How has the International Anti-Trafficking Response Adapted to COVID-19?

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The International Anti-Human Trafficking Network (IAHTN): An international sub-group was set up in 2015 and later relaunched as the IAHTN in 2019 to 'develop partnerships and encourage collaboration, facilitating shared learning and development of best practice'.[1] The network has a membership of UK-based NGOs with an international response to human trafficking and modern slavery.

Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI): The JLI was established in 2012 and 'is an international collaboration to develop and communicate evidence on local faith actors' roles and contributions to development and humanitarian action for community wellbeing.'[2] The JLI operates through a series of 'learning hubs' and the research carried out for this report was supported by the Anti-Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Hub.[3] It aims to be 'a horizontal learning community that links academics, policy makers and practitioners working on issues of faith, faith leaders and religious communities to combat human trafficking and modern slavery.'

University of Leeds, Centre for Religion and Public Life: The Centre for Religions and Public Life carries out research into the immensely important, and increasingly contentious, role of religion in public life in the world today. It has a long tradition of working closely with non-academic partners to identify the ways in which academic research is relevant to their work and to produce research that is capable of meeting their need to better understand contemporary global challenges. It is based at the University of Leeds, one of the largest higher education institutions in the UK, renowned globally for the quality of its teaching and research.

[1] https://www.humantraffickingfoundation.org/ourwork/international
[2] https://jliflc.com/
[3] https://aht-ms.jliflc.com/
[4] https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/centre-religion-public-life

University of Nottingham, The Rights Lab: The Rights Lab, at the University of Nottingham, is the world's largest group of modern slavery researchers, and home to many leading modern slavery experts. Through our five research programmes, we deliver new and cutting-edge research that provides rigorous data, evidence and discoveries for the global anti-slavery effort. Our impact team provides an interface between the Rights Lab research programmes and civil society, business and government, and our INSPIRE project elevates survivor-informed research as a key part of knowledge production to help end slavery.[5]

The Salvation Army: The Salvation Army is an international Christian church and charity which has been fighting against social inequality and transforming lives for over 150 years. We express our faith through charitable action by working at the heart of communities and we offer practical support and services to all who need them, regardless of their background. Our work includes: homelessness, poverty, anti-trafficking and modern slavery, addiction, older people services, community services and campaigning and social policy.

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[5] https://jliflc.com/resources/draft-anti-human-trafficking-modern-slavery-learning-hub-terms-reference-tor/

IAHT Network

Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

University of Nottingham Rights Lab

THE SALVATION ARMY

Acknowledgments

Human trafficking is the illegal selling of human beings for the purpose of exploitation and financial gain – it is a crime that has thrived worldwide and the most abhorrent of our generation. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the trafficking trade with more and more people trapped in exploitation and modern-day slavery.

As such, we would like to thank all of those who participated in this research and that were able to shed light on the extent of human trafficking activities since the COVID-19 pandemic first began. We would like to thank those who responded to the survey and agreed to be interviewed, providing us with a comprehensive learning on how the international anti-trafficking sector has adapted to COVID-19. Finally, we express our sincere gratitude to the contributors, who gave their time and effort to make this research possible.

Acronyms

AHT
Anti-Human Trafficking

ATMS
Anti-Trafficking and Modern Slavery

COVID-19
Coronavirus 2019

FBO
Faith-based Organisation

IAHTN
International Anti-Human Trafficking Network

JLI
Joint Learning Initiative

NGO
Non-Governmental Organisation

PPE
Personal Protective Equipment

UK
United Kingdom

UoL
University of Leeds


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Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to share the findings from a project that was carried out by the International Anti-Human Trafficking Network (IAHTN), the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) and the University of Leeds (UoL) to gather evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on the international anti-trafficking response.

It comprised two phases: the dissemination of an online survey that received 47 responses, followed up by 13 semi-structured interviews carried out online. The contribution of this research is distinctive in two main ways.

First, while there is a wide-ranging emergent literature on this topic, the main focus so far has been upon the increased vulnerabilities that COVID-19 has given rise to as well as new methods of trafficking as perpetrators adapt to changing conditions. One distinctive aspect of the research presented here is its *focus on how COVID-19 has affected responses to trafficking and unsafe migration and on gathering information about effective responses to the challenges this has presented.*

The second distinctive contribution of this research is its *focus on how faith actors are responding to the increased pressure that COVID-19 has placed upon their anti-trafficking work.* While the majority of faith actors operate just like any other professional organisation working in this area, an understanding of the distinctive features that they might bring to their work is limited, particularly at the local level (Frame 2020).

The report begins with an exploration of published reports, findings from IAHTN webinars and academic and grey literature focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on trafficking in persons.

Key survey and interview findings are then highlighted, followed by a conclusion and recommendations.

We recommend that:

Responses to human trafficking and modern slavery should be strengthened and also integrated within emergency responses to humanitarian crises such as pandemics. For instance, this should include a rapid analysis of vulnerabilities when an emergency occurs and more awareness on human trafficking during a crisis.

The dissemination of awareness messages in the community that look at reducing health stigma, especially amongst marginalised groups such as migrant workers and sex workers, needs to be encouraged.

We found such groups were being blamed for spreading the virus and other health concerns.

As additional resources, such as phones and laptops, are now being sought to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, organisations who do not normally **explore partnership opportunities with private companies** should do so.

Local faith actors are primary responders to human trafficking and COVID-19 yet are often not recognised for this work. There is a need for anti-trafficking organisations to **seek ways of engaging with local faith actors, beyond the Christian FBOs** who are well known for their work on anti-trafficking as well as health improvement.

There is a need for **more research on the role of faith actors/activities** in anti-human trafficking work. We need to better understand: why Christians appear to dominate the faith-based response and in what ways actors from other faith traditions also contribute; the impact of faith activities in anti-trafficking work – from prayer as something not just focused on the transcendental but also as building individual and community resilience and the role it can play as a symbolic practice to effect social and political change; and how non-faith actors at the local level also engage with faith activities in their communities.

Introduction

COVID-19 has presented the world with unprecedented constraints, leading to new ways of carrying out our day-to-day activities. To reduce the spread of the virus, measures have been introduced including lockdowns, social distancing, travel restrictions and limitations on economic and public activities.

Although these enforcements have increased police visibility and possibly discouraged crimes, criminal activity continues behind closed doors. With respect to the trafficking of persons, criminals are adjusting their approaches, in particular by abusing modern technologies.

Given the restriction of movement, the reduction of social and public services and the diversion of law enforcement resources, victims of human trafficking have less chance of escape and of receiving help.

Negative effects of the virus are exacerbated in countries with high population densities, weak health services, significant numbers of returning migrants, corruption at various political levels and a high proportion of the population working in manufacturing.

Anti-trafficking organisations fear that once restrictions are lifted there will be a massive increase in migration and exploitation as people try to support their families, and this influx of labour will drive down wages and working conditions (Carvalho, 2020).

This fear was also discussed by NGOs taking part in a webinar organised by the IAHTN in May 2020, attended by its member organisations. One participant based in India said that as lockdown lifts he has a very strong sense that trafficking and modern slavery crimes will increase. He estimated that in India, about 70% of businesses use migrant labourers, and that out of 130 million migrant workers 60 million are displaced or have lost their jobs so now are returning home. To cope with compounded conditions of poverty, these migrants are borrowing more from contractors and agents to survive, which will lead to a major crisis in debt bondage nationwide, potentially the biggest ever seen, and more people will be forced into modern-day slavery.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began in early 2020, there has been a flurry of articles and reports reflecting concerns over the increased vulnerability of people to trafficking and modern slavery, and responses to this. These range from online articles on the websites of agencies and organisations that focus on human trafficking and modern slavery, as well as from newspapers and blogs (eg Carvalho 2020; Al Jazeera 2020; Redfern 2020), to longer reports and briefings (UNDOC 2020; Anti-Slavery International 2020; Sanchez and Achilli 2020; Hope for Justice 2020; Wagner and Hoang 2020; Walk Free Foundation 2020; Giammarinaro 2020) and peer-reviewed academic journal articles (Armitage and Nellums 2020; Molobe et al 2020; Trautrims et al 2020; Asongo and Usman 2020; Rafferty 2020; Somma de Castro 2020; Punaks and Lama 2020; Offa 2020; Kondrad 2020).

In Appendix 1 we provide an annotated bibliography. As the months have moved on, short impressionistic and responsive articles have been accompanied by reports and journal articles based on primary research, including surveys and other online research methods, and new research that has been funded is in the pipeline. For instance, in the UK the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy Evidence Centre has recently funded 17 research projects on human trafficking, modern slavery and COVID-19.[6]

[6] https://modernslaverypec.org/all-projects

Our contribution to this literature and research is to share the findings of a project that was carried out by the International Anti-Human Trafficking Network (IAHTN), the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) and the University of Leeds (UoL).

This research is distinctive in two main ways. First, while there is a wide-ranging emergent literature on this topic, the main focus so far has been upon the increased vulnerabilities that COVID-19 has given rise to, as well as new methods of trafficking as perpetrators adapt to changing conditions. One distinctive aspect of the research presented here is its focus on how COVID-19 has affected responses to trafficking and unsafe migration and on gathering information about effective responses to the challenges this has presented. It aims to share promising practices among NGOs internationally in order to better serve survivors and at-risk populations and to inform advocacy, policy and funding priorities.

The second distinctive contribution of this research is its focus on how faith actors are responding to the increased pressure that COVID-19 has placed upon their anti-trafficking work. Other studies have outlined how faith actors constitute a significant portion of the anti-human trafficking sector and this was confirmed by the fact that 27 out of the 47 responses to the online survey that we distributed were from faith actors (Lonergan et al 2021; Frame et al 2019; Frame 2020). Faith actors were not specifically sought out to participate in the research, apart from circulating the survey to the members of the JLI which does have a higher proportion of faith actor members than the other organisations and networks that disseminated the survey. However, only four respondents received the survey from the JLI. While the majority of faith actors operate just like any other professional organisation working in this area, an understanding of the distinctive features that they might bring to their work is limited, particularly at the local level (Frame 2020).

Methodology

An online survey (see Appendix 2 for survey questions) was jointly designed by the IAHTN, the Rights Lab at Nottingham University, Anti-Trafficking and Modern Slavery Hub at the Joint Learning Initiative, the University of Leeds and Walk Free. The survey was distributed to member organisations of the IAHTN and the JLI such as the Global Learning Community (GLC), European Freedom Network (EFN) and Freedom Collaborative whereby participants had one month to respond.

In total we received 47 responses from various anti-trafficking faith and non-faith-based NGOs and charities in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas, the Caribbean and Oceania.

We then contacted a selection of the respondents for follow-up online interviews to understand further about how COVID-19 had impacted their context of work. We carried out 13 semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3 for discussion guide) with both faith and non-faith actors, each lasting between 30-60 minutes. These interviews were then transcribed and analysed.

Prior to interviews taking place, participants were asked to sign a consent form, and at the start of each interview participants were reminded of the ethical issues involved in the research.

The research was approved by the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee. The IAHTN held three webinars with its members on the impact of COVID-19 on their work, which were recorded and transcribed. The IAHTN also distributed preliminary survey findings to their members through the IAHTN newsletter (Appendix 4).

Outline of Report

This report commences with an exploration of published reports, findings from IAHTN webinars and academic and grey literature focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on trafficking in persons. Key survey and interview findings are then highlighted, followed by a conclusion and recommendations for next steps.

Impact of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons

In this section we provide a thematic overview of the key areas where COVID-19 has had an impact on trafficking in persons. It includes information from academic and grey literature,[7] and some findings from the IAHTN webinars.

The literature that we consulted is included in the annotated bibliography in Appendix 1. Our findings are organised under the following headings: Loss of Livelihoods, Health Risks, Changes in Migration Patterns and Repatriation, Domestic and Online Exploitation, Supply Chain Risks, Reduced Services and Responses of Organisations.


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Loss of Livelihoods

The pandemic has increased economic instability with millions of people losing their jobs (Anti-Slavery International, 2020). The garment industry in Bangladesh and India for instance has cancelled orders and halted trading, resulting in one million workers being laid off or temporarily suspended (ibid).

An NGO representative taking part in a network webinar confirmed that there are problems with companies cancelling orders and not paying for or demanding discounts on orders of garments, which is passing the problem down the line to the most vulnerable individuals and resulting in workers being unpaid and unemployed. Another participant reported similar patterns in Cambodia, where thousands of migrants working in factories in Thailand and within the country have lost their jobs.

Women in particular are more likely to lose their jobs given the nature of the sectors they work in or they are unable to go to work due to an increase of household duties and childcare as a result of lockdown (Wenham, Smith and Morgan, 2020).

An NGO representative taking part in a network webinar discussed how most individuals losing their jobs from garment manufacturing are women, sending them into desperate situations where they are at higher risk of exploitation, prostitution and engaging in more dangerous sex work for income.

NGO representatives participating in a network webinar also highlighted that loss of income for migrant workers will have a significant negative impact on their families who are often reliant on remittances, and this may put these individuals at greater risk of trafficking and exploitation as they seek supplementary income. Both migrants and their families are now unable to repay the loans they have taken out in anticipation of repaying them with wages.

[7] Grey literature refers to material that is produced by organisations outside of academic and commercial publishing. It can include reports, working papers or minutes from meetings, for instance, and may be published as well as unpublished.

