

REGIONAL TRENDS REPORT

Study Research On Vulnerability To Trafficking In Persons Among
The Crisis-Affected Populations In The Levant Region, 2021

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STUDY RESEARCH ON VULNERABILITY TO TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AMONG THE CRISIS-AFFECTED POPULATIONS IN THE LEVANT REGION, 2021



This study focuses on some of the emerging findings of International Organization for Migration's (IOM) research on the risks and vulnerabilities to Trafficking in Persons (TiP) of crisis-affected populations in both the internal displacement and refugee context of the Levant region. It also discusses the potential implications of the findings for counter-trafficking activities in the region. The findings are relevant to Iraqi and Syrian nationals in the Levant region with the acknowledgement that the crises-affected populations include the host communities as well as other migrant groups.

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BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH REGIONAL REPORT

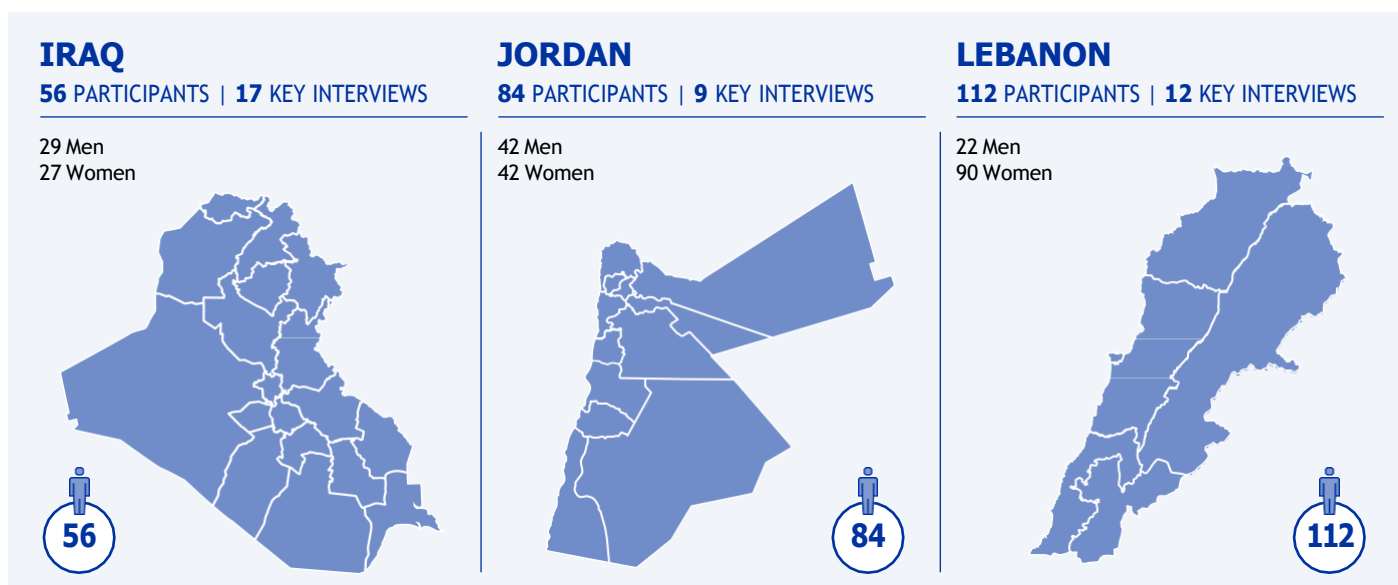
This study was commissioned to explore the situation of trafficking in persons in the Levant countries with the aim to produce reliable evidence on crisis and vulnerability to TiP and consequently to inform programming and policy, based on an improved understanding of:

1. The characteristics of the crises-affected populations at risk of Trafficking in Persons;
2. The patterns of exploitation and means to control the victims;
3. The relationship between coping strategies employed by the crises-affected populations, and potential recruitment and entry into trafficking;
4. Assistance needs and challenges of trafficked victims or at-risk individuals. All the data and information gathered were key to devising appropriate recommendations to address TIP response in humanitarian settings in the Levant region.

