

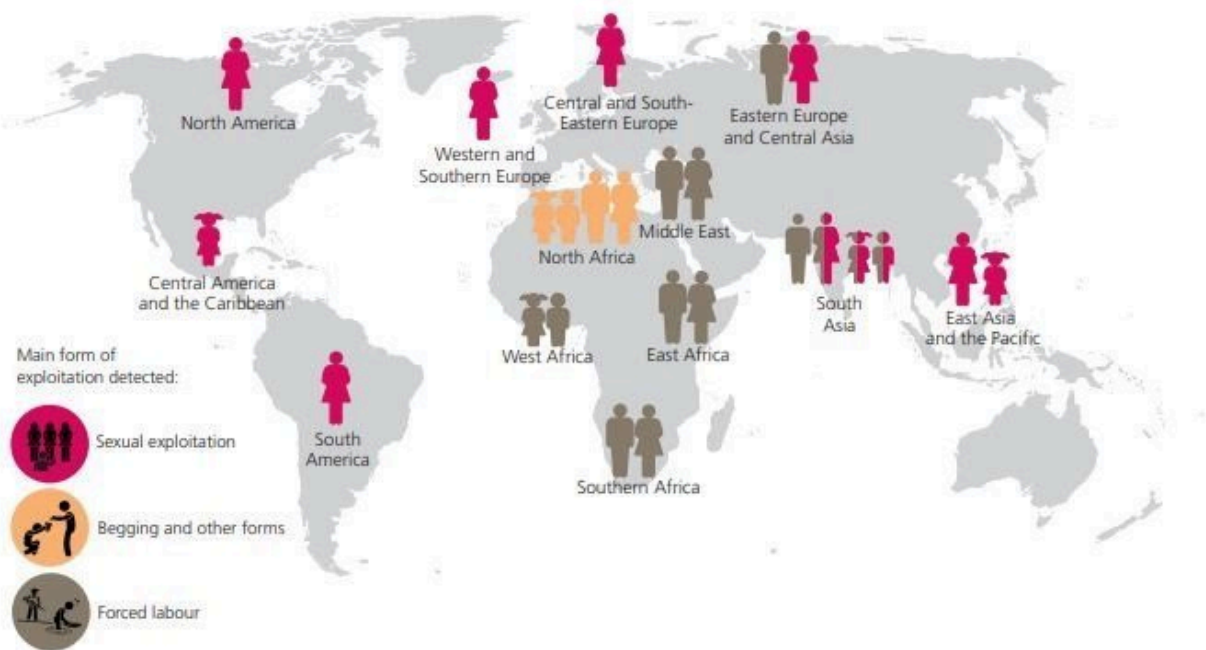
# Human trafficking cases hit a 13-year record high, new UN report shows

“The report was undertaken for a simple reason: if we want to succeed in confronting human trafficking in all its manifestations, we must better understand its scope and structure,” said Yury Fedotov, UNODC’s Executive Director as he presented the report in New York. “We need to appreciate where human trafficking is happening, who are its victims and who is perpetrating this crime.”

According to the latest figures compiled by UNODC, the record conviction and detection rates could either be a sign that countries have strengthened their capacity to identify victims – such as through specific legislation, better coordination among law enforcement entities, and improved victim protection services – or, that the number of actual instances of trafficking has increased.

While in 2003 fewer than 20,000 cases had been recorded, the number of cases recorded in 2016 had jumped to over 25,000.

Main forms of exploitation and profiles of detected victims, by subregions, 2016 (or most recent)



Source: UNODC elaboration of national data.

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

UNODC

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## **Despite improvements in data collection, impunity prevails**

Over the last decade, the capacity of national authorities to track and assess patterns and flows of human trafficking has improved in many parts of the world. UNODC's report notes that this is also due to a specific focus of the international community in developing standards for data collection. In 2009, only 26 countries had an institution which systematically collected and disseminated data on trafficking cases, while by 2018, the number had risen to 65.

However, many countries in Africa and Asia continue to have low conviction rates, and at the same time detect fewer victims which, UNODC stresses, "does not necessarily mean that traffickers are not active".

In fact, the report shows that victims trafficked from areas of the world with low detection/conviction rates are found in large numbers in other areas of the world, suggesting that a high degree of impunity prevails in these low-reporting regions.

"This impunity could serve as an incentive to carry out more trafficking," the report warns.

## **Women and girls remain a major target**

"Traffickers the world over continue to target women and girls," wrote Executive Director Fedotov, in the report's preface. 'The vast majority of detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and 35 per cent of those trafficked for forced labour are female."

The report notes "considerable regional differences in the sex and age profiles of detected trafficking victims." In West Africa, most of the detected victims are children, both boys and girls, while in South Asia, victims are equally reported to be men, women and children. In Central Asia, a larger share of adult men is detected compared to other regions, while in Central America and the Caribbean, more girls are recorded.

## **Sexual exploitation, the top form of trafficking**

Most of the victims detected globally are trafficked for sexual exploitation, especially in the Americas, Europe, and East Asia and the Pacific. In sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, trafficking for forced labour is the most commonly detected form. In Central Asia and South Asia, trafficking for forced labour and sexual exploitation are equally prevalent,

Other forms of human trafficking include: girls forced into marriage, more commonly detected in South-East Asia; children for illegal adoption, more common in Central and South American countries; forced criminality, mainly reported in Western and Southern Europe; and organ removal, primarily detected in North Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe.

Many other forms, such as trafficking for exploitation in begging, or for the production of pornographic material, are reported in different parts of the

world.

## **Armed conflict and displacement, a key driver of human trafficking**

The report shows that armed conflicts can increase vulnerability to trafficking in different ways as areas with weak rule of law and lack of resources to respond to crime, provide traffickers with a fertile terrain to carry out their operations, preying on those who are desperately in need.

Armed groups and other criminals may take the opportunity to traffic victims – including children – for sexual exploitation, sexual slavery, forced marriage, armed combat and various forms of forced labour. This is the case for example in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, South-East Asia and elsewhere.

In some refugee camps in the Middle East, also, it has been documented that girls and young women have been ‘married off’ without their consent and subjected to sexual exploitation in neighbouring countries.

In addition, recruitment of children for use as armed combatants is widely documented. UNODC’s report notes that within conflict zones, armed groups can use trafficking as a strategy to assert territorial dominance, spread fear among civilians in the territories where they operate to keep the local population under control. They may also use women and girls as ‘sex slaves’ or force them into marriages to appeal to new potential male recruits.

The study shows that in all the conflicts examined for the report, forcibly displaced populations (refugees and internally displaced families) have been specifically targeted: from settlements of Syrian and Iraqi refugees, to Afghans and Rohingya fleeing conflict and persecution.

Notably, the risk faced by migrants and refugees travelling through conflict areas, such as Libya or parts of sub-Saharan Africa, is also well documented: in Libya, for example, militias control some detention centres for migrants and refugees and are coercing detained migrants and asylum seekers for different exploitative purposes.

“While we are far from ending impunity, we have made headway in the 15 years since the Protocol against Trafficking in Persons entered into force,” said UNODC’s chief Mr. Fedotov, as he noted that “nearly every country now has legislation in place criminalizing human trafficking”.

“The international community needs to accelerate progress to build capacities and cooperation, to stop human trafficking in conflict situations and in all our societies where this terrible crime continues to operate in the shadows,” he stated in the report’s preface.

***Watch the full launch event for the 2018 report here:***