

Monthly Report

May 2020

Please consider this report under the restricted conditions of the current pandemic and the persistent lack of data regarding Human Trafficking, due to its underground and criminal nature. Furthermore, law enforcement organisations often avoid transparency in order to protect victims. The Palermo Convention only focuses on Human Trafficking cases involving transnational movements. Worldwide lockdowns and borders closures worsened the economic situation creating vulnerabilities among migrant labour and limited regular migration. The demand for smuggling through borders could increase and other forms of exploitation, trafficking and slavery are being exacerbated within domestic territories.

OVERVIEW

There is no official data to support the suspicion, to state that trafficking is increasing alongside the pandemic. It can be forecasted that Covid19 has a large impact on human trafficking and modern slavery. While effects will vary across communities, it is widely accepted that as the economic situation worsens as a result of the uncertainties, then exploitation will rise. According to the **UNODC**, lockdowns are not only disproportionately affecting the poorest and marginalised, but are also impacting the anti-slavery community's ability to work effectively, both through falling charitable donations and limited ability to do their work. During the 2008 financial crisis, it was observed that victims of human trafficking from countries with a high rate of unemployment increased and they were identified lately abroad. **Arise Foundation** transmitted to the Section an assessment concerning the likely short, middle and long term impacts of Covid19 on Human Trafficking.

Concerning the **short term**, most migrants and vulnerable individuals lost their employment when the lockdowns began over the world. Where their work was informal or exploitative many will also not be able to claim any form of benefits. Those in generational or debt bondage, such as in brick kilns, have largely been abandoned. They are often facing horrific living conditions, many miles away from their families, and with no other sources of income. There is an immediate reduction in some forms of trafficking: with highly restricted movement some forms of exploitation have notably dropped, including labour exploitation and some sexual exploitation. However, this does not mean that there is not a problem currently - many people are still trapped, and illicit movement will continue where possible. An increase in sexual and online exploitation has been reported. Sex trafficking for pornography rose since the spread of Covid19. There is general agreement that women and girls are becoming more vulnerable due to the current situation. Some people trapped in exploitation will be quarantined with their abusers, and there is evidence that people trapped in labour exploitation are being moved to online forms of exploitation. Furthermore, while agencies, including police, are mainly focusing on the health crisis, criminal actions involving trafficking risk not being caught. Increased screen time also increases the risks of online trafficking.

With regards to the **middle term**, as lockdowns spread around the globe there has been a rise in online sexual exploitation, often the exploitation of minors, as people spend increasing amounts of time on the internet, and families become more desperate for income. Mass-migration constitutes a spreading phenomenon, especially in India, where has been mass migration from the cities to the rural areas as internal migrants, many of whom were exploited, have had to return to their home areas. This is bringing increased chances of infection to poor rural areas, and creating increased economic pressures. While some communities are getting relief from the government, others are severely lacking. This, combined with the lack of employment, means that families are facing increased economic pressure. Moreover, where countries are largely reliant on remittances (for example the Philippines) the massive reductions in these will increase economic pressures on the families remaining in the home countries.

The **long term** impact could result in a significant rise in exploitation: as lockdowns lift, there is the potential for a massive increase in trafficking and exploitation. Marginalised communities will be especially vulnerable as they have to find ways to repay loans, or quick sources of income. Increased inequalities are driving exploitation: there is a large risk that as countries recover from the virus there will be larger systemic issues and heightened increase in inequalities. Unequal access to social protections, increased risk exposure in lower-paid jobs and other issues are likely to increase chances of trafficking as systemic injustices hit the poorest. Moreover, until remittances are possible, many

families will face dire economic prospects, especially in countries like the Philippines. Migration will drive trafficking: there is the chance that, when migrating is possible again, communities will see mass migration from rural to urban areas as people seek income. This will create high risks of trafficking as people are desperate to move quickly. According to **Talitha Kum network** Covid19 and lockdown measures are affecting dramatically services provided to human trafficking victims and survivors. Countries such as US, Brazil, Italy and Spain are facing more the direct impact of Covid19 on their services to survivors. Shelters' lifestyle changed due to the lockdown: staying indoor, no volunteers coming, no school, and no training. Furthermore, sanitising protocols, quarantine procedures in case of illness, frequent hand washing and daily temperature monitoring, physical distancing had to be put in place. Lockdown created stress, tension and hopelessness of the sheltered survivors, with the risk of re-traumatization. Some of the shelters had to send home some of the survivors to allow the distance of 2 meters of single rooms, stopping the process of social reintegration. The maintenance cost has increased due to more expensive food, additional purchasing of cleaning and protection materials alongside the difficulty of raising funds to support the costs, and the longer term for the healing process. Some shelters, including those in the United States, a new hotspot of the pandemic, are looking for financial support to pay the bill for power, water, power, staff people. The pandemic is an accelerator of processes and inequalities. Generally worldwide it has been registered an exponential rise in poverty, hunger and social instability, unequal access to personal protection materials and health care services, including for mental health; domestic violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation, suffered by women and children; the instability and violence among people on the move, migrants workers and undocumented migrants, due to borders closure.

UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children urged to protect children among the pandemic: even before the crisis, around 70 million children were already constrained in a precarious socio-economic situation. It is concerning that several countries have diverted resources for fighting crime to implement the measures to contain Covid19. Simultaneously, services to assist trafficking victims are being reduced or even shut down. Special attention should be paid to the **perspective from the streets to the indoors**, making exploitation even more unnoted and insidious. With the lockdown the online demand related to **sexual exploitation and pornographic content** significantly increased. The website Pornhub increased 24% in Europe, 95% in India, after the porno platform was available for free online. During the pandemic 1,100 Coronavirus-themed videos were uploaded to Pornhub. The demand for new content from viewers with more than the usual leisure time may prompt criminal groups to coerce sex workers, drug users, or other vulnerable people into live and recorded sexual exploitation. Furthermore, children at home are easily lured online. Similarly, those perverts may use the lockdown time to seek out sites with live child sexual exploitation (CSE) online, where there is a ready supply developing as children are kept home from school, and both criminal groups and impoverished families look for new sources of income. The **Federal Bureau of Investigation** has warned that children who homeschool, play games online and use social media during school closures may be targeted and lured by sexual predators, as they spend extended time online. Finally, much of the content related to child sexual exploitation is shared between private user groups and chats. Another long-term risk is that during the lockdown, those with CSE interests, but who had not acted upon them, may now make contact with these online communities and remain active members long after the urgency of the pandemic has passed. The phenomenon of luring and fishing taking place on Facebook platforms through fake profiles and *ads* (in Italy 70% of cases were reported on Facebook) was widely spread before the Covid lockdown. Reports have been made pointing to an increase in posting porno videos in the chats (Talitha Kum Network registered cases also in the shelters), the lockdown led to diminishment in demand for prostitution for the fear of infection, but this caused many women and men, especially undocumented migrants ending up in sexual exploitation and online requests of sex services. Girls are moved from street sexual exploitation to brothels. Another issue to consider is the lack of access to the health care system for undocumented migrants exploited in prostitution. Finally, human trafficking victims do not have individual protection devices, places for the quarantine before entering a protected shelter, no way to escape when living with abusers and smugglers, and no way to report to law enforcement.