RESEARCH POPULATION & SAMPLE

To capture a clear picture of the situation of Trafficking in Persons in the Levant region, a data collection exercise was conducted in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, in two stages. For the first stage, the target population consisted of the people at risk through the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). For the second stage, the target population involved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders specialized or main stakeholders or decision makers in counter-trafficking efforts. Each country aimed at covering nearly 10 FGD comprising 10 to 15 participants in each FGD in addition to 10-15 interviews with key stakeholders. Some of the FGD were replaced or followed by a mapping exercise which allowed to identify the patterns of trafficking in details.

Area	FGD or Mapping exercise or a combined approach	Key Stakeholders in-depth interviews
Iraq	7 with 56 participants (29 men and 27 women)	17
Jordan	8 with 84 participants (42 men and 42 women)	9
Lebanon	10 with 112 participants (22 men and 90 women)	12



Furthermore, an analysis from a counter-trafficking perspective of the existing assessment such as the Migrant Vulnerabilities Country report, 2018 in Turkey as well as the data gathered by Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM) in Syria helped capturing instance of manifestations of exploitations and Trafficking in Persons. This data was collected with 404 key informants in 14 Governorates in nearly 500 districts. Data collected was triangulated whenever possible, and these quantitative findings were contextualized with desk reviews.

An extensive research and desk review were conducted to analyze each Humanitarian Response in each of the different states as well as reports related to trafficking in crisis/conflict settings. Content analysis was used to gather data related to the legal frameworks governing migration and Trafficking in Persons in the countries under study as well as data related to vulnerability of crisis-affected populations in the Levant region.

CONTEXT OF THE LEVANT REGION

Describing trafficking trends in the Levant region is challenging, considering the very different country contexts, that range from internal displacement, active conflict and breakdown of the rule of law, to refugees hosted in a context of political instability. In addition, the movements of the crises-affected populations are complex. They range from returns to the place of origin (including spontaneous returns of Internally displaced persons (IDPs)), to recurrent displacement within the same country, circular cross-border movements and one-way migration journeys beyond the Levant. Finally, an added layer of complexity when describing the potential trafficking in persons patterns, is brought by the different national groups that are affected by the crises.

The region has long been affected by conflict-generated crises that led to forced migration. The most recent and intense conflicts were in Syria and Iraq. They resulted in hardship, insecurity and human rights violations for millions of Syrians and Iraqis. For example, the level of internal displacement as well as the number of refugees that sought safety in the neighboring countries is very high: there are an estimated 6 million IDPs in Syria, and an estimated 1,9 million IDPs in Iraq. In the case of Iraq, it is estimated that more than half of the IDPs have been displaced for over 3 years. There are also 5,6 million Syrians in neighboring countries, including Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Within Syria, it was estimated that there were an estimated 13 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2019, while in Iraq, approximately 6.7 million were in such need.

It is widely acknowledged that protracted conflict and displacement create uncertainty, trauma and deteriorate individuals' livelihoods, which can make affected population more desperate and more vulnerable to exploitation.

REGIONAL FINDINGS

Risks of specific forms of Trafficking in Persons

The findings suggest that the risks of TiP for labor exploitation, servitude, forced recruitment into armed groups, forced marriage and forced prostitution are common in the Levant region. Early marriage that is likely to result in forced marriage of children as well as begging as a form of labor exploitation were particular risks reported.



1. Labor exploitation mainly in construction and agriculture sectors

- » Experience of abuse: long working hours, minimal or no pay, no breaks, coerced and controlled work through confiscation of papers, verbal and physical abuse and threats
- » Push factors for exploitation: unable to fight the abuse due to the fear of losing any means of survival or the shelter that the employer offers, fear of being reported to the authorities due to irregular migration status.



2. Child labor mainly in agricultural, forced recruitment for armed groups and begging specifically in urban areas and locations which are known touristic attractions

- » Experience of abuse: forced begging, sexual servitude, forced marriage to a member of an armed group or forced fighting for an armed group.
- » Push factors for exploitation: the diversification of the household's access to livelihoods and the lack of parents' knowledge about the detrimental impact of the work on the children development.



3. Sexual exploitation

- » Experience of abuse: early marriage, forced marriage, survival sex
- » Push factors for exploitation: the parents' need to ensure girls' security and protection from harassment (especially in camp settings) as well as the children's access to better economic opportunities.

