

What Is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is a global crime that trades in people and exploits them for profit. People of all genders, ages and backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world. Traffickers use violence, fraudulent employment agencies, and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick, coerce and deceive their victims. The organized networks or individuals behind this lucrative crime take advantage of people who are vulnerable, desperate or simply seeking a better life.

The definition of trafficking consists of three core elements:

- The act of trafficking, which means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons.
- The means of trafficking which includes threat of or use of force, deception, coercion, abuse of power or position of vulnerability.
- The purpose of trafficking which is always exploitation.

How Is Human Trafficking Different From Migrant Smuggling?

These are two distinct but interconnected crimes. Both are illegal activities that treat people as commodities. While trafficking in persons is a crime that aims to exploit a person who may or may not be a migrant, smuggling of migrants does not, by definition, involve the exploitation of the migrant. Trafficking victims can be trafficked within their home country or internationally, whereas migrant smuggling always crosses national borders. Some trafficked people might start their journey by being smuggled into a country illegally, not knowing the intention of the trafficker to exploit them, or find themselves deceived, coerced or forced into an exploitative situation later in the process, for example being forced to work for no or very little money to pay for their transportation. Criminals may both traffic and smuggle people, employing the same routes and methods of transporting them.

Who Are The Victims Of Human Trafficking?

Victims of trafficking can be any age, any gender and from anywhere in the world. According to UNODC's 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons which is compiled using official figures from over 141 countries, female victims continue to be the primary targets. The Report shows that in 2020 42 percent of detected victims were women and 18 percent girls. For male victims, the Report shows that 23 percent of detected victims were men and 17 per cent were boys. The Report shows that the share of children among detected trafficking victims has tripled while the share of boys has increased five times over the past 15 years. Globally, one in every three victims detected is a child. Girls are mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation, while boys are used for forced labour. The share of detected male victims has risen from around 10 per cent in 2003 to 40 per cent in 2020.

Why Are People Trafficked?

Traffickers target people who are marginalized or in difficult circumstances. Undocumented migrants and people who are in desperate need of employment are vulnerable, particularly to trafficking for forced labour. Victims may be forced or tricked into an exploitative situation which constitutes trafficking after the traffickers use violence, deception or blackmail. Criminals

trafficking children target victims from extremely poor households, dysfunctional families or those who are abandoned and have no parental care.

What If A Trafficked Person Consents?

According to the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol, the consent of the victim to the exploitation is irrelevant when the threat of or use of force, deception, coercion, abuse of power or position of vulnerability is used. In the case of children, consent is irrelevant regardless of whether any means were used or not.

Who Are The Traffickers?

UNODC's 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons shows that 58 percent of people convicted of human trafficking offences in 2020 were male, although the participation of women is higher compared with other crimes. About one per cent of the total convictions involved traffickers who were under the age of 18. Eastern Europe and Central Asia continue to convict far more females than males, with 85 percent of convictions involving women in Central Asia in 2020. While many traffickers have criminal backgrounds and use trafficking as a direct source of income, there are also business owners, intimate partners and other family members involved in human trafficking. Court cases reveal instances of parents facilitating the sexual exploitation of their children or forcing them into street begging.

How Widespread Is Human Trafficking?

UNODC has been collecting international statistics on detected victims of human trafficking since 2003. These show that human trafficking occurs in every region of the world. States can be the origin, transit or destination country for victims, or even a combination of all. The collected data provides information on victims who were in contact with authorities and does not reflect the actual prevalence of the crime or the hidden number of victims. The data collected for the 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons shows that in 2020 about 50,000 human trafficking victims were detected and reported by 141 countries. 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. In 2020, 65 percent of the victims detected in Western and Southern Europe were foreign-born trafficked from a wide variety of origin countries. During the same period, victims from East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa were detected in a large number of countries in almost every region of the world. Central and South-Eastern European victims were detected in large numbers but mainly in European destinations.

What Are The Most Commonly Identified Forms Of Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking has many forms. These include exploitation in the sex, entertainment and hospitality industries, and as domestic workers or in forced marriages. Victims are forced to work in factories, on construction sites or in the agricultural sector without pay or with an inadequate salary, living in fear of violence and often in inhumane conditions. Some victims are tricked or coerced into having their organs removed. Children are forced to serve as soldiers or to commit crimes for the benefit of the criminals. The 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons shows that 38,7 per cent of detected victims in 2020 were trafficked for sexual exploitation, 38,8 per cent were exploited for forced labour, 10,2 per cent were subjected to

forced criminal activity, while 0,9 per cent were trafficked for forced marriage and smaller numbers were coerced into begging, organ removal, and other purposes. The detected forms of exploitation vary widely across different subregions. The share of detected victims trafficked for forced labour has steadily increased for more than a decade.

What Types Of Industries Are Affected By Human Trafficking?

No industry or economic sector is immune to human trafficking. There are high-risk sectors, in which victims are most frequently found, such as agriculture or horticulture, construction, the garment and textile industries, catering and restaurants, domestic work, entertainment and the sex industry.

What Is The Role Of Transnational Organised Crime Groups In Human Trafficking?

The criminals who engage in trafficking range from organized criminal groups to individuals operating on their own or in small groups on an opportunistic basis. The more organized groups are commonly involved in other serious crimes, such as trafficking in drugs, arms and other illicit commodities, as well as corruption and the bribery of officials. When organized criminal groups are involved, many more victims are trafficked, often for longer periods, across wider distances and with more violence.

Do Many Traffickers Get Caught And Convicted?

While most countries have had comprehensive trafficking in persons legislation in place for some years, the number of convictions has only recently started to grow. The increased number of convictions broadly follows the increases in the number of detected and reported victims, which shows that the criminal justice response is reflecting the detection trend. However, several areas continue to have very low numbers of convictions for trafficking, and at the same time detect fewer victims. Limited numbers of detected victims and few convictions does not necessarily mean that traffickers are not active in these countries. Victims trafficked from regions with low detection and conviction rates are found in large numbers in other regions.

What Is The Role Of Technology In Human Trafficking?

Traffickers have integrated technology into their business model at every stage of the process, from recruiting to exploiting victims. Many children are approached by traffickers on social media. UNODC has identified two types of strategies, “hunting” involving a trafficker actively pursuing a victim, typically on social media and “fishing”, when perpetrators post job advertisements and wait for potential victims to respond. Technology can be misused by traffickers to launder or transfer illicit profits. It can also have a positive use in helping to combat trafficking, such as by aiding investigations, enhancing prosecutions, raising awareness, and providing services to victims.