

The Risks of Labour Trafficking for Migrant Workers: A Focus on Human Trafficking and AI

Boutier, Indira; Maganaris, Emmanuel

Publication date:
2025

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in ResearchOnline](#)

Citation for published version (Harvard):
Boutier, I & Maganaris, E 2025, *The Risks of Labour Trafficking for Migrant Workers: A Focus on Human Trafficking and AI*. United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please view our takedown policy at <https://edshare.gcu.ac.uk/id/eprint/5179> for details of how to contact us.

The risks of labour trafficking for migrant workers: a focus on human trafficking and AI

DR. INDIRA BOUTIER, LECTURER IN LAW, GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY

DR. EMMANUEL MAGANARIS, SENIOR LECTURER IN LAW, GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY

This document aims to promote and protect human rights. It is important to note that the information contained in this report is based on publicly available sources, including interviews, documents and other publicly available materials. The authors cannot be held liable for any direct, indirect, incidental, consequential or punitive damages resulting from the use, interpretation or reliance on the information provided.

Table of contents

Introduction	3
1. Gender-Specific Vulnerabilities in Labour Trafficking	3
2. Intersectional Vulnerabilities Among Other At-Risk Groups	4
2.1. LGBTQI+ Migrant Workers	4
2.2. Migrant Workers with Disabilities	5
2.3. Indigenous Peoples	6
2.4. Older Persons	7
2.5. Children and Youth	8
3. The Role of AI Technologies in Anti-Trafficking Efforts	9
3.1. Capabilities and Benefits: Augmenting Human Capacity	9
3.2. Risks: Bias, Surveillance, and Privacy Infringements	9
3.3. Explainability and the Accountability Gap	10
3.4. A Human Rights–Centred Regulatory Response	10
Conclusion	11
Annexes	12
Annex I: Data and Statistics	12
Annex II: Case Studies (2020-205)	14
1. Women Migrant Domestic Workers (Kafala System)	14
2. LGBTQIA+ Migrants	14
3. Persons with Disabilities	14
4. Indigenous Communities	15
5. Older Migrants	15
6. Child Migrants (Cross-Border Trafficking)	16
Annex III: Good Practice Examples	17
1. Ethical Recruitment Programs	17
2. Intersectional Awareness & Training	18
3. Corporate Due Diligence and Grievance Mechanisms	18
Annex IV: AI Technologies and Human Rights Assessment Tools	20
1. Big Data & Predictive Analytics	20
2. Satellite Imagery & Remote Sensing	20
3. Natural Language Processing (NLP)	20

4. Risk-Profiling and Screening	21
5. Algorithmic Impact Assessments (AIAs)	21
6. Ethical AI Deployment Criteria	21
Annex V: Recommendations	24
Annex VI: Glossary of Terms and Acronyms	28
Sources	30

Introduction

Human trafficking for labour exploitation remains a pervasive human rights abuse affecting millions worldwide. Recent estimates indicate that about 27.6 million people are in situations of forced labour or sexual exploitation globally. Trafficking often has a gendered impact: women and girls are disproportionately affected, especially in certain forms of exploitation. In the EU, 69% of identified trafficking victims are exploited in the sex trade (95% of whom are women and girls), while 19% are trafficked for labour exploitation (with women and girls comprising about 27% of labour trafficking victims). These figures challenge the misconception that trafficking only involves sexual exploitation of young women – men, children, and older persons can also be victims – and women are also exploited in forced labour. Crucially, migrant workers in cross-border settings are at elevated risk: one analysis found migrant workers to be three times more likely to experience forced labour than non-migrants. Factors such as insecure immigration status, language barriers, and lack of access to services all weaken migrant workers' defences against traffickers.¹

This report examines how structural inequalities, and intersectional vulnerabilities increase the risks of labour trafficking. It explores gender-specific vulnerabilities facing women migrant workers, the role of informal work sectors and economic dependencies (eg. debt bondage) in facilitating exploitation, and how emerging AI technologies are being deployed in anti-trafficking efforts. The report then broadens in scope to analyse unique risks faced by other marginalised groups – LGBTQI+ migrants, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, older persons, and youth – and how global supply chains and informal economies create enabling environments for their exploitation. The report considers as well as the impact of data protection and AI governance laws (GDPR and the EU AI Act) on the use of technology in combating trafficking.

1. Gender-Specific Vulnerabilities in Labour Trafficking²

Women migrant workers are subject to a distinct convergence of structural vulnerabilities that heighten their risk of labour trafficking. These arise from entrenched gender-based discrimination, socio-economic inequality, and restrictive labour migration regimes. Notably, women are disproportionately represented in informal and unregulated labour sectors such as domestic work, caregiving, agriculture, and low-wage manufacturing – spheres that typically lack robust legal protections. The nature of these sectors, which often operate within private homes or remote locations, impedes regulatory oversight and facilitates abuse.

GRETA reports (Council of Europe) have highlighted the prevalence of trafficking for domestic servitude, including in diplomatic households, where victims are doubly isolated – by both geography and law. Diplomatic immunity and lax enforcement of labour rights leave women in these contexts without recourse. Many migrant women's legal residency is tied to their employer through restrictive visa schemes or sponsorship systems (e.g. kafala-style sponsorship regimes). These arrangements increase dependency and deter victims from fleeing abusive environments, as it can result in loss of legal status or income. Debt bondage further compounds the risk. Many women incur significant financial obligations to intermediaries for overseas employment. These debts are subsequently exploited by traffickers to restrict their freedom, creating a cycle of dependency. In parallel, traffickers leverage gendered stereotypes –

¹ For more data see [Annex I](#).

