



ICAT The Inter-Agency Coordination Group
against Trafficking in Persons

Call for Accelerated Action by 2025 to **PREVENT AND END CHILD TRAFFICKING**

November 2023
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We, the Heads of the 31 organizations that form the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), call on all States and other relevant stakeholders to undertake the following 10 actions by 2025 to prevent and end child trafficking globally:

- 1. Prioritize investment in prevention and protection systems and services that are easily accessible to all children without discrimination.**
- 2. Protect and assist trafficked children.**
- 3. Ensure the ethical, safe and meaningful participation of survivors of child trafficking and children at risk in the design of anti-trafficking responses.**
- 4. Strengthen measures to deter traffickers.**
- 5. Strengthen efforts to guarantee child online safety.**
- 6. Set out clearly the expectation that businesses conduct child rights due diligence as part of their human rights due diligence.**
- 7. Ensure that child trafficking is addressed in humanitarian contexts as part of measures that address the broader continuum of violence against children.**
- 8. Mainstream child protection in environmental and climate change policies as well as disaster preparedness and response plans and action.**
- 9. Enhance the evidence base (i.e., data and research) to address gaps in knowledge on child trafficking and inform appropriate responses.**
- 10. Enhance collaboration and coordination among different stakeholders and between States to facilitate effective responses to child trafficking.**

8 November 2023

PREAMBLE

We, the Heads of the 31 organizations that form the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), draw global attention to the following facts:

- Child trafficking is one of the worst forms of violence against children and a grave global concern that requires urgent and comprehensive action.^[i]
- Deeply intertwined with other forms of child exploitation and abuse, trafficking affects children of all backgrounds, demographics and abilities.^[ii] At the same time, children, because of their age, are affected by trafficking in ways that differ to adults, while the impact upon them is compounded depending on their gender, ability, or other diversity characteristics.^[iii]
- While trafficked children across all regions continue to suffer, anti-trafficking responses are failing to adequately address their needs and protect, respect and fulfill their rights.^[iv]
- Overlapping crises, including armed conflicts and persecution, political instability, pandemics, economic hardships, natural disasters, environmental degradation, and climate change,^[v] are further exposing children, particularly those who are already in precarious circumstances, to heightened risks of trafficking.^[vi] These children include, amongst others, unaccompanied children in mixed movements fleeing persecution, violence and poverty.
- Children are often among those most exposed to the risk of trafficking for - and exploitation in - illicit activities and forced criminality.^[vii] Some trafficked children are wrongfully arrested and penalized rather than being identified as victims and provided with the necessary protection and assistance.^[viii]
- With rapid advancements in and easy access to the digital environment, children are increasingly connecting to various online platforms, apps, resources, and services in larger numbers, at younger ages, and often without appropriate safeguards. The protection of children from newly emerging threats, including technology-facilitated trafficking and forms of exploitation associated with it, is insufficient.^[ix]
- To effectively tackle the multifaceted phenomenon of child trafficking, States must recognize and embrace their responsibility to protect children and act with due diligence to ensure that child trafficking is also addressed within a child protection framework.
- **Preventing and ending child trafficking must be a priority for all.**

Through accelerated multi-stakeholder action, States and other stakeholders, including the business sector, should act now to end child trafficking, empower all children and safeguard their rights.



We call on all States and other relevant stakeholders to undertake the following 10 actions by 2025 to prevent and end child trafficking globally:

1. Prioritize investment in integrated, child- and gender-specific violence prevention and protection systems and services^[x] that are easily accessible to all children without discrimination: The relevant systems at the national level should ensure early detection and identification of children at risk; appropriate care and protection, including for children and their caregivers in the most vulnerable situations; and effective mitigation against the risks of trafficking. This includes effective measures that specifically address the rights of children with disabilities and those in institutional care, where this form of care is still practiced, noting that family and community-based care should be universally prioritized and the institutionalization of children prevented and phased out. These systems should also address the social norms that foster an environment of tolerance towards the exploitation of children of all genders, abilities or other diversity characteristics. They should further recognize the role of communities and families in addressing vulnerability factors and building resilience. States should enhance safe and regular migration options and ensure that children and their families enjoy an adequate standard of living and have access to social protection programmes regardless of their migration status. Prevention of child trafficking also entails access to territory and asylum for children in need of international protection, durable solutions^[xi] and complementary pathways^[xii] for refugee children and their families.^[xiii]

