



United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Topic B. Efforts to ensure the protection of child trafficking victims

Introduction:

Child trafficking is one of the most serious forms of child exploitation and a flagrant violation of human rights. This crime involves the capture, transportation and exploitation of minors for the purposes of forced labor, sexual abuse, slavery or domestic servitude, among others. Children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to their dependence on adults, their lack of resources to defend themselves, and the ease with which they can be deceived or forced into exploitative situations.

Unfortunately, child trafficking networks operate around the world, especially in countries with severe economic crises, conflicts, and inadequate child protection systems. Poverty, lack of access to education, family disintegration, domestic violence, armed conflicts and irregular migration are some of the factors that increase the risk of minors falling into trafficking networks. Criminal organizations exploit these vulnerabilities, using deception or violence to recruit children and force them to participate in illicit activities.

Therefore, children who are victims of trafficking suffer devastating consequences, including physical and psychological trauma, loss of their childhood and, in many cases, irreversible damage to their social and emotional development. Trafficked children are deprived of their right to education, a life free of violence, and a safe childhood, perpetuating a cycle of poverty, exclusion and vulnerability in communities. This is not only a criminal problem, but a humanitarian crisis that affects the stability and well-being of the entire global society.





Concepts and definitions:

- **Child trafficking:** recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation in various ways.¹
- **Criminal prosecution:** process of bringing those responsible for committing a crime to justice.
- **Exploitation:** use of a person for another's benefit, including activities such as forced labor, sexual services, begging or organ removal.
- **Internal trafficking:** trafficking that occurs within a single country.
- **Legal assistance:** provision of free legal services to victims, such as legal representation and advice.
- **Palermo protocol:** international treaty that establishes minimum standards to prevent, suppress, punish, and combat human trafficking.²
- **Rehabilitation:** the process of helping victims recover from trauma and reintegrate into society.
- **Social safety net:** policies and programs that help individuals and families manage risk and volatility, protect them from poverty and inequality, and help them to access economic opportunity.³
- **Trafficking networks:** organized groups that engage in human trafficking.
- **Transnational trafficking:** trafficking that involves multiple countries.
- **Victim protection:** set of measures to safeguard the rights and well-being of victims of any crime.
- **Vulnerability:** factors that increase a person's risk of becoming a victim, in this case, of trafficking, such as poverty, lack of education, and discrimination.

¹ UNODC. *Explainer: Understanding Child Trafficking*. United Nations, New York. "No update date". In: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/frontpage/2024/July/explainer-understanding-child-trafficking.html> (14/01/2025).

² OHCHR. *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*. United Nations, New York, 15/11/2000. (14/01/2025).

³ World Bank Group. *Safety Nets*. World Bank Group, Washington D.C. "No update date". In: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/safetynets#:~:text=Social%20safety%20nets%20can%20be,them%20to%20access%20economic%20opportunity%20>. (14/01/2025).





Current issue:

Child trafficking is a global and complex crime that involves the exploitation of minors for purposes of forced labor, prostitution, illegal adoptions, criminal activities, organ trafficking, and others. In this regard, the implementation of efforts to protect children who are victims of trafficking is very challenging. Although laws and international agreements addressing child trafficking exist, their implementation is uneven across countries.

In many places, laws are not effectively enforced due to a lack of resources, corruption, or a lack of political will to address the issue, causing many children to be vulnerable to exploitation. Since child trafficking is a transnational crime, it often involves networks operating across international borders. Because of this, cooperation between countries is crucial. Nonetheless, coordination among law enforcement officials, governments, and international organizations remains insufficient due to differences in laws, judicial procedures, and migration policies.

