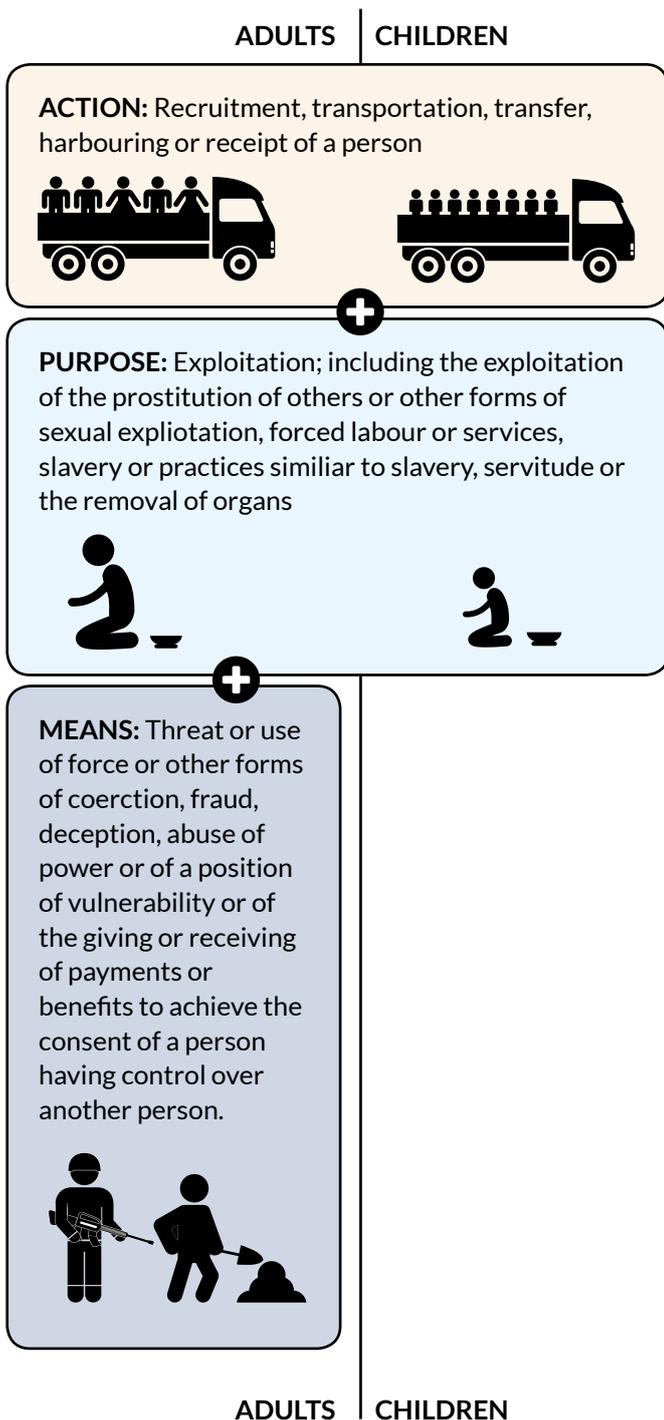


TRAFFICKING IN CHILDREN

HOW DOES TRAFFICKING IN CHILDREN DIFFER FROM TRAFFICKING IN ADULTS?



DATA SNAPSHOT: WHAT IS THE SCALE OF TRAFFICKING IN CHILDREN?

Children represent 28 per cent of the total victims of trafficking identified (20 per cent girls and 8 per cent boys).¹ In regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean, the majority of identified trafficked victims are children (64 per cent and 62 per cent respectively).² Globally, 4.3 million children are estimated to be in forced labour, many of whom are likely to have been trafficked.³

Migrants, refugees, and internally displaced children are particularly at risk of being trafficking. As of 2016, 28 million children were living in forced displacement, and a further 20 million migrant children were living outside their country of birth.⁴

Trafficked children may be forced to work or provide services, often in hazardous, exploitative or extremely abusive conditions. They may be exploited in begging or forced to commit crimes. They may have their organs removed. Children, particularly girls, who are out of school are more likely to be working under exploitative conditions and less likely to have access to safety nets, which can make them more vulnerable to trafficking.⁵ Girls face a higher risk of being trafficked into sexual exploitation or child marriage, whereas boys are at a greater risk of being trafficked for use in armed forces or groups.⁶

TRAFFICKED CHILDREN MAY EXPERIENCE:

- forced labour
- child marriage
- sexual exploitation
- captivity
- violence or abuse

1 by reporting countries between 2012 and 2014, UNODC (2016) [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#), p. 25-26.

2 *Ibid.*

3 ILO (2017) [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage](#), p. 18.

4 UNICEF (2016) [Uprooted](#), p. 3.

5 UNICEF (2017) [All Children in School: Education](#).

6 UNICEF (2017) [A Child is a Child](#), pp. 38-40.

CHILD-SPECIFIC DRIVERS AND CHALLENGES

Lack of Safe and Regular Pathways to Migrate or Seek Asylum with Their Families Puts Children at Risk of Being Trafficked

Whether they are escaping war and violence or lack of opportunities at home, too few children find pathways to move legally and safely.⁷ Lack of legal opportunities for low-skilled migrants and practical and administrative obstacles often unnecessarily separate families for extended periods of time. This increases the likelihood that children and their family members will choose irregular channels to move, or that children will move on their own, and can leave children more vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation by traffickers.

Children are more vulnerable to trafficking when these factors are coupled with inadequate education, healthcare, and social protection systems, statelessness, poverty, discrimination and organised crime. Lack of information on how to safely navigate the internet and social media poses an additional risk for online exploitation.

