at the hands of smugglers.⁴⁸

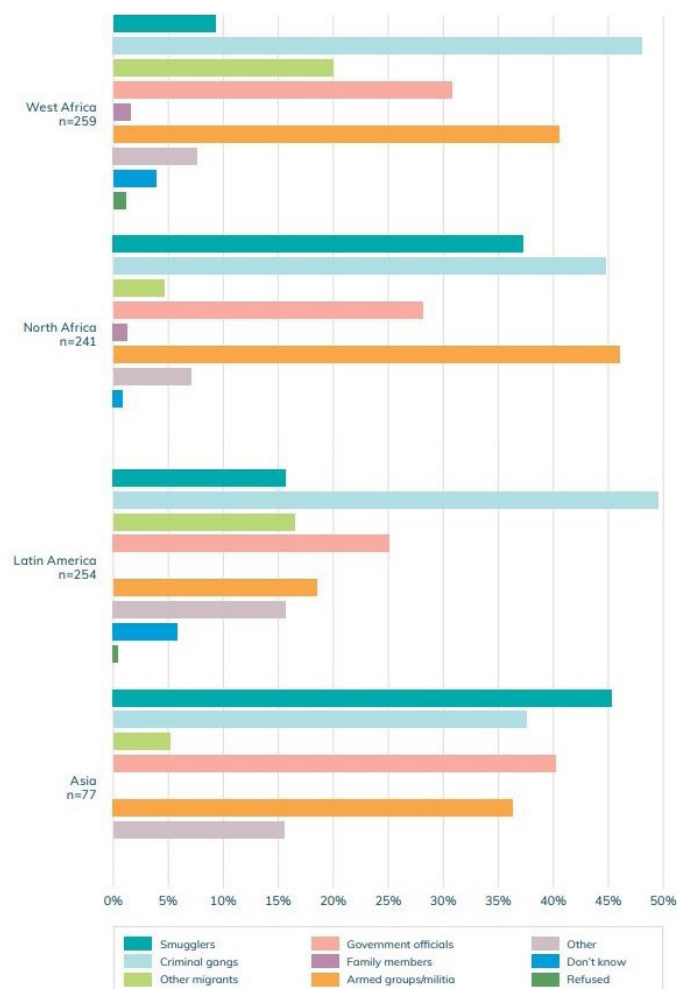
Smuggling is strongly driven by desperation arising from a migrant's circumstances, often tied to a lack of economic opportunity.⁴⁹ The World Bank projects that as a result of the pandemic, the global extreme poverty rate will rise for the first time in 20 years, with countries that already have high poverty rates the most severely impacted.⁵⁰ In 2021 alone, an estimated 88 million to 150 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty, accounting for between 9.1 per cent and 9.4 per cent of the world's population.⁵¹

Given the combination of regular migrant entry points being largely restricted with sharply increasing rates of poverty, it is highly likely that many would-be legal migrants have sought smuggling services and will continue to do so in rising numbers.⁵² According to a recent study by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), 37 percent of migrants interviewed across all regions indicated a greater need for smugglers since the pandemic began, while 43 percent indicated more difficulty in accessing smuggling services.⁵³ This combination only serves to heighten smugglers' control over migrants, since their services are more scarce.

And, as has always been the case, migrants seeking smuggling services place themselves

at a high risk for becoming trafficking victims. While the usual routes and previously less patrolled areas of borders have tighter controls now, the pandemic has simply changed the way smugglers operate. Criminal smuggling networks have continued to thrive during the pandemic, with their methods becoming riskier.⁵⁴ Restrictions at border entry points and increased patrol presence are leading smugglers to resort to more dangerous routes in harsher conditions, where migrants are exposed to violence and abuse.⁵⁵ In North Africa and Asia, migrants have reported that smugglers are the actors most likely to perpetrate violent acts and protection incidents against them during their journeys (see, Figure 8).⁵⁶

Figure 8. Actors Most Likely to Perpetrate Protection Incidents During the Migration Journey, by Migrant Estimation, by Region (2020)



Source: Mixed Migration Centre (MMC).

As such, in these ways, the pandemic has increased the likelihood of trafficking instances becoming more commonplace within not only occurrences of smuggling, but also in irregular migration in general.

Policy Response #1. Governments should improve and expand screening and identification measures, including screening of all smuggled migrants as potential victims of trafficking in persons.

Governments should establish better mechanisms to screen and identify potential trafficking victims disguised by their outward appearances as smuggled migrants. Furthermore, given the prevalence of trafficking in the context of smuggling, all smuggled migrants should be screened as being potential trafficking victims. Pursuant to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, States Parties have an obligation to identify victims of trafficking to ensure that their rights are not further violated and that they can access assistance and protection measures, as appropriate.⁵⁷

Even in pre-pandemic times, the confusion between trafficking and smuggling led to a failure to identify some migrants as victims of trafficking.⁵⁸ However, with the pandemic, governments, in the name of public health, have largely focused on strict control of their borders with quarantine and/or removal of those entering irregularly with little attention to migrants' circumstances. For example, the United States, whose laws mandate that unaccompanied children must be screened as potential victims of trafficking at its borders, has been reported during the pandemic to have unilaterally turned away hundreds of potential child victims of trafficking without carrying out the proper procedures prescribed by law.⁵⁹

However, as evidenced above, with more people aiming to migrate for economic opportunities seeking smuggling services, particularly from poorer countries, paired with greater obstacles in front of them along with smugglers' heightened control over them, proper screening and identification processes must be put in place and enforced by all governments. For countries with no screening and identification measures present, nationally and uniformly, the appropriate border and immigration authorities should be given at the very least basic training on the red flags of trafficking in persons, on how trafficking victims may also be smuggled migrants, and information on where a trafficking victim should be referred for services in the case of identification. For countries with screening and identification processes, even trained officials can miss a potential victim of trafficking in a smuggling scenario due to a focus on immigration enforcement. Here, it is crucial that governments expand the training of border and immigration officials to include a specific emphasis on screening and identification, rather than enforcement.

