



COVID - 19 FUELS VULNERABILITIES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS FROM VENEZUELA:

Key messages to community, refugees and migrants

Human trafficking and smuggling of migrants¹ are crimes with serious human rights implications that are accentuated in crisis times. With the outbreak of COVID-19, women and men refugees and migrants from Venezuela may face specific vulnerabilities to those crimes due to the circumstances of their journey and their poor living and working conditions. Unprecedented travel and mobility restrictions intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have multifaceted impacts which, in combination, foster an environment where refugees and migrants, particularly those in irregular situations, could be abused and exploited, along with challenges to identify, protect and prosecute. As a result of the outbreak, refugees and migrants previously less at risk of trafficking may become victims, while vulnerabilities of persons already at risk of trafficking may be further exacerbated, for example, for women and girls who disproportionality have fallen victims to this crime.

The human trafficking and smuggling of migrants' subsector calls for attention to the challenging situation of refugees and migrants from Venezuela vulnerable to trafficking and smuggling. This document provides key messages based on a gender-sensitive approach, for community members, refugees and migrants. This document can also be used by practitioners to adapt ongoing counter-trafficking efforts - in prevention and/or provision of assistance - in the context of COVID-19, and to elaborate messages for targeted community groups.

Key messages to community, refugees and migrants vulnerable to human trafficking

- **What is human trafficking?** Human trafficking is a crime and a serious violation of human rights. It is modern day slavery, driven by demand for sex, cheap labor, or services. The purpose of the trafficker is to make money and benefits by exploiting human beings including the removal of organs, treating people as commodities. Traffickers use various methods such as threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception (including deceptive love affairs), sexual violence, abuse of power or vulnerable position, offering payments to convince people to accept service or job.
- **Who is vulnerable to human trafficking?** Anyone can be a victim of trafficking: men, women, boys, girls, and LGBTI persons. Traffickers target vulnerable people and families - single headed household, widows, children of broken families, families with financial problems among others. Because of COVID-19, people are losing jobs, livelihoods and shelters and becoming vulnerable to human trafficking. Globally, more than 70 % of detected victims of human trafficking are women and girls. They are disproportionately affected by this crime².
- **Human trafficking can happen anywhere.** People can be trafficked anywhere both within the country and outside of the country. People can be trafficked in your own community, on the journey, on borders, or in another country.

1 The subsector uses the terminology of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime (UNTOC) on the term migrant smuggling, but recognizes that this crime also affects refugees.

2 ICAT. Draft Submission to CEDAW's General Recommendation on Trafficking in Women and Girls in the Context of Global Migration. Available in: <https://icat.network/sites/default/files/publications/documents/ICAT%20submission%20to%20CEDAW.pdf>



- **Who can be a trafficker?** Traffickers can be anyone. People are often deceived by people they know and trust - friends, neighbors, employers, and brokers. Sometimes they may even be your own family members, your boy/girlfriend, or spouse. Traffickers may come from your village, your hometown or from far-away places. Traffickers may be a former victim of trafficking.
- **Tricks and techniques used by traffickers.** In times of COVID-19, everyone is affected and losing jobs and livelihoods. You must suspect any attractive and lucrative offers (including online recruitment) as signs of human trafficking: telling you that you will be offered a job to escape from current difficult situations; pretending to become your lover or boyfriend before selling you to others; putting you in slavery as a means of debt bondage; giving upfront payment to you or your family with false premise (e.g. arrange documents and transportation to destination city/country).

Traffickers are watching you, your daughters, and your sons, in times of COVID-19 outbreak. Traffickers prey on the vulnerability of people. Protect yourself, your family members, and your community from human trafficking, abuse, and exploitation.

- **If you are an owner of a house currently rented to refugees or migrants, please do not evict those who cannot pay the rents. Consider delaying or suspending the rents.** Offering vulnerable migrants temporary free accommodation in times of COVID-19 outbreak will not only prevent them from becoming homeless, but also maintain the safety and security of the neighborhood and prevent potential traffickers entering into your community.
- **Stay connected with your family even when distancing physically.** Although it can be difficult to keep children and adolescents confined for longer periods, family solidarity can mitigate the risk of being lured by traffickers. Staying in a family will allow for closer attention to your family members' behaviour. Maintain regular communication via social media and Apps. Emotional connection with close people will also mitigate social isolation, and reduce the risk of getting involved in trafficking situations.
- **In case of school closures, resist offers to send children away to a school elsewhere, or to accept offers of work outside of the home.** Keep children within the household, however difficult this can be, and search for alternate activities that maintain social isolation and good hygiene and care practices.
- **If you ask help of smugglers to cross border irregularly,** they might take advantage of current situation with movement restrictions, and abuse your vulnerable situation by using extortion, debt bondage, and ransom taking. In other words, a situation that begins as smuggling of migrants could become a trafficking situation.
- **Have the hotline contact numbers³ if you decide to migrate and carry it with you always.** Search and collect information about risk of irregular migration as well as about phone numbers of consulates, organizations and police in your transit, destination country. Carry with you the list of hotline numbers. Share the contact lists with your family and friends.
- **If you notice anyone in your community who might be in trafficking situation, consult with them (and their family) if they are in need of any support. Only after their consent is obtained, and the person feels safe, contact support organizations for help and access to service, care, and referral.** Respect the confidentiality of the person concerned and do not talk about it with other people.
- **You can help other victims and protect your community.** Your information can help to prevent human trafficking and to rescue other victims of trafficking. If you notice any strangers or unscrupulous brokers likely to be involved in human trafficking in your community, try to contact NGOs or police. You can also protect your community by sharing the key messages with your friends and neighbors about the risk of human trafficking and exploitation.

³ Contact numbers of specialized service providers need to be provided in each country to refugees and migrants.