



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

IOM GLOBAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING DATABASE COUNTER TRAFFICKING DIVISION

IOM has been working actively to counter the trafficking in persons since 1997. To date, the Organization has implemented almost 500 projects in 85 countries, and has provided direct assistance to several thousand trafficked persons.¹

Trafficking and data collection: Current barriers

It has been broadly argued that in order to combat human trafficking effectively there is a need for reliable and standardized data on trafficking. Yet collecting information on trafficking is a very difficult task for several reasons:

- The underground and illegal nature of trafficking;
- The lack of anti-trafficking legislation in many countries;
- The reluctance of victims to report their experiences to the authorities;
- The lack of government priority given to data collection and research;

Added to this, and despite growing number of trafficking related research studies, there remains a critical lack of data on human trafficking at the national and international level: Too few data collection efforts stand to employ standardized methodologies and comparable indicators. Even in the rare cases where national data collection efforts look to adopt standardized methodologies, there remains a lack of means by which data can be shared by varying and international anti-trafficking actors in a safe and secure manner. The resulting impact is that often the data gathered are not comparable and the potential for use is limited. Reliable, accurate and consistent datasets for analysis pose a major issue, resulting in a true picture of the issues being hidden and potentially misinterpreted. In addition, the lack of primary and accurate datasets stands as a barrier to the effective monitoring and evaluation of international anti-trafficking programmes: Anti-trafficking actors cannot know what is working and what is failing if they do not have access to accurate data to help understand the phenomenon and substantiate claims.

A publication by Laczko et al (2005) recommended that agencies combating human trafficking should be encouraged to collect data in a systematic and comparable manner: And it was illustrated that the IOM counter-trafficking database could act as a common research and methodological template for the collection of data on trafficking. This view was further reinforced at the EU level by the European Experts Group which recommended pooling existing data from a wide range of sources and to promote the sharing of information between different agencies. And at a recent IOM-led UN.GIFT expert research meeting in Cairo, Egypt, the merits of the IOM Global database were further highlighted and the system was upheld as a model of good practice for the systematic collection of human trafficking data.

¹ Please see, *The IOM Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking* (2007.) This Handbook provides guidance and advice necessary to effectively deliver a full range of assistance to victims of trafficking from the point of initial contact and screening to the effective social reintegration of the individuals concerned.

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The IOM Global (Victim-Centred) Human Trafficking Database:

In an attempt to bridge such gaps, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is using a unique tool to monitor the assistance and collect information on the victims of trafficking (VoTs) it assists. The IOM global human trafficking database is the World's largest database of primary data on registered victims of trafficking (VoTs), containing only primary data on 13,809² registered victims of more than 85 different nationalities trafficked to more than 100 destination countries.

It is a standardized anti-trafficking data-management tool available to all IOM missions and is actively used throughout all regions of the world. Containing only primary information, this unique tool specifically facilitates the management of the whole IOM direct assistance, movement and reintegration process through a centrally managed system as well as mapping the victim's trafficking experience. The structure follows the format of the accompanying IOM VoT questionnaires, used by IOM missions and partnering organisations involved in direct assistance, and containing a wealth of information both of a quantitative and qualitative nature: the Screening Interview Form is intended to assess whether the individual is a victim of trafficking and thus eligible for an IOM's assistance project; and the Assistance Interview Form stands to track the nature of direct assistance given along with documenting further details of the trafficking experience.

While initially designed as a case management tool for IOM counter-trafficking direct assistance programmes, the system quickly demonstrated its added value to research. Containing information of both a quantitative and qualitative nature, the CTM stores valuable primary data collected from assisted victims on:

- The socioeconomic profile of victims;
- The profile of traffickers;
- Trafficking routes;
- Patterns of exploitation and abuse;
- Nature of assistance provided;
- Instances of re-trafficking.

In addition to serving its case management function, it also serves as a knowledge bank, from which statistical and detailed reports can be drawn³. In so doing, it strengthens the research capacity and understanding of the causes, processes, trends and consequences of trafficking, informing program development and policy making on counter-trafficking. As noted in the 2006 GAO report, "*the [CTM] database created by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides a useful systematic profile of victims and traffickers across countries*" (10)⁴ and "*improves the overall understanding of the broader dimensions of trafficking*" (21)).

IOM⁵ continues to publish a number of in-depth narrative reports which form part of the *IOM Global Human Trafficking Thematic Research Series*. Drawing upon both quantitative and non-

² As of end of Decmeber 2009. Sex breakdown of 11,290 females and 2,519 males.

³ Please see Surtees (2005) [Second Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking in South-Eastern Europe 2005](#) which drew upon the data held within the CTM as the primary dataset.

⁴ GAO (2006) *Human Trafficking: Better Data, Strategy and Reporting Needed to Enhance U.S. Anti-trafficking Efforts Abroad*.

⁵ Together with the NEXUS Institute and other external consultants.

personal qualitative data held within the IOM global database, the series specifically address contemporary issues on human trafficking. All documents are available at www.iom.int.

In all cases, of course, nothing that could compromise the privacy or identity of trafficked individuals is released: strict controls designed to ensure the confidentiality and security of all data has been established. Indeed, through the global database IOM seeks to promote and ensure international best practices for the secure collection, storage and processing of standardized and comparable data on human trafficking.

Working towards an external IOM Global (Victim-Centred) Human Trafficking Database:

Drawing upon the technology and methodology tried and tested by IOM over the past eight years, IOM is currently seeking to develop the functioning of the database as an external case management and data collection tool to be used by NGOs and governments; standing to complement IOM's sharing of experiences and lessons learned with external parties active in the field of counter trafficking through [*The IOM Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking*](#).

Whereas trafficking data collection efforts have often been criticized for being fragmented, the IOM global trafficking database has been commended for being systematic and could, in return, "*assist ... efforts to compile better data on trafficking victims*" (GAO, 2006: 20). Not only will the pre-defined and standardized IOM database structure, methodology and core trafficking indicators⁶ allow for the attainment of comparable transnational data, it is anticipated the data collection management system has the potential to become one of the primary data collection and statistical tools for research on trafficking in human beings. Indeed, through the global database IOM seeks to promote and ensure international best practices for the secure collection, storage and processing of standardized and comparable data on human trafficking.

Please contact CTS-db@iom.int for more detailed information.

⁶ IOM has also developed a sister "core indicator" system. This set of core victim-centred indicators on human trafficking has been taken from both the Screening and Assistance forms. It is envisaged that the core variables will give external organisations more flexibility with regard to data collection mechanisms, providing for cultural and regional adaptation, while in return maintaining the comparability of data collected