Cross-border travel has been restricted, preventing migrant workers from returning home (Cockayne and Smith, 2020). They are stranded in their host county/city with very little means to support themselves as many are reliant on their employers. In Malaysia, for example, migrant workers have not been receiving their pay since February 2020 in anticipation of the lockdown.[8]

An NGO representative taking part in a network webinar discussed how hundreds of millions of migrant workers in India were stranded without transport or identification documents after the April 2020 lockdown. Another representative raised how in other countries, stranded migrant workers who are unable to return home are overstaying their visas and many are unable to repay their recruitment debts. Others are paying exorbitant fees to return home since borders are closed.

A participant from India particularly highlighted that migrants are borrowing more from agents and others, and will continue to borrow to survive, which will lead to a major crisis in debt bondage nationwide (potentially the largest the country has ever seen) and forced slavery. An additional risk posed to migrants was data and privacy issues involved in track and trace efforts, which are required by law in some countries. Some tracking applications require smartphones, which some migrants don't have, restricting their ability to move around.

These effects of the pandemic increase vulnerability to unsafe migration and human trafficking among those becoming more desperate in seeking income, while criminal networks are using the opportunity to prey on this increased vulnerability.

Health Risks

Poor living and working conditions make migrant workers susceptible to catching COVID-19 and access to health care can be a challenge, especially for workers who are of undocumented status (Armitage and Nellums, 2020). A participant in a network webinar confirmed that poor and crowded conditions in migrant dormitories were a major concern for migrant workers as well as dangerous working conditions – for example, being forced to work without proper personal protective equipment (PPE). While some countries are paying for migrants' health services, others are not.

The disparate access to medical care among migrant workers (especially those without documents) was repeatedly raised during network webinars as putting them at higher risk of contracting the virus.

Documented migrants have low access to sick leave and health care, while undocumented migrants are deterred from seeking medical help because of their immigration status. Furthermore, the impact on migrants' mental health from lockdown and concerns about remittances was also highlighted, with reports of increases in suicides among migrant workers in some countries.

[8] Webinar by Liberty Shared and USAID on 'Impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable migrant workers in Malaysia'. Date of Webinar: 29 April 2020.

Changes in Migration Patterns and Repatriation

Movement restrictions have not stopped the migration of vulnerable people. For example, many boats have continued to depart from Libya carrying migrants (Sanchez and Achilli, 2020). Instead, the pandemic and increased restrictions will drive irregular migration and human trafficking even further underground into more precarious, unknown, expensive and dangerous channels less likely to be identified by authorities.

In fact, some argue that uncertainty could increase the demand for smuggling and some may attempt to travel without a smuggler (Interpol, 2020). This will leave migrants and other groups even more vulnerable to exploitation and less accessible to service providers as well as aiding the spread of the virus.

NGO representatives taking part in network webinars highlighted the variety of government approaches to repatriating migrant workers. In some countries these efforts have been positive, helping migrants return home with flights and cancelling visa penalties.

In other countries, repatriation has been slow or undertaken without first testing migrants. Some countries have engaged in forced repatriations, expelling tens of thousands of irregular migrants. Origin countries were struggling to cope with processing, quarantining and providing services to returned migrants.

This complex process has raised the need to address whose responsibility it is to provide basic services to migrants between origin and destination countries and employers.

In addition, migrants and vulnerable groups are often subject to discrimination and xenophobia, leading to violence and abuse from the host community (Walk Free Foundation, 2020). Participants in a network webinar confirmed that migrants who are returning home to their origin countries are facing stigma and discrimination about carrying the virus, which means further discrimination and isolation from their social networks as well as health care and other services.

Communities surrounding quarantine centres are sometimes angry about these centres being set up (as perhaps they have not been properly consulted about this) and can be hostile. It is crucial to develop protocols to receive and provide services for returning migrants as well as for employers of migrant workers.

A participant in a network webinar raised that many migrants are moving straight to large cities after returning home to find work. Another discussed that despite the trauma of being forcibly repatriated by their host countries, many migrants were attempting to immediately cross irregularly back into these countries.

Domestic and Online Exploitation

It is evident that human traffickers and criminal gangs are adjusting their recruitment methods as a result of the pandemic. Equality Now (2020) indicates that perpetrators are taking advantage of online forums to groom their victims for online sexual exploitation, many of whom are minors. Since lockdown began, schools have been closed and children have been spending more time online as much of classes and teaching is conducted over the internet.

One NGO in India who took part in a network webinar discussed a huge increase in calls received by child helplines since lockdown and reports a 95% increase in child pornography viewing online. Another representative noted that domestic violence has risen dramatically, by 100% in some cases.

As parents are also working from home, children are left online with minimal supervision making them vulnerable to being exposed to offenders through various means such as gaming and chat groups (Europol, 2020). Anti-trafficking organisations are concerned that the pandemic has increased risks of child-trafficking activities and exploitation. Children who were previously cared for and fed in schools are now at home where they are more vulnerable to abuse and being put to work to earn money for the family in the context of loss of incomes (Giammarinaro, 2020).

Child labour and human trafficking will likely increase as children are sent to seek work in cities and other countries for this purpose or to flee domestic violence at home. Parents may also be more likely to marry off female children to decrease the burden on family expenses with less scrutiny on the husband (Giammarinaro, 2020; Carvalho, 2020). Those who have been trafficked are unable to seek help; for example, forced brides in China are less able to leave their houses or enter embassies.

Similarly, others argue that domestic workers are also at risk of further exploitation and abuse as a result of being confined at their employers' homes. One NGO representative taking part in a webinar raised anecdotal evidence that some individuals were attempting to sell their domestic workers online. Since families are at home more than usual, it is likely that working hours for domestic workers have extended and many are prone to physical and sexual abuse (Council for Foreign Relations, 2020).

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Supply Chain Risks

Participants in a network webinar highlighted the risks involved in companies switching to new markets and in the disruption of existing checks and balances in supply chains such as auditing. They highlighted a need to explore how these measures can be adapted and restarted during and after the crisis.

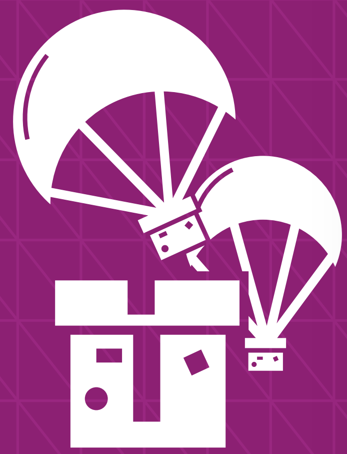
A related issue raised by some webinar participants is that in the context of economic challenges, governments are releasing restrictions on labour laws to stimulate economies, allowing cuts in salaries and early terminations of contracts.

Reduced Services

Essential and practical ways to support trafficked victims and survivors have become a challenge for service providers. Wagner and Hoang (2020) find that restriction of movement and lockdown has reduced face-to-face contact with survivors and there are risks that contact can be lost altogether, placing survivors at greater vulnerability and possibility of re-trafficking.

NGOs taking part in a network webinar raised the challenge of ensuring continuity in care for survivors in community-based care because of the suspension of field work, as well as for clients who were ready to return to their families but have now had their reintegration disrupted, which causes additional psychological problems. There is the additional challenge of ensuring the health and safety of staff who are still providing services in shelters.

It is also very difficult to reach migrants or victims who have been stranded or abandoned by their exploiters. In addition, because of the movement of people (especially women) from cities to safer village areas, it will be harder for NGOs to contact and support these individuals during and after lockdown. Webinar participants also highlighted how community-based prevention and advocacy activities have been suspended.



Some service providers may not be fully equipped to respond to the sudden surge in demand. The services offered are also dependent on funds in which several NGOs and providers have experienced cuts (Redfern, 2020), preventing the opportunity to operate at a full scale.

During network webinars participants raised this challenge, noting that most donors had not opened new sources of funding for human trafficking responses to the virus. Donors and governments are reviewing their policies and programming responses and are in need of research and information from NGOs on the ground to inform this moving forward.

Trafficked survivors face the challenges of self-isolation and social distancing, especially in shared accommodation such as a safe house or shelter (Anti-Slavery International, 2020). Armitage and Nellums (2020) further indicate that safe distancing measures and lockdowns have limited the ability of law enforcement, NGOs and health workers to identify and access vulnerable or exploited groups, contributing to a rise in trafficking and a jump in 'unmet physical and psychological needs in an invisible group of all genders and ages'.

Furthermore, participants in a webinar discussed how government funds and efforts are being channelled to health services, putting law enforcement and protection on the backburner. This means a significant disruption in cases and prosecution that will be challenging to reestablish.

Responses

NGOs taking part in network webinars discussed how they have adapted to the global pandemic. Many have focused mainly on meeting the basic needs of vulnerable populations through food, hygiene and medical support. Others have been assisting the government with assessing and providing basic services to returning migrants, including translation, mental health assessments and coaching for social workers.

Responses among faith-based and non-faith-based organisations were fairly similar, although it was noted that church congregations in Singapore were active in providing individuals who were able to translate for migrant workers. Such examples have been further echoed by faith-based organisations taking part in a webinar. In the Philippines, for instance, churches are supporting migrant workers with online applications that will allow them to access support.

In Malaysia, churches are distributing food in dormitories where migrant workers are accommodated. In addition, faith-based organisations are also responding by providing cash-based interventions for vulnerable groups, transport assistance for migrant workers and online monitoring with beneficiaries. Some organisations have been working to help health workers incorporate trafficking issues into their COVID-19 responses at both the country and regional level, providing specialised guidance, for example, on how to prioritise livelihood programmes for those most vulnerable to trafficking. Others are working with government policies in this area. Savings groups have been adapted so that savings and withdrawals can be made on an individual basis.

Photo by Srimathi Jayaprakash on Unsplash

One organisation noted that with women who previously worked in brothels now at home, there is a small positive window of opportunity to encourage these women to pursue alternative sources of income, and they are working with these women to create future plans for work.

Many NGOs have leveraged technology in their response to the virus, for example by creating chats to update migrants or survivors with key information in their native languages, communicate and connect individuals to services as needed, for example through local authorities who can better access these groups directly. Some training is also being done via Zoom and other online platforms. Follow-up visits are conducted by phone instead of in person. Despite some providers moving their operations online such as helplines and online counselling, these may only be possible for survivors with internet access (UNODC, 2020). Other NGOs participating in network webinars have used billboards and radio to spread information on trafficking in this context.

On the supply chain side, an NGO representative taking part in a webinar discussed how their organisation is working with fashion companies to hold them accountable to their actions during the crisis, especially in relation to cancelling orders, and encouraging companies to post something specific about modern slavery on their social media.

Survey and Interview Findings

This section highlights the key findings from the survey and interviews. We received 47 responses to the survey and carried out 13 follow-up interviews. The overarching research question we wanted to explore was 'How has the international anti-trafficking response adapted to COVID-19?'

One limitation of the data is that the survey respondents and interviewees were mostly from formal NGOs, international (58%) and local (26.1%), with none from locally led community based-groups or government. Therefore the findings are not representative of the wider anti-trafficking sector.

48.9% ASIA

38.3% AFRICA

38.3% EUROPE

A further limitation is that most participants worked in Asia (48.9%), Africa (38.3%) or Europe (38.3%) which again is not representative of anti-trafficking work at the global level. The survey was only produced in English, which will have restricted participation by some respondents. See Appendix 5 for further demographic information of survey participants.

A unique feature of this research, compared with other projects, was to intentionally include questions directed at faith actors working in the field of anti-trafficking. However, as with the characteristics of the respondents overall, this research only captured data about international and local faith-based organisations (FBO) rather than local faith actors, whose work is more informal and may not be self-identified as related to MSHT. This is a neglected area of research.

Twenty-seven of the survey respondents and five interviewees identified as faith-based. Four out of 27 of these survey respondents identified themselves as from a 'religious institution / place of worship', with the remaining 23 identifying as from international and local NGOs.

We know from cross-checking the names of the organisations that identified as 'religious institution / place of worship' that only one was a local faith actor, the others being representatives of large international church-based organisations.

Out of the four interview respondents who identified themselves as from a 'religious institution / place of worship', one of those was not a FBO.

This could be an error or may reflect the ambiguity in the use of the term FBO, where its meaning and use varies widely (see Tomalin, 2012). We know from other studies that some organisations choose not to use the term FBO for a range of reasons, including hostility to faith actors generally or of their tradition in the locations where they work or fear of being branded as actively engaging in proselytisation alongside their other activities (Tomalin, 2012).

We begin this section with an overview of the findings from all participants according to the following thematic areas: changes in exploitation and services, accessing beneficiaries/ stakeholders, adapting to the impact of COVID-19, outcomes of new or changed programmes and new programmes and responses. We follow this with a section that focuses on the findings from the questions posed to faith actors.

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Changes in Exploitation and Services

Trafficking and Exploitation

To understand changes in trafficking in persons and exploitation as a result of the pandemic, survey participants were asked: *'Have the ways people are being exploited changed as a result of COVID-19?'*

Sixty-six percent of participants agreed COVID-19 had had an impact on trafficking and exploitation trends whilst 27% did not know and 6% did not feel there had been any changes.

To understand further the nature of changes in trafficking in persons and exploitation, participants highlighted the following observations in the narrative sections of the survey and in follow-up interviews

Online Exploitation

In general, a high proportion of participants stated that the internet has been utilised for various means which has led to a surge in trafficking and exploitation activities.

Perpetrators have enhanced their recruitment of victims on the internet and one participant noted that the internet was being used to *"reach out to isolated communities to recruit and traffick people"*.

Once recruited, victims are sexually exploited or abused online and this is usually live streamed for others to access. Survey participants further stated that women and children in prostitution have *"moved from street life to online"*, triggering an illegal online business and a rise in streaming of pornography.

