



A call for action on trafficking in persons

The Heads of the thirty United Nations entities and other international and regional organizations making up the Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT) welcome the commitments undertaken by States in the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (GPA) and the Political Declaration to be adopted by the UN General Assembly this month to enhance global responses to trafficking in persons.

As States gather to reflect on and share their national experiences, successes, lessons learned and plans, we must collectively acknowledge, however, that greater action is needed, globally, to implement these commitments and successfully combat this serious crime that violates fundamental human rights. To that end, we reiterate our call to governments in all regions to urgently address the following priorities through State-led action.

1. Address the core drivers of trafficking in persons – a shift towards reducing vulnerability

Crisis situations aggravate the underlying factors that make people vulnerable to trafficking in persons, while at the same time creating new vulnerabilities. This has become apparent during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, but it equally applies to conflicts, natural disasters and other crises. Drivers, such as widespread violence, poverty, systemic inequality, discrimination, marginalization, and corruption, enable trafficking to exist and persist.

Trafficking in women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation continues to be the most detected form of the crime, while trafficking for forced labour, mostly of men and boys, is on the rise. Alarming, children make up one third of all detected victims exploited in both offline and online environments. With limited safe and legal pathways to migrate and seek protection, people on the move, especially unaccompanied minors, will continue to resort to smugglers to cross borders, placing them at high risk of being trafficked.

ICAT calls on States to:

- Address the underlying social and structural inequalities in each country that render people vulnerable to this crime.
- Address gender-based discrimination affecting women, girls and LGBTQI+ persons, as well as discrimination of individuals belonging to ethnic, racial or religious minorities, among others, which can be exacerbated during crises, and can foster trafficking in persons.
- Tackle trafficking in persons in a holistic manner that also addresses impediments to an effective response, such as corruption and impunity.
- Develop and implement concrete and tailored measures, including legislation, standards and guidelines, to prevent and respond to trafficking in persons in the context of crises and safeguard the rights of trafficking victims.
- Invest in child protection systems, including in the online environment, to prevent, report and respond to trafficking in children and ensure that justice systems are child-friendly.
- Provide safe, orderly and regular pathways for people to move for better opportunities and seek protection.



2. Discourage the demand that fosters trafficking in persons

There would be no trafficking in persons if there was no ‘demand’ for the services of those exploited through human trafficking. Demand manifests itself in multiple ways. Consumers of goods or services can, advertently or inadvertently, contribute to exploitation of others. As such, action targeting the procurement and use of goods and services is critical to countering trafficking in persons.

ICAT calls on States to:

- Intensify efforts to discourage demand that fosters all forms of exploitation leading to trafficking in persons.
- Adopt or strengthen regulations governing sustainable procurement practices, use of technology, and protection of workers’ rights.

ICAT also calls on all its members to ensure that its own procurement practices comply with the highest international human rights and labour law standards to prevent trafficking in persons.

3. Ensure a rights-based, child-friendly, gender-sensitive and victim and survivor-centred approach

By the very nature of the crime of trafficking in persons, victims and survivors often suffer the worst forms of physical and/or psychological abuse, including long-term trauma. All too often, they are subsequently detained, prosecuted and punished for acts committed as a consequence of being trafficked, instead of being recognized as victims and provided access to justice mechanisms and prompt redress.

ICAT calls on States to:

- Expedite the mainstreaming of human-rights, gender-transformative, child-friendly and victim-centered approaches, including ensuring non-discrimination and disability inclusion, in counter-trafficking interventions.
- Strengthen victim identification and protection measures, including long-term social inclusion, which must not be made conditional on the participation of victims/survivors in criminal proceedings.
- Grant victims, including children, access to justice and effective remedies, including by applying the non-punishment principle which provides that trafficked persons should not be subject to arrest, charge, detention, prosecution, or be penalized or otherwise punished for illegal conduct that they committed as a direct consequence of being trafficked.
- Safeguard the best interests of the child in cases involving child victims of trafficking, including assignment of a guardian for unaccompanied children and presumption of childhood where age is disputed.



4. Hold traffickers accountable

Globally, prosecutions and convictions of perpetrators of trafficking in persons remain strikingly low compared to the extent of the crime. Limitations in anti-trafficking response capacity mean that traffickers continue to exploit victims and operate with impunity. The misuse of the Internet and other technologies by traffickers, particularly in the COVID-19 context, has further increased this trend. Child trafficking for online sexual exploitation has spiked. Enhancement of the capacity of criminal justice actors, including to enable cross border cooperation is paramount. The exchange of high-quality strategic and operational information in the framework of international police and judicial cooperation is needed to strengthen investigations, and ensure more effective prosecution and appropriate convictions.

ICAT calls on States to:

- Provide for the sustained and systematized capacity of criminal justice actors, and allocate adequate resources to dedicated counter-trafficking units, to facilitate, among others, information sharing and intelligence-based investigations.
- Enhance investigations of corruption and illicit financial flows associated with trafficking and the related seizure of proceeds of this crime.
- Increase digital expertise and appropriate usage of new technology in anti-trafficking responses, in compliance with human rights, including the right to privacy, and in partnership with relevant private sector entities.

5. Build the evidence base on trafficking in persons

Responses to trafficking in persons must be evidence-based if they are to be effective. However, noting trafficking in persons is a complex, clandestine crime, there remains an acute lack of sustained efforts to gather quality data and evidence, especially on emerging trends, threats and *modi operandi*, for the development of effective State policies and programmes.

In order to inform anti-trafficking policy and practice, ICAT calls on States to:

- Improve the collection, analysis, and sharing of data on trafficking in persons, disaggregated by sex, age and other relevant factors, including the form of exploitation, and using systematic and consistent criteria, including data on vulnerabilities to trafficking in conflict and crisis situations.
- In support of this, establish bilateral and multilateral data-sharing protocols, including between agencies, and strengthen administrative data systems in line with international best practice and invest in tools and approaches for statistical data collection to estimate the prevalence of trafficking in persons.
- Cooperate on data and knowledge-sharing initiatives at the national, regional and international levels.



6. Systematise cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships

The multi-faceted nature of trafficking in persons calls for strengthened multi-stakeholder cooperation, including cross-border cooperation involving source, transit and destination countries, as well as public-private partnerships.

ICAT calls on States to:

- Expedite cooperation, both sectoral and cross-sectoral, to effectively respond to trafficking in persons, including in partnership with non-governmental organizations, private companies, trade unions and workers organizations, technology and social media companies, and academia.
- Include perspectives and voices of victims and survivors of trafficking in the design and implementation of anti-trafficking prevention and protection measures.