

Stop Trafficking!

Awareness Advocacy Action

Anti-Human Trafficking Newsletter • August 2021 • Vol. 19 • No. 8

FOCUS: This issue highlights topics covered by the United States State Department Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report for 2021.

The 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report sends a strong message to the world that global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and enduring discriminatory policies and practices, have a disproportionate effect on individuals already oppressed by other injustices. These challenges further compound existing vulnerabilities to exploitation, including human trafficking. We must break this inhumane cycle of discrimination and injustices if we hope to one day eliminate human trafficking. We must also acknowledge that we will never be able to understand the full scope of what is needed without the expertise of those affected by systemic inequality.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS REPORT: JUNE 2021



Click [here](#) to access the entire report.

Systemic discrimination creates inequities between communities, whether the discrimination targets perceptions of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, or any other social identities. It manifests in societal exclusion and prejudices against those communities, which help perpetuate an imbalance of opportunity and support. These inequities undercut our goal of combating human trafficking and embolden traffickers.

We have seen, for instance, how deeply held racial biases and stereotypes inappropriately influence outcomes for those in our criminal justice system as they lead to racially disparate assumptions about who is identified as a trafficker and who is identified as a victim.

Doing so requires us to mitigate harmful practices and policies that cause socioeconomic or political vulnerabilities that traffickers often prey on. Part of this work requires us to acknowledge we will never be able to understand the full scope of what is needed without the expertise of those affected by systemic inequality.

The concurrence of the increased number of individuals at risk, traffickers' ability to capitalize on competing crises, and the diversion of resources to pandemic response efforts has resulted in an ideal environment for human trafficking to flourish and evolve.

Human Trafficking in the Context of a Global Pandemic

The introduction to the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report examines the emerging trends, challenges, and adaptations to global anti-trafficking efforts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has both significantly increased the number of people vulnerable to human trafficking and impacted anti-trafficking efforts globally. Human traffickers quickly adapted to prey on the vulnerabilities exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic while governments diverted resources and attention toward the pandemic, at the expense of anti-trafficking efforts.

The introduction to this year's TIP Report highlights human trafficking issues related to COVID-19, with a special focus on lessons learned from the anti-trafficking community. The report offers considerations to rebuild momentum through coordinated anti-trafficking strategies. The introduction also illustrates collaborative ways to reimagine anti-trafficking efforts. It includes an emphasis on preparedness to prevent similar effects during future crises on trafficking victims and vulnerable individuals, as well as efforts to combat the most recent emerging human trafficking trends.

Changing Trends in Human Trafficking Amid the Pandemic: A Growing Number of People Experiencing Economic and Social Vulnerabilities

The pandemic caused both economic and social suffering which increased risks for already vulnerable populations. These included women and children, people affected by travel restrictions and stay-at-home orders, communities in areas of food insecurity, and survivors of trafficking, as well as persons directly and indirectly affected by the disruption of economic activities. Globally, schools were shut down and some children lacked access to education, shelter, and/ or food.

Survivors of trafficking faced an increased risk of potential re-victimization due to financial and emotional hardships during the crisis. Survivors report a decline in their mental health to government-imposed lockdowns triggering memories of exploitative situations. Many survivors lost their jobs due to lockdowns and some were pressured by former traffickers when other

employment options dried up. Some survivors had to sell their cell phones to purchase food, further isolating them from potential assistance from caseworkers.

With lockdowns during the pandemic, there were increased reports of gender-based violence and substance abuse, both of which put individuals at risk for trafficking. Migrant workers and those in the informal economy faced employment conditions that made them more vulnerable to trafficking. These include restricted movement, minimal oversight mechanisms, withheld wages, and increasing debts. During stay-at-home orders, workers who lived at their worksites became particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor while being restricted in their ability to seek assistance or leave their situation of exploitation.

Traffickers Quickly Adapt and Exploit COVID-19-related Risks

Human traffickers were quick to take advantage of the vulnerabilities created by the pandemic. They targeted individuals confined to their homes or workplaces, households in dire need of financial support, and workers in the informal sector. Child trafficking increased. Traffickers sought families facing financial difficulties and offered false promises and fraudulent job offers to recruit their children, while other families exploited or sold their children to traffickers to financially support themselves.

Traffickers sought to re-exploit survivors who became financially unstable and vulnerable to revictimization.

Traffickers also took advantage of the reduced capacity and shifting priorities of law enforcement.

Disruptions to public justice systems and diversion of resources from anti-trafficking efforts during the pandemic increased impunity for traffickers and decreased their chances of being arrested.

During the pandemic, many people shifted to online communication, including human traffickers. With schools closed globally, children spent more time

online for virtual learning, often with little parental supervision. Traffickers took advantage of this situation and turned more to online grooming and commercial sexual exploitation.

Some of the increases in child exploitation online resulted from sensationalized trafficking-related stories and misinformation on social media platforms.