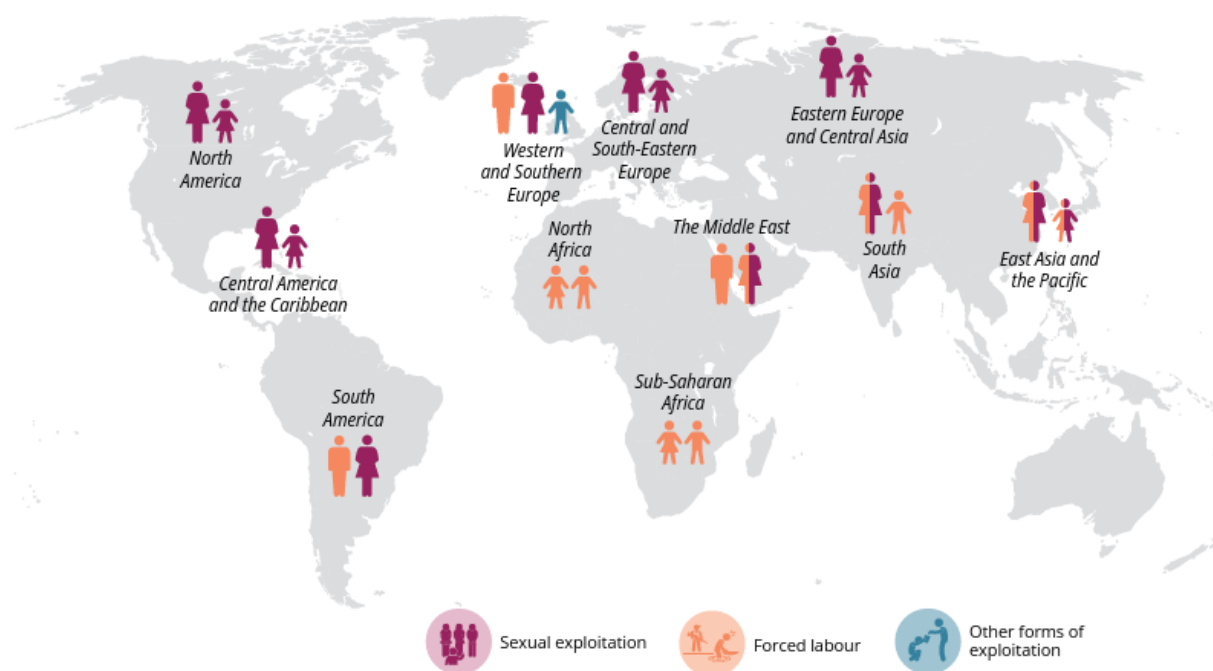


Figure 1. Main detected victims and forms of exploitation⁴

⁴ UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024*. (11/02/2025). p. 46



The figures are alarming. In 2022, children accounted for 38% of recorded victims of trafficking detected globally. Specifically, girls represented 22% of total victims, being more typically trafficked for sexual exploitation, while boys represented 16% of total victims, being primarily trafficked for forced labor and other forms of exploitation such as forced criminality.⁵

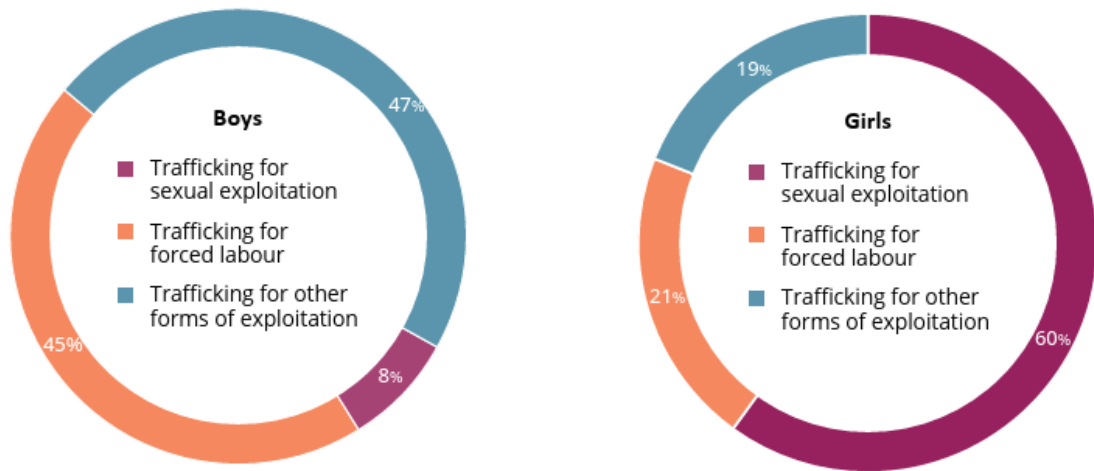


Figure 2. Detected child victims of trafficking, by form of exploitation, 2022 (or most recent)⁶

Also, according to reports from international organizations, such as UNICEF and UNODC, millions of children around the world are victims of trafficking every year. In addition, a rising number of cases is a result of factors such as armed conflict, poverty, irregular migration, lack of education, domestic violence, and weakness of social protection systems. Furthermore, the use of digital technologies by criminal networks to recruit and exploit children has increased the complexity of the problem.