AFRICA

The **International Organisation for Migration** and the **UNHCR** launched a joint virtual consultation focused on *Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) in the context of Covid-19 in the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes*. Adapting to remote working in the individual management of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and monitoring and reporting them during the pandemic were identified as key challenges. In this context, the international organisations stressed the importance of using remote channels, involving local partners to a greater extent and finding new, responsive solutions, based on the local reality. In a report from The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, have taken into consideration the 2,015 assessments conducted on child labour and exploitation in **Sierra Leone and Liberia** during the Ebola (EVD) epidemic. In **Sierra Leone**, children needed to take on responsibilities to supplement household income and this constituted a direct correlation between school closure and increases of child labour and exploitation. In **Liberia** children were also identified engaging in hazardous labour in order to supplement family income lost as a result of the quarantine measures. In Sierra Leone, transactional sex in particular was identified as an emerging phenomenon during the outbreak as adolescent girls identified ways to meet the basic needs of their families. Accounts from responders in Liberia suggest similar patterns of risk emerged. **Talitha Kum Burkina Faso** reported receiving requests for help from people trafficked and retained at the border, because of the lockdown, seeking for help. In **Chad**, the closure of schools due to the lockdown is challenging more than 102,000 refugee students, making them more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups, exploitation, and domestic, sexual based violence, as confinement can increase violence towards women. For these reasons, the **JRS** on the ground continues to accompany their students at a distance. In **North Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo**, JRS provides displaced women protection through training and income-generating activities to help them improve their livelihoods and reach self-sufficiency. A group of 200 displaced women is taking part in the project for preventing sexual abuses. The project includes cash assistance and land rental for agricultural activities. The women have been or are at risk of being raped by armed groups and, because of that, stigmatised and excluded from their families and communities. In **Senegal**, **UNODC** reported its support to the Government in order to identify thousands of street children that studied in religious boarding schools. These children were often subjected to exploitation and are now at heightened risk. Since their schools are closed, many children are increasingly online for learning and socializing. This increases their vulnerability to online predators. Child rights groups, law enforcement officials and international organizations report of a greater demand for online sexual abuse material and risks of online grooming. In **Nigeria**, the **Bakhita Centre** promoted by the **Order of Malta and the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Louis** for rehabilitation of trafficking victims experienced fear and security issues due to a very rigid lockdown that created the favorable conditions for riots within Lagos. The **Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime** issued a report on correlation between crime and contagion. According to this, migrant detention centres in **Libya** constitute a ticking time bomb, as crowded and unsanitary conditions in the centres make migrants extremely vulnerable to the Covid19. Furthermore, the Government of National Accord's Interior Ministry reported a massacre of migrants in a trafficking facility. 30 people, 26 from Bangladesh and 4 from Africa, were killed in revenge by the traffickers. This kill happened in Mezdah, 150 km south of the capital, and it also caused the injury of 11 other migrants. The ministry promised to prosecute the perpetrators of the massacre and bring them to justice. Meanwhile, in **Messina**, Libyan traffickers were sentenced to 20 years in prison each. They were accused of various crimes including, criminal association, trafficking, sexual violence, murder and torture. They were recognized by some of the migrants rescued from the "NGO" ship of the Mediterranean NGO, who landed in Lampedusa in July. The **UN Security Council Report on UNSMIL**, issued in May 2020, mentioned that around 3,115 refugees and migrants have been registered as rescued at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard. Many were deported again to detention centres in Libya. UNSMIL received reports of smuggling and trafficking of asylum seekers and refugees in the Abu Isa and Nasir detention centres in **Zawiyah**. More than 1,400 migrants and refugees are currently in detention centres under the control of the Interior Ministry. Women and girls detained in prisons and detention centres continued to be exposed to sexual violence. During the reporting period, UNSMIL documented 8 cases of women and girls raped by traffickers and Libyan security personnel during detention. Migrant and refugee women who had not been detained reported being subjected to sexual harassment by armed men in Tripoli. The situation of migrants in the North African country is worsening day by day, between the pandemic and the resumption of fighting.