² For more information see [Annex II - 1](#)

presuming women to be more compliant or less likely to seek help – and may employ sexual violence as an additional coercive tool, even where labour exploitation is the primary objective.

The undervaluation of women’s labour within the informal economy is both a symptom and enabler of these abuses. Sectors like domestic work operate outside standard labour frameworks, often without formal contracts or access to grievance mechanisms. Women in these roles endure exploitative conditions, including non-payment of wages and extended work hours. Oversight in such settings is rare. In global supply chains, women are concentrated in lower-tier roles, frequently employed via subcontractors, which further fragments responsibility and masks abuse. Without stringent due diligence by companies, forced labour persists undetected.

Legal frameworks (e.g. EU Directive 2011/36/EU) have highlighted the necessity of a gender-sensitive approach to anti-trafficking efforts by states and business, and the Palermo Protocol urges States to consider “*the special vulnerability of women*”. Such measures must recognise the intersection of gender, migration, and economic coercion. Practical reforms – including eliminating recruitment fees, improving access to labour inspections, and facilitating employer changes for migrant workers – are essential. Equally, responses must affirm women’s agency, supporting their right to organise, access justice, and assert their rights proactively.

2. Intersectional Vulnerabilities Among Other At-Risk Groups

While gender is a critical factor, other identity traits and social statuses intersect with migrant status to create unique vulnerabilities to labour trafficking and abuse. Importantly, these categories are not mutually exclusive (e.g. an individual can be an LGBTQIA+ youth or an Indigenous person with a disability), and such overlapping identities can compound risk.

2.1. LGBTQIA+ Migrant Workers³

LGBTQIA+ persons face intersecting forms of marginalisation that heighten their vulnerability to trafficking. Structural discrimination, familial rejection, and exclusion from formal labour markets frequently drive members of this community to migrate in search of security or opportunity. Yet, these same conditions render them susceptible to exploitation, including by traffickers who prey on isolation and precarity.

Empirical studies and regional assessments (e.g. ASEAN and Australia Counter Trafficking initiative) underline how LGBTQIA+ youth are particularly at risk. Family-based queerphobia or transphobia often results in early homelessness, forcing individuals into informal settlements, refugee corridors, or street economies – all of which may be infiltrated by traffickers. As one Thai advocate notes, queer and trans individuals are exposed to trafficking due to familial rejection and the absence of safe housing, which in turn channels them toward exploitative labour or sexual servitude.

Transgender and non-binary persons face acute structural barriers. In some jurisdictions, 60% of trans individuals face job application discrimination, limiting access to formal employment and driving many into informal or criminalised workspaces. This increases their exposure to abuse, while simultaneously restricting their ability to seek recourse. Trans migrants may be coerced into illicit sectors such as sex work or domestic servitude, where they remain effectively unprotected due to pervasive stigma and fear of institutional mistreatment.

³ For more information see [Annexe II – 2](#).

Within global supply chains and workplace audits, LGBTQIA+ identities remain largely invisible. Standard compliance assessments often overlook sexual orientation and gender identity, leaving LGBTQIA+ migrant workers without tailored protections. Furthermore, trafficking into sexual exploitation – particularly targeting transgender women – may go uninvestigated due to societal biases that undermine victim credibility. Even in cases of labour exploitation, survivors face discrimination when attempting to access support. For instance, binary-gendered shelters have placed trans women in male facilities, exposing them to potential harm. Gay men, too, have reported being dismissed or mistreated by law enforcement, aggravating underreporting and impunity.

This “double vulnerability” (socioeconomically disadvantaged and LGBTQIA+) demands a nuanced response. International human rights frameworks affirm that anti-trafficking efforts must be non-discriminatory. In fact, the EU Directive 2011/36/EU call for victim assistance “without discrimination,” which includes sexual orientation and gender identity.

To meet this obligation, anti-trafficking policies must include targeted measures. These include inclusive shelter models, trauma-informed services for queer and trans survivors, and professional training for service providers. Legal reforms to address employment discrimination are equally vital, as access to dignified work can serve as a bulwark against trafficking. Community-based outreach and corporate accountability mechanisms must also evolve to reflect the lived realities of LGBTQIA+ migrants, whose vulnerabilities are not intrinsic but produced by exclusionary systems.

2.2. Migrant Workers with Disabilities⁴

Persons with disabilities (PWD) – including those with physical, sensory, intellectual, and psychosocial impairments – constitute a group at elevated risk of human trafficking yet remain underrepresented in prevailing discourse and response frameworks. Their vulnerabilities are multifaceted and structurally embedded. Traffickers exploit their dependence on others for mobility, communication, and essential services, deliberately targeting them based on assumptions that they are less likely to escape or report abuse.

The U.S. Office for Victims of Crime underlined the “benefits trafficking” practice, wherein exploiters steal disability-related welfare payments or pensions (e.g. *Linda Weston* case). In some cases, traffickers masquerade as romantic partners or caregivers, isolating and coercing PWD into commercial sex or forced labour. Communication barriers and deliberate isolation often leave abuses hidden, particularly when caregivers or interpreters are perpetrators themselves. Communication barriers aggravate this exploitation. Non-verbal individuals or those with intellectual disabilities may be unable to report abuse or rely on traffickers as their interpreters – allowing the abuse to remain hidden. The deliberate isolation of PWD, combined with their communication challenges, reinforces this cycle of silence.