Considerations for the Anti-Trafficking Field's Response to the Pandemic and Beyond

The anti-trafficking community made a concerted effort to incorporate anti-trafficking efforts into broader crisis responses in the past through building capacity, developing guidance and training, and supporting the coordination of actors in the field. This has been seen through other crises, such as the Darfur Genocide in 2003, the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria in 2009, the Philippines Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014, the emergence of the migrant crisis in Europe in 2015, and the Rohingya exodus in Burma in 2017, to name a few.

As the global community journeys through the second year fighting the global pandemic, the anti-trafficking community must emphasize learning and collaboration to deliver a continued and improved response to combating trafficking in this challenging environment. Drawing on lessons learned from the pandemic response thus far, there are four main considerations that aim to mitigate the impacts of crises and guide the path forward for the anti-trafficking community:

1. The value of collaboration between anti-trafficking actors.
2. The need to incorporate anti-trafficking efforts into existing responses in other contexts, such as in humanitarian settings.
3. The importance of proactive response and crisis mitigation planning to anti-trafficking activities.
4. The application of equity-based approaches.

Addressing human trafficking during a global pandemic requires the entire anti-trafficking community to establish a comprehensive coordinated response. Governments should continue working with neighbors and NGOs to address cross-border trafficking issues and support

strong collaboration at the borders to identify and prevent trafficking.

Service providers should continue sharing information to promote promising practices for supporting identified victims and vulnerable populations during the pandemic, many of which were survivor-led and from various regions of the country, to present.

The anti-trafficking community should increase collaboration with the private sector to strengthen anti-trafficking efforts that encourage and support the prevention of forced labor in supply chains. In the long term, private-sector collaboration should aim to improve the ability of companies to withstand shocks from crises that could leave portions of their workforce vulnerable to trafficking.

When responding to the impacts of the COVID-19 virus, those working on safety and security measures must be equipped with the knowledge and resources to identify and refer cases of human trafficking. For example, training on trafficking indicators should be expanded to healthcare workers, such as those supporting COVID-19 testing and vaccination efforts as they might be the few people a victim could interact with in public.

Other measures to consider include conducting awareness-raising campaigns when stay-at-home orders remain in place, providing services to identified victims when there are no safe spaces available, and intervening in stalled public justice systems to ensure minimal disruption and deter traffickers from expanding their activities.

Effective risk mitigation and management plans should responsibly incorporate survivor-informed, trauma-informed, and victim-centered approaches to meet the needs of survivors and minimize the chances of re-traumatization during crises.

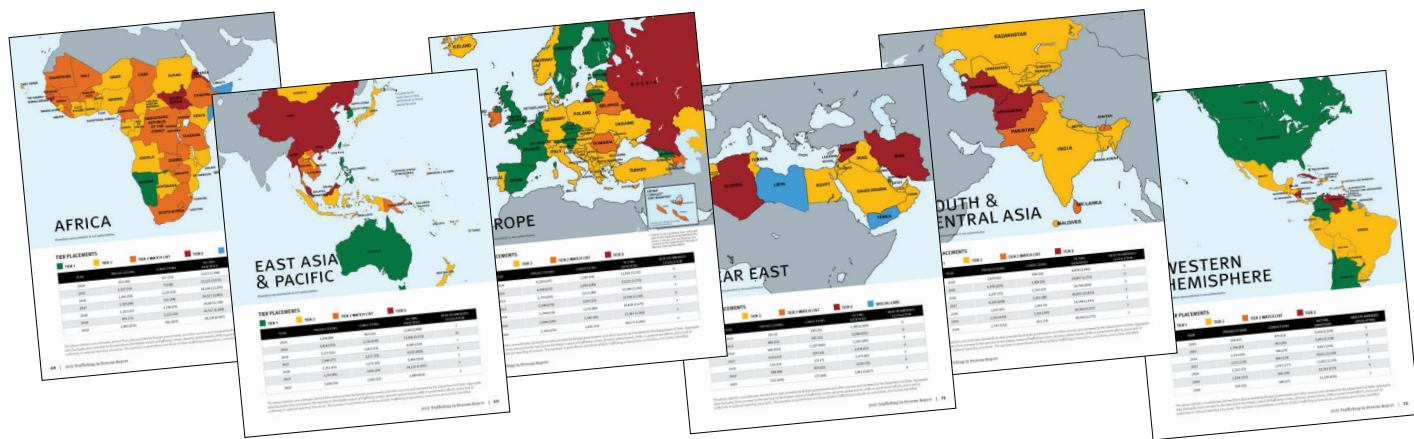
Governments can enhance efforts to reduce disparities that widened during the pandemic—which also contributed to trafficking risks and emboldened traffickers—by formulating policies and programs that meet the needs of marginalized and underserved communities.

