

Rising human trafficking takes on 'horrific dimensions': almost a third of victims are children

A new [UN report](#) published on Monday shows that human trafficking is on the rise and taking on “horrific dimensions”, with sexual exploitation of victims the main driver. Children now account for 30 per cent of those being trafficked, and far more girls are detected than boys.

The study from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)), draws on information from 142 countries, examining trafficking trends and patterns. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of UNODC, said that “human trafficking has taken on horrific dimensions as armed groups and terrorists use it to spread fear and gain victims to offer as incentives to recruit new fighters,” citing child soldiers, forced labour and sexual slavery as examples.

While the average numbers of reported victims had fluctuated during the earlier years for which UNODC had collected data, the global trend has shown a steady increase since 2010. Asia and the Americas are the regions which have seen the largest increase in the numbers of victims detected, which may be explained by improved methods of detecting, recording and reporting data on trafficking – or a real increase in the number of victims.

Most victims of trafficking detected outside their region of origin are from East Asia, followed by sub-Saharan Africa: whilst there has been an increase in the number of convictions for trafficking in these regions, the study concluding that large areas of impunity still exist in many Asian and African countries, and conviction rates for trafficking remain very low.

Trafficking for sexual exploitation is the most prevalent form in European countries, whilst in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, forced labour is the main factor driving the illicit trade. Women and girls make up most trafficking victims worldwide: almost three-quarters of them are trafficked for sexual exploitation, and 35 per cent (women and girls) are trafficked for forced labour.

Armed conflict the focus

The main focus of the report is on the impact of armed conflict on trafficking. In conflict zones, where the rule of law is weak, and civilians have little protection from crime, armed groups and criminals may take the opportunity to traffic them. One example given in the study is the phenomenon of girls and young women in refugee camps in the Middle East being “married off” without their consent and subjected to sexual exploitation in neighbouring countries.

Addressing human trafficking is a key part of the [UN Sustainable Development](#)

[Agenda](#), requiring Member States to monitor progress in tackling the problem, and report the number of victims by sex, age and form of exploitation.

However, significant gaps in knowledge remain, with many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and some parts of East Asia still lacking sufficient capacity to record and share data on trafficking in persons. “This report shows that we need to step up technical assistance and strengthen cooperation, to support all countries to protect victims and bring criminals to justice, and achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals](#),” said Mr. Fedotov.



UNODC

#EndHumanTrafficking visual. According to the UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 30% of human trafficking victims are children.

[2019 ‘a critical year’ for Somali politics and development says Security Council](#)

In the wake of the Somali Government’s decision last week to expel the head of the UN’s assistance mission, [UNSOM](#), the Security Council on Saturday cautioned that 2019 would be “a critical year” for the east African nation that is reconstituting itself after decades of conflict.

In a statement following on from UN Secretary-General António Guterres [on Friday](#), deeply regretting the Government’s declaration that Nicholas Haysom was persona non grata, the 15 Council members expressed their regret, and

thanked the veteran South African lawyer and senior UN official “and underlined their full support” for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and its mandate provided last year under [Security Council Resolution 2408](#).

The members of the Security Council underlined that 2019 would be a critical year for Somalia, and called on its leaders to work together to advance political and security reform – *Press Statement*

“The members of the Security Council underscored the strong and continued commitment of the international community to support peace, stability and development in Somalia, and reiterated in this regard their expectation of full cooperation between Somalia and the United Nations.”

Mr Haysom was accused by the Somali Federal Government of interfering in its internal affairs, by questioning the detention of an opposition candidate for state-wide office, who had been a leader in the extremist Al-Shabaab group, before defecting. The Government said he had not undergone sufficient rehabilitation or proved his commitment to democratic politics. In protests against the jailing of the candidate in South West state days before the vote, at least 15 died and many were detained, according to news reports.

Mr. Guterres said on Friday that in the interests of putting the Somali people, and the work of UNSOM first, he would be appointing a new Special Representative and head of mission, “in due course”. He offered Mr. Haysom his “full confidence” in his long and successful track record on service to the UN.

