FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION

TWENTY YEARS OF IOM CHILD TRAFFICKING DATA TO INFORM POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS

COVID-19	novel coronavirus disease 2019
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CTDC	Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative
FXB	François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University
ICS-TIP	International Classification Standard for Administrative Data on Trafficking in Persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission
NGO	non-governmental organization
SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
VoTD	International Organization for Migration Victims of Trafficking Database
WRI	WorldRiskIndex

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

adolescent	Adolescents are considered those individuals between the age of 10 and 19. Adolescence is that phase of life that stretches between childhood and adulthood (UNICEF, n.d.).
child	"Every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (United Nations, 1989: article 1).
child exploitation	"The act of taking advantage of a child, including through: economic exploitation and any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development; exploitation for illicit drug production and trafficking; sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, specifically the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity, the exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices and the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials; and the abduction of, sale of or traffic in children, or any other forms of child exploitation" (IOM, 2019c, adapted from CRC).
child labour	"Any work performed by a child which deprives him or her of his or her childhood, potential, and dignity, and is detrimental to his or her health, education, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development" (IOM, 2019c, adapted from CRC).
exploitation	"The act of taking advantage of something or someone, in particular the act of taking unjust advantage of another for one's own benefit" (IOM, 2019c).

forced marriage	"Marriage that is entered into without the free and full consent of one or both the intending spouses" (IOM, 2019c).
human trafficker	"Any person who commits or attempts to commit the crime of trafficking in persons or any person who participates as an accomplice, organizes, or directs other persons to commit the crime of trafficking in persons" (IOM, 2019c).
trafficking in persons	"The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring 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 shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (United Nations, 2000a).
victim of trafficking in human beings	"Any natural person subject to trafficking in human beings, regardless of whether the perpetrator is identified, apprehended, prosecuted or convicted" (IOM, 2019c).
	Though the authors of the report do recognize the debates around the use of the terms "victim" as opposed to "survivors" when referring to trafficked individuals, they opt to use the language used in the Palermo Protocol, also in accordance with the language used by the IOM caseworkers and IOM in general.
young adulthood	There is no standard definition for young adulthood; rather, young people are defined in different ways in different contexts. For the purpose of this report, young people are defined as those between the ages of 18 and 23 years (adapted from Higley, 2019).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and background

The international community has shown its commitment to punishing trafficking in persons, and to addressing the harmful impacts of these crimes, by the widespread adoption of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (United Nations, 2000b), its supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol; United Nations, 2000a) and other international instruments. Despite these efforts, large numbers of people including children continue to fall victim to traffickers worldwide, due to inequitable social, economic, environmental and political factors that engender exploitative and discriminatory practices. The urgent need for the global community to continue to expand its commitment to counter human trafficking is therefore clear.

A critical component of an enhanced global anti-trafficking effort is the availability of reliable and up-to-date data to empirically ground interventions. At present, actionable data for this purpose are limited, particularly in relation to child trafficking, both because victims are hard to reach via traditional surveys, and because a range of complex ethical issues arise in conducting the research. This report, based on a detailed and careful analysis of extensive, globally sourced data, is an effort to address this data lacuna.

From Evidence to Action: Twenty Years of IOM Child Trafficking Data to Inform Policy and Programming aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of child trafficking on a global scale. It was produced through a collaboration between the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University (FXB), using the IOM Victims of Trafficking Database (VoTD). This is the largest available international database of individual victims of trafficking. While IOM counter-trafficking work continues, this report focuses on a twenty-year period of IOM efforts to assist and support victims of human trafficking worldwide, from 2002 to mid-2021. It contains primary data collected from approximately 69,000 victims of human trafficking of 156 nationalities, trafficked in 186 countries, who registered with IOM in 113 countries where IOM operates.

The report documents trends and patterns of child trafficking to understand how they are shaped by individual, societal and structural factors. The report includes an analysis of the data and recommendations that take account of relevant international instruments.

Methodology

The report starts with a literature review and general descriptive statistics on the VoTD data set used for the analysis. The VoTD provides a comprehensive and standardized source of information on trafficking, including on victims' experiences and profiles, entry into the trafficking process, sectors of exploitation and experience of abuse, among other things. For this report, the most recently available data from the VoTD were analysed, collected between 2002 and the first half of 2021. The data were tested using a mix of parametric and non-parametric tests and multivariable regression analysis to examine the predictive power of specific factors, such as gender and education, in assessing children's vulnerability to trafficking.

The wealth of data included in the VoTD over almost 20 years contributes significantly to the understanding of child trafficking modalities, dynamics and patterns across the world. However, the conclusions generated from this data set should be considered within the context of the data set's limitations: data are only collected on victims that reach IOM for protection and assistance, and therefore

the data may not include all victims in a country or region. The database functions primarily to facilitate support to victims, rather than for data purposes, and the completeness of the data may vary, depending on the context. The VoTD should not, therefore, be considered indicative of the prevalence of human trafficking in a country or region.

Understanding trends, patterns and dynamics

Among the 69,514 victims assisted by IOM between 2002 and the first half of 2021, for whom complete information on "age at registration" was recorded, 12,754 reported being 17 years old or younger at the age of their entry into the trafficking process, at the time of their exploitation, or at the time of their registration with IOM, representing 18.3 per cent of all victims registered in the VoTD.

The analysis confirms that child trafficking victims come from all backgrounds and genders. According to the data set, 57.4 per cent of child victims were female and 42.6 per cent were male.[1] This differential is greater among young people aged 18–23 at the time of IOM registration, of whom 77.4 per cent were female.

No age range is immune to child trafficking: child victims range from 0 to 17 years old. Based on the age reported at the time of IOM registration, children aged 13–17 formed the largest group of child victims (46.6%). Further, a small but significant percentage of child victims (12.6%) were aged between 0 and 2 years old at the time of IOM registration, indicating that these victims were likely born into trafficking.

Recruiters are those individuals or groups that introduce victims to the situation that leads to trafficking. More than half of the child victims reported the involvement of friends and family in their recruitment into trafficking (37.4% and 14.7%, respectively; 51.1%, taken together). The data also showed that family and friends play an important role in the recruitment of children in countries where either widespread or localized extreme poverty is common.

Following the recruitment of the victim, an enmeshment process is typically used to ensure the prolonged exploitation of the victim and to prevent their exit from the trafficking process. According to the analysis, false promises were the most common means of control reported by children (58.9%), followed by psychological and physical abuse (56.3% and 50.6%, respectively). Use of threats against the victims (39.5%), as well as the use of excessive working hours to control them (36.5%), were also reported by a sizeable share of child victims.

Victims of human trafficking can be exploited in a variety of ways. According to data from the VoTD, 43.4 per cent of child victims were trafficked for forced labour, 20.8 per cent were trafficked for sexual exploitation and a smaller number for both forced labour and sexual exploitation. Victims of trafficking for forced labour are exploited in a wide range of industries. According to the VoTD, child victims reported being exploited in domestic work (14.5%), begging (10.2%), hospitality (3.4%) and agriculture (3.3%). Analysis further showed that female child victims are more likely to report sexual exploitation (30.3%) than male child victims (7.3%). The analysis also revealed important geographic patterns: 37.3 per cent of child victims originating from Europe and Central Asia were trafficked for sexual exploitation.

The analysis of the VoTD provides details on how trafficking flows and patterns can differ across countries and regions. Over 56.9 per cent of identified child victims had been trafficked within their country of origin. In cases of international trafficking, child victims were mostly trafficked to neighbouring, wealthier countries, with a smaller number being trafficked to distant wealthy regions.

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[1]   Note that, as discussed in the main text of the report and especially in text box 2, for reasons of data protection as well as changes to the ways that data on gender have been recorded over the period in which the data referenced in this report were gathered, the analysis focuses on male and female children. IOM nonetheless acknowledges the experiences of victims of trafficking of all genders.

Why some children are more vulnerable than others

Utilizing data from the VoTD, four logistic regression models were generated to analyse the predictive power of specific factors in assessing vulnerability to: human trafficking; trafficking for sexual exploitation, specifically, and trafficking for labour exploitation, specifically, as a child compared to as an adult; and domestic trafficking as a child compared to international trafficking as a child.

The modelling showed that:

- Males had 1.99 times the odds of being trafficked as children compared to females. Males also had 1.55 times the odds of being exploited for labour as a child rather than as an adult when compared to females. Male child victims had 39 per cent less likelihood of being trafficked internationally than domestically, as compared to female child victims.

- Lower levels of education were associated with higher odds of being trafficked as a child. Specifically, victims with no education were 22.76 times more likely to be trafficked as a child than were victims who attended high school.

- Being trafficked as a child was associated with reduced odds of experiencing sexual exploitation, as compared to being trafficked as an adult. On the other hand, being trafficked as a child was associated with 1.44 times the odds of experiencing labour exploitation, as compared to being trafficked as an adult.

- Originating from a low-income country tends to be a factor that contributes to increased vulnerability to being trafficked as a child rather than as an adult and particularly to being trafficked for labour exploitation as a child rather than as an adult. Specifically, originating from a low-income country had odds that were 5.57 higher for being trafficked as a child rather than as an adult in comparison to originating from a high-income country.

- Child victims trafficked for sexual exploitation were more likely to be trafficked internationally, while child victims trafficked for forced labour were more likely to be trafficked domestically.

- Those from countries at higher risk of disasters and climate change vulnerability had 1.12 times the odds of being trafficked as children compared to adults, but when there was a disaster, child victims had a higher chance of being trafficked domestically rather than internationally.

While the regression analysis yielded insights into vulnerability to trafficking, due to the limited availability of information on individual- and community-level factors, the models have limited ability to explain how these factors can influence trafficking outcomes. It is also important to consider that this sample is not representative of the trafficked population, but rather of those who escaped trafficking and whose cases were registered with IOM.

Reflections and recommendations

Child trafficking is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that continues to spread and evolve within and across borders. No age range, no gender, and no nationality is immune to child trafficking; it is a truly global phenomenon.

This first report on child trafficking, based on global data, is being published with the hope that its findings will contribute to the existing literature, guiding and informing measures to combat the phenomenon as they slowly evolve from a law-enforcement approach to approaches that are more rights-based, as well as victim- and child-centred. Combating trafficking in persons should remain an international priority, with responses tailored to the context of each country, and to the complex intersection of individual, community and societal factors affecting children. Key measures include:

(a) Strengthening the evidence base on trafficking in general, and child trafficking in particular: research and the generation and collection of data should be driven by clear policy and programmatic goals to avoid the pitfall of simply collecting data without a clear purpose or intended use.

(b) Preventing and reducing vulnerability to trafficking: minimizing children's exposure to trafficking should be a priority, including through prevention measures that respond to trafficking dynamics and address individual-, community- and society-level factors that contribute to vulnerability to child trafficking.

(c) Protecting and assisting child victims of trafficking: ensuring that children who have been trafficked have access to comprehensive, multisectoral and coordinated protection and assistance, tailored to their individual circumstances, needs and expressed wishes. This includes strengthening mechanisms for identification and referral of individuals in need, in line with considerations of the best interests of the child.

(d) Enhancing coordination of the trafficking response: to comprehensively address child trafficking, governments, civil society and the public and private sectors must work cooperatively to address the underlying drivers of the phenomenon, including the inequities that perpetuate child exploitation and stigmatization. This includes the obligation to uphold international commitments, as well as to strengthen and establish new frameworks for cooperation on the response to trafficking in persons.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS REPORT

Thousands of children are trafficked globally each year. While the exact numbers remain unknown due to insufficient data and evidence, it is clear that child trafficking is a global phenomenon (IOM, 2019b:7). In 2020, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that among approximately 50,000 trafficking victims in 135 countries worldwide, one in three was a child (UNODC, 2020). Trafficked children were found in every region of the world, and they were trafficked into a wide array of exploitative situations. However, there is a dearth of in-depth information and analysis on the nature of child trafficking, including how to better understand demographic and geographic patterns, how to unpack vulnerabilities to trafficking, and the effect it has on individuals, communities and society more broadly.

In early 2021, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University (FXB) initiated a collaboration to produce the first global report on child trafficking based on the IOM Victims of Trafficking Database (VoTD). The VoTD contains primary data collected from more than 69,000 victims of human trafficking of all ages and genders, representing twenty years of IOM efforts to assist and support victims of human trafficking worldwide. This study is part of the wider IOM effort to collect and disseminate empirical data on human trafficking to inform policy and programming. By leveraging the largest available international data set of disaggregated data on individual victims of human trafficking, this report aims to yield valuable insights into the dynamics, trends and patterns that characterize global child trafficking, further contributing to larger international efforts to narrow the knowledge gap around the phenomenon. More specifically, this report is the first to utilize data on approximately 13,000 individual children who have been trafficked, aiming to provide a better understanding of the profile of child victims, document geographical patterns, trafficking routes and commonly employed exploitation methods, and identify individual, societal and structural factors that predict vulnerability to child trafficking. A central goal of the report is to equip governments, organizations and the counter-trafficking community in general with empirical data that can drive and inform appropriate responses to child trafficking at national and international levels. By generating targeted recommendations, the report further aims to become a valuable tool toward an evidence-based prevention framework for addressing the risk of child trafficking and toward comprehensive, child-centred, integrated services, as victims need and deserve.

1.2. RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING, CHILD TRAFFICKING AND VULNERABILITY

Human trafficking is not a field of study in and of itself, like migration, political science or sociology. Instead, it is a composite area that involves a vast number of different disciplines, government stakeholders, international organizations, civil society organizations and practitioners. Only in 2015 did the subject receive a specific English language journal, the Journal of Human Trafficking. A brief review of the represented authorship in the Journal of Human Trafficking from 2015 to 2022 reveals the many different disciplines and areas of interest represented: criminology, migration studies, health sciences, psychology, law, international law, political science, anthropology, economics, statistics. The journal also includes, over this time, contributions from not just academics but also international organizations and civil society organizations.

Several comprehensive trafficking literature reviews have been published over the past years, and the literature can be divided by academic discipline and area of focus (Goździak and Bump, 2008; Sweileh, 2018; Goździak et al., 2015). Much scholarship focuses on a specific form of trafficking, such as trafficking for sexual exploitation (Deshpande and Nour, 2013; Muraya and Fry, 2016). Other scholarship focuses on certain trafficked populations, such as migrants or women and girls (IOM, 2017; Hansen et al., 2019). More comprehensive studies and reports lend their interest to broader populations and thematic areas (UNODC, 2018b; ILO, Walk Free and IOM, 2022; UNICEF and IOM, 2017). Scopus Sweileh (2018) found that literature on trafficking for sexual exploitation dominated the field, while lesser focus was given to health-related topics and labour exploitation. What is true for research on human trafficking in general is even more pronounced for research on human trafficking in children more specifically. While considerable advances have been made over the past two decades, roughly, since the establishment of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (known as the Palermo Protocol; see United Nations, 2000a), research on trafficking in children suffers considerably from a dearth of data and information, as well as from methodological challenges, disciplinary differences and often a national focus, all of which continue to complicate comprehensive efforts to carve out clear research paths and related responses.

Research on child trafficking offers only limited detailed information on child vulnerabilities to trafficking, as well as on the vulnerabilities they face as a result of it. However, research on trafficking for sexual exploitation has found that considerably more female than male children are exploited (Stöckl et al, 2021; UNODC, 2020). Other studies into the nationalities of children trafficked for sexual exploitation reveal areas where trafficking of children for sexual exploitation is particularly prevalent (UNODC, 2020; UNICRI, 2010; Omorodion, 2009; Dhungel, 2017; Eurostat, 2015). Victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are particularly at risk of serious health effects, including sexually transmitted diseases, mental health illness and sexual or physical violence (Zimmerman and Kiss, 2017:2; Sweileh, 2018:2). Such research has the potential to contribute to both prevention and protection elements of responses to trafficking in persons, but more detailed analysis is needed to inform tailored actions to meet the needs and address the vulnerabilities of child victims of trafficking.

Research on forced labour provides much the same picture, but with male children at the centre, with more male than female children found to be victims of trafficking for forced labour (UNODC, 2020; ILO, Walk Free, and IOM, 2022). Much like those trafficked for sexual exploitation, forced labour victims also often experience significant health challenges following exploitation, which can have long-lasting consequences (Kasper and Chiang, 2020). Research that focuses on different types of exploitation can help to provide indications of children's vulnerabilities. However, such studies rarely systematize the complex web of interdependent variables of which these variables are a part. Placing additional focus on the specific groups that are particularly at risk, where they are from, the modalities of trafficking, and the consequences of their trafficking experience can further strengthen the response to trafficking in persons and its effects.

1.3. CHILD TRAFFICKING: FRAMEWORKS, CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

The international community has shown a firm commitment to countering and punishing trafficking in persons, to addressing vulnerability and to protecting victims, notably through the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (United Nations, 2000b) and its supplementary Palermo Protocol (United Nations, 2000a). The Palermo Protocol defines trafficking in persons as:

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The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring 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.

(United Nations, 2000a:article 3(a))

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This definition understands trafficking of adults as comprising three distinct stages: the act, the means and the purpose. However, in cases of trafficking of children, the means stage is not required for a situation to be considered human trafficking. A child, defined in the Palermo Protocol (article 3(d)) as anyone under the age of 18 years, is considered trafficked so long as an act along with the purpose of trafficking in some form is verifiable (United Nations, 2000a:article 3l).

In addition to the United Nations Transnational Organized Crime Convention and the Palermo Protocol, there are a number of other international instruments that include provisions that relate to child trafficking.

These include, but are not limited to:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
  (1948)

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
  (1966)

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
  (1979)

- Convention on the Rights of the Child
  (1989), and its optional protocols, including:

  - Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
    (2000)

  - Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography
    (2000)

- International Standards on Child Labour, Minimum Age Convention
  (ILO Convention No. 138)

- International Standards on Child Labour, Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention
  (ILO Convention No. 182)

These international legal instruments and provisions were supplemented in 2015 by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have direct reference to human trafficking in three targets:

- SDG target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

- SDG target 8.7: Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

- SDG target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

While the three goals above refer specifically to trafficking, there are a number of related goals that seek to address particularly vulnerable groups and related circumstances in which trafficking often takes place. Child migrants constitute one such group. Migration can facilitate access to previously unattainable protections and resources for children, as it can for adults. But it can also exacerbate vulnerabilities. SDG 10 focuses on reducing inequalities, aiming to "facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies" (United Nations, 2015). Migrant children's vulnerability is increased when the conditions under which children migrate hamper their access to health care, education and other basic services. Migration, because of the circumstances under which it occurs, may also deprive families of resources and force them to seek unsafe jobs or to rely on human smugglers, which research has shown typically increases the likelihood of trafficking (IOM, 2017). Similarly, SDG target 16.9 aims to provide a legal identity for all, including by universalizing access to birth registration. When children lack a legal identity, they are more likely to encounter obstacles accessing health care, education and other social services. They may also have difficulty proving their age. These legal obstacles increase the chances of children being forced into situations of exploitation (Selim, 2019).

In 2018, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration was adopted as the first intergovernmentally negotiated document, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner, including the response to trafficking in persons (specifically, objective 10). The Global Compact for Migration complements the SDGs, in particular target 10.7, with a focus on policies in support of safe, orderly and regular migration. Among its guiding principles are rights-based and child-sensitive approaches. Much like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Compact emphasizes the importance of evidence, including the collection, management and use of data, to inform responses to migration-related challenges: "Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies" (United Nations, 2019:objective 1).

Despite these international mechanisms and instruments, children continue to fall victim to traffickers worldwide, particularly in challenging contexts such as economic hardship, conflict settings, climate change, environmental degradation and disasters. The United Nations Secretary-General's report on the progress of the SDGs from 2021 found that the global COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects on already-vulnerable children and communities. Moreover, the report stated that "children in poor and disadvantaged communities are at much greater risk of child labour, child marriage and child trafficking. In fact, the global gains in reducing child labour are likely to be reversed for the first time in 20 years. In short, the crisis is having life-altering consequences for millions of children and youth worldwide" (UNODC, 2021b).

1.4. EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

The need for the global community to continue to expand its commitments to countering human trafficking is clear, and goes hand-in-hand with the need for data and evidence as critical components of an effective response to trafficking in persons. However, despite an increasing body of knowledge about child trafficking and violence against children (IOM, 2019b), actionable data on trafficking in persons remain limited. There are many reasons for this: trafficking in persons is clandestine, and data are therefore difficult to gather; trafficked persons or people with knowledge of trafficking crimes are often reluctant to report them out of fear of repercussions; data collection on trafficking needs several safety protocols, given the risk of retribution from perpetrators (IOM, 2019a:9). Even where data and information are collected, data management poses significant further challenges. Currently, there are limited overarching, internationally agreed upon standards for codifying these data; databases are diverse, dispersed, disconnected; inconsistent definitions of trafficking in persons are used by different countries, institutions and partners; data-collecting entities such as ministries and civil society organizations may not share data.

