

Counter-Trafficking in Emergency Contexts

Overview

Human trafficking may be present before, during or after a crisis. Yet a humanitarian response often overlooks victims of human trafficking as a beneficiary group in need of life-saving assistance. To address this gap, IOM pursues top-down and bottom-up approaches to integrate counter-trafficking (CT) activities in humanitarian responses so that victims of trafficking are fully protected, receive tailored assistance, and risks to potential victims are stymied.

CT initiatives by IOM in humanitarian settings include the development of specialized tools for the humanitarian community and IOM staff, collecting data analysis and research, collaborating with partners to identify protect and assist victims of trafficking, advocating among the humanitarian and donor community to raise awareness about the trafficking networks that deliberately target crisis-affected men, women, boys and girls who are suffering and desperate for a respite, a livelihood, and a way out of the upheaval.

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons articulates the process of tackling trafficking and calls upon governments to lead a counter-trafficking (CT) approach that is based on prevention, protection, and prosecution. Governments usually rely on key partners to contribute to the implementation of such approach.

Recognizing that a crisis context can exacerbate trafficking trends, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2331 in 2016, which condemns trafficking in persons in areas affected by armed conflict and urges States to investigate, disrupt and dismantle trafficking networks, amongst key actions. Additionally, the UN Special Rapporteur on TIP (UNSRtIP) issued several reports in 2016 calling on the UN and governments to act against trafficking in complex situations of conflict, and the UN Security Council Resolution 2331 also summoned action on TIP in armed conflicts. In 2023, the UNSRtIP, is dedicating her 2 annual thematic reports (presented to the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly) to issues of key concern to the Global Protection Cluster – (1) Trafficking in persons and protection of refugees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and (2) Strengthening accountability for trafficking in persons in the context of conflict. These reports provide a critical opportunity for IOM as the co-leads of the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) anti trafficking task team (ATTT) to influence the narrative about trafficking in the contexts of emergencies.

When conflict or a natural disaster causes a humanitarian emergency - often during the first few days and weeks - humanitarian personnel focus on assisting the crisis-affected people, providing them with health services, food, water, temporary shelter, etc. While addressing this chaos, humanitarian personnel must also address the risks of trafficking, and actively identify and assist victims of trafficking.

In line with the Centrality of Protection in an emergency response, human trafficking shall be considered a protection concern. Protection entails ensuring the rights of affected population are respected, protected, and fulfilled. As mentioned above, human trafficking and everything that happens to victims - the abuses, the violence, the exploitation in and of itself – violate human rights. Therefore, human trafficking is a protection issue that must be addressed.

The protection of victims of trafficking begins with identification and safety, and leads to multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance that ends the exploitation and encourages empowerment and self-reliance.

Key Points

- Trafficking in persons is a serious crime that affects every country in the world.
- Crisis situations anywhere can exacerbate existing risks and/or give rise to new trends due to large-scale displacement, family separation, and a total disruption of civil protection and community networks.
- IOM is a global leader in counter-trafficking for over 25 years.
- IOM considers counter trafficking in humanitarian settings a lifesaving and core to humanitarian programming.
- IOM works within the humanitarian community to mitigate the risk of trafficking and to ensure that counter trafficking consideration are embedded into humanitarian coordination structures and responses.

Description

Human trafficking happens anywhere in the world, affecting almost every country either as a place of origin, transit, or destination. At any moment of the day, there are thousands of trafficked persons in situations of forced labour, domestic servitude, and/or sexual exploitation. The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons articulates the process and calls on governments to lead a counter-trafficking (CT) approach that is based on prevention, protection, and prosecution. Governments usually rely on key partners to contribute to the implementation of the CT approach.

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Human Trafficking and the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)

Data collected through IOM's [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#) site assessments, household surveys and flow monitoring can inform humanitarian operations conducted by the IOM and its partners of key human trafficking risk and vulnerability factors, related protection issues, and contextual shifts as they occur on the ground.

The DTM thematic data collection serves four overarching objectives: (1) informs responses to humanitarian crises, including by the use of results to highlight risks and vulnerabilities to human trafficking in key documents (2) contributes to program design in internal displacement, refugee and mixed migration contexts; (3) assists in mobilizing preventative resources to combat vulnerability factors that enhance the likelihood of human trafficking and other abusive or exploitative practices occurring; and, (4) promotes the need for donors, government authorities, and other stakeholders to reinforce counter-trafficking interventions.

As human trafficking is a protection issue, all data considered relevant to protection can be analyzed from a counter-trafficking perspective. Recent work has focused on (1) developing and piloting standardized thematic indicators as well as indicators that are suitable to specific contexts; (2) providing guidance regarding ethical and responsible data collection practices; (3) engaging in data analytics that is relevant to counter-trafficking and other protection activities; (4) disseminating research findings of human trafficking to internal and external stakeholders.