Strained relations between central and regional government, and the legislature, together with the complex web of inter-communal politics, have caused tensions across the country, as further elections on Somalia’s road to full democratic government beckon next year.

“The members of the Security Council underlined that 2019 would be a critical year for Somalia, and called on its leaders to work together to advance political and security reforms. The members of the Security Council reaffirmed their respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and unity of Somalia”, said the statement.

Members also “paid tribute to the contribution of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), UNSOM, the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS), and all Somali and international actors working to bring peace and stability’.

[Burkina Faso: Dozens killed in clashes, UN chief condemns attacks](#)

More than 40 civilians have been reportedly killed during intercommunal clashes this week in northern Burkina Faso, prompting [UN Secretary-General António Guterres](#) to issue a statement on Friday night condemning the violence and “deteriorating security situation” in parts of the West African country.

The first deadly attack on Monday night took place in the village of Yirgou, according to news reports, by suspected extremists, with reprisal attacks taking place the following day, against local ethnic Fulani Muslim herding communities in the Barsalogo district.

The UN chief expressed his deep condolences to the families of the victims and wished a swift recovery to those who were injured in the clashes.

According to news agencies, landlocked Burkina Faso has seen a rise in jihadist violence over recent months, which has long plagued neighbouring Mali to the north, and is a major security threat across the whole Sahel region. On Monday, the Burkinabe Government declared a state of emergency in some northern provinces close to the Mali border.

“The Secretary-General is concerned over the deteriorating security situation in some parts of the country, where the authorities declared a state of emergency. He is also concerned about the intercommunal violence,” said [Friday’s statement](#) issued on behalf of the UN chief.

“The Secretary-General reiterates the commitment of the United Nations to support Burkina Faso in its efforts to fight terrorism, sustain its security sector reforms, promote national reconciliation and create conditions for sustainable peace and development” the statement concluded.

[Palestinian students ‘compelled to drop dreams because of financial cuts’](#)

For students attending schools funded by the UN relief agency for Palestine refugees, ([UNRWA](#)), uncertainty over the future has become a constant worry, said the agency’s Director of Operations in Gaza, Matthias Schmale.

UNRWA faced an unprecedented financial crisis during 2018 that threatened the provision of essential services to millions of Palestine refugees, including

more than 500,000 school students. Although sufficient funds were provided to reopen classrooms in September, there are no guarantees that 2019 will be any easier.

The agency's 711 schools provide free basic education for Palestinian refugee children in the West Bank – including East Jerusalem – Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. But despite reopening after a long summer break, UNRWA was forced to take some difficult decisions which had a direct impact on the students' daily lives.

UN News's Reem Abaza was recently in Gaza where she visited the Ar Rimal girls' school, where UNRWA launched its major global fundraising campaign last year called 'Dignity is Priceless' to address mainly education and health needs, and to ensure that the schools opened their doors.

"During the summer vacation we usually feel happy and enjoy our time, but last time we were afraid wondering if UNRWA might close or we might not be able to go to school", said Raghd, a 6th grade student.

Hada, 14, stated that when school began "everybody was very anxious", and that when they "knocked on the door of the social counselor asking for support, they were reminded that she was no longer there". In several schools, the position of social counselor was abolished due to financial constraints.

"The school is trying as much as it can to teach us in a hands-on method, and in past years when we studied chemistry we used to do experiments. I have dreams to be something big in the future, but I have to cut those dreams down because of the situation we live in now", Eva, 14, told UN News.

Those concerns were shared with other students from the neighboring A-Zeitoun school for boys.

UNRWA's Director of Operations in Gaza, Matthias Schmale, said he "understood the concerns of the students very clearly, but that their determination also serves as a source of inspiration".

"A very moving moment very recently was when a girl called Jenin, who is part of our school parliament here in northern Gaza, came to me and said that in January when we launched the 'Dignity is priceless' campaign I gave her an UNRWA pin," he said.