Data limitations have significant implications for the knowledge and understanding of trafficking in children. How common is child trafficking? What are children's pathways into trafficking and how is trafficking perpetuated? Who are the perpetrators, what are the relations between perpetrators and victims? What legal and policy structures drive children into exploitative situations? What steps should we take to reduce the risks of child trafficking? These are some of the questions that remain unanswered, in part because of the scarcity of data available. A failure to rectify this situation contributes to continuing negative impacts on those who have been trafficked and on those at risk of trafficking.

Consolidating efforts to obtain better data and information about child trafficking is crucial to be able to adequately address it. Recent and ongoing work by different stakeholders supports that goal, including the development of the working version of the International Classification Standard for Administrative Data on Trafficking in Persons (ICS-TIP), through collaboration between IOM and UNODC. As well, support for front-line organizations to establish and implement case management systems, such as the Human Trafficking Case Data Standard developed by IOM, is another example of how tools and capacity development can enhance data outcomes. Other work to support collaborations toward consolidating national and regional data in global databases as can be seen in the Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC), which includes data from the VoTD. As noted in the introduction, the VoTD is the largest global compilation of primary, qualitative and quantitative data collected directly from victims who were assisted by IOM since 2002, and includes data from more than 69,000 recognized victims of human trafficking from 156 nationalities, trafficked in 186 countries, who registered with IOM in 113 countries where IOM operates.

This research report is the first that utilizes these data with a view to contributing to evidence-based policymaking and programming. To this end, this research report comprehensively documents what we know about child human trafficking. Drawing on twenty years of data from the VoTD, it is meticulously researched and narrated with a wealth of contextual examples, highlighting how child human trafficking affects children. It also addresses the nuances of a crime that takes place on a global scale. Anecdotal evidence is supported by complex statistical modelling, continuing the important work to deepen our understanding of children's vulnerability and the specific risks they face. These are vital results in light of the limited advances that the global community has achieved when it comes to progress on the SDGs in relation to human trafficking, in terms of providing actionable evidence for policymakers. Finally, the report sketches out a set of relevant recommendations, formulated against the backdrop of the international commitments made through the SDGs and the Global Compact for Migration.

The report and its recommendations are particularly important as they come in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic that has significantly amplified the risk of trafficking for vulnerable populations (UNODC, 2021a). The pandemic has not only impacted established efforts to prevent human trafficking; as well, it has transformed the trafficking landscape. Its socioeconomic consequences continue to affect both the developing and developed world, creating new groups of victims, exacerbating pre-existing risk factors and laying the ground for novel trends to emerge (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020; Europol, 2020a). Though this report does not evaluate or monitor the effect of the pandemic on child trafficking as a whole, it does provide critical data for filling knowledge gaps, which may benefit existing efforts and lead to new interventions.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. THE VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING DATABASE: SCOPE, DATA COLLECTION PROCESS, MEASURES AND GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

As part of its comprehensive approach to addressing human trafficking – ranging from protecting victims of trafficking, through sensitizing and strengthening national, regional and community-level systems, to working with the private sector to promote ethical recruitment, due diligence and remediation measures – IOM aims to increase the availability of systematic, quantitative and qualitative data on human trafficking. A key element of this effort is the VoTD, the largest global compilation of primary, quantitative data collected directly from victims who were assisted by IOM since 2002. The data set is derived from the IOM case management database, a centrally managed system that facilitates the management of victims' assistance. A variety of information on victims' experiences and profiles is routinely collected and entered into this system, ranging from entry into the trafficking process, to type and sectors of exploitation and experiences of abuse. The tool is being widely used across the 113 countries where IOM missions operate. The VoTD therefore provides a comprehensive and standardized source of information on trafficking.

More specifically, the VoTD includes information on victims' basic demographics, their socioeconomic background prior to trafficking, the ways they entered the human trafficking process, the means of control used during their exploitation, trafficking locations (transit and destination) and routes, the types of exploitation experienced, information on recruiters and their relationship with victims, and information on perpetrators. The database also includes information on victim exploitation at different stages, the type of work forced upon them, as well as their age at the time they entered the trafficking process, their age at the time of their exploitation and their age at the time they registered with IOM.

Data are collected by IOM case workers from the moment of initial contact with the victim up to the conclusion of their engagement with post-trafficking support. To ensure a standardized collection process, data are recorded in standard forms that gather information that helps assess whether the person seeking assistance is a victim of human trafficking, as well as information on the victim's trafficking experience and the assistance provided to them. The forms contain questions with multiple response options, allowing case workers to also record different experiences of coercion and abuse. This standardized collection process not only reduces the incidence of invalid entries, but also allows for international comparative analysis across the countries where IOM operates. Thus, findings are international in scope. The data collection procedures are fully compliant with the IOM Data Protection Principles (IOM, 2010), and consistent with the IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse (IOM, 2019a). Further, data from the VoTD used for the purposes of this research have had all direct identifiers removed and were further de-identified before being made available to Harvard University researchers for analysis.

The detailed information from the VoTD contributes to a fuller understanding of the trajectory of a victim and the trafficking patterns across different routes, and informs conclusions about the trafficking process across age groups. The high level of details that the tools collect from each victim, combined with the large number of victims that IOM has interviewed systematically over a period of 20 years and across all regions, offers reliable information on the profile of a very hard-to-reach population, as well as on developing patterns and trends, thus providing a strong evidence base for policies and for informing context-specific programmes and interventions.

In 2017, the VoTD became a critical part of the CTDC, the first global data hub on human trafficking that brings together global data collected by five different organizations (IOM, Liberty Shared, Polaris, NGO A21 and the Portuguese Observatory on Trafficking in Human Beings), combined in one harmonized and anonymized data set. This was an important effort toward breaking down information-sharing barriers and making hard-to-obtain data available to all those actors working on eradicating human trafficking and assisting victims (for more, see CTDC, n.d.).

Table 1. Benefits of the Victims of Trafficking Database

Properties of VoTD	Benefits
Large sample size	VoTD provides a large amount of data collected from hard-to-reach populations, allowing for more effective descriptive statistics.
Extensive level of detail	Combined with the large sample size, the extensive detail that IOM case workers collect from each victim leads to better identification of patterns, trends and profiles of victims.
Consistent data collection across 113 countries and across time	The standardized collection process that IOM employs allows for international comparative analysis and provides information on developing trends and trafficking patterns across different routes and across time.

2.2. DATA ANALYSIS

For this report, the most recently available data from the VoTD were analysed. These data were collected between 2002 and the first half of 2021.

Text box 1. Defining victims of child trafficking in the Victims of Trafficking Database

Given the focused scope of this report, a new variable was created and added to the data set called "child trafficking". This new variable captures data on victims who reported being 17 years old or younger, either at the age of entry into the trafficking process, at the time of their exploitation, or at the time of their registration with IOM. Utilizing the available data, this new variable captures not only those victims who reported being a child during their victimization, but also those victims who aged out during their victimization and were no longer children when they registered with IOM. The distinction between child victims at registration and victims who had aged out at or before registration was not always clear, due to significant data gaps on the "age at entry" and "age at exploitation" variables (see 2.3. Methodological limitations for more details). As only age at registration with IOM is a compulsory field that had to be completed by IOM case managers, it is the age variable with the most reliable level of completion (99.7% for the entire population). Therefore, the precise number of victims who aged out during their exploitation or prior to their IOM registration remains unknown.

Differences between populations discussed in this report (based on age, sex and citizenship) were tested using a mix of parametric and non-parametric tests, including Pearson correlation (r), Chi-square test (χ^2) and Spearman correlation (ρ), with significance tested at p = 0.05. For a subset of the analyses that were run, victims falling into the "child trafficking" category were divided into two age groups (0–9 and 10–17), to examine any differences between younger and older child victims. Multivariable regression analysis to examine the odds of being trafficked during childhood in comparison to adulthood was also included to evaluate potential predictors of trafficking during childhood.

2.3.   METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

The wealth of data included in the VoTD over almost 20 years contributes significantly to the understanding of child trafficking modalities, dynamics and patterns across the world. However, the conclusions generated from this data set should be considered within the context of the data set's limitations.

Text box 2.   Limitations to the data regarding gender

Victims of trafficking include people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics, and IOM acknowledges the experiences of victims of trafficking of all genders.

IOM institutional understanding of and approach to gender considerations has evolved considerably over the years. The VoTD is based on data generated from IOM case managements forms. When initially developed, these forms reflected standard demographic fields in identity documents, and therefore older versions of the forms did not record the wider range of gender identities that are currently reflected. To ensure consistency, sex assigned at birth has been used for the analysis across the report.

Moreover, since some gender identities comprise a smaller subset of the wider population, their inclusion can present data protection risks. For example, children of diverse gender identities in the VoTD comprise less than 1 per cent of the sample; therefore, their inclusion could result in data being linked back to individual cases.

The VoTD, despite its volume and breadth, cannot be considered indicative of the prevalence of human trafficking. As the data are collected only from victims referred to and assisted by IOM and its partners, the database may not be representative of all victims identified in a country or region, nor of the wider population of victims that includes unidentified victims as well (Grant et al., 2018). Further, it should be considered that the number of cases identified and included in the database depends on the capacity of the IOM missions to identify, register and assist victims. As a result, conclusions around the prevalence of the phenomenon within countries cannot be drawn, as a higher number of cases in a given country may indicate effective counter-trafficking responses rather than widespread trafficking, and a lower number of cases may indicate the lack of capacity to identify and assist victims, or challenges in identifying and assisting victims, rather than indicating a low prevalence of trafficking.

Table 2. Limitations of the Victims of Trafficking Database

Properties of VoTD	Limitations
Data in the VoTD is collected only from identified victims referred to IOM and its partners	The data set may not be representative of all victims identified in a country or region, nor of the wider population of victims that includes unidentified victims as well.
The amount of data included in the VoTD is highly correlated with the capacity of IOM offices in different regions	Conclusions around the prevalence of the phenomenon within countries cannot be drawn as a lower number of cases could be an indicator of the lack of capacity to identify and assist victims, or of challenges in identifying and assisting victims.
Large number of missing values	As IOM data collection activities are secondary to primary activities focusing on victims' needs, the quality and completeness of the data tend to vary between IOM missions, which have different levels of resources available and can play different roles in different contexts, leading to missing values.

Additionally, although the total number of victims included in the data set is 69,700, many of the data set's variables contain missing values, a limitation that affects its completeness and ease of interpretability. The counter-trafficking programme's top priority is to identify and support victims; data collection activities are both secondary and, in many instances, focused on gathering information pertinent to a victim's needs. Thus, the quality and completeness of the data tend to vary, in some cases substantially, between registered individuals (Stöckl et al., 2021). Further, it should be noted that on many occasions the full extent and details of the trafficking scenario become available only during the investigation and prosecution phase rather than the initial protection process, resulting in missing information within the data set itself. Therefore, the results and conclusions presented in this report pertain to records for which data were entered for the relevant data fields, not the overall sample. This explains why the report presents different absolute counts of victims and corresponding relative response rates across questions. Finally, since the overarching aim of the report is to provide an overview of the dynamics and patterns of the phenomenon of child trafficking based on the data collected in the countries that IOM operates, an in-depth and robust analysis of the data collected in individual countries is beyond the scope of this report.

Despite these limitations and constraints this data set significantly contributes to research on child trafficking as it provides a detailed view into the experiences of victims, their backgrounds, the forms of trafficking and exploitation they experience, and the means of control used against them, based on information collected from a large number of victims across regions and over a period of twenty years. Though the findings cannot be considered representative, the volume and geographical scope of the VoTD affords a rich and multidimensional view into child trafficking trends and patterns, critical to generating recommendations and informing policies.

3. CHILD TRAFFICKING ACROSS THE GLOBE: UNDERSTANDING TRENDS, PATTERNS AND DYNAMICS

Among the 69,514 victims with complete information on "age at registration"[2] assisted by IOM between 2002 and the first half of 2021, 12,754 victims reported being 17 years old or younger either at the age of their entry into the trafficking process, at the time of their exploitation, or at the time of their registration with IOM, representing 18.3 per cent of all victims registered in the VoTD. The average child victim age at registration was 11.5 years (SD = 5.9), while the average age of all victims included in the data set was 27.4 years (SD = 12.2).

Figure 1.   Age at registration of all victims included in the Victims of Trafficking Database
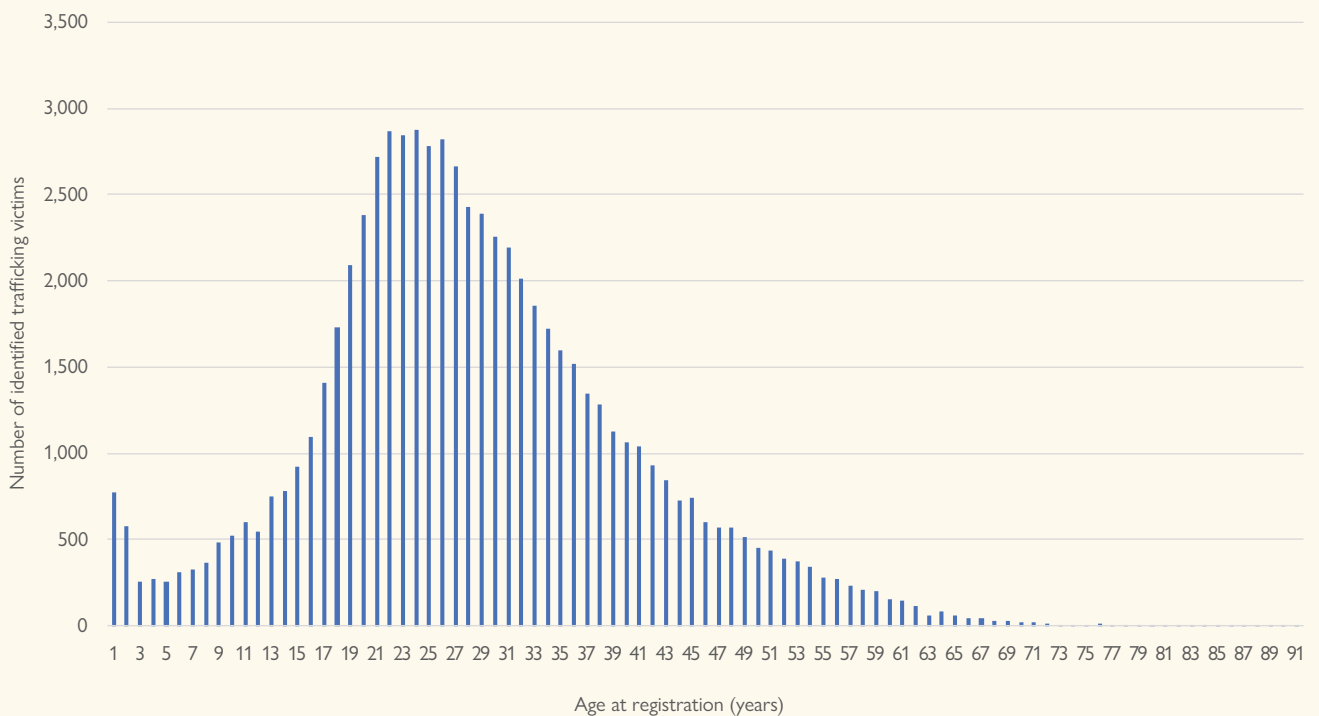
_____

Figure 2.   Age composition of all victims included in the Victims of Trafficking Database (n = 69,514)

0%

17%

23%

38%

22%

■ 0–17 ■ 18–23 ■ 24–35 ■ 36–64 ■ 65+
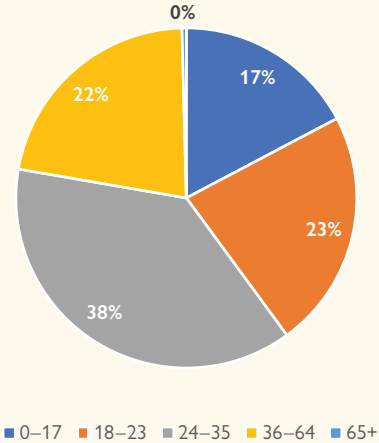
Further, 6 per cent (758) of those victims identified as children reported being 18 and over at the time of their registration with IOM. Of those victims who aged out during their victimization, the vast majority (82.6%) were identified as young people (age 18–23), while 16.4 per cent fell under the category of young adults (age 24–36). Further, the data show that nearly half (46.8%) of those victims who aged out entered into trafficking while 17 years old.

Figure 3.   Age at entry into trafficking of those victims who aged out (n = 758)

Number of traffickked vitcims

Age at entry into trafficking (years)
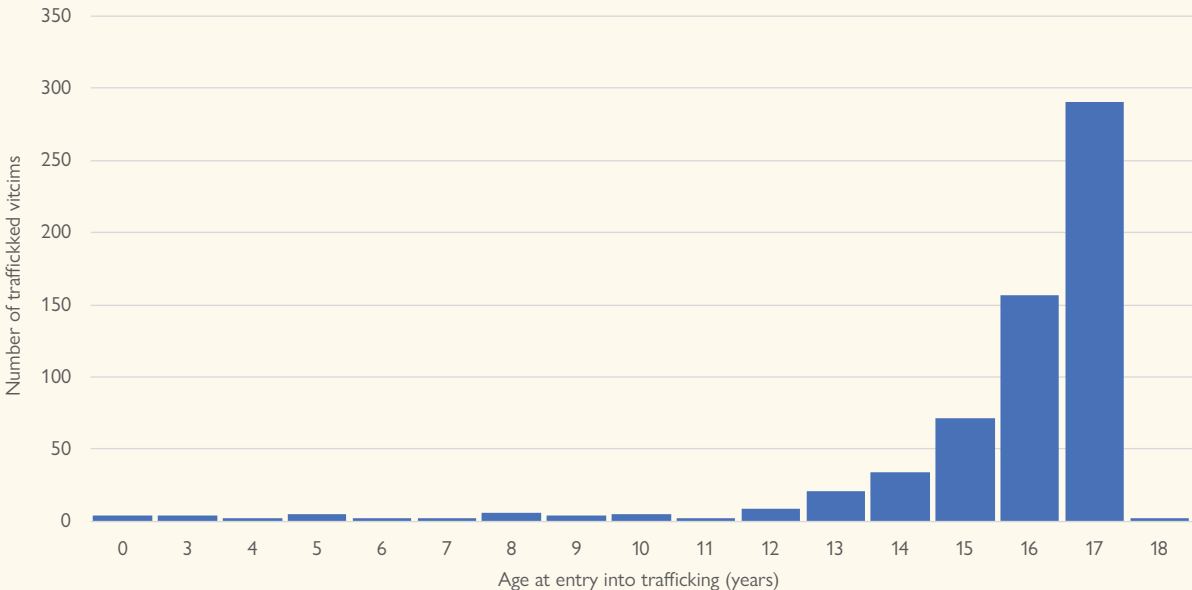
It should be noted that the age at entry and age at exploitation variables have a significant number of missing values: among the 12,754 trafficked children, 70.6 per cent of the data entries were missing information on age at entry and 92.1 per cent of the data entries were missing information on age at exploitation. It is therefore difficult to accurately determine how many of the victims who reported being over the age of 18 at the time of registration with IOM had been children when initially trafficked.[3]

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[3]   As already noted, age at registration is one of the few compulsory and complete variables of the data set. This information is recorded for 98.9 per cent for the entire child trafficked population.

3.1.   THE BASIC PROFILE OF CHILD VICTIMS

No single profile for child trafficking victims exists. A range of factors, conditions and circumstances in the life of a child may affect their vulnerability to trafficking. The VoTD is consistent in this regard with the scholarly literature on the topic, confirming that child trafficking victims come from all backgrounds and genders. According to the data set, 57.4 per cent of child victims were female and 42.6 per cent were male. This gender differential is greater among young people aged 18–23 at the time of IOM registration, of whom 77.4 per cent were female. Despite the preponderance of females among child and young victims, further analysis showed that male victims were more likely to be trafficked while children (for more details see 4.2. Results).

No age range is immune to child trafficking: child victims range from 0 to 17 years old. Based on the age reported at the time of registration, children aged 13–17 formed the largest group of child victims (46.6%). Further, a small but significant percentage of child victims (12.6%) were aged between 0 and 2 years old at the time of IOM registration, indicating that these victims were likely born into trafficking.

Text box 3.   Born into trafficking

Despite increased efforts to systematically collect data on human trafficking, data on pregnant victims of human trafficking and children born into trafficking remain limited. Being pregnant, including because of sexual abuse within the trafficking chain, and giving birth while trafficked, adds an additional layer of vulnerability for victims. In addition to the psychological and physical needs that pregnancy and delivery create for women in an abusive environment without access to proper medical care, their newborns can be utilized by traffickers as a means of controlling victims, further perpetuating their victimization (Anti-trafficking Monitoring Group, 2016). Children born into trafficking are at increased risk of being sold or forced into child labour and the sex industry from a very young age (Willis et al., 2016).

