

Key Findings

- Human trafficking for forced labour, sexual exploitation and other exploitative industries occurs in virtually every country in the world today, and migrants are particularly vulnerable, especially if they are forced to choose unsafe, disorderly and irregular migration routes where there is little protection or support.
- Trafficking generates at least USD 150 billion in illegal profits each year, and 49,000 detected victims of trafficking were reported in 2018. The number of non-identified trafficking victims may be up to 5 times higher, and COVID-19 is expected to worsen the situation, creating the socioeconomic conditions in which human trafficking thrives.
- Most governments have been vocal in their campaigns against human trafficking, with the 2000 UN trafficking protocol achieving almost universal ratification, unlike most migration-related instruments. This is a paradox given that creating safe and regular migration routes is one of the key measures governments can take to combat trafficking.
- The intersection between human trafficking and migration complicates efforts to combat trafficking. Media and policymakers frequently mix up human trafficking and migrant smuggling. This can be by mistake, but also by design, raising the risk that counter-trafficking is leveraged as political currency to confront irregular migration.
- The nexus between migration and trafficking also impedes justice. Victims often have irregular immigration status, making them reluctant to cooperate in investigations for fear of deportation. Institutionalized negative stereotypes of migrants also means the rights of victims are not always upheld, with some detained and prosecuted.
- Many initiatives to combat trafficking have focused on public awareness campaigns in countries of origin, and reliable information about the risks is essential. However, these campaigns are often viewed with suspicion and are ineffective if they are perceived to be about deterring migration rather than protecting people.
- Successful initiatives to combat trafficking include campaigns targeting specific populations that are adapted to local contexts and directly involve migrants. Migrants can play a huge role as a trusted source of information, and technological innovations such as crowdsourcing migrant experiences are contributing to raising awareness.

- Private sector partnerships are another promising avenue, with financial actors playing a key role in identifying the disrupting illicit gains. Companies are also increasingly influenced by corporate responsibility interests and supply chain sustainability. However, this must not deflect from the central responsibility of government authorities to take action.

Takeaway for Policy

Efforts to combat human trafficking will fail if anti-trafficking measures are used to covertly deter irregular migration. Instead, one of the most effective steps governments can take to eradicate the illegal activity is to work on enhancing safe and legal pathways for migration, which offer protection to those most at risk.



The full chapter is available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022-chapter-10>.



The WMR interactive platform can be accessed at <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/>.

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