



# Recommendations for the inclusion of human trafficking considerations into national pandemic preparedness plans

WP2\_ D2.4\_ Protocols for COVID-19 and response system



Co-funded by  
the European Union

The content of this publication represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

## Partners

KMOP | [www.kmop.gr](http://www.kmop.gr)

PAYOKE | [www.payoke.be](http://www.payoke.be)

APG23 | <https://www.apg23.org>

DIFFERENZA DONNA ASSOCIAZIONE | [www.differenzadonna.org](http://www.differenzadonna.org)

SOLWODI | [www.solwodi.de](http://www.solwodi.de)

## Author

Silvia Lamonaca, Payoke, Belgium

Roberta Arico, Independent Expert, Belgium

## Table of Contents

1. Background .....	3
2. At-risk groups .....	3
3. Recommendations .....	4
4. References .....	6

## 1. Background

The covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities among potential victims of human trafficking. Anti-trafficking efforts since 2020 were negatively impacted by the overall restrictions imposed to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, as they also implied limitations on the provision of public services and activities, including law enforcement. Furthermore, a considerable part of trafficking activities moved online. Criminals are adapting to the "new reality" created by the pandemic, particularly by employing new communication technologies. There is an evolution in the modus operandi of perpetrators of human trafficking as they take advantage of social media online platforms and mobile applications to recruit and exploit victims, organize their criminal activity and advertise to potential users. At the same time, the pandemic affects the extent to which governments and non-governmental organizations can provide essential services to victims of trafficking. It has further highlighted systemic and entrenched economic and social inequality, an inequality that is among the root causes of human trafficking.

The pandemic and measures to combat it make it more difficult for people impacted by human trafficking to access health care due to restrictions and lockdowns. It leads to even greater vulnerability among those already vulnerable who are on low incomes or working in the informal sector (migrants in illegal residence, seasonal workers, sex workers,...). There is a risk of even more exploitation in sectors where trafficking is often identified, due to the reduction in production costs as a result of economic difficulties and also because the authorities carry out fewer checks.

## 2. At-risk groups

Although COVID-19 affects the entire population, it affects people differently depending on physiological differences, health conditions, socio-economic inequalities, gender, and cultural norms. Some groups may be more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking :

- People living in humanitarian emergency settings
- People with poor economic or employment opportunities
- Children with reduced or no access to education
- Persons with disabilities or learning difficulties
- People with mental health issues
- People with drug and alcohol addiction

- Unaccompanied and separated children
- Migrants, including refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented people
- Seasonal workers
- Female domestic workers
- Sexual and gender minorities
- Ethnic or religious minorities
- Homeless people or those in precarious living conditions
- Women and children

It is important to note that human trafficking is a complex phenomenon, and the factors listed above affect one another and are interrelated.

### 3. Recommendations

National agencies and civil society organizations can take human trafficking into account in their national pandemic preparedness plans, by way of<sup>1</sup>:

- Providing tailor-made and accessible information about public interest topics through a multilingual awareness campaign;
- Understanding how people experience multiple vulnerabilities and the traffickers' modus operandi to exploit people at risk and in need under emergency circumstances;
- Collecting sex, age and disability disaggregated data and analyzing the differential impact, barriers, and risks faced by different groups;
- Assessing potential barriers in accessing services and accurate information, especially for at-risk groups; and offer protection and assistance through the provision of essential services such as health and psychosocial support, ensuring that everyone, and universal access regardless of status or documentation;
  - Guaranteeing personal protective equipment, tests, and vaccinations for all in critical health condition without discrimination.

<sup>1</sup> The following guidelines are based on reports published by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC, 2020), UN Women (2020), UNODC (2020), and both of the Amelie projects' Covid committee reports.

- Ensuring that all general preparedness and response plans and activities extend to migrants, including irregular migrants. To determine needs and eligibility, such support should be accessible and based on vulnerability rather than employment, immigration, or legal status;
- Promptly communicating to survivors any changes in processes, delays, or postponements in civil, administrative, or criminal justice procedures in a language they understand;
- Ensuring that basic needs are met (e.g. housing, basic necessities), while ensuring accessibility to healthcare, services, and benefits without discrimination (e.g. based on legal status, residence permit, working conditions);
  - Health care should be provided to victims of trafficking during the COVID-19 pandemic or any other emergency situation, regardless of their immigration status, and without fear of administrative detention or deportation.
- Including those who are most vulnerable to the risks of trafficking or their caretakers in covid-19 awareness raising initiatives;
- Providing women (especially migrants) with access to services and financial and economic support in an emergency;
- Providing more targeted information to service providers, taking into account language barriers and incorporating culturally sensitive practices;
- Guaranteeing a continuous presence of cultural mediators;
- Training staff and volunteers in all sectors on human trafficking and ensure capacity building:
  - Providing them with the training and support they need to understand risks, including human trafficking, in order to respond to emergency situations in a safe manner
  - Providing them with accurate and current information about support services for vulnerable cases, including victims of trafficking
  - Enabling them to provide safe referrals.
  - Increasing training and capacity building on interconnected phenomena such as secondary exploitation and re-victimization.
  - Emphasizing gender-based and victim-centered approaches that should be adopted during investigations and procedures.
  - Providing stress management training to equip staff with coping strategies for reducing anxiety and key skills for thriving under pressure.
- Enhancing the national referral mechanisms, which appear slow in comparison with criminal organizations' high degree of flexibility and adaptability;

- Using technology to improve access to services for victims of trafficking through online platforms. It is vital that victims and survivors of trafficking have access to smartphones and online technology free of charge to access digitized services
- The pandemic has increased online grooming, recruitment, and exploitation, especially among women and children. To address trafficking in cyberspace, governments should adopt anti-trafficking laws that reflect gender and age-specificities of online crimes related to human trafficking, and provide bespoke training to relevant agencies and service providers
- Working with Internet service providers, credit card companies, and banks to prevent the use of the Internet for sexual exploitation and disrupt traditional payment methods.
- Establishing (or strengthening, where they already exist) specialized trafficking police units and promoting their cooperation with frontline officers;
- Law enforcement officials remaining vigilant and adapting their responses to new and evolving crime patterns in order to prevent human traffickers from operating with impunity in times of crises;
- Ensuring that adequate resources are allocated to specialized anti-trafficking law enforcement units. Law enforcement should prioritize detecting and identifying trafficking victims and investigating

## 4. References

Amelie, report of the 1st COVID-19 committee meeting

Amelie, report of the 2nd COVID-19 committee meeting

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (2020). COVID-19 Impact on Trafficking in Persons, A Protection, Gender & Inclusion (PGI) Technical Guidance Note. <https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/Covid-19-TiP-Technical-guidance-FINAL-290520.pdf>

UNODC. (2020). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficking in persons, preliminary findings and messaging based on rapid stocktaking. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS Thematic Brief on COVID-19.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS%20Thematic%20Brief%20on%20COVID-19.pdf)

UN WOMEN (2020). Guidance, Addressing Emerging Human Trafficking Trends and Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Guidance-Addressing-emerging-human-trafficking-trends-and-consequences-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-en.pdf>





[www.project-amelie.eu](http://www.project-amelie.eu)  
[info@project-amelie.eu](mailto:info@project-amelie.eu)



Co-funded by  
the European Union

The content of this publication represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.