Since 2002, IOM has registered 1,609 victims aged 0–2 years, 48 per cent of whom were registered as newborns. Of these victims, 58.3 per cent were trafficked internationally.[a] According to the information collected by IOM case workers during the protection process, one out of three child victims born into trafficking experienced forced labour (33%) and 22.9 per cent experienced sexual exploitation.[b]

Notes: [a] Of the 1,609 child victims aged 0–2, 1,590 (98.8%) had complete information on citizenship, place of exploitation and place of registration that allows for a determination on whether the victim was trafficked domestically or internationally,

[b] Of the 1,609 child victims aged 0–2, 454 (28.2%) had complete information on the type of trafficking they experienced.

Analysis further revealed interesting geographic patterns in the profile of child victims of trafficking.[4] Child victims that were assisted by IOM originated from 120 countries, further illustrating how widespread child trafficking is. According to the VoTD, children represented the highest proportion of victims (45.2%) originating from Latin America and the Caribbean. Further, 27.4 per cent of victims originating from sub-Saharan Africa were children, equal to the percentage of young adult victims (27.1%). Additionally, two out of three victims originating from Southern, Northern and Western Europe were under the age of 23 at the time of registration with IOM.[5] Looking at patterns within countries, particularly interesting is the fact that the vast majority of registered victims originating from Ghana (73.3%) and from Afghanistan (87.8%) were children.

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[4]   Of the 12,754 child victims, 11,537 (90.4%) had complete information on country of origin.
[5]   Of the 69,700 registered victims in the VoTD, 67,576 (97.0%) had complete information on age at registration and country of origin.

When it comes to gender patterns, the analysis showed that the vast majority of child victims originating from Northern, Southern and Western Europe were females (82.9%). The oppositive pattern was observed in Africa and Southern Asia: over half of the child victims originating from Africa (55.1%), and 77.6 per cent of the child victims originating from Southern Asia were male. Clear gender patterns were also documented at the country level: registered child victims originating from the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Romania and the Russian Federation were mostly female (97.8%, 86.3% and 69.8%, respectively), while those originating from Afghanistan and Senegal were mainly male (85.2% and 98.9% respectively).

Text box 4.   Afghanistan as a case study

According to the VoTD, 87.8 per cent of victims originating from Afghanistan were children when trafficked, with only 4.3 per cent of victims from Afghanistan being adults.[a] Existing evidence suggests that Afghanistan is facing a large-scale human trafficking crisis deeply rooted in centuries of abuse (McLean, 2021) and social practices that jeopardize the position of young women and children in Afghan society (IOM, 2008).

Afghanistan is one of the lowest income countries in the world, with some of the lowest social indicators. The country has a Human Capital Index below 0.4, among the lowest globally (World Bank, n.d.), and one of the world's lowest employment-to-population ratios, with 21 per cent of the working-age population unemployed (Bedoya et al., 2019). Inadequate and under-financed Afghan State institutions leave Afghan citizens and businesses unprotected, with few and weak or no social welfare systems to support them (OECD, 2019). Years of conflict in the country have further exacerbated the situation, resulting in an increase in informal sector and illicit activities (Galdo et al., 2020) that leave workers without social and legal protection (OECD, 2019).

The extreme poverty in Afghanistan has forced a significant number of children into child labour. In 2019, UNICEF reported that 30% of children were engaged in child labour (UNICEF, 2019), yet the phenomenon may be even more widespread. Though non-hazardous labour is legal only for children over the age of 15, children of all ages engage in child labour, working long hours with little or no pay (Human Rights Watch, 2016a). They primarily work in brick and carpet production, in the metal industry as tinsmiths and welders, in mines, in agriculture, and in the streets as vendors and beggars (ibid.). Indeed, analysis of the VoTD shows that, of child victims from Afghanistan who provided enough information to allow IOM case workers to determine the form of trafficking they had experienced, the vast majority had been trafficked for forced labour (91.4%).[b]

Afghan children are also vulnerable to recruitment as child soldiers. A Human Rights Watch study in 2016 showed that, since mid-2015, Taliban forces had increased the number of children among their ranks (Human Rights Watch, 2016b). According to the US Department of State, the Government of Afghanistan, prior to the 2021 Taliban takeover, did not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and was not making significant efforts to prevent victimization, prosecute traffickers and protect victims (US Department of State, 2020): authorities tended to arrest and penalize trafficking victims rather than perpetrators, often punishing the former for "moral crimes", thus preventing victims from reporting their victimization and seeking assistance and protection (US Department of State, 2021). On the other hand, Afghanistan's labour inspectorate was not authorized to impose penalties for child labour violations (US Department of Labor: Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020), leaving children vulnerable to some of the worst forms of child labour and exploitation.

According to the VoTD, the vast majority of child victims originating from Afghanistan were male (85.2%) and were exploited domestically, with only a small percentage being exploited in other countries, primarily Saudi Arabia (11.7%). The data set further shows that child trafficking is most prevalent among children aged 8–15.

The high numbers of younger male victims in comparison to female victims could also be associated with the practice of bacha bazi, an illegal cultural practice in Afghanistan that is connected to sexual slavery and child trafficking (ibid.), and is inextricably linked to gender discrimination. According to this practice, as women are not allowed to appear in public, they are replaced by young males. Though the VoTD does not provide any data on this practice, a large body of existing literature discusses the existence of this practice. According to recent studies, the practice usually targets males up to the age of 20, though males under the age of 14 comprise the majority of victims. Though this custom was banned in 2017, it remains active among high ranked and powerful individuals (US Department of State, 2020). Years of armed conflict, in combination with the precarious economic situation in Afghanistan, have aggravated the use of this practice, putting more and more young males at risk (Sakhno, 2020).

Notes: [a] The total number of registered victims originating from Afghanistan was 516.

           [b] Of the 516 child victims originating from Afghanistan, only 232 had enough information to allow for a determination of the form of trafficking they had experienced.

Figure 4.   Afghanistan

Source: United Nations Geospatial, 2011.

Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

3.1.1. Level of educational attainment

The relationship between educational attainment and trafficking victimization is unclear. While studies have shown that victims of human trafficking generally have little to no formal education (Gacinya, 2020; David et al., 2019; Carpenter and Gates, 2016), victims with high levels of education are also at risk when other vulnerability factors are present.

According to the VoTD, only 10.1 per cent of child victims who provided information about their educational attainment reported having no education at all, while the majority of child victims (84.2%) reported having attended some level of education, ranging from primary education to middle school, high school, and higher technical and religious education.

The data also revealed interesting gender differences in educational attainment: 82.2 per cent of female child victims had attended primary, middle or high school, a higher proportion than the corresponding figure for male child victims (68.0%). Further, male child victims reported having no education at all more frequently that female child victims.

Table 3. Education levels of child victims of trafficking per age

Level of education	Age, in years				
	0–9	10–14	15–17	18+	Total
High school/secondary school	3.3% (9)	2.4% (11)	12.2% (98)	28.1% (38)	9.3% (156)
Middle school	3.3% (9)	8.2% (38)	38.1% (306)	35.6% (48)	23.9% (401)
None	21.7% (60)	14.7% (68)	5.1% (41)	0.7% (1)	10.1% (170)
Other	19.9% (55)	6.0% (28)	1.7% (14)	0.0% (0)	5.8% (97)
Primary or elementary school	48.6% (134)	66.3% (307)	34.0% (273)	23.0% (31)	44.4% (745)
Religious education	1.4% (4)	2.2% (10)	0.4% (3)	0.0% (0)	1.0% (17)
Technical training	1.8% (5)	0.2% (1)	8.6% (69)	12.6% (17)	5.5% (92)
Total	100.0% (276)	100.0% (463)	100.0% (804)	100.0% (135)	100.0% (1 678)

Note: Complete information on education level was available for 1,678 child victims (13.2% of 12,754).

Data pointed to interesting geographical patterns as well: 10 per cent of child victims originating from sub-Saharan Africa[6] had received no education at all, while the majority of them had received just basic education (69.2% primary or elementary school). It should be noted that more than 72 per cent of them were over the age of 10, but still had received only the basic level of education. On the other hand, 42.5 per cent of child victims originating from Eastern Europe and Central Asia[7] had attended middle school, with only a very small percentage having received no education at all.

This finding reflects the access to education gaps that exists across regions. According to estimates, sub Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest rates of educational exclusion, with over one fifth of children aged 6 to 11 being out of school. The percentage is higher among older children (UNESCO, n.d.). Further, in South Asia more than 50 per cent of children "live in learning poverty"

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[6] Sub-Saharan Africa, as designated by the World Bank, includes 48 countries: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, the Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, the Sudan, Togo, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

[7] The Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, as designated by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), includes 18 countries or areas/places: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kosovo.* (*References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).)

(UNICEF, 2022a). This translates into approximately 32 million primary- and lower-secondary-school-aged children with no access to education (UNICEF, 2022b). However, it should be noted that among the sample of 12,754 child victims, only 1,688 (13.2%) provided information about their education level; thus, the results presented should be considered with caution.

> **Text box 5. Are educated children less vulnerable to trafficking?**
>
> Existing literature has shown that, though the lack of education and the desire for education can be strong predictors of vulnerability to trafficking, children with higher levels of education are not immune to trafficking when other factors of vulnerability exist (Bales and Lize, 2005). Studies have shown that trafficked victims from post-Soviet countries, in particular, have higher levels of educational attainment (Round and Kuznetsova, 2016; Surtees, 2015).
>
> According to the VoTD, child victims originating from Ukraine span all levels of education. 35.3 per cent of child victims reported that they had attended middle school, while 19.2 per cent reported having no education at all, and 21.6 per cent reported attending high school. Similar patterns were observed among child victims originating from Belarus. Almost half of the child victims originating from Belarus reported that they had attended middle school, with almost one out of three child victims reporting having attended high school or having received technical training. Further, almost 92 per cent of the victims originating from Romania reported having attended some level of education ranging from primary school to high school. These findings further underscore the point that no subgroup is immune to trafficking if other factors intersect.

3.2. THE DYNAMICS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING: RECRUITMENT PROCESS, MEANS OF CONTROL, TYPE OF EXPLOITATION

As already noted, the Palermo Protocol defines trafficking of adults as comprising three distinct stages: the act, the means and the purpose. However, when it comes to defining trafficking of children, only the act and the purpose are required. In non-legal language, the Palermo Protocol emphasizes that in cases involving adult victims, force, fraud, or coercion must be present for a particular exploitation to be considered human trafficking, whereas in cases involving children, the use of these means is not necessary. On the contrary, according to the Protocol, children cannot give informed consent for their exploitation, even when they have agreed to travel and fully understand their situation (see also Goździak and Vogel, 2020). Existing research has shown that the recruitment methods that traffickers employ, as well as the means to control child victims, not only depend on the type of trafficking and the network involved but also tend to differ from the ones used for adult victims, due to the different needs and situations of children (Baird and Conolly, 2021; Bouché and Shady, 2017; Banks and Kyckelhahn, 2011).

3.2.1. The act: The recruitment process

Recruiters are those individuals or groups that introduce victims to the situation that leads to their trafficking. They are understood to be, generally, individuals who are highly adept at winning the trust of potential victims (UNODC, 2008). Recruiters use a wide range of coercive recruitment practices, including debt bondage or denunciation to authorities as well as deception regarding the nature and the conditions of the work to which victims are being recruited (UNODC, 2015). Recruiters can be individuals or groups, may be members of broad organized criminal networks, and may oscillate between the roles of recruiter, trafficker and exploiter. Much of the literature uses the terms traffickers and recruiters interchangeably (UNODC, 2008). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking (OHCHR, 2010), the role of the recruiter falls under the definition of human trafficker, along with the role of the "transporter" and the "exploiter".

Based on the VoTD, only 7.3 per cent of the total number of child victims had information on their relationship to their recruiter entered by the case workers. All results presented in this analysis are in relation to this sample. On many occasions, victims are not aware of all the details of their trafficking, nor are they aware of the role that specific people played in their exploitation. Further, from victims' responses, it was impossible to determine whether large or small criminal networks were behind their recruitment and exploitation.

Though the number of child victims with complete information on their recruitment was small, it nonetheless revealed interesting findings. More than half of the child victims reported the involvement of friends and family in their recruitment (37.4% and 14.7%, respectively; 51.1%, taken together). Additionally, when compared to adults (aged 24 and over), a higher percentage of child victims were recruited by people with whom they had close ties (partners, family and friends). In fact, this study showed that 35.4 per cent of victims over the age of 24 were recruited by people they knew (partners, family and friends), in comparison to 52.5 per cent of child victims.[8]

According to existing literature, there is growing evidence to suggest that the personal relationships of victims play a larger role in the recruitment process than previously thought (Merodio et al., 2020; IPEC, 2007), particularly at the early stages of recruitment (IOM, n.d.b). Though the VoTD does not include in-depth details on recruiters, existing literature does provide insight on who these recruiters may be. For example, they can be people who grew up in the same area where victims originate, who now live in cities, or friends and peers who are former or current domestic or sex workers. They can also be members of local communities, including senior army officers and businesspeople to whom parents give their children with the promise of a better future (ibid.). Part of the recruitment process may also include parents themselves, who engage directly with someone they believe to be an employer as they seek employment opportunities for their children, without knowing how exploitative the conditions are for their children. Though they may not be considered recruiters, they unwittingly become part of the process.

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[8]   It is important to note that these percentages apply to the total number of adult and child victims for whom complete information on their recruitment was available. This translates into 8,444 adult victims over the age of 24 and 929 child victims.

- Intimate partner - Family - Friend - Other
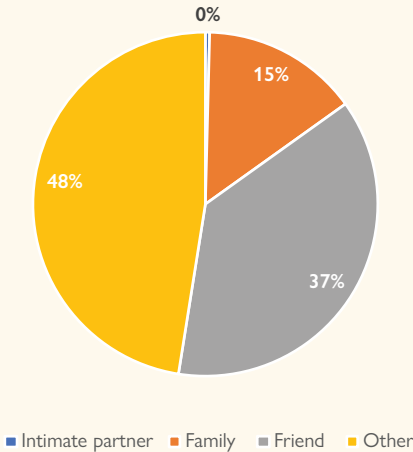
Among child victims, children aged 14–17 were the most likely to report being recruited by a family member (35.8%), as well as the most likely to report being recruited by a friend (42.9%). The recruitment process also revealed marked gender differences: female child victims were more likely to be recruited by a family member or a friend than male child victims. According to the data, 66.6 per cent of child victims who reported being recruited by a friend, and 62 per cent of those who reported being recruited by family, were female. The opposite trend was observed among young victims aged 18–23: the majority of those victims who reported being recruited by a friend were male (61.2%).

When searching for geographic patterns, the data showed that family and friends play a significant role in the recruitment of children in countries where either widespread or localized extreme poverty is common: the majority of registered child victims originating from Indonesia (65.3%), Uganda (59.8%) and Haiti (55.6%) were recruited by a friend or a family member. A smaller but still significant number of child victims originating from Ukraine (41.5%) and Myanmar (20.6%) also reported being recruited by a friend or a family member. When families face severe economic hardship, family members themselves may resort to negative coping mechanisms and may encourage children to enter the labour market or take on seemingly good opportunities that can help the family and themselves, with or without being aware of the exploitative practices that children may face and often even without taking into account the best interests of their child (UNICEF and IOM, 2017; UNODC, 2020).

Text box 7.   Child trafficking in Uganda

Despite significant efforts, Uganda is still considered one of the lowest income nations in the world (Owori, 2020), with 42.2 per cent of the population living in poverty (Knoema, n.d.). Growing economic disparity, lack of employment opportunities, long-standing harmful cultural norms and traditions like child marriage (Expertise France, 2017), as well as the country's limited success in combating trafficking, are all significant risk factors that increase children's vulnerability to trafficking, with parents often playing an unwitting role in their children's victimization. According to the VoTD, child victims comprised the largest group of victims originating from Uganda (43.9%), with more than half of them being female child victims (52.2%). More than half of the registered Ugandan child victims reported being recruited by a friend or a family member.

The phenomenon of child trafficking in Uganda is multifaceted. It occurs at both the national and international levels and involves many different players. According to existing literature, at the national level, Ugandan children from mostly rural areas are trafficked to big cities and forced to work in domestic service, agriculture, the sex industry and illegal activities such as street begging. At the international level, Ugandan children are often trafficked to neighbouring East African countries for forced labour and sexual exploitation (Irish Centre for Human Rights, 2020). Indeed, the VoTD showed that the vast majority of registered child victims originating from Uganda (86.7%) had been trafficked for forced labour.

In addition to extreme poverty, the lack of adequate information about child trafficking and its risks is another enabling factor of the phenomenon: often, parents and local leaders are unaware of the risks latent in apparently good opportunities for their children, unwittingly contributing to their victimization. Despite the efforts of the Government of Uganda to eliminate the phenomenon, existing legislation to protect victims and prosecute perpetrators is limited (US Department of State, 2021), while law reform to include support and programmes for child victims has been slow, further allowing child trafficking to grow unchecked. (See also Uganda Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2021.)

Research has also shown that the relationship between the recruiter and the victim often defines the modus operandi of the recruitment process (UNODC, 2008). The current study showed that the role of a family member in the recruitment of child victims is significantly correlated with trafficking for forced labour ($\chi^2 = 60.99$, $p < 0.001$) and sexual exploitation ($\chi^2 = 5.27$, $p = 0.022$), suggesting a positive correlation in the VoTD sample between the role of family in the recruitment of child victims and child trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation. Though these links are important, they should be considered with caution, given the relatively small number of children who reported being recruited by a family member (n = 137, across a sample of 929 child victims who provided information about their recruiter).

3.2.2. The means: Enmeshment in human trafficking

As already described, the means of trafficking (such as force, fraud, or coercion) do not necessarily need to be present in cases of child exploitation for those cases to still qualify as human trafficking. However, those means often are present, and can be a significant contributor to the trauma and harm experienced by child trafficking victims. This section is therefore included so that the findings can help unpack this part of the child trafficking victims' experiences and related responses.

Following the recruitment of the victim, an enmeshment process is typically used to ensure the prolonged exploitation of the victim and to prevent their exit from the trafficking process. This process, widely referenced in academic literature, differs from the recruitment process, though often similar means and manipulative methods of gaining control over the victim are utilized (Baird and Conolly, 2021; Roe-Sepowitz, 2019; Bruhns et al., 2018; Reid, 2016).

The existing literature commonly refers to two separate means employed by traffickers to control their victims and prolong their exploitation: means of control; and means of reinforcing the victims' dependency on traffickers. The means of control are primarily aggressive, intimidating methods, all designed to induce fear in the victims, such as physical, sexual and psychological abuse; threats against the lives of victims, their families, or their children; withholding identity documents; and forced exposure to the perpetration of violence against other victims. This category also includes blackmail and other methods that threaten victims with the potential for intolerable shame (Baird and Conolly, 2021; O'Brien and Li, 2020; Roe-Sepowitz, 2019; Corbett, 2018; Reid, 2016).

On the other hand, means that reinforce dependency do not necessarily inflict fear but rather are employed to tie victims to their traffickers. For example, traffickers work to make themselves the sole, or main, provider of basic needs for their victims, or to create a relationship of debt bondage or drug bondage with their victims. By requiring high exit fees or demanding the full payoff of debts incurred while fostering drug addiction, traffickers create and reinforce a level of dependency that victims cannot easily overcome. Though all methods are widely employed by traffickers, the literature cites drug and debt bondage as the most common methods (Baird and Conolly, 2021; Edinburgh et al., 2015; Marcus et al., 2014), and aversive tactics that instil and reinforce fear as the most difficult to escape (Baird and Conolly, 2021; Marcus et al., 2014). It is worth reiterating that though the use of coercive means is necessary to establish that an adult is a victim of human trafficking, this is not necessary for cases involving child trafficking.

Text box 8.   Collecting data on the means of control

During registration, IOM case workers ask trafficking victims to indicate which means of control, from a list of 18 options, they have been subject to. The list includes physical, psychological and sexual violence; restricted freedom; withholding of documents and necessities; threats; restricting access to or manipulating children; debt and drug bondage; and false promises. If the means experienced by the victim were not included in the list, the victim's response was recorded under the option "other". Case workers also had the option to report multiple methods of control. Victims who did not report any of the means of control included in the list items were excluded from analyses on means of control.

Of 12,754 victims who were trafficked while children, only 1,943 (15.2% of the total number of child victims) had information on at least 1 of the 18 means of control entered by caseworkers in the VoTD. A plausible explanation for this lack of information is that, given that it is not necessary to investigate the means of control that a child experienced in order to ascertain that the child is a victim of trafficking, IOM case workers are less likely to document them, even if they are reported by children. All results presented in this analysis are in relation to this sample.

According to the analysis, false promises were the most common means of control reported by children (58.9%), followed by the use of psychological and physical abuse (56.3% and 50.6%, respectively). Use of threats against the victims, as well as the use of excessive working hours to control them, were also reported by a sizeable number of child victims (39.5%, and 36.5%). When compared with adults, the data showed that some means are used with the same frequency to control victims regardless of their age: false promises as a means of control was reported by 80 per cent of adult victims, followed by removal of earnings (73.5%), the use of psychological abuse (72.3%), being forced to work excessive hours (72.3%) and restriction of movement (69.5%).

