



Global Commission  
on Modern Slavery  
& Human Trafficking

# Framework of Analysis for Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking

A tool for prevention

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## Foreword

### Adama Dieng

Founder and Honorary President  
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(PATROL-AFRICA)



As citizens, legislators, producers and consumers we have a responsibility to ask ourselves what we can do to prevent modern slavery and human trafficking. These violations of basic human dignity and rights continue to be perpetrated on an increasingly large scale and across the entire globe. They are not only deeply embedded within global supply chains, but also result from situations of instability generated by climate change, socio-economic underdevelopment, political upheaval and armed conflict. Much more can be done to strengthen humanitarian prevention and protection in order both to mitigate the effect of these crimes, and to reduce their likelihood.

The Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking is addressing the issue of modern slavery and human trafficking on the assumption that they do not constitute isolated or spontaneous events. On the contrary, our research suggests that they are complex phenomena, whose triggering factors are deeply intertwined with historically grounded exploitative socio-economic structures, imperial legacies, discriminatory cultural practices, and local, national and international instability.

The Global Commission’s Civil Society Working Group has developed this Prevention Framework as a guide to the risks of modern slavery and human trafficking. It is hoped that the Framework will play a pivotal role in supporting key global, regional, national and local actors and enabling them, within and outside crisis contexts, to act on these crimes in ways they currently don’t. Furthermore, the Framework should assist the Member States and Observer States of the United Nations to identify gaps in their anti-slavery and anti-trafficking capacities and strategies.



**“Prevention means acting early and quickly. To do that, we need to identify the key risk factors that contribute to the spread of modern slavery and human trafficking.”**

**– Adama Dieng, Founder and Honorary President PATROL-AFRICA**

Global supply chains are increasingly likely to employ slave labour, especially in countries with weak or poorly enforced labour regulations. Complex, globalised supply chains often lack transparency, making it difficult to trace products and inspect working conditions. Combined with the pressure to decrease costs and maximise profits and shareholder value, this lack of transparency can lead companies to outsource production to suppliers that do not meet fair labour standards in the fields of safety and pay, thus increasing the risk of exploitation. Sectors such as textiles, construction and healthcare have been particularly exposed to these exploitative trends in recent years. The same applies to the mining sectors connected to the supply of rare minerals, including those necessary for green energy and industrial transition (notably cobalt and lithium). Illegal migrant workers and impoverished groups of local miners are often involved in workplace accidents and injuries, posing a challenge to healthcare facilities and other community services.

The increasingly widespread use of social media, especially by young people seeking friendship, recognition, validation or escape from their socio-economic predicament, has also significantly aggravated vulnerability to modern slavery and human trafficking. Traffickers use social media to spread false information and misleading promises in order to manipulate and recruit victims by posing as friends or potential employers. They exploit individuals' vulnerability by offering them attractive opportunities that turn out to be traps. These trends are particularly widespread in the Global South and do not only apply to the recruitment of forced labourers, but also to other forms of slavery such as servitude, forced sexual exploitation, forced criminality, forced marriage, trafficking in human remains and organ removal.

I am pleased to present this Prevention Framework at a time in which the United Nations system should undertake a fundamental revision and re-orientation of its humanitarian strategies in order to meet Sustainable Development Millennium Goal 8.7, namely eradicating forced labour, ending modern slavery and human trafficking, and ensuring the prohibition of the worst forms of child labour. In practice this means placing the prevention of modern slavery and human trafficking at the heart of the United Nations' developmental and humanitarian strategy.

As affirmed in Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one of the United Nations' founding documents, the eradication of slavery in all its forms constitutes one of the chief goals of the organisation's mission. The drafters of the Declaration stressed that the Article was not only meant to promote the abolition of forced labour, but all forms of servitude and human trafficking. The need to further ensure the UN's commitment to the eradication of both modern slavery and human trafficking resulted in the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), also called the Palermo Convention, which formally commits all Member States to the elimination of both of these crimes.

I therefore urge entities and partners in the UN system, national governments, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and regional, national and local civil society organisations (CSOs) to support coordinated and integrated anti-slavery and anti-trafficking strategies. Some Member States have already undertaken strong measures against social media conglomerates to protect their younger citizens from new forms of manipulation and exploitation. However, it is imperative that NGOs, researchers and other actors also redouble their efforts in studying solutions to prevent and contain these new trends in modern slavery and human trafficking. The same applies to the world of business, where some companies have already exhibited the diligence and transparency necessary to prevent and combat these abuses. An example worth highlighting of this new corporate responsibility is that of Northwell Health, a non-profit integrated healthcare network that is New York State's largest healthcare provider and private employer, whose initiatives should set a standard for the entire private healthcare sector.

Prevention means acting early and quickly. To do that, we need to identify the key risk factors that contribute to the spread of modern slavery and human trafficking. We owe this to the more than 50 million innocent people who are currently in modern slavery, the unspecified number of individuals who are currently being trafficked, and those whose freedom may be at risk in the future.

I am particularly indebted to Professor Andrew Thompson, Chairman of the Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking's Civil Society Working Group, as well as his Postdoctoral Research Assistant Dr. Cesare Vagge, and his Doctoral Student Ms. Marly Tiburcio-Carneiro, for having enthusiastically contributed to the drafting of this Prevention Framework.







# Introduction

## What is the Framework of Analysis?

In July 2014 United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, devised a Framework of Analysis for atrocity crimes. The document is meant to function as a prevention tool. Drawing on this model, the Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking has developed a new framework, an integrated analysis and risk assessment tool. The Framework has a twofold purpose: identifying the key risk factors that increase people's vulnerability to modern slavery and human trafficking, and acting as a guide for strengthening the prevention capabilities of national, regional and international actors involved in the policy-making process. In 2020 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) also developed a framework of analysis on the management of information concerning human trafficking in emergency contexts<sup>1</sup>. The IOM document and our Framework share some important features, such as the use of individual, family and community risk factors, as well as indicators to identify the root causes of trafficking. The Global Commission, like the IOM, is committed to fostering cooperation between international organisations (IOs) and civil society, and we share the goal of building anti-trafficking into the regular protection programming of leading humanitarian actors. We have benefited from the IOM framework in ways acknowledged in the text below, but our aim has been to go further than information management, to provide a tool for analysis which can strengthen prevention and protection practice in the field. The Framework of Analysis is a public document, and the Global Commission recommends its usage by a wide range of governmental and non-governmental actors involved in combating modern slavery and human trafficking.

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<sup>1</sup> IOM, *Counter-Trafficking in Emergencies: Information Management Guide*, 2020, p. 1.



# What is vulnerability? What are risk factors & indicators?

Vulnerability has been defined by the United Nations as “a condition resulting from how individuals negatively experience the complex interaction of social, cultural, economic, political and environmental factors that create the context for their communities”<sup>2</sup>. Risk factors are specific conditions that increase the risk of susceptibility to a negative outcome. The risk factors identified in this Framework include behaviours, circumstances or elements that create an environment conducive to the occurrence of modern slavery and human trafficking, or that indicate the potential, probability or risk of their occurrence. Some risk factors are structural – for example the presence of chronically weak state institutions – while others pertain to more dynamic circumstances, such as the sudden eruption of ethnic violence. Some risk factors are common to a range of crimes, including modern slavery, human trafficking and other offences such as smuggling, drug trafficking, sexual and child abuse, and atrocity crimes; other risk factors are more specific to both modern slavery and human trafficking, or to either of the two.

