

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.