Some gender differences emerge from the data.[9] The most common means of control reported by female child victims was psychological abuse (61.6%), followed by the use of false promises (57.3%), and physical abuse (54.0%). By contrast, the most frequently reported means of control among male child victims were false promises (61.6%), followed by the use of psychological abuse (48.1%) and physical abuse (45.2%).

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[9]   Of the 1,943 child victims who provided at least one means of control, 60.6 per cent were female and 39.4 per cent were male.
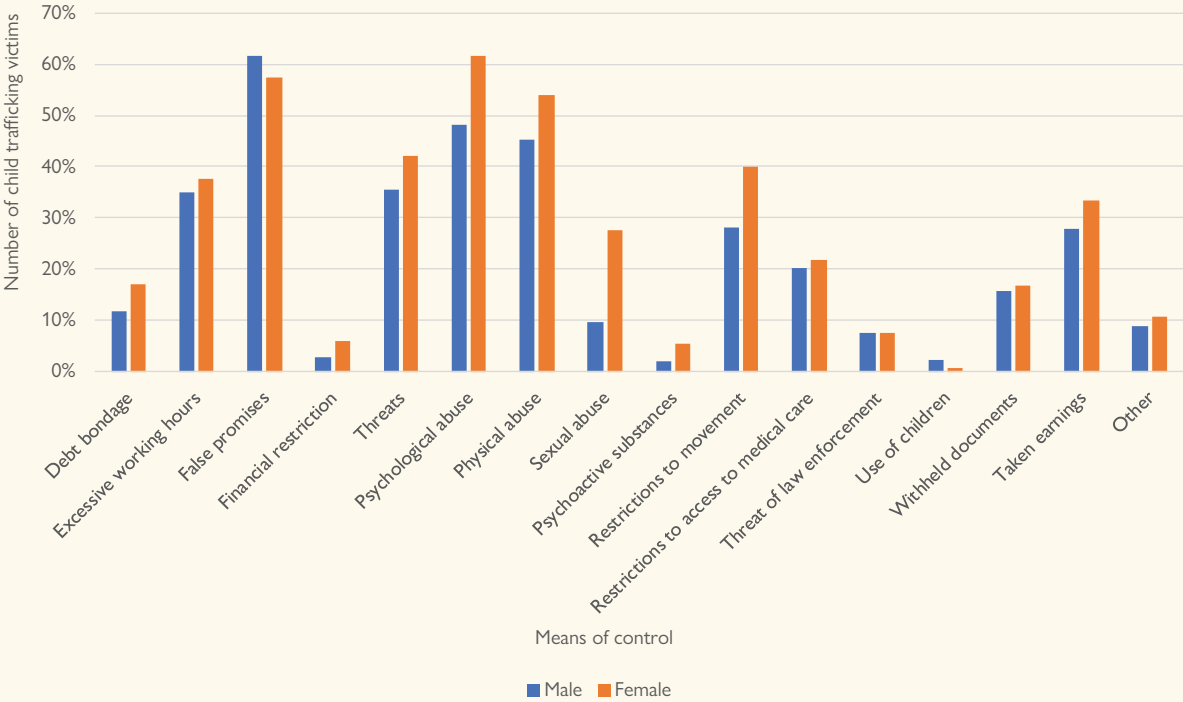
There were statistically significant differences between male and female child victims for most forms of means of control (p < 0.0001), further showing that the means of control employed do differ according to the gender of the child victim. Female child victims comprised the majority of those who reported experiencing sexual abuse as a means of control (81.7%), followed by debt bondage (68.7%), psychological abuse (66.3%) and physical abuse (64.8%). For other means of control, the gender differences were not significant: there were no statistically significant differences between male and female child victims for the use of false promises (χ^2 = 3.55, p = 0.06), threat of law enforcement (χ^2 = 0.0003, p = 0.99) and withholding of documents (χ^2 = 0.32, p = 0.57) as means of controlling victims.

Text box 9.   Debt bondage as a means of control

According to the 1956 United Nations Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, debt bondage is defined as "the status or condition arising from a pledge by a debtor of his personal services or of those of a person under his control as security for a debt, if the value of those services as reasonably assessed is not applied towards the liquidation of the debt or the length and nature of those services are not respectively limited and defined" (United Nations, 1956). Once in debt, victims lose control over labour conditions and are forced to work to pay it off, often for very long hours and at minimal wages, with accumulating interest making a full payoff elusive. Because of the dramatic power disparities involved, these debtors regularly perform work the value of which cumulatively far exceeds the initial debt (GAATW, 2009). Often, victims become dependent on traffickers even for basic daily needs, threatened with death if they attempt to escape. Even if the victim manages to escape, they never really gain a sense of freedom while the unpaid debt remains.

Analysis of the VoTD revealed significant geographic patterns related to the use of debt bondage as a means of controlling child victims. For example, one out of three child victims originating from Indonesia reported debt bondage as a means of control. Similarly, 26 per cent of the child victims originating from Ukraine and 23.3 per cent originating from Nigeria reported being controlled through debt bondage during their trafficking.[a] All three countries have high poverty rates (National

Bureau of Statistics Nigeria, 2020; World Bank, 2019; Igiebor, 2019) that leave vulnerable groups of citizens, including children, with no option but to seek loans to meet basic needs or pay for the costs of migration. Weak financial and regulatory frameworks in these countries, in combination with systemic and structural inequalities, corruption and limited access to justice (Gan Integrity, 2020a, 2020b; Atlantic Council, 2019) regularly trap families in an intergenerational cycle of poverty that allows debt bondage to flourish, further reducing the possibility of victim release from bonded labour (OHCHR, 2016).

Almost half of the child victims originating from Ukraine and Indonesia also reported experiencing confiscation of earnings and working excessive hours as a means of control. The majority of child victims originating from Myanmar reported being forced to work excessive hours as means of control (83.3%; n = 168), and one out of two child victims reported experiencing confiscation of their earnings.

Note: ᵃ Of the total number of child victims, 1,942 had complete information on citizenship and means of control. Of those, 89 originated from Indonesia, 219 from Ukraine and 129 from Nigeria.

Text box 10. Physical, psychological and sexual violence as means of control

The use of violence against victims – ranging from rape, beatings, burnings, intimidation, threats against themselves and their family to blackmail and coerced exposure to witnessing violence against others – induces fear and shame and serves as a deterrent to those seeking to escape or seeking help. Often, the use of violence against victims is followed by acts of caring, leading to a continuous cycle of caring and violence that establishes coercive control of victims through the creation of a trauma bond (Baird and Conolly, 2021).

According to the data set, children were slightly more likely to report experiencing physical violence than young adults aged 18–23 and adults (50.6%, 49% and 49.4% respectively). Further, child victims were slightly more likely to be coerced through the use of sexual violence (20.5%) than young adult victims (19.9%). It should be noted that sexual abuse is used significantly less to control adult victims, as only 10.3 per cent of the adult victims reported experiencing this means of control. Focusing on child victims only, the analysis further showed that while the use of physical violence was reported as a means of control at similar rates across all age groups, the use of sexual violence as a means of control was reported at higher rates among children over the age of 11, with the rates increasing as child victims' age increased.

Geographic patterns were also revealed, relating to the use of physical, sexual and psychological abuse as means of control: more than half of the child victims originating from Africa reported being controlled through the use of physical abuse (60.3%) and psychological abuse (54.6%). On the other hand, the most commonly reported means of control experienced by child victims originating from Europe and Central Asia were psychological abuse (65.7%) and use of threats (51.9%). The pattern seemed to change for child victims originating from Asia and the Pacific, as the majority of them reported being controlled through the use of false promises (69.7%), followed by restrictions to their movement (49.2%).

Focusing on patterns at the country level, analysis showed that the majority of child victims originating from Belarus reported experiencing sexual violence (75.4%), 40.3 per cent of whom reported being between the ages of 13 and 15. Sexual violence was also reported in high rates by child victims originating from Nigeria (37.2%) and Indonesia (34.8%). Though sexual violence as a means of control was reported by victims of both genders, in Indonesia, only female child victims reported experiencing sexual violence.

The majority of child victims originating from Haiti and Myanmar reported being controlled through the use of physical abuse (65.8% and 86.3%). In Myanmar, however, this means was more commonly used to control children aged 15–17 (37.5%), while in Haiti almost half of the children reporting this means of control were aged 12–14 (46.7%).

3.2.3. The purpose: Forms of exploitation

According to the Palermo Protocol (United Nations, 2000a), the purpose of human trafficking is exploitation. Exploitation is a "difficult concept, certainly never defined in international law, and subject to a variety of interpretations" (Plant, 2015:154); the Protocol leaves relatively open the types of exploitation that victims may be subjected to. It specifies that exploitation shall include, at a minimum, sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs (article 3(a)). IOM defines exploitation as "the act of taking unjust advantage of another for one's own benefit" (IOM, 2019c). It follows that victims of human trafficking can be exploited in a variety of ways. Literature identifies forced labour, forced criminal activities, sexual exploitation, forced military service, removal of organs, and forced marriage as forms of exploitation that trafficking victims may be subjected to (IOM, n.d.a). Though these forms have distinct characteristics, their common aspect is the exploitation of a victim's inherent vulnerability (Interpol, n.d.).

According to the VoTD, 43.4 per cent of child victims were trafficked for forced labour, 20.8 per cent were trafficked for sexual exploitation and a smaller number for both forced labour and sexual exploitation.[10] Further, female child victims constituted the largest share of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation (85.6%), and forced marriage (85.2%), though it should be noted that the number of victims reporting child marriage was small (n = 27).

Figure 7.   Forms of trafficking among child victims by gender[11]

Percentage of child trafficking victims

■ Male ■ Female

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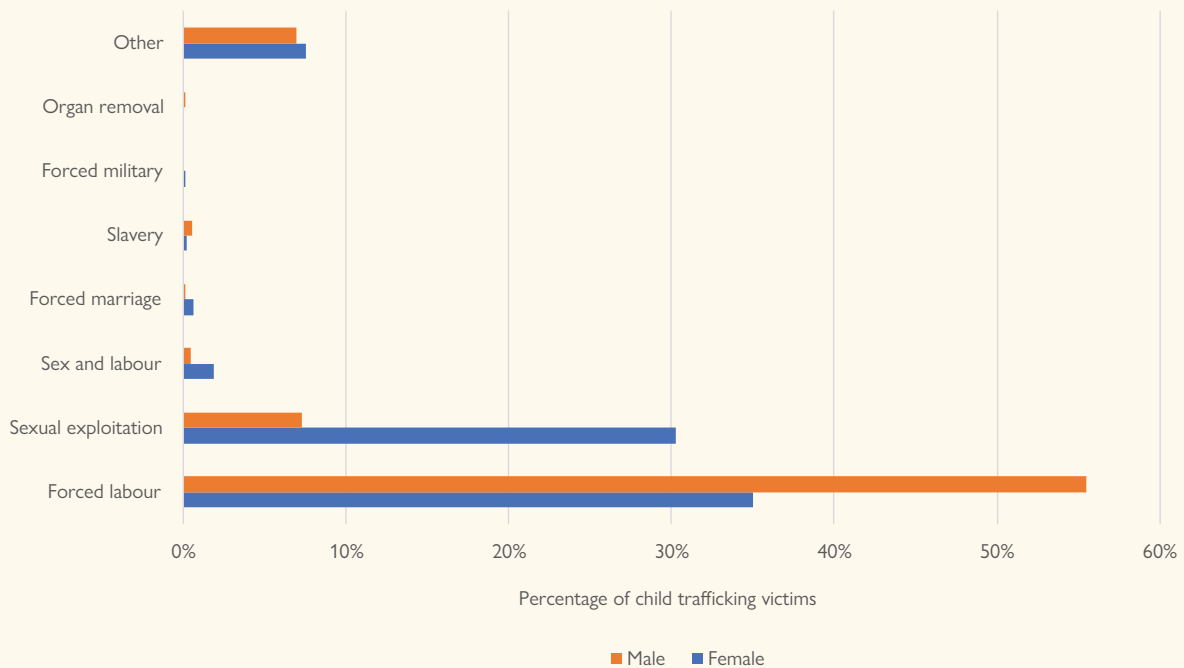
[10]   Complete information on the type of trafficking experienced was available for 6,064 child victims (47.6% of the total number).
[11]   Of the subsample of 6,064 child victims with information on the type of trafficking experienced, 3,571 were female and 2,493 were male.

3. Child trafficking across the globe: Understanding trends, patterns and dynamics

A. Child trafficking for forced labour

Trafficking for forced labour involves a wide range of methods of exploitation in an array of income-generating activities. It is a form of trafficking in which victims are not necessarily hidden or involved in carrying out clandestine or illicit activities. In fact, victims often participate directly in the regular economy, in plain sight (UNODC, 2020).

While child trafficking for forced labour and child labour share common driving factors, the phenomena are conceptually different (ibid.). According to the ILO Forced Labour Convention of 1930, forced labour is defined as "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself [or herself, or themselves] voluntarily" (ILO, 1930). Child labour is defined as the work performed by children aged 5–11, work performed by children aged 12–14 that is not considered light and requires more than 14 hours per week, as well as hazardous work performed by children aged 15–17 (IOM, 2019c). It is important to mention that not all work carried out by children is considered child labour. And not all cases of child labour will meet the forced labour definition. All cases of the forced labour and trafficking of children are counted under the worst forms of child labour, however (ILO, 1999). While child labour is not specifically enumerated in the Palermo Protocol as a form of exploitation that victims may be trafficked for, it may be identified as a form of trafficking if an act with intent to exploit is also undertaken by a perpetrator. The multidimensional nature of the phenomenon of trafficking for forced labour, affected as it is by differing cultural practices and macroeconomic dynamics in different economic sectors (UNODC, 2020), makes its investigation, detection and elimination complicated, often leaving victims unprotected even when in plain sight.

Analysis of the VoTD showed that almost half of child victims had been trafficked for forced labour (43.4%),[12] with male child victims reporting this form of exploitation more frequently (55.5%, n = 2,493) than female child victims (35.0%, n = 3,571).

Moreover, the analysis showed that child victims aged 15–17 accounted for the largest share of children trafficked for forced labour (25.9%). Children aged 12–14 were also trafficked for forced labour in significant numbers (23.9%), while the numbers dropped substantially for younger children. Though this data set showed that older children were more likely to be trafficked for forced labour, the existing literature has not yielded precise statistics on the age range of child victims (UNODC, 2020).

While the phenomenon of child trafficking for forced labour is widespread across the world, this analysis showed that there were specific regions where this form of exploitation was particularly prevalent: child victims originating from South-East Asia and the Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin American and the Caribbean were, in the majority of cases, trafficked for forced labour (62.6%, 57.5% and 79.4%, respectively). These are regions where child labour in general is widespread. According to a recent global ILO study, the African, Asian and Pacific regions rank highest in the number of children in child labour: 9 out of 10 children in child labour originate from one of these regions (ILO, 2017). This stark reality contributes to the proliferation of trafficking of children for forced labour.

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[12]   Of the total sample of 12,754 child victims, 6,069 child victims (47.6%) provided complete information that allowed for a determination of whether the child had been trafficked for forced labour or not.

> **Text box 12. Child trafficking for labour exploitation in Ghana and Myanmar**
>
> High rates of poverty and lack of employment opportunities, combined with significant cultural acceptance of children working in the labour market, create fertile conditions for the diffusion of child trafficking for forced labour, with victims invisible while in plain sight (UNODC, 2020).
>
> According to the VoTD, trafficking for forced labour particularly affected children originating from countries with high rates of child labour, such as Haiti, Ghana, Afghanistan and Myanmar. Indeed, the analysis showed that 97.2 per cent of child victims originating from Myanmar were trafficked for forced labour. In Myanmar, a country with a poverty rate of 24.8 per cent as of 2017, 1.1 million children over the age of five are trapped in child labour, often subjected to exploitative practices. The combined effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the ongoing political crisis facing the country, are estimated to have driven the numbers of those living below the poverty line to 46.3 per cent by the end of 2022, further increasing the risk of child trafficking (UNDP, 2021).
>
> In Ghana, despite the country's explicit commitment to accelerate efforts to stop child labour (Human Rights Watch, 2021), the phenomenon is still prevalent. According to the VoTD, 93 per cent of Ghanaian child victims were trafficked for forced labour.[a] Though Ghana has achieved economic improvements as the world's second-largest producer of cocoa beans and gold, rendering it one of the fastest growing economies in Africa, the country's poverty rate is still at 13.3 per cent. Poverty affects Ghanaian children in particular, in comparison to adults, with approximately three out of four children, or 73.4 per cent of the total child population, considered multidimensionally poor (NDPC, Ghana Statistical Service and UNICEF, 2020). As a result, one in every six children between the ages of 6 and 14 is involved in child labour, working excessive hours under abusive conditions. According to the existing literature, 88 per cent of these children work in the agricultural sector, while a small percentage are involved in the fishing sector (O'Connell, 2019). In most cases, these children are below the legal age limit for the work they are doing. They conduct labour that is considered hazardous under the law and are paid less than the true value of their labour (International Justice Mission, 2015).
>
> *Note:*   [a] The form of trafficking experienced could be determined from information provided for 586 child victims originating from Ghana.

According to the VoTD, child victims trafficked for forced labour were mostly controlled through psychological abuse (56.9%), false promises (61.8%), and physical abuse (54.0%). A lower but highly significant percentage reported being controlled through threats (34.8%), working excessive hours (49.0%), and confiscation of their earnings (36.4%).[13] When compared with adult victims, the analysis showed that while the use of psychological abuse and false promises are widely used to control both child and adult victims, adult victims are also likely to experience restrictions to medical care, removal of earnings, debt bondage and the threat of law enforcement.

Work sectors with significant rates of child victims of trafficking for forced labour

Victims of trafficking for forced labour are exploited in a wide range of industries. Such victims work in private and public enterprises, in workplaces that are both legal and illegal, and in a wide range of work sectors including agriculture, construction, electronics manufacturing, mining, fishing, hospitality, domestic service and domestic servitude, forestry, housekeeping, transportation, textile and apparel manufacturing, street begging, drug sales, gun carrying and peddling operations. Though victims exploited in the sex industry are largely considered victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, trafficking for forced labour has also been found in a wide range of venues within the sex industry.

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[13]   Of the 2,633 children trafficked for forced labour, 1,090 had information on means of control.

According to the VoTD, child victims reported being exploited in domestic work (14.5%), begging (10.2%), hospitality (3.4%) and agriculture (3.3%).[14] The analysis further indicated that children between the ages of 9 and 13 were more likely to be exploited for begging, while older child victims (aged 15–17) were more likely to be trafficked in the hospitality sector and for domestic work. When first forced to beg, 45.9 per cent of the children were between ages 9 and 13, and 33 per cent were 8 or younger, with the rates dropping for victims over the age of 14.[15] On the other hand, only 8.6 per cent of children were under the age of 9 when trafficked for domestic work,[16] and no victims reported being under the age of 8 when exploited in the hospitality sector.[17] In terms of gender differences, the analysis showed that a higher proportion of male children were trafficked into agriculture, begging and construction compared to female children, while more female children were trafficked into domestic work and hospitality.

Text box 13. Child begging as a form of exploitation

Though child begging often takes place in broad daylight, paradoxically, its victims often remain invisible to law enforcement, child protection systems and society as a whole (Save the Children, 2011). Begging is defined as "a range of activities whereby an individual asks a stranger for money on the basis of being poor or needing charitable donations for health or religious reasons. Beggars may also sell small items, such as dusters or flowers, in return for money that may have little to do with the value of the item for sale" (CSSRK, 2004). Victims forced to beg are of all ages, and the numbers of child victims have reached alarming proportions across the world. Children's manifest vulnerability is instrumentalized to leverage sympathy and to increase the profitability of the activity for the traffickers.

According to analysis of the VoTD, 26.5 per cent of the child victims exploited for labour in Ukraine were exploited for begging, 37 per cent of whom were between the ages of 10 and 12. This aligns with recent existing literature showing that one in four child victims of trafficking in Ukraine are child beggars (IOM, 2018). Further, 26 per cent of child victims being exploited for labour in Afghanistan reported being forced to beg. Local NGOs have argued that the continuously increasing number of internally displaced people in Afghanistan has exacerbated the exploitation of children for begging by organized criminal networks (US Department of State, 2019).

According to the data, child begging was also prevalent in Uganda: more than half of the child victims exploited in the country for labour (58.1%) were exploited for begging. It is worth noting that more than 40 per cent of these victims (41.8%) were exploited for begging between the ages of 5 and 7 years old. In response to the increased number of child beggars, the Kampala Child Protection Ordinance 2019 under the jurisdiction of the Kampala Capital City Authority criminalizes giving money, food or clothing to children on the street (US Department of State, 2020). Though the legislation was welcomed as a preventative measure against those seeking to exploit children as beggars, it was also harshly criticized as it did nothing to combat the root causes of the problem (Okiror, 2019).

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[14] Of the total number of child victims included in the VoTD, only 2,846 child victims had information on the type of labour for which they were trafficked.
[15] A total of 290 child victims reported being trafficked for begging and had complete information on age at registration.
[16] A total of 412 child victims reported being trafficked for domestic work and had complete information on age at registration.
[17] A total of 96 child victims reported being trafficked for work in the hospitality sector and had complete information on age at registration.