Communities need to evaluate and understand how individual organizations perpetuate the marginalization of vulnerable populations, including

Awareness

persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ persons, indigenous peoples, and members of racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups. Law enforcement should address biases to improve identification and protection efforts for victims from marginalized communities while preventing re-traumatization. In the face of the COVID pandemic and future crises, it is the responsibility of the international community to work together toward the shared goal

of preventing and combating human trafficking, protecting victims, and empowering survivors. This past year has demonstrated the determination of the anti-trafficking community amid extraordinary challenges. With continued collaboration, adaptation, and commitment to serving the needs of victims, survivors, and vulnerable populations, anti-trafficking efforts will emerge stronger in the post-pandemic era.



Tier Placements

The 2021 report downgrades Cyprus, Israel, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland from the top Tier 1 category to Tier 2. The countries were cited for a decrease in investigations and prosecutions of perpetrators for labor trafficking, failing to improve victim identification and lacking legal safeguards to protect trafficking victims. Inadequate prison sentences for child sex traffickers, not prosecuting any human trafficking cases during the reporting period and charging people suspected of the crime with lesser offenses. Turkey, which remains in Tier 2, is cited for providing “operational, equipment, and financial support” to an armed militia in Syria that recruits child soldiers. Guinea-Bissau and Malaysia were both downgraded to Tier 3, the lowest ranking, after they spent three years on the Tier 2 Watch List. Both countries failed to take steps to improve their anti-human trafficking efforts.

The report cites some improvements. Belarus, Burundi, Lesotho and Papua New Guinea – have been removed from Tier 3 and placed on the Tier 2 Watch List. Saudi Arabia is upgraded for the second year in a row, to Tier 2.

TIER PLACEMENTS

TIER 1

ARGENTINA	CANADA	FRANCE	NAMIBIA	SWEDEN
AUSTRALIA	CHILE	GEORGIA	NETHERLANDS	TAIWAN
AUSTRIA	COLOMBIA	GUYANA	PHILIPPINES	UNITED KINGDOM
BAHAMAS, THE	CZECH REPUBLIC	KOREA, SOUTH	SINGAPORE	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BAHRAIN	ESTONIA	LITHUANIA	SLOVENIA	
BELGIUM	FINLAND	LUXEMBOURG	SPAIN	

TIER 2

ALBANIA	ECUADOR	JORDAN	MOZAMBIQUE	SEYCHELLES
ANGOLA	EGYPT	KAZAKHSTAN	NEW ZEALAND	SIERRA LEONE
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA	EL SALVADOR	KYRGYZ REPUBLIC	NIGER	SLOVAK REPUBLIC
ARMENIA	ESWATINI	KENYA	NIGERIA	SOLOMON ISLANDS
BANGLADESH	FIJI	KOSOVO	NEPAL	SUDAN
BENIN	GABON	KUWAIT	NORTH MACEDONIA	SURINAME
BOLIVIA	GERMANY	LAOS	NORWAY	SWITZERLAND
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	GHANA	LATVIA	OMAN	TAJIKISTAN
BOTSWANA	GREECE	LEBANON	PANAMA	TOGO
BRAZIL	GUATEMALA	MADAGASCAR	PARAGUAY	TUNISIA
BULGARIA	HONDURAS	MALAWI	PERU	TURKEY
CABO VERDE	HUNGARY	MALDIVES	POLAND	UKRAINE
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	ICELAND	MALTA	PORTUGAL	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
CONGO, REPUBLIC OF THE	INDIA	MAURITIUS	QATAR	URUGUAY
COSTA RICA	INDONESIA	MEXICO	RWANDA	UZBEKISTAN
COTE D'IVOIRE	IRAQ	MICRONESIA	SAINT LUCIA	VANUATU
CROATIA	ISRAEL	MOLDOVA	ST. VINCENT	
CYPRUS	ITALY	MONGOLIA	AND THE GRENADINES	
DENMARK	JAPAN	MONTENEGRO	SAUDI ARABIA	
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	JAMAICA	MOROCCO	SERBIA	

TIER 2 WATCH LIST

ARUBA	CAMEROON	HAITI	PALAU	TONGA
AZERBAIJAN	CHAD	HONG KONG	PAPUA NEW GUINEA	TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
BARBADOS	CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE	IRELAND	ROMANIA	UGANDA
BELARUS	CURAÇAO	LESOTHO	SENEGAL	VIETNAM
BELIZE	DJIBOUTI	LIBERIA	SINT MAARTEN	ZAMBIA
BHUTAN	EQUATORIAL GUINEA	MACAU	SOUTH AFRICA	ZIMBABWE
BRUNEI	ETHIOPIA	MALI	SRI LANKA	
BURKINA FASO	GAMBIA, THE	MARSHALL ISLANDS	TANZANIA	
BURUNDI	GUINEA	MAURITANIA	THAILAND	
CAMBODIA		PAKISTAN	TIMOR-LESTE	

