

# Stop Trafficking!

## Awareness Advocacy Action

Anti-Human Trafficking Newsletter • November 2020 • Vol. 18 • No. 11

*FOCUS: This issue highlights some of the many predictable and many unforeseen ways the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted human trafficking.*

## The Double Pandemics: Human Trafficking and COVID-19

*Christina Bain, a visiting researcher at the Center for the Study of Europe at Boston University Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies, and Louise Shelley, the Omer L. and Nancy Hirst Endowed Chair and the director of the Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center at George Mason University Schar School of Policy and Government authored a post as part of the Council on Foreign Relations' blog series on human trafficking on the evolution of human trafficking during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has shattered human lives, the global economy, and educational systems. The International Labor Organization estimates that the lockdowns caused by the pandemic have affected a staggering 2.7 billion workers or 81 percent of the world's workforce, while the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization estimates that school closures in 194 countries affected 90 percent of the world's students. In this environment, human trafficking can flourish.

Some of the most vulnerable to human trafficking are those whose lives have been devastated by the current health crisis, many of whom are minorities. Survivors are being forced to return to their exploiters as they have lost their jobs and medical insurance. Some who had found support in shelters are becoming homeless as many shelters that used to house former trafficking victims are shutting down due to a lack of financial support. Young women who cannot afford to pay their rents, or are financially vulnerable, are being subject to sextortion by their landlords. According to a survey by the U.S. based National Fair Housing Alliance of one hundred fair housing organizations, thirteen percent of organizations have seen an increase in sexual harassment complaints since the pandemic started.

With children and youth at home and isolated from school services, they are increasingly vulnerable to online predators. Child predators are exchanging strategies on how to further exploit children in lockdown. These predators know that many children will be isolated, spending several hours a day online. Parents may also be unemployed and distracted by working from home. Predators will have more time to download material and/or produce content if they have a child living with them in their home. Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in the number of graphic sexual imagery, including images of children being sexually abused at home. Social distancing isolates children and teens from their peers, mentors, and supportive adults.

Human trafficking for the purpose of organ removal has temporarily declined since transplantation surgeries have come to an almost halt during the pandemic. Travel bans have also made it more difficult for desperate organ recipients to travel abroad to access an organ. However, given the large numbers of unemployed people, it is anticipated that traffickers may exploit the most vulnerable by luring them into selling an organ.

Previous outbreaks of serious infectious diseases may have increased the rise in human trafficking. Ebola, for example, increased the number of orphans vulnerable to trafficking. Other disease outbreaks have forced states to divert resources needed to combat human trafficking to other critical community needs. With each day we learn more on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted human trafficking. Click [here](#) to learn more.



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## Increased Children's Risk to Trafficking

*Tasneem Tayeb reports on how the pandemic has impacted the lives of children worldwide.*

It took only weeks for the COVID-19 crisis to impact children globally. From increased threats of becoming victims of human trafficking—for sex, forced labor and begging, domestic servitude, child marriage-- and reduced access to nutrition, basic healthcare facilities and education, to increased risk of emotional abuse and mental trauma, children today, especially the ones born into poverty, are at greater risk of exploitation. According to UNICEF, “The economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic could push up to 86 million more children into household poverty by the end of 2020.”

According to a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report, joblessness due to the pandemic is increasing child abandonment or using children to earn money which makes children vulnerable and at risk of exploitation. The economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increased risk for girls from poor and rural areas in Africa and Asia of dropping out of school and ending up in forced marriages and forced pregnancies.

If one or both parents die due to the virus, children may be forced into child labor, including work that harms their health and safety. Studies indicate that as parents and caregivers in poor countries fall sick or die, children will take over part of their roles, including domestic work and earning responsibilities, as seen previously in Mali, Mexico, and Tanzania.

UNICEF predicts that millions of children will become vulnerable to child labor due to a rise in global poverty alone. This increase in child labor can last generations. Children who enter the labor force are unlikely to stop working even if their economic situation improves. They will continue to experience the implications of child labor, such as less education and worse employment opportunities, when they are adults and start families of their own. UNICEF also found that the younger children are when they start working the more likely they will experience chronic health issues as adults.

Programs that address poverty are critical to aid those most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and child labor. Over 100 countries have legislated social protection programs, including non-contributory cash transfers. These programs serve to lower child labor outside the household and help households offset economic shocks. In Colombia, cash transfers helped offset increases in child labor due to the absence of the father. In Zambia, cash transfers helped households cushion the effect of weather shocks.