As the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking (ICAT) has illustrated, risk factors fall into different categories and can be personal, situational and contextual<sup>3</sup>. Personal factors are traits that are inherent to each individual, such as age, gender, ethnicity and disability. Situational factors relate to temporary challenges that negatively affect the situation of a person in a specific period and in a specific context, such as destitution, temporary illness, unemployment and legal status. Contextual factors relate to the influence of the external environment, as well as structural elements that negatively impact a person’s circumstances. These include crisis contexts and related losses of livelihood, as well as discriminatory laws and policies and social norms. As the IOM has shown, resilience is key to reducing the likelihood of vulnerability: resilience is determined by a range of “protective factors” such as peace and security, equitable economic development, an efficient social welfare system and a high level of individual education<sup>4</sup>.

Indicators are different manifestations of each risk factor, and therefore assist in determining the degree to which an individual risk factor is present in a given environment. To be effective, assessments require the systematic collection of accurate and reliable information based on the risk factors and indicators that the Framework identifies.

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2 ICAT, *Addressing Vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons*, 2022, p. 2.

3 Ibid., pp. 2-4; the IOM has alternatively categorised risk factors as individual, family and community risk factors. See IOM, *Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability*, retrieved from: <https://emm.iom.int/handbooks/migrants-vulnerable-violence-exploitation-and-abuse/determinants-migrant-vulnerability>

4 IOM, *Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability*

The risk factors and indicators reflect definitions of human trafficking and modern slavery in international law, case law from the work of international courts or tribunals, and empirical analysis of past and present situations<sup>5</sup>.

## How to use the Framework of Analysis

National policy-makers, IOs, INGOs and CSOs are encouraged to use this Framework to guide the collection and assessment of information and data concerning modern slavery and human trafficking, and to help to train their staff to become aware of and alert to the circumstances and situations that increase people’s vulnerability to these crimes. The analysis of the totality of the gathered information and data should help in assessing the extent to which a particular state/ region is exposed to the kinds of stresses that may lead to modern slavery and human trafficking. More specifically, the Framework is intended to assist IOs, INGOs and CSOs in identifying potential victims of modern slavery and trafficking, understand the underlying cultural and societal norms that push people into situations where they are exploited, and “develop strategies to prevent and respond more effectively to these crimes”<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, the Framework can be used to understand how vulnerable individuals, communities and groups can be provided with viable, legal and safe alternatives to unreliable, illegal and unsafe survival strategies that may lead them to being trafficked and exploited.

## How accurate are risk assessments of modern slavery & human trafficking?

The Framework will help policy-makers and humanitarian actors to make qualitative and systematic assessments of the risk of modern slavery and human trafficking in specific situations. However, the presence of risk factors in a given context does not necessarily or inevitably lead to human trafficking and modern slavery. The extent of exposure is due to a number of influences, such as the strength of law enforcement agencies, the resilience and ‘countervailing power’ of civil society, and the interventions of IOs and INGOs on the ground to ensure that modern slavery and human trafficking are effectively combated. It is impossible to draw a direct causal relation between the presence of a particular risk factor and the occurrence of modern slavery. Yet it is equally important to highlight the fact that modern slavery and human trafficking are less likely to take place in the absence of all or most of the risk factors identified in the Framework.

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5 We recognise the danger that the emphasis on risk and protective factors is always on the risk of *being* exploited. This can sometimes contribute to inadvertent victim-blaming. Hence we are mindful of the need also to understand risk factors that pertain to *perpetrating* violence and exploitation

6 ICAT, *Addressing Vulnerability*, p. 1.

# What do we mean by modern slavery & human trafficking?

**Slavery** describes the severe exploitation of people for commercial or personal gain. ‘Modern slavery’ refers to the ongoing control and exploitation of a person including (but not limited to) forced labour (including forced sexual exploitation), debt bondage, forced marriage and child exploitation. It emphasises the absolute power imbalance between the victim and the perpetrator, resulting in the victim’s loss of freedom and dignity, as well as their inability to escape the situation. **Human trafficking** refers to “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation, which shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”<sup>7</sup>.

## Who are the victims of modern slavery & human trafficking?

The victims of human trafficking and modern slavery are disproportionately found among individuals who are disadvantaged or discriminated-against. Trafficked and enslaved people are more likely to come from the poorest social strata of society. Many victims are women, children and members of groups who are structurally underprivileged and marginalised on the grounds of their ethnicity, race, disability, age, caste, sexual identity or gender identity. Migrants without documentation who flee their countries illegally because of economic underdevelopment, political and ethnic persecution, armed conflict and climate change are also particularly vulnerable. The same applies to stateless individuals and internally displaced persons. Traffickers prey upon victims’ vulnerabilities, and coerce them into a situation of exploitation by means of false promises, debt bondage or violent abduction.

## Why is it important to prevent modern slavery & human trafficking?

Modern slavery and human trafficking are major human rights violations. The first and most compelling reason for fighting modern slavery and human trafficking is to preserve

7 “Modern slavery” is not defined by law, but is used as an umbrella term that covers acts including those listed in this paragraph. “Human trafficking (trafficking in persons)” is defined by the *Palermo Protocol*: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>.

human freedom, dignity and life. These are also exploitative practices, which perpetuate existing economic, social and racial inequalities. The prevention of modern slavery and human trafficking thus contributes to the broader fight against global socio-economic inequalities and racial discrimination.

Modern slavery and human trafficking significantly hinder socio-economic development. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), modern slavery and forced labour constitute one of the chief “low value-added activities” that prevent countries from rising on the human development index<sup>8</sup>. Fighting both crimes is a fundamental precondition for the socio-economic development of low and middle-income countries, especially in the Global South. Modern slavery and human trafficking are also heavily intertwined with global supply chains, with an estimated 75% of forced labour being employed in manufacturing industries<sup>9</sup>. Forced labour also undercuts legitimate business and provides an unfair advantage to unscrupulous employers<sup>10</sup>.

Modern slavery and human trafficking are also major international security concerns: they significantly contribute to the funding of international and national criminal and terrorist organisations. The 2022 report on human trafficking by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) illustrated the fact that criminal organisations control 69% of human trafficking activities<sup>11</sup>. According to the 2023 Global Organized Crime Index, as of 2021 human trafficking was a pervasive part of the illicit economy, second only to financial crimes<sup>12</sup>.

## Is there a legal responsibility to prevent modern slavery & human trafficking?

International commitments to end modern slavery date back to the Brussels Conference of 1889-90, whose General Act formally committed European colonial powers to the implementation of legal provisions for the suppression of the slave trade in its countries of origin, as well as measures against the maritime slave trade. Concrete actions against modern slavery were, however, only made after the League of Nations Slavery Convention of 1926, which resulted from decades of political pressure from legislators, political leaders, intellectuals and activists both from colonial powers and the colonies themselves.

8 S.C. Lees, *Ending Modern-day Slavery that Lurks in Global Supply Chains*, retrieved from: <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/bizhumanrights/blog/ending-modern-day-slavery-lurks-global-supply-chains>.

9 M. Friedman, *Fighting Human Slavery: Why the Private Sector should care*, Retrieved from: [https://hdr.undp.org/content/fighting-human-slavery-why-private-sector-should-care?\\_gl=1\\*10qbqq\\*\\_gcl\\_au\\*NzYwNDU3MzAxLjE3MjQ0NTUyNjE.\\*\\_ga\\*MTI5Mzk3NTU1Ni4xNzI0NDU1MjYx\\*\\_ga\\_3W7LPK0WP1\\*MTcyNDk0NDQxMS4zLjEuMTcyNDk0NDQyMC41MS4wLjA](https://hdr.undp.org/content/fighting-human-slavery-why-private-sector-should-care?_gl=1*10qbqq*_gcl_au*NzYwNDU3MzAxLjE3MjQ0NTUyNjE.*_ga*MTI5Mzk3NTU1Ni4xNzI0NDU1MjYx*_ga_3W7LPK0WP1*MTcyNDk0NDQxMS4zLjEuMTcyNDk0NDQyMC41MS4wLjA)

10 Ibid.

11 UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, 2022, p. xiii.

12 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, *Global Organized Crime Index 2023*, 2023, p. 11.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) drafted its first convention on the abolition of forced labour in 1930. The document called upon all member states to commit to the suppression of forced labour in all its forms, including debt bondage, state-imposed forced labour, forced prison labour and domestic servitude. These principles were reiterated in the 1957 ILO Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, which also prohibited specific forms of forced labour, such as politically motivated forced labour, developmental forced labour and disciplinary forced labour as a means to intimidate potential strikers.