2. Protect and assist trafficked children: Child victims of trafficking should be guaranteed comprehensive, multi-sectoral and coordinated protection and assistance tailored to their age, gender, diversity characteristics, distinct vulnerable situations, interests, needs, and preferences. Strengthening the early identification of trafficked children and of those at risk and child-sensitive referral mechanisms, ensuring compliance with the non-punishment principle^[xiv] and access to child protection systems, child-friendly justice, remedies - and, in the case of children fleeing conflict and persecution – child-friendly asylum procedures, are crucial to ensure that child victims receive the appropriate care and support they need and to which they are entitled. It is essential to adopt a victim-centered approach that address the needs and rights of child victims throughout the entire process. The return of child victims must be carried out only where it is assessed and determined to be in the child's best interests and in full compliance with the principles of non-refoulement and of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and be voluntary, safe, and dignified, while securing adequate care arrangements and short- and long-term support programmes. Noting the general lack of protection mechanisms available to children as they transition into adulthood, States should review their existing support measures to children, adolescents, and youth to protect them against trafficking in persons.



3. Ensure the ethical, safe, and meaningful participation of survivors of child trafficking and children at risk: Children must be listened to, ethically and safely involved, and empowered to inform and contribute to decision making that shapes child trafficking prevention and response.

4. Strengthen measures to deter traffickers: States should review and strengthen legislation, regulations, policies, and practices against child trafficking to take into account emerging forms and methods of exploitation of children and ensure more effective deterrence and criminal justice responses. This should include the assessment and strengthening of criminal justice systems' action and capacities to disrupt and dismantle business models utilized by child traffickers, inter alia through financial investigation, to hold perpetrators accountable and end their impunity, including those associated with terrorism and its financing or taking place in conflict or post-conflict settings. The demand that fosters the exploitation of boys, girls and children with diverse gender identities, abilities or other diversity characteristics, including commercial sexual exploitation and abuse of children as well as labour exploitation, must be discouraged. This should include, among other actions, holding accountable those who buy products and services resulting from child exploitation and abuse and their intermediaries.

5. Strengthen efforts to guarantee child online safety: States should adopt legislation requiring online platforms to implement strong measures. This should include age and consent verification to prevent online harms to children; the exercise of regular due diligence, based on concrete standards, to identify and mitigate risks of child trafficking; and the speedy removal of child sexual abuse material from the Internet.

States should further consider mandating online platforms to develop monitoring frameworks for child exploitative materials and the misuse of platforms, along with the relevant reporting and accountability mechanisms. Provisions should be put in place for financial institutions, digital currency platforms, and intermediaries to imbed and implement "red flag" indicators in their risk assessment to identify perpetrators of child trafficking and online exploitation and abuse.

6. Set out clearly the expectation that businesses conduct child rights due diligence as part of their human rights due diligence: States should enact and enforce laws that require the business sector (including state-owned enterprises) to respect children's right to be free from trafficking, exploitation, and abuse, including by carrying out effective due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate, and remediate child trafficking and exploitation in their operations and value chains. This should include the implementation of clear reporting and accountability mechanisms. All businesses, including the financial sector, must respect human rights, including child rights, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises, and the ILO Declaration on Multinational Enterprises. Where businesses are found to have caused or contributed to child trafficking, they should be held accountable and should provide for and cooperate in remedy for victims.



7. Ensure that child trafficking is addressed in humanitarian contexts as part of measures that address the broader continuum of violence against children: Anti-trafficking work should be integrated systematically into humanitarian responses, including emergency preparedness, pre-crisis planning, as part of a crisis response, and in post-crisis recovery. This would, inter alia, contribute to the consistent implementation of clear and effective reporting and accountability mechanisms for child trafficking in conflict situations. States should review their national frameworks and safeguarding mechanisms to ensure they adhere to the relevant international standards and guidelines, including in relation to international adoption during crises, to avert protection risks, particularly for unaccompanied and separated children.