"She told me that in 'the dark moments when we didn't know if the school year would open on time', she looked at this pin, and it gave her courage, hope and optimism". Then she gave me a little black bracelet and asked me to look at it, when I would feel uncertain."

UNRWA operations have been hit hard by the United States decision at the beginning of 2018 to cut back its funding of the Agency by around \$300 million. That constituted the largest ever reduction in funding in UNRWA's history.

UNRWA was [established](#) by the General Assembly in 1949 to provide assistance

and protection to a population of some five million registered Palestine refugees in various countries throughout the Middle East. Apart from schooling, it provides relief and social services, camp infrastructure and upgrading, health care and emergency assistance as needed.

The 'abuse of food relief in Yemen' must end now

On Friday, the United Nations' World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) demanded that the stealing of food by warring factions in Yemen must stop immediately; and welcomed a statement from Houthi rebel leaders saying that the situation was now under investigation.

WFP's demands were issued in a letter to the Houthi leadership as well as in a news release on New Year's Eve.

"This is an issue that affects not just WFP but all aid agencies working in Yemen and indeed in war zones everywhere and no-one can say for certain how widespread this problem is", said WFP spokesperson Hervé Verhoosel, noting that humanitarian food assistance was being diverted in Houthi-controlled areas, including the capital of Sana'a, and, to a lesser extent, in the Government-controlled areas as well.

According to news reports, factions and militias on both sides of the conflict have blocked food aid from reaching groups suspected of disloyalty, diverting it instead to front-line combat units or selling it for a profit on the black market.

The UN agency has learned that many desperately poor people have taken to selling part of their food rations for education, medicines and rent.

An ounce of prevention worth a ton of cure

The Yemen Government gave WFP permission to biometrically register beneficiaries, by identifying and authenticating each individual based on person-specific data.

The *de facto* authorities in Sana'a have a responsibility to take action against those involved in stealing – *WFP spokesperson*

So far, WFP monitoring has identified seven centres in Sana'a city where an estimated 1,200 metric tons of food was diverted in August and September, equivalent to about one per cent of the food provided nationally each month.

“It is our monitoring systems that detected there was a problem”, Mr. Verhoosel explained. “We are committed to ensuring our food assistance reaches those who most need it.”

As the local partner organization involved in the abuse has at the same time helped provide food assistance to three million people, WFP underscored that the authorities must investigate and dismiss those responsible, regardless of whether the corruption was carried out by the Government or non-governmental organizations.

“To improve the support to beneficiaries, we have been looking into the introduction of cash-based transfers in some areas”, said Mr. Verhoosel. “However, given the risk of corruption, we have made it clear to the *de facto* authorities that we will not introduce cash-based transfers unless we are authorized to implement a biometric identification system that uses personal data, including iris scans and ten-finger prints”.

WFP is tackling the issue by tracking and monitoring suspected locations and closely inspecting distribution centres.

“The *de facto* authorities in Sana’a have a responsibility to take action against those involved in stealing from the beneficiaries and in trading of food aid,” he stressed. “They should allow an independent beneficiary selection process and a biometric-based registration system.”

Mr. Verhoosel said that the biometric identification system had been rolled out in Government-controlled areas and that authorities in Sana’a had yet to agree to implement the system.

UN Special Envoy to pay a visit

Meanwhile, Martin Griffiths, the UN Special Envoy for the country, is set to visit Yemen and Saudi Arabia on Saturday in his latest round of consultations with the warring parties, where a fragile truce has been holding in the key port city of Hudaydah, since 18 December.

According to the UN in Geneva, Mr. Griffiths is expected to meet with the Ansarallah leadership, (the official name of the Houthi movement), as well as with the head of the UN-convened Committee monitoring the Hudaydah ceasefire, General Patrick Cammaert; as well as UN Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande in Sana’a. He will then meet the President of Yemen, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, and other officials in Riyadh.