The issue of forced and servile marriage was addressed in the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1999 ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour reinforced the 1957 Convention by committing member states to ending forced child labour, child soldiering, child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation. In 2000 the United Nations signed the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. The Protocol addressed forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, sex trafficking, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, adult criminal exploitation and removal of organs.

The 2011 Convention on Business and Human Rights sought to ‘embed’ international business activity with rules aimed at increasing respect for business-related basic human rights, addressing issues such as trade union representation, gender-based sexual violence, humanitarian law violations in conflict areas, and the protection of migrant workers. Finally, the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Goal N.8 on sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and work committed member states to encourage entrepreneurship and job creation as means to eradicate modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking.

## How can modern slavery & human trafficking be prevented?

The prevention of modern slavery and human trafficking is first and foremost the responsibility of individual states. Prevention can be achieved through the establishment of legitimate national institutions; by eliminating corruption within legislative and executive bodies; by establishing inter-agency task forces to exchange information and coordinate action among domestic agencies responsible for the investigation of human trafficking and related crimes such as money-laundering and terrorism; and by supporting a strong and autonomous civil society as well as pluralistic media. Consolidating a resilient civil society is particularly vital when the state fails to provide the protection necessary for the prevention of modern slavery and human trafficking. Civil society organisations (CSOs) – trade organisations (labour unions and business associations), charities, women’s groups, human rights advocacy groups and religious organisations – should therefore be recognised as essential actors in the prevention of modern slavery and human trafficking.

IOs and INGOs have a part to play in ensuring that national governments recognise the vital role of CSOs as vital first-responders, and contribute to building their capacity by providing them with funding, human resources and technical support. CSOs can use their direct experience on the ground to help IOs and INGOs understand the root causes and precursors of these crimes, and the collection of this information can enable states and IOs to identify measures that can be taken to prevent them.

## What is the role of the Global Commission in the prevention of modern slavery & human trafficking and in the responsibility to protect?

The overarching goal of the Global Commission is that of restoring lost political momentum to the prevention of modern slavery and human trafficking. The Commission therefore seeks to catalyse action by states and other stakeholders (international organisations inside and outside the UN family, INGOS, CSOs, businesses, labour unions and, crucially, people with lived experience). The Commission works to promote and facilitate partnerships between these actors, with the objective of amplifying and complementing their collaborative efforts. The Commission is currently engaged with three key work streams: the identification of reliance on forced labour in key global supply chains; monitoring and lobbying for effective implementation of anti-trafficking and anti-slavery provisions by national governments that have committed to the eradication of these crimes; and ensuring a much more effective engagement of civil society in the crisis contexts in which modern slavery and human trafficking currently occur.

The purpose of the Commission’s Civil Society Working Group is to evaluate the anti-trafficking and anti-slavery strategies of leading IOs/ INGOs; identify the key challenges faced by CSOs in their effort to prevent human trafficking; and promote the strengthening of civil society’s ‘countervailing power’ against these offences by turning its organs into first-responders. The Civil Society Working Group has produced this Framework of Analysis on behalf of the Commission as a whole. We owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Adama Dieng – former UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide – and the staff of his office, who developed the 2014 atrocity prevention framework of analysis, which this document is based on.



# Risk Factors

## General Risk Factors

RISK FACTOR	1	Situations of Armed Conflict or Instability
RISK FACTOR	2	Records of Serious Violations of Human Rights
RISK FACTOR	3	Weakness of State Structures

### RISK FACTOR 1

## Situations of armed conflict or other forms of instability

Modern slavery and human trafficking often take place in situations of conflict and instability. These situations include armed conflicts, economic crises, pandemics and the aftermath of natural disasters caused by climate change. Their intersection results in vulnerabilities, which fundamentally increase exposure to slavery and human trafficking.

### Indicators:

- 1.1 International or non-international armed conflict, which impacts upon the security situation by challenging state authority and its law enforcement capacity.
- 1.2 Situations of economic crisis, which undermine lawful labour relations and remove social safety nets.
- 1.3 Pandemics, which result in economically harmful lockdowns, exacerbate existing inequalities, and limit opportunities to identify and report human trafficking.
- 1.4 Natural disasters, which forcibly disperse people and divert emergency services and civil society organisations for the purposes of immediate recovery.



## RISK FACTOR 2

### Records of serious human rights violations

Although modern slavery and human trafficking take place in affluent, democratic and relatively stable polities, these crimes also occur in countries with a record of serious human rights violations. These countries tend to have a history of significant limitation of political and civil liberties, state-sanctioned – often hereditary – slave labour, ethnic discrimination and political and racial violence, which have not been prevented, punished or adequately addressed.

#### Indicators:

- 2.1 Authoritarianism, which seriously violates human rights and humanitarian labour relations, particularly if it targets protected groups, populations or individuals.
- 2.2 Past acts of ethnic discrimination, which can still preclude targeted groups, populations or individuals from having social protection.
- 2.3 Unpunished past acts of political and racial violence, which still place targeted groups in a vulnerable position and result in popular mistrust of state institutions.
- 2.4 Support for, or being reluctant or unable to condemn, groups accused of involvement in serious human rights violations – including slavery and trafficking – which makes exploiters unaccountable.
- 2.5 Justification, biased accounts, denial and lack of transitional justice and reconciliation in relation to past human rights violations, which legitimise perpetrators.

## RISK FACTOR 3

### Weakness of state structures

When state institutions and frameworks are inadequate or simply do not exist, the ability of civil administration to prevent slavery and human trafficking is compromised. As a consequence, citizens are left vulnerable to exploiters who may take advantage of the limitation or dysfunction of state machinery to violate fair labour practices and other human rights.

#### Indicators:

- 3.1 A weak national legal framework, which does not offer ample and effective protection, including through ratification and domestication of relevant international human rights conventions and treaties.
- 3.2 A lack of commitment to action against human trafficking, including the establishment and empowerment of National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators, Rapporteurs, and Inter-Agency Task Forces.
- 3.3 National judicial, law enforcement and human rights institutions which lack strong mandates, sufficient resources, adequate representation and training.
- 3.4 A judiciary which is subjected to political pressures and is unable to provide independent and impartial verdicts on human rights violations.
- 3.5 High levels of corruption or poor governance which prevent effective policy responses and benefit exploiters.
- 3.6 Security forces, military forces, irregular units and non-state armed groups which lack effective civilian control and adequate training on human rights and humanitarian law, especially in the field of means and methods of warfare.
- 3.7 Absent or inadequate external or internal oversight and accountability mechanisms, which prevents victims from coming forward and seeking recourse for their claims.
- 3.8 Lack of or insufficient resources which prevents effective reform or institution-building, and the implementation of social protection measures, including empowering public social welfare agencies to identify and assist victims.
- 3.9 Inadequate training for state officials on modern slavery and human trafficking which severely impairs identification, investigation and prosecution.
- 3.10 Significant obstacles in gaining access to justice and protection, including corruption, intimidation, insufficient or exclusive labour inspections, lack of awareness, and delays in judicial proceedings.