Similar trends were identified in follow-up interviews. Several participants across different regions indicated the rise in online recruitment, especially for sexual exploitation. School closures and children spending more time online for their classes were thought to be reasons for this increase:

"When schools were closed, children were being asked to go online for their lessons and that exposed them to interacting with the perpetrators" (Interview Participant, Malawi).

"The kids are back at school but even still [they] are spending more time online and during lockdown they were spending more time online ... we did see an increase in attempted child sexual exploitation in people connecting and grooming with students" (Interview Participant, Thailand).

One interview participant also supported survey findings in that the web was being used to grow the sex trade:

"Women are used on web sex cams so they're moving up completely to the online world which is done completely off the radar. They just need a wall, a bed and a camera" (Interview Participant, UK).

Technology has contributed to maintaining modern slavery and human trafficking activities even during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, there is evidence that in the UK physical meetings between survivors and clients are still taking place:

"What we've also noticed [during the lockdown] is the victims being taken to clients' addresses, so they are driven to and from bookings rather than clients coming to them. In some brothels, especially... we're noticing that they've adapted the way the actual brothel operates in terms of they have temperature scanners, hand gel and face masks. So, as you walk in immediately you have the right signs and instructions on what to do ... we're noticing that a smokescreen is being created that this is a well and healthy working brothel and the customers can rest assured that when they come in they'll be COVID-19 free" (Interview Participant, UK).

Child Labour

With schools closed, survey participants raised concerns of an increase in child labour/child trafficking. Vulnerable families may have lost jobs, with many encouraging their children to find work and support the family "either domestically or selling items on the street" (survey participant). Another participant identified that "[children] are working for places like quarries where they are doing challenging physical labour to help get a small income for their parents". Participants are also concerned that children are being sold as brides to reduce the financial burdens in the household. One interviewee stated that growing numbers of children and young people were being coerced into forced marriage:

"A trend which I'm sure is also familiar in other places, but for us is in cases of early and forced marriage, for young people to be taken overseas on holidays to be married, and of course, with travel restrictions, that hasn't been happening...

...I think the threat to forced marriage and the risk of it is still there, just whether or not the actual marriage can occur. We have seen some more religious ceremonies taking place which wouldn't be constituting marriage in Australia but do according to custom and tradition" (Interview Participant, Australia).

These findings suggest the negative economic impact of COVID-19 on families, especially for those who are from low-income backgrounds. In the struggle for survival, children are being exposed to risky employment and many are being sold as brides. Traffickers are exploiting the economic consequences of the pandemic and preying on vulnerable families by offering them false opportunities for their children, but in reality, creating a path for child trafficking and exploitation.

Unemployment

Loss of jobs and unemployment has been another impact of COVID-19 identified by survey participants, which could make people more vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation. Some participants indicated that migrant workers in particular were affected by unemployment.

A survey participant exemplified this, stating that "lots of workers on the move who were previously in Thailand have flooded back to Cambodia just before the borders closed.

They are unemployed and getting increasingly desperate". Perpetrators have used such conditions to their advantage to recruit the unemployed for various forms of trafficking and exploitation. Survey participants also note that some migrant women who have lost their jobs are resorting to illegal means such as "survival sex" and prostitution.

One interview participant observed the abuse of governmental schemes in which these have been claimed through survivors of forced labour:

"What we have then noticed in the labour side is the abuse of the furlough scheme has increased. We're talking about bad, bordering criminal employment, they're given an average of £450 a month. Now, from [the victims'] reports they said that their basic take home is about £1,000 a month so we know they're only getting 40%, 50% of their actual income, but [the victims] are told that that's their 80%, which means that the 30%, 40% difference goes straight to the traffickers or to the exploiters" (Interview Participant, UK).

People Seeking Services

To understand whether COVID-19 had impacted people seeking assistance and support, survey participants were asked, 'Has there been a change in the number of people seeking services?' More than half of participants had seen an increase in people seeking services (55%) whilst 27% claimed there was no change and 17% had seen a decrease.

Financial Support

Several survey participants indicated there was an increase in people seeking financial assistance possibly due to many losing their jobs and lack of economic stability.

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Necessities

Basic necessities were also another form of support identified by survey participants - people were in need of things like food and medication. One survey participant stated: "Brothels are in complete lockdown in Bangladesh. Women who live in the brothels are requiring increase of food, hygiene and medicine." Another participant indicated that "people are coming from the community and asking for help and other types of support including rent, food and psychosocial support". Some participants also mentioned people were seeking shelter support.

Several interview participants expressed that their focus had shifted slightly to responding to COVID-19 within the community. A few organisations were able to receive additional funding to support their COVID-19 response:

"Donor X gave us a million bars of soap that we distributed [with] messaging about the importance of handwashing ... [We got a cash donation from Donor Y] and we're using that to assist government workers in Yangon, because they're migrants, they often live in factory-provided dormitory accommodation and so once the factories stop working and they're not being paid ... [our garment sector project has also received additional money for COVID-19 response]" (Interview Participant, Myanmar).

"We did get funding from government who fund our regular programming quite quickly, which was great; they were very responsive and recognised the needs of our trafficking clients ... In Bangladesh the protection team and anti-trafficking team were being offered funding constantly, but we couldn't spend money because there was nothing we could actually do" (Interview Participant, Australia and Bangladesh).

Others indicated the difficulty in receiving funds and resources, given that there has been a shift in response as a result of COVID-19:

"We couldn't get support, every government attention [is] going to COVID-19 eradication so they couldn't support [us]. Thank God for some development partners who actually came to [our] aid, who realised that, no, the victims of trafficking [also] need support" (Interview Participant, Nigeria).

> As NGOs we don’t get any subsidy from our government. We purely have got to rely on external aid. And so unfortunately also it seems the focus for most of our donors, most of our sponsors, the focus has changed because they’re also having to respond to the shocks created by COVID-19 in their own respective countries” (Interview Participant, Malawi).

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“We lost a huge donor. Our major donor was in aviation” (Interview Participant, Indonesia). The above excerpts suggest that anti-trafficking NGOs are shifting not only to respond to trafficking issues but also providing COVID-19 support for vulnerable communities, which may decrease their risk to trafficking. In some locations, separate funds and resources are being allocated for a COVID-19 response that organisations can apply for.

In other locations, local funding is scarce, and many are having to rely on external aid which may not be readily available. As such, receiving additional resources can also depend on the relationships that an organisation has with their partners or stakeholders as well as how well equipped national or local governments may be.

Other Services

Interview participants further expressed evidence of intersectional impacts of COVID-19 and, in the long term, this could see a rise in people seeking specialised support and services. Some intersectional impacts included a rise in gender-based violence or domestic violence and an increase in mental health issues:

“Certainly, we are seeing an increase in gender-based violence, partly because of economic pressure. We are seeing some difficulties of female garment workers who move to Yangon which is like the commercial capital and they’ve had to go back to the place of origin without work” (Interview Participant, Myanmar).

“We had students who felt isolated, felt very lonely, who were looking for a bit more support than perhaps normally they’d be a bit more independent but were feeling very vulnerable and a bit lonely and isolated during that time” (Interview Participant, Thailand).

Although there was little evidence from the interviews to suggest that these impacts were being seen amongst survivors of trafficking, literature indicates that this may be on the rise especially for domestic workers who are confined in the private space and prone to physical and sexual violence (Council for Foreign Relations, 2020).

One interview participant highlighted that although access to healthcare in Indonesia was quite straightforward, women working in the red-light districts were in fact being denied access because of stigma associated with their work:

"Women in the red-light district where they're working aren't even being allowed to go to the clinics that are open because of the stigma of their work. So I think maybe people are just that much more worried about COVID-19, and they feel like these women because of what they do and their work is at high risk, and don't want them here in case they have COVID-19. We've had some people that have been denied medical treatment and healthcare" (Interview Participant, Indonesia).

This suggests the assumption that some members of society, usually those who are marginalised, will carry and spread the virus to the rest of their community. For example, The Walk Free Foundation (2020) highlighted that migrant populations were particularly subjected to xenophobia and discrimination as they were thought to carry the virus, often leading to violence and abuse from their host communities. There are concerns that marginalised groups, including trafficked persons, may not seek services or support in fear of being discriminated against, therefore concealing the true effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on these groups.

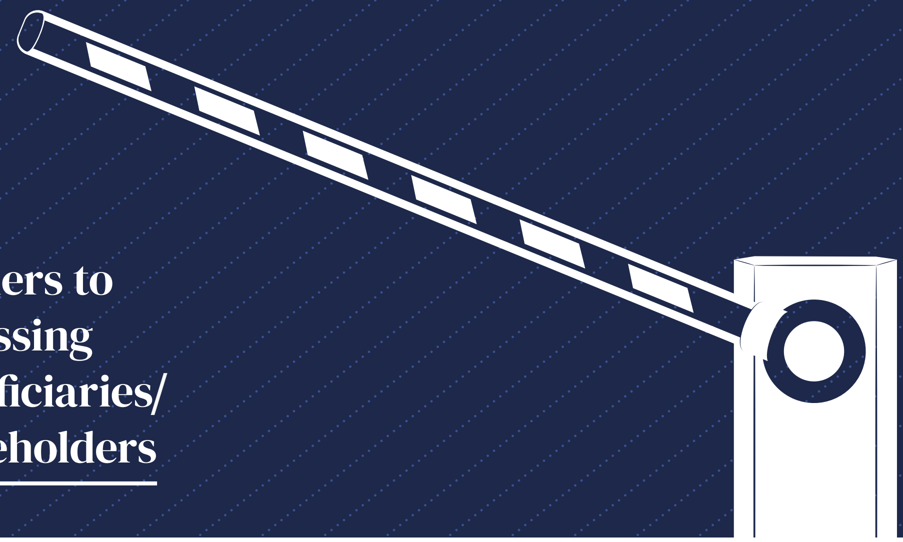
Despite some services that trafficked survivors have been able to gain access to, these are being delayed as a result of the pandemic. For instance, court cases are being put on hold, thus delaying justice for the survivors:

"There's a perception that older people are more at risk of getting COVID-19, and so the trend I think in most of the courts is that most of the judges, the magistrates are a bit older, they are above 50 so most of them are having to shun court sessions on the understanding that they are prone to getting COVID-19. So, we keep getting adjournments and sometimes it's not even justified, they don't even give you a reason, you just hear that it's been adjourned to a later date" (Interview Participant, Malawi).

"We are working with the government institutions to provide adequate legal support in taking traffickers to court, the cost of getting their property, in getting justice and restitution where necessary for the victims of trafficking. [But] many court cases are put on hold, courts are not in session [and have not resumed]" (Interview Participant, Nigeria).

An interview participant from the UK illustrates slightly different observations in that during the lockdown, the UK justice system have been able to focus on more complex cases such as trafficking and criminal networks:

"Low-impact, high-volume crimes like your burglaries and your sheds and your thefts, because people have been at home we've noticed a drop on those, which meant that the police had the time to focus on some of the more complex low-volume but high-impact crime such as domestic abuse, especially with the lockdown and the difficulty to get the victims out of a situation. Also, the ability to develop more information and intelligence around criminal networks operating" (Interview Participant, UK).



Barriers to Accessing Beneficiaries/ Stakeholders

Ninety-eight per cent of survey participants indicated that they had experienced barriers to accessing beneficiaries/stakeholders as a result of COVID-19. When asked to outline the key barriers that they have faced, a high proportion of survey participants indicated barriers to travel and conducting face-to-face visits both with beneficiaries and the community.

Lockdown, restriction of movement and social distancing have all prevented participants from travelling, especially to at-risk communities, therefore limiting outreach activities and communication: "The lockdown in Indonesia is restricting movement and has hindered some of our staff ability to visit the community."

"Because we are unable to travel, we cannot do follow-up visits, we are aware that there are a number of children who need additional income generation support back in their communities, but we are unable to do this... Lockdown restrictions and social distancing have created barriers in meeting others and in providing first-hand support."

A few survey participants also indicated technology and internet literacy as a barrier in accessing beneficiaries/stakeholders. In addition, all survey participants faced barriers to accessing beneficiaries of various backgrounds, especially adult females and minors, as a result of COVID-19.

Similar barriers were identified by interviewees. Given such barriers in accessing beneficiaries, some participants mentioned new methods of providing support to them:

"We definitely focused a lot more on following up, phoning, chatting to people online with the students we work with to provide that kind of psychosocial support" (Interview Participant, Thailand).

"[We're] placing Facebook and Instagram ads where potential survivors will find them offering free trauma courses and things like that and [we've] got about 30 women doing that" (Interview Participant, Romania and EU).

"What we do have that's slightly unusual is that [we've started offering] counselling in [the beneficiaries'] first language, so we've vetted and built a directory of counsellors from over 20 languages, both males and females" (Interview Participant, UK).

Stakeholder and Partnerships

In some locations, partnership development was deemed to be significant in supporting communities and mobilising resources during the pandemic. Although engagement has been largely web-based, several interviewees identified several new partnerships that they formed as a result of COVID-19:

"We are trying to establish a network in Blantyre. Of course, before that I must say that we have engaged and are trying to [create] a partnership with the Malawi Congress of Trade Unions and the Teachers Union of Malawi. [Our partnership with them is to end or advance] in getting government to prioritise children to end child trafficking, child labour and child marriages in their responses to COVID-19" (Interview Participant, Malawi).