IOM's collection, analysis and interpretation of data relevant to human trafficking in humanitarian settings is further supported by HQ technical resources.

Highlights of recent work based on DTM data collection:

- Venezuela Crisis: Brief on Venezuelans' vulnerability to some forms of exploitation, trafficking and discrimination, published in July 2019. The analysis is based on DTM-collected data from flow monitoring undertaken in Central America and the Caribbean in late 2018. The English version can be found [here](#) and in Spanish [here](#).
- Central African Republic: Regular protection risks reports, based on the DTM site assessments conducted in different prefectures in the country that are affected by internal displacement. The English version of Round 6 can be found [here](#). The French version can be found [here](#).

Relevance to IOM's Emergency Operations

Trafficking in persons (TIP) is a crime and a grave violation of human rights as defined in Article 3(a) of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. It takes place in every region of the world, in both ordinary times and in times of crisis. Its root causes can include poverty and economic inequality, homelessness, structural or interpersonal violence, gender inequalities, armed conflict and post-conflict factors. Trafficking manifests in multiple forms affecting women, girls, boys, and men who are exploited for domestic servitude, sex, forced labor, and forced marriage among others.

Research has shown that humanitarian crises may exacerbate pre-existing trafficking trends and give rise to new ones. While certain forms of trafficking are a direct result of crises, such as exploitative sexual services demanded by armed groups or the forced recruitment of child soldiers, others are less evident with traffickers thriving on the widespread human, material, social and economic losses caused by crises and the inability of families and communities to protect themselves and their children. Moreover, conflict and displacement have a close impact on trafficking risks due to the general erosion of the rule of law and the breakdown of social safety nets or the lack of other protection systems which increase overall vulnerabilities and drive individuals towards negative coping mechanisms.

The effects of a humanitarian crisis – such as the war in Ukraine in 2021, Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013-2014 and the 2015 earthquake in Nepal – demonstrated to IOM and the broader humanitarian community how trafficking trends can quickly emerge and increase in the ensuing days of the devastation. Research published by IOM in 2015 reflects how trafficking trends are prevalent in crisis contexts caused by natural disasters, conflict, and protracted situations.

The [Migration Crisis Operational Framework \(MCOF\)](#) devotes Sector 10 specifically to CT and Assisting Vulnerable Migrants (AVM). The MCOF is the institutional framework for IOM humanitarian work and MCOF wheel corresponds to the sectors in the standard humanitarian response.

In line with [IOM's Humanitarian Policy - Principles for Humanitarian Action \(PHA\)](#), all humanitarian personnel have responsibilities in protection. Human trafficking, because of its abuse and exploitation, is a human rights violation and, thus, a protection issue. IOM must expand counter-trafficking activities in humanitarian settings to benefit IDPs, returning IDPs, host communities, migrant and refugee populations, as well as other key stakeholders from government and civil society. In so doing, IOM is fulfilling commitment to protection mainstreaming and accountability to affected populations initiatives.

To do so, IOM draws on decades of in-house CT experience that assisted over 100,000 victims of trafficking, and extensive collaboration with government and civil society partners. Simply put, IOM is renowned globally for its diverse range of effective CT programming.

Coordination

2023 is an important year for pushing forward coordinated action to prevent the trafficking of crisis-affected people and provide robust protection for those who are.

In 2023, IOM is co-chairing the main UN-mandated platform on counter-trafficking, the Interagency Working Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), together with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children (OSRSG-VAC) and under the overall coordination of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Under IOM's co-chairpersonship, ICAT implements an ambitious workplan centered around seven priority areas, one of which is addressing trafficking in persons in crises. ICAT issued a [Call to Action](#) urging countries, humanitarian actors and other relevant stakeholders to put in place effective measures to combat trafficking in persons in the context of increasing humanitarian crises and conflict situations.

Since 2017, IOM is co-leading the GPC Anti-Trafficking Task Team together with the Office of UNHCR, encompassing various UN agencies and international NGOs. The ATTT has been working on improving understanding of and responses to trafficking in persons in humanitarian action since its inception. The ATTT has devised introductory guidance on anti-trafficking action in internal displacement contexts, builds the capacity of field protection colleagues through direct expert deployments and trainings, supports clusters with remote requests for assistance (such as creation of workplans or case advice), and leads policy considerations on the positioning of anti-trafficking in the humanitarian response. In 2023, the GPC ATTT has undertaken a stock taking assessment of the progress made toward better understanding and embedding anti-trafficking action in Protection Clusters since its inception. The GPC ATTT has surveyed 25/32 Protection Clusters and carried out in depth interviews with colleagues in 15 Protection Clusters,

including, protection coordinators and coordinators, and CP and GBV specialists. Findings and recommendations of the stocktaking exercise will be presented to the GPC and partners, SAG members and UNSRTiP in June 2023 to strategize on the way forward on anti-trafficking action in humanitarian settings.