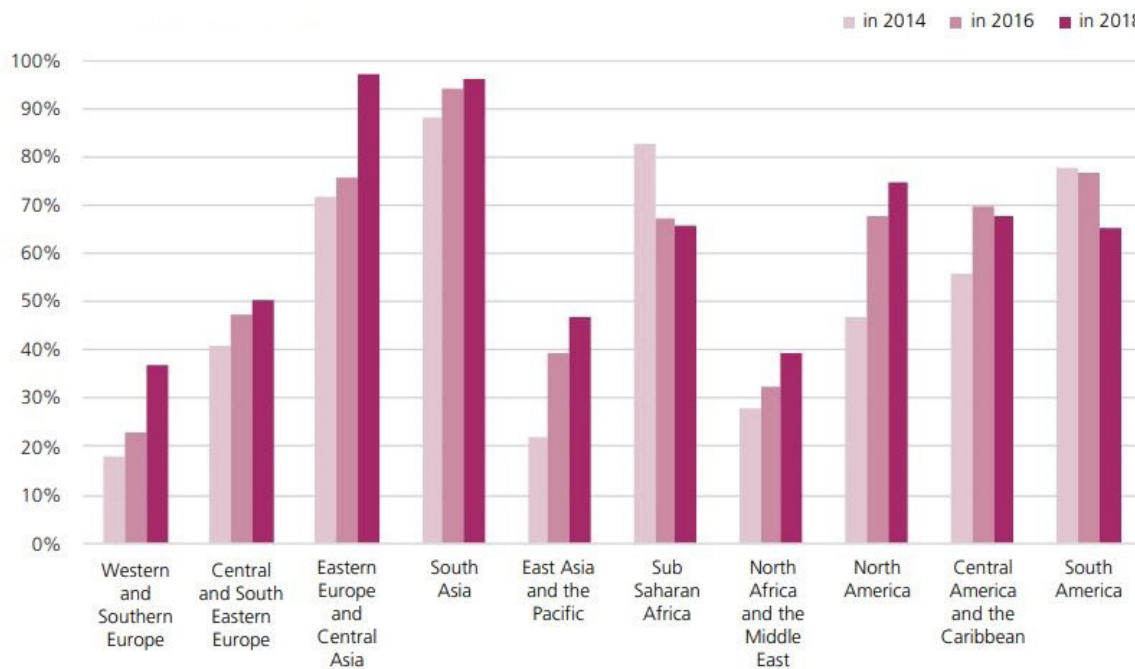
Therefore, it is important for governments to screen all smuggled migrants as potential victims of trafficking in persons. These screenings should continue after the cessation of the pandemic as the world continues to recover from its economic aftershocks.

Trafficking Flow Impact #2. Domestic trafficking increasing in response to tighter border controls.

While many migrants may seek the assistance of a smuggler to leave their countries of origin, trafficking is likely to increase within the confines of national borders.

As discussed above, domestic trafficking is the most common type of trafficking in most regions across the world. Since 2010, there has been a significant and steady increase in

Figure 9. Shares of Victims Detected Within Their Country's Borders, by Subregion (2014, 2016, 2018)



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) elaboration of national data.

the share of victims detected within their own country's borders.⁶⁰ The share of identified domestic victims more than doubled between 2014 and 2018 (*see*, Figure 9). Pre-pandemic, the high volume of domestic victims was the result of multiple factors: improved controls at borders, interceptions prior to reaching the border, and increased detections due to better awareness of law enforcement and/or prosecutions lodged under trafficking in persons statutes previously recorded otherwise.⁶¹

With the onslaught of the pandemic, it is likely that, at least while restrictions of all levels are in place, domestic trafficking will only continue to increase. And, in converse to pre-pandemic domestic trafficking, this is largely in part due to strict border controls in most countries in the world. Moreover, law enforcement in many places has diverted its attention to enforcing pandemic related quarantines and

curfews, shifting resources away from identification of potential domestic trafficking operations.⁶² Thus, many domestic traffickers, some involved with dangerous criminal organizations, are likely able to act more outside the eye of justice than previously.

Policy Response #2. Shift law enforcement focus toward domestic rather than cross-border trafficking.

Because much victim identification is tied in with immigration and labor enforcement, many countries tend to focus on cross-border trafficking. Moreover, in some countries, such as in the United States, widespread public opinion remains that, trafficking victims, mostly young women, primarily come from other (poor) countries and that its own nationals cannot and are not trafficked.⁶³

Meanwhile, many domestic victims go unidentified. Some are classified as victims of domestic violence, which many are. However, this may limit them from receiving adequate protection and services that take into account the specificity and intricacies of trafficking. Some cases that initially appear to be domestic violence may mask sex or labor trafficking.⁶⁴ While interrelated, domestic violence and trafficking are distinct, with different legal protections and services available for each.

While several countries do have comprehensive protection and services for victims of domestic violence, this is often not the case. Yet, some countries do ensure protection and services for victims of trafficking that do not have the same available by law for domestic violence victims, or vice versa. Furthermore, in countries where domestic violence is more socially acceptable, it may be more difficult for victims to seek help. For example, Bahrain funds and provides a robust services and protection plan for victims of trafficking.⁶⁵ Yet, in stark contrast, marital rape is not criminalized, and a rapist may be exonerated if they marry their victim.⁶⁶ As such, a victim considered only as a victim of domestic violence may not be able to access the protection and services he or she would if identified as a victim of trafficking.

Therefore, governments should shift their focus inward to the trafficking occurring within their borders with a response that is both reactive and proactive. Reactively, first, law enforcement should receive training on the distinct differences between domestic violence and domestic trafficking, including on victim identification strategies. Along these same lines, law enforcement should work to identify common domestic trafficking schemes and corridors. One example of identifying these patterns can be found in the “county lines” trafficking cases in the United Kingdom. In these cases, “county lines” is a term law enforcement uses to refer to the form of trafficking whereby

illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs.⁶⁷ In response, law enforcement collectively has worked to identify and take effective action in specific areas with the most significant problems.⁶⁸ As the pandemic has shifted and continues to shift patterns and flows of trafficking, it is crucial that governments establish a comprehensive plan to react and identify shifting domestic flows.

Second, governments should ensure that law enforcement work to avoid diverting as many resources as possible away from identifying and investigating domestic trafficking operations. Rather, governments should assist their law enforcement bodies by conducting studies on the impact of the pandemic on the modus operandi of all offenders, but particularly those of organized crime groups, engaging in domestic trafficking.⁶⁹ Organized criminal groups are particularly adaptive to their environments, and understanding the pandemic period operations of trafficking will assist law enforcement to assist victims and bring offenders to justice more efficiently.

