



ICAT The Inter-Agency Coordination Group
against Trafficking in Persons

A WORLD IN CRISIS:

Global Humanitarian Crises and Conflicts
Increase Human Trafficking Concerns

CALL TO ACTION

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The world is currently experiencing multiple crises with serious humanitarian consequences. Armed conflicts, terrorism, climate change-induced disasters, the lingering COVID-19 pandemic and other health emergencies, as well as rising economic and food insecurity are exacerbating existing vulnerabilities of individuals and communities globally while creating new risks and reducing livelihood options. Amidst this, evidence continues to build that humanitarian crises and conflicts lead to increased trafficking in persons and other serious human rights violations.¹ Furthermore, the increased misuse of technology, including in times of crises, has broadened the geographical scope, helping traffickers to operate across borders and in multiple locations simultaneously.²

Approximately two billion people, equating to over a quarter of the world's population, currently live in conflict-affected countries.³ Refugees, internally displaced and other people affected by humanitarian crises or conflicts may encounter limited or no access to community support, education and health services, as well as limited financial resources or opportunities for income generation and decent work, making them more vulnerable to trafficking. Moreover, children who are displaced, unaccompanied or

separated from their parents or caregivers and support networks are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. In addition, conflicts weaken the rule of law and hamper the capacity to respond to crime and traffickers target people in conflict-affected areas or as they are forcibly displaced elsewhere.⁴

Women and girls are predominantly impacted by trafficking for sexual exploitation, sexual slavery and forced marriage, especially in environments marked by conflict and crises. In many documented conflicts, victims, including children, were also abducted and recruited by armed groups, and used as armed combatants, or exploited in various forms, including for forced labor.⁵ Exploitation in origin countries, along the route and in destination countries, is not confined to conflict situations alone but also transcends to post-conflict situations, and in protracted refugee situations.

Traffickers capitalize on the widespread human, material, social and economic distress caused by emergencies⁶, which worsen particularly in situations where multiple crises overlap. These crises and conflicts create significant opportunities for traffickers who operate in the most pervasive way, often generating illicit profits.

1 See: ICAT Issue Brief on [Trafficking in Persons in Humanitarian Situations, 2017](#); UNODC Global Report on [Trafficking in Persons 2018](#); Report of UN Secretary-General on [Trafficking in Women and Girls, 2022](#); ILO, Walk Free & IOM, 2022, [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage](#).

2 UNODC, 2020, [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#); CEDAW General Recommendation No.38 on [Trafficking in Women and Girls in the Context of Global Migration](#); ICAT [Statement](#) on World Day against Trafficking in Persons 2022.

3 Report of the Secretary-General on [Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, 2022](#).

4 UNODC, 2018, [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#).

5 UNODC, 2018, [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#).

6 GPC, 2020, [An Introductory Guide to Anti-Trafficking Action in Internal Displacement Contexts](#).



States have obligations to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, and to protect and assist victims and survivors. Moreover, humanitarian actors and relevant stakeholders play an important role in supporting States' counter-trafficking efforts, especially through preventive and protective measures. In this regard, ICAT calls on **STATES** to ensure human-rights compliant, gender-responsive, equitable, age-sensitive, disability-inclusive, culturally sensitive, trauma-informed, and victim and survivor-centered responses to trafficking in persons to:

- 1. Address root causes**, including by establishing legislation, policy and programmatic actions that address and end discrimination that puts people at risk of trafficking in humanitarian situations, especially women, children, people with disabilities and minority groups, and discourage the demand fostering all forms of exploitation of persons that leads to trafficking.
- 2. Mitigate risks of trafficking in situations of displacement** through comprehensive prevention and protection measures, whether in camps, urban settings and outside of formal reception arrangements, including through timely provision of adequate documentation and enabling access to financial and communication services, and facilitation of access to decent, regularized work and livelihoods for displaced persons in host communities.
- 3. Strengthen humanitarian and crisis response plans**, including national action plans on peace and security, disaster risk reduction and pandemics, and establish resilient systems, including for child protection and for survivors of violence, to ensure that they do not collapse in the event of emergencies and continue to reduce the risk of trafficking in persons.
- 4. Be inclusive. Ensure that frontline civil society actors as well as survivors and survivor-led organizations are included in developing crisis response plans** and that they are adequately resourced to prevent and address trafficking in humanitarian situations, and make protection and support services sustainable and easily accessible for victims and survivors of trafficking, including in locations along routes where most abuses and violations are reported.
- 5. Establish and implement a holistic response** to trafficking in persons in humanitarian crises that includes timely evidence gathering and direct assistance to all victims and those vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse.
- 6. Expand the number and range of legal pathways** available for persons with international protection needs to be admitted to or resettled in third countries, as well as other pathways to facilitate access to protection and solutions.
- 7. Protect people from online exploitation and abuse**, recognizing the dual nature of technology as enabler and disabler of trafficking, including in humanitarian crises.