> **"There is a new coalition of organisations working together to specifically support migrant workers. It was really great to see [the coalition] come together so quickly in responding to COVID-19 and in mobilising those resources to be distributed" (Interview Participant, Thailand).**

"I think the COVID-19 environment has helped Romanian organisations to talk to one another and work together better. So, there's been a task force set up there that we're part of" (Interview Participant, Romania and EU).

When interview participants were asked what the partnership involved, several indicated that this was based on coordinating their efforts, such as reaching out to communities and distributing basic necessities to prevent them from being in a situation where they are vulnerable or at risk of being trafficked. Other activities included delivering training within the community, developing and building capacity of volunteers and follow-ups within the community. One participant further stated that partnerships were also formed as a result of receiving grants from a partner to implement COVID-19 responses.

Adapting to the Impact of COVID-19

Additional Resources for a Response

When survey participants were questioned if they required additional resources as part of their initial response, 85% of participants agreed this to be the case in the context of their work. We can further observe that additional resources were required for survey participants working across the various beneficiary groups – this was most common with survey participants working with adult women and minors. What is also significant is that additional resources were also required for those working with people with disabilities. Across the responses, the following were identified as being the key additional resources required.

Technology

Overall, survey participants claimed mobile phones, laptops and internet data as the main additional resources required. The purpose of requiring additional technology was so that, firstly, staff could work from home (and have online meetings), and secondly, to maintain communication and conduct outreach and case management with beneficiaries over the internet.

Protection

Protective equipment such as hand sanitisers, soaps, gloves, buckets, masks and PPE were also required by a high proportion of survey participants. Such equipment was to be utilized when activities resumed in the community and at accommodations that supported migrant workers.

Food / Food Packages

Survey participants further noted that there were additional requirements of food / food packages to be distributed to the community.

Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

Implementation of New or Changed Programmes as a Result of COVID-19

Survey participants were given the opportunity to share if they had implemented any new or changed programmes as a result of the pandemic. A high proportion of participants indicated that one of the key changes that they had implemented was using more of the online platforms and adapting their activities on to the internet:

"We are conducting online conferences on the COVID-19 response instead of [meeting] in person."

"We moved a lot of our programmes to online platforms, such as WhatsApp share groups, and Facebook sharing platforms to support the community." (Survey Participant)

"[We are using] virtual platforms for the coordination component of our programme."

"[We are doing] online classes and counselling."

Given that countries had implemented lockdown and restriction of movement rules, going online portrayed to be the most appropriate means to maintain communication between staff, beneficiaries and stakeholders as well as continuing momentum of anti-trafficking work with the community. Survey participants further justified using the online platform:

"We cannot stay without doing anything while the pandemic still affects [us] organizationally and personally. That is why we [conducted an] online conference and training to respond to the issue."

"To ensure our service users feel supported during the lockdown, and closely monitor their wellbeing as a safeguarding procedure."

"To encourage community members [and remind them] of reporting mechanisms and options. [It's also important] to maintain communication and contact with communities so that activities could be resumed following the lifting of restrictions."

"Due to the inability to meet and deliver training in person [there is] the ongoing need to build the capacity of humanitarian actors in Cox's Bazar on anti-trafficking."

"To maintain momentum with community members [and ensure] a continued coordination. Trafficking has not stopped, it is continuing. Therefore, AHT activities need to continue."

Another significant new or changed programme response identified by survey participants is adapting the current programme(s) to continue support for beneficiaries and/or educate targeted groups:

Shelter/Safe House Context

"We have two aftercare shelters for child victims of trafficking. These remain open but we have adjusted our programming ... and instituted safety measures at each of our aftercare centres, including daily infecting, temperature checks on entry and exit, as well as shift adjustments to minimize the number of people coming in and out." (Survey Participant)

"Our beneficiaries come from a state-run shelter home which is right next door to our project building. Despite the initial lockdown measures the beneficiaries continued to come to our centres. We limited 10 people at a time in our project, and the centre was well equipped with masks, soaps and hand sanitisers."

"We have had to stop all group activities at the centre. We have replaced this with individual counselling – and incorporating art therapy into this"

"We are doing more community-based aftercare so that we don't have a large group of children in one centre."

"The shelter for abused foreign domestic workers has developed a voluntary sewing of reusable face masks programme with the sponsor of sewing machines. The women were taught how to make these reusable masks ... thousands of these masks were deployed to the male migrant workers."

In general, survey participants wanted to ensure that safety measures were implemented in a shelter / safe house setting to protect both staff and beneficiaries from catching the virus, as well as trying to keep things 'normal'.

Outreach Support

"[We are conducting] weekly coronavirus care plans looking at physical/mental health, particularly impacts of isolation."

"All staff have been given extra phone credit so that they are able to constantly be in contact with women in our programme or outreach support."

"We have offered COVID-19 testing to beneficiaries."

"[We are doing] more personal and intensive work with women outside of a secure shelter."

Education and Awareness

"[We are doing] integrated awareness raising on COVID-19 ... increased efforts for gender-based violence prevention, rape, sex and corruption education. [We are also creating] simple messages through community radios to prevent child trafficking and migration."

"We spent the first few weeks trying to educate the community on COVID-19 prevention."

"[We are] trying out to implement prevention workshops through online resources."

"Increased advisory support given to work migrants to uncover trafficking and to prevent trafficking."

Participants who took part in follow-up interviews also indicated the significance of anti-trafficking awareness during the pandemic firstly to raise awareness on COVID-19 and the safety precautions to prevent catching the virus, and secondly to continue working with communities and educating them on the risks of false opportunities being offered during a time of a crisis.

Some non-faith actors who took part in the interviews highlighted that they were able to do prevention work to protect those who were vulnerable:

"[We are doing a] forced marriage prevention project ... We use a self-identification approach, so communities identify that forced marriage is an issue for them and we work with community liaisons who are employed as part of the project" (Interview Participant, Australia and Bangladesh).

"We've been doing a lot of public information, so there's a lot of languages in Myanmar, so we've been working with XZ [who] has translated main messages into, I want to say 18 but it may be 20, local languages for broadcast. So, people are broadcasting those messages, either on local radio stations or you get people going around with loudspeakers" (Interview Participant, Myanmar).

However, prevention was not only based on sharing awareness messages and educating the community.

One participant stated that ensuring vulnerable families had basic necessities was also a means to prevent them from the risks of modern slavery and human trafficking:

"A group of the most at-risk families [were identified] that had basically teenage girls. And these were people that were already in desperate poverty. So [we] ended up doing a similar food project. I'm wanting to see them not just through the pandemic but even after the pandemic, knowing that those particular girls were super, super high risk to be trafficked in the next few years" (Interview Participant, Indonesia).

A handful of survey participants also identified distribution of food packages and basic materials, particularly amongst vulnerable individuals/communities and those who may have lost their jobs as a result of COVID-19:

“We have implemented a COVID-19 emergency response fund ... it focuses on giving basic relief to bridge lockdown for the communities most vulnerable to exploitation in source countries. The fund provides food, basic supplies and PPE.” (Survey Participant)

“Once the Surabaya government went into lockdown, we transitioned our programme to a feeding programme since most in this community are day labourers and lost their already sparse income.”

“I am now in conversation with some of the girls in my town [about] getting a food parcel to them so they do not have to prostitute themselves.”

“Food parcel delivery [has] also expanded into our outreach into a new area with women of a different nationality.”

Survey participants explained reasons for distributing food packages and basic materials as part of their programme response:

“[There] are changing needs within communities and frontline requests for emergency support.”

“Government programmes for foods and supplies are moving slowly and are not for those who are legal residents, [whereas] the majority of whom we serve [are not legal].”

“More people [are going] hungry due to the lockdown as they rely on daily wages.”

Outcomes of New or Changed Programmes

When survey participants were questioned on what they thought the outcomes of their new or changed programme response was, just over half (53%) of participants claimed they had a positive impact, whilst 25% claimed this was negative and 38% did not know.

Positive Outcomes

Of those survey participants who responded that their new or changed programmes had had a positive response, many highlighted that this was because there was **greater communication** with both vulnerable people/ communities as well as other stakeholders leading to a development of **deeper relationships:**

Vulnerable Groups /Communities

“[The community members] are very grateful for the food and they do not need to spend their little money on that. We have grown into a better relationship with them through this time.”

“More contact with some of the women... we also help them with papers and even to find work.”

“Community members are continuing to respond and communicate with project staff.”

“Friendships have formed in our daily community Zoom calls. Some service users have become active since the bootcamp classes, and one of our service users has been teaching a weekly baking class.”

Photo by Nathaniel Tetteh on Unsplash

Stakeholders

"The emergency COVID-19 project is going well and bringing outreach organisations into more contact with victims."

"We have developed a much better relationship with our local government as we worked together on food distribution – we believe this will help us as we hope to engage in policy or advocacy around trafficking, sexual exploitation and early marriage."

"NGOs are working together to find answers to online outreach."

A handful of survey participants also indicated the positive outcome of distributing food and necessities, as this helped to **reduce vulnerability** of those with low incomes or who have lost their jobs:

"Reduced vulnerability of poor women and girls who may not afford to bring food on the table as they have lost their jobs and businesses."

"When it comes to humanitarian assistance, the vulnerable people were able to access basic needs."

"We have been providing food which really blessed some who were only eating one small meal a day. This has opened doors for us for connection and relationship."

Photo by Cok Wisnu on Unsplash

Negative Outcomes

In general, survey participants who indicated their current programme responses have had a negative outcome felt this was mainly due to not being able to meet physically. As a result, beneficiaries could not receive the appropriate support and care during this time:

"We cannot reach our beneficiaries and provide the right care and support."

"One negative is we cannot meet together – therefore you miss a lot by not being physically together and sensing what is going wrong for [the beneficiaries] ... We have the sense that we do not fully know what they are experiencing."

"[We are] not being able to do group work in the centre or reunification and follow-up in the community of girls who have exited. [This] is causing a serious problem for us. Being unable to accept new referrals also means that girls are not receiving the support they need."

"[The beneficiaries] are also suffering psychologically from separation from their support systems and the fear and uncertainties associated with the virus."

New Responses and Practices

To understand if there were any further responses and practices as a result of COVID-19, survey participants were questioned if they had observed any new responses or practices implemented by others (i.e. NGOs, government, community leaders etc). Here, only 34% of participants claimed they were aware of new responses or practices; 47% stated they did not know and 19% did not observe new responses. To understand which sectors or stakeholders had been implementing these new responses, a high proportion of survey participants indicated 'NGOs' whilst fewer participants felt 'businesses' were implementing new responses or practices.

Survey participants claimed that, in general, there has been a shift towards a humanitarian response such as the distribution of food and materials, and this was becoming a common practice across the different stakeholders. However, there have been some new responses and practices observed by survey participants and this included:

"**Increasing support** for foreign students who have now lost their jobs and struggling to pay for their studies as they get no support from authorities."

"**Government helplines** have become more active and publicised during this time, i.e. GBV helpline."

"**Fundraising appeals** for provisions to survivors and victims."

"Government has introduced and reinforced laws that if a child is assaulted or someone is using child labour, the perpetrator will receive punishment and charges."

"Nyumba Kumi Initiative[9] is going door-to-door to sensitise households/parents on not exploiting children through child labour (whilst children are not at school)."

"Some organisations are providing shelter to at-risk street children."

Photo by Dimitry B on Unsplash

[9] Nyumba Kumi Initiative is a community policing strategy at the household level in Kenya https://academic.oup.com/policing/advance-article/doi/10.1093/police/paaa004/5803158

These new responses and practices are predominantly emerging in Asia and Africa whilst there are fewer cases in Europe.

Given that many countries imposed lockdowns and restriction on movement, almost all non-faith actors who took part in follow-up interviews expressed difficulty in implementing their programmes as these had to be conducted either through other means, put on hold or stopped altogether. The pandemic has been a time of adjusting and adapting, especially through remote working practices and limiting face-to-face contact.

Interview participants were asked if they or their organisation would do anything different when responding to modern slavery and human trafficking as a result of COVID-19, to which several participants stated they would introduce or strengthen initiatives, or adapt to new ways of working:

“Capturing the victim’s feedback. So we started introducing voice recorders given to our victims where they can record a diary of their thoughts and feelings to try and understand what that day in a pandemic looked like for them” (Interview Participant, UK).

> “I would like to put more focus on rehabilitation and the reintegration because that’s one of the areas which is neglected. I think most of the organisations are responding to it on the surface. But what we have noticed and noted from the cases that we have taken to psychiatrists and the psychologists is that this is a deeper problem which must be given proper attention, but also integrating these people in their communities and give them something to do to reduce their vulnerability so that they don’t come back to be trafficked again. So, I would like to enhance that approach hand in hand with the raising awareness and sensitisation for prevention”
>
> (Interview Participant, Malawi)

“It’s a pathway that’s opened up to us now that people now know how to use, they’re not afraid of Zoom calls or anything like that. So, yeah, we’ll definitely keep doing that and it’s meant that we’re able to plan things differently, so instead of planning conference to conference which are a year, a year and a half apart, we can plan all different things in between because people are just more willing to be online” (Interview Participant, Romania and EU).

Interview participants were further asked whether the national or local government had implemented any COVID-19 and human trafficking responses within their context of work. Non-faith actors who took part in follow-up interviews portrayed a mixed response in whether their government or local authority were responding to modern slavery and human trafficking in time of the COVID-19 pandemic:

“In terms of responding to COVID-19 and to trafficking, we worked really closely with the [Thai] government. [They have a] network of health volunteers in the different communities, so we worked really closely with them to help monitor the situation in the villages, even when we couldn’t go in ourselves, to look out for things like domestic violence or neglect, particularly with vulnerable children” (Interview Participant, Thailand).