Traffickers use their visible impairments to elicit sympathy and increase earnings, notably in cross-border contexts. Such cases are not confined to domestic exploitation: documented incidents in Southeast Asia and in Kenya reveal how children with disabilities are trafficked across borders under false pretences, then subjected to forced begging or labour (begging being recognised as a form of trafficking in EU law). Beyond begging, PWD are found in factories or farms, sometimes not even recognised as victims because authorities assume they are simply being “cared for” by the people exploiting them. Trafficking can also cause disabilities: victims may suffer injuries or trauma that result in long-term physical or mental impairments.

⁴ For more information see [Annex II – 3](#).

Systemic issues like poverty, stigma, inaccessible shelters, and lack of disability-disaggregated data further increase these vulnerabilities. In many jurisdictions, anti-trafficking materials and hotlines are not accessible, and shelters lack the necessary accommodations. Stigma compounds these issues: societal shame surrounding disability may lead families to conceal, neglect, or in extreme cases, sell disabled relatives. Where PWD do seek justice, they may confront disbelief, inaccessible legal procedures, or inadequate support services.

This invisibility persists in policy and data. Few trafficking statistics disaggregate by disability status, and corporate supply chain audits rarely consider the specific vulnerabilities of disabled workers. Consequently, trafficking involving PWD often remains undetected and unaddressed.

To address this, anti-trafficking efforts must adopt a disability-inclusive approach – improving accessibility in victim support services, providing targeted training for frontline responders, and ensuring employment practices respect the rights and dignity of disabled workers.

2.3. Indigenous Peoples⁵

Indigenous peoples globally experience heightened vulnerability to human trafficking due to historical injustices, land dispossession, discrimination, and socio-economic marginalisation. – which heighten their susceptibility to exploitation, including in the form of human trafficking and modern slavery. Loss of ancestral territories and traditional livelihoods frequently pushes Indigenous populations into precarious migration paths, exposing them to exploitative labour conditions. This vulnerability is further aggravated by climate change and environmental degradation, as seen with Bolivia's Urus-Matos community, who migrated after Lake Poopó dried up, leading to exploitation in urban agriculture, domestic work, and construction.

Indigenous women and girls face compounded risks, notably in domestic servitude and sexual exploitation, driven by colonial legacies and ongoing racism. Indigenous children from impoverished areas may be trafficked into urban centres for labour, lacking language skills and legal knowledge necessary for protection.

In parts of Asia and Africa, entire communities endure forced labour, including Indigenous men exploited in logging and mining camps, or generations bound by hereditary debt bondage in agriculture and artisanal sectors. These forms of exploitation persist largely in the informal economy, where regulatory oversight is minimal, and rights protections are frequently absent.

Lack of legal identity and secure land tenure further exposes Indigenous populations to trafficking. Statelessness and documentation gaps leave many invisible to protection systems, enabling traffickers to operate with impunity. Extractive industries often displace Indigenous groups without their consent, fostering exploitative migration. As Anti-Slavery International has observed, environmental injustice and trafficking risk are increasingly intertwined.

Although international frameworks like the Palermo Protocol and EU Directive 2011/36/EU do not explicitly reference Indigenous peoples, their vulnerabilities are implicitly covered through obligations addressing socio-economic conditions. Moreover, ILO research has confirmed that Indigenous peoples are at elevated risk of forced labour due to systemic exclusion from social, economic, and legal protections.

Addressing trafficking of Indigenous peoples requires robust labour protections in high-risk sectors, culturally tailored outreach and victim services, and recognition of Indigenous governance structures. Adherence to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), alongside inclusive business practices under the UN Guiding Principles on

⁵ For more information see [Annex II – 4](#).

Business and Human Rights, can help empower Indigenous communities to protect their rights, lands, and futures, thus breaking the cycle of exploitation and trafficking

2.4. Older Persons⁶

Older persons – commonly defined as individuals aged 60 and above – remain markedly underrepresented in global anti-trafficking narratives, despite documented evidence that they are not immune to exploitation. While younger individuals constitute the majority of identified trafficking victims, emerging research reveals that older adults can also fall victim to trafficking in forms such as forced labour, forced begging, and financial exploitation. The intersection of age-related discrimination (ageism) diminished social visibility, and dependency creates specific vulnerabilities that are rarely addressed in mainstream responses.

Traffickers and abusive actors deliberately target older persons, perceiving them as less likely to be believed or capable of resistance. In certain cases, migrant elders – particularly women – have been found in live-in domestic work arrangements that mirror conditions of slavery, including withheld wages, excessive work hours, and threats of deportation. These arrangements are often dismissed by authorities as familial or caregiving roles, complicating legal recognition of trafficking indicators.

The “benefits trafficking” happens as well for older persons. This financial abuse can escalate into forced labour or sexual exploitation, especially where survival resources such as shelter, or medication are used as leverage. The line between domestic abuse and trafficking becomes blurred but legally significant, particularly when elements of coercion, movement, and economic gain are present.

Elderly individuals with cognitive impairments such as dementia face additional risk. Their limited capacity to comprehend or articulate abuse can render them entirely dependent on exploiters who may act as their intermediaries with authorities. This manipulation – whether through physical isolation or legal instruments like power of attorney – is a tactic to mask trafficking in plain sight.