Lessons Learned / Best Practice

IOM, together with other UN and non-UN entities, has been a major responder to the humanitarian crises stemming from Russia's military aggression against Ukraine since 2014, and significantly scaled up its operations in the wake of the full-scale war that commenced in February 2022. Counter-trafficking efforts are an integral part of IOM's protection programming within the humanitarian response, encompassing direct services, capacity development, information dissemination, and other activities. For example, IOM Ukraine has assisted more than 400 persons trafficked and exploited since 24 February 2022. Some of the cases IOM encountered posed specific challenges, for which no relevant guidance was available. In this sense, Ukraine presents an important case study for the protection of human rights of trafficked persons in conflict, particularly examining the avenues for the effective application of the non-punishment principle and reinforcing accountability for trafficking in persons in conflict through the intersecting reporting mechanisms, including CRSV, GBV, VAC, and others.

IOM's Role

As early as 2010, when it became apparent to IOM that the colossal earthquake in Haiti was affecting the country's trafficking context, IOM has been strongly advocating for the integration of counter-trafficking activities into the broader humanitarian response carried out in emergency settings.

IOM uses its position as a principal of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a core member of the Global Protection Cluster (GPC), the Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Areas of Responsibilities (AORs), and leader of Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) to regularly draw attention to trafficking in persons in areas affected by armed conflict, natural disaster and other crises.

IOM has been a significant contributor to the revision process of the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Recent changes to the Minimum Standard for Child Labour better articulate trafficking as a worst-form of child labour and guidance on how to respond. Thanks to IOM's advocacy effort, trafficking is being considered as a cross-cutting child protection issue within the Minimum Standards.

This momentum is carrying over to other aspects of the humanitarian response. For example, trafficking as a pressing issue is increasingly referenced in the Humanitarian Needs Overview that are part of the strategic Humanitarian Response Plans (part of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC)).

Moreover, several humanitarian donors have generously funded projects for IOM and other partners to conduct activities that prevent trafficking and protect trafficked persons in humanitarian settings. This funding has enabled IOM to deploy CT experts and case workers in humanitarian settings to identify and assist victims of trafficking, liaise with government and humanitarian stakeholders, and raise awareness about the risks of trafficking among crisis-affected population. Data collected through IOM's Displacement Tracking Matric (DTM) site assessment, migrant flow monitoring and surveys can inform IOM and partners' humanitarian operations about contextual changes and possible Protection issues, including human trafficking. IOM's CT work in humanitarian settings is further supported by headquarter (HQ) technical resources available.

Links

- [The Global Protection Cluster's Anti-Trafficking Task Team](#)
- [Introductory Guidance to Anti-Trafficking Action in Internal Displacement \(2020\)](#)
- [Counter Trafficking in Emergencies Information Management Guide \(2020\)](#),
- [Inclusion of child trafficking in Minimum Standards for CP in Humanitarian Action \(2019\)](#):
- [Counter Trafficking in Humanitarian Settings self-paced learning modules](#)
- [IOM Digital Space for all resources on CT in Emergencies](#)
- [Advocacy statements on Ukraine with national protection cluster and AORs](#)

Media



[IOM's Principles for Humanitarian Action](#)



[Mainstream Protection](#)



[Protection is central to IOM's response to crises](#)



[Trafficking in persons in contexts in crisis](#)



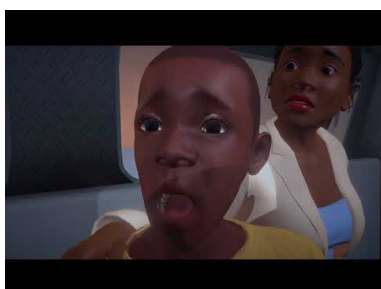
[Philippines: Deeper Scars](#)



[Anti-Trafficking Campaign \(IOM\): The Story of Fatma](#)



[Salma](#)



[Combating Human Trafficking in Ghana](#)



[Displacement Tracking Matrix \(DTM\)](#)

Other Entries in this Topic

- [IOM's Humanitarian Policy - Principles for Humanitarian Action \(PHA\)](#)
- [Migration Crisis Operational Framework \(MCOF\)](#)
- [MICIC Guidelines](#)

Contacts

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Document last updated: Oct 2023