While growing numbers of child victims of trafficking are recorded in Europe and North America, these regions are still detecting more adult than child victims. However, in terms of regional variation, Central America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa recorded the highest share of children out of total detected victims, which is equivalent to 60% approximately, followed by East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia.⁷

⁵ UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024*. United Nations, 2024. In: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html>. (11/02/2025). p. 42
⁶ UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024*. (11/02/2025). p. 43
⁷ UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024*. (11/02/2025). p. 45



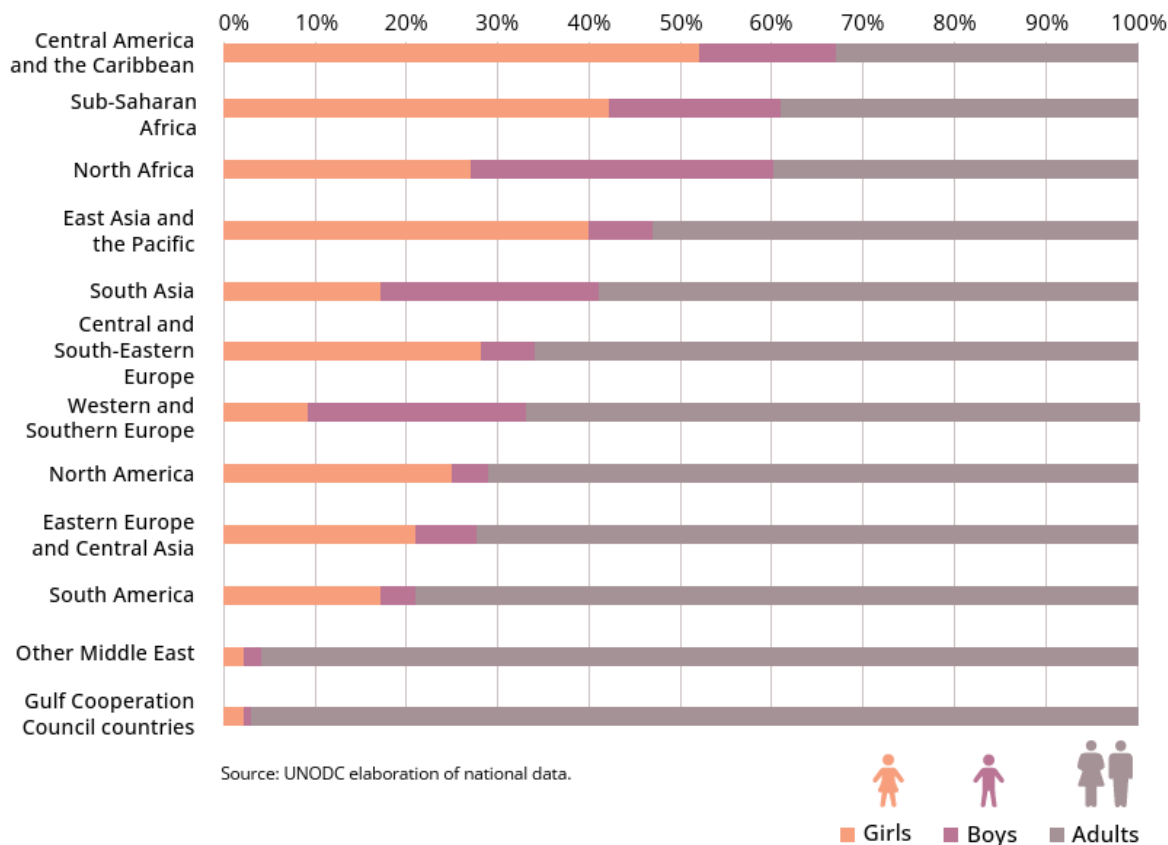


Figure 3. Detected victims of trafficking in persons, by age groups and sex, by region 2022 (or most recent)⁸

Additionally, the UNODC did an analysis of 407 court cases including information on 1453 victims, in which the data suggested that institutions fail to actively identify the victims of trafficking, with them often needing to take the first action to contact the authorities. Female victims (32%) seem to be detected because of their own action more frequently than male victims (25%), who emerge more frequently from proactive action from the authorities. For girls, it appears family members play an important role with parents or siblings typically contacting the authorities to report cases of trafficking.⁹

So, child trafficking not only affects the physical well-being of children, but also their emotional and psychological development. Victims of trafficking often suffer deep trauma, which can produce lifelong consequences, including psychological disorders, health problems, and difficulties in integrating socially. Protecting these children is essential for

⁸ UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024*. (11/02/2025). p. 46

⁹ UNODC. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2024*. (11/02/2025). p. 48





them to overcome their traumas and develop in a healthy manner. However, they are often stigmatized or do not receive enough support to reintegrate into society. This includes limited access to health services, education, and psychological rehabilitation. In some cases, the children themselves are seen as guilty or complicit, which can make this process even more difficult.

Despite all the efforts, there are still several issues that the international community needs to face, and the world is not yet fully on track to eliminating this problem. International organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society, governments, and other members of the international community continue to work to improve the protection of children who are victims of trafficking through stricter legislation, prevention programs, public awareness campaigns, international cooperation, and support services for victims. Nonetheless, a more coordinated and sustained effort is needed to eradicate this crime and ensure the safety of children worldwide. No country is exempt from suffering the effects of child trafficking.