B. Child trafficking for sexual exploitation

Child trafficking for sexual exploitation refers to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child, with the purpose of exploiting them sexually. Sexual exploitation may take many forms in the context of trafficking in persons. While forced prostitution is common, children may also be trafficked for purposes such as pornography, online chat rooms, or sexual servitude, which also fall under this category of exploitation. This already prevalent phenomenon proliferated during the COVID-19 pandemic, with traffickers responding to the closure of businesses and movement restrictions by further developing online sexual exploitation of children. Existing literature shows that since the onset of the pandemic, the diffusion of graphic sexual imagery of children has significantly increased, while online predators have become more creative in the techniques they use to exploit children (Europol, 2020b). It should be noted that child trafficking for sexual exploitation and sexual exploitation of children are different phenomena, as children may be sexually exploited without being trafficked. Thus, these two terms should not be used interchangeably (ECPAT, 2020).

Analysis of the VoTD showed that 20.8 per cent of child victims had been trafficked for sexual exploitation.[18] Analysis further showed that female child victims are more likely to report sexual exploitation (30.3%) than male child victims (7.3%).[19] The fact that male child victims reported sexual exploitation at lower rates, however, should not be taken to indicate that male children are not at risk. Instead, the low proportion of identified males, a finding confirmed by the literature (Trounson and Pfeifer, 2020; Greenbaum, 2020), is the consequence of a combination of factors including cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and public perceptions around male sexual exploitation. These lead to an underrecognition of male children's victimization, limited screening of male children at high risk, as well as underreporting by the victims themselves (Greenbaum, 2020; von Hohendorff et al., 2017; Dennis, 2008).

Text box 14. Male child victims trafficked into sexual exploitation: A profile

According to the VoTD, the majority of the male child victims (72.4%) had educational levels that did not exceed middle school; only 3 per cent had no education at all. Though male victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation span all ages, male victims aged 15 to 17 reported higher rates of sexual exploitation. In terms of their recruitment, the analysis showed that almost half of the male child victims were recruited by a friend (49.1%). Male child victims trafficked into sexual exploitation were more likely to be controlled through the use of psychological (67.7%) and sexual (61.6%) abuse and the use of false promises (51.5%), and were more likely to be trafficked internationally (59.6%).

Further, though male child victims trafficked into sexual exploitation span all regions, the analysis showed that almost half of male child victims originating from Western and Central Asia are trafficked into sexual exploitation. The phenomenon is also highly prevalent among male victims originating from Europe: 37.4 per cent of male child victims originating from Eastern Europe and 29.2 per cent of male child victims originating from continental Europe reported being sexually exploited. In contrast, the number of male victims reporting being trafficked into sexual exploitation who originated from South Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean was small (3.4% and 6.2% respectively). However, this should not be interpreted as an indication of a low prevalence of the phenomenon in these regions; rather, it should be taken as an indication of a need to improve efforts to identify and assist male victims in these regions.

Of the sample of children who reported sexual exploitation (n = 1,265), the analysis showed that children aged 15 to 17 years represented a greater proportion (53.8%) compared to children of other ages reporting sexual exploitation. Further, according to the data, young adults are more likely to be trafficked for sexual exploitation than children or adults; 43.9 per cent of young adults (n = 11,582) reported being trafficked

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[18] Complete information was available for 3,571 female child victims and 2,493 male child victims that allowed for a determination of whether they had been trafficked for sexual exploitation.
[19] Complete information on gender was available for 1,262 child victims who reported being trafficked for sexual exploitation.

for sexual exploitation, as compared to 20.8 per cent of children (n = 6,068) and 20.0 per cent of adults (n = 23,171).

The analysis also revealed significant geographic patterns: 37.3 per cent of child victims originating from Europe and Central Asia were trafficked for sexual exploitation. It should be noted, however, that child victims trafficked for sexual exploitation who were assisted by IOM originated from 58 countries. Focusing on the phenomenon at the country level, the majority of child victims originating from Belarus (83.9%) and Romania (65.6%), as well as a smaller but significant number from Ukraine (23,5%), reported being trafficked for sexual exploitation.[20] The collapse of Soviet communism in 1989 provided new geographical and human resources for the sex trade, as the daunting economic uncertainty that Eastern European countries faced exacerbated citizens' and particularly women's and children's vulnerability, turning them into easy victims. Further, the collapse of the Soviet Union catapulted Eastern European countries into the global economy which, in combination with porous European borders and Eastern Europeans' need for labour opportunities, generated new recruiting grounds for traffickers, allowing secondary economic activities to blossom (Kligman and Limoncelli, 2005).

Text box 15. The "fifth wives": Child sexual exploitation in the Niger

The Niger is considered a country of origin and of transit, as well as a country of destination, for victims of human trafficking for forced labour and sexual exploitation. Though many drivers have led to the prevalence of the phenomenon in the country, child trafficking is also related to traditional, caste-based slavery practices against children. A well-known slavery custom, practised for centuries, is "Wahaya", involving the sale of young females of slave descent, usually younger than 15 years old, to older, wealthy men to become their unofficial "fifth wife", in addition to the four wives that they are permitted to have legally according to their religious tradition (US Department of State, 2020; Abdelkader and Zangaou, 2012). Though they are called wives, these children do not have any of the rights that legal wives have, but instead they are treated as subordinates, being forced into sexual slavery and domestic work (US Department of State, 2020; Abdelkader and Zangaou, 2012). In 2019, the Niger Court of Appeals outlawed the "fifth wife" tradition, yet it persists in parts of the country among certain communities (Peyton, 2019).

As is the case for victims of trafficking for forced labour, the use of psychological violence and abuse was widely employed against child victims of sexual exploitation as a means of control: 61.6 per cent of child victims reported that they experienced psychological violence.[21] Child victims also reported being controlled through sexual abuse (60.5%), false promises (54%), physical abuse (47.1%), and restriction of movement (32.8%). Further, sexual abuse was commonly used to control victims of sexual exploitation, regardless of age: 60.5 per cent of child victims (n = 537), 41.2 per cent of young adults (n = 479), and 50.9 per cent of adult victims over the age of 23 (n = 1,214) reported experiencing sexual abuse.

Work sectors with significant rates of child victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation

Child trafficking for sexual exploitation manifests in numerous and varied forms, ranging from forced prostitution, early marriage, pornography and performance in sexual venues, to online dissemination of media showing children forced into sexual activities (OJJDP, 2014). Reports of prostitution were similar across age groups: 2.1 per cent of young adults (n = 11,325) reported prostitution; 1.6 per cent of children (n = 5,929); and 1.4 per cent of adults (n = 22,465).[22] However, the number of child victims reporting the specific sectors in which they were exploited was very small, so statistically significant results could not be obtained.

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20 Relevant information to determine the form of trafficking experienced was provided by 367 child victims from Belarus, 157 from Romania and 528 from Ukraine.
21 Complete information on means of control was available for 537 child victims who had reported experiencing trafficking for sexual exploitation.
22 Complete information on the type of sexual exploitation was available for 39,824 victims (57.1% of the total number of victims registered in the VoTD).

3.3. MAPPING THE TRADE IN CHILDREN: GLOBAL MOVEMENTS RELATED TO CHILD TRAFFICKING

Describing human trafficking as a monster, UNODC acknowledged in 2008 that, despite the limitations in data collection, knowledge of the phenomenon allowed actors across the world to see its footprints, and to start understanding its size, shape and means (Costa, 2008). Twenty years after the Palermo Protocol was signed to combat trafficking in persons, global knowledge of the phenomenon has significantly increased. This has generated some useful mapping of global trafficking patterns, helping to better understand victims' profiles and needs. While there remains much to learn, significant aspects of the phenomenon, along with the factors that enable it and the unlawful undertakings that collude with it, are now known, guiding and informing the implementation of the Protocol's "3 Ps": prevention of the crime, prosecution of the traffickers, and protection of the victims, with a fourth "P" now commonly added: partnership for the response to trafficking.

Further, mapping global trafficking flows and identifying trafficking hotspots can be a valuable tool for developing regional, collaborative approaches to combat the phenomenon. Significant global efforts to analyse national and regional data, and to study trafficking patterns, have generated a greater understanding of the location of so-called "origin, transit or destination" countries for victims. These efforts have also contributed to successful mapping of some of the most common routes employed by traffickers (UNODC, 2016). In practice, however, there is increasing acknowledgement that countries oscillate between origin, transit and destination, sometimes playing all three roles simultaneously (UNODC, 2014). Constantly changing trafficking routes have stimulated the development of increasingly sophisticated data collection and monitoring strategies, but significant information deficits remain (ibid.). Despite these challenges, global mapping has yielded some instructive generalizations about trafficking patterns: the phenomenon does not have clear geographic boundaries; no country is immune to it; domestic trafficking is as common as international trafficking (UNODC, 2018a); and, though trafficking patterns adapt quickly to geopolitical changes, as a general rule victims are typically moved from poorer to more prosperous parts of a country or region, either through areas where mobility is regular and chances of detection are limited, or through dangerous routes where detection by authorities is very difficult. (See also Kangaspunta, 2003; UNODC, 2018a.)

Analysis of the VoTD showed interesting geographic patterns related to international and domestic trafficking of children, offering valuable information on the international routes that victims followed,[23] and providing details on how trafficking flows and patterns can differ across countries and regions. In particular, the analysis showed that 56.9 per cent of identified child victims had been trafficked within their country of origin.[24] Looking at geographical patterns, the vast majority of child victims originating from Eastern Europe and Central Asia (80.5%, n = 5,406), Latin America (70.3%, n = 1,085) and South Asia (84.4%, n = 557) were trafficked domestically.

In cases of international trafficking, child victims were most commonly trafficked to neighbouring, wealthier countries, with a smaller number being trafficked to distant wealthy regions. The data further showed that affluent countries of the "Global North" were a destination for victims from a large number of countries, spanning both the "Global North" and the "Global South".

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[23]   The percentages reflect the numbers of child victims registered in each one of these countries, who originated from the same country and who also provided information on their country of exploitation.
[24]   Complete information on citizenship was available for 12,754 child victims.

> **Text box 16. Determining trafficking routes in the context of this data set**
>
> During the screening process, information about both the country of citizenship and the country of exploitation of the victim was collected. The country of exploitation was defined as the last country in which the victim was exploited, even when the victim had been exploited in many countries. In case this information is missing, then the variable "country of exploitation" draws data from the location of the screening interview, the case location, and the location of the IOM mission managing the case.
>
> Though country of citizenship is not always aligned with the country of origin of the victims, in the context of this report, the country of origin was defined as the country of citizenship of the victim.
>
> If the country of citizenship and the country of exploitation were the same, then the case was determined to be a case of domestic trafficking. In cases where information about the country of exploitation was not available, only the country of registration and the country of citizenship were used to determine whether the case was one of domestic or international trafficking.

The data further revealed interesting trafficking flows and patterns within specific countries: while 91 per cent of the victims originating from the Republic of Moldova had been trafficked domestically, those victims trafficked internationally were exploited in Ukraine (51%), the Russian Federation (19.7 %) and Türkiye (7.3 %). The remaining had been trafficked and exploited in wealthier countries in the region, such as Italy, the United Arab Emirates and Germany.

For child victims originating from and registered in Ukraine and Belarus, though the vast majority had been trafficked domestically (68.5% and 70.6%, respectively), a significant number of Ukrainian and Belarusian child victims had been trafficked in the Russian Federation. Smaller numbers were also exploited in Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates, illustrating a trafficking pattern already well documented among adult victims: child trafficking victims originating from Eastern Europe are largely trafficked within the same subregion. On the other hand, 95.2 per cent of Ghanaian child victims and 95.5 per cent of Haitian child victims had been trafficked domestically, with a very small percentage of Haitian victims being exploited in the neighbouring country of the Dominican Republic.

Further exploring geographic patterns, the data showed that in Nigeria and Cambodia, international child trafficking was more widespread than domestic trafficking. Specifically, internationally trafficked child victims from Nigeria were exploited in Libya (32.2%), Mali (20.6%), Morocco (15.3%), and the Sudan (6.8%). Meanwhile, internationally trafficked child victims from Cambodia were exploited in Thailand (58.2%), Indonesia (21.3%) and Malaysia (17.2%).

Text box 17. Indonesia's child trafficking problem

About 1 in 10 victims of trafficking (11.9%) registered by the IOM office in Indonesia are children. Among the child victims, the vast majority come from Indonesia (73.4%), followed by Myanmar (22.1%), and other countries worldwide. The data showed the IOM office in Indonesia assists more domestic than international child victims. However, data further showed that Indonesian child victims had also been trafficked worldwide, with a significant number reporting Myanmar as their country of exploitation.

Indonesia is considered both an origin and destination country for child victims of trafficking, with victims being trafficked into both forced labour and the sex industry. Traffickers exploit children in fishing, construction, mining, manufacturing and domestic service, and also in illicit activities such as the production, sale and transportation of drugs (US Department of State, 2021). Additionally, since the early 2000s, child trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Indonesia has become particularly pervasive, with 30 per cent of child victims being exploited in child sex tourism (Moore, 2020).

Many factors have contributed to the prevalence of these phenomena in Indonesia, including economic inequalities, underdevelopment, lack of economic opportunities, limited access to education opportunities, lack of birth registration and widespread social acceptance of child labour and child marriage (ibid.). Financial pressure and economic setbacks, in combination with early marriage practices, have pushed many children into child labour through ambiguous and exploitative channels that appear as the only viable options (Hulsbergen, 2020). Further, though tourism in the country has been a significant contributor to economic growth, external shocks ranging from environmental degradation and disasters to the Bali bombing, the Timor-Leste Crisis of 1999 (Manning, 2000) and the COVID-19 pandemic have damaged the tourism sector, allowing for criminal networks to capitalize on the country's instability and people's growing vulnerabilities (Hulsbergen, 2020). Beyond these driving factors, the country also faces a series of institutional challenges that have enabled the trafficking phenomenon to grow. Indonesia's legal plurality,[25] in combination with a large regulatory system and widespread corruption (Moore, 2020), enable controversial interpretations of many illegalized practices (Hulsbergen, 2020), leading to weak implementation of child protection laws and of sanctions against traffickers (US Department of State, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted the financial stability of the population, leading to an increase in child labour practices. Recent data illustrated that child prostitution cases increased by 31.6 per cent during the pandemic, with much of the exploitation taking place online (Marutika, 2021). Considering the impact of the pandemic on its capacity, the Government of Indonesia has increased its efforts to combat the phenomenon. However, the country still does not meet minimum standards in prevention, identification and protection of victims, and prosecution of traffickers, allowing the phenomenon to increase (US Department of State, 2021).

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[25] Indonesia recognizes the existence of multiple sources of law, in addition to the country's legislation, within its own jurisdiction. These secondary sources can be religious law, customary law or international treaties, sources that are accepted as valid. Despite the legal pluralism, the Government of Indonesia still monopolizes the administration of laws (Wang, 2001).

4. UNDERSTANDING WHY SOME CHILDREN ARE MORE VULNERABLE THAN OTHERS

The scholarly literature shows that human trafficking spans all ages, genders and nationalities, indicating that it is a truly global phenomenon. Researchers also agree, however, that there are intersecting vulnerabilities that can increase some children's susceptibility to trafficking, with an interplay of individual, relationship, community and societal factors (Sanchez and Pacquiao, 2018; Greenbaum et al., 2017).

Utilizing the VoTD, three logistic regression models were generated to analyse the predictive power of specific factors in assessing vulnerability to (a) trafficking, (b) trafficking for sexual exploitation specifically, and (c) trafficking for the purpose of labour specifically, as a child compared to as an adult. Further, a fourth logistic model was generated to analyse the predictive power of specific factors in assessing vulnerability to domestic trafficking as a child compared to international trafficking as a child. The factors added to the model were chosen based on the framework of the social ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994 and 1981) and the IOM determinants of migrant vulnerability model (IOM, 2019a). Employing these frameworks, the authors aimed to explain how the inherent attributes of a child interact with their environment, increasing their likelihood to become victims of trafficking as children. This approach constitutes an attempt to move beyond the simplified push and pull factor models that tend to ignore complex and fluid interactions of individual, environmental and societal factors (Wood, 2020). Instead, it supports the notion that the aetiology of child trafficking is most accurately represented by a cumulative risk hypothesis (Lamela and Figueiredo, 2018; Kerr, 2014; Appleyard et al., 2005), which posits that a problem is caused by an accumulation of risk factors, regardless of whether some specific factors are present or not (Finigan-Carr et al., 2019). Accordingly, each one of the risk factors by itself may not necessarily lead to a child's vulnerability or victimization, but when these factors are combined, the risk increases significantly (Kerr, 2014; Bales and Soodalter, 2009).

According to the robustness assessment, these models have low recall, likely due to an unbalanced data set (more adults than children) and lack of information on potential confounders, which could not be adjusted for. Therefore, results should be interpreted with an abundance of caution. Despite the limitations, the value of these regressions is significant, given the number of extremely hard-to-reach participants included in the models and the fact that data were collected over a period of 20 years. The findings will add to the existing literature on developing comprehensive prevention, identification and early intervention efforts for children at heightened risk for trafficking.

Text box 18. Cumulative risk factors that increase children's vulnerability to trafficking

While not inclusive of all factors that increase children's vulnerability, the list below presents the most common risk factors identified in the literature. Some of these factors may mediate risk for child trafficking more than others (for example, poverty), while some other risk factors play a larger role under specific contexts (for example, gender in the context of humanitarian crises).

According to the social ecological model, as well as the determinants of migrant vulnerability model, risk factors can be grouped into four different categories:

Individual factors
Individual factors stem from the child's own biology and personal history (Sanchez and Pacquiao, 2018; Krug et al., 2002). Some of the most common factors that have been found to increase children's vulnerability are gender, class, race, age, presence of physical or mental disability, childhood experiences of abuse, emotional trauma, and history of substance abuse. This level also includes personal beliefs that drive specific behaviours, often shaped by the values and social norms cultivated at the relationship and societal level (Finigan-Carr et al., 2019).

Household and family factors
Household and family factors stem from the relationships that a child develops in various microsystems, such as home and peer groups. Some factors reported were unstable living conditions (Salisbury et al., 2015), a dysfunctional family environment, involvement of family and peers in the trafficking trade (Gibbs et al., 2015), unhealthy conceptions of normative interpersonal relationships adopted by a child's close environment (Finigan-Carr et al., 2019) and lack of social support. However, parents can also unwittingly become part of the trafficking process when seeking employment or educational opportunities for their children, without knowing that these opportunities will become exploitative.

Community factors
Community factors stem from the social relationships that a child develops in different contexts such as schools, neighbourhoods and local communities, which render them vulnerable to exploitation (Krug et al., 2002). Relationships developed at the community level are highly influenced by the processes taking place at the societal level, though there are many instances where communities develop their own norms to guide relationships in opposition to broader societal expectations (Finigan-Carr et al., 2019). Some of the factors reported are limited socioeconomic resources, low socioeconomic status, lack of quality educational opportunities, discrimination that leads to unequal access to resources (ibid.), sociocultural beliefs around sexuality, marriage, child labour, childhood, adulthood and manhood, community violence and gang presence.

Structural factors
Structural factors are broader societal and cultural factors and conditions that create an environment where child trafficking can thrive (ibid.). These factors can be policies that cause, sustain and broaden economic and social inequalities, legislation around trafficking, child protection and child labour, societal awareness and beliefs around trafficking, political instability, corruption, history of conflict, climate change, environmental degradation and disasters.

Figure 8. The determinants of migrant vulnerability (DoMV) model
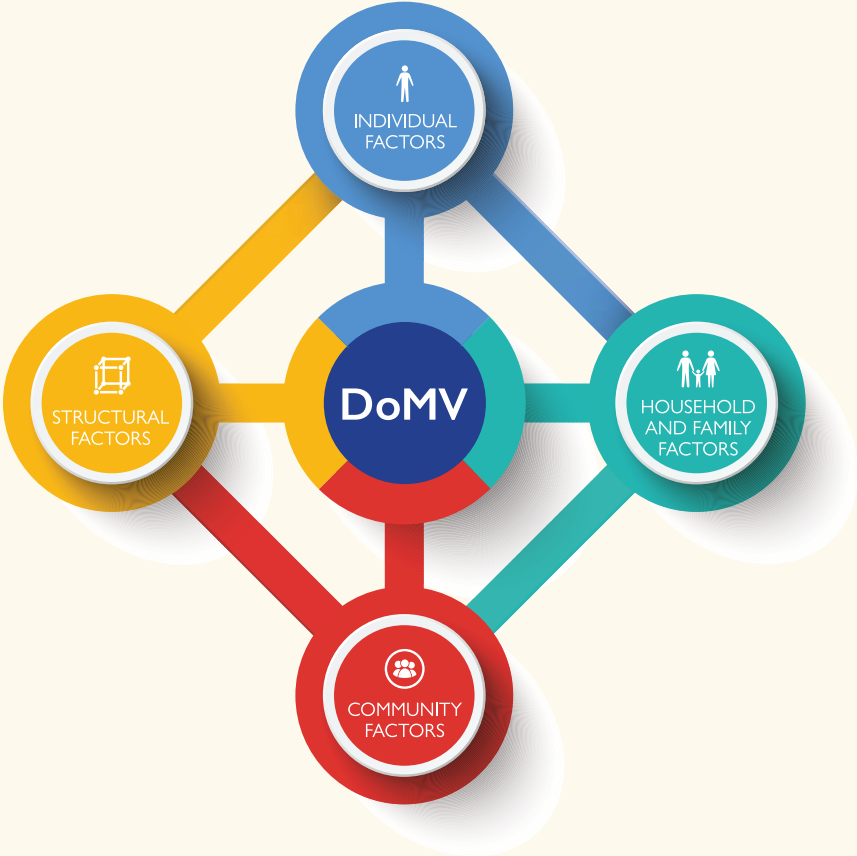
Source: IOM, 2019a.