“We were able to get some funding [from the government] to be able to provide short-term emergency response to [migrants in Australia] but have been really heavily advocating for more systemic inclusion of migrants on temporary visas within those support frameworks, especially given the travel restrictions” (Interview Participant, Australia and Bangladesh).

“The [government] have not [responded to human trafficking during this time]. That’s a sad fact. I had a meeting with the minister for child labour and we wanted him to appreciate what the government responses are insofar as ending child labour is concerned. And lobbying them to prioritise children in their responses on COVID-19” (Interview Participant, Malawi).

“A lot of the people in the [government] anti-trafficking department got rescheduled and put into other places. The government [recently] passed through some law… [which] just makes it easier to support trafficking and traffickers. All the NGOs have got together and are complaining about it. So, the laws have been going backwards during COVID-19” (Interview Participant, Romania and EU).

Faith Responses

Profile of Faith Actors

Out of the 47 responses, 27 were from organisations that identify as faith-based. The majority of these faith actors self-identified as international NGOs (17) and only one as a 'local faith actor'. The fact that 57% of the survey respondents were faith-based likely reflects the high proportion of faith actors working in this field, although with such a small survey this percentage cannot be taken as representative of the whole sector.

While there could be a bias towards faith actors in the sample, only four of the respondents said that they received the survey from the JLI – an organisation that specifically aims to connect with faith actors.

However, out of the 27 faith actors, 26 of these were Christian and one Buddhist (the Buddhist participant received the survey from the JLI). Again, this could be the result of a bias towards Christian actors in the survey, with those from other faith traditions linked to networks that are not part of the IAHTN.

Given that the IAHTN is global and would likely partner with organisations from other faiths if identified, our suggestion is that the absence of respondents from other faith traditions could have more to do with the Christian response to anti-trafficking being more likely to take the form of internationally networked formal organisations intentionally working on human trafficking.

By contrast, we suggest that other faith traditions are engaged in anti-human trafficking, but that the response is informal, often at local level and not necessarily consciously articulated as working in the human trafficking area.

These local faith responses, which would also include Christians at the local level, are therefore not the natural partners of the IAHTN and its member organisations. This suggests the existence of parallel faith-based anti-human trafficking activity that is not networked into the wider terrain and about which we know very little.

For instance, our one Buddhist respondent was a local faith actor representative of a network of nunneries that have been set up in the Himalayas to provide education to girls, both secular and Buddhist.

While anti-trafficking is not consciously articulated as one of the goals and the nuns living in the monasteries do not as of yet engage in any anti-trafficking education nor are linked to anti-trafficking networks, the education that they provide to girls living in poverty makes them less vulnerable to kidnapping, coercion and arranged marriage.

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Engaging in Faith Activities

One factor that might differentiate faith actors from non-faith actors is whether their programming includes faith activities. Twenty-three of the faith respondents said that their programmes sometimes involved a faith activity and four said they did not.

These included prayer (21/91.3%), using religious texts (17/73.9%), collective worship (15/65.2%), singing (15/62.5%), engaging with religious leaders (13/56.5%), meditation (3/13%) and chanting (1/4.2%):

"We have sample sermons, yes, that can be used in the churches and we have extracted also various Bible texts that make reference to human trafficking for ease of them relating. We even have songs as well that we have selected and that go hand in hand with the theme of human trafficking and then Bible study guidance material as well" (Interview Participant, Kenya).

"...we also have Bible studies that are very much part of the training events that we do. So really trying to see where has God been in this story about slavery and trafficking throughout our faith history and our Scriptures? So a lot of unpacking of some of those stories, and also what's the vision for transformation that we see especially in the gospel but not restricted to that?"

A local NGO from Cameroon stated that they carried out "awareness creation in churches" and a local NGO in Tanzania "engaged with religious leaders"; an international organisation working in Uganda, USA and China said that "faith activities are not a formal part of the programme, but are offered to beneficiaries depending on their faith preference".

We need to know more about the impact of faith activities in anti-trafficking work – from prayer as something not just focused on the transcendental but also as building individual and community resilience and the role it can play as a symbolic practice to effect social and political change. to how non-faith actors at the local level also engage with religious leaders in their communities (Schwarz, 2018).

Engagement in Anti-trafficking Activities

For faith-based and non-faith-based organisations, activities targeted at prevention and awareness raising, and training / capacity building are the most significant activities, along with community-based support services and outreach / identification of services. However, significant differences exist in terms of four areas: research, policy and advocacy, social enterprise / freedom business and repatriation.

The non-faith based organisations are more likely to engage in research, policy and advocacy, social enterprise / freedom business and the faith-based significantly more likely to engage in 'repatriation'. The findings about policy and advocacy are supported by other research (e.g. Lonergan et al 2021). While the other differences cannot be taken as representative of the whole sector, due to the small scale of the project, explanations for the other areas would need further research.

Responding to COVID-19

Several of the faith actors interviewed use their links with churches to directly connect with communities in their work on prevention – as one respondent told us:

"Most religious leaders know what human trafficking is, but they couldn't exactly relate it to the day-to-day life, and so that's where our sensitisation forums really came in handy, to help them even identify that they could also be involved in human trafficking situations unknowingly, and even being used as aids or as people who are perpetrating the crime without knowing it" (Interview Participant, Kenya).

Faith leaders are often trusted community figures and can play a role in challenging norms and behaviours that might lead to trafficking and unsafe migration, and in identifying potential trafficked persons.

According to one of our faith-based respondents regarding gender-based violence or child exploitation:

"Most of the people in my setting would actually prefer to first get help from a church, either because they feel that that's the safest place they could go to or they think that maybe the religious leader is able to refer them to somewhere else that they can access" (Interview Participant, Kenya).

We asked interviewees about reports that some religious leaders had been discouraging people from taking advice seriously about how to avoid COVID-19. As one respondent told us:

"About faith healing – and we have heard reports of people, especially earlier in the pandemic, saying, 'Why are you wearing a mask, do you lack faith that God's going to protect you?'" (Interview Participant, UK).

However, another said that:

"I can't generalise them and say, "This is a Christian theory" or "a Muslim theory'; it's just more of individual pastors and individual religious leaders, not even, maybe not even the church or a certain congregation. So, it's just varying opinions, I would actually more call them opinions than theories of what people think COVID-19 is.

And especially because it's a very sporadic and highly infectious disease, so not very many people are understanding the whole science behind it. So there are those who choose to have religious opinions about it. Some will say it's a demonic attack, there are those who believe it's a spiritual attack, so then, others believe it's because the end of the world is near, so that's their religious opinion towards that. But really not, I wouldn't confine it to any congregation or any set of, you know, direct church or anything; it's just varying opinions of various religious leaders."

With COVID-19, places of worship have been closed so this work has not been able to continue. An interviewee from the UK said, "Because churches have been closed, we've lost that platform because a lot of it was happening through that church context."

This has forced religious leaders to adopt new methods of engaging with their communities. As one respondent told us:

"You've got people using radio, using TV platforms. Even one in Kenya I heard of who put a loudspeaker on his roof and says, 'My Land Rover is my safe space, and I'm going to drive around the villages and talk to people through my loudspeaker.' So people have been very creative" (Interview Participant, UK).

Where faith leaders have been able to reach communities, the focus has been on COVID-19 messaging around health and hygiene, shifting more recently to also include vaccine uptake. This raises an important point about local faith actors – that unlike other faith and non-faith-based anti-trafficking organisations, anti-trafficking is not their core business and the work they do in this area is likely to take a back seat to other priorities particularly when a crisis hits.

This points to the importance of building links with local faith actors to build their capacity in this area as well as that of anti-trafficking organisations in how to engage with faith actors in order to make the contribution of local faith to this field more sustainable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has explored the overarching research question 'How has the international anti-trafficking response adapted to COVID-19?' An online survey was distributed amongst several anti-trafficking networks and organisations, with follow-up interviews amongst participants from both faith-based and non-faith-based organisations.

Overall, participants identified COVID-19 as exacerbating human trafficking activities, especially online exploitation and child labour. With schools closed and classes taking place online, children were seen as an easy target for traffickers to coerce them into exploitative situations. Vulnerable families where parents have lost their jobs or livelihoods as a result of COVID-19 were also targeted by traffickers.

Throughout lockdown, there was an increase in many families and communities requiring support, to which participants in this study adapted their responses by distributing basic necessities such as dry foods / food packages, medication and health and sanitation products. This was firstly to ensure a means of survival and secondly to prevent families and communities from accepting risky opportunities, possibly offered by traffickers, in order to survive.

Participants faced several barriers in accessing their service users. Meeting face to face with survivors was a key challenge due to social distancing measures and restriction of travel imposed by various governments.

As such, online platforms were being used extensively to follow up and conduct counselling with survivors, for which research participants also sought additional resources such as phones for survivors to utilise. In contexts such as safe houses and accommodation for migrant workers, participants sought protective equipment such as hand sanitisers, soaps, masks and gloves to prevent people from catching the virus. Participants' working arrangements had also changed to working remotely using online platforms to keep in touch with colleagues, conduct online training and conferences and share human trafficking awareness messages to communities.

Adapting responses to COVID-19 was also dependent on funding where additional resources were sought by participants only if funding was available. Some participants expressed the availability of government grants and the ease of obtaining these. Others stated that government grants were difficult to receive in their local context given that much of the government efforts were focused on responding to COVID-19.

Faith leaders were able to use their links with churches to directly inform communities and carry out prevention work amongst them. As such, faith actors that took part in this survey stated that faith leaders were regarded as trusted members of the community and can play a role in challenging norms and behaviours that might lead to trafficking and unsafe migration.

Despite places of worship being closed as a result of COVID-19, the role of faith leaders has been significant in spreading awareness messages around health and hygiene. When a crisis hits, faith actors are likely to respond immediately, and thus it is beneficial for anti-trafficking organisations to build connections with faith actors (and vice versa) to develop capacity to ensure a sustainable contribution of local faith actors.

Based on the research findings, we have made the following recommendations:

- Responses to human trafficking and modern slavery should be strengthened and also integrated within emergency responses to humanitarian crises such as pandemics. For instance, this should include a rapid analysis of vulnerabilities when an emergency occurs and more awareness of human trafficking during a crisis.
- The dissemination of awareness messages in the community that look at reducing health stigma, especially amongst marginalised groups such as migrant workers and sex workers, need to be encouraged. We found such groups were being blamed for spreading the virus and other health concerns.
- As additional resources, such as phones and laptops, are now being sought to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, organisations who do not normally explore partnership opportunities with private companies should do so. Local faith actors are primary responders to human trafficking and COVID-19, yet are often not recognised for this work.

  There is a need for anti-trafficking organisations to seek ways of engaging with local faith actors, beyond the Christian FBOs who are well known for their work on anti-trafficking as well as health improvement.
- There is a need for more research on the role of faith actors/activities in anti-human trafficking work. We need to better understand: why Christians appear to dominate the faith-based response and in what ways actors from other faith traditions also contribute; the impact of faith activities in anti-trafficking work – from prayer as something not just focused on the transcendental but also as building individual and community resilience, to the role it can play as a symbolic practice to effect social and political change; and how non-faith actors at the local level also engage with faith activities in their communities.

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Appendix 1:
Annotated bibliography

Reports and Policy Briefs

1. **UNODC (2020): 'Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Trafficking in Persons'** **https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS_Thematic_Brief_on_COVID-19.pdf**

   This paper portrays how COVID-19 has made it more difficult to identify survivors and that there has been an increase in vulnerability to human trafficking and modern slavery. Survivors are exploited in illegal, informal and unregulated services which make them hidden in plain sight; there is also a lack of willingness by the survivors themselves to report their exploitation, or their inability to do so. Survivors are more prone to contracting the virus, less equipped to prevent it and have less access to healthcare. Essential and practical ways to support survivors have become a challenge. Rising unemployment has also increased vulnerability and exposure to exploitation. Domestic abuse is also on the rise, especially for domestic workers who are confined indoors with their employers. Closed borders mean that migrant workers are unable to return home. The situation can worsen if migrant workers have lost their jobs and cannot get access to public funds, health care and essential necessities. Undocumented migrants face precarious working and living conditions resulting in greater vulnerability to falling prey to criminal networks.

   Services provided online, such as helplines, may be the only possible option for survivors in such circumstances, but not all survivors will have internet access. Some providers may not be fully equipped to respond to the sudden surge in demand. Governments are diverting resources to respond to COVID-19 so investigating trafficking in persons will become a lower priority. Justice systems, interpretation and legal providers are limiting their services, which can pose barriers for survivors who are seeking compensation and court case outcomes.

2. **Anti-Slavery International (2020): 'Leaving No-One Behind'** **https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ASI_Leaving-noone-behind-April-2020-1.pdf**

   Anti-Slavery International identify five notable impacts of COVID-19 on slavery and human trafficking. These include:

- **Survivors of slavery facing new and increased risks** – challenges of self-isolation and social distancing. Shared facilities in accommodation (i.e. safe houses) and some providers have insufficient equipment. For survivors not in safe houses, they may have loss of face-to-face contact with support workers, increasing isolation and vulnerability. Higher risks of forced child begging, increased abuse/exploitation, forced labour in agriculture due to increased demand for food. COVID-19 crisis will provide particular businesses with opportunities to operate with forced labour.