In displacement contexts, the vulnerabilities of older persons are magnified. The IOM noted that older persons fleeing conflict (eg. Ukraine crisis) are disproportionately exposed to trafficking and smuggling due to mobility limitations, reliance on strangers, and lack of familial support. Offers of assistance from traffickers thus appears benevolent, masking exploitative intent that culminates in forced begging or unremunerated work in host countries.

Anti-trafficking training and public awareness campaigns often focus on youth and women, rendering older adults virtually invisible in prevention and response strategies. To address this oversight, a multifaceted response is needed. First, policy and legislation should explicitly recognise the trafficking of older persons and provide enhanced protections, including stricter penalties for offenders. Social and medical service providers must be trained to identify signs of exploitation specific to elderly populations, such as sudden changes in financial control or coerced dependency. Public messaging must affirm that trafficking “has no age limit,” aligning with guidance from bodies like the U.S. Office for Victims of Crime.

Businesses and supply chains should also be scrutinised for age-based exploitation, particularly in agriculture or caregiving sectors, where older individuals work informally or in exchange for non-monetary compensation.

⁶ For more information see [Annex II – 5](#).

2.5. Children and Youth⁷

Children (under 18) and young adults (18 to 24) constitute one of the most vulnerable demographics in the global context of trafficking in persons. Under international law (the Palermo Protocol and ILO conventions on child labour) the trafficking of children is a grave violation of human rights and a form of modern slavery. States are accordingly obligated to adopt enhanced protections for minors, acknowledging their developmental and socio-legal dependence.

Yet despite these legal safeguards, children account for a disproportionate share of identified victims worldwide. According to UN data, 1 in every 3 detected trafficking victims is a child, the majority of whom are girls. This elevated vulnerability arises from factors inherent to youth – limited life experience, cognitive immaturity, and reliance on adults for protection – which traffickers exploit with impunity. The most egregious manifestations of child labour trafficking include forced work in agriculture, mining, domestic service, and street begging (eg. Kenya). These practices persist in informal economies and global supply chains, where subcontracting obscures accountability and permits the exploitation of children under abusive, unregulated conditions.

Migration significantly compounds the risk. Unaccompanied minors fleeing war, persecution, or economic deprivation are particularly susceptible to exploitation. Smuggling arrangements can quickly evolve into trafficking when children are compelled to “repay” debts through forced labour or sexual servitude. During the Syrian conflict, adolescent boys were documented working under coercive conditions in agriculture, while girls were subjected to “temporary marriages” – a euphemism for sexual exploitation. In Central America, children migrating north to escape gang violence have similarly fallen into trafficking networks. Even children migrating with families may be targeted if their caregivers are economically desperate and deceived by false promises of employment or education.

Marginalised youth – including those from ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ communities, or impoverished backgrounds – face compounded vulnerabilities. These children are overrepresented in street economies, institutional care systems, or displacement settings where traffickers operate with limited oversight.

A new and deeply concerning vector of recruitment is technology. With increasing access to digital platforms, traffickers have shifted to online spaces, grooming minors through social media and messaging applications. Europol and national child protection bodies have reported spikes in online enticement, where traffickers pose as peers or romantic interests. This culminates in both sexual and labour exploitation, with children persuaded to travel across borders or cities for fictitious job offers or relationships.

The consequences for child victims are severe and often lifelong. Physical harm, malnutrition, sexual violence, and loss of education are common, alongside profound psychological trauma. The EU Directive 2011/36/EU require that trafficked children receive tailored assistance, including legal guardianship, education access, and psychosocial rehabilitation. However, implementation gaps remain. Children frequently do not self-identify as victims, particularly when groomed or misled into believing they are participating voluntarily. In some jurisdictions, children engaged in activities such as begging or armed conflict are misclassified as offenders rather than victims, impeding access to protection.

⁷ For more information see [Annex II – 6](#).

Child protection systems must proactively identify vulnerable youth and ensure authorities are trained to detect and respond to trafficking. Cross-border collaboration is vital for safe repatriation and reintegration, while education campaigns can help families and youth recognise deceptive recruitment tactics. The private sector plays a role through ethical recruitment and supply chain due diligence. International efforts, such as the UN Global Action Plan, aim to eliminate forced child labour by 2025. All interventions must prioritise child rights, recognising that coercion need not be proven in child trafficking cases, and responses should account for intersecting vulnerabilities such as disability, minority status, or Indigeneity.

3. The Role of AI Technologies in Anti-Trafficking Efforts

Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a significant area of innovation in the global fight against human trafficking. From natural language processing (NLP) that scans digital content for trafficking indicators, to machine learning models that identify anomalous patterns in financial or labour data, AI is increasingly leveraged to support prevention, detection, and intervention strategies. However, while these technologies offer transformative capabilities, they also pose substantive risks – particularly with respect to human rights, privacy, and systemic bias. This section explores the application of AI in labour trafficking contexts, with particular attention to gendered and cross-border exploitation, and evaluates the emerging regulatory frameworks designed to ensure responsible use.⁸

3.1. Capabilities and Benefits: Augmenting Human Capacity

AI's principal advantage lies in its capacity to process vast datasets at speed and scale. Applications include the use of NLP to analyse online job postings and recruitment messages, flagging coded language associated with exploitative schemes. In one documented case, algorithms identified clusters of suspicious domestic work ads targeting women, prompting early intervention by authorities. Similarly, predictive analytics have been used to identify trafficking hotspots, allocate enforcement resources, and detect labour abuse trends in real time.