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Authorities worldwide are concerned that the temporary disruption of schooling due to the pandemic will have permanent effects, especially for the poorest. Studies show that when children stop going to school and start earning an independent income, it is extremely difficult to get them to go back to school. For instance, a study of teacher strikes in Argentina found that even temporary school closures can result in permanently lower schooling and reduced labor earnings into adulthood as children who leave school early enter low-skill occupations. According to UNICEF, the global shutdown may limit the ability of children to start earning while they are out of school, potentially decreasing the chance that children will not go back to school.

Child labor has decreased in areas of the world where schooling was affordable to most of the children in the area. There is evidence from India, for example, that the impact of economic downturns on child labor was not as great in areas where schooling was more affordable. Also, reports from Mexico and Senegal indicate that child labor decreases when school quality improves. If school fees increase or school quality deteriorates post-COVID-19, a further increase in child labor seems likely.

For children who are victims of trafficking, school functions as a resource. Teachers, coaches, and other school personnel are trained to recognize signs of trafficking in students, offer referrals to social services when appropriate, and intervene in suspected trafficking situations.

Tasneem Tayeb recently wrote in *The Daily Star, Bangladesh* that families, unable to feed all their children, often marry off their girls at an early age, at times in exchange for money. These little girls are subjected to marital rape by their husbands, and most suffer severe reproductive health damages due to the burden of early motherhood. Some men marry these young girls to rape them, and then to sell them to sex traffickers for money. At times, mothers sell their daughters to sex traffickers for money. Young boys in Bangladesh are often sent away to work in the informal sector to earn money for their families. These young boys are often preyed

upon for trafficking as slaves and sometimes into male prostitution. This will only escalate with increasing poverty due to the pandemic.

Child survivors of trafficking experience postponements in the appointment of legal guardians, which is significant as it impacts children's ability to access appropriate protection and legal procedures. Besides limited access to accommodation, child survivors experience challenges in accessing health care, including access to primary doctors, psychological services, hospitals, pharmacies, COVID-19 testing, and personal protective equipment. Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Increase in Cybercrime

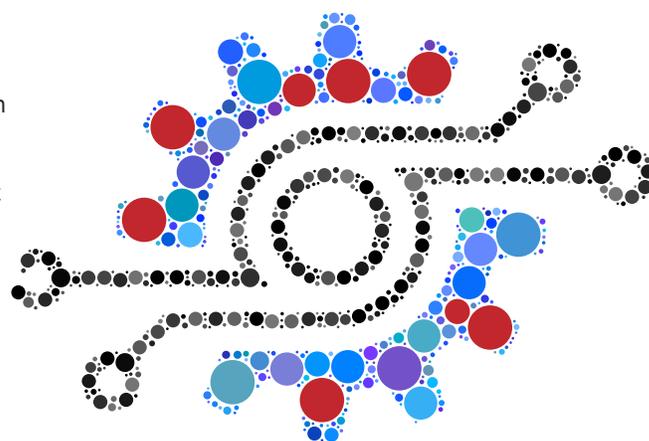
A key finding of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and UN Women report, *Addressing Emerging Human Trafficking Trends and Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic* is that the COVID-19 pandemic had the most significant impact on cybercrimes compared to other forms of criminal activities. According to statistics published by the National Human Trafficking Hotline from 2019, the most utilized venues of sex trafficking relied on physical establishments. Only 9% of the reported venues were predominantly internet-based (i.e., online pornography channels). Online recruitment, grooming and exploitation have been widely used by traffickers during the pandemic while trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation online, including the demand for Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) has also increased. In March 2020, the FBI published an official statement warning, "due to school closings and social distancing enforced to mitigate COVID-19, children will potentially be exposed to an increased risk of child exploitation via online channels."

With more people working remotely due to the pandemic, abusers have a new way to target people online to both generate demand and to groom vulnerable women and children. Survivors report being targeted during the COVID-19 pandemic by traffickers, mostly online. Moreover, there are reports of increased grooming and exploitation of children online through gaming sites and social media platforms by sexual predators as children have to stay home more and the demand for pornography has risen. Survivors who have children reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, their child was targeted with offers of employment or solicitation of their images.

The use of Zoom for conferencing has led to the "invasion" of Zoom with displays of child pornography in an effort to decrease the natural repulsion toward such pornography and potentially increase interest. Pornography is a gateway to sex trafficking both for buyers and victims. Buyers viewing pornography may be more inclined to consider seeking out a trafficker and it is common for traffickers to expose children to pornography to convince them sexual acts are normal.

International and national law enforcement agencies, including Europol and the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, are warning about the increased risk of sexual exploitation on the Internet and signs of child abuse or child trafficking. Australian authorities reported the identification of an online grooming manual shared by perpetrators. Many European countries reported an increase in reports of online child sexual abuse material during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as attempts to access illegal materials online. Europol report conversations in online forums (including those in the DarkWeb) on the increased availability of children online during the COVID-19 pandemic due to isolation, unsupervised Internet access, as well as more time for offenders to download and trade CSAM as many are teleworking or spending more time at home due to restriction of movement.

