

AGGRAVATING CIRCUMSTANCES: THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON THE FIGHT AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) is honoured to be part of this meeting. Thank you to the UNODC for organizing this event and to fellow speakers for their contributions.

Today we would like to focus our remarks on the impacts of the pandemic on the fight against human trafficking.

As stated in the UN [Global Plan of Action](#), it is of great importance to address underlying factors that make people vulnerable to human trafficking.

COVID-19 has increased the known drivers of human trafficking: exacerbating poverty, limiting social and economic opportunity, and reducing the capacity to provide protections to those that are vulnerable.

As governments prepare to review the Global Plan of Action, it is critical to consider the pandemic's impacts, and to orientate the Plan of Action to directly address them. The GI-TOC has spoken to our network of experts, grantees and grassroots organisations directly fighting human trafficking on the ground. We have observed the following eight trends:

1. **Economic drivers and root causes of human trafficking are intensified:** as millions of jobs have been lost worldwide and global economic activity declines, vulnerabilities have increased among existing and potential victims.
2. Given increased travel restrictions, our field networks have documented an **increase in illegal and irregular migration flows**. Irregular migrants are an extremely high-risk group for falling victim to trafficking.
3. **Forms of exploitation are heightened:** criminal groups and networks have adjusted their modus operandi and exploitation types to capitalise on the crises. Online exploitation has specifically proliferated with the populations of victims and users increasing significantly.

4. The pandemic has a **multifaceted impact on children**, including a reported rise in online child sexual exploitation and increased rates of child labour and marriage.
5. There is a **shift towards informality and illegality in formal and informal supply chains**, creating more opportunities for labour exploitation, in particular at a time when states' attention and capacity are elsewhere.
6. Victim **identification, assistance and support services have been disrupted**. Civil society actors have to cancel victim rescue missions and assistance services.
7. There is reduced capacity, or **disruption, in enforcement, policing, investigation and justice systems**.
8. **Financial support for anti-trafficking efforts has been interrupted or reduced**. NGOs and research institutions are facing funding shortages, delays or cancellations of on-going projects as donors switch priorities.

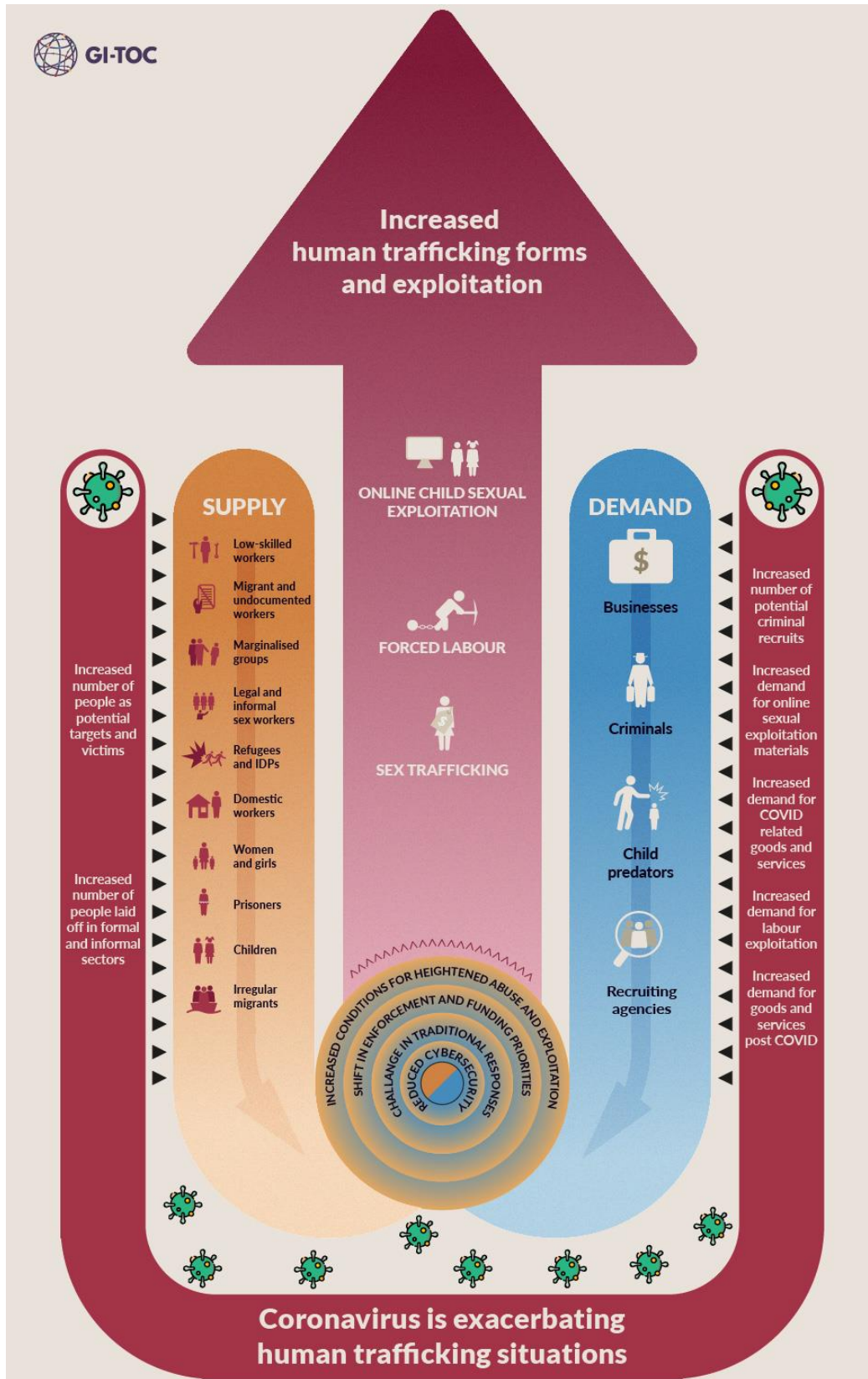
These trends and challenges are exacerbating **existing structural weaknesses** and are **causing systemic changes**, which may favour illicit activities if left unaddressed.