In the labour context, AI has demonstrated promise in linking disparate reports of abuse, uncovering coordinated trafficking networks that may otherwise evade detection. AI-driven analysis of satellite imagery, for example, has been used to detect illegal brick kilns and unregulated fishing vessels – indicators of forced labour. NGOs and tech firms are also developing AI tools to trace supply chain anomalies, such as abnormally low payrolls in subcontracting firms. When deployed judiciously, AI can serve as an investigative force multiplier, enabling enforcement agencies to focus on victim support and proactive prevention.

3.2. Risks: Bias, Surveillance, and Privacy Infringements

Despite its utility, AI introduces significant ethical concerns. Chief among these is algorithmic bias. Because AI systems are trained on historical data – which often reflects societal and institutional biases – they may reinforce discriminatory patterns. For example, a model trained predominantly on cases involving young female victims from certain regions may systematically overlook older, male, or ethnically diverse victims. Such profiling risks not only misidentification but also resource misallocation.

Furthermore, AI's integration with predictive policing raises concerns about over-surveillance. Studies have shown that such systems tend to concentrate enforcement in low-income or

⁸ For more information see [Annex IV](#).

racialised communities. In trafficking contexts, this could result in disproportionate scrutiny of migrant workers or sex workers, undermining trust and deterring victim reporting.

Privacy and data protection concerns are similarly acute. The deployment of AI often involves the processing of sensitive personal data – including biometrics, geolocation, and communication records. The EU’s GDPR imposes strict requirements on such practices, mandating legality, proportionality, and individual rights such as access and erasure.

Unregulated use of facial recognition or tools like Clearview AI could jeopardise victim safety. For instance, an escaped trafficking survivor’s photo, if scraped from social media by an AI system, could inadvertently alert their trafficker to their location. Data misuse of this nature not only violates GDPR principles but also risks re-victimisation and retaliatory harm.

3.3. Explainability and the Accountability Gap

Another critical issue is algorithmic opacity. “Black box” models – particularly in deep learning – often fail to provide clear reasoning for their outputs. This lack of transparency impairs accountability and legal challenge. A system that flags an NGO worker as a potential trafficker due to communication with known victims, without disclosing its logic, could lead to harmful false positives. The EU AI Act addresses this by requiring high-risk systems to include human oversight, traceability, and explain ability mechanisms. Techniques such as Integrated Gradients are being explored to improve interpretability in this domain.

Moreover, AI models trained in specific socio-cultural contexts may not generalise across borders. A system developed for English-language trafficking indicators in Europe may underperform in African or Asian contexts, where linguistic, cultural, and operational dynamics differ significantly. Additionally, traffickers adapt rapidly to technological scrutiny, employing coded language and shifting platforms to avoid detection – highlighting the need for continuous model updating.

3.4. A Human Rights–Centred Regulatory Response

To reconcile these tensions, a “human rights by design” approach is essential. This includes conducting algorithmic impact assessments prior to deployment (as required by the EU AI Act), ensuring stakeholder consultation – particularly from vulnerable communities – and embedding human oversight in decision-making processes. Transparency should extend to public disclosures about the nature and logic of AI systems used in trafficking contexts.

Collaborative initiatives such as Tech Against Trafficking illustrate the potential for ethical innovation. These platforms advocate for shared, anonymised data environments and cross-border standards that respect privacy while enhancing detection. Key principles include data minimisation, purpose limitation, and consent – foundational elements under GDPR.

It is equally critical to resist over-reliance on AI. These tools should augment, not replace, traditional investigative methods and victim services. AI cannot substitute the trust-building, cultural sensitivity, and context-specific expertise essential to anti-trafficking work. Overuse may even create complacency, leading to under-detection in areas not digitally surveyed.

Finally, the intersectional risks of misuse must not be overlooked. A misconfigured algorithm that disproportionately targets LGBTQIA+ online communities or misidentifies Indigenous workers as suspects can reproduce systemic injustices. Conversely, ethical AI can help surface hidden patterns that human bias might ignore. The goal, as Boutier and Maganaris argue, is to

“ethically align AI interventions while respecting data sovereignty, transparency, and interpretability.”

With proper regulation, robust oversight, and rights-based design, AI can be a powerful instrument in combating trafficking. But it must remain a tool – not a substitute – for human judgment and justice.

Conclusion

Human trafficking for labour exploitation represents a profound violation of human rights, affecting millions globally. This report has illuminated the vulnerabilities that predispose certain groups - such as women migrant workers, LGBTQIA+ individuals, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, older persons, and youth - to heightened risks of exploitation. These vulnerabilities are deeply rooted in systemic inequalities, including gender discrimination, socio-economic marginalisation, and historical injustices.

Addressing labour trafficking necessitates a comprehensive approach that acknowledges and tackles these underlying factors. Legal frameworks must be strengthened and effectively enforced to protect vulnerable populations. This includes implementing gender-sensitive policies, ensuring disability-inclusive measures, and recognising the unique rights of Indigenous communities. Moreover, the integration of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence in anti-trafficking efforts must be conducted with careful consideration of ethical implications, data privacy, and potential biases.

Collaboration among governments, civil society, and the private sector is essential to disrupt the systemic conditions that facilitate labour trafficking.⁹

⁹ For further recommendations see [Annex V](#).