TIER 3

AFGHANISTAN	COMOROS	IRAN	RUSSIA	VENEZUELA
ALGERIA	CUBA	KOREA, NORTH	SOUTH SUDAN	
BURMA	ERITREA	MALAYSIA	SYRIA	
CHINA	GUINEA-BISSAU	NICARAGUA	TURKMENISTAN	

SPECIAL CASE

LIBYA	SOMALIA	YEMEN
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The Negative Impacts of Human Trafficking Misinformation

Many people imagine human trafficking as women and children being forcibly kidnapped and sold into sexual slavery by strangers far from home. These images, however, do not capture the typical reality of sex and labor trafficking. Most victims of human trafficking are exploited by someone they know, a boyfriend, a family member, or an acquaintance they met online. Traffickers use fraudulent methods to recruit their victims.

Misconceptions about human trafficking have always prevailed; however, with the misuse of social media misinformation and rumors about the crime spread rapidly. In the past few years in the United States, individuals have sometimes deliberately deceived the public by spreading disinformation about child sex trafficking and conspiracy theories which often go viral on mainstream social media platforms. False and misleading rumors and theories that a global ring of politicians and celebrities are exploiting children, that companies selling furniture or other high-priced items online are also selling missing children, or that phishing texts are tricking people into human trafficking schemes are all unfounded and perpetuate false narratives about the realities of human trafficking.

Unfortunately, this spread of misinformation only hurts victims and survivors and the ability of the anti-trafficking community to protect those who have or are currently experiencing human trafficking and to bring traffickers to justice. When false or misleading rumors about human trafficking quickly spread online and through social media, concerned individuals may want to take action because they genuinely believe the information. This can lead to damaging effects on the ability of law enforcement, NGOs, and other victim service providers to respond to real cases.

False information and rumors about human trafficking can overwhelm law enforcement and established systems of intervention and care that respond to potential and confirmed cases of human trafficking. Those who are victims of human trafficking end up not receiving the response and support they need. Moreover, the spread of



misinformation about human trafficking leads anti-trafficking advocates and organizations to allocate time and resources to re-educate the public rather than providing the services needed to aid survivors. Survivors report feelings of being re-exploited because the trauma they faced is being questioned or used for nefarious, and sometimes political, purposes.

When Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have posted statements debunking misinformation they have become victims of cyberattacks and threats. Some employees of NGOs that help identify and provide services to survivors of human trafficking have even faced threats of violence.

Extremist groups have disseminated misinformation about sex trafficking as a means of recruiting new members and as a gateway to further radicalize members. It is imperative to stop the spread of misinformation, including conspiracy theories, both to combat sex and labor trafficking and to prevent violent extremism and counter threats to U.S. national security. An important component of successful anti-trafficking policies is a well-informed public that understands the real indicators of the crime and can identify it when it happens in their own communities.

Social media has been used by traffickers to recruit victims, to proliferate their trafficking operations, and to control victims through restricting their social media access, impersonating the victim, or spreading lies and rumors online. However, survivors are embracing social media as a way to reach out for help or to build a support network that allows them to engage with each other, build a community, and work as survivor leaders.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Navigating the Unique Complexities in Familial Trafficking

In 2017, the International Office of Migration estimated that 41 percent of child trafficking is familial trafficking, which is when a family member or guardian is the child's trafficker or the one who sells the child to a third-party trafficker. Familial trafficking is difficult to identify because it takes place within family networks. The children often do not realize that they are victims. Indicators for familial trafficking are different from indicators for other types of trafficking. The trafficker may begin grooming the victim at an early age, using their proximity to take advantage of the child's inability to verbally express concerns or safety issues.

When the family member is the trafficker, the exploitation is often normalized and accepted within the family culture, sometimes spanning generations. This normalization of exploitation may also occur when familial trafficking is tied to economic and cultural factors, such as in some cases of forced child labor in agriculture.

Misperceptions, such as the belief that familial trafficking only occurs within neighborhoods, communities, or countries of low socioeconomic status, contribute to challenges to prosecution, prevention, and protection efforts. Whether the parent or guardian is the trafficker or sells the child who is then placed in the care of another trafficker, the trafficker is both that child's exploiter and caregiver. If another family member notices the exploitation of the child, there is a strong incentive to look the other way to protect the reputation of the family.

Because children are dependent on their families for their basic needs, they are often faced with being deprived of basic needs or with physical violence if they do not comply with the trafficker.

When children experience familial trafficking, the reality is that abuse, pain, torture, and exploitation is the only life these survivors may have known. Children may develop educational and social delays, physical health problems, and psychological disorders, such as complex post-traumatic stress disorder and attachment disorders. Survivors have presented with head, stomach, and body aches; throat and urinary tract infections; interrupted sleep due to nightmares and flashbacks; difficulty concentrating; and asthma. Some are reported to have learning disabilities, including illiteracy and processing challenges. Other children excel, whether because school is where they feel safe or because they have been conditioned to please adults in their lives or developed resiliency and survival skills early in life.

