

COVID - 19 FUELS VULNERABILITIES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS A FROM VENEZUELA:

Recommendation to service providers

Human trafficking and smuggling of migrants¹ are crimes with serious human rights implications that are accentuated in crisis times. With the outbreak of COVID-19, women and men refugees and migrants from Venezuela may face specific vulnerabilities to those crimes due to the circumstances of their journey and their poor living and working conditions. Unprecedented travel and mobility restrictions intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have multifaceted impacts which, in combination, foster an environment where refugees and migrants, particularly those in irregular situations, could be abused and exploited, along with challenges to identify, protect and prosecute. As a result of the outbreak, refugees and migrants previously less at risk of trafficking may become victims, while vulnerabilities of persons already at risk of trafficking may be further exacerbated, for example, women and girls disproportionality falling victims to this crime.

The human trafficking and smuggling of migrants' subsector calls for attention to the challenging situation of refugees and migrants from Venezuela vulnerable to trafficking and smuggling. This document provides key considerations and messages based on a gender-sensitive approach for service providers. The recommendation can be used by practitioners and humanitarian actors to adapt or integrate ongoing counter-trafficking efforts in prevention and/or provision of assistance in the context of COVID-19.

Continue service provision, review service mapping and referral pathway

- **Continue to provide assistance and services for victims of trafficking with proper sanitary measures**, including but not limited to, safe house, food, health including physical and psychosocial support, livelihood, despite confinement and quarantine measures and their migratory status.
- **Shift or adapt some case management services to remote operation or alternative ways** (online or telephone counselling, creation of online platform/chats/peer support groups), preventing to expose women and men to additional harm.
- **Map and monitor the operational capacity and continuity of specialized service providers** for victims of trafficking (hotlines, health centers, safe house, psychosocial support, livelihood, etc.). **Evaluate and review the existing referral pathway to reflect changes in staff and operational capacity** to provide assistance (staff, movement restriction, hours).
- **Identify refugees and migrants at risk of being victims of trafficking whose assistance has been disrupted** by the COVID-19 outbreak and support them with alternative measures.
- **Ensure equal access without any barriers for victims of trafficking in a gender, age and ethnic-responsive way**, by identifying and addressing the COVID-19- related specific needs, gaps and impacts of women, girls, boys, men, elder persons, indigenous and LGBTI people.

¹ The subsector uses the terminology of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime (UNTOC) on the term migrant smuggling, but recognizes that this crime also affects refugees.



Communication, information, and awareness raising

- **Provide timely COVID-19-related up-to-date and country-specific health information and education** to refugees and migrants from Venezuela in shelters or reception centers through most effective, consultative, and accessible means of communication that is culturally appropriate for all women and men.
- **Develop key messages** for refugees and migrants from Venezuela and host communities about the increased risk of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, including contact information of helplines and available services, and the specific risk and measures for men, women, boys, girls and LGBTI persons.
- **Design and carry out targeted information and awareness raising activities** aimed at refugees and migrants at high risk of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, through means of communication that are accessible under the COVID-19 measures (internet, social media, YouTube video). When tailoring the messages, it is recommended to contextualize taking into account the pre-existing types and patterns of exploitation in each country and a gender-responsive approach.
- **Disseminate key messages in consultation and participation of civil society groups, including women and LGBTI groups,** and in coordination with other sectors and groups (Transportation, Communication with Community, Protection, etc.).
- **All frontline workers should be sensitized to existing and expected trafficking and smuggling of migrants risks** including labor and sexual exploitation, as well as to be able to guide individuals through the existing referral mechanisms for women and men refugees and migrants.

Data collection, information management

- **Monitor the situation of COVID-19 outbreak, gather information about evolving trends, patterns, and caseload of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants,** and profile of groups vulnerable to exploitation with a gender analysis, through various channels (law enforcement, hotlines, informants from community and migrants).
- **Collect the data (both qualitative and quantitative disaggregated by sex and age) and generate statistics on the number of victims of human trafficking who seek assistance,** including the types of vulnerabilities, type of exploitation, gender analysis, age and ethnic information, and assistance needed.

Review project scope activities

- **Review foreseen project scope and activities to examine feasibility under current circumstances.** This will allow for timely adaptation for project outcomes and activities taking alternative measures into consideration in order to account for refugees and migrants and staff safety alike while ensuring that project goals will still be achieved.
- **Identify activities that cannot be implemented or can be modified to respond to emerging needs and gaps during the COVID-19 outbreak.** Coordination with donors about adaptation and optimize the use of resources.

Staff safety

- Provide information about **the needs and gaps of personal protective equipment** to continue providing protection, assistance and care for victims of trafficking.
- **Provide guidance and training to frontline staff through virtual means** on safe case management, referral to essential services, how to adapt to the changing environment and enhance preparedness to resume and scale up assistance to refugees and migrants. **Ensure they have up-to-date information on their rights and how to perform their duties safely.**