Proactively, governments must close the gap in services and protection between victims of trafficking and domestic violence. In countries where services and protection for victims of trafficking are more comprehensive than those for victims of domestic violence, and vice versa, governments must work to provide complete and encompassing services for all victims of crime. While this is a long-term goal, the pandemic has only exposed the gaps and the ability of domestic victims of trafficking to be identified and receive the services and protection they desperately need, especially in a time of crisis such as this.

Thus, governments must first shift their focus inward, train appropriate law enforcement on

identification of victims, establish a plan to monitor shifting domestic flows, and conduct comprehensive studies on the impact of the pandemic on the modus operandi of offenders, particularly organized criminal groups. Second, governments must work to ensure all victims of crime are able to access and receive services and protection on an equal footing.

Trafficking Flow Impact #3. As a result of lockdowns, many trafficking flows have moved to cyberspace, allowing offenders to traffic more victims across a greater geographic area with minimal effort.

Due to social distancing measures in place, much of the Global North has been forced to resort to technology to facilitate work and study remotely. Great percentages of the population, from children in kindergarten to directors of large firms use Internet technology to keep the wheels of the world in motion. Meetings and classes are held in cyberspace, and even outside work and school, people seek entertainment and streaming services via the Internet. Virtually most human activity in many countries has been moved online during the pandemic.

Unfortunately, it is not just the facilitation of school and work that has moved to cyberspace – offenders have also found that the Internet is an exceptionally fertile ground for operations that would have taken place in person only months prior. Like all trafficking, cyber trafficking flows are driven by vulnerability, which is in strong supply. As discussed in the next section, many people are vulnerable as a result of the pandemic, having lost their jobs. And, with the rising demand for entertainment, particularly illicit sexual forms of it, traffickers have access to lucrative business schemes to exploit such vulnerable people for a fraction of the labor output.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has

established that demand has been channeled through social media, dark web, and messaging platforms that provide easy access to potential victims but hide the identity of the offenders.⁷⁰ Moreover, offenders are able to use legitimate websites that do not raise the suspicion of law enforcement to both recruit and exploit victims. According to UNODC,

Everyday digital platforms are used by traffickers to advertise deceptive job offers and to market exploitative services to potential paying customers. Victims are recruited through social media, with traffickers taking advantage of publicly available personal information and the anonymity of online spaces to contact victims. Patterns of exploitation have been transformed by digital platforms, as webcams and livestreams have created new forms of exploitation and reduced the need for transportation and transfer of victims. With the help of the internet, traffickers have learnt to adapt their strategies to effectively target specific victims, by actively “hunting” those who they deem as vulnerable to falling victim to trafficking, or passively “fishing” for potential victims by posting advertisements and waiting for potential victims to respond.⁷¹

This use of everyday websites was an emerging pattern even prior to the pandemic. For example, in 2017 in the United States, one study of trafficking cases involving sexual exploitation indicated that the primary business model in 84.3 per cent of the cases involved “Internet-based commercial sex” with 78.6 per cent involving advertisements posted on Backpage.com and Craigslist and 7.6 per cent using Facebook.⁷² In Austria in the same year, the Internet was used as the most common criminal infrastructure by perpetrators in 74 per cent of human trafficking cases.⁷³

Technology allows traffickers to easily and anonymously establish significant cyber flows of victims. Cyber trafficking flows are often characterized by victims held and coerced into video performances, allowing the perpetrators to connect with potential clients living abroad.⁷⁴ This type of trafficking has been identified in several countries and typically relies on the availability of video equipment and digital recording devices to broadcast victims' exploitation.⁷⁵ Before the emergence of today's Internet technology, a trafficker would have to put in great planning and effort to transport a victim from one location to another to "sell" their services to a limited number of "customers," risking the detection of law enforcement. Now traffickers may easily exploit multiple victims at home at the click of a button behind a screen and "sell" their services to multiple locations around the world to potentially thousands of "customers." Unfortunately, the pandemic has increased people's use of technology, their vulnerability, and therefore their likelihood of being trafficked in this manner.

While all groups may be affected, children in particular are at risk for falling victim to sexual exploitation as a result of the shifting trafficking flows into cyberspace due to several factors. First, prior to the pandemic, children spent most of their time physically at school, supervised with direct access to social services and interventions. In the pandemic, many children are at home in virtual school with parents who are also working remotely and are unable to directly supervise them. This lack of oversight creates an unprecedented opportunity for an increase in grooming and online enticement, exacerbated by children's natural vulnerability.⁷⁶ Second, individuals who have lost their jobs and the incomes needed to sustain their families may look for alternative, illegal means of generating revenue, including livestreaming sexual abuse of their children for money.⁷⁷

Policy Response #3. Governments should establish specialized task forces that include law enforcement and technology companies that set up adaptive controls.

While many governments do have task forces designed to combat trafficking in persons, the increased cyber flows and the unique qualities of the pandemic require a distinct approach.

As such, governments should seek to establish specialized task forces that include all actors involved with a particular focus on strengthening cooperation between law enforcement and technology companies. Through this cooperation, taking into account the particular ways that the pandemic has facilitated cyber trafficking, governments and technology sites should set up comprehensive and cooperative controls to reduce the risk of exposing vulnerable people to trafficking and exploitation. Second, online platforms should use their data, artificial intelligence, and analytics to identify any pattern that could lead to trafficking and identification of the involved parties taking part in illegal operations and share this information with governments to better tailor law enforcement response.⁷⁸ Finally, technology companies should work with governments to put appropriate governance structures and procedures in place that allow law enforcement to be effective in their response and provide the relevant level of information to the concerned authorities.⁷⁹

Overall Trafficking Flow Picture

In short, the stricter border controls in many parts of the world paired with increasing economic deprivation has likely caused three trafficking flows to emerge. First, migrants unable to legally migrate, but now more desperate to do so, seek smuggling services, which are scarce and use more dangerous routes, heightening the already high risk of migrants becoming victims of trafficking along their journeys. Second, following the

trend of the last ten years, domestic trafficking has likely significantly increased due to restricted travel and diverted attention of law enforcement to ensuing pandemic related measures. Third, cyber trafficking flows have likely increased reflective of the shift of many aspects of human life to online venues, and when paired with vulnerabilities of people of all ages, but particularly children, the Internet has exploded in terms of its worth as a fertile recruitment and exploitation ground to offenders. While there is no succinct data as of the publication of this paper, given the trends in the past along with adjacent data, these flows are likely significant.