The decisions that anti-trafficking stakeholders take now will have a huge impact on how criminals can capitalize on the social and economic crises during and after the pandemic.

The GI-TOC therefore recommends that states act to mitigate these impacts, especially (i) dedicate human and financial resources to bolster civil society and enforcement capacity; and (ii) ensure that vulnerable groups are included in the pandemic response and post-pandemic recovery plans, as they are now particularly marginalized by the crises that it has induced.

 <p>1. Intensifying drivers and root causes of human trafficking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Vulnerability may increase among existing victims, vulnerable groups (including trafficking survivors) and those who were previously less vulnerable to human trafficking. 	 <p>2. Heightened and changed forms of exploitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increased abuse. ■ Shifts towards alternative exploitation types. ■ 'Adjusted' criminal modus operandi. ■ Supply of new criminal recruits. 	 <p>3. Multifaceted impact on children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rise in online child sexual exploitation. ■ Depriving many children of one or both parents and/or caregivers, thus increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. ■ Increased rates of child labour and child marriage. 	 <p>4. Shift towards informality in both formal and informal sectors of global supply chains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ More opportunities for criminals to exploit in informal sectors due to increased supply of vulnerable groups. ■ Coronavirus-induced economic crisis incentivizes businesses to exploit workers to remain viable.
 <p>5. Increased illegal and irregular migration flows</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ More people will be forced to move irregularly. ■ Irregular migrants are likely to experience increased human-trafficking risks. 	 <p>6. Disruption in victim assistance and support services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NGOs have been dramatically limited in their anti-trafficking response, including cancelling victim rescue missions, shelters, in-person counselling and legal-assistance services. 	 <p>7. Reduced enforcement, policing, investigation and justice system capacities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Delays and/or reductions in law-enforcement operations and investigations of human-trafficking cases. ■ Disruptions in criminal justice systems, court cases being put on hold. ■ Decreased cyber-security and monitoring capacities of the private sector. 	 <p>8. Interrupted financial support and funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Grants and donations are in steep decline, leading to reduced financial support for anti-trafficking efforts and organizations. ■ NGOs and research institutions are facing shortages of funding, delays or cancellations of ongoing research projects as donors and foundations switch priorities.

Impact of the pandemic on the fight against human trafficking



Coronavirus-induced supply-demand dynamics