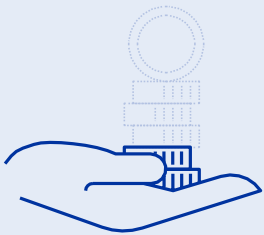


4. Potential trafficking for organ removal

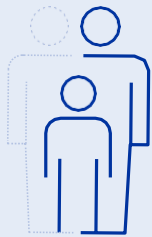
- » Respondents mentioned of hearing - but not knowing personally - about cases of children who were abducted for the purpose of organ removal. These children came back to their communities without an organ.

PRECONDITIONS & VULNERABILITIES OF CRISIS AFFECTED POPULATION TO TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

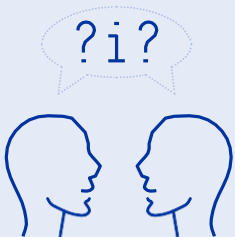
Insecure livelihoods of Syrians and Iraqi as a major risk of Trafficking in Persons - lack of sustainable source of income to ensure a decent shelter and meet basic needs. Inability of men and women to find decent work and children to go to school was associated with increasing desperation which leads to the acceptance of exploitative offers and situations that might amount to Trafficking in Persons such as Worst Form of Child Labor.



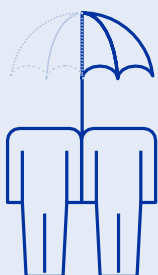
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People implicated into the Trafficking in Persons process - recruiters are often from the displaced community itself, and not only from the host community. Both children and adults can be exploited by members of their own immediate or extended family, or by other people who are also themselves in a desperate situation. It is often the difficulties of survival in a displacement situation that drive their vulnerabilities to trafficking, and lead to friends, neighbors, family and acquaintances to play a role into a trafficking process.



Limited and fragmented specialized assistance - findings show that there is not enough expertise to deal with trafficking cases by the humanitarian workers. There are insufficient mechanisms in place to address trafficking, such as dedicated working groups within the protection clusters. Informants mentioned that they have little trust in the criminal justice system, which would probably have an impact into their likeliness to seek or accept assistance.



The limitations of the protection work for the crises-affected populations. There appear to be limited general protection mechanisms - not only through the counter-trafficking lens - for the crises-affected populations, which result from: limited resources available and donor fatigue

1. limited resources available and donor fatigue
2. lack of registration to access aid due to safety and security concerns of the crises-affected populations
3. limited resettlement options to countries that could provide better standards of living for the crisis-affected population.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 OUTBREAK

The COVID-19 outbreak continues to disrupt State functions, impairing the capacities of already vulnerable population and affecting family and social networks including in areas impacted by crisis prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, as it is the situation in the Levant region. As a result, it has been observed that vulnerabilities of people already at-risk of trafficking have been further exacerbated and people previously less at risk of trafficking became victims. In order to further understand vulnerabilities of crisis-affected population to trafficking within COVID-19 outbreak context, reference was made to existing secondary data available including the Regional Needs Overview- 2021¹ and the Humanitarian Needs Overview - Syrian Arab Republic-2021, whereby below elements were observed:

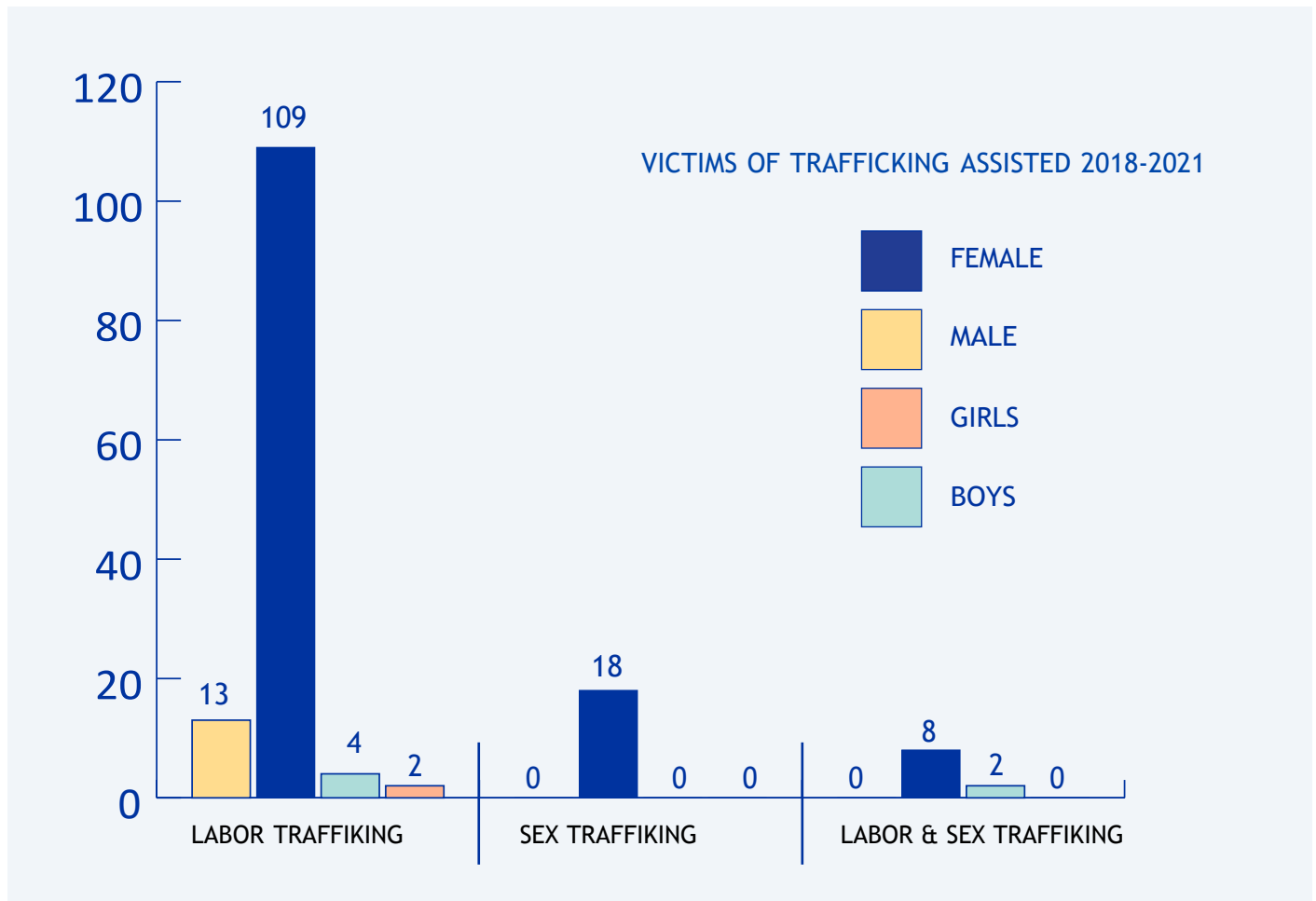
- » Forced and child marriage, sexual violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, and domestic violence are the common reported forms of sexual and gender-based violence affecting refugees and host communities. Access to healthcare and/or preventative equipment including services for women and girls who are survivors of violence have been disrupted by COVID-19 measures.
- » Fears around livelihoods and financial difficulties and increased parental anxieties and frustrations have further aggravated tensions increasing the risk of child abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation and recruitment of children by parties to the conflict.
- » Female headed households face additional vulnerabilities and rely on child labor twice as much as male-headed households, increasing the vulnerability of children to Worst Form of Child Labor.
- » Families with children with disabilities often live in isolated situations, due to discrimination where they may be exposed to additional risks like stigma, exploitation including child trafficking and abuse, and inadequate access to services.
- » As per recent assessments conducted by IOM in Jordan² and Lebanon³, vulnerabilities to trafficking among migrants' population increased as it is extremely difficult to access basic needs as a direct consequence of the pandemic. Many migrants in the Levant region are experiencing the highest degree of socio-economic marginalization, leaving them at risk of violence, exploitation and abuse.
- » COVID-19 measures resulted in disruption of referral pathways - such as those for victims of trafficking, leading to interruptions in case identification, referral, and protection processes.
- » A wide range of mental health conditions and psychosocial consequences has been attributed to challenges like lack of resources, fear of evictions, risks of exploitation, violence and discrimination, disruption of social networks and lack of livelihood opportunities.
- » The deteriorating economy and widespread poverty, lack and loss of livelihoods, multiple cycles of displacement, substandard living conditions, the breakdown of family or community support structures have depleted the coping abilities of individuals.

1 http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/RNO_3RP.pdf

2 https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/JOR_Socioeconomic-Response-Plan_2020.pdf

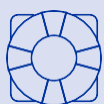
3 <https://rocairo.iom.int/publications/needs-and-vulnerability-assesment-migrants-lebanon>

VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING ASSISTED 2018-2021



REGIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides some potential recommendations drawn from Palermo Protocol and based on the findings of this research.