4.1. DEVELOPING PREDICTIVE MODELS

Dependent and independent variables

Model A: An outcome variable "trafficked as a child" was generated based on the same criteria that were used to identify the child trafficked population. These criteria were specified using the following Boolean expression: being 17 years old or younger at either age of exploitation OR age of entry into trafficking OR age at registration. This outcome was represented in binary form where meeting the Boolean expression was categorized as trafficked as a child = "1" and not meeting it was categorized as trafficked as a child = "0". In the latter case, not trafficked as a child refers to trafficked participants in the data set who were trafficked as adults.

Model B: Model B was constructed using a binary outcome variable categorized as meeting the condition (trafficking for forced labour as a child = "1") when the participant reported labour exploitation and was classified as a child, and not meeting the condition (trafficking for forced labour as a child = "0") when the participant reported forced labour and was classified as an adult participant.

Model C: The dependent variable for this model was restricted to those who were trafficked as children. Based on the definition of international trafficking previously detailed in this report, the outcome variable was set to "1" for children who had been trafficked internationally and "0" for children who had been trafficked domestically.

Model D: The binary outcome was categorized based on information reported regarding the means of control, dividing victims into those who reported having been trafficked by means of tactics that foster dependency, and those who reported having been trafficked by means of tactics of direct control. Based on the definition of means of control and dependency previously detailed in this report, victims who reported "debt bondage", "psychoactive substances" or "excessive working hours" were defined as being depended to the trafficker, while victims who reported experiencing "physical abuse", "sexual abuse", "psychological abuse", "threats", "threats of law enforcement", "uses children", "withholds necessities", "withholds documents", "false promises", "restricts financial", "restricts medical care", "restricts movement", or "takes earnings" were defined as being controlled by the trafficker. Those who reported being depended to the trafficker were considered as "1" and those who reported being controlled were considered as "0".

Model E: An outcome variable "trafficked for sexual exploitation" was generated to include all participants in the data set (both adults and children) who reported being trafficked for sexual exploitation. The outcome variable was set to "1" for participants who reported this form of exploitation and "0" for those who did not report this form of exploitation.

Model F: Similar to Model E, an outcome variable "trafficked for forced labour" was generated to include all those participants in the data set (both adults and children) who reported being trafficked for forced labour. The outcome variable was set to "1" for participants who reported this form of exploitation and "0" for those who did not report this form of exploitation.

Based on the two theoretical frameworks employed and the availability of related variables in the most recent VoTD, the following variables were included in the models as independent variables:

A. Individual factors: sex (male or female), level of education (ordinal), age (child or adult);

B. Community factors: country of citizenship income classification (low, lower-middle, upper-middle and high income; this factor also falls under societal factors);

C. Societal factors: country of citizenship human trafficking tier level (tier 1, tier 2, tier 2 watch list, tier 3), and the WRI score for country of citizenship.

For the purposes of this analysis, the country of citizenship income classification variable was created, grouping the countries of citizenship into four categories based on gross national income per capita per country. The variable reflects the classification of each country as determined by the World Bank. Countries with gross national income (GNI) per capita below 955 United States dollars (USD) fall under the category of low income countries; countries with GNI between USD 1,036 and USD 4,045 fall under the category of low-middle income countries; countries with GNI between USD 3,046 and USD 12,535 fall under the category of upper-middle income countries; and countries with GNI of USD 12,696 or more fall under the category of high income countries (World Bank, 2020a). This classification aimed to explore whether specific economic or financial difficulties that countries face play a role in children's vulnerability to trafficking.

The country of citizenship human trafficking tier level variable was created to classify the countries of citizenship within four categories (tier 1, tier 2, tier watch list, tier 3) based on the actions and efforts of each country to combat human trafficking. The variable reflects the tier placement of each country as determined by the US Department of State in 2021 (US Department of State, 2021). However, this variable should be considered with caution when results are interpreted, as "the measure itself may be endogenous by design since changes in reported human trafficking caseloads are part of the TIP's [that is, the trafficking in persons reports'] evaluation of countries. The second mechanism is the rule of law, and the third is citizens' access to justice.... As expected, there are fewer trafficking cases in tier 1 countries. However, there are no differences in the number of trafficking cases in countries in tier 2,

tier 2 (watchlist) and tier 3, suggesting that the classification is driven more by anti-trafficking policy mandates than actual numbers of detected trafficking cases" (World Bank and IOM, 2022:23).

The WorldRiskIndex (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft, n.d.) is a statistical index that considers exposure to extreme natural events such as earthquakes, storms, floods, droughts, or sea-level rise, and calculates the country's capacity to respond to them. It establishes a disaster risk value for 181 countries, based on 28 indicators that enable statements on potentially threatened countries and on the social, economic and ecological conditions of societies. The WRI uses data that are available worldwide and accessible to the public (Welle and Birkmann, 2015; Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft, n.d.).

Last, in a post hoc exploratory analysis, we created a variable titled "adequate education for age" to account for the dependence on level of education on age. Specifically, victims of trafficking who had met the following conditions were considered to have attained an "adequate" level of education for their age:

- Those 6 years and younger with level of education as none;

- Those between 7 and 11 years of age with an education level of primary or elementary school;

- Those between 12 and 14 years of age with an education level of middle or high school;

- Those 15 years or older with an education level as middle or high school, technical training, or university.

Those who did not meet these conditions or who had a level of educational attainment of "other" were considered inadequate. Religious education was excluded from this subsample since only 17 reported it and whether it was "adequate" was not consistent internationally according to individual country standards.

Text box 19. The human trafficking tiers

"Tier 1: Countries and territories with governments that fully comply with the minimum standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000.

Tier 2: Countries and territories with governments that do not fully comply with the Act's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.

Tier 2 Watch List: Countries and territories with governments that do not fully comply with the Act's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards, and:

a) The estimated number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is significant or is significantly increasing, and the country is not taking proportional concrete action; or

b) There is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year.

Tier 3: Countries and territories with governments that do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so".

Source: US Department of State, 2021.

Model selection

Given the dichotomous nature of outcomes, a logistic regression model was used to characterize the relationship between various predictors and the dependent variable in each case. The criteria for a logistic regression model – such as a binary outcome, no outliers in the data and no high multicollinearity among predictors – were all met (Peng et al., 2002). Covariates were selected based on the social ecological model and on available data.

Levels of covariates with few observations were omitted to increase the stability of the model. For example, "religious education" as part of the education variable and "tier 3" as part of the human trafficking tier variable were each removed, since they had only 17 and 19 observations, respectively. Participants with any missing information on the dependent and independent variables were also excluded from the models and no imputations were made for missing data. Further, some levels of covariates from certain models are missing as a result of missing information for that covariate within the specific subsample used to run that model.

Model A: Assessing vulnerability to human trafficking as a child compared to as an adult

Gender, education, country income level, human trafficking tier and the WRI were included in model A as independent variables. A reference group of "high school/secondary school" was set for education and "tier 1" was set for human trafficking tier levels to be used as comparators. All variables were converted into factor variables. After these adjustments, the model was fit and used to estimate the odds of being trafficked as a child relative to being trafficked as an adult.

Age was not included in this analysis as an independent variable. Since the outcome was defined based on respondents' ages, including it as a variable would have explained almost all variation in outcomes. In a sensitivity analysis we included age-adjusted education in our multivariate model, and this did not alter the interpretation of our results.

Additionally, though including recruiter relationship in the regression model was considered, after filtering out participants with missing information on primary covariates, there were no participants with complete information on recruiter relationship. The final sample used for this regression analysis comprised 9,413 participants.

Model B: Assessing vulnerability to trafficking for forced labour as a child compared to as an adult

The same independent variables included in model A were included in model B. However, in this model, the country income classification of "high income" was excluded since there were no observations of that category in the subsample, and therefore, "upper-middle income" became the referent group. The final sample used for this regression analysis comprised 3,228 participants.

Model C: Assessing vulnerability to international or domestic trafficking as a child

In addition to the independent variables included in previous models, form of exploitation (only forced labour and sexual exploitation categories, due to sufficient sample size) was also included. For this analysis, the high income country income group and the tier 1 human trafficking group were excluded due to an insufficient sample size in the subsample. The same referent groups were used as in previous models. The final sample used for this regression analysis comprised 1,449 participants.

Model D: Assessing vulnerability to trafficking by means of dependency compared to by means of control

The independent variables included in this model were gender, age group (whether a child or adult), country income group, human trafficking tier, form of exploitation, and the WRI. For this model, the high income country income group and the tier 1 human trafficking group were excluded due to insufficient

sample size in the subsample. Therefore, upper-middle income was used as a referent group for country income group and tier 2 was used as a referent group for human trafficking tier. The final sample used for this regression analysis comprised 11,451 participants.

Model E: Assessing vulnerability to sexual exploitation

The independent variables included in this model were gender, age group (whether a child or adult), education, country income group, human trafficking tier, and the WRI. As in model D, the high income country income group and the tier 1 human trafficking group were excluded due to insufficient sample size in the subsample, and upper-middle income was used as a referent group for country income group and tier 2 was used as a referent group for human trafficking tier. The final sample used for this regression analysis comprised 9,045 participants.

Model F: Assessing vulnerability to forced labour

The same independent variables included in model E were included in model F. As in model E, the high income country income group and the tier 1 human trafficking group were excluded due to insufficient sample size in the subsample. Upper-middle income was used as a referent group for country income group and tier 2 was used as a referent group for human trafficking tier. The final sample used for this regression analysis comprised 8,902 participants.

Model G: Other predictors of trafficking as a child versus as an adult

The same independent variables were included as in model A. However, since level of education is generally dependent on age, we created a binary variable called "adequate education for age" as a predictor instead of education. Those who had completed education that would be expected for their age at registration were considered "adequate", while those who had not completed sufficient education for their age were "inadequate". The adequate category was used as a referent group. All participants that were 3 years old or younger were excluded from this model, since they are not expected to have completed any education. The final sample used for this regression analysis comprised 10,505 participants.

4.2.   RESULTS

Sex (individual factor)

Model A showed that in this data set, males had 1.99 times the odds of being trafficked as children compared to females, after controlling for education, country income classification, and trafficking tier level (Table 4). Further, according to model B, males had 1.55 times the odds of being exploited for labour as a child rather than as an adult when compared to females, after adjustment of relevant covariates in those two models (Table 5). Though the whole trafficking process is considered to be highly gendered, from the root causes to the measures taken to prevent it (Voronova and Radjenovic, 2016), the VoTD showed that males have often times higher chances of becoming victims of trafficking for forced labour while children, as compared to adults, when other factors are present. For example, in countries where child labour is culturally acceptable and social norms around gender confine female children to the home, male children may be more at risk for exploitation and trafficking before they reach adulthood.

Model C further showed that male child victims had 39 per cent less likelihood of being trafficked internationally than domestically, as compared to female child victims (Table 6), while they are more likely to be controlled through means of control rather than means that reinforce dependency on traffickers, as compared to female child victims (Table 7). Last, males in this data set, regardless of age, had substantially reduced odds of being trafficked for sexual exploitation in comparison to females (Table 8), while they have 16.74 times the odds of being trafficked for forced labour as compared to females after adjustment for relevant covariates (Table 9).

Education (individual factor)

After controlling for other covariates in the fully adjusted models, model A showed that in this data set, lower levels of education were associated with higher odds of being trafficked as a child. Specifically, victims with no education were 22.76 times more likely to be trafficked as a child than were victims who attended high school. Similarly, those with higher educational attainment or technical training showed reduced odds of being trafficked as a child when compared to those with lower levels of education attainment (Table 4). Model B (Table 5) further showed that lower levels of education were also associated with higher odds of being trafficked for forced labour as a child rather than as an adult. Indeed, compared to those who achieved a high school level of education, participants who only completed primary school education had 34.16 times the odds for forced labour as a child than as an adult. Existing literature confirms that the risk of being trafficked as a child is exacerbated by poor access to or withdrawal from education. Lack of education perpetuates poverty, inequality and limited access to services, some of the main risk factors for exploitation and trafficking. Though a higher level of education cannot necessarily protect children when other risk factors are present, it can be a major protective factor in the battle against some of the most significant factors that perpetuate exploitation and trafficking.

Further, model E showed that those participants with lower levels of educational attainment generally had reduced odds of reporting sexual exploitation rather than not reporting it, compared to those with high school level education. However, those with a middle school education had 1.45 times the odds of reporting sexual exploitation as compared to those who had completed high school. On the other hand, those who completed technical training as their highest form of education had 2.15 times the odds of reporting forced labour compared as those who had completed high school (Table 9).

Moreover, when we explored adequate education for age as a predictor of trafficking as a child compared to adult (Table 10), we found that inadequate education was associated with 5.36 times the odds of trafficking as a child versus as an adult after adjusting for relevant covariates, further highlighting that lack of education can increase the risk of trafficking for children.

Age (individual factor)

When age group (child versus adult) was included as an independent variable, model E showed that being trafficked as a child was associated with reduced odds of experiencing sexual exploitation, as compared to being trafficked as an adult (Table 8). On the other hand, being trafficked as a child was associated with 1.44 times the odds of experiencing forced labour after adjustment, as compared to being trafficked as an adult (Table 9), indicating that in this data set, a child victim was more likely to be trafficked for forced labour than an adult victim and less likely to be trafficked for sexual exploitation than an adult.

Country of citizenship income classification (community and societal factor)

According to this data set, originating from a low income country tends to be a factor that contributes to increased vulnerability to being trafficked as a child rather than as an adult and to being trafficked for forced labour specifically as a child rather than as an adult. In fact, model A showed that participants originating from a low income country had odds that were 5.57 higher for being trafficked as children rather than as adults in comparison to those originating from a high income country (Table 4). Further, model B showed that the same group had 1.28 times the odds of being trafficked for forced labour as a child rather than as an adult when compared to upper-middle income countries (Table 5).

Inhabitants of low income nations face extreme poverty, limited access to essential services such as clean water, electricity, education and health care, high rates of crime, corruption at all levels of government and political instability. Further, low income countries are more vulnerable to crises and economic shocks that widen existing inequalities and increase poverty, while limiting the capacity to combat the phenomenon of exploitation and trafficking. Driven by poverty, citizens of these countries are more prone to accept child labour and child marriage as a way to fight poverty, or to fall into debt bondage by following traffickers' false promises, severely increasing children's vulnerability to exploitation at younger ages.

Further, the adjusted model results suggested that participants from low income countries had reduced odds of being controlled through means of dependency rather than means of control, as compared to participants from upper-middle income countries (Table 7). Compared to those from upper-middle income countries, participants from lower-middle income countries further had 31.4 times the odds of reporting forced labour than not, after adjustment (Table 9).

Country of citizenship human trafficking tier level (societal factor)

Model A showed that participants from countries with a tier 2 human trafficking ranking had 4.49 times the odds of becoming victims of trafficking during childhood in comparison to victims from countries with a tier 1 ranking (Table A). The adjusted odds ratio was 5.20 for victims from countries with a tier 2 watch list ranking. Further, participants coming from countries with a tier 2 watch list ranking had increased odds (1.79 and 1.77, respectively) of reporting sexual exploitation and forced labour as compared to participants from countries with a tier 2 ranking, after adjustment (Table 8 and Table 9).

Form of exploitation

The form of exploitation was used as a covariate only in model C and model D (Table 6 and Table 7). Model C showed that, in this data set, the form of exploitation that a victim experienced tends to be a factor that contributes to increased vulnerability to being trafficked internationally rather than domestically. Indeed, it showed that being trafficked for sexual exploitation was associated with 1.56 times the odds of being trafficked internationally, whereas forced labour was associated with lower odds or 60 per cent less chance of being trafficked internationally as compared to domestically. In other words, child victims trafficked for sexual exploitation are more likely to be trafficked internationally, while child victims trafficked for forced labour are more likely to be trafficked domestically. Further, model D showed that participants trafficked for forced labour had 3.68 times the odds of being controlled through means of dependency, such as debt bondage, rather than means of control, after adjustment (Table 7).

Risk of disaster (societal factor)

Model A indicated that participants from countries at higher risk of vulnerability to climate change, environmental degradation and disasters had 1.12 times the odds of being trafficked as children compared to adults. Similarly, victims from countries with a higher WRI had 1.28 times the odds of being exploited for labour as children compared to adults. On the other hand, the WRI was associated with reduced odds of being trafficked internationally compared to domestically, amongst children; specifically, the index was associated with 11 per cent less chance of being trafficked internationally compared to domestically in children, indicating that when there is a disaster, child victims have a higher chance of being trafficked domestically than internationally.

Additionally, a higher WRI score was associated with increased odds of being trafficked for forced labour, indicating that participants from countries with a higher WRI had 1.19 times the odds of being trafficked for forced labour, whereas a higher WRI was associated with 0.83 times the odds of being trafficked for sexual exploitation, after adjustment (Table 8 and Table 9).

Robustness of results

To assess the robustness of results, we performed a train test split evaluation, where the data were split into training and testing sets to estimate the performance of each model on real simulated outcomes. We then built the logistic regression using the training data and tested the regression on the test set. A confusion matrix was applied to determine relevant metrics.

Model A had an accuracy of 90.1 per cent, which is the proportion of predictions that the model predicted correctly. The sensitivity or recall, meaning the proportion of children that are in fact children, was 99 per cent. The specificity or precision of this model, meaning the proportion of adults that are in fact adults, was 41.5 per cent. Even though the accuracy was high, the sensitivity of the model was low, most likely due to the high prevalence of adults in the data. Therefore, we calculated the F_1 score – a metric used to report the harmonic average of sensitivity and specificity in cases of unbalanced data – and obtained a score of 58.5 per cent, which more accurately represents the accuracy of the model.

Model B had an accuracy of 93.4 per cent. The sensitivity was 97.2 per cent and the specificity of this model, was 80.7 per cent. A harmonic average of sensitivity was taken to obtain an F_1 score of 88.2 per cent.

Model C had an accuracy of 69.9 per cent. The sensitivity was 85.5 per cent and the specificity of this model was 42.3 per cent. Since precision was low, an F_1 score of 57.5 per cent was calculated, which more accurately represents the accuracy.

Model D had an accuracy of 79.5 per cent. The sensitivity was 35.8 per cent and the specificity of this model was 91.9 per cent. The calculated F_1 score was 51.6 per cent, which more accurately represents the accuracy.

Model E had an accuracy of 76.3 per cent. The sensitivity was 74.5 per cent and the specificity was 77.8 per cent. The calculated F_1 score was 76.1 per cent.

Model F had an accuracy of 78.5 per cent. The sensitivity was 94.4 per cent and the specificity was 50.6 per cent. The calculated F_1 score was 65.8 per cent.

Model G had an accuracy of 89.4 per cent. The sensitivity was 99.1 per cent and the specificity was 28.7 per cent. The calculated F_1 score was 44.4 per cent.

Limitations of the models

The interpretation of these results should be exercised with caution. Due to the limited availability of information on individual- and community-level factors that may influence age at trafficking, the models lack adjustment for very important factors that, according to existing literature, influence trafficking outcomes. Though available covariates, as well as country-level covariates were considered, it was not possible to isolate the true associations between these variables and the outcomes due to poor adjustment of the model. Therefore, the interpretation of these coefficients should be taken with extreme caution since there is likely the issue of residual confounding.

It is also important to consider that this sample is not representative of the trafficked population, but rather of those who escaped trafficking and registered with IOM. Additionally, given that the entire data set comprised trafficked individuals, it was not possible to investigate factors that influence vulnerability to trafficking but rather forms of trafficking. Last, after assessing the robustness of results, steps were taken to strengthen the model by trying other models (complementary log-log regression model) suited for unbalanced data sets and including recruiter relationship as an independent. However, these did not improve model performance. It was not possible to include other country-level covariates relevant to these outcomes due to high collinearity between covariates. Future research should focus on collecting demographic information and other individual-level factors that may influence trafficking outcomes in order to estimate well-adjusted relationships. Furthermore, it is important to collect this information on comparable populations (that is, those who have not been trafficked) to be able to analyse determinants of child trafficking and trafficking in general.