CENTRAL and WESTERN EUROPE

UNODC reported that smuggling of migrants across the **Mediterranean** western route was not significantly affected by the pandemic, figures do not differ significantly, compared to 2019. Conversely, the eastern route of the Mediterranean saw a reduction as Turkey and European Union are in migration management negotiations. The use of the central route increased as well, this is likely linked more to the Libyan conflict than Covid19. The pandemic is not affecting smuggling across European external borders. **Europol** reported the latest developments of Covid19 on the criminal landscape in Europe. Governments are focused on containing the spread of the coronavirus, supporting public health systems and at the same time trying to safeguard the economy and to ensure public order. Measures impacted the organised crime landscape. Crime evolved on the basis of new opportunities given by the crisis and adapted the *modus operandi*. Several factors prompted changes in crime. Among these, there has been a high demand for protective devices and pharmaceutical products, the decreased mobility across and into the EU, citizens remaining at home are increasingly relying on digital solutions. Furthermore, limitations to public life could make some criminal activities less visible and move them to private homes or online. According to **Europol** increased anxiety and fear may create vulnerability to exploitation. The result is the increase of fraud and online sexual exploitation. As lockdowns have compelled shutdown of many businesses, it is likely that exploiters will adapt their operations, by focusing on wider forms of exploitation such as online fraud activities (i.e. identity theft, credit card fraud, mobile phone and laptop fraud, bank loans and welfare benefit fraud, etc). The **UK National Crime Agency**, **Europol**, and **Interpol** have all highlighted crime diversification during the Covid19 pandemic; victims who could be utilised to sell fake medical equipment, forced to pickpocket, or forced to beg. Those exploiting children through such activities as drug trafficking may be able to adapt their working practices and distribution models, i.e. delivery of goods by children on bikes in the **United Kingdom** under the veil that they are “exercising” or utilising wider delivery services. Equally, as many retail outlets are closed and deserted, including trading estates, they may be utilised by criminals to sell drugs. Since the United Kingdom lockdown began on the 23rd of March, there has been a 49% increase in calls and online requests for help relating to domestic abuse. **The Archbishop of Westminster, His Eminence Vincent Cardinal Nichols** is urging the British Government to keep responding to modern slavery, especially during the pandemic. He is also inviting faithful to support and fund organisations working directly with victims. In **Southern Italy**, according to the **Episcopal Conference of Calabria**, the economic and labour crisis caused by the pandemic exacerbated the situation of agricultural laborers being exploited; the category includes many migrants. Previous research indicated working conditions of migrants as dire: no contracts, sub-minimum wages, excessively long working hours, not compensated by overtime pay, lack of health and safety conditions in the workplace, occupational diseases and no access to medical aid, bad living, and hygiene conditions. Italian bishops point out that the management of the phenomenon is in the hands of criminal organizations, who use mafia methods to control the territory. The pandemic is watering down controls and reducing the capacity to rescue people from exploitation and to care for survivors. As a consequence, the health and the dignity of victims of trafficking is being compromised. In **Spain**, the “Proyecto Esperanza” of the **Congregation of Sisters Adorers** provided care to 115 victims of trafficking since the proclamation of the Covid19 emergency. 105 of them are women and 10 are minors. The majority are receiving counseling and specialised support: social, legal, and access to employment or education. Some have been accommodated in emergency homes. The Sisters ensured that newcomers respected the quarantine period. **Talitha Kum** network in Italy and Spain reported that the Sisters and other people working in the shelters suffered traumatic situations due to Covid19. In **Lepe (Huelva)**, there is a large seasonal migrant worker camp where about 300 people live, the majority Malians. **Caritas Spain** calculates that in Huelva alone there are about 2,000 workers living in subhuman conditions. They earn about six euros an hour. Some of them have lived in this settlement or other neighboring settlements for more than a decade. In **Italy**, human trafficking victims undergoing rehabilitation process are involved in the Covid19 pandemic response. Girls rescued from prostitution are making Personal Protective Equipment such as masks in tailoring laboratories. The project is organised by the Ursuline Sisters. The laboratory was created in 2004 in several sites made available by the Diocese, to provide professional training and legal properly-paid employment to women rescued from prostitution.

EASTERN EUROPE and CENTRAL ASIA

Despite Covid19 lockdowns the new **Balkan route** through Bosnia (1,000 km border with Croatia) has not been interrupted. Law enforcement from **Bosnia, Croatia** and regional agency Europol arrested 8 traffickers and blocked the smuggling of 45 migrants into the European Union. The detainees are suspected of transporting, hiding and smuggling migrants mostly **from Turkey via Bosnia into EU member Croatia and onwards to Italy**. **RENATE Romania** reported online sexual exploitation and abuse in Covid19. The Covid precautions have hindered the recruitment of victims and have complicated some types of human trafficking. In this scenario, the internet has become a privileged vehicle for exploitation and abuse. Europol and the NGOs operating in the counteracting human trafficking warn that abusers are searching the opportunities to adapt to the changes that occur in society and in relation to their potential victims, and shifted their criminal activities to the online world. Online resources such as open and classified advertisement sites, adult websites, social media platforms, chatrooms, extending into the dark web-enable traffickers to interact with an increasing number of potential victims. During a webinar organized by RENATE for the Council of Europe, Sr Adina Balan - whose several years of work in assistance of the victims of human trafficking in Romania legitimate her- denounced a sharp increase of the cases of sexual exploitation of minors on the web and calls for the adoption of urgent actions in counteracting the spreading phenomenon.