# Specific Risk Factors

RISK FACTOR	4	Vulnerabilities Arising from Personal and Family Background
RISK FACTOR	5	Established Cultural Practices and Behaviours
RISK FACTOR	6	Extreme Poverty, Deprivation and Harsh Living Environments
RISK FACTOR	7	Displacement, Smuggling and the Breakdown of Family Networks
RISK FACTOR	8	Lack of Effective Humanitarian Protection
RISK FACTOR	9	Poor Border Controls and Law Enforcement, and Prosecution of Victims

## RISK FACTOR 4

### Vulnerabilities arising from personal & family background

Vulnerabilities from personal and family background crucially shape exposure to human trafficking and modern slavery. The intersection of the following risk factors significantly heightens vulnerabilities and necessitates tailored interventions to meet the diverse needs of at-risk individuals.

#### Indicators:

- 4.1 Factors such as sex, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, culture, language, caste, religion, nationality, ethnicity, education, family dynamics, mental illness, addiction and legal status significantly influence risk profiles in contexts lacking appropriate social or economic protections.
- 4.2 Age and gender influence trafficking and exploitation types: girls and women are more frequently targeted for forced marriage, sexual exploitation and domestic labour, while boys and men are more at risk of forced labour, forced criminality and conscription by armed groups, with boys in particular being targeted for child soldiering.

- 4.3 Women and young people are particularly vulnerable due to societal undervaluation, discrimination, inequality in access to resources, fewer economic opportunities and lack of information about risks.
- 4.4 Young people face higher risks due to diminished support networks, and physical and social isolation.
- 4.5 Older women, especially widows, suffer from stigma, fewer job opportunities and increased exploitation risks.
- 4.6 Individuals with disabilities and special educational needs – especially those experiencing heightened isolation and loneliness – are more likely to be actively sought-out by traffickers.
- 4.7 Past abuse, violence, family dysfunction and/ or state violence can normalise exploitation and violence.

## RISK FACTOR 5

### Established cultural practices & behaviours

Established cultural practices and behaviours contribute significantly to vulnerability in various communities; these risks are magnified for minorities and marginalised groups who face heightened vulnerabilities to trafficking and exploitation. Communities such as the Roma, with vulnerabilities deeply rooted in marginalisation, stigmatisation and disempowerment, exacerbated by limited access to essential social services such as healthcare and education, are particularly susceptible. This social isolation is further compounded by negative stereotyping and exclusion from anti-trafficking initiatives. Authorities often misinterpret illegal activities as cultural traditions, leading to under-reporting and under-investigation, perpetuating a cycle of neglect and abuse.

#### Indicators:

- 5.1 Harmful religious and cultural practices, including child marriage and forced marriage, expectations to marry at a certain age, dowry systems and entrenched gender roles, reinforce exploitative practices.
- 5.2 Cultural expectations for women to financially support significant family ceremonies often push them to migrate, increasing their risk of exploitation.
- 5.3 Gender roles and stereotypes, such as the assertion of male authority, entrench exploitative practices.
- 5.4 Cultural constructs of masculinity discourage male victims of sexual violence from seeking help, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and hindering support.
- 5.5 Patriarchal values and cultural expectations that give higher status to males exacerbate the stigma associated with failed migration, and prevents men from either seeking help or being identified as victims of trafficking.



- 5.6 Deep-rooted cultural norms impede the registration of vital events, such as births and deaths, particularly for women and girls.
- 5.7 Local geography, culture and economy shape the conditions and forms of exploitation, with practices such as child labour being more easily adopted in cultures where they are common and accepted.
- 5.8 Practices such as child fosterage can evolve into hidden exploitative labour systems established through patterns of family and kinship migration, whereby children are sent away to work, sometimes leading to their exploitation by the receiving families.
- 5.9 Stateless people typically lack legal status, which makes it difficult for them to access services and protection, obtain documents and travel freely. They also face barriers to accessing education, formal employment and decent opportunities.
- 5.10 Cultural norms, such as the expectation of being able to purchase cheap goods, contribute to the demand for inexpensive labour, perpetuating exploitative practices.
- 5.11 Discriminatory cultural practices such as “untouchability” hinder the exercise of citizenship and access to services, with marginalised communities, including Dalits and Roma, often reporting that local authorities refuse to certify their eligibility or issue necessary documentation, even when all requirements are met.
- 5.12 Lack of documentation denies access to basic services such as healthcare, education and formal employment, and strips away the legal protections necessary to escape abuse.
- 5.13 The role of remittances in countries of origin, such as Nepal and Vietnam, is significant; if these remittances, often generated by forced or exploitative labour, were cut off or substantially reduced, the economic impact on these countries would be substantial.

## RISK FACTOR 6

### Extreme poverty, deprivation & harsh living environments

Extreme poverty, deprivation and harsh living environments significantly increase vulnerability, especially where families struggle to meet basic needs such as having access to food, clean water and essential services.

#### Indicators:

- 6.1 Loss of livelihoods, debt, homelessness and internal displacement compound these challenges and create precarious situations.
- 6.2 Combined with irregular legal status, these factors often force individuals into high-risk survival strategies such as prostitution, irregular work, reliance on smuggling, and even the decision to become perpetrators of these crimes.

- 6.3 In regions where child labour is culturally accepted, traffickers exploit children more easily. Child labour frequently becomes a coping mechanism for families under severe stress, particularly where social protection systems are inadequate.
- 6.4 The presence of informal markets, low wages, seasonal work, high rates of manual labour, dangerous working conditions, labour scarcity and illegal resource extraction.

## RISK FACTOR 7

### Forced displacement, smuggling & the breakdown of family networks

All forms of displacement heighten vulnerability, with forced displacement posing even greater risks due to the urgent and unplanned nature of the movement, further increasing the chances of exploitation and trafficking.

#### Indicators:

- 7.1 Inability to relocate to safe locations via safe and legal pathways of admission, often due to limited access to regular means of travel during conflicts and humanitarian and natural disasters.
- 7.2 Climate change contributes to the growing category of climate refugees placed in situations where people are forced to move without protection.
- 7.3 Physical access to humanitarian support being limited or non-existent, especially inside refugee camps and informal settlements for internally displaced individuals characterised by poor security, overcrowding and lack of basic services.
- 7.4 When forced displacement forces individuals or groups to cross borders, seas and deserts, and traverse areas with minimal to no state control and where criminal group networks are present and/or thriving.
- 7.5 Forced displacement and resorting to previously unknown smugglers (including paying for their services) increase the risk that an individual, even more so if they are a child, transitions from being smuggled to being trafficked, especially as they move farther away from their original place of communal safety.
- 7.6 Relying on co-ethnic networks for voluntary migration journeys, securing employment and navigating the host country. These networks play a dual role, and exacerbate vulnerability to exploitation while on route, or when relationships turn sour or fail to provide meaningful employment, leaving migrants without support or recourse.
- 7.7 Disruption of community and family networks particularly increases the risks of exploitation and trafficking for children, especially when they are unaccompanied, separated from other people, or coming from institutional care settings.
- 7.8 A lack of family tracing and reunification programmes, as well as a breakdown of social safety nets and other protection systems.



## RISK FACTOR 8

### Lack of effective humanitarian protection

Increased risk of exposure to trafficking and slavery due to lack of effective humanitarian protection, such as limited access to humanitarian assistance, national protection mechanisms, social networks and other support systems.