8. **Take all necessary measures to ensure the registration, vetting and oversight of volunteers and volunteer organizations** working as part of humanitarian responses, with additional requirements for organizations in contact with children to adhere to common principles of child safeguarding and to follow established codes of conduct.
9. **Establish and/or implement effective national human trafficking referral mechanisms (NRM)s** and tailor their functionality to emergencies and humanitarian crises, to ensure continued identification, protection, assistance and support, and social inclusion of victims and survivors of trafficking, with their consent, as well as to prevent re-trafficking and other forms of exploitation.
10. **Protect the children.** Ensure effective international cooperation to identify and assist unaccompanied and separated children, trace missing children, prevent illicit adoption of children, support child-headed households and children with increased familial responsibility, and facilitate family reunifications, when in the best interest of the child, recognizing that they may be victims of trafficking or at risk of trafficking and sexual or other forms of violence and exploitation.
11. **Engage the private sector.** Cooperate with the financial services sector to promote their active involvement in detecting, tracing and reporting suspicious financial transactions relating to trafficking in persons, including in, from and to countries facing humanitarian crises and conflicts.
12. **Prioritize criminal justice processes and accessibility of redress** even during a crisis and enforce a judicial approach that recognize the non-punishment principle⁷ for victims of trafficking, including not detaining adults on immigration grounds, seeing dignified alternatives, and not detaining children even as a last resort.
13. **Combat impunity.** Strengthen efforts to bring traffickers to justice, including cases associated with terrorism and its financing or taking place in conflict or post-conflict settings.

⁷ ICAT 2020 Issue Brief on [Non-punishment of Victims of Trafficking](#); OHCHR 2002 [Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking](#).



As trafficking in persons is a crime and can even possibly involve a violation of human rights, it is also a protection concern. In line with international law and the obligation to protect, all stakeholders in humanitarian responses have an important role to play in reducing risks related to exploitation and trafficking in persons.

In this regard, ICAT calls on **HUMANITARIAN ACTORS**, in line with all considerations and safeguards relating to humanitarian interventions and principles, and leveraging the efforts of existing coordination mechanisms⁸, to:

1. **Strengthen collective humanitarian action** to mitigate risks of, prevent and respond to trafficking in persons, through the implementation of a coherent, unified responses to all humanitarian crises.
2. **Follow a holistic approach.** Integrate systematically robust counter-trafficking interventions as part of humanitarian responses, looking at effective ways to mobilize protective factors that enhance resilience, at the individual, household, community, and structural levels.⁹
3. **Put in place robust child-safeguarding policies, procedures, and training** for humanitarian personnel to incorporate age, gender, disability, trauma-informed, and culturally sensitive approaches in humanitarian responses, and ensure the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse among crisis-affected populations.
4. **Ensure adherence to established principles¹⁰ on data collection and reporting**, especially in humanitarian contexts, applying a 'Do No Harm' approach to, among others, minimize risks of revictimization, retaliation, or stigmatization.

⁸ Including the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) established through UN General Assembly [resolution 46/182](#) on strengthening the coordination of the UN's humanitarian emergency assistance, the [Global Protection Cluster](#) Anti-Trafficking Task Team, etc.

⁹ See GPC, 2020, [An Introductory Guide to Anti-Trafficking Action in Internal Displacement Contexts](#).

¹⁰ See IOM, 2020, [Counter Trafficking in Emergencies Information Management Guide; global Protection Information Management \(PIM\) Principles](#).



ICAT also calls, in addition to humanitarian actors, on **RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS**, including civil society organizations, faith-based institutions, private sector and academia, to:

1. **Facilitate appropriate and ethical victim support;** safe access to criminal justice procedures and possibility of seeking redress, including interventions that promote recovery and social inclusion.
2. **Provide for basic services to displaced persons** that are tailored to their specific needs and choices, ensure effective provision of these services and inform in an accessible way the displaced persons on the available services and procedures, to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation, including by human traffickers.
3. **Effectively cooperate with law enforcement authorities,** including through the safe sharing of information on potential cases of trafficking in persons and the protection of victims of trafficking in the context of humanitarian crises and conflicts, while ensuring safety, data protection and privacy of the victims.
4. **Also increase cooperation with** Financial Intelligence Units to share information regarding suspicious activities that could be associated with criminal activities, including trafficking in persons.

Noting the indispensable importance of cooperation, ICAT and its members and partners commit to work alongside States and other stakeholders to prevent and combat trafficking in persons especially in humanitarian crises and conflicts.

MEMBERS

- Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)
- Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)
- Department of Peace Operations (DPO)
- Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA)
- International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
- International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
- 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)
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- United Nations University (UNU)
- UN Women
- The World Bank

PARTNERS

- Council of Europe
- UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children
- UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences



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