SOUTH ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The Asia Pacific region is one of the most concerning human trafficking hotspot worldwide. It has one of the highest number of people stuck in slavery. The **International Labour Organisation's** figures show that about 152 million children, aged between 5 and 17, were subject to child labour in 2016, out of which 62 million were in Asia and the Pacific. In **India**, millions of migrants who have left their villages to work in the cities now find themselves stranded with no job or money since the government imposed a nationwide lockdown to contain the pandemic outbreak. Most of the migrants work in the cities as domestic helpers, drivers, daily-wage labourers on construction sites or street vendors. In the absence of work, they depend on food handouts from the government and charities. Some have resorted to begging. Although the problem of migrant workers is not unique to India, the sheer scale has made it extremely difficult to provide aid to everyone. This makes the risk of human trafficking even higher. The **Jesuits of South Asia** have responded by launching a campaign to raise funds for the millions of migrant workers in need of relief. All over India, millions of migrant workers are fleeing its shuttered cities and trekking home to their villages. These informal workers are part of the big city economy, in construction, food, plumbing and delivering. They escape poverty in their villages, most of the estimated 100 million of them live in squalid housing in congested urban ghettos and easily risk being caught in human trafficking nets. Factory workers in **Bangladesh** experienced a lack of jobs as global fashion brands have canceled or delayed orders worth \$138 million due to the pandemic. More than 100 factories have already lost orders as retail sales plummeted globally and companies like Zara owner Inditex and H&M temporarily closed stores in Europe. These workers are dependent on export and the lack of orders could put them at risk. Covid19 travel restrictions have forced anti-trafficking groups to suspend rescue operations of **Vietnamese and Cambodian "brides" from China**, with some now in hiding having escaped the homes of traffickers and clients. Over the past decade, tens of thousands of Southeast Asian women have been lured to China by criminal networks promising lucrative jobs, only to be sold as brides. Charities in Vietnam and Cambodia reported that some women who fled this year have been detained and shut off from communication, while others who are "not under immediate threat of being killed" have been advised to sit tight. In **Malaysia**, the Refugee Women's Protection Corps, a project of the **International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)**, supports refugees affected by sexual-based violence. Furthermore, ICMC is releasing a series of videos focusing on topics discussed in the Refugee Protection Corps' regular programming, such as child marriage. Emergency assistance for survivors of sexual-based violence remained available through ICMC's partner, a shelter operated by the **Sisters of the Good Shepherd**. ICMC also continues to provide emergency cash assistance to needy refugee survivors of sexual violence. As aforementioned, lockdowns continue across countries and citizens have difficulty accessing sexual services, exploiters may further innovate the use of online platforms, including the dark web. This may include increased cyber-sex trafficking. For instance, in **South East Asia** improved internet and increased access to mobile telephones has led to reports of an increase of live streaming of abuse prior to the pandemic. Confirming worldwide trends, it is, therefore, highly likely

that cyber-sex traffickers may utilise the Covid19 pandemic to target vulnerable children. It is also possible that abuse at home may increase where people try to make money to fill the gap created by the economic impact of Covid19 through a variety of means such as cyber-sex trafficking. These risks have been issued in a report produced by the **Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action** with guidance on safeguarding children during this crisis. It provides practical safeguarding recommendations. Cybersex traffickers are likely to exploit the coronavirus pandemic to target more children across Southeast Asia for online sexual abuse. The global spread of cheap, high-speed internet and the rise in mobile phone ownership has fuelled cybersex trafficking in recent years, with children from **Thailand to the Philippines** being exploited over livestreams for paying clients worldwide. UNICEF reported that around 165 countries have shut schools due to the outbreak, impacting more than 1.5 billion children who will have more time to spend online at risk of fishing. UNICEF estimates around 1.8 million children are sex trafficked every year, data do not include cybersex trafficking. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (US) that was involved previously with law enforcement training authorities in **Cambodia and the Philippines** to tackle cybersex trafficking, issued a statement warning about the increased risk of online abuse due to school closures. The Philippines are considered to be the epicentre of the live-stream sex abuse trade and there are concerns for an increase in exploitation as many children are abused at home by their own relatives; they can earn up to \$100 per broadcast. The phenomenon's main drivers are relative impunity for traffickers, the lucrative nature of the crime together with huge economic disparity between traffickers and remote sex offenders, inexpensive internet access; the widespread of broadcast-capable cameras; and English language proficiency, allowing traffickers to communicate with a massive market of potential remote offenders. In **Thailand**, the Internet Crimes Against Children taskforce received reports of online sex abuse on a daily basis, with victims as young as eight years old. In **Nepal**, a serious socio-economic crisis is on the horizon. In Kathmandu, the majority of residents work in an informal economy with no social protection. In addition, Nepal's main resources are collapsing. Tourism which provides a large part of the country's wealth has stopped. Many Nepalese victims of labour exploitation in the Gulf countries have been sent home without compensation. Returning into the Country several were taken to centres, allegedly for testing. According to some NGOs, these are detention centres in which they barely receive enough to eat. In **Kathmandu**, young girls and women working in bars, restaurants, and massage centres often victims of sexual exploitation, found themselves without income due to the closure of establishments. Trafficking could easily rise even more in this context. Women already living in prostitution with the Covid19 find themselves without income are at risk of being victims of other trafficking networks exploiting them abroad, particularly in **India**. Furthermore, there is the resurgence of cultural traditions favoring the slavery of children. Mainly, in rural areas, these times of crisis can encourage the resurgence of a phenomenon that is sometimes called "Kamalari". Even if this practice is prohibited it keeps going on in isolated rural communities and it consists in entrusting children to a richer family so that it is taken care of. Often, these children enter into a relationship of dependence and they are forced to work in agriculture. They are not sent to school and sometimes abused. Forced marriage too constitutes a resort to cope with financial difficulties. This concerns girls who are sometimes not yet 16 years old.