Technology companies using automated tools to detect child abuse content based on previously categorized material are struggling to identify new uncategorized data and are further constrained by the impact of the pandemic due to lack of capacity. At the same time distributors of CSAM are constantly developing sophisticated, cross-platform strategies in coded language to evade detection, and using popular platforms to attract audiences, diverting interested consumers to private channels for access to the material. Click [here](#) to learn more.





# Awareness

## Racism, COVID-19 and Human Trafficking

Racism has driven legislation and policies that have inhibited the economic and educational opportunities of people of color in the United States for generations. The resulting poverty, and the unequal protection of people of color under the law, are key risk factors in determining who gets trafficked and who gets COVID-19.

Traffickers prey on the vulnerabilities of people, especially of people living in poverty who have few options available to them to support themselves and their families. Reports indicate that almost half of Black and Latino workers have jobs that require them to be physically present at work during the pandemic. By comparison, far more white people can work from home or stay at home and keep their jobs safe than Latinos or Blacks. Moreover, many jobs that are directly descendant from historical slavery and typically performed by people of color, such as domestic work, have been purposefully left out of most of the nation's major labor protections. Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Impact on Women and Girls

A survey by UN Women and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) demonstrated heightened vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, while men and boys were targeted by traffickers for the purpose of exploitation in labor or criminal activities.

The sudden forced cohabitation and economic distress have increased violence at home. Measures of temporary quarantine, lockdown and restriction of movement led to the inability of vulnerable or already affected persons to leave the place where they are residing, exposing them to the constant control and potential exploitation by abusers. Isolation with the perpetrator also hinders the possibilities to seek help and report to the police, either by telephone or online.

Domestic violence is among the push factors into trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Experiences of domestic violence can further lead to a victim feeling the need to escape their home and communities, which may heighten their vulnerability to trafficking. Women and girls are more vulnerable to intimate partner trafficking when they are sexually exploited and trafficked by their own partner with whom they may be quarantined.



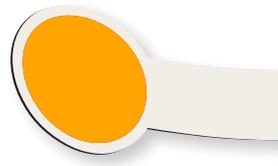
Alexander Penyushkin/Shutterstock.com

Another aspect of vulnerability to trafficking is related to the role of women and girls within the family. Women engaged in informal work may experience further exacerbation of their vulnerability due to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, reports suggest that some landlords are beginning to demand sex instead of rent from their female tenants in the face of job cuts and a potential housing crisis.

The pandemic highlights that the dynamics of trafficking for sexual exploitation, particularly impacting women and children, are currently shifting from the more traditional forms of exploitation to various forms of trafficking.

The COVID-19 pandemic also has immediate and serious implications for women in the sex industry. In countries where prostitution is legal, the temporary closure of the sex trade is likely to drive it underground, increasing the risk for affected women of being abused and trafficked or put at risk of contracting the virus. In these countries, while a few women may be entitled to state social support, this does not apply to most domestic and migrant women in the sex industry. In other parts of the world, restrictions of movement and economic hardship are forcing women into the sex industry, where they may engage in riskier behavior to ensure food and shelter for themselves and their families, including lowering prices and engaging with potentially infected buyers.

In the United States, anti-trafficking organizations say they are particularly concerned about the long-term consequences that COVID-19 is likely to have on women of color and those from other marginalized groups. The social and economic inequalities that they confront on a daily basis mean that even pre-pandemic, they faced a disproportionate risk of trafficking and exploitation. Click [here](#) to learn more.



## Impact on Victims

*“Victims are being forced to interact with others who may be infected, as traffickers find new ways to exploit victims.” (Female survivor from the United Kingdom)*

Traffickers do not care about the health of the people they exploit— their only concern is money and how to obtain as much of it as quickly as possible. Unsafe work environments put trafficking victims at increased risk for contracting COVID-19. Moreover, trafficking victims are vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 because they often suffer from malnutrition, lack of sleep, substance reliance, and inadequate access to healthcare.

Despite stay-at-home orders, people are continuing to purchase sex, placing sex trafficking victims’ health and safety in jeopardy. According to Mama Fatima Singhateh, Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, the Covid-19 lockdown has resulted in people finding newer ways of availing prostitution services—through “delivery” or “drive-through”. There are reports in which victims trafficked for sex are advertised as being virus-free or willing to wear a mask and gloves. Some traffickers abandon their victims, leaving them in unfamiliar locations with no means to live. The pandemic has hastened a push by many human traffickers to move their operations online, with pornography production and efforts on social media to recruit young victims.