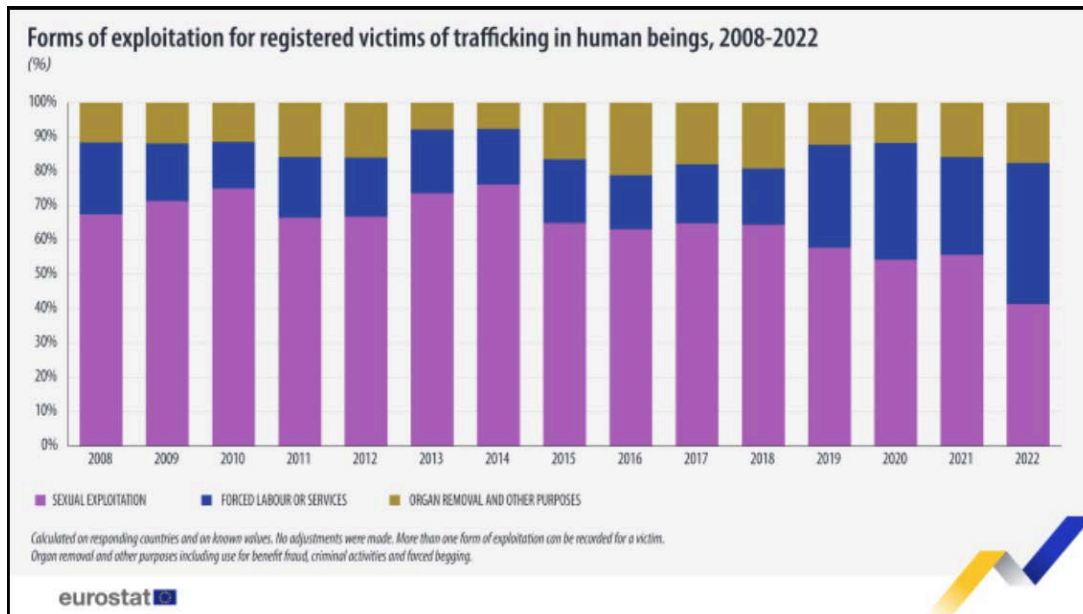
Annexes

Annex I: Data and Statistics

Global Overview: An estimated 27.6 million people were in forced labour globally in 2021. Women and girls comprise about 39% of forced labour victims, and children about 12% (roughly 3.3 million). Trafficking in persons takes many forms – in 2018, 50% of detected trafficking victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation and 38% for forced labour. Outside of sex or labour, about 12% were exploited in other ways (including forced criminality, begging, forced marriage, organ removal). Detection data show roughly one in three victims globally is a child, though this varies by region. Women remain a large share of victims, especially in cross-border trafficking, while men are increasingly identified in labour trafficking cases.

Regional Patterns: Regional trends illustrate intersectional risks. In Asia and the Pacific, about 15.1 million people are in forced labour – the highest number of any region. Many are migrants working in construction, manufacturing, agriculture, or domestic work. South Asia sees prevalent debt bondage of lower-caste and indigenous groups in industries like brick kilns and agriculture. North Africa and the Middle East (MENA) detect more adult male trafficking victims than other regions, reflecting large numbers of male migrant workers exploited under the kafala sponsorship system and in sectors like construction. In contrast, Europe and Central Asia report more female victims, often in sexual exploitation or domestic servitude. In Sub-Saharan Africa, children make up a majority of detected victims, linked to child labour and trafficking in rural agricultural and mining sectors.

Europe (EU) Focus: In 2022, EU countries registered 10,093 victims of human trafficking (a 41% increase from 2021). About 63% of these victims were female (women or girls). Notably, 75% of victims were foreign nationals (37% from other EU states and 63% from non-EU countries). The forms of exploitation in Europe are shifting: sexual exploitation has declined to about 41.4% of cases (its lowest share on record), while forced labour and services rose to 41.1% in 2022. The remaining – approximately 17.5% - involve “other” exploitative purposes such as forced criminality, benefit fraud, and forced begging. Children in Europe are trafficked for sexual exploitation but also forced begging and criminal activities, especially among marginalised Roma and migrant youth.



Explanation: Forms of exploitation of registered trafficking victims in the EU (2008–2022). In 2022, sexual exploitation (purple) fell to 41.4% of cases – its lowest level – while exploitation through forced labour/services (blue) rose to 41.1%, nearly equal. “Other” forms (gold) – including forced begging, criminal activities, benefit fraud, etc. – made up about 17.5. Data from 18–27 EU states reporting each year

Intersectional Vulnerabilities in Data: The data reflect how overlapping vulnerabilities affect trafficking patterns. Women and girls are disproportionately victims of sexual exploitation, while men and boys are more often exploited for forced labour. For example, globally about 72% of men and 66% of boys who are trafficking victims are in forced labour, whereas around 77% of women victims are in sexual exploitation. Migrant status is a risk amplifier: most victims detected in wealthy regions are foreign migrants. In the EU, only 25% of victims were citizens of the country of exploitation, and 63% were from non-EU countries (often from Nigeria, Vietnam, Eastern Europe, etc.). Children comprise a large share of victims in poorer regions – e.g. over 50% of detected victims in many African countries are children. Conflict and displacement also drive child trafficking spikes; globally the number of child victims detected jumped 31% from 2019 to 2022 amid instability and COVID-19 impacts. These statistics indicate that trafficking is not gender - or age-neutral – it exploits those already facing inequality, whether due to gender, age (minors or the elderly), poverty, ethnic minority status, disability, or migration status.