MIDDLE EAST

In **Syria**, refugees in the midst of economic crisis and lockdown are resorting to sell their organs on the black market just to pay rent. **CBS News** foreign correspondents investigate posts on Facebook offering desperate refugees money for their kidneys and livers at the border of Turkey. In the **Gulf countries**, **Talitha Kum** reported that some trafficked victims who are now abandoned on the streets and rendered homeless, are further victimised as they have no protections or identity papers or any means of survival within countries where there is no hope of employment due to the pandemic. Due to the lockdown many cannot be repatriated. The consequences are extreme poverty, high risk of being infected by the Covid19, and mental health issues. The isolation increased new trauma over the trauma of trafficking, such as suicidal thinking and depression. In **Bahrain**, Human Rights activists called for the protection of migrant workers during the pandemic. The majority of migrant workers in the Country come from south and south-east Asia and east Africa. These suffer already inhuman and unhygienic conditions, forced labour, low-paid wages, risk of infection, crowded labour accommodations and inequitable access to medical care and health insurance. Since quarantine began, reported sexual abuses significantly increased in the Middle East. In **Lebanon**

calls to domestic violence hotlines increased by 110 per cent in March 2020 compared to the previous year. According to records, 11 women have been killed as a result of domestic violence since the start of lockdown. The number of those requesting access to emergency shelters in Lebanon has increased to 4-6 women per week.

CENTRAL AND NORTHERN AMERICA

In April 2020, the United States Government issued an Executive Order blocking regular immigration. A decrease in migration to the United States would significantly impact the economy of the Central American countries. El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras depend on migrants' remittances (13-21% of their GDPs). UNODC reported the same trend correlating unemployment and trafficking as for Europe. As the economic situation worsens human trafficking rises. In the **United States**, with the pandemic a new form of trafficking is emerging: it has been reported that landlords are pressuring renters, usually women, who are not able to pay their rent, because of the lockdown they are out of work, to trade sexual services in return for not being made homeless. Furthermore, in the United States, as said for Europe and South Asia, traffickers during Covid19 moved significantly into web exploitation. Online platforms are becoming popular places for sex traffickers to lure children and adults facing financial turmoil because of the pandemic. Associations in the front line against HT are calling for funding of anti-trafficking programs in new federal legislation. The Covid19's impact on forced labour is still difficult to assess, but can be easily forecasted that people desperate for work may be prone to employment schemes in which they are cheated out of promised wages. According to the Polaris Project, which operates the **U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline**, is that buyers of sexual services were not stopped by the pandemic, on the contrary they are very active. Trafficking victims are being forced to participate in remote, web-based sexual activity or pornography and that the marketplace has expanded. Associations of the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline recalled that a person on a webcam or in a pornographic video is likely to be a trafficking victim. The **U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking** reported these activities target and endanger especially children. The nuns told the **Catholic News Service**, they are trying to raise awareness among people with the same means while they are at home. Tracking the inroads of traffickers into new online sources is difficult. The anti-trafficking programs with Migration and Refugee Services of the **U.S. Bishops' Conference** exposed high concern about online pornography. The demand for pornography online increased dramatically during the pandemic. People are being coerced into it, without knowing they are being recorded. At the **US-Mexico border**, on the Mexican side, more than 60,000 asylum-seekers live in an uncertain situation and in danger of being trafficked. Asylum hearings have been postponed through at least June 19, 2020, but could be delayed further. Asylum-seekers in Mexico have experienced violence, kidnapping, and other forms of abuse, while those residing in camps or shelters risk contracting Covid19. In **Haiti**, camps of IPDs are becoming hotspots for human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The chaos brought by the Covid19 is expected to make the situations of vulnerable people, especially children, at risk of being trafficked even more precarious.