Child survivors of familial trafficking situations often have limited resources when seeking assistance. Victims might not be able to identify with the indicators of human trafficking featured in most public awareness and outreach campaigns that share information on how to seek help. Some service providers use the same approaches and resources for familial trafficking that are used for all types of human trafficking, which can be inappropriate and even harmful. Programs for survivors that focus on familial trafficking empower the survivors when they learn they are not alone in their journey.

This section of the TIP report was produced by the Human Trafficking Expert Consultant Network (the Network) funded by the TIP Office. The purpose of the Network is to engage experts, particularly those with lived experience of human trafficking, to provide expertise and input on Department of State anti-trafficking policies, strategies, and products.

Advocacy

Acknowledging Historical and Ongoing Harm: The Connections between Systemic Racism and Human Trafficking

“There are many jurisdictions that are predominantly White, yet the most being exploited, arrested and children taken into custody are women of color. There is a big problem of Black and Brown bodies being treated differently from White bodies. It’s not that people of color do more drugs, are more engaged in criminal behavior, it’s that they are more vulnerable, more targeted by the police for prostitution and other crimes. There is a connection and a disparity from police profiling, arrest, incarceration rates, sentencing, and recidivism. When a White person goes missing, you hear about it every five minutes. In contrast, when Black and Brown bodies go missing you don’t hear about their disappearance anywhere near as often, if at all.” -Autumn Burris, Founding CEO, Survivors for Solutions, featured in ECPAT-USA’s “Survivor Perspective” blog series



The legacy of the systemic racism and colonization globalized during the transatlantic slave trade through chattel slavery in many ways foreshadow the challenges and trends of human trafficking today. Human traffickers always take advantage of vulnerability. People of color or part of a racial minority suffer from discriminatory policies that make them vulnerable socioeconomically and politically.

Efforts to effectively prosecute, protect and prevent human trafficking must embrace racial justice and equity. However, data and feedback from those with lived experience of human trafficking demonstrate that systemic racism undercuts the intended goals of prosecuting traffickers, protecting those victimized, and preventing human trafficking in significant ways.

Ingrained racial biases and stereotypes, which were created as a way to dehumanize certain racial communities to justify their exploitation and exclusion, hinder progress in anti-trafficking efforts because they lead to racially disparate assumptions about who is a trafficker and who should have access to victim protection and services. For example, a black male victim of trafficking will be treated as a trafficker by law enforcement. These stereotypes may impact which communities law enforcement target for anti-trafficking operations, which victim witnesses the criminal justice system deems credible, and which individuals process their experiences as exploitation and seek help. This in turn benefits the traffickers. Traffickers factor racial biases into strategies aimed at reducing their own risk of getting caught while increasing the risk of law enforcement improperly penalizing victims.

Discriminatory governmental policies create disparities in who has access to economic opportunities. These harmful practices include redlining, lending discrimination, unequal distribution of government subsidies and services, restricted entry into white collar or higher paying jobs, and intentional exclusions of certain professions from worker protections. Traffickers will then target those who are economically struggling for sex trafficking or forced labor.

Inequalities created by systemic racism have survived in part because of the intentional destruction of certain racial groups' social support networks. Traffickers will target individuals with weaker community or family connections, knowing they have fewer safeguards. The chattel slavery system relied on the separation of family units during auctions and trading of enslaved people. It restricted where and how enslaved people could gather or socialize which served to weaken communal bonds. This pattern of fracturing families and communities led to a disproportionate number of people of color in other systems, such as prisons, runaway and homeless youth services, and foster or institutional care. This served to further exacerbate the social isolation.

Similar family separation policies were used to weaken or destroy indigenous families and communities. Native children were forcibly removed from their families and tribes and sent to “boarding schools” with the intention of forcing them to assimilate and no longer identify with their culture. Such policies have resulted in an ongoing disproportionate number of Native children in the child welfare system, increasing their vulnerability to human trafficking.

Until we acknowledge the structures of power and historical context behind unequal distribution of privilege and protection, traffickers will exploit those hurt by systemic racism and injustice.

Child-Friendly Spaces for Survivors of Human Trafficking

Government authorities and service providers should take special measures to ensure appropriate support and care are available to child victims of trafficking. Care should be taken so that children receive immediate support and assistance in a safe and comfortable setting that is not intimidating or retraumatizing. Child-friendly spaces are an essential component of holistic victim-centered and trauma-informed care for child survivors of human trafficking.