Annex II: Case Studies (2020-2025)

1. Women Migrant Domestic Workers (Kafala System)

Case – Sri Lankan Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia (2021): Forty-one Sri Lankan women, mostly domestic workers, were trapped under the kafala system in Saudi Arabia and ended up detained for months in a deportation centre after fleeing abusive employers. Under kafala, their visas tied them to sponsors, so when they escaped exploitative households (where reports include physical abuse, overwork, and non-payment), they lost legal status and were jailed instead of protected. This case highlights the extreme vulnerability of women in domestic servitude in the Gulf. In another account, an Ethiopian domestic worker in Oman, deceived by a recruiter, was made to sleep on an open balcony and work without rest – “They beat you; they starve you... We are dying – we need help,” she said. Gender, ethnicity, and immigration status intersect, as these women face racial and gender discrimination, isolation in private homes, and legal structures (kafala) that enable forced labour.

2. LGBTQIA+ Migrants

LGBTQIA+ individuals on the move often lack legal protections and face stigma, which traffickers exploit. For example, trafficking rings in the Gulf have targeted LGBTQIA+ Africans: there are documented cases of gay and transgender Africans trafficked to the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia and forced into sexual servitude for wealthy patrons. These victims, already marginalised due to sexual orientation or gender identity (often criminalised in their home countries), are lured with false promises of work or safety. Once in the destination country, they are coerced into prostitution or pornography rings, effectively enslaved and unable to seek help because approaching authorities could mean further persecution for being LGBTQIA+. Such cases demonstrate the double vulnerability – as migrants and as sexual minorities – leading to “invisible” trafficking of LGBTQIA+ persons, who are less likely to report for fear of outing or prosecution (e.g., Latin American transgender women have been trafficked to Western Europe for sex work under similar conditions. The severe violence, isolation, and health risks (including high HIV rates) endured by LGBTQIA+ trafficking victims highlight the need for tailored protections.

3. Persons with Disabilities

Individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities are targeted by traffickers for certain forms of forced labour and exploitation. In South Asia, children with disabilities have been trafficked by criminal gangs for forced begging, sometimes even mutilated to elicit public sympathy. For instance, reports from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan describe gangs that intentionally maim or deform children or keep them in extreme destitution to increase their earnings from begging. These children are forced to beg on the streets all day and must surrender all money; if they don't collect enough, they suffer beatings and abuse. Adults with disabilities are also exploited – in Europe, anti-trafficking experts found that traffickers deliberately target persons with visible disabilities or mental illnesses to force them into street begging or petty crimes, knowing they may have reduced capacity to seek help. Another emerging trend is “*benefits trafficking*”: in the US and UK, traffickers have posed as caregivers to take control of disabled or elderly people and then swindle their social benefits, confining them in poor conditions (a form of

financial and labour exploitation). These cases show how disability, coupled with social isolation and dependence, can be ruthlessly exploited by traffickers.

4. Indigenous Communities

Indigenous and tribal populations, often living in poverty and marginalisation, have been prey to traffickers in cross-border contexts.

Case – Indigenous Youth from Colombia (2024): In May 2024, Colombia’s Supreme Court upheld the landmark conviction of a trafficker who transported a young indigenous woman from her rural community to Bogotá to exploit her in forced labour. Indigenous communities like the Misak in Cauca have faced conflict and displacement, which traffickers exploit: women and girls are deceived with false jobs or education opportunities and then enslaved as domestic servants or in sweatshops. In this case, early warnings by the community led to a government–UNODC program to train indigenous youth about trafficking risks. Elsewhere, in Southeast Asia, indigenous girls from hill tribes with no citizenship have been trafficked across borders into factories or as domestic workers, unable to seek help due to language and legal status barriers. These scenarios illustrate multi-generational vulnerability: indigenous peoples often lack economic opportunities and trust in authorities, and traffickers take advantage of that remoteness and mistrust to entrap victims. Culturally appropriate prevention and victim services are critical for these communities.

5. Older Migrants

Older individuals, such as migrants beyond their prime working age, also fall victim to trafficking, though their plight is less often reported. Traffickers consider them “less visible.” For example, in Europe, a case came to light of a 58-year-old homeless Polish man who had been kept in a shack in the UK and forced to work in construction for years with no pay – effectively modern slavery until his rescue in 2021. This case was part of what's described as "the largest human trafficking ring ever exposed in the UK," with an estimated 400 victims.

Older migrants can be exploited in farm work, caregiving, or begging rings. One emerging scheme is the aforementioned *benefits trafficking*: criminal networks in the US have targeted elderly immigrants who receive pensions or disability benefits, offering them “care” or housing but instead confiscating their benefit payments and holding them in inhumane conditions. In the United States, approximately 23 states have identified Benefits Trafficking occurring within their borders, though it may be classified under different terms such as theft, financial exploitation, neglect, or abuse of older and disabled adults. A notable case that exemplifies this scheme is that of Linda Weston in Pennsylvania. Weston and her co-defendants were charged with labor and sex trafficking for holding six adults with cognitive disabilities in forced labor and sexual servitude for years, stealing their Social Security benefits and subjecting them to extreme abuse.

These older victims, sometimes with cognitive impairments, are shuttled between locations to prevent detection and are denied food and medical care while traffickers collect their checks. In essence, they are trafficked for their welfare benefits. Such cases highlight that age (both young and old) is a risk factor – older migrants with limited social support can be as vulnerable as youth, requiring targeted outreach (e.g. through social services and community programs) to identify and assist them.

6. Child Migrants (Cross-Border Trafficking)

Children who migrate – whether refugees, asylum-seekers, or those smuggled – are at acute risk of trafficking. Traffickers capitalise on their lack of protection. In Europe’s migrant crisis, unaccompanied minors from Syria, Afghanistan, Africa, and elsewhere have been kidnapped or coerced from refugee camps into labour or sex trafficking.