In response, governments should develop better strategies that specifically respond to the new flows including the following: improve and expand screening and identification measures, including screening of all smuggled migrants as potential victims of trafficking in persons; shift law enforcement focus toward domestic trafficking rather than cross-border by establishing training on the differences between domestic violence and trafficking, identifying and monitoring new domestic flows, conducting studies on the impact of the pandemic on the modus operandi of offenders, and ensure that all victims of crime have equal protection and services; and, finally, establish task forces that consist of law enforcement and technology companies to place specific controls on site usage to reduce trafficking while setting up specific reporting mechanisms.

Impact on Victims of Trafficking

The pandemic has exacerbated already existing vulnerabilities and created risks for more people to fall victim to trafficking as well as heightened the risks for those already in trafficking situations. Vulnerability provides the fuel for the engine of trafficking to start, and in some cases, continue to run for a prolonged period of time. Even years prior to the pandemic, UNODC pointed out that,

Human traffickers prey on people who are poor, isolated and weak. Issues such as disempowerment, social exclusion and economic vulnerability are the result of policies and practices that marginalize entire groups of people and make them particularly vulnerable to being trafficked. Natural disasters, conflict and political turmoil weaken already tenuous social protection measures. Individuals are vulnerable to being trafficked not only because of conditions in their countries of origin, however. The allure of opportunity, the relentless demand for inexpensive goods and services and the expectation of reliable income drive people into potentially dangerous situations where they are at risk of being exploited.⁸⁰

During the pandemic, economic vulnerability is particularly striking, though not the only factor creating and exacerbating risk of people both becoming victims or worsening their trafficking situation. Vulnerability of many types has long been a driver of trafficking. In a study of cases from around the world, UNODC found that in 51 percent of cases, economic vulnerability was the preexisting factor that traffickers took advantage of.⁸¹ Other significant preexisting factors that traffickers took advantage of were being a child with a dysfunctional family (20 percent), being an intimate partner of a trafficker (13 percent), and immigration status (10 percent).⁸² During the pandemic, many of these vulnerabilities have only been exacerbated.

In this section, the pandemic's impacts on potential and current victims of trafficking are discussed along with how governments can best respond to their needs. While clearly some victim profiles will be more targeted and impacted than others, the pandemic has affected all potential and current victims of trafficking, and thus, while there is an analysis on certain

profiles and forms of exploitation, a thorough discussion of specifically how each profile has been affected is outside the scope of this paper. While the impacts on those vulnerable to trafficking and current victims of trafficking are numerous, it is likely that three particularly significant trends have developed due to the pandemic.

Victim Impact #1. Increasing numbers of economically vulnerable people are seeking employment outside government labor controls, placing themselves at risk.

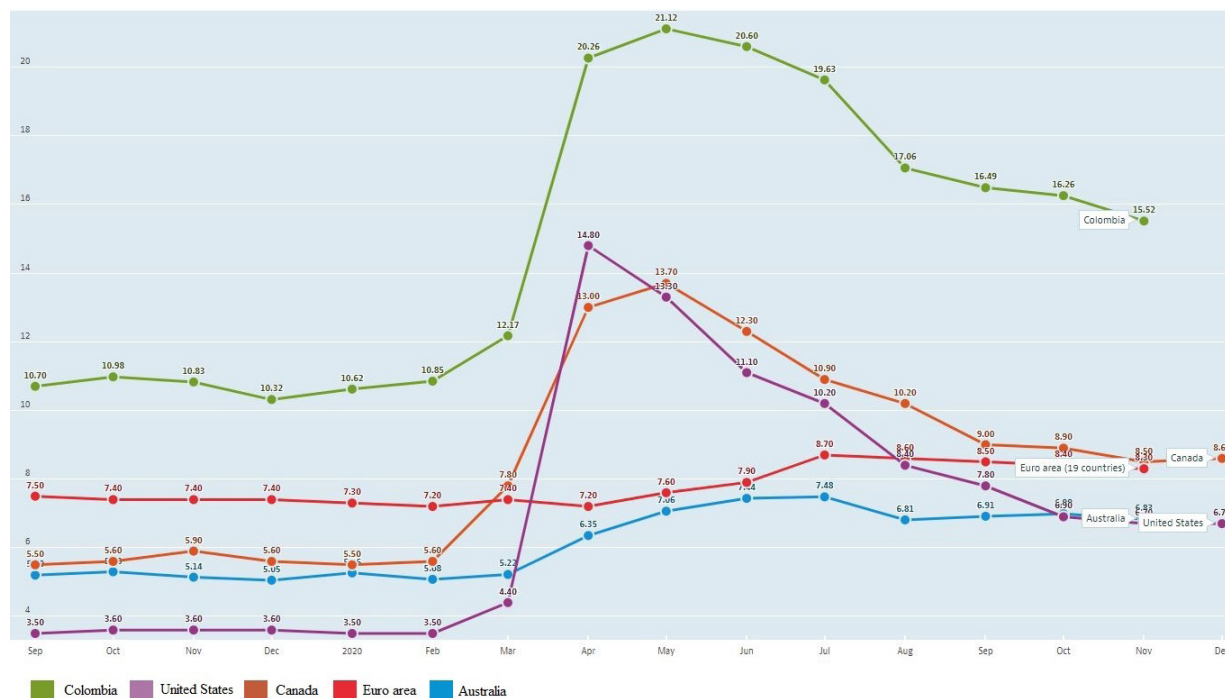
The effects of the global curbing of migration flows on the world economy are clear. Spiking unemployment and lost wage rates are commonplace, while global remittance rates have plummeted. Due to the world's economic activity slowing, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has predicted that if its projections are correct, the recession due to the pandemic

is, and will continue to be, the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression (1929-1939).⁸³

First, spiking unemployment rates are widespread. For example, in the United States in February 2020, just prior to many entering lockdown, the national unemployment rate as measured by the total percentage of the labor force unemployed stood at 3.5 percent (see, Figure 10).⁸⁴ By April 2020, this percentage had jumped to 14.8 percent.⁸⁵ Across an aggregate of the 19 countries using the Euro as a currency, the unemployment rate rose from 7.2 percent in April 2020 to 8.7 percent in July 2020.⁸⁶