8. Mainstream child protection in environmental and climate change policies as well as disaster preparedness and response plans and action: During disasters, children who are displaced or orphaned are perceived to be among the most vulnerable to trafficking.^[xvi] Responding organizations and authorities should be equipped to undertake early preventive and protective action, including as part of disaster preparedness and risk reduction plans. In this context, it is important to ensure that child-critical services, including education, health, social protection, and child protection services, are shock-responsive, accessible to children^[xvii] on the move, and inclusive.

9. Enhance evidence base (i.e., data and research): It is crucial to direct resources to addressing ongoing gaps in knowledge related to child trafficking while upholding the highest ethical standards and the best interests, well-being, and rights of affected children, including through the ethical and responsible collection, analysis, and use of age, gender, and other disaggregated data, to inform and direct evidence-based responses.

10. Enhance collaboration and coordination: States must ensure that responses to child trafficking are neither siloed nor fragmented and should foster stronger collaboration among governmental actors, civil society, and private sector stakeholders. While national child protection systems should play a leading role in the protection and assistance of trafficked children, governments should also ensure coordination with immigration, border governance, security, law enforcement, justice, education, health, social protection, and asylum authorities to enable early identification, referral, and protection of at-risk children, including in cross-border contexts, especially those who are unaccompanied or separated, as well as continuous protection for all children and young people. Countries of origin, transit, and destination for child trafficking need to have regular communication channels and share information in a uniform, timely, and coordinated manner, in line with the best interests of the child.



ICAT RESOURCES:

- ICAT Joint Statements on the World Day against Trafficking in Persons ([2023](#), [2022](#))
- ICAT [Call to Action on Trafficking in Persons in the Context of Humanitarian Crises and Conflicts](#) (2022)
- ICAT [Issue Brief on Addressing Vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons](#) (2022)
- ICAT [Issue Brief on Trafficking in Children](#) (2018)

SELECTED OTHER RESOURCES:

- [Advocacy Brief – Protecting the rights of children on the move in times of crisis](#) (2023)
- [From Evidence to Action: Twenty years of child trafficking data to inform policy and programming](#) (2023)
- [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#) (2022)
- [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery](#) (2022). See 1.2.4 on Forced Labour of Children
- [Legislating for the digital age: Global guide on improving legislative frameworks to protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse](#) (2022)
- [Policy Brief - Keeping children safe in the digital environment: The importance of protection and empowerment](#) (2021)
- [Gender Dimensions of Violence Against Children and Adolescents](#) (2020)
- [Establishing National Focal Points to Protect Child Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings](#) (2020)
- [Child Trafficking and Child Protection: Ensuring that Child Protection Mechanisms Protect the Rights and Meet the Needs of Child Victims of Human Trafficking](#) (2018)

[I] Children account for 35% of all identified victims of trafficking according to the 2022 UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (GLOTIP 2022); According to ILO, a total of 3.3 million children are in situations of forced labor on any given day, of them 1.7 million children in commercial sexual exploitation, many are likely to have been trafficked. According to GLOTIP 2022, child victims of trafficking are subjected to physical or extreme violence at a rate almost two times higher than adults.

[II] While certain factors such as gender, level of education, country of origin, and exposure to natural disasters and climate change, among others, contribute to the increased vulnerability of some children to trafficking, no child is immune. See ICAT, Issue Brief on Addressing Vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons (2022) and IOM, From Evidence to Action: Twenty years of IOM child trafficking data to inform policy and programming.

[III] Girls account for 27% of detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation as opposed to boys who make up 5%; while boys account for 12% of detected victims of trafficking for forced labor as opposed to girls who make up 5%, according to the GLOTIP 2022. Yet, a recent review conducted by the Global Protection Cluster's Anti-Trafficking Task Team had found that boys are often overlooked as a risk group for trafficking in emergencies. See, GPC, Statement of the Global Protection Cluster on the World Day against Trafficking in Persons (July 2023). A UNICEF report noted evidence that LGBTQI+ individuals are often rejected by their families and forced into homelessness, placing them at even greater risk of various types of violence, including sexual exploitation. See UNICEF, Gender Dimensions of Violence Against Children and Adolescents (2020).