PILLAR 1

Pillar 1 - Comprehensive Prevention efforts

- Foster coordination between humanitarian/protection actors and specialized counter-trafficking practitioners⁴.
- Strengthening of child protection by integrating child protection into national migration systems, incorporating a non-discriminatory approach based on Best Interest of the Child principles and improving coordination between authorities charged with migration and asylum procedures and child protection.
- Collecting timely and reliable data including proxy indicators on risks and vulnerabilities to TIP in the regular and large one-off data quantitative collection exercises, as well as analyzing existing assessments.
- Early warning and monitoring: (i) such warnings could be hotlines to report TIP incidents, (ii) and regular assessment on the protection risks faced by different groups of crisis-affected populations.
- Responding to the basic needs of crisis-affected populations and enabling referral, and access to

⁴ The terms humanitarian/protection actors encompass a broad range of stakeholders operating in crises areas, who may come across presumed trafficked persons or persons at risk of trafficking in the exercise of their duties.

livelihood opportunities for those identified at-risk of trafficking.

- Increasing awareness on TIP: enhance the implementation of a regional awareness strategy⁵ to address the prevention of TIP in humanitarian settings and mainstream CT into existing awareness strategies and initiatives led by humanitarian actors.
- Conducting outreach sessions related to TIP focusing on means used by exploiters to control victims; self-protection measures, info on services available and criminal justice considerations.



PILLAR 2

Pillar 2 - Strengthening the protection sphere for victims of trafficking

- Increasing identification through awareness raising and capacity building of front liners, service providers, medical professionals, security entities dealing with vulnerable groups.
- Fostering coordination between humanitarian and counter-trafficking actors to improve identification, referral and access of victims of trafficking to comprehensive assistance.
- Include indicators of trafficking to identify vulnerability to TIP as part of existing individual protection assessment and referral.
- Ensuring victims of trafficking have access to comprehensive and trauma-informed care through a mapping of services .
- Provision of cross-border case management to allow access of VoTs to assistance and protection beyond borders: such as resettlement options to a third country and access to complementary pathway for protection.
- Supporting community-based interventions to facilitate the return of victims to their communities, to address stigma and security concerns and maximize opportunities for social cohesion.
- Supporting the amendment of national laws and policies including development of national standard operating procedures (SOPs) or update of existing SOPs to enhance protection of VoT crisis-affected populations.



PILLAR 3

Pillar 3 - Victim-centered prosecution

- Enhancing criminal justice responses as part of the assistance and protection of VoTs and the application of non-criminalization principle.
- Facilitating access of VoTs to unconditional assistance despite their willingness to cooperate with law enforcement agencies.
- Ensuring victim-centered investigation and prosecutions, whereby VoTs should not be arrested or deported.
- Supporting the development laws and policies that allow the prosecution of traffickers and penalization of clients benefiting from sexual services⁶.
- Assessing legislations and using a systemic approach to give proper protection for victims of trafficking, given that TIP is an organized crime.



PILLAR 4

Pillar 4 - Partnerships and accountability to affected populations

- Establish a network of key actors in the Levant region, given the similarities identified in the region and the need to ensure a coordinated response, in line with the regional framework SOPs to coordinate efforts among humanitarian and counter-trafficking actors to strengthen prevention, protection and prosecution efforts in the field of counter-trafficking.
- Supporting the establishment of a national body/ or providing support to existing bodies to coordinate counter-trafficking efforts in humanitarian settings at all levels including prevention, protection and prosecution.
- Building partnership with affected communities to engage them in the counter-trafficking responses.
- Fostering cooperation beyond the Levant region, with countries who can play a role in the response to the crisis, within the counter-trafficking efforts.

5 https://iomint-my.sharepoint.com/:f/g/personal/ebsaibess_iom_int/Eg-KbMgHPhNKhCWzHJgHVowBi8tFzm9GDL5cuVDW5ir9Yg?e=oPAL1b

6 https://iomint-my.sharepoint.com/:b/g/personal/ebsaibess_iom_int/EbYAhQ_k8yFDmUZKypRn_kgBGGgSD-6k2oyrFBcScP074Q?e=4ShPoc