Second, even if employment is not lost, income losses have been common during the pandemic. According to the ILO, income globally declined by 10.7 percent during the first three quarters of 2020 in comparison to the same

Figure 10. Unemployment Rates in Australia, Canada, Columbia, the Euro area, and the United States, by Total Percentage of the Labor Force (September 2019 -December 2020)



Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

period in 2019.⁸⁷ The estimated income losses amounted to \$3.5 trillion, or 5.5 percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁸⁸

Third, fewer families can rely on remittances sent home. As discussed above, remittance rates in 2020 reduced sharply, and are projected to shrink an additional 14 percent in 2021.⁸⁹ In countries such as Tonga, Haiti, Lebanon, and South Sudan, remittances make up over 30 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁹⁰ Families dependent on remittances to sustain themselves have seen a reduction or cessation of this income in all regions. As a result of loss of remittances, people must seek other or additional sources of income.

As such, many economically vulnerable people are seeking employment, often outside of government regulation. Moreover, vulnerable individuals are more likely to accept riskier jobs in order to survive. Particularly vulnerable are undocumented migrants along with already identified and rescued victims of trafficking, vulnerable to being re-exploited. As discussed above, economic vulnerability tends to be the prevailing preexisting factor that traffickers prey upon.

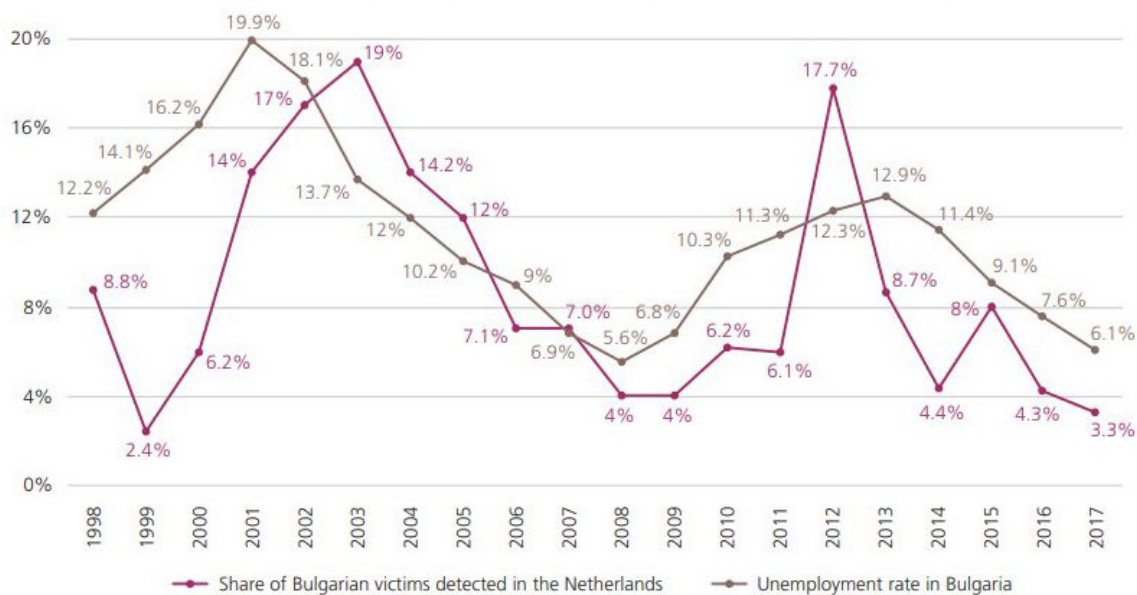
The pandemic has led to a global recession due to limited economic activity. Therefore, looking at trafficking in the context of a past recession can aid in understanding how economic vulnerability, particularly unemployment and lost wages, impacts victims.

Between 2007 and 2010, the world experienced a recession that has come to be known as the Global Financial Crisis (hereinafter “Financial Crisis”) that resulted in prolonged and high unemployment rates in many countries.⁹¹ By the end of 2009, 205 million people worldwide were unemployed, 27 million more than in 2007.⁹² The Financial Crisis quickly turned into a social crisis, with increasing unemployment rates both in richer and poorer countries.⁹³ Not all countries, however, were

affected in the same way. The uneven rate of recovery seems to have affected trafficking in persons, with victims from more slow recovering countries particularly affected by prolonged high unemployment rates increasingly detected in certain destination countries with faster recovery rates.⁹⁴ To illustrate, UNODC compiled a comparison of unemployment rates in Bulgaria in the Financial Crisis paired with the detection rate of Bulgarian victims in the Netherlands with corresponding years (see, Figure 11).⁹⁵ This comparison shows that increased unemployment rates have a strong correlation to increased incidences of trafficking. More examples solidify this phenomenon with similar trends viewed for victims from Hungary and Czechia, two countries with slower economic recovery, detected in the Netherlands at the same time.⁹⁶

Moreover, low wage and informal sector workers are disproportionately impacted and at even greater risk to becoming victims of trafficking. Compounding the issue, many workers in these sectors are undocumented, increasing their risk of being exposed to exploitation. Dramatic increases in unemployment and reductions in income, especially for low wage and informal sector workers, mean that significant numbers of people who were already vulnerable find themselves in even more precarious circumstances.⁹⁷ From the garment industry, agriculture, and farming, to manufacturing and domestic work, millions of people who were living on subsistence conditions have lost their wages.⁹⁸ Those who continue to work in these sectors, where trafficking is frequently detected, may also face more exploitation because of the need to lower production costs due to economic difficulties, as well as due to less controls by the authorities.⁹⁹ Beyond seeking risky and unregulated employment, those who have lost jobs or wages are at risk of becoming victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and debt bondage, with reports

Figure 11. Relationship Between Unemployment Rates in Bulgaria and Bulgarians as a Share of Potential Victims of Trafficking Detected in the Netherlands (1998-2017)*



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) elaboration based on International Labor Organization (ILO) Estimates (unemployment rates), Dutch National Rapporteur (potential trafficking victims detected).