- **Increasing vulnerability to slavery** – economic distress that bring risks (i.e. families will be pressed into bonded labour for survival). Lockdown has led to mass lay-off of staff and cancelled orders; the garment industry has particularly been affected (for instance, by late March 2020 a million workers in Bangladesh had been laid off or temporarily suspended). Unemployment will shrink income for workers and their families. Mass unemployment, high debt and little government safety net creates opportunities for human traffickers.

- **Worsening discrimination** – migrant workers returning to their homeland are facing a cold welcome. Despite their harsh journeys to even reach their home nation, many are being blamed for 'bringing the virus with them'. The return of migrants whose remittances have been crucial to family survival, will also put additional pressures on family and finances and reduce social distancing space, and increase infection risks. Caste prejudice is also likely to be reinforced.

- **Risks for migrant workers** – cannot access rights, in particular where they are undocumented. Limitations on the type of work migrants can do due to their status. Thus some get pushed into risky work situations where distancing and isolation are extremely difficult.

- **Disruption of anti-slavery efforts increased** – lockdowns that has been imposed have limited the work of anti-slavery organisations.

3. **Gabriella Sanchez and Luigi Achilli (2020) 'Stranded: The Impacts of COVID-19 on Irregular Migration and Migrant Smuggling', European University Institute Policy Brief Issue 2020(20). https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/67069/PB_2020_20_MPC.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y**

- **Stranded migrants** – Migrants and refugees who were travelling at the time of the pandemic have become stranded and subject to a combination of internal virus-related lockdown/distancing restrictions and cross-border migration restrictions. For example, Italy has clamped down further in preventing boats of migrants from entering their waters and the US has put a freeze on asylum applications. This leaves those travelling unable to return home (for example through IOM's Voluntary Return and Reintegration Assistance programme) or to complete their journey, leaving them in a highly precarious situation.

- **Driving migration underground** – Movement restrictions will not put a stop to migration. For example, many boats have continued to depart from Libya carrying migrants during April 2020. Instead, the pandemic and increased restrictions will drive irregular migration and human trafficking even further underground into more precarious, unknown, expensive and dangerous channels less likely to be identified by authorities. In fact, some argue that uncertainty could increase the demand for smuggling and some may attempt to travel without a smuggler. This will leave migrants and other groups even more vulnerable to exploitation and less accessible to service providers as well as aiding spread of the virus.

- Supported by citation: 'COVID-19 impact on migrant smuggling and human trafficking', Interpol, 11 June 2020 (**https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2020/COVID-19-impact-on-migrant-smuggling-and-human-trafficking**) and 'How COVID-19 restrictions and the economic consequences are likely to impact migrant smuggling and cross-border trafficking in persons to Europe and North America', United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, May 2020.

- Criminalisation of migration – There is concern that the pandemic will be used as grounds to further criminalise irregular migration under the false idea that smugglers exclusively work as closed, criminal, hierarchical networks. Instead, smuggling is often facilitated by vulnerable individuals and community networks, so such measures are likely to negatively impact these grassroots level smugglers while higher up individuals go unnoticed.

4. **Hope for Justice (2020) 'Covid-19 and potential implications on human trafficking and other forms of modern slavery internationally'** **http://10w65b10dnmm5sfip499zfny-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Hope-for-Justice-2020.-COVID-19-and-potential-implications-on-human-trafficking-and-other-forms-of-modern-slavery-internationally.pdf**

   This briefing from HFJ highlights some of the global concerns and increased threats that COVID-19 has posed for modern slavery. It covers the following themes:

   - Increased threat and vulnerability of individuals and communities including access to state and non-state support structures / safeguarding mechanisms.
   - Potential impact on the modus operandi of exploiters.
   - Potential impact on the rule of law and law enforcement activities.
   - Potential risks for businesses.

5. **Livia Wagner and Thi Hoang (2020) 'Aggravating Circumstances: How coronavirus impacts human trafficking' Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime** **https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Aggravating-circumstances-How-coronavirus-impacts-human-trafficking-GITOC-1.pdf**

   Challenges in Responding: Civil society – donor funding is a concern, reduction in anti-trafficking activities, cancellations of services for trafficked survivors, struggle to maintain housing and legal support, logistical challenges, halt in operation means that it is difficult to rescue victims, loss of contact with beneficiaries. Solutions: For instance, Sanctuary for Families (US) working remotely and with services mainly online such as counselling and legal aid, Freedom Collaborative have set up a COVID-19 response Facebook group, Verite has compiled a list of coronavirus-related resources and recommendations for businesses and government.

6. **Walk Free Foundation (2020) 'Protecting People in a pandemic' Walk Free Foundation** **https://cdn.minderoo.org/content/uploads/2020/04/30211819/Walk-Free-Foundation-COVID-19-Report.pdf**

   This paper explores the key risks of COVID-19 for migrant and vulnerable workers. Since the pandemic began, migrant and vulnerable workers have experienced the following: stranded in their host country/city due to travel restrictions, poor living and working conditions, lower access to healthcare and sick leave, lack of access to testing given their immigration status and xenophobia and discrimination leading to violence and abuse.

7. **Maria Grazia Giammarinaro (2020) 'COVID-19 Position paper: The impact and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on trafficked and exploited persons' United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures** **https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Trafficking/COVID-19-Impact-trafficking.pdf**

   The closure of schools could increase the risk of online sexual exploitation, given that children are spending more time with online classes and minimal parental supervision. Some families may have reduced income and might look for alternative, illegal means such as selling videos of sexual abuse of children in the family. The police have also warned of new types of live-streaming due to the surge in demand for pornographic material. School closures can also make children prone to human trafficking as they are left idle and some fragile families may be burdened with extra financial constraints, thus forcing a child into early marriage or forced labour. Traffickers may benefit from disruption to education services and promise families with education and work or simply to pay for a child's education.

Photo by Kay Asante on Unsplash

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

1. **Richard Armitage and Laura B. Nellums (2020) 'COVID-19: Compounding the health-related harms of human trafficking', EClinicalMedicine. https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/eclinm/PIIS2589-5370(20)30153-X.pdf**

- **Increased vulnerability to exploitation** – The pandemic has driven an increase in unemployment, unprotected unskilled and informal work and health-related costs for most vulnerable populations who have been left without work. These effects of the pandemic increase vulnerability to unsafe migration and human trafficking among those becoming more desperate in seeking income, while criminal networks are using the opportunity to prey on this increased vulnerability.
- **Health risk for victims** – Those who were in situations of trafficking and exploitation at the time of the pandemic are at a higher risk of contracting the virus because of their existing health concerns, dangerous working environments, poor living conditions and access to health services, undocumented status, fear of deportation or arrest if they seek healthcare, unfamiliarity with their destination country (including culture, systems and language) and restrictions imposed on their movement by exploiters.
- **Service disruption** – Safe distancing measures and lockdowns have limited the ability of law enforcement, NGOs and health workers to identify and access vulnerable or exploited groups, contributing to a rise in trafficking and a jump in 'unmet physical and psychological needs in an invisible group of all genders and ages'.
- **Health workers recommendation** – There is a need for health workers to remain vigilant in spotting signs of exploitation, as health professionals have come under huge strain during the pandemic but also remain in an important position to identify victims of trafficking.
- **Pandemic-trafficking nexus** – Practitioners observe that a similar rise in trafficking and exploitation has taken place in previous pandemics, representing an important intersection between disease and trafficking that is often overlooked.

2. **Ikenna Daniel Molobe, Oluwakemi Ololade Odukoya, Brenda Chukuwufunaya Isikekepei and Flavio Francisco Marsiglia (2020) 'Migrant communities and the COVID-19 response in sub-Saharan Africa' Pan African Medical Journal 35(2). https://www.panafrican-med-journal.com/content/series/35/2/17/full/**

- **Health risk for migrants and trafficking victims** – Similarly, others note that vulnerable individuals (including refugees, migrants and victims of trafficking) who have been stranded in unfamiliar countries because of lockdown measures could be more vulnerable to contracting the virus. This in turn may increase the spread of the virus as they go untreated. In addition, vulnerable groups are at a higher risk of mental health issues including depression, anxiety and suicide during this time because of their confinement in potentially exploitative situations in foreign and unfamiliar countries. These health risks are especially concerning in less developed countries where the health infrastructure is already poor.

- **Recommendation on health for vulnerable groups** –
    - Countries should plan to include and proactively identify and reach out to these populations as part of their COVID-19 response for the wellbeing both of these vulnerable groups and the wider population. It is key for countries to ensure access to preventative healthcare services as well as quarantine, treatment and meals for those who do not have health insurance in their host country, and create an open environment where these groups do not feel in fear of seeking medical attention. To this end, governments should suspend any restrictive immigration laws that could put migrants and vulnerable groups at risk of deportation or arrest and ensure that personal information (collected for health services and/or contact tracing) is not used against these groups and clearly communicate these assurances. However, a key challenge will be the credibility of these assurances, especially as personal information is highly sensitive and could be used by governments at a later date.
    - Frontline health workers should receive additional training on responding to the particular needs of vulnerable groups including immigrants, including referrals for further health or social services.
    - Technology is a key tool that can allow governments to spread public health messages in a variety of languages and cultural formats, both through social media and apps. Such technology should be used in conjunction with free helpline numbers for these groups where individuals can seek health advice, referrals and telephone counselling services.
    - Governments should also leverage migrant networks to spread these messages and reach hidden groups through kinship ties.

3. **Alexander Trautrims, Martin C. Schleper, M. Selim Cakir and Stefan Gold (2020) 'Survival at the expense of the weakest? Managing modern slavery risks in supply chains during COVID-19', Journal of Risk Research. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13669877.2020.1772347?needAccess=true**

- The pandemic has created huge shocks for the global supply chain by changing demand patterns, disrupting supply and decreasing risk management mechanisms. This brings the risk that supply chains that were already problematic in terms of slavery could become even more prone to involving exploitation for a number of reasons. First, surges in demand for some products (for example, medical supplies and essential food) have led to governments, consumers and businesses prioritising supply over supply chain due diligence or labour rights. Second, some industries such as the garment sector have experienced low demand, resulting in vulnerable workers being laid off and unpaid making them more vulnerable to exploitation. Third, normal mechanisms used to monitor supply chains have been disrupted as companies struggle to survive the oncoming global recession and as inspectors and organisations are unable to travel to supply locations to audit. Finally, governments are temporarily relaxing some measures to prevent modern slavery; for example in the UK where restrictions on high modern slavery risk sectors have been lifted, or in the US where the government allowed an import of medical gloves from a Malaysian company accused of using forced labour.

- Recommendation for businesses – There is an opportunity in this disruption to rethink global supply chains and break previously harmful ways of doing business, especially if consumers bring greater awareness in consumption habits post-pandemic. A more closely managed supply chain could actually bring benefits for lead firms in terms of managing and sharing information with suppliers in the long term which can mitigate disruption from events such as pandemics.

4. **Simplice A. Asongu & Usman M. Usman (2020) 'The COVID-19 pandemic: Theoretical and practical perspectives on children, women and sex trafficking' Health Care for Women International. 41(11-12):1384-1397. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33290191/**

- This article takes a gender theory lens to examine the impact of COVID-19 on sex trafficking. It begins with a literature review examining the COVID-19 pandemic and human trafficking. The research finds that during the pandemic, the trafficking of girls and women has increased, as has domestic violence. There is a need for 'timely, vital, and consistent policies' (1394) to tackle these problems.

5. **Yvonne Rafferty (2020) 'Promoting the Welfare, Protection and Care of Victims of Child Trafficking during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic', Journal of Children's Services 15(4). Emerald Publishing Limited: 191–200. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JCS-07-2020-0027/full/html**

- The paper focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on children who have been trafficked. It highlights research from other pandemics and the impact on the trafficking of children.
- It proposes three action points: 'commit to the promises made in international and regional mandates and guidelines; address the risk and vulnerability factors that have been identified; and implement the promising prevention activities described in the literature' (Rafferty 2020).

6. **Martin Punaks and Samjyor Lama (2020) 'Orphanage Trafficking and Child Protection in Emergencies in Nepal: A Comparative Analysis of the 2015 Earthquake and the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic'. Institutionalised Children Explorations and Beyond. 8(1):26-37. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2349300320975547**

- The article compares the Nepal earthquake in 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 in terms of how each has impacted on children, with specific reference to orphanage trafficking.
- Both increased vulnerability for children, but at the same time drove 'forward innovation in child protection practices, particularly through the use of reintegration, case management and family preservation programmes' (26).

7. **Favour Offia (2020) 'Impact of COVID-19 on Human Trafficking in Uganda', SSRN Scholarly Paper, ID 3719029. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3719029, accessed 11 January, 2021.**

- 'This Brief examines how the pandemic could affect victims/survivors of human trafficking and the potential of the pandemic to heighten the risks and vulnerabilities to human trafficking. It further pays specific attention to the impact of COVID-19 on child trafficking, and the possibilities of the pandemic to exacerbate vulnerabilities of Uganda's refugee population to human trafficking.'

Online Articles and Blog Posts (selected)

1. **Raquel Carvalho (2020) 'How coronavirus puts Asia's most vulnerable at greater risk of homelessness, human trafficking', South China Morning Post, https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/health-environment/article/3078395/children-dog-cage-how-coronavirus-puts-asias-most**

- Risk for children – Children who were previously cared for and fed in schools are now at home where they are more vulnerable to abuse and being put to work to earn money for the family in the context of loss of incomes. Child labour and human trafficking will likely increase as children are sent to seek work in cities and other countries for this purpose or flee domestic violence at home. Parents may also be more likely to marry off female children to decrease the burden on family expenses with less scrutiny on the husband. Those who have been trafficked are unable to seek help, for example forced brides in China are less able to leave their houses or enter embassies.
- Risks after lockdown – Organisations fear that once restrictions are lifted there will be a massive increase in migration and exploitation as people try to support their families, and this influx of labour will drive down wages and working conditions.