Table 4. Model A: Logistic regression results for predictors of trafficking as a child (versus as an adult)

Covariates	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval	P value
Sex			
Male	1.99	1.68, 2.36	**< 0.001**
Female	Ref	Ref	Ref
Education			
None	22.76	16.3, 2.34	**< 0.001**
Primary/elementary	18.68	14.63, 24.00	**< 0.001**
Middle school	4.18	3.36, 5.24	**< 0.001**
High school/secondary school	Ref	Ref	Ref
Technical training	0.54	0.40, 0.71	**< 0.01**
Other	10.69	13.21, 29.54	**< 0.01**
Country income level			
Low income	5.57	1.31, 39.19	**< 0.05**
Lower-middle income	4.87	1.26, 32.54	**< 0.05**
Upper-middle income	2.53	0.65, 16.93	0.24
High income	Ref	Ref	Ref
Human trafficking tier			
Tier 1	Ref	Ref	Ref
Tier 2	4.48	1.87, 13.3	**< 0.01**
Tier 2 watch list	5.20	2.19, 15.40	**< 0.01**
WRI (risk of disaster)	1.12	1.08, 1.15	**< 0.01**

Notes: n = 9,413; "Ref" indicates the reference group.
* Bolded values indicate statistical significance at the alpha = 0.05 level.

Table 5. Model B: Logistic regression results for predictors of forced labour as a child (versus adult)

Covariates	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval	P value
Sex			
Male	1.55	114, 2.12	**< 0.01**
Female	Ref	Ref	Ref
Education			
None	41.72	20.90, 87.20	**< 0.001**
Primary/elementary	34.16	21.08, 56.9	**< 0.001**
Middle school	1.76	1.05, 2.97	**0.03**
High school/secondary school	Ref	Ref	Ref
Technical training	0.49	0.29, 0.83	**< 0.01**
Other	64.4	26.0, 186.54	**< 0.001**
Country income level			
Low income	1.18	0.45, 3.20	0.74
Lower-middle income	2.44	1.33, 4.57	**< 0.01**
Upper-middle income	Ref	Ref	Ref
Human trafficking tier			
Tier 1	Ref	Ref	Ref
Tier 2	6.17	0.78, 129.08	0.12
Tier 2 watch list	8.03	1.05, 165.28	0.07
WRI (risk of disaster)	1.28	1.20, 1.36	**< 0.01**

Notes: n = 9,413; "Ref" indicates the reference group.
* Bolded values indicate statistical significance at the alpha = 0.05 level.

Table 6. Model C: Logistic regression results for predictors of international versus domestic trafficking in children

Covariates	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval	P value
Sex			
Male	0.66	0.47, 0.94	**< 0.05**
Female	Ref	Ref	Ref
Education			
None	0.29	0.16, 0.51	**< 0.001**
Primary/elementary	0.20	0.12, 0.32	**< 0.001**
Middle school	0.54	0.33, 0.87	**< 0.05**
High school/secondary school	Ref	Ref	Ref
Technical training	0.68	0.36, 1.28	0.23
Other	0.07	0.02, 0.16	**< 0.001**
Country income level			
Low income	2.39	1.16, 4.85	**< 0.05**
Lower-middle income	0.76	0.53, 1.19	0.14
Upper-middle income	Ref	Ref	Ref
Human trafficking tier			
Tier 1	Ref	Ref	Ref
Tier 2	2.56	1.72, 3.82	**< 0.001**
Type of trafficking			
Forced labour	0.49	0.33, 1.28	**< 0.001**
Sexual exploitation	0.91	0.63, 1.30	0.60
WRI (risk of disaster)	0.96	1.72, 3.82	**< 0.01**

Notes: n = 1,449; "Ref" indicates the reference group.
*Bolded values indicate statistical significance at the alpha = 0.05 level.

Table 7. Model D: Logistic regression results for predictors of trafficking through dependency versus control

Covariates	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval	P value
Sex			
Male	0.95	0.85, 1.06	0.37
Female	Ref	Ref	Ref
Age category			
Child	0.31	0.27, 0.37	**< 0.001**
Adult	Ref	Ref	Ref
Country income level			
Low income	0.48	0.39, 0.60	**< 0.001**
Lower-middle income	1.34	1.16, 1.59	**< 0.001**
Upper-middle income	Ref	Ref	Ref
Human trafficking tier			
Tier 2	Ref	Ref	Ref
Tier 2 watch list	0.71	0.60, 0.85	**< 0.001**
Trafficking location			
Domestic	Ref	Ref	Ref
International	1.31	1.15, 1.49	**< 0.001**
Type of trafficking			
Forced labour	2.40	2.10, 2.78	**< 0.001**
Sexual exploitation	0.90	0.76, 1.07	0.23
WRI (risk of disaster)	0.93	0.92, 0.95	**< 0.001**

Notes: n = 10,934; "Ref" indicates the reference group.
*Bolded values indicate statistical significance at the alpha = 0.05 level.

Table 8. Model E: Logistic regression results for predictors of trafficking for sexual exploitation

Covariates	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval	P value
Sex			
Male	0.01	0.006, 0.01	**< 0.001**
Female	Ref	Ref	Ref
Age category			
Child	0.53	0.44, 0.63	**< 0.001**
Adult	Ref	Ref	Ref
Education			
None	0.57	0.40, 0.83	**< 0.01**
Primary/elementary	0.76	0.61, 0.95	**< 0.001**
Middle school	1.45	1.24, 1.70	**< 0.05**
High school/secondary school	Ref	Ref	**< 0.001**
Technical training	0.51	0.44, 0.58	**< 0.001**
Other	0.83	0.51, 1.35	0.44
Country income level			
Low income	0.15	0.08, 0.27	**< 0.001**
Lower-middle income	0.39	0.33, 0.46	**< 0.001**
Upper-middle income	Ref	Ref	Ref
Human trafficking tier			
Tier 2	Ref	Ref	Ref
Tier 2 watch list	1.79	1.49, 2.16	**< 0.001**
WRI (risk of disaster)	0.83	0.80, 0.86	**< 0.001**

Notes: n = 9,045; "Ref" indicates the reference group.
          * Bolded values indicate statistical significance at the alpha = 0.05 level.

Table 9. Model F: Logistic regression results for predictors of trafficking for forced labour

Covariates	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval	P value
Sex			
Male	16.74	14.6, 19.27	**< 0.001**
Female	Ref	Ref	Ref
Age category			
Child	1.44	1.19, 1.74	**< 0.001**
Adult	Ref	Ref	Ref
Education			
None	0.49	0.32, 0.73	**< 0.01**
Primary/elementary	1.16	0.92, 1.46	0.21
Middle school	0.59	0.49, 0.70	**< 0.001**
High school/secondary school	Ref	Ref	**< 0.001**
Technical training	2.15	1.88, 2.46	**< 0.001**
Other	0.62	0.38, 1.00	0.06
Country income level			
Low income	5.55	3.26, 9.50	**< 0.001**
Lower-middle income	3.14	2.53, 3.93	**< 0.001**
Upper-middle income	Ref	Ref	Ref
Human trafficking tier			
Tier 2	Ref	Ref	Ref
Tier 2 watch list	1.77	1.41, 2.23	**< 0.001**
WRI (risk of disaster)	1.19	1.15, 1.23	**< 0.001**

Notes: n = 8,902; "Ref" indicates the reference group.
          * Bolded values indicate statistical significance at the alpha = 0.05 level.

Table 10. Model G: Logistic regression results for predictors of trafficking as a child (versus adult)

Covariates	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval	P value
Sex			
Male	1.65	1.41, 1.92	**< 0.001**
Female	Ref	Ref	Ref
Education			
Adequate education	Ref	Ref	Ref
Inadequate education	5.36	4.58, 6.28	**< 0.001**
Country income level			
Low income	5.39	1.11, 41.71	0.06
Lower-middle income	5.67	1.26, 42.17	**0.05**
Upper-middle income	3.87	0.86, 28.87	0.12
High income	Ref	Ref	Ref
Human trafficking tier			
Tier 1	Ref	Ref	Ref
Tier 2	**4.85**	**2.07, 14.24**	**< 0.01**
Tier 2 watch list	5.45	2.33, 15.90	**< 0.001**
WRI (risk of disaster)	1.36	1.33, 1.40	**< 0.01**

Notes: n = 10,505; "Ref" indicates the reference group.
* Bolded values indicate statistical significance at the alpha = 0.05 level.

5. REFLECTIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Child trafficking is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that continues to spread and expand within and across borders. Though human rights advocacy has impinged on the policy frameworks of countries across the world, with fundamental child rights principles widely established and adopted, child trafficking nonetheless continues to be a pervasive and devastating phenomenon. Significant efforts have been made to collect reliable empirical information as a basis for better comprehending the dynamics and consequences of child trafficking. Analysis of the VoTD that includes data on approximately 13,000 child victims of human trafficking, collected over a period of 20 years, brings the scientific community a step closer to better understanding child trafficking's footprint, while shedding light on its driving forces and highlighting the vulnerabilities and human rights violations that arise throughout the trafficking process.

This report indicates that no age range, no gender, and no nationality is immune to child trafficking, confirming that it is a truly global phenomenon. The data collected by IOM in 113 countries show that though the number of female child victims is slightly higher than the number of male child victims, male victims have higher chances of being trafficked as children (versus as adults) as compared to female victims, further highlighting the need to step up measures that reduce the exposure of male children to risk. The data analysed in the report show that male child victims are more likely to be trafficked for forced labour in comparison to female child victims. Further, the regression models show that child victims are more likely to be trafficked for forced labour than adult victims and less likely to be trafficked for sexual exploitation than adult victims. A closer look at trafficking methods employed shows that false promises and psychological and physical abuse are the most common means used to control child victims, with sexual abuse being used primarily to control female child victims.

The study highlights that there are certain core economic sectors with significant incidences of workers who are child victims of trafficking for forced labour. While victims of trafficking for forced labour are linked to a wide range of industries and work sectors, according to the VoTD the main forms of labour-related exploitation of child victims are domestic work, begging, hospitality and agriculture. There are important variations by age, with children between the ages of 9 and 13 being more likely to be exploited for begging, while older child victims (aged 15–17) are more likely to be trafficked in the hospitality sector and for domestic work, for example. In terms of gender differences, the analysis shows that a higher proportion of male children are trafficked into agriculture, begging and construction compared to female children, while more female children are trafficked into domestic work and hospitality. These findings are important to inform tailored (such as by age and gender) responses to trafficking prevention, labour rights interventions into the relevant industries, and measures to enhance the identification and protection of victims.

The analysis demonstrates that child trafficking for sexual exploitation manifests in numerous and varied forms, ranging from forced prostitution, early marriage, pornography and performance in sexual venues, to online dissemination of media showing children forced into sexual activities. The VoTD reveals that reports of prostitution are similar across age groups; however, the number of child victims reporting the specific sectors in which they are exploited was very small, so further research is needed to better understand these dynamics.

The role of people in the recruitment process with whom child victims have close ties is also an important finding of this study: contrary to what was previously thought, this data set shows that child victims are more frequently recruited by family members and friends, with female child victims being more at risk. Their involvement in the recruitment process seems to be higher in countries where extreme poverty is common. Poverty is also highly correlated with the prevalence of child trafficking in general. The data show that victims originating from a low-income country are more likely to be trafficked as children rather than as adults, in comparison to those originating from a high-income country. The data further show that child victims trafficked for sexual exploitation are more likely to be trafficked internationally, while child victims trafficked for forced labour are more likely to be trafficked domestically. Last, this study concludes that, though higher levels of education are largely considered as a protective factor that decreases children's vulnerability to trafficking, children with higher levels of education can also be at risk when other factors of vulnerability exist.

The analysis of the VoTD shows important geographic patterns relating to international and domestic trafficking of children, offering valuable information on the international routes victims follow, and providing details on how trafficking flows and patterns can differ across countries and regions. In particular, the analysis shows that more than half of identified child victims had been trafficked within their country of origin, with domestic trafficking being particularly prominent in South Asia (close to 85%), Eastern Europe and Central Asia (around 80%) and Latin America (approximately 70%). In cases of international trafficking, child victims were most commonly trafficked to neighbouring, wealthier countries, with a smaller number being trafficked to distant wealthy regions. The data further showed that affluent countries of the "Global North" were a destination for victims from a large number of countries, spanning both the "Global North" and the "Global South".

As the first report on child trafficking based on global data, it is hoped that these findings will contribute to the existing literature on the field, further guiding and informing a framework to combat the phenomenon that is slowly evolving from a purely law-enforcement approach to a more grounded, rights-based, victim-centred approach. However, there remains much to be done. The COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted established efforts to prevent the phenomenon and protect its victims, while transforming the trafficking landscape and resulting in additional vulnerabilities for many. Though this report does not study the impact of the pandemic on child trafficking, a significant number of studies have already documented that impact: the changes in financial and employment conditions that followed measures to mitigate the pandemic's toll on human life have not only exacerbated pre-existing human trafficking trends but also laid the ground for the emergence of new trends (World Bank, 2020b; World Bank and IOM, 2022). The pandemic has further compounded risk, especially for countries facing pre-existing humanitarian crises, exacerbating the vulnerability of those already in precarious situations. Existing data show that millions of people have been exposed to extreme poverty, hunger, and food insecurity: available estimates suggest that 270 million people are at severe risk of food insecurity in the near future (United Nations General Assembly, 2020) and up to 150 million people face extreme poverty (World Bank, 2020b). On the other hand, as countries have overwhelmingly focused on preventing a public health crisis, combating human trafficking has become less of a priority, allowing traffickers to capitalize on their victims' immediate loss, destruction and lack of viable alternatives for survival, trapping them in exploitative situations where the line between consent and coercion is often blurred (Carroll, 2020). Though limited, existing evidence confirms that not only did human trafficking not slow down during the pandemic, but instead it rapidly evolved, adapting its tactics to exploit risk factors generated or magnified by the pandemic: India and Nepal have documented an increase in cases of child marriage as a result of the economic recession (Swamy, 2020; Bhabha et al., 2020); Haiti, the Niger and Mali have documented cases of sexual exploitation in camps for internally displaced persons as a result of reduced security (US Department of State, 2021); India has recorded cases of debt bondage or bonded labour, with families unable to repay loans taken to cover survival costs during lockdowns, offering up their children to moneylenders (Nagaraj et al., 2020); the reduction of income generating opportunities in Mexico's informal markets has rendered asylum seekers vulnerable to sexual exploitation, with unaccompanied migrant children being most at risk (Merida, 2020; Crail, 2020). Finally,

multiple countries have reported a drastic increase in online commercial sexual exploitation of children, with some noting an increase of more than 300 per cent in referrals of cases of trafficking for online sexual exploitation (US Department of State, 2021).

With evidence that the world will continue to suffer the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for years to come, magnifying deeply entrenched economic and social inequalities (UNODC, 2021a), it is expected that the prevalence of child trafficking will increase. Despite the practical challenges involved in merging anti-trafficking activities with pandemic mitigation strategies, the anti-trafficking community has demonstrated new insights and lessons, but more steps are needed to move toward a comprehensive, coordinated, equity-based response to ensure that humanity will still honour the commitment made to end human trafficking by the year 2030.

In this context, combating human trafficking should remain a priority for countries at all levels. Countries should enhance their bilateral, regional and international collaboration and adopt cross-border strategies to accelerate action, share knowledge and data and drive innovation. Trafficking responses should reconsider the driving forces of the phenomenon and focus on extending social protection systems to reduce pre-existing and future inequalities, addressing gender-related vulnerabilities and deeply entrenched exploitative labour practices, strengthening policies and legislation and ensuring their enforcement. Particular attention should be paid to promoting dialogue to close the existing chasm between child rights and migration control mandates, to ensure that those children seeking a better life will not see irregular migration at the hands of trafficking networks as their only viable option. Measures designed to halt the spread of human trafficking are unlikely to generate sustainable outcomes unless they are accompanied by the development of safe, regular and accessible options for those seeking to leave intolerable home circumstances (Chuang, 2020; Gallagher, 2010). Of course, these responses will not be effective if they do not consider the heterogeneity of contexts in which child trafficking occurs, as well as the heterogeneity of the child victims themselves. There are significant differences between age groups, between genders as well as between children who come from different cultural, social and economic backgrounds. Responses need to be tailored to the context of each country, and to the complexity of the intersection of individual, community and societal factors that children face, to ensure positive results.

Recommendations

This report offers evidence-based recommendations in four key areas, setting out key actions for consideration by national governments, United Nations entities and other international actors and other partners engaged in combating child trafficking. Within each area, recommendations are structured as actionable steps that can drive and inform an effective child-centred prevention framework, as well as the implementation of comprehensive, child-centred, integrated and inclusive services that children need and deserve. They further advocate movement towards a holistic approach that defines and treats human trafficking as a consequence of existing structural phenomena such as inequality, poverty and discrimination, as well as lack of corporate accountability for exploitation.

To respond to the challenges that these phenomena produce, it is essential to support children at risk of and subject to trafficking, their caregivers and their communities in accessing and exercising their rights, and to directly address their needs. Member States have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil these rights and address these needs, at individual and household levels, as well as at community and structural levels, in both humanitarian and development settings. Fulfilling these duties requires cooperation, both within each State and among Member States; as well, where necessary, support must be provided to enhance the capacities of States to carry out these duties. Such cooperation and support are important elements of reducing vulnerability and promoting resilience to child trafficking.

Area 1. Research, data and evidence

Data collection, data generation and research should be focused on fulfilling specific policy and programmatic needs, such as filling data gaps and enabling targeted initiatives to prevent future exposure to trafficking and to protect the rights of already trafficked children, ensuring that their entitlements and aspirations are fulfilled. It remains essential to highlight the need for interventions at individual and household levels, as well as at community and structural levels, in humanitarian and development settings. Exploitative work settings – with poor or non-existent health and safety monitoring, and poorly controlled global supply chains that depend on these settings for the supply of cheap products – are the bedrock on which child trafficking flourishes.

In the area of research, data and evidence, therefore, the report makes the following recommendations.

1.1 Further strengthen the collection, management and use of administrative data on the prevalence, characteristics, precipitators and consequences of child trafficking, ensuring the inclusion of those from diverse backgrounds and hard-to-reach populations, including through:

- Supporting awareness and implementation of the ICS-TIP by governments as a "common reference and guidance for the safe collection, management and reporting of data on trafficking in persons, as well as standardized indicators to ensure consistency and quality of data" across all stages of the data lifecycle (IOM and UNODC, forthcoming).

- Supporting front-line organizations to utilize the Human Trafficking Case Data System to streamline the ethical and safe collection, management and use of data on trafficking survivors.

- Ensuring the privacy and security of victims by implementing data security and data protection principles in all aspects of data collection and research.

1.2 Continue to conduct systematic research on the factors driving vulnerability in different contexts, including exposure to conflict, displacement, social and economic marginalization, as well as particular risk factors related to age, sex, disability, family structure and ethnicity.

1.3 As far as possible, employ a participatory approach, directly involving affected communities in both defining and benefiting from research, including through involving the affected communities in the process of translating findings into interventions and policy change.

1.4 Strengthen the monitoring of the response to trafficking in persons and use this to inform future programming, including through collecting data on the efficacy of existing anti-trafficking responses, strategies and programmes over time, including during crises, to allow for data-driven and evidence-based programming.

1.5 Continue to study the intersection between child trafficking, migration and child labour, as well as other related phenomena, in order to better understand the complexities and to improve the complementarity of responses.

1.6 Explore emerging issues and trends regarding the phenomenon of trafficking in persons and its victims, and use this research to inform future policy and programming. For example:

- Collecting data from victims trafficked during the COVID-19 pandemic to increase the evidence base on how vulnerability to trafficking, as well as trafficking modalities, evolved during the pandemic, including recruitment methods, trafficking routes and sectors of exploitation, as well as what this means for the identification and protection of child victims of trafficking.

- Further exploring, through data and research, the impact that climate change, environmental degradation and disasters have on adults and children of all genders and how this relates to child trafficking, particularly in the context of sudden- and slow-onset disasters, including its impact on livelihoods and human mobility (internal displacement or irregular migration, for example).

1.7 Establish and implement systematic and harmonized approaches to counter-trafficking information management in humanitarian and crisis responses to better identify, understand, prevent and respond to specific child trafficking dynamics, vulnerabilities and risks, building on existing data collection tools and established coordination forums, such as clusters.

1.8 Utilize new and emerging technologies and data generation methods, such as geospatial data and big data, to further improve our understanding of child trafficking.

Area 2. Prevention and reduction of vulnerability to trafficking

Children's exposure to trafficking in persons should be reduced, including through prevention measures that respond to trafficking dynamics and address individual-, community- and society-level factors that contribute to children's vulnerability to trafficking (see also OHCHR, 2010). Collaboration with organizations working on labour rights and the improvement of workers' conditions is an essential part of child trafficking prevention.

To achieve these reductions and preventions, the report makes the following recommendations.

2.1 Increase the capacity of governmental and non-governmental anti-trafficking actors to ascertain those groups of children most at risk of trafficking and exploitation within their area(s) of operation, and their capacity to use this to inform prevention efforts.