*Linear Regression, Bulgarian victims of trafficking as dependent share of total victims detected in the Netherlands, and independent variable Bulgarian unemployment rate recorded one year before victim detection. Results: R-sq. 716, Sig : .000, standard coeff. For independent variable 0.846, sig. 0.000.

of landlords exchanging reduced rent for sex and loan sharks promising low interest loans in debt bondage schemes.^{100,101}

Policy Response #4. Governments should strengthen and expand labor inspections while at the same time granting immediate immigration and labor documentation to undocumented migrants and those identified and rescued as victims of trafficking within their countries, at a minimum, for a temporary period.

Identification of trafficking victims is difficult, even under normal circumstances. Yet, services considered non-essential, including on-site police and labor inspections, have been decreased worldwide.¹⁰² Governments are diverting resources to address the pandemic

and the police have new tasks for the enforcement of lockdowns and social distancing, affecting their normal operational capacity.¹⁰³ Under these conditions, there is a looming danger that investigating trafficking in persons will become low priority. Proactive inspections of suspected sites and cases are reduced, leading to a climate of practical impunity where offenders can operate with low risk of detection and conviction.¹⁰⁴ As such, at a minimum, governments should provide appropriate protective measures and funding to labor inspectorates so that they may continue, if not strengthen, their efforts to pre-pandemic levels.

Furthermore, a lack of documentation leads migrants to seek risky employment and victims of trafficking already identified and rescued to

be exploited again. Many migrants and already identified victims are often (re)exploited in illegal, informal, or unregulated sectors (e.g., petty crime, sex industry, domestic settings, drug cultivation and trafficking, agriculture, and construction).¹⁰⁵ Due to their undocumented status, many are unwilling, frightened, and/or unable to report their victimization, fearful of being detained and/or deported.¹⁰⁶

First, governments should immediately provide, at least for a temporary period of time, documentation to undocumented migrants and identified and rescued victims of trafficking. Doing so would allow potential victims of trafficking and those revictimized to be less fearful of reporting exploitation to law enforcement and lead to governments being able to target the most at-risk sectors of the economy. Second, governments should immediately provide undocumented migrants and identified and rescued victims of trafficking employment documentation that allows them to seek formal employment, thus aiding in keeping them out of particularly risky, unregulated sectors. In addition, this employment documentation must be untied to an employer, which only increases the risk of a person's ability to leave a potentially exploitative situation.¹⁰⁷ It is critical that this documentation is given immediately. In the United States, for example, most trafficking victims must wait up to two years on average to receive immigration status, at which point they are granted work authorization.¹⁰⁸ While there are limited government funding sources available to identified and rescued victims, the lack of employment status puts them at risk of revictimization. Thus, it is crucial that governments address immigration and employment documentation issues immediately for both undocumented migrants and identified and rescued victims of trafficking.

While this does not address the unemployment directly, and people will of course still seek risky employment when desperate, it does

allow both would-be and current victims of trafficking to seek employment that is more regulated. Moreover, by gaining even temporary documentation, migrants are able to seek services that are available to protect them from becoming new victims of trafficking. Having documentation often allows migrants to seek services without fear being deported or detained by government authorities. Furthermore, in many countries, migrants who are potentially victims of trafficking require immigration status in order to be eligible for services.

Victim Impact #2. Levels of violence appear to be on the rise toward current victims of trafficking with decreased interventions by law enforcement.

As discussed above, many households are confined to their homes and in close quarters. Similar to patterns of domestic violence, economic stress, coupled with physical confinement in the home, is likely to lead to increased abuse and violence for those trapped in trafficking situations.¹⁰⁹

In particular, in situations where the trafficking occurs – and has always occurred – within the home, the exploitation may be exacerbated. Even pre-pandemic, victims of trafficking for the purpose of domestic servitude faced unique difficulties relating to their exploitation such as the private nature of the work and being in close contact with their offender(s). In terms of the nature of the trafficking itself, one pattern in particular appears to characterize trafficking for the purpose of domestic servitude: extremely high levels of violence, abuse and exploitation at the hands of persons not typically considered as “professional” criminals but rather as members of the household where the victim is employed and exploited.¹¹⁰ The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons reports that victims of domestic servitude may experience food deprivation, beatings with electrical wires, or

scalding with hot water along with sexual and psychological abuse.¹¹¹

Moreover, the situation of cohabitation of the domestic worker with the employer contributes to incidences of violence and abuse. Such a situation exacerbates the level of dependency and may result in an increased level of intimacy among the people living under the same roof.¹¹² Cohabitation also can result in the isolation of domestic workers, often to the extreme of complete segregation.¹¹³

As a result of many people working and spending more time at home, the domestic servant-victim is in closer daily contact with their employer-offender, thus likely heightening the risk for even more violent and abusive exploitation. And, due to the location of the trafficking being in the home paired with an environment where priorities and actions are geared towards limiting the spread of the virus, it is easier for such offenders to hide, making victims increasingly invisible.¹¹⁴

Victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation also are at risk of facing rising levels of violence towards them. Restricted in their ability to “earn,” victims trapped with intimate partners or pimps are particularly vulnerable.¹¹⁵ Moreover, the potential loss of financial gains can result in worse treatment for their victims.¹¹⁶ And, as discussed above, further exacerbating the abuse these victims face, their offenders may move their trafficking operations to cyberspace, thus compounding their exploitation.

Policy Response #5. Governments should provide law enforcement proper protection and prioritize trafficking investigations.

Much like with labor inspections, while trafficking and exploitation is on the rise, both in public employment and in private homes, anti-trafficking law enforcement authorities appear to have decreased investigations and rescues in this area. This could be due to a lack

of proper pandemic-appropriate protection and shift in priorities.

In many countries, law enforcement officials have expressed that they lack basic protective gear and fear infection when dealing with vulnerable people living in precarious conditions, thus reducing their ability and willingness to enter potential trafficking situations.¹¹⁷ In the United States, for example, many police departments responded to the pandemic in various ways, such as reassigning personnel to high-traffic areas, suspending training, roll calls, and community outreach initiatives, only issuing citations for low-level crimes, implementing safety precautions for officers, and limiting access to department facilities.¹¹⁸ However, law enforcement must be given the best available protection in order to continue to respond to reports of trafficking safely, and as aggressively, as before the pandemic.