SOUTH AMERICA

In South America, the lockdowns and measures of the pandemic are going to exacerbate labour exploitation and economic inequalities. The medias' attention and information are focused only on the Covid19, and this risks diverting attention from other violations of human dignity. In **Amazonia**, an increase of land grabbing for mining and deforestation has been registered. **Talitha Kum Network** in Amazonia (Brazil) reported an increase of forced migration **from Venezuela to Brazil** for labor and sexual exploitation. Criminal organizations work undisturbed and hidden, forcing vulnerable people into mining labour, and land grabbing. During the Covid19 pandemic, a war is being waged along the **Venezuela-Colombia border**, across which people, narcotics, black market gasoline, food, and medicine are smuggled, and where criminals and guerrillas find refuge. The conflict was already stewing, but border closure drove the violence up. For instance, in 2019, when the frontier was closed for three months on the Venezuelan side, kidnappings, forced recruitment by armed groups, and disappearances of migrants escalated. Last March, the border was again closed, by the Colombian authorities in order to contain the outbreak, and thousands of Venezuelan migrants tried to return to their home. Killings were reported on the *trochas*, the smuggling routes crossing the border. Both local press in **Cúcuta**, and Venezuelan officials, have also reported displaced people

escaping borderland clashes between armed groups around **Boca de Grita**. The **Scalabrinian Missionaries of Toledo (Brazil)** reported that human trafficking is continuing during the pandemic, and it may increase because of economic strain, particularly in the labour sector. According to them, also in Brazil the global trend of the growth of online exploitation of children can be confirmed. Concerning this phenomenon, the nuns of the **Rede Um Grito pela Vida** conducted a campaign on social networks to promote prevention, protection, and action against this type of crime.

OCEANIA

In **Papua New Guinea**, the Government imposed lockdown in March 2020. The impacts of these restrictions, particularly the movement of people and banning of vending activities has severely affected most people, but more particularly the vulnerable groups. The **Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands**, through Caritas, supported some of the most affected and vulnerable, among these the West Papuan victims of human trafficking. As livelihood options are impacted there is increased pressure on families to maintain their wellbeing and food rations. Many people, especially women and girls, including migrants and asylum seekers may be forced into trafficking activities to make ends meet during this difficult time. Human trafficking activities in Papua New Guinea has been continuing almost unreported, involving both local and foreign nationals. In January 2020, authorities discovered 8 Chinese women smuggled as victims of Human Trafficking in Port Moresby. According to the local media, these Chinese women entered Port Moresby with fraudulent visas.

INITIATIVES AND GOOD PRACTICES OF THE ORDER OF MALTA RELATED TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND COVID19

During the Covid19 pandemic, besides many initiatives and projects focus on health and sanitary relief countering Covid19, such as the activity in hospitals and clinics or the emergency Covid hospitals set up in Italy (Fiera Milano, Civitanova and Genova), in Austria, Portugal, and Ivory Coast, the Malteser, the Italian Relief Corps, the SMOM National Associations provided an indirect and effective service to those vulnerable and in need. In a global context of economic uncertainty, unemployment and while Governments are focusing mainly on containing the outbreak, these are the most at risk of getting lured or falling into human trafficking nets. Traffickers exploit vulnerability and primary needs. The assistance to the population, delivering essential goods, food, PPE, and medicines prevent that people in need seek out services that create bondage debts. Some of the initiatives, good practices both at multilateral level and on the field, have been very specific and dedicated.

Prof. Michel Veutey, Ambassador of the Order of Malta to monitor and combat human trafficking promoted **online courses** with the *Collège Universitaire Henry Dunant* of Geneva to **monitor and combat human trafficking**. The modules comprehend introduction to the phenomenon, prevention, health and psychological perspective.

Since March 2020, about 40 psychologists of the **Order of Malta's Italian Relief Corps (CISOM)** are operating in different regions of Italy in support of population lockdown. The assistance, through a hotline number, was organised in partnership with municipalities, regions and the Italian Interior Ministry. According to Dr. Policastro, national coordinator of CISOM's psychologists, the majority of calls and help requests concerned loneliness and depression. Although there are no records of explicit requests for help related to domestic abuses, the situations of vulnerability could create the perfect *humus* for human trafficking phenomena.