#### Indicators:

- 8.1 Ineffective asylum protection, a lack of targeted support and assistance in appropriate locations (including origin, transit and destination countries), insufficient provision of trauma and mental health services, and a lack of protection-specific assistance in formal and informal settlement settings, including support for host communities.
- 8.2 Social norms and stigma associated with victimhood, discrimination and stigmatisation from their communities, significantly increase vulnerability to trafficking and hinder the reintegration of survivors.
- 8.3 Inadequate survivor support, mandatory return and lack of risk assessment prior to return, increase the risk of re-trafficking, when people fall back into initial conditions of vulnerability.
- 8.4 Charging for legal advice may hinder survivor support, making it difficult for survivors to navigate the justice system, assert their rights and access protections.
- 8.5 Inadequate and unsafe accommodation, including in the shelters provided for other categories of victims and targeted groups, can jeopardise the protection, recovery and reintegration of survivors, depriving them of the stability and security needed to rebuild their lives.
- 8.6 Limited access to affordable healthcare and to the labour market can increase the risk of trafficking by exacerbating economic vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit.
- 8.7 In refugees' and displaced persons' camps, neglecting to provide safe education and training opportunities, and failing to ensure timely provision of information and basic safety procedures (such as places to register, and the inclusion of sufficient lighting to enable women and children to have safe access to sanitation facilities), exacerbate risks and undermine the well-being of displaced populations.

## RISK FACTOR 9

### Poor border controls and law enforcement, & prosecution of victims

These critical factors impede the identification of vulnerable groups and exacerbate the issues of human trafficking and modern slavery, allowing them to persist unchecked. The distrust of service providers and local authorities undermines the effectiveness of international humanitarian efforts.

#### Indicators:

- 9.1 Victims who do not self-identify, or fear reprisal from criminals or enforcement action by authorities, add to the difficulty of reporting and addressing these crimes.
- 9.2 Unsafe and insufficiently effective reporting practices, potential retaliation from traffickers or authorities.
- 9.3 Criminalisation, detention, deportation or removal due to irregular legal status and the lack, confiscation or loss of identification papers.
- 9.4 Law enforcement and other authorities prioritising immigration status over victim protection and anti-trafficking measures, creating a “culture of disbelief” around migrants’ and victims’ experiences. This deters migrants from seeking help, as interactions with authorities may result in deportation or other punitive measures.
- 9.5 Border controls and restrictive measures aiming to reduce (undocumented) migration often increase trafficking risks by forcing migrants to take more expensive and dangerous routes. These policies also affect children and young people, who are often criminalised under these policies.
- 9.6 Persistent stereotypes, archetypes and myths, such as the notion of the “ideal victim” or misconceptions about forms of trafficking, continue to impede effective response measures.
- 9.7 Lack of cross-border cooperation among law enforcement agencies, insufficient government engagement with the private sector to prevent forced labour in supply chains during crises, and lack of training in victim-centred, trauma-informed, gender-sensitive and age-specific approaches to rehabilitation.



# Appendix

## General Risk Factors

### 1. Situations of armed conflict or instability

Slavery and human trafficking often take place against a background of international or non-international armed conflict. Armed conflicts are characterised by a high incidence of violence, insecurity and permissibility of acts that would otherwise not be acceptable. In addition, the capacity of states to implement coercive measures is usually at its peak during periods of conflict. Wartime economic mobilisation favours the implementation of coercive mechanisms in the field of labour relations, that can easily slide into state-sanctioned slavery and human trafficking<sup>1</sup>. Non-state armed groups also rely on modern slavery as a financing system, a recruitment tool or warfare method<sup>2</sup>. As acknowledged by the UN Security Council, terrorist organisations also rely on human trafficking to spread terror, control populations, and impede the restoration of peace and livelihoods<sup>3</sup>. Their victims are frequently labelled as “affiliates” and are denied humanitarian assistance, leaving them more vulnerable to re-trafficking, re-recruitment and radicalisation<sup>4</sup>. Economic instability is also a driver of modern slavery and human trafficking. In times of crisis, unscrupulous actors resort to slavery to boost the competitiveness of their businesses, and citizens are pushed to seek risky forms of employment, thus exposing themselves to the risk of being trafficked, exploited and enslaved<sup>5</sup>. Natural disasters are also drivers of modern slavery, increasing vulnerability by overwhelming law enforcement and relief agencies, and diverting public and private resources from anti-trafficking efforts<sup>6</sup>. Natural disaster settings also create the demand for cheap and easily exploitable labour for reconstruction purposes<sup>7</sup>. Climate change hazards such as floods, landslides, erosion, wildfires and desertification also drive vulnerability, as

1 Walk Free, *Global Slavery Index 2023*, 2023, pp. 52-3.

2 J. Rizk, ‘Exploring the Nexus between Armed Groups and the Trafficking and Smuggling of Human Beings in the Central Sahel and Libya’, *Studies in Conflict*, 47, No. 7 (2021), p. 773.

3 CTED, *Identifying and exploring the nexus between human trafficking, terrorism, and terrorism financing*, pp. 4; 15-16.

4 Ibid., p. 15.

5 The World Bank & The International Organization for Migration, *Economic Shocks and Human Trafficking Risks: Evidence from the IOM’s Victims of Human Trafficking Database*, 2022, p. 4.

6 K. Hoogesteyn et al., ‘The Intersection of Human Trafficking and Natural Disasters: A Scoping Review’, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 0, No. 00 (2024), p. 6.

7 Ibid., p. 5.

they increase food insecurity and render access to livelihood more challenging<sup>8</sup>. Instability also emerges in the context of the restrictive measures undertaken during pandemics such as COVID-19. Lockdowns lead to business closures, unemployment, reductions in welfare, restrictions in the range of action of NGOs, and the exacerbation of existing inequalities<sup>9</sup>. As a result, vulnerable individuals such as children are particularly at risk from exploiters and traffickers<sup>10</sup>. During lockdowns isolated individuals are exposed to online recruitment platforms run by exploiters<sup>11</sup>. Situations of armed conflict and other forms of instability do not necessarily or inevitably lead to the spread of slavery and human trafficking, but they greatly increase the likelihood of these crimes. Vulnerabilities to modern slavery and human trafficking also markedly increase when the humanitarian community lacks a predictable, at-scale way to respond.

### 2. Records of serious violations of human rights

Countries that have a history of authoritarianism and human rights violations are more prone to slavery and human trafficking. Violations affect civil and political rights, such as the freedom to form unions, as well as minority rights<sup>12</sup>. Some of these countries also often share a history of hereditary slavery, shaped by ethnic and racial divides<sup>13</sup>. Systemic discrimination against indigenous populations and the violation of their rights increase the vulnerability of these groups to slavery and trafficking<sup>14</sup>. In countries with records of serious human rights violations the state itself is likely to promote slavery, by pushing citizens to work in certain economic sectors via forced conscription<sup>15</sup>. These forms of state-sponsored forced labour can take place in the context of emergency settings such as responses to natural disasters<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. Weakness of state structures

The risk of slavery and human trafficking can be increased by a state’s lack of capacity to prevent these crimes. A state protects its citizens through the establishment of frameworks and institutions that are guided by the rule of law, fair labour principles and adequate welfare provision. However, when such structures are inadequate or simply do not exist, the ability of the state to prevent slavery and human trafficking is significantly diminished. As a consequence, citizens are left vulnerable to those who may take advantage of the limitation or dysfunction of state machinery in order to violate fair labour practices and basic human rights<sup>17</sup>. This is particularly the case in countries with large numbers of

8 Anti-Slavery International & International Institute for Environment and Development, *Climate-induced migration and modern slavery: A toolkit for policy-makers*, 2021, p. 14.