Second, the attention of governments, and thus that of law enforcement, has been shifted greatly to public health purposes in the interiors of most countries. As discussed above, law enforcement has been responsible for enforcing pandemic-related restrictions, such as quarantines and curfews in many places. Worldwide lockdowns are likely to have triggered significant changes in patrol allocations, as police and supplementary forces are called upon to ensure that residents do not violate stay-at-home ordinances.¹¹⁹ In particular, police and other law enforcement forces are likely being redeployed to cities from rural areas, further slimming policing there.¹²⁰ The reallocation and shift of focus of law enforcement combined with a lack of proper protective equipment weakens the government’s ability to identify and investigate trafficking situations and rescue victims. As such, governments should reallocate at least a minimal number of law enforcement to prioritize trafficking investigations during the pandemic and immediately afterward.

Victim Impact #3. Vulnerable people and current victims of trafficking have diminished access to services, protection, and justice at a time where demand for these is rising.

As discussed above, the greatest of all the pandemic's impacts have placed vulnerable people at risk of trafficking, already identified and rescued victims of revictimization, and current victims at risk of their exploitation being exacerbated. Yet, in spite of the rising numbers of potential and actual victims, social support services have been limited, shelters closed, and medical facilities restricted. Government funding that was present in pre-pandemic times has often been reduced and diverted elsewhere.¹²¹ In addition, many countries considered reducing their aid to social and health-related development projects in the world's most vulnerable countries.¹²² Further compounding victims' exploitation is the fact that without services, victims are also more exposed to contracting the virus, less equipped to prevent it, and have less access to healthcare to ensure their recovery.¹²³

In a recent study of victims in the United States, the Polaris Project, a nongovernmental organization, found that in comparison to 2019, in 2020, the number of crisis trafficking situations increased by more than 40 percent.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, in April 2020, 50 percent of social services providers were either considering or already implementing measures that would limit receiving referrals of trafficking victims, and another four percent had already stopped accepting any new referrals.¹²⁵ In addition, as discussed above, funding and allocations of law enforcement have been diverted elsewhere, limiting the access that victims have to both rescue and protection, increasing the risk for revictimization.

Justice systems are also limiting services usually available to victims of trafficking, with adjudication of cases, including those on compensation, many times halted and jus-

tice delayed for victims.¹²⁶ Further difficulties include the following: filing deadlines with courts may be missed or evidence collection may not be possible, impacting judicial and investigative processes; the ability to comply with statutory limitation periods may also be affected and potentially create additional challenges for legal assistance providers; and, access to information or translation and interpretation services for victims of trafficking is becoming a challenge, as services are reduced to a minimum.¹²⁷

In concert, victims, whether they be potential, identified and rescued, or current, have greatly diminished access to services, protection, and justice, thus placing them at risk at a particularly difficult time in history.

Policy Response #6. Governments should mandate at least pre-pandemic level funding to social services providers and ensure that justice processes for victims are designated as essential.

While social services providers have had greater demand from victims, they have had to decrease their operations due to the pandemic's safety concerns and associated costs (protective equipment, cleaning fees, etc.) along with funding cuts. However, governments should restore funding to social services providers to, at a minimum, pre-pandemic levels.

The most heavily affected area of social services support has been in housing, difficult even prior to the pandemic to obtain for victims of trafficking. If governments must prioritize certain types of funding, housing support in the forms of rent and mortgage payments, utility payments, and provision of temporary housing will help to reduce immediate vulnerability.¹²⁸ Overall, governments should prioritize additional resources to fill the immediate needs of victims during and immediately after the pandemic, including, but

not limited to, emergency shelter, food, transportation, and medical and behavioral health treatment and medication.

Furthermore, governments should prioritize funding to allow social services providers to provide socially distant services, such as online counselling, via the Internet and digital platforms. Social services providers in many countries have demonstrated the effectiveness of funding such services. In Colombia, for instance, online counselling funded by the United Nations has shown success in providing for victims.¹²⁹ In addition, countries that do not have trafficking hotlines should allocate funding to allow social services providers to establish and operate one.

Finally, governments should ensure that justice processes for victims of trafficking are designated as essential, including provision of translation services. Moreover, forgiveness policies should be put in place for missed deadlines due to the pandemic. Furthermore, where feasible, technology should be utilized to facilitate access to judicial processes and enable the collection and provision of evidence, the submission of documents and the filing or adjudicating of motions or petitions to courts.¹³⁰

Overall Victim Impact Picture

As the pandemic has continued to squeeze the global population in multiple restrictive ways, three main trends have likely emerged that impact trafficking victims in particular. First, increasing numbers of economically vulnerable people are seeking employment outside government labor controls, placing themselves at risk of trafficking, particularly undocumented migrants and already identified and rescued victims of trafficking lacking immigration and/or labor documentation. Second, for victims currently still in their trafficking situations, it is likely that many are experiencing rising levels of violence at the hands of their offender(s) with decreased interventions due to a lack of

pandemic-related protection equipment for and the diversion of the attention of law enforcement elsewhere. Third, vulnerable people, identified and rescued victims, and current victims of trafficking have diminished access to services, protection, and justice at a time where demand for these is rising. While each is significant in its own right, the three act together to greatly compound the difficulties and exploitation that vulnerable people, identified and rescued victims, and current victims face of being trafficked, revictimized, or their exploitation severely exacerbated.

In response, governments should, at a minimum, do the following: strengthen and expand labor inspections while at the same time granting immediate immigration and employment documentation to undocumented migrants and those identified and rescued as victims of trafficking, at least temporarily; provide law enforcement proper pandemic-related protection and prioritize trafficking investigations otherwise delayed or uninvestigated due to the reallocation of law enforcement; and, finally, mandate at least pre-pandemic level funding to social services providers and ensure that justice processes for victims are designated as essential to safeguard victims' access to support, protection, and justice.

Conclusion

The pandemic has placed the vulnerable in even more untenable situations that expose them to a greater risk of trafficking. At the same time, government actions around the world, such as tight border controls and diverting funding meant to assist victims of trafficking in order to better control the spread of COVID-19, have inadvertently assisted offenders to exploit their victims. The policy responses recommended above serve to assist vulnerable people, already identified and rescued victims, and victims currently in their trafficking situations in an emergent and immediate way. However, there is a need

for long-term improvements in cooperation between countries as well as structural improvements in each country alone, as unfortunately, and sometimes tragically, revealed in a time of crisis.