Child-friendly spaces, which can be a separate room or even just a corner of a regular interview room, are typically located in places such as police stations or hospitals. The use of child-friendly spaces reflects a multidisciplinary approach. They should provide a place for children to feel safe and for social workers, medical professionals, law enforcement, and others to conduct victim interviews, psychosocial counseling, and medical care. Providing a safe and structured environment for play and learning, such spaces also can help facilitate the prosecution of human traffickers as children provide information to law enforcement to help hold perpetrators accountable.

Child-friendly spaces generally provide age-appropriate furniture and decorations, painting the walls in calming colors, and displaying children's artwork or murals. Toys, art supplies, and age-appropriate books are also provided. A comforting environment and informal play can assist survivors in expressing their feelings of fear and distress. Ensuring that a child feels safe is crucial. The physical space must be easily accessible, ideally through its own entrance and exit, and separates the survivor from the perpetrator to prevent further trauma.

A safe space affords children privacy so they can talk about their experiences freely. A child-friendly space provides survivors with an array of comprehensive services and referral networks in one place. In addition to addressing immediate needs by providing food, water, and sanitary facilities, a child-friendly space should address longer-term needs through the provision of medical screening and services, psychosocial counseling, referrals, and information about legal proceedings. Receiving various services in one place and during the same timeframe shields the survivor from having to repeat the story of what happened to them multiple times.

Services provided in the space should be trauma-informed, age-appropriate, and culturally and linguistically sensitive. This approach considers the vulnerabilities and experiences of trauma survivors and places priority on restoring a survivor's feelings of safety, choice, and control.

Service providers should make sure children understand their rights and are empowered to make decisions about their own care, where appropriate.

A trauma-informed approach should ultimately build trust and transparency between survivors and service providers, and it must also be responsive to gender, age, ethnicity, and cultural differences. Interviewing and service provision that is not trauma-informed or in the best interest of the child can be retraumatizing and inhibit a successful recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic increases children's vulnerability to trafficking. Families may require children to find work due to parents not working and lost income. Many children might not be attending school where they have access to trusted adults. Because of this increased vulnerability, establishing and maintaining child-friendly spaces is critical to prioritize during the pandemic; they can even be a safe place where children learn about public health protections such as social distancing, mask-wearing, and proper hygiene.

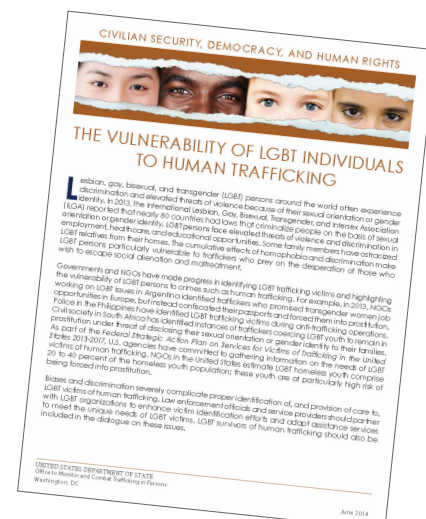


A Child-Friendly Space is a safe place set up in a disaster-affected community where children's unique needs can be met. These spaces help children return to a normal routine by offering activities, games and informal education.

Child-Friendly Spaces are one of the ways we prioritize the care and protection of children in emergency situations. (World Vision)

Letter on LGBTQI+ Vulnerability to Human Trafficking

The Department of State received the following letter, printed on page 50 of the report, in response to its annual “Federal Register” notice requesting information relevant to countries’ progress in addressing human trafficking. By publishing it, with the author’s consent, the Department seeks to shine a light on a population particularly vulnerable to human trafficking that is often misunderstood and overlooked. The Department has highlighted the vulnerability of LGBTQI+ individuals, the trafficking risks they face, and the challenges associated with victim identification and protection around the world. The circumstances of LGBTQI+ individuals, including threats of public disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity, are not isolated to foreign countries.



Dear Reader,

It was the winter after my 19th year; my mother was informed that I was seeing a boy. The conversation started, “I have never been so humiliated; how was I supposed to maintain my composure?” After a few moments of inquiring, I was informed of what was so humiliating to her, me. I knew my family loathed gays. I had grown up in the United States during the AIDS pandemic, hearing “the only good [expletive] is a dead one,” or “it is their punishment for being how they are, they deserve it.” My family openly praised my uncle’s contraction of HIV and waited for his death. When the tables turned onto me, I already knew their opinions. When I was told, “you will either be a child of mine or gay,” I simply said fine and walked out the door with the few items I could carry. That was the year Matthew Shepard was beaten and left for dead hanging on a fence.

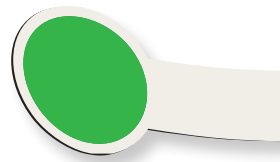
That first month I was learning the ‘safe’ spots to park my car to sleep. I was cleaning up in bathrooms and going to college and work. Then the church started the process of ex-communication to revoke my college scholarships because they believed I was willingly living my life in sin. I finished out the semester and decided I would wait for a bit to finish college. After four years and three promotions at work, I was told, “you are too gay; if you want to continue working here, you will go back in the closet.” I figured within the previous two months I had already lost my house, my family, and my college scholarship—at that point, what was my job? I went to the city north of my hometown and started couch surfing with people from the clubs I went to.