Many trafficking enterprises violated closure restrictions even during the height of the pandemic in their respective areas. These venues of sex and labor trafficking operate behind the façade of a commercial front business — like illicit massage venues used as a cover for sex trafficking. They work with cash transactions and engage in various types of financial crimes and fraud, including underreporting their annual income, paying lower taxes and lower insurance premiums and violating sales tax laws in their pricing and advertising. Some venues have changed nothing about their business operations besides turning off the open sign, with customers still entering through a back door and being serviced inside the parlor. Others are operating by appointment only to minimize traffic and detection. Massage parlor trafficking is an insidious

form of trafficking that has been incredibly organized and difficult to eradicate across the nation and the most prolific buyers do not care about public health concerns like communicable disease or COVID-19.

In Italy, thousands of Nigerian women forced into prostitution were left to starve by sex traffickers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Trafficking gangs abandoned women and their children, who were unable to leave their homes or work and were left without food or money to pay the rent. Given their illegal status, they had no recourse to financial assistance or unemployment benefits. Said one survivor of human trafficking: “In the eyes of sex traffickers these women are subhuman, exploited to enrich their pimps, who treat them like ATMs. And when the ATM runs out of cash, they discard it and look for another one.” These women and children were “left alone and cashless by their exploiters, and some of their landlords even threw them out on the streets.”

The Arise Foundation reports that in places like India, exploited communities of migrants, tea garden workers, brick kiln workers, domestic workers and other daily wage earners, have been abandoned by their employers. Their wages, and in some cases accommodation, have disappeared and they have no way to make money. They are left to their own devices, without assistance.

The pandemic has brought with it an increase in reports of domestic violence. Economic stress along with physical confinement in the home has led to increased abuse and violence for those trapped in trafficking situations. Restricted in their ability to ‘earn’, victims of sex trafficking trapped with intimate partners or pimps are particularly vulnerable. Victims of labor trafficking may be forced to work increased hours in hazardous conditions, increasing their potential exposure to the virus. Many victims are being forced to pick up other jobs or engage in criminal activity to supplement income for their traffickers. These risks are only exacerbated by limited social support services, shelter closures, and restricted access to medical facilities and care.

# Advocacy

Victims who have been provided with temporary immigration documents or time-limited services linked to their status as victims of trafficking might not be able to renew them. The situation can worsen if borders are closed and planned repatriations cannot take place, while residence permits and related access to healthcare and social benefits have already expired.

With many services closed, hotlines and helplines are often the only possible option for victims in the current circumstances. However, this switch is not possible in many parts of the world that lack infrastructure. Even where it is possible, providers may not be equipped to meet the sudden surge in demand.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

*“I think the biggest issue for me as a survivor of human trafficking and COVID-19, is the PTSD. We are living in unprecedented times and while we are ‘in the life’, everything is chaos. There are a lot of parallels that influence my increased depression and anxiety.” (Female survivor from the United States)*

## Challenges to Survivors

*The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and UN Women conducted a global survey of survivors of trafficking and frontline stakeholders in order to address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.*

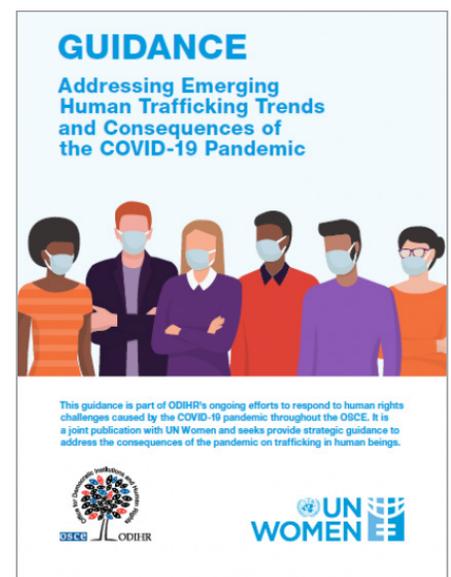
The Covid-19 pandemic has created new risks and challenges to survivors of trafficking. Both male and female trafficking survivors said they believe the coronavirus pandemic is having a particularly concerning effect on women and girls. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, over twenty percent of the female trafficking survivors said they had been approached about entering the sex industry, while 14 percent had been offered “illicit” employment in other sectors.

The pandemic has impacted the effective functioning of The National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. The effect of the pandemic on law enforcement operations and capacity makes detection of trafficking cases more challenging. Survivors also experienced difficulties in accessing

sheltered accommodations and other needed assistance, as many shelters and service providers are only partially functional, closed or not accepting new clients. Other obstacles mentioned by survivors include psychological, medical, interpretation and legal services.