In terms of long-term policy responses, countries must share data with one another in a systematic manner. The need for a uniform, cooperative systematic data collection and analysis on the impact of the pandemic on trafficking in persons is critical, as it does not affect all regions similarly: experience from one country could be vital to others.¹³¹ And, if scientists are correct, the current pandemic will not be the last, making the need for the sharing of information even more important.¹³²

Within countries themselves, governments must address the structural issues that both drive trafficking, exacerbate it, and prevent victims from accessing services, protection, and justice. First, the root causes that push the most vulnerable – migrants, the disabled, the elderly, women, and girls – into trafficking situations and exploitation must be addressed at

city, state/province, and national levels. These root causes are numerous, but mainly originate from socio-economic injustice and inequality, an issue in much, if not all, of the world. Second, communities, social services providers, nongovernmental organizations, and governments must all collaborate to ensure that gaps in services, protection, and justice are not present in the future for victims of trafficking. Moreover, governments must prioritize funding and support for vulnerable people, identified and rescued victims of trafficking, and current victims of trafficking and not view it as expendable and divertible elsewhere in public emergencies. Trafficking in and of itself is a public emergency, and the support of victims must be deemed essential.

These are lofty goals that will take many dedicated years to address, but to best protect the most vulnerable from becoming far too distant socially, governments must seek to fix the foundations that serve only to inflict damage on the world's most vulnerable.

Annex 1: Figure Sources, Explanations, and Notes

Figure Number	Title	Page	Source	Explanations and Notes
1	Shares of Victims of Trafficking Who Were Repatriated to Their Country of Origin, by Area of Repatriation (2017-2018)	3	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), <i>Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020</i> (2021), p. 60. Published in Vienna, Austria.	Repatriation data should be considered a partial picture of overall trafficking flows when paired with citizenship of victim and country of detection as many governments hold repatriation agreements with certain other countries, which may affect data.
2	Trends in Age and Sex Profiles of Detected Victims of Trafficking (Selected Years)	4	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), <i>Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020</i> (2021), p. 32. Published in Vienna, Austria.	
3	Shares of Detected Victims of Trafficking, by Form of Exploitation and Subregion of Detection (2018, or most recent)	5	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), <i>Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020</i> (2021), p. 35. Published in Vienna, Austria.	The United Nations collects data over a two-year period before releasing a biennial report. Some countries submit data for 2019 and/or 2020 in addition to 2016-2018.
4	Average Number of Victims per One Person Convicted of Trafficking in Persons (2003-2018)	6	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), <i>Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020</i> (2021), p. 63. Published in Vienna, Austria.	Understanding United Nations data: High numbers can generally be understood as an indication of multiple incidents of trafficking, or as an indication of an efficient criminal justice system. However, recording no or a few convictions per year in countries whose citizens are trafficked and detected by authorities in other countries, is a red flag.
5	Travel Restrictions, Percentage of CTA to CTA Travel Restrictions Imposed by Type (January 2020)	7	International Organization for Migration (IOM), <i>Human Mobility Impacts</i> (January 2020), www.migration.iom.int/ . Monitored from Le Grand-Saconnex, Switzerland.	The color is code of restrictions is as follows: Red: Total restriction - country/territory/area has imposed a total entry restriction for nationals and/or passengers arriving from restricted country/territory/area, irrespective of the period of restriction. Yellow: Partial restriction - country/territory/area has imposed some restrictions to nationals and/or passenger arriving from restricted country/territory/area. These partial restrictions could also be related to visa changes, medical measures, among others.
6	Residence Permits Issued in OECD Member States (2019 vs. 2020)	7	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), <i>OECD International Migration Outlook 2020</i> (October 2020), www.oecd.org/migration/covid-19-crisis-puts-migration-and-progress-on-integration-at-risk.htm . Published in Paris, France.	Index for January 2019 = 100.

7	Number of Illegal Border Crossings Detected by Frontex into Europe, by Route (2019 vs. 2020)	8	Frontex, <i>Irregular migration into EU last year lowest since 2013 due to COVID-19</i> (January 2021), www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/irregular-migration-into-eu-last-year-lowest-since-2013-due-to-covid-19-j34zp2 . Published in Warsaw, Poland.	The preliminary data presented in this statement refer to the number of detections of irregular border crossing at the external borders of the EU. The same person may attempt to cross the border several times in different locations at the external border.
8	Actors Most Likely to Perpetrate Protection Incidents During the Migration Journey, by Migrant Estimation, by Region (2020)	10	Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), <i>Impact of COVID-19 on migrant smuggling</i> , COVID-19 Global Thematic Update #1 (September 2020), p. 6, www.mixedmigration.org/resource/covid-19-global-thematic-update-1/ . Published in Geneva, Switzerland.	1,419 respondents were interviewed between 2 and 31 July 2020, with 159 interviews conducted in Asia, 357 in Latin America, 341 in North Africa, and 562 in West Africa. All figures are rounded to the nearest whole number. 44 interviews were discarded from analysis due to questionnaire incompleteness or data quality issues. Sample sizes at country level are still small for some countries, and findings regarding these should therefore be considered with caution.
9	Shares of Victims Detected Within Their Country's Borders, by Subregion (2014, 2016, 2018)	12	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), <i>Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020</i> (2021), p. 55. Published in Vienna, Austria.	
10	Unemployment Rates in Australia, Canada, Columbia, the Euro area, and the United States, by Total Percentage of the Labor Force (September 2019 -December 2020)	17	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), <i>Unemployment Rate Data</i> (January 2021), www.data.oecd.org/unemp/unemployment-rate.htm Monitored from Paris, France.	The unemployed are people of working age who are without work, are available for work, and have taken specific steps to find work. The uniform application of this definition results in estimates of unemployment rates that are more internationally comparable than estimates based on national definitions of unemployment. This indicator is measured in numbers of unemployed people as a percentage of the labor force and it is seasonally adjusted. The labor force is defined as the total number of unemployed people plus those in employment. Data are based on labor force surveys (LFS). For EU countries where monthly LFS information is not available, the monthly unemployed figures are estimated by Eurostat.
11	Relationship Between Unemployment Rates in Bulgaria and Bulgarians as a Share of Potential Victims of Trafficking Detected in the Netherlands (1998-2017)	19	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), <i>Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020</i> (2021), p. 74. Published in Vienna, Austria.	

Endnotes

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