9 A. Lumley-Sapansky et al., ‘Exacerbating pre-existing Vulnerabilities: an Analysis of the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Human Trafficking’, *Human Rights Review*, 24 (2023), p. 349.

10 R.R. Habib et al., ‘Child labor and associated risk factors in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic: a scoping review’, *Frontiers in Public Health* (2024), pp. 3-5.

11 Walk Free, *Global Slavery*, p. 18.

12 Ibid., p. 18.

13 Ibid., p. 2.

14 B. Jackson & J.L. Decker-Sparks, ‘Ending slavery by de-carbonization? Exploring the nexus of modern slavery, deforestation, and climate change action via REDD+’, *Energy Research and Social Science*, 69 (2020), p. 3.

15 Walk Free, *Global Slavery*, pp. 50-1.

16 Hoogesteyn et al., ‘The Intersection’, p. 7.

17 W. Avis, *Key Drivers of Modern Slavery*, 2020, p. 14.



migrant workers who are not afforded the same kind of legal and welfare provisions as their local counterparts<sup>18</sup>. Weakness of state structures may not directly cause slavery and human trafficking, but when combined with other factors, this weakness in large areas beyond state control elevates the influence and risk of forced labour by unscrupulous employers and armed groups<sup>19</sup>. The weakness of state structures can also favour the consolidation of tribal structures, which share ideological and cultural traits and economic interests with the armed groups that engage in trafficking<sup>20</sup>.

# Specific Risk Factors

## 4. Vulnerabilities arising from personal & family background

Personal and family background crucially affects exposure to human trafficking and modern slavery. Factors such as sex, age, gender, sexual orientation, culture, language, caste, religion, nationality, ethnicity, education, family dynamics, mental illness, addiction and legal status significantly influence risk profiles<sup>21</sup>. Age and gender influence trafficking and exploitation types: girls and women are more susceptible to forced marriage, sexual exploitation and domestic labour, while boys and men risk harsh labour and conscription by armed groups, with boys in particular being vulnerable to child soldiering<sup>22</sup>. Children have been particularly vulnerable to forced recruitment by terrorist groups<sup>23</sup>. Women and young people are particularly vulnerable due to societal undervaluation and lack of information about risks<sup>24</sup>. Young people face greater risks due to diminished support networks, and physical and social isolation<sup>25</sup>. Older women, especially widows, suffer from stigma, fewer job opportunities, and increased exploitation risks. Disabilities or special educational needs further increase vulnerability by impairing people’s comprehension of risk and boundaries, especially among those experiencing heightened isolation and loneliness<sup>26</sup>. Past abuse, violence and family dysfunction can normalise exploitation and violence<sup>27</sup>. The intersection of these risk factors significantly heightens vulnerabilities, and necessitates tailored interventions to meet the diverse needs of at-risk individuals<sup>28</sup>.

18 IOM, Walk Free & Alliance 8.7., *Migrants and their vulnerability to human trafficking, modern slavery, and forced labor*, 2019, p. 10; Walk Free, *Global Slavery*, pp. 3-4.  
19 Avis, *Key Drivers of modern slavery*, p. 14.  
20 Rizk, ‘Exploring the Nexus’, pp. 779-81.  
21 Save the Children, *Tipping Points to Turning Points: How Can Programmes and Policies Better Respond to the Risks of Child Trafficking and Exploitation on the Central Mediterranean Route?*, 2024, p. 37; IOM, *An Introductory Guide to Anti-Trafficking Action in Internal Displacement Contexts*, 2020, p. 9; Walk Free, *Global Slavery Index*, p. 6.  
22 Delta 8.7, *Delta 8.7 Crisis Policy Guide*, 2021, pp. 2, 14, 26.  
23 CTED, *Identifying and exploring the nexus*, p. 28.  
24 L. D. Gezie et al., ‘Exploring Factors That Contribute to Human Trafficking in Ethiopia: A Socio-Ecological Perspective’, *Globalization and Health* 17, no. 1 (2021), pp. 2-3, 12.  
25 E. Celiksoy et al., ‘Prevention and Identification of Children Experiencing Modern Slavery’, 2024, p. 22.  
26 Ibid., p. 21.  
27 IOM; *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*; Embody & UKaid, *The Tradition of Toil, the interplay of social norms and stigma in relation to human trafficking in Indonesia*, 2021, p. 27; H. Franchino-Olsen, ‘Vulnerabilities Relevant for Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children/ Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Systematic Review of Risk Factors’, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 22, no. 1 (2021), pp. 106, 108; L. C. N. Wood, ‘Child Modern Slavery, Trafficking and Health: A Practical Review of Factors Contributing to Children’s Vulnerability and the Potential Impacts of Severe Exploitation on Health’, *BMJ Paediatrics Open* 4, no. 1 (2020), pp. 4, 6-8; Walk Free, ‘*Stacked Odds*’: *How lifelong inequality shapes women and girls’ experience of modern slavery* 2020, p. 77.  
28 IOM, *An Introductory Guide to Anti-Trafficking Action*, p. 9.

## 5. Established cultural practices & behaviours

These significantly contribute to vulnerability. Risks are magnified for minorities and marginalised groups, who face heightened vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation. Minorities and marginalised communities, such as the Roma and Dalits, are particularly susceptible, with vulnerabilities being deeply rooted in marginalisation, stigmatisation and disempowerment, and exacerbated by limited citizens’ rights and access to essential social services such as healthcare and education<sup>29</sup>. These communities often find that local authorities refuse to certify their eligibility or to issue necessary documentation, even when they meet all requirements<sup>30</sup>. State-sanctioned discrimination constitutes a “pathway to a lack of documentation”, which renders marginalised people invisible and excluded from basic rights and services<sup>31</sup>. Negative stereotyping and exclusion from anti-trafficking initiatives further compound their social isolation<sup>32</sup>. Authorities often misinterpret illegal activities as cultural traditions, leading to underreporting and under-investigation, perpetuating a cycle of neglect and abuse<sup>33</sup>.

Harmful religious and cultural practices, including child marriage and forced marriage, expectations to marry at a certain age, dowry systems and entrenched gender roles, reinforce exploitative practices<sup>34</sup>. Historical legacies, coupled with gender ideology, roles and stereotypes, entrench exploitative practices<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, deep-rooted cultural norms impede the registration of vital events, such as births and deaths, particularly for women and girls,<sup>36</sup> while cultural constructs of masculinity can discourage male victims of sexual violence from seeking help<sup>37</sup>.

Cultural norms shape migration choices<sup>38</sup>. Expectations that women will fund significant family ceremonies often push them to migrate, increasing their exploitation risk,<sup>39</sup> and patriarchal values and male-dominated cultural expectations are known to exacerbate the stigma of perceived failed migration<sup>40</sup>. The role of remittances in countries of origin, such as Nepal and Vietnam, is also significant; if these remittances, often generated by forced or exploitative labour, were cut off or substantially reduced, the economic impact on these