Particularly significant is the increase of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and other psychological issues reported among survivors. Having previously been held against their will, for many survivors Covid-19 feels like a similar situation all over again and may trigger traumatic memories – restrictions in their movement, being told what to do, having limited or no access to emotional and practical support, and being completely isolated.

Most survivors state that the economic downturn will increase the vulnerability to recruitment by traffickers and the risk of re-



victimization of survivors, and that these factors have been further negatively impacted by reprioritization of human and financial resources by government institutions to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the pandemic

has forced the closure of childcare facilities and barred access to many of the entry-level jobs that survivors rely on. These services are imperative for survivors getting back on their feet. Fewer employment opportunities will further increase survivors' vulnerability to being re-trafficked.

Court closures have disrupted the prosecution of trafficking cases, causing many survivors to worry about traffickers being released and retaliating against them. Survivors may distrust the legal system and be reluctant to testify against their traffickers, so trial delays may influence them to change their minds about cooperating with prosecution.

In some countries, survivors living in shelters are prevented from moving out as respective emergency measures make it difficult to visit rental housing and sign rental contracts. Moreover, they are prohibited to return to their country of origin or experience delays due to closed borders, interrupted long-distance transport and unavailability of assistance from governmental agencies and service providers in the country of return.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Human Trafficking for Forced Labor

Poverty, inequality, political instability, conflict, crime/violence, and tightening of restrictions on immigration all increase workers' vulnerability to becoming victims of human trafficking, and these will likely worsen during and after the Covid-19 crisis according to Verité.

The International Labor Organization estimates that the Covid-19 pandemic will eliminate millions of full-time jobs globally. This will create a population of desperate, unemployed workers competing for limited employment opportunities, increasing the number of people vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

Human traffickers and unscrupulous employers do not consider the wellbeing of workers or provide adequate sanitary measures, personal protective equipment (PPE), or medical care. Victims of forced labor cannot give or withdraw their consent to work under hazardous conditions, including potential exposure to Covid-19. Victims of labor trafficking cannot leave their places of work. This, along with travel restrictions due to the pandemic, may lead desperate, laid-off workers to take hazardous jobs in sectors in which they have no experience.

Restrictions on the movement of migrant workers create a scarcity of workers in the agricultural industry which may lead to food shortages. Informal labor brokerage networks may form to recruit workers, increasing the risk of human trafficking. Migrant workers who are currently abroad may be left stranded without a source of income and/or the money needed to return to their home countries. Aspiring migrant workers who have already paid their recruiters to secure them jobs abroad may also be unable to travel back to their home countries due to travel restrictions, leaving them unemployed and burdened by recruitment debt. Workers find themselves in a situation of debt bondage if they are expected to cover their food and housing costs during quarantine.

Some sectors are experiencing an increased need for workers, including agriculture, mask and glove manufacturing, medical care, and transportation and delivery services. There is a danger that workers may be deceived or charged fees during the recruitment process. There have been reports of extensive overtime and restrictions on workers' freedom of movement in the production of PPE. There is an increased need for essential goods, such as gloves and masks, and some of these manufacturers have a history of forced labor. Aside from the increased risk of human trafficking, there have been reports of decreased government enforcement of laws on human trafficking and cuts in social services for the most vulnerable populations, such as immigrants and refugees.

## Impact on Shelters

Shelters for trafficking survivors worldwide are struggling to stay open during the pandemic. A quarter of organizations said they had the space to accept new residents during the pandemic, but to comply with government-imposed social distancing regulations they were now legally obliged to turn away women who arrived seeking sanctuary from their abusers. Moreover, some shelters have had to close because of infections while others have partially suspended services.

A recent UN survey of organizations working in 102 countries found that many fear that the diversion of funding and attention away from anti-trafficking responses will force them to close their shelters.

The repercussions of such closures are grave. Without access to shelters, some survivors of trafficking will be forced to live on the streets, where they will be exposed not only to infection but also further violence and abuse.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



# Advocacy

Verité recommends that companies:

- Strengthen their supplier codes of conduct to ensure that they cover risks related to Covid-19
- Standards should guarantee that workers are provided with healthy workplaces, including paid sick leave, PPE, sanitized workplaces and dormitories, and the ability to socially distance.
- Standards should ensure that work is always voluntary, and workers are never forced to work under hazardous conditions or when ill, and do not engage in forced overtime.

For more information on Verité and Covid-19 and forced labor, please click [here](#).

