

These COVID-19 Analytical Snapshots are designed to capture the latest information and analysis in a fast-moving environment. Topics will be repeated from time to time as analysis develops. If you have an item to include, please email us at research@iom.int.

What is human trafficking?

According to the [2000 Protocol](#) to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, human trafficking is defined on the basis of three main cumulative elements:

an act	+	by means of	+	for the purpose of exploitation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruitment • transport • transfer • harbouring • receipt of persons 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • threat or use of force • coercion • abduction • fraud • abuse of power or of vulnerability • giving payments or benefits 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prostitution of others • sexual exploitation • forced labour • slavery or similar practices • removal of organs • other types of exploitation

Human trafficking, modern slavery and smuggling: What are the differences?

Often referred to as “modern slavery”, human trafficking is to be distinguished from the smuggling of migrants. Although the [two often blur](#) in practice, contrary to smuggling, trafficking:

- Occurs without consent, entailing coercion or deception
- Is for the specific purpose of ongoing exploitation (which doesn't end after arrival at the destination)
- Can happen both within and/or across States' borders.



The impact of COVID-19 on victims of trafficking

The [identification](#) of victims of trafficking is difficult because of the underground criminal nature of trafficking. The [pandemic risks](#) further curtailing identification efforts due to measures of confinement, [priorities](#) of law enforcement shifting from the apprehension of traffickers to the monitoring of confinement and other measures against COVID-19, and the closure of social services which play an important role in identifying trafficking victims.

The protection of victims of trafficking may also be impacted by the pandemic, especially when they experienced pre-existing socio-economic difficulties. Their living conditions may put them at increased risk of infection. They have also higher risks of [re-exploitation](#) when they cannot benefit from assistance and care because of the suspension of services or the impossibility the practice preventive measures in victims' [shelters](#).

United in the fight against COVID-19

In Azerbaijan, the trafficking of personal protection equipment outside the region by criminal groups has created shortages. A [group of victims of trafficking](#) in a shelter supported by IOM is producing masks for themselves and the local community, contributing to the fight against the pandemic.



Accrued risks of human trafficking due to the COVID-19 pandemic

The [socio-economic impacts](#) of the pandemic are exacerbating [vulnerabilities](#) in our societies, including systemic issues related to health care, social security, security of employment or working conditions. As in times of [economic crisis](#), increased [insecurity, poverty and marginalization](#) induced by [diseases outbreaks](#) can be key drivers of human trafficking. [Criminal groups such as traffickers](#) are likely to take advantage of people's vulnerabilities for exploitative purposes. Increasing rates of [unemployment](#) which will likely worsen in the forthcoming months will add additional pressures on workers and increase jobs competition, while reducing flows of [international remittances](#) to countries of origin, thereby exposing more families to poverty.

Risks of human trafficking induced by the pandemic can, for example, take the form of:

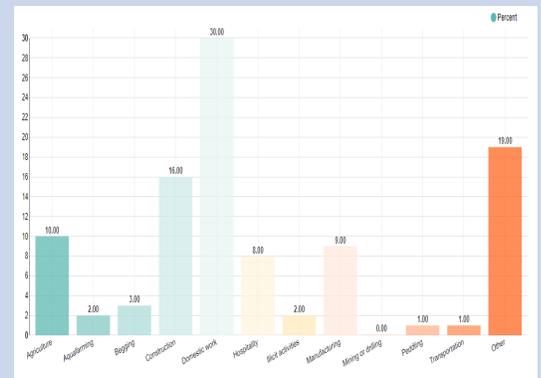
- ⇒ The [disruption of supply chains](#) with little oversight over potentially exploitative working conditions at the other end of the chain.
- ⇒ Factories lending money for workers confined at home without financial resources which may turn out in [debt bondage](#).
- ⇒ [Prohibition of sex work](#) due to lockdown in some countries which risks pushing sex workers underground and increasing their vulnerability to human trafficking.

Main types of exploitation

The [Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative](#) highlights that the two main types of exploitation of trafficking victims are sexual exploitation (53.66%) and forced labour (41.81%).

Most victims of labour exploitation have been trafficked into the following sectors:

- ⇒ Domestic work (30%)
- ⇒ Construction (16%)
- ⇒ Agriculture (10%)
- ⇒ Manufacturing (9%)
- ⇒ Hospitality (8%)



Click on the [graph](#) for a full view and analysis



Migrants in irregular situations, asylum seekers, exploited and trafficked persons may be particularly at risk of COVID-19 because their living or working environment may expose them to the virus without necessary protection.

[Statement](#) by UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Mr Felipe González Morales, and UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, Ms Marie Grazia Giammarinaro, 3 April 2020

This COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot has been produced by [IOM Research](#) (research@iom.int).

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