Vulnerable Situations Do Not End When Children Are Identified as Victims of Trafficking

Children are too infrequently identified as victims of trafficking. Few come forward for fear of their traffickers, lack of information about their options, mistrust of authorities, fear of stigma or the likelihood of being returned without any safeguards and limited material support.

When identification does take place, it is not always prompt or effective. Officials may arrive too late or subsequently lose track of children. Children suffer consequences where authorities do not put the best interests of the child first; where there is limited coordination between law enforcement, child protection and immigration authorities; where justice systems are not child-friendly or gender-sensitive and result in re-victimisation of children; and where there are few criminal prosecutions of traffickers and even fewer convictions.⁸

A specific challenge is the lack of sustainable solutions for child victims – including long-term assistance, rehabilitation, and protection. Child protection systems remain under-resourced, and there is an acute lack of legal guardians and alternative care arrangements. Children are often placed in accommodation which is not specialised or appropriate for their needs, where they risk further traumatising and re-victimisation. Traumatized boys can face additional challenges, as gender stereotypes can prevent them from getting the help they need,⁹ while girls may also be at further risk of exploitation and abuse due to gender discrimination and gendered poverty.

Where long-term assistance is available, it is often conditional upon cooperation with a criminal investigation against the traffickers.

Children who are returned without being identified as victims of trafficking, or without having their best interests or the risk of return properly assessed, face a high risk of harm upon their return, including reprisals and the risk of being re-trafficked.

7 This is especially true for children and young people travelling alone, possessing low levels of education, undertaking longer journeys, and/or coming from Sub-Saharan Africa IOM and UNICEF (2017), *Harrowing Journeys. Children on the Move across the Mediterranean Sea, at Risk of Trafficking and Exploitation*.

8 UNICEF (2017) *Exploitation, Trafficking and Smuggling Can Be Avoided*, p. 4.

9 UNHCR (2012) *Working with Men and Boy Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Forced Displacement*, Geneva, p.2.

WHAT ARE ICAT'S RECOMMENDATIONS?

- Ensure that **the best interests of the child are the primary consideration** in laws, policies, programmes and interventions on trafficking in children.

Prevention of Child Trafficking

- **Expand safe and legal pathways for children to move with their families**, including by accelerating refugee status determination and family reunification procedures; scaling up resettlement schemes; issuing humanitarian, student, and trainee visas; and setting up labour migration schemes for all skill levels that take into consideration every child's right to family life.
- **Strengthen multidisciplinary child and social protection systems in countries of origin, transit and destination** to prevent, identify, refer, and address cases of trafficking, violence, abuse, and exploitation against children, including unaccompanied or separated children and children with disabilities.
- **Improve cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange** between and among border control, law enforcement child protection authorities and implement faster family tracing and reunification procedures and alternative care arrangements for children deprived of parental care. Avoid measures which may push children to choose riskier routes and to move alone to avoid detection by law enforcement.¹⁰

Identification and Protection of Child Victims of Trafficking

- Ensure that trafficked children are **never criminalised or detained**.
- Treat children as children and carry out **age assessments only as a measure of last resort and in a manner that is multi-disciplinary, scientifically and culturally appropriate, child- and gender-sensitive and overseen by the child's guardian**. In the event of continuing uncertainty, a victim should be assumed to be a child.¹¹
- Ensure that **non-national child victims have the same rights as nationals**.
- Promptly and systematically **appoint a qualified guardian** for all unaccompanied or separated children. **Provide child victims with access to family- or community-based alternative care**, rather than shelters.
- **Ensure that child victims of trafficking receive support services** including psycho-social counselling, legal assistance (if needed), (re)training, and education non-conditionally, regardless of their cooperation without criminal justice actors.
- **Ensure that trafficked children are informed, continue to be informed, and have the right to be heard**, regardless of their age and status, and that their right to privacy is safeguarded. This includes establishing child and gender-sensitive reporting and complaint mechanisms and a participatory process to determine the best interests of the child.¹²

¹⁰ UNICEF (2017) *A Child is a Child*, p. 20.

¹¹ See also UNICEF (2013) *Age Assessment: A Technical Note*.

¹² United Nations (2005) *Justice in Matters involving Child Survivors or Witnesses of Crime*.

Sustainable Solutions

- **Provide children with timely access to information,** presented in an easily understood manner, on their rights and options, in accordance with their age and maturity.
- **Ensure that sustainable solutions are guided by an individual assessment of the child's case and best interests' determination,** regardless of the child's status, and that the child participates in this process to a degree appropriate to her/his age and maturity.
- **Consider providing trafficked children legal residence in the country of transit or destination,** when in the child's best interests.
- **Carry out returns to the country of origin only when in the best interests of the trafficked child,** following a risk and security assessment to ensure that safe return has been conducted, and when long-term reintegration support is available in the country of return. Post-return assistance should include physical and psychological support, assurance of their access to protection, healthcare, and education and/or vocational training, as well as preventing discrimination and re-trafficking.

WHAT IS ICAT?

The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking of Persons (ICAT) is a policy forum mandated by the UN General Assembly to improve coordination among UN agencies and other relevant international organisations to facilitate a holistic and comprehensive approach to preventing and combating trafficking of persons. ICAT was formally established in March 2007, pursuant to the United Nations General Assembly [Resolution 61/180](#). ICAT consists of 22 organisations. The members of the ICAT Working Group are ICMPD, ILO, IOM, the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, OHCHR, OSCE, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNODC, UNWOMEN, as well as the CoE as a partner organisation.