I then started working in escorting services through a bar where I didn’t know the rates charged, didn’t handle the money, and had little to no control over refusing clients who were violent or wouldn’t use condoms. Some of us were there to pay off the debts owed to the bar owner. We were given drugs that kept us numb. Our debts were too high. We paid daily for a bed, for the space at the bar, for the help the bar owners gave us. When we couldn’t pay, we slept on subways, in empty warehouses, in cars, or on couches. We traveled a lot; we were always on the road between cities, between states, and wherever we were told to go. Thankfully, a bar owner friend would stitch us up without a hospital visit when we were hurt, so we didn’t have another bill. There were always lies, and it was never as glamorous as we were promised. Do you get to choose to be abused in a society where death is the alternative?

Living in abandoned places meant our cars were taken, we were mugged, we had our modest apartments broke into—life was hard. In three years, I had slept with over 500 people. When there was an error at the local health clinic, and my blood got mixed up with another person’s, I tested false positive for AIDS. I always expected to test positive, so when I retested, I was in shock when it came back negative. I left the escort service at that point. I knew I was playing with fire.

Many of us loathe the churches that allowed us to be abused with their hatred of us from the pulpit. Many of us are sexually assaulted by family, peers in schools, our ministers, or coaches. Over half of us on the streets are there because we were thrown out for being ourselves. Forty percent of those on the streets are LGBTQI+. We are the unwanted, the forgotten, the lost kids of the streets that no one misses or looks for. We aren’t victims because we “chose” this life. We are trafficked to survive; we are abused because we are unwanted, and we have to fight to be heard in the society we live in. Our bodies are lying in alleys and warehouses unnoticed; we are pawns in a system that doesn’t care about us. We need to overcome the years of institutional bias and discrimination by politicians trying to criminalize our use of bathrooms or marriages. We need to be seen as people. We need to be seen as people experiencing victimization. We need to be told this isn’t normal and that we are experiencing victimization.

Nat Paul, Subject Matter Expert with Lived Experience of Human Trafficking



2021 TIP Report Heroes

Each year, the Department of State honors individuals around the world who have devoted their lives to the fight against human trafficking. These individuals include NGO workers, lawmakers, government officials, survivors of human trafficking, and concerned citizens. They are recognized for their tireless efforts to protect victims, punish offenders, and mitigate the underlying factors that cause vulnerabilities traffickers often target.

For more information about current and past TIP Report Heroes, please visit the TIP Report Heroes Global Network at www.tipheroes.org.



Albania: Sister Imelda Poole

Sister Imelda Poole is a member of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Mary Ward) congregation and serves as president of the Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation (RENATE), a network of European women religious from 21 countries combating human trafficking. She has prioritized achieving systemic change through grassroots action and effective networking. At the local and regional levels, she is persistent in advancing advocacy, outreach, and rehabilitation services to combat human trafficking. Poole has traveled throughout Europe,

mentoring and training others and becoming a leading spokesperson for anti-trafficking initiatives in Europe. When her ministry moved to Albania in 2005, she quickly established the anti-trafficking NGO Mary Ward Loreto (MWL) in Albania. Under Poole's strategic direction, MWL addresses the root causes of human trafficking, focusing on communities where Roma, migrants, women, and children are most vulnerable. Poole and her staff have worked with more than 3,000 women. They have set up 16 economic empowerment businesses throughout Albania, which aim to decrease women's risk of exploitation by providing opportunities to participate in entrepreneurial projects in tourism, design, and education. In the past year, the MWL team has worked to reduce the vulnerability of individuals and families in Albania affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to human trafficking.



Gabon: Chantal Sagbo Sasse Ep. Guedet Mandzela

Chantal Sagbo Sasse has been at the forefront of Gabon's anti-trafficking movement for more than two decades. She launched one of the country's preeminent NGOs dedicated to combating child trafficking, Service International de la Formation des Enfants de la Rue (SIFOS), in 2000 and has led the organization since its founding. Under Sagbo Sasse's courageous leadership and vision, SIFOS offers critical education to children who have experienced human trafficking, homelessness, or residential institutionalization.

She has diligently worked with community members, law enforcement and government officials, and other NGOs to ensure the country is proactively identifying victims and referring them to care. Through her early work, Sagbo Sasse frequently interacted and established a deep connection with children who had survived human trafficking, many who were coming from Benin, her country of origin. She and her team have developed anti-trafficking monitoring cells throughout the country's capital composed of community members, whom SIFOS has trained and empowered to identify human trafficking within vulnerable populations, and to safely report suspected cases to authorities. From 2000 to 2020, SIFOS helped identify 578 child trafficking victims and reintegrate 9,039 children into local society.