[IV] For example, according to GLOTIP 2022, the rate of identification of child victims of trafficking has tripled in the last 15 years, and 2021 was the worst year on record for online child exploitation, an issue that overlaps substantially with human trafficking. UNICEF reports that interviews with children across 12 countries in the East Asia and Pacific and Eastern and Southern Africa regions during 2020-2021 indicated that between 1% and 20% of children had suffered online sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year. See, UNICEF, Legislating for the digital age (2022). See also, ICAT, Joint Statement on the World Day against Trafficking in Persons (2023).

[V] Although it can be a challenge to establish that slow-onset climate change contributes to increased trafficking in persons, there is enough anecdotal evidence to support the presumption. For example, when irreversible damage due to slow-onset events occurs (such as in the case of land erosion or repeated droughts), households may face increased debt and poverty. Increased desperation may push affected populations into the hands of criminal actors, and even into colluding with them, as seen in instances of parents deceived or compelled into placing their children into dangerous situations that can become exploitative, in order to cope with the losses associated with a changing climate. See IOM, The Climate Change-Human Trafficking Nexus (2016).

[VI] See, ICAT, Issue Brief on Addressing Vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons (2022). See also, Report of the Secretary General on trafficking in persons in armed conflict pursuant to Security Council resolution 2388 (2017), S/2018/1042, para 12; UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2018).

[VII] For example, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children has highlighted the specific vulnerability of children in the context of armed violence in communities, including gang-related violence, noting that children as young as 9 or 10 years of age participate in human trafficking, acting as guides, lookouts or informants. They may then be required to guard safe houses and prevent escapes; and later, they may be armed to become involved in more dangerous assignments, such as kidnapping and murder. See Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, *Protecting children affected by armed violence in the community* (2016), p. 19.

[VII] See, ICAT, *Issue Brief on Non-Punishment of Victims of Trafficking* (2020).

[IX] See, ICAT, *Joint Statement on the World Day against Trafficking in Persons* (2022).

[X] These encompass social welfare, protection, and care/guardianship services; birth registration and documentation; safe, inclusive and empowering education, including safe and inclusive digital learning; physical, mental and sexual and reproductive health services; justice; and parenting support and sustainable social protection for vulnerable families and communities.

[XI] Durable solutions refer to the means by which the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers, refugee returnees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons including those who may also receive protection and assistance from State and other partners can be satisfactorily and permanently resolved through ensuring national protection for their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

[XII] Complementary pathways are existing legal admission pathways that are adjusted for persons in need of international protection, as well as newly created programmes that provide for lawful stay in a third country where the international protection needs of the beneficiaries are met. These programmes are additional and separate to resettlement programmes.

[XIII] UNHCR, *MASTER Glossary of terms* (2021).

[XIV] States parties' to the Convention on the Rights of the Child are obligated to ensure that children who are victims are not treated as offenders or subject to forms of punishment such as detention and deportation. Further, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, requires States to take into account the age, gender and special needs of victims of trafficking in persons, in particular the rights of the child. That includes the obligations of States parties to ensure the right of the child to be heard and that the best interests of the child are taken as a primary consideration, also taking into consideration the fact that, in the context of international migration, children may be in particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable situations. See Joint general comment No. 3 of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families/No. 22 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017) on the general principles regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration, para. 23. See also, Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, on the Implementation of the non-punishment principle (2021).

[XV] The first time the issue of human trafficking during natural disasters came into the spotlight was after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, when several child protection organizations noticed an increase in child abductions for "adoption" abroad. Though no cases could be directly attributed, various stakeholders, including civil society, academia and organizations, began to conduct awareness-raising measures in areas at risk of human trafficking. See IOM, *The Climate Change-Human Trafficking Nexus* (2016).

[XVI] See, UNICEF, *Children Displaced in a Changing Climate: Preparing for a Future Already Underway* (2023).



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- International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO-Interpol)
- International Labour Organization (ILO)
- International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
- Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict
- Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children
- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
- Organization of American States (OAS)
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)
- United Nations Joint Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
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