29 Intervention at the 24th Conference of the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons by Elżbieta Mirga-Wójtowicz, Researcher, Centre for Migration Research Warsaw University, Foundation Jaw Dikh, Poland, retrieved from <https://www.osce.org/event/alliance24>  
30 UNUCPR & Freedom Fund, *Modern slavery risks among people lacking official documentation*, p. 14.  
31 UNUCPR & Freedom Fund, *No Identity, No Protection: How lack of documentation drives modern slavery*, 2024, pp. 1, 45.  
32 Intervention by Elżbieta Mirga-Wójtowicz.  
33 Ibid.  
34 Gezie et al., ‘Exploring factors that contribute to human trafficking in Ethiopia’, p. 3; Walk Free, ‘*Stacked Odds*’, p. 55; S. Angharad, et al., *Modern Slavery and Financial Exclusion: Exploring Crisis-Related Risks for Men*, 2024, pp. 40, 56; IOM, ILO and Walk Free, *No Escape: Assessing the relationship between slavery-related abuse and internal displacement in Nigeria, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo* (2022), p. 65.  
35 Ibid., p. 20; B. Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid: Politics, Labour, and Ecology in the Nigerien Sahel, 1800-2000*, 2018, p. 306.  
36 UNUCPR & Freedom Fund, *Modern slavery risks among people lacking official documentation: A global evidence review*, 2024, p. 17.  
37 Angharad et al., ‘Modern Slavery and Financial Exclusion’, p. 55.  
38 IOM, Embody & UKaid, *They Snatched from Me My Own Cry: The interplay of social norms and stigma in relation to human trafficking in Ethiopia. Case Study: Jimma and Arsi Zones*, 2021, p. v.  
39 IOM, Embody & UKaid, *The Tradition of Toil*, p. vi.  
40 IOM, Embody & UKaid, *They Snatched from Me My Own Cry*, p. 26.



countries would be substantial. Local geography, culture and economy shape the conditions and forms of exploitation, making established practices such as child labour even more prevalent<sup>41</sup>. In some communities, child fosterage can turn into hidden exploitative labour systems through family and kinship migration, where children who are sent away to work are sometimes exploited by the receiving families<sup>42</sup>. In more affluent societies cultural norms, such as expectations of being able to purchase cheap goods, contribute to the demand for inexpensive labour, perpetuating exploitative practices pursued by businesses seeking to reduce costs and increase profits<sup>43</sup>. This is particularly the case in consumer sectors such as the clothing industry, whose doubling in size in the past 15 years has been predominantly driven by demand for fast fashion<sup>44</sup>. Consumerist values, rapidly changing trends and easily accessed goods also actively contribute to climate change, in turn driving precarious migration and heightening modern slavery and human trafficking<sup>45</sup>. Resisting traditional, religious and cultural practices is difficult in semi-autonomous social settings, especially when national and international laws are rarely encountered in daily life<sup>46</sup>. Certain practices may persist despite government prohibition, when international and national anti-slavery laws compete with local perceptions of religious and traditional laws as being superior to governmental laws<sup>47</sup>.

## 6. Extreme poverty, deprivation & harsh living environments

These significantly increase vulnerability, especially where families struggle to meet basic needs such as the provision of food, clean water and essential services<sup>48</sup>. The loss of livelihoods, debt, homelessness and relocation to overcrowded refugee or displaced persons' camps compound these challenges and create precarious situations<sup>49</sup>. Combined with irregular legal status, these factors often force individuals into high-risk survival strategies such as prostitution, irregular work and relying on smugglers. Child labour frequently becomes a coping mechanism for families under severe stress, particularly where social protection systems are inadequate<sup>50</sup>. In regions where child labour is culturally accepted, traffickers exploit children more easily. Additionally, the presence of informal markets, low wages, seasonal work, high manual labour, dangerous working conditions, labour scarcity and illegal resource extraction further increase vulnerabilities.

## 7. Displacement, smuggling & the breakdown of family networks

All forms of displacement heighten vulnerability, with forced displacement posing even greater risks due to the urgent and unplanned nature of the movement, further increasing the chances of exploitation and trafficking. The inability to relocate to safe locations via secure routes, often due to limited access to regular means of travel during conflicts and humanitarian and natural disasters, represent significant vulnerability risk factors for human trafficking and modern slavery<sup>51</sup>. Additionally, climate change contributes to the growing category of climate refugees placed in situations where people are forced to move without protection, providing increased opportunities for exploitation<sup>52</sup>. These challenges are further compounded by the absence of safe physical access to humanitarian support, particularly in situations where adequate resettlement opportunities are essential but unavailable<sup>53</sup>. Trafficking risks escalate significantly when displacement forces individuals or groups to cross borders, seas and deserts and traverse areas with minimal to no state control, where criminal group networks are present and thriving<sup>54</sup>. Displacement and resorting to previously unknown smugglers increase the risk that an individual (and even more so if they are a child) transitions from being smuggled to being trafficked, especially as they move farther away from their original place of communal safety. Voluntary migration where migrants rely on co-ethnic networks for their journey, securing employment and navigating the host country, also plays a dual role and exacerbates vulnerability to exploitation. When relationships turn sour or fail to provide meaningful employment, migrants may find themselves in exploitative situations without support or recourse<sup>55</sup>. Social events such as divorce, peer pressure, family conflicts, sexual, emotional and physical abuse as well as neglect, large family size and pregnancy outside of marriage (which could result in stigma) can push individuals towards risky migration decisions<sup>56</sup>. The disruption of community and family networks particularly increases the risks of exploitation and trafficking for children, especially when they are unaccompanied, separated from their families or coming from institutional care settings<sup>57</sup>. The lack of family tracing and reunification programmes, as well as the breakdown of social safety nets and other protection systems, also augment this vulnerability risk factor<sup>58</sup>.

41 T. Washburn et al., 'Modern Slavery and Labor Exploitation during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Conceptual Model', *Global Health Action* 15, no. 1 (2022), p. 6.  
42 Angharad et al., 'Modern Slavery and Financial Exclusion', p. 35.  
43 A. Lumley-Sapanski et al., 'Exacerbating Pre-Existing Vulnerabilities: An Analysis of the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Human Trafficking in Sudan', *Human Rights Review (Piscataway, N.J.)* 24, no. 3 (2023): p. 345.  
44 Walk Free, *Global Slavery*, p. 20.  
45 J. L. Decker Sparks et al., 'Growing Evidence of the Interconnections between Modern Slavery, Environmental Degradation, and Climate Change', *One Earth* 4, no. 2 (2021), p. 188.  
46 Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid*, pp. 55, 306.  
47 Ibid., p. 56.  
48 Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid*, p. 8.  
49 Save the Children, 'Tipping Points to Turning Points', 38; Walk Free, 'Stacked Odds', pp. 51, 80, 139.  
50 Washburn et al., 'Modern Slavery and Labor Exploitation during the COVID 19 Pandemic', p. 6.

51 Justice & Care, *Anti-trafficking in humanitarian settings: gaps and priorities for a more systematic response*, 2024, p. 8; IOM, *An Introductory Guide to Anti-Trafficking Action in Internal Displacement Contexts*, p. 8.  
52 Decker-Sparks et al., 'Growing Evidence of the Interconnections', p. 182.  
53 IOM, *An Introductory Guide to Anti-Trafficking Action in Internal Displacement Contexts*, p. 9.  
54 Save the Children, 'Tipping Points to Turning Points', p. 62.  
55 W. Shankley, 'Gender, modern slavery and labour exploitation: experiences of male Polish migrants in England', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49, no. 5 (2021), p. 1278.  
56 Gezie et al., 'Exploring factors that contribute to human trafficking in Ethiopia', pp. 2, 3, 9.  
57 Delta 8.7, *Thematic Overview: Conflict and Humanitarian Settings, The impacts of conflict and humanitarian crises on modern slavery, human trafficking, forced labour and child labour* (N.D.), p. 2; Delta 8.7, *Crisis Policy Guide*, p. 2.  
58 Justice & Care, *Anti-trafficking in humanitarian settings*, p. 9; IOM, *An Introductory Guide to Anti-Trafficking Action in Internal Displacement Contexts*, p. 8.