2. **'Coronavirus lockdowns "conducive" to human trafficking', Al Jazeera, 17 June 2020. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/16/coronavirus-lockdowns-conducive-to-human-trafficking**

- Trafficking survivors at risk of further exploitation – Organisations are concerned that lockdown measures make it easier for traffickers to control and restrict the movement of survivors of trafficking, putting them at greater risk of exploitation.

3. **'COVID-19 and Modern Slavery: Challenges, Opportunities, and the Future of the Fight', Council for Foreign Relations, 28 April 2020** **https://www.cfr.org/Blog/COVID-19-and-modern-slavery-challenges-opportunities-and-future-fight**

- Domestic workers – Domestic workers are at a higher risk of physical and sexual abuse as they are trapped in the homes they work in.
- Short-term labour surplus – Decrease in demand accompanying lockdown and economic downturns will increase the number of vulnerable individuals searching for work, making them vulnerable to exploitation by those promising employment.
- Medium/long-term labour demand – As industries bounce back and lockdowns are lifted, there will be demand for companies to scale up production of certain goods using exploited labour.
- Public service funding – As governments dedicate a huge proportion of budgets to health services and economic bailouts, less will be available for social, legal and law enforcement services to address human trafficking and exploitation.
- Opportunities – On the flip side, coverage of the plight of daily wage earners in countries such as India has shone a spotlight on vulnerable groups which could spur efforts to address the root causes of these issues in the future. There is also an opportunity to reassess global supply chains and ethical production.

4. **Brian Monroe (2020) 'Special ATII Contributor Report: COVID-19 and Human Trafficking – Exacerbating Modern Slavery with a Global Health Pandemic', Association of Certified Financial Crime Specialists** **https://www.acfcs.org/COVID-19-and-human-trafficking-exacerbating-modern-slavery-with-a-global-health-pandemic/**

- As more exploitation moves online and as more individuals are vulnerable to trafficking during the pandemic, there are opportunities for authorities to identify exploitation via financial flows, such as irregular deposits and withdrawals from bank accounts, transactions made on the behalf of friends and relatives or deposits from bitcoin or dubious foreign exchange sites.

5. **Corinne Redfern (2020) 'The Pandemic's Hidden Human Trafficking Crisis', Foreign Policy** **https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/30/coronavirus-pandemic-human-trafficking-crisis/**

- Service provider challenges – NGOs have experienced funding cuts and disruptions from lockdown that exacerbate vulnerabilities to human trafficking. For example, the World Food Programme had to decrease food distribution by up to 50% in some areas, potentially forcing people to engage in increasingly risky activities to earn money to survive.
- Recommendation – Frontline workers must be trained to identify and provide basic support and referral to victims of human trafficking.

Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

6. **Europol (2020) 'COVID-19: Child Sexual Exploitation'** **https://www.europol.europa.eu/COVID-19/COVID-19-child-sexual-exploitation**

- Since lockdown began, children have been spending more time online. As adults are working from home, they are unable to spend much time with their children who are allowed greater unsupervised internet access time. This means that children are vulnerable to be exposed to offenders through various means such as gaming and chat groups. In addition, children are more inclined to making and sharing explicit material with peers, with these eventually reaching child sex offenders, and some may isolate themselves through instructions from an offender.

Appendix 2:
Survey Questions

Section 1: Details about you and your organisation

1. **What is your role in the organisation?**

2. **What region(s) does your organisation work in?**

- 2a. What country(ies) does your organisation work in?

3. **What type of entity is your organisation?**
   - o Government (service provider)
   - o Local NGO
   - o International NGO
   - o Locally-led community-based group
   - o Religious institution / place of worship
   - o Academia
   - o Other

- 3a. If you selected 'other' please specify.
- 3b. Additional information about your organisation
- 3c. If you are a religious institution / place of worship, please select
   - o Church
   - o Temple
   - o Mosque
   - o Gurdwara
   - o Faith school
   - o Other
- 3ci. If you selected Other, please specify:

4. **Is your organisation faith-based?**

- 4a. If you answered yes to being a faith-based organisation, which faith do you represent?
- 4b. If you selected Other, please specify:

5. **How many paid staff are in your organisation?**

6. **How many volunteers are in your organisation?**

7. **From which organisation or network did you receive this survey?**

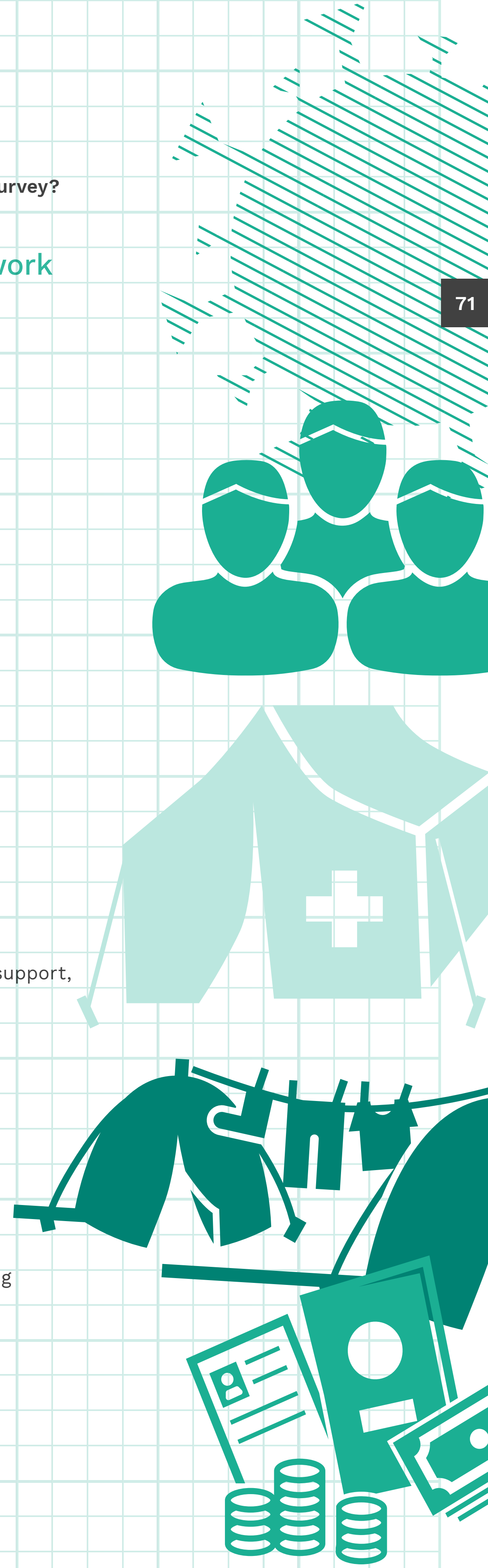
Section 2: Your organisation's scope of work

8. **Which beneficiary group or groups do you work with? [Please select all those that apply]**
   - o Adults
   - o Minors (under 18 years old)
   - o Male
   - o Female
   - o Transgender
   - o Those with disability/ies
   - o Other

- 8a. If you selected Other, please specify:

9. **Does your work respond to issues of trafficking?**

- 9a. What activities are you involved in within the area of response to trafficking?
   - o Prevention and awareness raising
   - o Outreach (identification of victims)
   - o Shelter aftercare / safe accommodation
   - o Community-based support services
   - o Specialised case management support (psychosocial support, trauma counselling, micro-credit, translation etc)
   - o Repatriation
   - o Reintegration
   - o Legal representation/prosecution
   - o Client training and education
   - o Social enterprise / freedom business
   - o Policy and advocacy
   - o Research
   - o NGO/government/partner training and capacity building
   - o Other
- 9ai.If you selected Other, please specify:



10. Does your work respond to issues of migration?

- 10a. What activities are you involved in within the area of response to migration?
    - o Prevention and awareness raising
    - o Outreach (identification of victims)
    - o Shelter aftercare / safe accommodation
    - o Community-based support services
    - o Specialised case management support (psychosocial support, trauma counselling, micro-credit, translation etc)
    - o Repatriation
    - o Reintegration
    - o Legal representation/prosecution
    - o Client training and education
    - o Social enterprise / freedom business
    - o Policy and advocacy
    - o Research
    - o NGO/government/partner training and capacity building
    - o Other
- 10ai. If you selected Other, please specify:

11. Do any of your programmes ever include a faith activity?

- 11a. If your programme includes faith activities, please select which ones:
    - o Prayer
    - o Meditation
    - o Collective worship
    - o Singing
    - o Chanting
    - o Using religious texts
    - o Engaging with religious leader
    - o Other
- 11ai. If you selected Other, please specify:

Section 3: The impact of COVID-19 on your beneficiaries and the emerging responses

12. Have the ways people are being exploited changed as a result of COVID-19?

- 12a. Please provide more information:

13. Has there been a change in the number of people seeking services?

- 13a. Please provide more information:

14. Have you experienced any barriers to accessing your beneficiary groups / stakeholders as a result of COVID-19?

- 14a. Please provide more information:

15. Has your initial response required additional resources?

- 15a. Please provide more information:

16. What new or changed programme responses are you now implementing as a result of COVID-19?

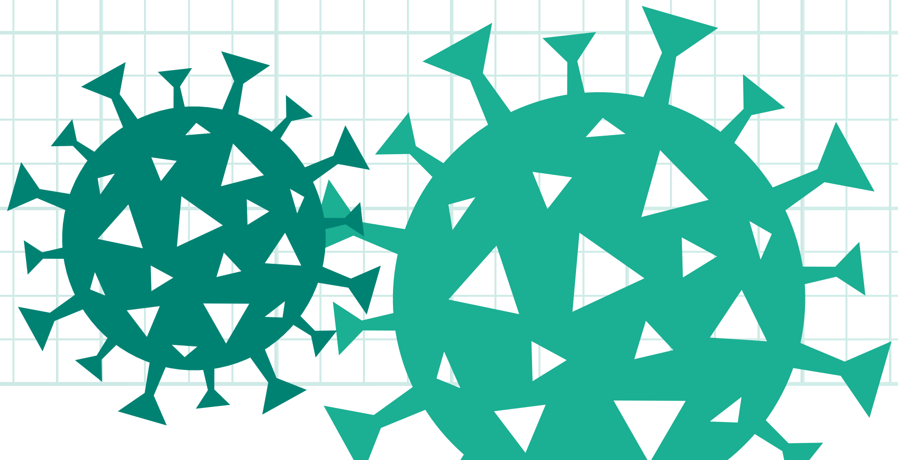
- 16a. Why did you implement this new/changed response?

17. Have there been any positive and/or negative outcomes in the initial impact of these responses on your beneficiaries?

- 17a. If you have observed positive outcomes, please provide more information:
- 17b. If you have observed negative outcomes, please provide more information:

18. Have you observed new responses and practices by others? Such as in the reduction in vulnerability or the protection of victims and survivors or responses to new forms of exploitation?

- 18a. Among which stakeholders have you seen these new responses or practices?
- 18ai. If you selected Other, please specify:
- 18aii. What are the new responses and practices that you have seen?



Appendix 3:
Discussion Guide Used in Interviews

For all organisations

1. **Background on organisation and their role.**
   - Prompt: Name and type of organisation? What does the organisation work on and where? What is your role in the organisation? Where are you based?

2. **Who do you normally work with and are there any specific groups, including new groups, you have identified that are seeking services and support?**
   - Prompt: people who have returned from abroad? Why are they requiring this service? Has there been a change in the number of people seeking services?

3. **Have the partnerships that you form changed at all because of COVID-19?**
   - Prompt: some people have told us they have increased, from necessity and the need to learn from each other.

4. **Are you aware of any new methods that traffickers are using to recruit their victims during this time?**
   - Prompt: Traffickers offering loans? New trafficking trends? More online sexual exploitation and online recruitment? Are NGOs advocating for change in policy or legislation to stay up to date with this changing nature of trafficking?

5. **What kind of intersectional impacts has COVID-19 had?**
   - Prompt: Have you seen an increase in sexual exploitation or physical abuse of people in forced labour or domestic servitude? Have NGOs working with survivors seen an increase/decrease in mental health issues / substance abuse or trauma because of COVID-19 restrictions? Have some sectors that have boomed during COVID-19 seen an increase in trafficking (tech industry, factories for certain products etc)? And have NGOs been able to respond to any of these?

6. **We have heard that there are delays in court cases with COVID-19. Have you noticed this and how has it affected your work?**
   - Prompt: Has there been an impact for people being unable to leave safe house accommodation to reintegrate into their communities? How has/will this impact on the recovery process?

7. **When communicating with survivors in your care, have you used any new techniques of providing support?**
   - Prompt: Therapy? Music? Games? Has any of the support you provide moved online?

8. **How easy or difficult has it been to implement COVID-19 guideline with survivors in your care?**
   - Prompt: Survivors with specific needs?

9. **How easy or difficult has it been to continue sharing anti-trafficking messaging during this time?**
   - Prompt: At the government level? Community level? Do people know where and how to report a case? How have the different groups responded?

10. **We have heard that income generation initiatives for survivors or in prevention projects have failed during COVID-19. Has this been your experience, and if so, how are you dealing with this?**
    - Prompt: Are you going to start again and do you have the funding for this? Are you going to try different income-generation ideas that are more secure in these times?