## COVID-19 in the Coffee Sector

With funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (USDOL-ILAB), Verité implemented The Cooperation On Fair, Free Equitable Employment (COFFEE) Project to improve the ability of the coffee sector to address labor violations, including forced labor, child labor, discrimination, wage and hour violations, and health and safety risks in the Latin America region. Verité has been engaging COFFEE Project stakeholders both internationally and in the project focal countries of Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico to learn about the impacts COVID-19 is having on coffee farmers and farm workers and to explore potential actions that could mitigate the effects of the pandemic on them.

At an international level, coffee producers, traders, and roasters have seen significant changes in coffee markets since the beginning of the pandemic. There have been increases in international coffee prices, with a strong likelihood of continued increases as countries stockpile coffee in case supply chains are hit harder by COVID-19. This could have a positive effect for coffee farmers who have until recently faced record low prices for their coffee. This increase in profit could provide them with essential income that could go toward improving working conditions.

However, coffee traders' and roasters' increased expenditures on coffee could decrease the amount of resources they have available for monitoring and remediating labor issues in their supply chains. Additionally, while the market price for coffee has increased, prices for fair trade coffee have stagnated, creating a risk of coffee producers abandoning fair trade schemes that promote decent working conditions. While there has been an increased demand for coffee sold by supermarkets, there have been steep decreases in demand for coffee sold at cafés, which is generally high-end or premium specialty coffee that brings much higher prices for farmers. Coffee producers face several challenges in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Travel restrictions related to the coronavirus are affecting the mobility of farmworkers during the peak harvest season. Labor shortages could jeopardize the coffee harvest, creating disruptions in the supply of coffee to consuming countries, and affecting the profitability of farmers that are already on the brink of bankruptcy due to the extremely low coffee prices of the past few years.

As states and municipalities have sought to limit travel to contain the spread of the virus, farmers are being prevented from hiring migrant workers. Coffee harvesting is highly time-sensitive, so the lack of access to migrant labor means that many coffee producers will have to turn to other sources of harvesting labor, such as inexperienced workers who have been laid off from other jobs, workers recruited by unvetted labor brokers, and family labor. This will increase forced labor risks like deceptive recruitment and recruitment fees, as well as the risk of child labor. As coffee harvesters are typically paid based on their production, inexperienced workers will likely earn far less than experienced harvesters, further increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.

Verité has found that the pandemic is increasing the risk of child labor and forced labor, especially in sectors such as agriculture, which have been declared essential services, meaning that workers are forced to continue working in these sectors despite the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

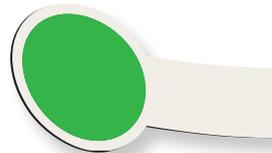
Also, even though coffee is considered an essential consumer good, economic hardship related to the pandemic will hit the consumption of coffee, especially ultra-premium coffee, which is more expensive and more often consumed at cafés.

New measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 contagion could increase the cost of production due to the need for training, additional PPE, and extensive sanitation measures for processing areas and equipment. Given that even before the pandemic, workers were rarely provided with the PPE needed to safely harvest and process coffee — such as hats, overalls/coats, boots, facemasks, goggles, and gloves — it is unlikely that farms will provide workers with sufficient PPE and sanitary measures to effectively protect workers during the pandemic. A lack of the infrastructure for proper hand washing and disposal of gloves or masks is an additional risk.

With significant economic impacts along the coffee supply chain as a result of the pandemic, there is a significant risk that working conditions will further deteriorate as crises usually affect the most vulnerable workers the hardest.

While it is possible to ensure adequate social distancing in coffee harvesting by carefully communicating guidance and monitoring compliance, the crowded nature of worker housing and dining facilities on many coffee farms makes social distancing especially challenging, particularly in bathrooms, dining rooms, and bedrooms. Most coffee farms are in rural areas where workers lack access to advanced medical facilities, creating an obstacle for the testing and treatment of those infected with the coronavirus. Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Action



## Anti-Trafficking Work in India

*Corinne Redfern writes for the Fuller Project on the impact of COVID on anti-trafficking activities in India.*

It is before 7 a.m. and Ruchira Gupta is on the phone to a local farmer in Uttar Pradesh, India, working to persuade him to give her whatever potatoes and onions he can spare. Her tone is urgent and pleading. If they will not donate for free, maybe they could discount the price?

Gupta can't stop making the calls. If she did, she fears thousands of women and children living in India's red-light districts would starve. Government restrictions, imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus, have robbed those working in India's sex trade of their income. The nature of the industry—and the trafficking pipeline that feeds it—mean that few women, if any, have the necessary documentation to claim government handouts and much needed financial aid.

Gupta heads the India-wide anti-trafficking organization Apne Aap. If a sex worker or trafficking victim



Fahmida Choudhury Ealin/Shutterstock.com

were to fall sick with the coronavirus, Gupta says they probably would not be able to afford medical treatment. Medical costs have increased in recent years, and an estimated 80 percent of the country does not have health insurance. "They would be left to die," she says. Without government assistance, it's fallen to Apne Aap, which is more used to running educational programs for children born inside the brothels than distributing food parcels, to keep the women and girls alive.