## 8. Increased risk of exposure to trafficking & slavery due to lack of effective humanitarian protection

This can arise from limited access to humanitarian assistance, national protection mechanisms, social networks and other support systems<sup>59</sup>. Additionally, ineffective asylum protection, a lack of targeted support and assistance in appropriate locations (including origin, transit and destination countries), insufficient provision of trauma and mental health services, and a lack of protection-specific assistance in formal and informal settlement settings, including support for host communities, all exacerbate human trafficking and modern slavery vulnerabilities<sup>60</sup>. This, combined with social norms and stigma associated with victimhood, discrimination and stigmatisation from their communities, significantly drive vulnerability to trafficking and hinder the reintegration of survivors<sup>61</sup>. Additionally, survivors who receive inadequate support are at risk of re-trafficking, falling back into their initial conditions of vulnerability<sup>62</sup>. For instance, charging for legal advice may hinder survivor support, making it difficult for survivors to navigate the justice system, assert their rights and access protections<sup>63</sup>. Inadequate and unsafe accommodation can jeopardise the protection, recovery and reintegration of survivors, depriving them of the stability and security needed to rebuild their lives<sup>64</sup>. Limited access to affordable healthcare can increase the risk of trafficking by exacerbating economic vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit<sup>65</sup>. In refugees' and displaced persons' camps, neglecting to provide safe education and training opportunities, failing to ensure timely provision of information and basic safety procedures, such as providing places to register and including sufficient lighting to enable women and children to have safe access to sanitation facilities, exacerbates risks and undermines the well-being of displaced populations, making them more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation<sup>66</sup>.

## 9. Lack of cross-border collaboration and harmonised legal approaches

These are critical factors that impede the identification of vulnerable groups and exacerbate the issues of human trafficking and modern slavery, allowing them to persist unchecked. Many victims do not self-identify, or fear reprisal from criminals or enforcement action by authorities, adding to the difficulty of reporting and addressing

these crimes<sup>67</sup>. Concerns about unsafe reporting practices, potential retaliation from traffickers or authorities, and significant obstacles in gaining access to justice and protection (include corruption, intimidation, insufficient labour inspections, lack of awareness and delays in judicial proceedings), all make victims hesitate to seek protection<sup>68</sup>. Additionally, fear of criminalisation, detention, deportation or removal, due to irregular legal status and the lack, confiscation or loss of identification papers, further discourages victims from seeking assistance<sup>69</sup>. Law enforcement responses prioritising immigration enforcement and immigration status over victim protection and trafficking create a “culture of disbelief” around migrants’ and victims’ experiences<sup>70</sup>. This in turn contributes to migrants being deterred from seeking help, as interactions with authorities may result in deportation or other punitive measures<sup>71</sup>. Border controls and restrictive measures aiming to reduce undocumented migration often increase trafficking risks, by forcing migrants to take more expensive and dangerous routes<sup>72</sup>. These policies also affect children and young people, who are often criminalised under these policies<sup>73</sup>. In some instances, even some governmental measures aimed at protecting illegal migrants can result in the infringement of their rights, thus increasing their distrust in public authorities<sup>74</sup>. This distrust of service providers and local authorities undermines the effectiveness of international humanitarian efforts<sup>75</sup>. Neglecting to train law enforcement and criminal justice actors in modern slavery and human trafficking severely impairs the identification, investigation and prosecution of these crimes. This lack of training allows persistent stereotypes, archetypes and myths, such as the notion of the “ideal victim” or misconceptions about the forms of trafficking, to continue impeding effective response measures, contributing to the sexualisation of slavery, and hindering its understanding from a broader perspective<sup>76</sup>. Additionally, a lack of cross-border cooperation among law enforcement agencies, and insufficient government engagement with the private sector to prevent forced labour in supply chains during crises, exacerbate the problem<sup>77</sup>.

59 IOM, *An Introductory Guide to Anti-Trafficking Action in Internal Displacement Contexts*, p. 8.

60 Justice & Care, *Anti-trafficking in humanitarian settings*, p. 9.

61 Shankley, ‘Gender, modern slavery and labour exploitation’, pp. 1285-86, 1288.

62 Delta 8.7, *Crisis Policy Guide*, p. 23; Delta 8.7, Delta 8.7 *Justice Policy Guide*, 2021, pp. 1-2; Avis, ‘Key Drivers of Modern Slavery’, p. 14.

63 Delta 8.7, *Justice Policy Guide*, p. 52.

64 Ibid., p. 54.

65 Ibid., p. 56.

66 Justice & Care, *Anti-trafficking in humanitarian settings: gaps and priorities for a more systematic response*, p. 9.

67 UNDP, ‘Corruption and contemporary forms of slavery: examining relationships and addressing policy gaps’, 2021, p. 51; OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, Tomoya Obokata* (2021), p. 10; Wood, ‘Child Modern Slavery’, p. 4.

68 Delta 8.7 *Thematic Overview*, p. 3; OHCHR, *Role of organised criminal groups with regards to Contemporary Forms of Slavery: Call for Input*, 2021, pp. 7, 10, 19.

69 Delta 8.7, *Thematic Overview*, p. 3; Delta 8.7, *Crisis Policy Guide*, p. 12; Delta 8.7, *Justice Policy Guide*, p. 41; OHCHR, *Role of organised criminal groups*, p. 19.

70 Shankley, ‘Gender, modern slavery and labour exploitation’, p. 1285-6; Delta 8.7, ‘Justice Policy Guide’, p. 41.

71 Shankley ‘Gender, modern slavery and labour exploitation’, p. 1288.

72 Washburn et al., ‘Modern Slavery and Labor Exploitation during the COVID-19 Pandemic’, p. 4; Delta 8.7 *Crisis Policy Guide*, p. 12.

73 Delta 8.7, *Crisis Policy Guide*, p. 12.

74 A. Bhagat, ‘Reducing Vulnerability to Exploitation of Nepali Migrant Workers’, 2024, p. 1.

75 Save the Children, ‘*Tipping Points to Turning Points*’, p. 16.

76 Delta 8.7, *Justice Policy Guide*, 8; Shankley, ‘Gender, modern slavery and labour exploitation’, pp. 1275-6.

77 Delta 8.7, *Justice Policy Guide*, pp. 2, 11,62; Gazie et al., ‘Exploring factors that contribute to human trafficking in Ethiopia’, p. 14.



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Global Commission  
on Modern Slavery  
& Human Trafficking

The Global Commission on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (<https://www.modernslaverycommission.org>) is an international initiative, led by Baroness May of Maidenhead, to exert high-level political leverage to restore political momentum towards achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.7: to eradicate forced labour, and to end modern slavery and human trafficking.

Notwithstanding the global consensus to eradicate human trafficking and modern slavery, there is a widely shared sense that not enough is being done at the global level to respond to the challenge: vulnerability to modern slavery and human trafficking has dramatically increased; political momentum towards eradicating modern slavery and human trafficking has stalled; the evidence and knowledge base is under-developed, with a lack of readily accessible evidence on effective responses to modern slavery and human trafficking; and international collaboration and partnerships are limited.

This Framework for Analysis on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking forms part of the Global Commission's efforts to build this evidence base and, more specifically, to better understand the full range of risk factors, which together are exposing people around the world to exploitation and making them more vulnerable to these crimes. The Framework of Analysis is to be used as a practical tool for prevention, and has a twofold purpose. First, to identify the key risk factors that increase people's vulnerability to modern slavery and human trafficking. Second, to act as a guide for strengthening the prevention capabilities of national, regional and international actors involved in the policy-making process, and of frontline responders such as civil society organisations and local and national NGOs.

We are grateful to all of those partners and stakeholders who have kindly commented upon and played an active part in the development of this document. This Framework of Analysis will be published alongside a major new report which the Global Commission on Modern Slavery is presenting to the United Nations on 8 April 2025.





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