Action

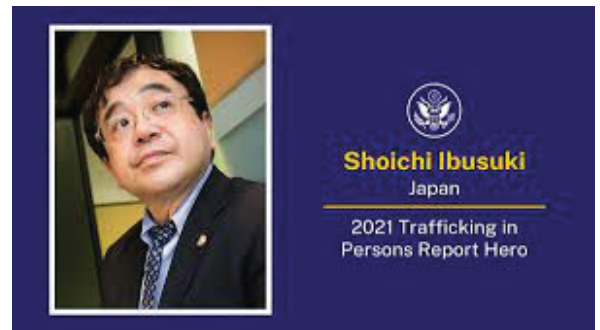
Central African Republic: Josiane Lina Bemaka-Soui



Josiane Lina Bemaka-Soui has developed the Central African Republic’s national anti-trafficking response from the ground up. In her role as Presidential Advisor and the national Disarmament, Demobilization, and Repatriation program’s Strategic Focal Point for Children, Bemaka-Soui operationalized the government’s anti-trafficking interagency committee and led the development and implementation of the country’s first national action plan on human trafficking. Bemaka-Soui’s leadership and efforts resulted in the critical foundation for the government to steadily improve its efforts to combat human trafficking.

Japan: Shoichi Ibusuki

Shoichi Ibusuki has been an unrelenting champion of protecting foreign workers’ rights, and he has worked tirelessly for years on behalf of foreign technical trainees to assist victims of forced labor and prevent abuse within Japan’s Technical Intern Training Program. He is the Co-President of the Lawyers’ Network for Technical Intern Trainees, the President of the Lawyers Network for Foreign Workers, and a prominent legal expert in foreign labor issues. Ibusuki’s advocacy, along with his unwavering and admirable dedication to helping foreign nationals enduring labor exploitation and protecting their human rights, have brought these issues to the forefront and raised their profile



Kazakhstan: Shakhnoza Khassanova

Shakhnoza Khassanova is the director of the Legal Center for Women’s Initiatives, “Sana Sezim.” She has more than a decade of experience raising awareness about human trafficking, advocating for greater victim protections, and aiding migrants and victims of human trafficking from across Central Asia. Founded in 2001, Sana Sezim has been a premier anti-trafficking organization in Kazakhstan and has greatly advanced efforts within the country to end human trafficking and help labor migrants. Led by Khassanova, Sana Sezim has worked tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to keep its shelter open for trafficking victims and to raise awareness about safe migration and

human trafficking. Khassanova and Sana Sezim have bravely remained on the front lines to continue assisting migrants stranded at the Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan border due to pandemic closures, and who thus faced increased risk to human trafficking.

Mexico: Guillermina Cabrera Figueroa

Guillermina Cabrera Figueroa is the specialized prosecutor for human trafficking for the State of Mexico. In addition to her anti-trafficking accomplishments in her current position, she has a track record of championing the rights of trafficking victims and providing them with services. With her determination, endless work, and leadership while



working in the federal government's Specialized Investigations Office on Organized Crime, Mexico obtained its first criminal sentencing for crimes involving human trafficking and organized crime in June 2011. In March 2013, Cabrera accepted the position of specialized prosecutor for human trafficking at the State of Mexico Attorney General's Office.



Qatar: Mohammed Al-Obaidly

Mohammed al-Obaidly is one of the most important Qatari figures advocating for labor and human trafficking reforms in Qatar. As an Assistant Undersecretary within the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs, he has initiated or executed many of the policies and programs that have had significant impacts for trafficking victims. These include the creation of Labor Dispute Resolution Committees, the opening of the first and only shelter in the country for human trafficking victims, the removal of exit permit requirements for migrant workers, imple-

mentation of the minimum wage, and abolishment of the No Objection Certificate (migrant workers were previously required to obtain these certificates from their employer to transfer to another employer). Qatar remains a difficult place for many migrant workers, and forced labor remains a serious concern in the country.

Spain: Rocio Mora-Nieto

For 26 years, Rocío Mora-Nieto has dedicated her efforts to combat the sexual exploitation of women and, since the 1990s, sex trafficking in Spain through her work as director of the Association for the Prevention, Reintegration and Assistance to Prostituted Women (APRAMP). An outstanding and passionate activist, she has led APRAMP to be a pioneer in the implementation of strategies aimed at improving coordination between the judiciary, state security forces, and the national government, which has resulted in an effective blow against criminal organizations responsible for sex trafficking in Spain.



Action Needed: Solidarity for Seafarers

Seafarers are at great risk for labor trafficking and human rights abuses, especially during the current pandemic. Please click [here](#) to urge Walmart to sign the Neptune Declaration to protect seafarers and recognize them as essential workers.



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