

This snapshot updates #14 and #59. These COVID-19 Analytical Snapshots are designed to capture the latest information, research 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.



New research and analysis on COVID-19 and human trafficking

[COVID-19: Compounding the health-related harms of human trafficking](#), by R. Armitage and L. Nellums

[COVID-19 and human trafficking—the amplified impact on vulnerable populations](#), by J. Todres and A. Diaz

[The Public Health Impact of Coronavirus Disease on Human Trafficking](#), by J. Greenbaum, H. Stoklosa and L. Murphy

[Promoting the welfare, protection and care of victims of child trafficking during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#), by Y. Rafferty



Overall increase in human trafficking in 2020



While some countries have reported a [decrease](#) in human trafficking cases identified in 2020 due to measures of confinement and lock down, various sources report that there has been a substantial rise in human trafficking in different locations and countries amid COVID-19 pandemic without being however able to measure it with precision:

- In the United States, human rights organizations report a [185% rise](#) in human trafficking cases.
- In Europe, domestic violence and abuse, a proven push factor in trafficking of women and girls, has [increased by 30%](#).

Traffickers adapting their modus operandi amid the pandemic

Previous crises have shed light on human traffickers' ability to quickly adapt their modes of operating. With States' adoption of confinement and lockdown measures, trafficking in persons, including of migrants, has become even more clandestine in nature. For instance, traffickers had to change the places where they used to [sexually exploit children in the Amazon in Brazil](#), sending them instead to private homes.



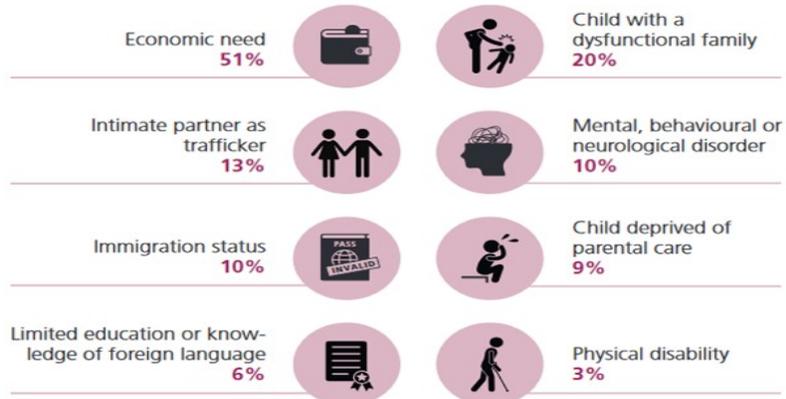
Mobility restrictions have been circumvented by traffickers' increased reliance on digital technology, including [social media](#), which they use both for "[hunting](#)" for new victims and "[fishing](#)" them through ads. Sex trafficking is reported to have increased in [Latin America](#) through deceptive (online) recruitment, especially of irregular migrant women in Mexico.

Traffickers have also taken advantage of lockdown and other measures. Cannabis farms in the UK known to [exploit irregular migrants](#), especially Vietnamese, through debt bondage, have increased their production to meet a [growing demand](#), at times taking advantage of [deserted streets and areas](#).

UNODC 2020 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons

In its [report](#) released in February 2021, UNODC explores socioeconomic factors that affect vulnerability to trafficking in persons.

Percentage of cases by pre-existing factors (more than one) that traffickers have taken advantage of



Source: [UNDOC, 2021](#)

As economic needs constituted a prime factor of vulnerability to trafficking already before the pandemic, the economic recession due to the pandemic is thus likely to have increased the number of victims. Individuals in countries the most affected by rising unemployment rates and GDP contraction are likely to be the most vulnerable to trafficking, including transnational trafficking to countries less economically impacted and that are more quickly recovering. Other non-economic determinants also remain relevant, including migration policies and discrimination.



Impacts on support from civil society organizations

[The impact of COVID-19 on trafficking survivors](#) is significant as their lives and support networks have been disrupted, calling for more tailored strategies to protect populations at risk of human trafficking or already trafficked.

[Civil society organizations](#) have struggled financially due to limited funding with the economic recession. They have also been hindered to carry out some of their protection activities for trafficked victims due to COVID-19 measures, especially those relying on community mobilization. A recent [statement](#) co-signed by 20 civil society organizations highlights the centrality of their work for identifying and protecting victims, which has been hampered by the pandemic and the related economic recession.

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

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