Seventy-five percent of organizations working to support trafficking survivors report they need additional resources to cope with the outbreak. Only 24 percent of anti-trafficking organizations said they would be able to remain fully operational without extra funding in the next 12 months.

In India, where the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 exceeded 1.5 million by July 29 and the Global Slavery Index estimates there are an estimated eight million victims of trafficking, the situation is so precarious that organizations such as Apne Aap have had to temporarily halt all plans of getting children out of brothels. The priority right now is supplying food and preventing the infection's spread. Gupta states that she has met with mothers who must choose between charging their phones to call for help and feeding their children.



# Action

“There’s been a huge loss of income, and this has feminized poverty in a big way,” says Gupta. “For marginalized groups of women like victims of sex trafficking, the bottom has completely dropped out of their world.” Even in ordinary times, support was scant for the women and children trapped in India’s commercial sex industry. Once part of the trade, there is little chance of escaping. But after years of sustained abuse, many trafficked women and girls fear that the pandemic will cause the country’s brothels to close, leaving them homeless. With the shelters full, they have nowhere to go.

For now, the activist says entering India’s red-light districts during the pandemic feels like stepping onto the set of a horror movie. She describes women crammed 12 to a single, windowless bedroom, and children too weak to swat away the flies that hover overhead. Sometimes, she sees women lying limp on the street. “I worked in the U.N. for 10 years, including in Kosovo after the war,” Gupta says. “I’ve never seen anything like this in my life.”

Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Domestic Workers

In the United States, 2 million women work as domestic workers, which include nannies, housekeepers, and caregivers. Data from the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline shows that of the approximately 8,000 labor trafficking cases identified between December 2007 and December 2017, the highest number of cases involved domestic workers. Most domestic workers are legal immigrants though some are undocumented.

In a survey by the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), only 8 percent of those who responded stated that they have a contract with their employer. Without official employment status, these workers are not eligible for unemployment insurance should their employers lay them off due to the pandemic, either to maintain quarantine or because the employer decides they do not need childcare or help cleaning while working from home or on lockdown.

Domestic workers employed in countries where the kafala system is implemented are particularly vulnerable to exploitation as they are bound to their employers who have the power to deny or withhold the work permits, leaving them without any proper documentation. Moreover, during the lockdown and with entire families and children staying at home, domestic workers might be obliged to work extra hours, or required to take care of people who fall sick of COVID-19 without adequate health protections. With families losing jobs, domestic workers can experience delays in payment of their wages or lose their income. Finally, alongside the rise of domestic violence during lockdown domestic workers in abusive or exploitative working conditions can find themselves at higher risk of violence and abuse by their employers or family members.

In the first major U.S. legislative response to the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress took notice of



such workers and others in the informal or “gig” economy. However, most domestic workers were left out of the relief altogether because few have contracts or recorded “proof” of their employment. Many domestic workers are paid in cash, often so that their employers can avoid any tax implications. Moreover, the legislation also provides tax credits for individuals who are experiencing economic dislocation as a result of the slowdown in economic activity, but that also leaves behind many domestic workers because it requires a Social Security number. Many domestic workers file taxes using a taxpayer identification number.

By leaving domestic workers out of the relief package provided for other workers, they become more vulnerable to being victimized by unscrupulous employers and traffickers.

Passage of the federal Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, legislation sponsored by Senator Kamala Harris, would include this vital segment of our workforce in the important protections afforded under federal labor law. If passed this bill would also extend new benefits to Domestic Workers, such as guaranteed paid time off, privacy protection, and a written employment contract. Sign on to support this legislation by clicking [here](#). For more information on the impact of COVID-19 on domestic workers, click [here](#).



## Save the Children®

“In dealing with the COVID-19 emergency we must not forget the invisible victims of trafficking and exploitation in our country. Unfortunately, traffickers have quickly managed to change the forms of sexual exploitation and have made victims even more isolated and difficult to reach.

“We need to step up the fight against child exploitation, with a particular focus on online exploitation, and intensify our work to support victims. A key aspect is the support for survivors who escape from exploitation. Many routes to re-integration for girls who had the courage to rebel against their exploiters are at risk because job placement opportunities, which are usually in sectors such as hotels or catering, have suddenly disappeared owing to COVID-19. We cannot fail to support the courage of these girls, who are exposed to serious risks of violence and retaliation.”