2.2 Work towards eliminating context-specific risk factors that exacerbate economic deprivation and limit children's potential and options,[26] rendering them more vulnerable to deception, coercion and false promises.

2.3 Ensure that children and their families enjoy an adequate standard of living and have access to social protection programmes, including by:

- Establishing effective communication mechanisms to ensure that all individuals and families with children, guardians of children, as well as children themselves, including children with disabilities, are aware of social protection services and programmes available to them, as well as of the steps needed to access them.

- Ensuring that the application process is barrier-free and accessible to everyone, regardless of education level, migration status, geographical location, access to technology, or any other factor.

- Ensuring that women and children can apply for and have access to these services and programmes as heads of households, and that social protection programmes are not accessible only to male heads of households.

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[26] See also SDG goal 1: end poverty in all its forms everywhere.

2.4   Ensure that all children have access to educational, life-skills and training opportunities to reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience,[27] including through:

- Establishing mechanisms to monitor school attendance and dropout rates, and generate supportive interventions to assist families in crisis, including through organizing effective mentorship, tutoring and scholarship programmes to enable children to stay in school and to access higher education and skill training based on the evolving demands of labour markets and the diverse needs of children.

- Organizing social protection structures that enable parents to send their children to school and prevent them from resorting to child labour or child marriage to survive.

- Providing inclusive, equitable and accessible quality education and training for everyone, ensuring that no one is left behind, including migrant children and youth, children with disabilities and children from religious, ethnic or other minorities.

- Facilitating access to lifelong learning opportunities, including by strengthening the capacities of education systems and by facilitating non-discriminatory access to early childhood development, formal schooling, non-formal education programmes for children for whom the formal system is inaccessible, on-the-job and vocational training, technical education and language training.

- Promoting school environments that are welcoming and safe; supporting the aspirations of migrant children by enhancing relationships within the school community, incorporating evidence-based information about migration into education curricula, and dedicating targeted resources to schools with a high concentration of migrant children for integration activities to promote respect for diversity and inclusion and to prevent all forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia and intolerance.

2.5   Promote safe and decent working opportunities for children of legal working age, including determining a minimum wage that will allow for an adequate standard of living,[28] such as by:

- Establishing mechanisms to identify the driving factors of informal labour markets within different contexts and developing targeted and context-specific policy responses, in collaboration with labour rights organizations, that promote decent working conditions and access to social protection and other social benefits for informal workers and their families.

- Providing incentives to businesses for a non-coercive and rights-respecting transition to formal labour markets, so that informal workers and their families gain full access to the benefits of social inclusion within their communities.

2.6   Ensure and enhance safe and regular migration options for children and their families,[29] such as through:

- Expanding options for academic mobility through scholarships and paid educational opportunities to allow older children to move to other countries to receive education or attend skills training.

- Ensuring that children and their families have access to visas on humanitarian grounds, particularly those whose protection concerns are not covered by the refugee protection regime.

- Strengthening access to birth registration and nationality (and reducing statelessness), to passport and other legal identity documentation, and to regular migration opportunities for children, including for children travelling alone.

- Ensuring implementation of fast family reunification procedures for migrant children that "promote the realization of the right to family life and the best interests of the child".

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[27]   See also SDG goal 4: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
[28]   See also SDG goal 8: promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
[29]   See also SDG target 10.7: facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people.

2.7 Ensure that children have access to appropriate legal travel identity documents and other forms of documentation, including birth and citizenship documentation, including for children born abroad, and during all phases of the migration journey, such as in transit countries and countries of destination, by engaging in education campaigns about the requirement and benefits of birth registration, to increase the capacities of individuals and families, as well as civil registration authorities, in the receiving country and through consular authorities, to contribute to the reduction of statelessness and vulnerability to trafficking.

2.8 Establish mechanisms to reduce vulnerability and combat discrimination and abuse against vulnerable groups of children, including through:

- Developing awareness-raising campaigns on the role of discriminatory attitudes, including with respect to children with disabilities, migrant children, LGBTI+ children and children from racial, ethnic, religious or other stigmatized minorities.

- Organizing trainings and seminars to deconstruct and change discriminatory attitudes towards and perceptions of specific groups of children that increase their vulnerability to exploitation.

- Establishing measures to reduce vulnerability to trafficking, particularly for those most at risk, such as child victims of violence, abuse and neglect, as well as homeless children and children with disabilities.

2.9 Put in place special measures to respond to the specific vulnerabilities of migrant children to trafficking, such as including migrant children in national child protection systems. To achieve this, establish robust procedures for the protection of migrant children in relevant legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings and decisions, as well as in all migration policies and programmes that impact children, including consular protection policies and services, as well as cross-border cooperation frameworks, in order to ensure that the best interests of the child are appropriately integrated, consistently interpreted and applied in coordination and cooperation with child protection authorities.

2.10 Ensure that combating child trafficking is considered in humanitarian action, including from the onset of crisis response and for its duration, through:

- Promoting the well-being of children and adolescents through positive caregiving and parenting activities and strategies for supporting at-risk children and adolescents with psychosocial needs, aiming to enhance confidence around parenting and caregiving skills for parents and caregivers living in a situation of profound distress.

- Reinforcing the employability and entrepreneurship skills of youth and adolescents at risk of trafficking by engaging them in sessions on employability and entrepreneurship skills.

- Facilitating dialogue to enable and empower children at risk of trafficking to express their views and have them considered.

2.11 Raise awareness and share information on trafficking at community levels, including by:

- Strengthening community-based protection mechanisms to prevent child trafficking, through engaging affected communities in the development, dissemination, monitoring and evaluation of awareness and self-help strategies. Specific attention should be paid to raising awareness around new and emerging threats such as online exploitation, "sextortion" and the use of the Internet for exploitation.

- Ensuring that awareness-raising campaigns reach communities with a higher vulnerability to trafficking, are multilingual, gender- and age-responsive and accessible to everyone, and that information is disseminated in ways that also benefit people with little or no education.

- Engaging youth and adults in the design of their own key advocacy messages on prevention of child trafficking that could be part of a youth-led advocacy campaign and social behavioural change.

- Establishing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate awareness-raising and information-sharing campaigns, adjusting as necessary.

> **Text box 21. Good practices amidst the pandemic: Raising awareness on human trafficking**
>
> IOM in Peru conducted a large-scale awareness-raising campaign on the increased risk of trafficking in persons amidst the pandemic, reaching over one million people. In Thailand, IOM supported the translation of the "Protect-U" app to regional languages, expanding the pool of victims able to access and use it. The app enabled victims of human trafficking or people from the general population to report suspected trafficking and transmit their GPS location (IOM, 2021). In India, UNICEF India in collaboration with several United Nations agencies coordinated a public advocacy campaign at a national level against stigma and discrimination, led by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, reaching more than 5 million people in nine states (UNICEF India, 2020).

Area 3. Protection and assistance in the context of trafficking

The right of children who have been trafficked to comprehensive, multisectoral and coordinated protection and assistance should be upheld. To achieve this, the report makes the following recommendations.

3.1 Ensure timely and effective identification of child victims, such as by:

- Strengthening the capacities of first responders – including government officials, non governmental partners, corporate actors and others – to identify and refer victims of trafficking in persons for protection and assistance, paying particular attention to the needs of children.

- Strengthening consular capacities to identify, protect and assist their nationals abroad who are in situations of vulnerability, including children at risk of and subject to trafficking.

- Developing context-specific tools to assist actors in identifying victims, including through proactive measures and utilizing new and emerging technologies.

- Ensuring that identifying and providing services to victims of trafficking remains a priority during humanitarian crises.

3.2 Enhance referral pathways and coordinated case management for victims of trafficking, with special considerations for children, including through:

- Establishing and implementing national referral mechanisms, recognizing their value as building blocks for cooperation, collaboration and partnership at international, national, subnational and local levels, with particular considerations for crisis settings (also refer to Area 4. Partnership and coordination of actors for the response to trafficking).

- Ensuring, where possible, integral and direct links between national referral mechanisms that identify and protect victims of trafficking and national child protection systems (also refer to Area 4. Partnership and coordination of actors for the response to trafficking).

- Establishing and implementing guidelines for victims' case management at national levels, as well as across borders (where necessary), and facilitating collaboration between different actors, in line with international frameworks and building on international best practices.

- Mapping existing services for child victims at the local and national levels to determine how they can effectively and efficiently collaborate and intersect for enhanced case management and coordination.

- Ensuring that case workers receive specialized training and receive specialized support to address the needs of child victims with physical, cognitive, emotional and other disabilities.

- Swiftly identifying and appointing a competent and impartial legal guardian for all child victims of trafficking. As well, ensuring that there are measures for family tracing and for the recovery of identity documents, as well as other documents.

- Establishing mechanisms to ensure that all case-related decisions for child victims of trafficking are taken in line with international commitments and principles on child rights, such as those set out in the CRC (United Nations, 1989). This includes ensuring the best interests of the child are considered at all times, and that each child has the opportunity to meaningfully participate in all decisions relating to their case.

- Factoring safety and security into decision-making, based on up-to-date risk assessments, including reliable and verified information on the nature of the child's victimization, their demographics (such as age, sex and family conditions), whether the child or their family has debts to traffickers, and the capacity of the country in which the child is located to ensure their safety, among other things.

3.3   Enhance comprehensive, individualized protection assistance for victims of trafficking, with special considerations for children, for example by:

- Promoting barrier-free access to health-care services (including mental health-care services), education, skills building and training, justice and legal assistance, recreation and other services for children who are at risk of or who have experienced trafficking, regardless of their immigration status or any other factor, such as age and sex, gender, ethnic or cultural identity, while also providing specialized services to child populations often overlooked, such as male children and LGBTQI+ youth. There should be special considerations for those in crisis settings.

- Ensuring that all victim support service providers that come into direct contact with child victims are well trained and are aware of and responsive to age, gender, cultural and other sensitivities, dynamics and needs.

- Establishing short- and long-term shelter for child victims, with a focus on "alterative", community-based care (such as foster care), and taking into consideration the individual circumstances, vulnerabilities, needs and views of each individual child.

- Empowering children at risk of and subject to trafficking and their caregivers as rights holders through meaningful participation in social cohesion activities and youth-led initiatives to raise their voices and be engaged in actions enabling their access to dignified protection, education services and employability opportunities.

- Ensuring the availability of resources and service programmes that address the needs of child victims with a wide range of physical, sensory, learning, mental, developmental and other disabilities; ensuring that child victims are aware of these services and can access them easily.

- Establishing special protection measures for humanitarian and crisis settings, including ensuring barrier-free access and identifying and responding to vulnerabilities and protection needs.

3.4   Establish measures to ensure that children are not placed in detention facilitates and are not prosecuted or otherwise criminalized as a result of having been trafficked.

3.5   Establish a monitoring and evaluation mechanism for all services to ensure that they are fit for purpose, and that no harm is caused. Assign an independent national actor or support the role of existing ones such as the role of the ombudsperson or that of a national human rights institution to monitor national efforts to combat human trafficking. This role should be strengthened during crises.

3.6   Leverage technology, including emerging technology, to improve victims' access to comprehensive protection and assistance, such as to support the delivery of services in hard-to-reach settings, and to promote barrier-free access for children with disabilities or children who may face linguistic or other barriers to service provision.

Text box 22. Good practices amidst the pandemic: Leveraging technology to help counter-trafficking efforts

In an effort to improve the efforts of Colombia's counter-trafficking national taskforce, IOM designed a georeferencing, GPS-based mobile application to allow for quick detection of trafficking victims and activation of direct assistance (US Department of State, 2021).

IOM Peru ran a series of webinars and training sessions at national and regional levels to ensure that counter-trafficking committees were well prepared to respond to the new risks of the pandemic, while continuing to offer technical assistance and support (IOM, 2021).

3.7   Ensure that returns of child victims are voluntary and safe, and in the child's best interests. Integrate safety and security considerations, as well as the views of the child, ascertained through a meticulous pre-return best interests assessment and best interests determination process to determine if, and when, returns should take place. These pre-return risk assessments should be carried out before any decision about return is made. If there is an indication that returning is not in a child's best interests, alternative options should be identified.

3.8   Ensure that short- and long- term support programmes for child victims are in place in the country of origin to support safe, dignified and sustainable reintegration into community life by providing returning child victims of trafficking with equal access to social protection and services, justice, psychosocial assistance, education, vocational training, employment opportunities and decent work. Allow them to fully build upon their human capital as active members of society and contributors to sustainable development in the country of origin upon return, including through:

- Enhancing the capacity of key stakeholders involved in the reintegration of migrant children in vulnerable situations, such as trafficked children, to apply child rights approaches to the sustainable reintegration of migrant children and families.

- Providing reintegration options that are informed by continuity of care. Transitional safety nets upon return, as well as all relevant service provision – including access to health, education, skills training and employment, social protection, family support and other services – should be part of this consideration.

- Involving family and community members in the reintegration process of child victims to allow for a protective social network to be built and to go beyond individual factors, to address factors at the community and societal levels, so long as it is safe to do so.

- Implementing community-based psychosocial activities to improve children's participation and adolescents' empowerment while helping them to understand their strengths and rights and how to protect themselves.

- Establishing a follow-up mechanism to monitor children's reintegration process and reduce their risk for revictimization, including through addressing underlying vulnerabilities.

> **Text box 23. Good practices amidst the pandemic: Ensuring access to reintegration assistance**
>
> IOM Guatemala developed a mobile app (OportuGuate) to assist returnees in gaining access to reintegration services, including educational and employment and entrepreneurial opportunities (IOM, 2021).

3.9 Strengthen mechanisms to ensure that all actions are in the best interests of the child; consider the child's views and preferences, prior to the determination of their case, for example by:

- Ensuring that a determination of the child victim's best interests is always carried out before any decision is made about their case. The determination process should follow established protocols and not succumb to countervailing pressures.

- Enhancing the capacity of governments and partners to ensure that the best interests principle is applied in practice to identify appropriate care, protection and long-term solutions for migrant children who are outside their countries of origin or habitual residence and are either travelling with their families or are unaccompanied or separated from their parents.

3.10 Provide special measures in times of crisis, including enhanced access to a safe and dignified integrated package of quality response and recovery services for children at risk of or subject to trafficking, in countries impacted by crises, by:

- Providing specialized services within the case management and referral systems to children of all genders, including adolescents at risk or subject to trafficking, and provide mental health and psychosocial support activities to children at risk of or subject to trafficking and their caregivers to overcome any distress, trauma, or shock and to mitigate the consequences of deprivation and structural violence, to improve their psychosocial resilience and well-being.

- Providing access to safe child-friendly spaces in which children at risk of or subject to trafficking in crisis-affected settings can take rest, feel good physically, continue their cognitive development and have opportunities to build their self-esteem.

- Utilizing new technologies to develop a robust infrastructure to ensure that services can continue to be offered to victims in alternative ways, if physical presence is not possible.

> **Text box 24. Good practices amidst the pandemic: Preventing victimization and empowering survivors at the community level**
>
> In Nigeria, a local NGO implemented a new programme to reduce the vulnerability of women at risk of trafficking. After identifying women at high risk, the "buddy programme" coupled them with female survivors who provided relevant information about the phenomenon and services available. This programme not only raised awareness among potential victims but also established a strong supportive network and empowered survivors, also reducing their risk for revictimization (UNODC, 2021a).

Area 4. Partnership and coordination of actors for the response to trafficking

Governments, civil society and the public and private sectors should work cooperatively to build upon existing national and international structures, and should engage in partnerships to prevent and respond to trafficking. This includes continuing to prioritize and uphold international commitments, as well as strengthening existing – and establishing new – cooperation frameworks for the prevention of and response to trafficking in persons. To enable such cooperation, the report makes the following recommendations.

4.1 Strengthen cross-border, regional and global partnerships, including through:

- Fostering partnerships among all stakeholders engaged in the response to child trafficking by promoting cross-sectoral partnerships, leveraging multilateral frameworks, processes and forums. This includes forums such as the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), as well as those established to support the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, among others.

- Strengthening regional and international collaboration by increasing the number of existing regional collaborations, as well as renewing existing ones, and building partnerships between countries to facilitate the dismantling of organized criminal networks and to facilitate the response to cases.

- Developing and implementing bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation frameworks and agreements, including readmission agreements, ensuring that the return and readmission of migrant children to their own country is safe, dignified and in full compliance with international human rights law, including the rights of the child, by determining clear and mutually agreed procedures that uphold procedural safeguards and guarantee individual assessments and legal certainty, and ensuring that these procedures also include provisions that facilitate sustainable reintegration (also see Area 3. Protection and assistance in the context of trafficking).

- Establishing or strengthening transnational referral mechanisms to enhance cross-border cooperation on victim protection (also see Area 3. Protection and assistance in the context of trafficking).[30]

4.2 Ensure that combating child trafficking remains a top priority on national, regional and international agendas, even amidst crises, and that collaborative steps are taken towards preventing child trafficking and responding robustly to it, such as by:

- Putting in place measures to ensure that the response to trafficking in persons, at all levels, addresses new trafficking in persons dynamics and emerging issues (such as the COVID-19 pandemic, online threats, climate change, environmental degradation and disasters).

- Strengthening national policy and legal frameworks, ensuring that they are in line with international commitments, promote a collaborative and comprehensive response to trafficking in persons, and are reflective of national contexts and evolving needs.

- Ensuring adequate funding for the response to trafficking, including through innovation and partnership. Donors can help towards these efforts by becoming flexible and allowing the reallocation of existing donations or by providing additional funds when needed.

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[30] For good practices on transnational referral mechanisms, see the IOM TACT Project, implemented in the framework of the European Union Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings (2012–2016), which aimed at reinforcing transnational cooperation between European Union Member States and priority countries as a way to better fight the trafficking phenomenon.

- Ensuring that during emergencies and crises, anti-trafficking mechanism do not suffer from budget cuts but instead receive the resources necessary to combat the increased potential for trafficking that follows crises.

> **Text box 25. Good practices amidst the pandemic: Donors' contribution and flexibility**
>
> In early 2020, the Freedom Fund organization set up a COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund that secured small-scale funding for 144 front-line organizations that support vulnerable communities at risk of exploitation in India, Nepal, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Thailand and Brazil. Front-line organizations were able to access this funding without facing delays and bureaucracy and were able to provide emergency relief and microgrants to vulnerable groups, while monitoring governmental response to their needs (Freedom Fund, 2020). The organization was able to raise USD 2 million for this effort.

4.3   Ensure safe and ethical information sharing and reporting on trafficking, both within and across borders, taking into consideration victims' views and respecting data protection and security principles, including through:

- Broadening existing collaborations, and investing in new ones at sectorial, regional, and international levels with the purpose of exchanging intelligence, tools and good practices geared to combating child trafficking, and to facilitate the use of administrative data and other data and research, to ensure policymaking and programming is based on evidence.

- Expanding these collaborations to include countries with limited resources so they may benefit from these intelligence-sharing strategies.

> **Text box 26. Good practices amidst the pandemic: Invest in information sharing**
>
> In late 2020, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 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) gathered more than 160 experts, academics and civil actors from States participating in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to discuss new challenges in the area of human trafficking that emerged during the pandemic. Participants exchanged knowledge and expertise and suggested potential measures that States could implement against the phenomenon (OSCE, 2020).

4.4   Engage in special cooperative measures on counter-trafficking and climate change, as well as on crisis preparedness and response. Given the complex nature of human trafficking, it is important for stakeholders (governments, the United Nations system and the donor community) to draw from the global patterns of risk outlined in this research and for counter-trafficking measures to be proactive, preventive and protective in the context of conflict, climate change and crisis situations, such as by:

- Integrating systematically robust counter-trafficking interventions as part of any humanitarian response, looking at effective ways to mitigate risks of, prevent and respond to human trafficking. These efforts should be understood as a comprehensive and sustainable programmatic response to address the risk factors that contribute to vulnerability to trafficking; they should mobilize protective factors that enhance resilience at the individual, household, community and structural levels, in line with the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons Call to Action (ICAT, 2022).

- Developing emergency protocols that will be immediately implemented during a state of crisis or emergency. Protocols should provide steps to establish a national emergency mechanism to ensure that the anti-trafficking system in place will continue to function even amidst an emergency, ensuring a clear division of roles and responsibilities among organizations during an emergency, to avoid confusion, redundancy and inefficiency (also see Area 3. Protection and assistance in the context of trafficking).

- Mainstreaming trafficking issues into existing training and sensitization for preparedness and emergency response, targeting security personnel, health workers, camp coordinators and aid workers.

- Integrating counter-trafficking into climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes, including during preparedness and response to disasters, with tailored programmes to address the vulnerability of children to trafficking.

- Carrying out measures to prevent human trafficking that might arise from slow-onset events, even if the scale or impact of trafficking has yet to be revealed. This requires understanding and commitment from the international community.

- Empowering communities affected by climate change, environmental degradation and disasters to develop community-based mitigation strategies aimed at reducing human trafficking. This can be achieved through the creation of survivor-friendly spaces and support for youth-led initiatives, as well as through addressing underlying economic vulnerabilities through training in business development and the provision of seed grants for self-employment.

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