

Fact-Sheet on the Economic Crisis, Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants

A. Introduction

In many countries around the world, the current economic crisis and recession have led to an increase in unemployment, underemployment and economic instability, thereby aggravating conditions that render people and communities vulnerable to trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants.

With businesses closing down; employers requesting fewer foreign workers; and governments halting the recruitment of new foreign labour, many people will take greater risks to migrate. Human traffickers and migrant smugglers are likely to take advantage of increased vulnerabilities due to the crisis and to exploit people's willingness to take risks as they become more desperate for jobs.

In destination countries, an increased demand for cheaper goods and services is putting pressure on the protection environment, leading to greater vulnerability of both regular and irregular migrants to exploitation. Additional vulnerability may arise due to increased competition with national workers for scarce jobs, and lower investments in community welfare. National workers may benefit from more support than foreign workers. Even under difficult conditions, however, the rights of smuggled migrants and of the victims of trafficking in persons must be upheld and trafficked victims appropriately identified and supported.

B. Evidence

There are currently no figures available to note a shift in the criminal activities of trafficking in persons or smuggling of migrants since the onset of the global economic and financial crisis. Some report that candidates to migration – be legally or illegally - are likely to postpone their migration decisions, while those present in

the countries already – legally or illegally - may stay there waiting for the crisis to pass. Others report that no mass returns of migrant workers have been observed, but new outflows from some countries of origin have slowed down.

However, reflecting on the root causes of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, we are inclined to fear that an increase has already taken place or will take place as vulnerability increases. In addition, the impact of the crisis on the decrease in public spending on activities to combat these crimes, protect the victims and uphold the rights of migrants, and on investment in social services, both at the household and national levels may be evident for many years to come.

Our experience and knowledge to date of trafficking in persons has shown it to be a dynamic practice. It manifests itself in multiple and increasing forms of exploitation which, globally, we struggle to identify and take action against. A common characteristic, however, is the criminal ingenuity shown to bypass systems and mistreat human beings to satisfy a demand, to take advantage of vulnerability and, ultimately, make profit. Experience has shown that traffickers respond quickly to times of change with appropriate mechanisms to maximize the profit while the corresponding ability of the anti-trafficking community to track and respond to these changed tactics by traffickers has been limited.

C. Challenges, Gaps and further Areas of Research

Coherent and comprehensive policies are needed to ensure that the rights of migrant workers are protected in any situation and more particularly in the one we know today.

Member States are encouraged to continue strengthening and prioritizing their efforts to implement comprehensive policies to combat trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants

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while ensuring the rights of trafficked victims and of smuggled migrants are strengthened in the context of wider development policies. Special vulnerabilities of child and women migrants need to be given due attention.

Monitoring and research of the effects of the crisis on vulnerability would need to be carried out on a systematic basis. Under the United Nations - GIVAS (Global Impact and Vulnerability Alert System), UNODC is currently conducting studies on the impact of the global economic downturn on the vulnerability to migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons in selected countries.

D. Policy Implications

1. Member States are encouraged to fully implement all relevant conventions dealing with trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants, human rights, forced labour, refugees, children, and ensure they are fully utilized in cases of trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling.

2. Member States should review their legislation with a view to implementing in practice all relevant conventions to prosecute traffickers and smugglers, identify victims of trafficking in persons, protect the rights of these victims and of smuggled migrants, paying particular attention to vulnerable groups.

3. Member States should strengthen the skills and capacity of criminal justice agencies responsible for combating trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants as well as social welfare agencies responsible for protecting the rights of those trafficked and smuggled, to ensure they are equipped to pro-actively detect the involvement of criminals and/or organized crime and can take appropriate measures.

4. All actors against trafficking, including criminal justice agencies and social welfare agencies should have the capacity to identify

victims of trafficking in persons and to ensure that the rights of those victims and of smuggled migrants are protected, taking into account the special vulnerabilities of children

5. Member States should ensure cooperation at the national, intra and inter-regional levels to combat trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants while ensuring the rights of victims of trafficking and smuggled migrants are upheld.

The GMG and its members are committed to drawing on the comparative advantages of each organization to promote the effective and efficient use of existing resources, and to support Member States in complying with their international commitments and ensuring the protection of the rights of victims of trafficking in persons and smuggled migrants.

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