11. **How easy or difficult was it for you/your organisation to receive additional resources to support your response?**
    - Prompt: Any challenges? Timeline?

12. **Have the government / local authority implemented any COVID-19 and human trafficking response in your context?**
    - Prompt: Any funding/grants? Prevention/awareness campaigns?

13. **There seemed to be a great deal of information coming through on the impact of COVID-19 – e.g. webinars, reports etc. Were you aware of this in your work on the front line? How much of it was useful and in what ways? How could it have been more helpful?**

14. In the case that NGOs were very restricted, or still are, in their business as usual, what have you used the time to do?

- Prompt: Was there online training that was helpful? Did you develop new materials? Did you develop new skills across the organisation? Set up systems and structures? Space for review and reflection? Has this impacted you as they start back again?

15. In the future, is there anything you/your organisation will do differently when responding to modern slavery and human trafficking as a result of COVID-19?

Plus these for those that are faith-based

16. Has COVID-19 changed how your organisation engages with faith?

- Prompt: Has it moved more towards more faith activities during COVID-19?

17. Has collective worship and contact with religious leaders decreased during this time, amongst staff/volunteers and service users? If yes, what has been the impact of this?

- Prompt: e.g. Have individuals found faith less a component of resiliency building as a result of being out of touch with their religious leaders or unable to meet for corporate worship?

18. What has been the impact of COVID-19 on places of worship from their perspective?

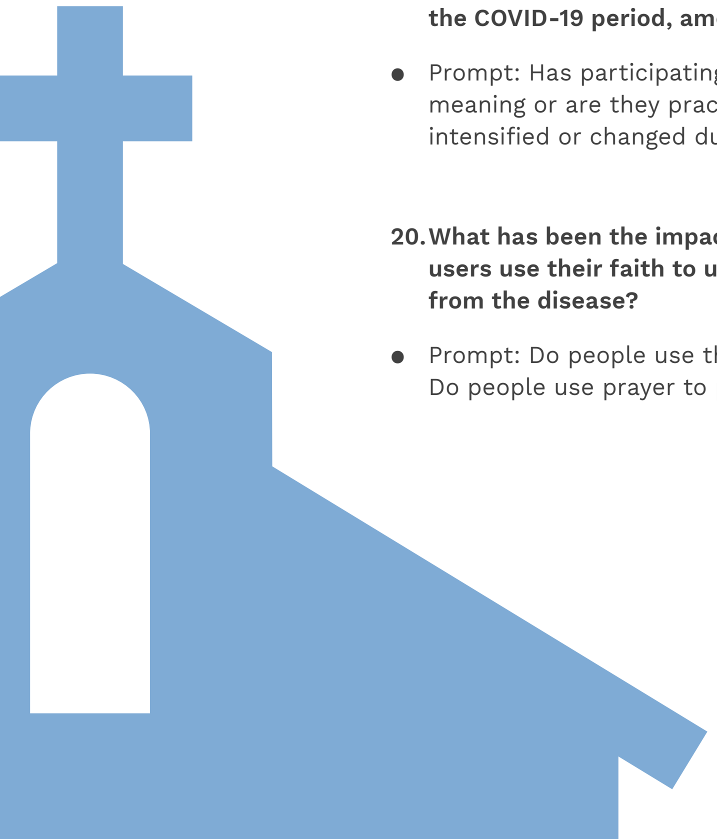
- Prompt: e.g. Has the pandemic changed their understanding of their theological role in the community?

19. Have personal religious practices / prayer increased as an activity during the COVID-19 period, amongst staff/volunteers and service users?

- Prompt: Has participating in individualised faith activities taken on a deeper meaning or are they practiced more often? Have personal religious practices intensified or changed due to less opportunity for collective worship?

20. What has been the impact on the way that staff/volunteers and service users use their faith to understand the disease and to protect themselves from the disease?

- Prompt: Do people use their faith to describe the origin of the disease? Do people use prayer to protect themselves from the virus?



Appendix 4:
Headline Survey Findings

These findings were shared by the International Anti-Human Trafficking Network in their June 2020 newsletter, which was distributed to members of the network. We've split the information into the following headlines:

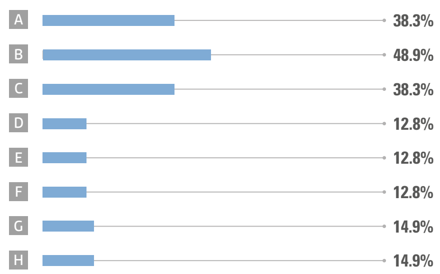
- Who responded to the survey
- Key observations of what has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic started
- The main challenges faced by organisations and how they are responding to them
- Good news stories to inspire your work

Who responded...

You are a global network of organisations responding to issues of human trafficking and migration (**Chart 1**):

- 47 organisations responded to this survey, 58% representing international NGOs, 26% local NGOs, with the remaining representing local church responses
- 11 of these organisations work in more than one region
- You work in 142 countries across the world
- 50% of the organisations have fewer than 50 paid staff and 50 volunteers, and 30% over 100

Chart 1: What Region(s) does your organisation work in?



A Africa (18)
B Asia (23)
C Europe (18)
D Oceania (6)
E The Caribbean (6)
F Central American (6)
G North American (7)
H South American (7)

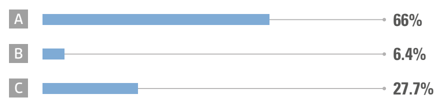
Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)

Key observations of what has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic started

Changes in the means of exploitation observed include (**Chart 2**):

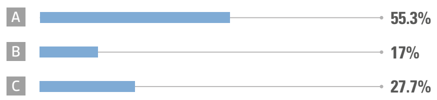
- 47 organisations responded to this survey, 58% representing international NGOs, 26% local NGOs, with the remaining representing local church responses
- 11 of these organisations work in more than one region
- You work in 142 countries across the world
- 50% of the organisations have fewer than 50 paid staff and 50 volunteers, and 30% over 100

Chart 2: Have the ways people are being exploited changed as a result of COVID-19?



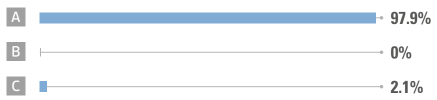
A Yes (31)
B No (8)
C Not known (13)

Chart 3: Has there been a change in the number of people seeking services?



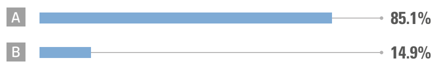
A Increased (26)
B Decreased (8)
C No change (13)

Chart 4: Have you experienced any barriers to accessing your beneficiary groups/ stakeholders as a result of COVID-19?



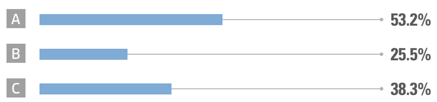
A Yes (46)
B No (0)
C Not known (1)

Chart 5: Has your initial response required additional resources?



A Yes (40)
B No (7)

Chart 6: Have there been any positive and/ or negative outcomes in the initial impact of these responses on your beneficiaries



A Yes (25)
B No (12)
C Not known (18)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)

Comments around the change in number of people seeking services include (**Chart 3**):

- A greater need for food and basic hygiene supplies and financial support
- The decrease is seen as being linked to the restrictions of movement

The main challenges faced by organisations and how they are responding to them

All but one organisation report barriers to accessing beneficiaries (**Chart 4**):

- 'Lockdown' measures and barriers to movement being the key barrier to seeing beneficiaries
- Closure of brothels/churches means usual methods of communication are not available

There has been a significant need for additional resources (**Chart 5**):

- For the purchase of PPE – protective equipment / cleaning products / soap / hand gel
- To enable organisations to 'deliver services' online and access support online – purchase of IT equipment / software / internet services
- To support an increased number of beneficiaries financially, including purchasing food and paying for accommodation

You've said there have been some immediate and new responses that you have had to make (**Chart 6**):

- A move online – for internal staff and volunteer meetings, counselling, training, client meetings, conferences
- A move from long-term strategic planning to providing immediate relief
- A move to providing care and support in communities

You have said that you have had to do this to deal with country-specific lockdown restrictions. You've said that while it was challenging, you have managed to do it.


Photo by Tanjir Ahmed Chowdhury on Unsplash

You've noted some positive outcomes:

- You've been able to show compassion to staff, volunteers and beneficiaries and helped to meet their needs to stay safe
- Relationships with local government have been strengthened

You've noticed some negative outcomes:

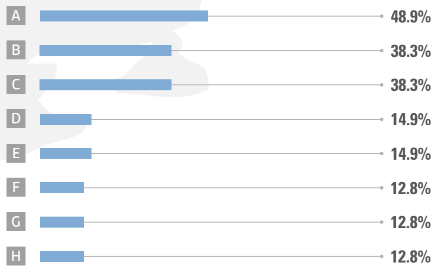
- You can't meet in person – this is difficult for staff, volunteers and beneficiaries
- You're concerned that some of your beneficiaries have become even more invisible – you don't know where they are and cannot contact them
- You haven't been able to accept new referrals

Other comments:

- Many of you have noted concerns about funding going forward – both from revenue from social enterprises which currently cannot run, and from funding bodies and donors.
- You are also concerned that the impact of COVID-19 will be longer lasting than you would like and will lead to new victims of exploitation as people who are already in potential target groups become more desperate.
- You are calling for greater collaboration.

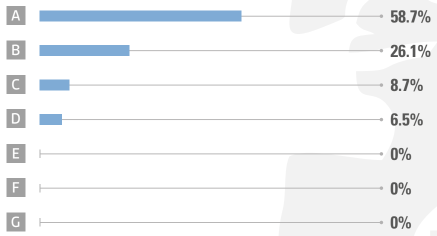
Appendix 5:
Demography of Survey Participants

Chart 1: What region(s) does your organisation work in?



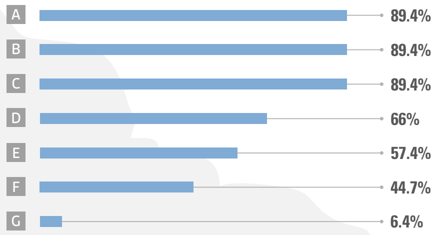
A Africa (23)
B Asia (18)
C Europe (18)
D Oceania (7)
E The Caribbean (7)
F Central American (6)
G North American (6)
H South American (6)

Chart 2: What type of entity is your organisation?



A International NGO (27)
B Local NGO (12)
C Religious Institution/Place of Worship (4)
D Other (3)
E Government – service provider (0)
F Locally-led Community Based Group (0)
G Academia (0)

Chart 3: Which beneficiary group or groups do you work with?

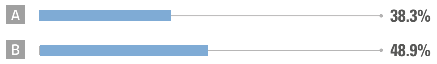


A Adults (42)
B Minors – under 18 year old (42)
C Female (42)
D Male (31)
E Those with disability/ies (27)
F Transgender (21)
G Other (3)

Chart 4: Does your work respond to issues of trafficking?

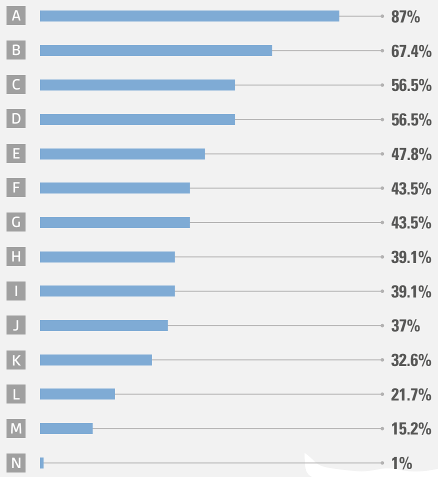
A Yes (46)
B No (1)

Chart 5: Does your work respond to issues of migration?



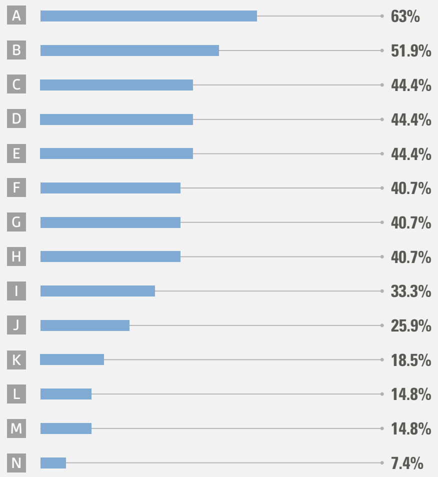
A Yes (27)
B No (20)

Chart 6: What activities are you involved in within the area of response to trafficking?



A Prevention and awareness raising (40)
B NGO/Govt/Partner Training and capacity building (31)
C Outreach – identification of victims (26)
D Community Based Support Services (26)
E Reintegration (22)
F Specialised Case Management Support – psychosocial support, trauma counselling etc (20)
G Client Training and Education (20)
H Shelter Aftercare/Safe Accommodation (18)
I Policy and Advocacy (18)
J Research (17)
K Repatriation (15)
L Social enterprise/freedom (10)
M Legal representation/Prosecution (7)
N Other (1)

Chart 7: What activities are you involved in within the area of response to migration?



A Prevention and awareness raising (17)
B Community Based Support Services (14)
C Outreach – identification of victims (12)
D Policy and Advocacy (12)
E NGO/Govt/Partner Training and capacity building (12)
F Shelter Aftercare/Safe Accommodation (11)
G Specialised Case Management Support – psychosocial support, trauma counselling etc (11)
H Reintegration (11)
I Research (9)
J Client Training and Education (7)
K Repatriation (5)
L Legal representation/Prosecution (4)
M Other (4)
N Social enterprise/freedom (2)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