The **The Permanent Mission of the Order of Malta to the United Nations** during the pandemic continued in advocating against human trafficking and made several comments to the *Draft General Recommendation on Trafficking in Women and Girls in the Context of Global Migration* of the Working Group of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Mission proposed to add as a form of trafficking the **removal of organs, forced criminal activities, sale of children, and as well forced motherhood**. Furthermore, it had been suggested to recall other international conventions in order to not limit human trafficking to transnational exploitation. Comments by the SMOM Permanent Mission suggested to include in a more specific way the involvement of public, private sector, media and Faith Based Organisations in promoting awareness campaigns, nationwide education, access of women to education and information about their rights, legal aid for victims, financial support of independent association, legal professional, and social services as well as the translation of the General Recommendation into local languages and training activities. Additionally, SMOM comments include the involvement of victims in organising social inclusion rehabilitation and community-based programmes; the call for a multilateral and governmental synergistic approach in countering human trafficking.

The already mentioned **Bakhita centre St. Louis Empowerment Network** to support victims of Human trafficking on their rehabilitation, in partnership with the **Order of Malta, in Lagos, Nigeria** sent a brief testimony on the situation of trafficking during Covid19 pandemic. **Romain Champierre de Villeneuve, Ambassador at-large for Africa** provided the experience of **Sr. Patricia Ebegbulem S.S.L.** within the Shelter – Bakhita Villa during the lockdown period. At the beginning they did not take the news coming from Europe seriously. In March, after the visit of some European friends who raised awareness concerning the situation they discovered that Covid19 was already in Nigeria. Deaths started and instructions, directives and guidelines were issued by the Governments, the Church, and the Congregations. The lockdown in Lagos commenced on March 23. Before the lockdown, they stopped taking other victims from outside Nigeria into the shelter. They were locked down with 8 of the girl victims of Human trafficking who are now in a rehabilitation process in the centre and 2 of their infants. The girls could not longer go to school and training. They combated boredom by involving the girls in activities such as praying, catechism, organising a choir, cooking, and preparing face masks for protection.



SOURCES

- Secretariat of State of the Holy See
- Sovereign Military Order of Malta
- Migrants and Refugees Regional Coordinator
- Permanent Mission of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to the United Nations Geneva
- Michel Veutey, Ambassador of the Order of Malta to monitor and combat human trafficking
- Romain Champierre de Villeneuve, SMOM Ambassador at-large to monitor and combat human trafficking in Africa
- Italian Relief Corps of the Order of Malta
- Calabria Bishops' Conference
- Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands
- International Catholic Commission on Migration
- Arise Foundation
- Jesuit Refugee Service
- Talitha Kum Network
- Secours Catholique (Caritas France)
- Rede "Um Grito pela Vida"
- Centro Scalabriniano de Estudos Migratórios
- United Nations Security Council
- United Nations High Commissariat for Refugees
- UNICEF
- United Nations Office for Drug and Crime
- EUROPOL
- INTERPOL
- International Organisation for Migration
- International Labour Organisation
- The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action
- International Justice Mission
- U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons
- Philippine InterAgency Council Against Trafficking
- Department of Justice (DOJ), Philippines
- National Crime Agency, United Kingdom
- Federal Bureau of Investigation , United States
- Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children
- International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children
- Collectif "Ensemble contre la traite des êtres humains"

MIGRANT SITUATION FROM THE APOSTOLIC Nuncios REPORTS

Sent 13/05/2020

SINGAPORE

Caritas Singapore supports people with dedicated hotlines and with economic and social support. Support for migrant workers with food parcels

MALAYSIA

The Church offers food, financial support, care, psychological support for the poor, single parents, migrants, refugees, sans papiers

COLOMBIA

Help should be given to Venezuelan migrants who plan to return home to the border dioceses (Cúcuta etc.)

PORTUGAL

In the country, the authorities take measures to recognize and safeguard migrants. 300 Argentines stranded in Portugal and helped by Caritas.

INDIA

Caritas India sends projects for the poor and migrants (Caritas India and her partners are reaching out to 1,01,446 migrant population out of total of 7,95,028 and providing the relief to the marginalized population through Food, Hygiene, Psychosocial support)

PANAMA

Archdiocese of Panama: offers 3,824 food packages and cleaning kits until 15/4 for 15,305 vulnerable people; mutual fund in parishes for aid to families without income; support for migrants and refugees (food hygiene kit etc.).

MEXICO

Many paid disinfectants and masks out of their own pockets and made them available. Attention centers for migrants attend as best they can. Caritas supplies food and medicine also using parochial structures in collaboration with businesses.

CROATIA

The government calls on the EU to protect Croatian borders. JRS Croatia: 60% of beneficiaries of protection in 2020 are vulnerable people, women, children, unaccompanied minors. The earthquake and COVID-19 complicated the search for funds.