*Raffaella Milano, Director of Italy-Europe Programs of Save the Children*

In a report released by Save the Children in August 2020, children make up a quarter of all victims of trafficking or exploitation. One in twenty cases of these child victims of human trafficking is under 8 years of age. The COVID-19 pandemic has isolated victims further, making it even harder to reach them.

The closure of schools due to the pandemic has pushed many children onto the streets in search of food or income, exposing them to the risk of being exploited or becoming victims of trafficking.

According to the testimonies of field workers in Italy, trafficking victims are being subjected to increased pressure and violence from traffickers. In many cases, encounters take place without any personal protection measures against COVID-19. Often, children are pushed off the streets into indoor prostitution. They would share an apartment with four or five other girls, where it was previously used by two victims.

The COVID-19 crisis has also changed the usual models of trafficking and exploitation. Criminal groups dedicated to sexual exploitation have been very quick to adapt their ways of working by intensifying the use of online communication and exploitation in homes. According to the European Commission, in some EU Member States the demand for child pornography has increased by up to 30% during the COVID-19 lockdown. At the same time, prevention and support activities for victims during the lockdown from non-governmental organizations have been limited. The lockdown has also limited the movement of victims and their opportunity to meet other people, find help or flee.

## Guidance

*Addressing emerging human trafficking trends and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic*

This resource, published by United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), is aimed at providing lawmakers, civil society organizations, and the private sector with effective guidance to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings. Moreover, the report promotes a human rights, gender, and age-sensitive, trauma-informed, and victim-centered approach now and after the pandemic.

The report is based on data collected through a global survey of survivors of trafficking and frontline organizations from more than 100 countries, as well as in consultation with a panel of experts.

The report analyzes the emerging COVID-19 human trafficking trends and consequences. At its core, the publication offers concrete policy recommendations to address these trends and impacts in the short to long term, in a manner consistent with international standards, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe commitments, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women



# Action

## Media Resources



Rome Reports: [Watch](#) this 2 minute YouTube video on how Catholic Sisters are helping those impacted by human trafficking under COVID-19.



How COVID-19 is Affecting Human Trafficking: Click [here](#) to view this 20 minute interview from the Greater Baltimore Medical Center.



Please click [here](#) to view a Webinar on *The Impact COVID-19 is Having on Human Trafficking* provided by the Events Industry Council: Global estimates by the International Labor Organization (2019) note that 40 million people worldwide are being trafficked for labour (including sex). During this time of uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, what

is the nature of the risk to people vulnerable to exploitation, and what implications are there for the events industry? Join us as we move beyond basics of the relevance of human trafficking to the events industry, and delve deeper into understanding new challenges and taking action in the time of COVID-19.



Please click [here](#) to view a 15 minute YouTube video on online child exploiting on the rise amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Websites

*Websites which will provide further information on COVID-19 and Human Trafficking*

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons  
Click [here](#).

Equitable Food Initiative  
Click [here](#).

UNICEF – Click [here](#).

UN Women – Click [here](#).

UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women – Click [here](#).

COVID-19 and Child Labor  
Click [here](#).

## The Future

Jamille Bigio and Haydn Welch, writing for Foreign Policy.com, suggest that how global leaders address the pandemic's effects on those at greatest risk for exploitation and human trafficking will shape the future of our economies and societies. When so many are suffering the consequences of COVID-19 and its accompanying economic fallout, it is critical that combating human trafficking remains a focus of governments, law enforcement, philanthropists, and the private sector. It is vital that the private sector be attentive to make sure that labor trafficking does not occur in their supply chains.

Corporations have an opportunity to modernize labor recruitment to increase safety and transparency while reducing the risks of forced labor. Governments must strengthen and enforce regulations for labor migration and ethical recruitment to prevent trafficking and online exploitation while holding traffickers accountable. They recommend that law enforcement increase partnership with the financial sector to identify and stop illicit financial transactions of traffickers.

To protect survivors of trafficking, governments should guarantee the availability of hotlines and safe accommodation that allow for physical distancing during the pandemic—in addition to longer-term support for survivors' reintegration in society. Service providers for victims may benefit from Nongovernmental organizations that are engaging online platforms and creating new Internet ventures to provide much-needed opportunities for victims of trafficking. Organizations like AnnieCannons are creating long-term employment solutions for victims of trafficking in tech-based jobs.

Multi-stakeholder coalitions of businesses, governments, and civil society are crucial right now to create solutions and strategies to address human trafficking. Coalitions such as Tech Against Trafficking and Project Protect/Project Organ (Canada) are emerging models of promising practices that can be employed to understand human trafficking and the impacts of a pandemic. As the crime of human trafficking evolves with the pandemic, multidisciplinary interventions coupled with innovation, technology, and entrepreneurial thinking must remain a priority.



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