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Misconceptions about human trafficking in a time of crisis

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Both natural and man-made crises are considered by many to be prime environments for trafficking in persons. However, the evidence for this is thin.

The relevant Protocols define people smuggling and trafficking differently¹ but in reality smuggling and trafficking networks are not distinct and many trafficking situations start as smuggling. Therefore, smuggling and trafficking should be thought of as interrelated phenomena – on a continuum from tolerable forms of labour migration to trafficking – perhaps particularly in the context of humanitarian crises when individuals in physical danger or dire economic situations might be actively seeking out smugglers to facilitate their migration from crisis-affected areas.

report[s] I would be cautious about using [them] since there are no accurate figures on the numbers of people who are trafficked on a regular basis prior to the cyclone.”²

The fear of increased vulnerability of Haitian children in the aftermath of the earthquake of 2010 was thought to be understandable given the trade of children in Haiti which existed before. Unfortunately many of the trade networks have links with the international adoption ‘market’. The association of child trafficking with inter-country adoption might strike some readers as obvious, others as offensive, but in the context of the aftermath of the earthquake