Initiatives taken by the international community:

Due to the severe violations posed by child trafficking, the international community has executed multiple important measures to combat this crime, aiming to protect victims and ensure justice. These include the creation of legal frameworks which establish laws and penalties to deter traffickers; the promotion of global awareness to help people recognize and report trafficking situations; the implementation of rehabilitation programs for survivors, which support their recovery and reintegration into society; and the improvement of international cooperation mechanisms to track and apprehend traffickers across borders.

International Legal Frameworks:

- **The Palermo Protocol:** this protocol was created in 2000 by the United Nations to combat transnational organized crime. It establishes clear measures to prevent trafficking, protect victims and hold traffickers accountable. It also focuses on child trafficking, offering solutions to help and protect them. In addition, it allows





cooperation between countries by providing a common legal framework to stop this crime, which helps victims be treated according to the same international standards.¹⁰

- **The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):** this treaty has been adopted by most countries, as it establishes that children have the fundamental right to protection from abuse and exploitation. It has promoted modifications regarding national laws to ensure that governments have specific ways to mitigate this problem. Also, its optional protocol reinforces the obligations of States towards child trafficking.¹¹

International and Regional Cooperation:

With the collaboration and support of organizations such as INTERPOL and EUROPOL, international operations have been created to help identify child trafficking networks. These efforts have led to the mass arrest of traffickers and the release of thousands of children who are victims of child trafficking.

Child Protection Systems:

There are many international organizations, such as UNICEF and the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT), that have implemented detailed programs for the protection of child victims of trafficking.¹²

- **Assistance and rehabilitation:** this includes medical, legal and psychological services, since it consists of the implementation of actions to return children to their homes and communities after being victims of trafficking, providing them with therapy to overcome the trauma, as well as educational support so that reintegrating into society becomes easier and more effective. The intention is to improve their physical, mental and emotional well-being to build a stable and new life for them.

¹⁰ OHCHR. *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*. (14/01/2025).

¹¹ OHCHR. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations, New York, 20/11/1989. (14/01/2025).

¹² ICAT. *El Grupo de Coordinación Interinstitucional contra la Trata de Personas*. United Nations, New York. "Sin fecha de actualización". En: <https://icat.un.org/> (14/01/2025).





- **Justice mechanisms:** special processes have been implemented so that children are safe and receive adequate treatment in the judicial system. These procedures include the use of specialized courts for minors and accompaniment for their protection in the judicial process.

Technology and Online Security:

Global campaigns for all audiences have been launched to raise awareness about the risk of online exploitation. Moreover, digital tools have been implemented to prevent and detect child sexual exploitation on social networks or digital platforms with the help of Google, Facebook and other companies. Additionally, security algorithms have been implemented, so that they can identify content that relates to trafficking and exploitation to alert the authorities.

Response to Crisis Contexts:

The United Nations has worked to expand humanitarian agencies and give protection to children in conflict zones and areas of displacement, especially trying to identify and help those who have been separated from their families or are unaccompanied to prevent any type of trafficking and abuse. This enables them to receive specific care and even be reunited with their families or placed in safer environments.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- **Lack of resources:** even though there are protection programs, sometimes they are ineffective due to the lack of resources of some governments, mainly in conflict areas and developing countries. This is a factor that limits the ability to provide immediate assistance to those children who are victims of trafficking.
- **Inequality in the distribution of aid:** even if aid is available, not all of it always reaches the children who are most vulnerable to trafficking, especially in rural areas and contexts of high migration.
- **Stronger international cooperation:** there is still a lack of cooperation between countries, undermining the protection of victims and making it even more complex to track traffickers down. Also, children who are rescued face difficulties being





reunited with their families due to bureaucratic barriers and lack of specific agreements on this matter.

Guiding questions:

1. Is your delegation a country of origin, transit, or destination regarding child trafficking?
2. How does the child trafficking problem affect your delegation?
3. How can your delegation effectively help address the underlying causes of child trafficking, such as poverty, lack of access to education, and gender discrimination?
4. What actions are being fostered in your delegation to improve public awareness regarding child trafficking?
5. What concrete measures has your delegation implemented to prevent child trafficking? Are they effective?
6. What measures is your delegation taking to ensure that victims of child trafficking receive adequate support, including psychological, educational, and legal assistance to facilitate their reintegration into society?
7. How can your delegation prevent and combat online child trafficking and digital child exploitation?
8. Is there a legal framework that your delegation embraces to eradicate child trafficking, whether it is national, regional or international?
9. Are these legal frameworks effectively implemented? If not, how can your delegation help improve this situation?
10. What is your delegation's position on the implementation of stricter laws to sanction child traffickers?
11. Does your delegation participate in any regional or international effort to prevent child trafficking and protect the victims?
12. Can your delegation offer any kind of support for other members of the international community to eradicate child trafficking effectively?





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