For instance, in the Balkans (January 2024), a married couple in Bosnia was convicted of forcing four migrant children to beg on the streets from morning till night for over a year). Children account for approximately 25% of all detected trafficking victims in the region. In 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina identified 37 trafficking victims, primarily women and children, with forced labor (including begging) being a prevalent form of exploitation. Mobile teams in Bosnia and Herzegovina identified 243 children involved in forced begging in 2023, with 33 of these children designated as potential trafficking victims and referred to social welfare centers. In another case, authorities in Serbia dismantled a family-run ring that trafficked Roma children into Western Europe, forcing them to pickpocket and steal – the children were beaten if they failed to bring in a certain amount per day (cases documented in 2020–2022).

Meanwhile, teenagers on the move can fall prey to false “rehabilitation” programs: between 2014 and 2019, a group of German and Romanian traffickers deceived troubled teens in Germany into coming to a bogus youth center in Romania where they were exploited, until a joint police operation prosecuted 14 perpetrators.

Globally, child trafficking for labour is rising: UNODC reported a 38% jump in girl victims from 2019 to 2022). Many boys are forced into work in agriculture, mining, or as couriers in drug trafficking across borders. Girls are often forced into domestic servitude or child marriage (itself a form of trafficking when movement and exploitation are involved, as seen in a Slovenian case where a father sold his 17-year-old daughter into marriage with an abuser). These cases demonstrate that child migrants – often alone and without guardians – can be coerced into any exploitive situation, from factories to brothels, by traffickers who capitalise on their desperation and lack of oversight. Robust cross-border child protection systems and faster family reunification are needed to combat this.

Annex III: Good Practice Examples

Effective strategies against labour trafficking address the entire chain – from recruitment to employment conditions to victim support – with an intersectional lens. Below are good practice examples (by states, civil society, and businesses) from 2020 to 2025.

1. Ethical Recruitment Programs

Public-private partnerships are promoting fair hiring to prevent exploitation at the source. For example, the International Recruitment Integrity System (IRIS) led by IOM has developed a certification for labour recruiters adhering to ethical standards (no worker fees, transparency in contracts). To become certified, recruiters must demonstrate that their management systems adhere to ethical recruitment principles, including:

1. Prohibition of recruitment fees and costs to migrant workers
2. Respect for freedom of movement
3. Transparency in terms and conditions of employment
4. Confidentiality and data protection
5. Access to remedy

Several governments support IRIS, and companies have signed on – H&M Group partnered with IOM to improve ethical recruitment in its supply chain. Such programs help eliminate debt bondage by ensuring migrant workers do not incur huge debts to brokers.

Another state-led initiative is the Philippines' regulation of recruitment agencies – the government strictly licenses agencies and prosecutes those involved in trafficking, while also negotiating bilateral labour agreements (e.g. with Saudi Arabia, UAE) that include migrant worker protections. This comprehensive regulatory framework is spearheaded by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), which oversees the licensing and monitoring of recruitment agencies. To obtain and retain licenses, agencies must meet stringent financial, operational, and legal standards, and they are subject to inspections and investigations in response to complaints. Violations of labor laws can result in administrative penalties, including license suspension or revocation. The Philippines also enforces robust anti-trafficking measures through the Labor Code and the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act, imposing criminal sanctions—including imprisonment and fines—on illegal recruiters, especially in large-scale or syndicated cases. The POEA collaborates with agencies like the Bureau of Immigration and the National Bureau of Investigation to combat trafficking effectively. Additionally, bilateral labor agreements with countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, and Lebanon outline standards for fair treatment, ethical employment practices, salary protection, dispute resolution, and welfare services for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Recent developments in this system include the digitalisation of POEA processes to boost transparency, expanded anti-illegal recruitment campaigns, improved reintegration and welfare support through the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), and ongoing negotiations with key destination countries to further strengthen protections – particularly for domestic workers.

These efforts demonstrate how origin and destination countries can collaborate to ensure migrants are hired transparently and legally, reducing vulnerability to trafficking.

2. Intersectional Awareness & Training

Governments and NGOs are increasingly providing specialised training to identify and assist *diverse victims* of trafficking. For instance, the OSCE in 2024 published guidelines (“Invisible Victims”) on trafficking and disability, urging states to train law enforcement and service providers to recognise that traffickers target persons with disabilities and to make services accessible. Anti-trafficking coalitions have also begun to incorporate LGBTQIA+ sensitivity – e.g. in 2022, NGOs in Southeast Asia (ASEAN-ACT program) held workshops on protecting transgender trafficking victims, recognising they often don’t report due to fear of discrimination.

In Colombia, as noted, UNODC and the government launched a community-based training with indigenous leaders to raise awareness of trafficking risks among indigenous youth.

Similarly, frontline officers in the EU (border guards, labor inspectors) are receiving training on gender-sensitive and child-friendly approaches – learning, for example, how to spot signs of domestic servitude in a household or forced begging involving Roma children. These capacity-building initiatives show good practice in acknowledging that *one-size-fits-all anti-trafficking responses fail*: instead, tailored approaches accounting for gender, age, disability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation yield better victim identification and prevention.

3. Corporate Due Diligence and Grievance Mechanisms

The private sector has a key role in combating labour trafficking in supply chains. Leading companies are implementing human rights due diligence (HRDD) processes to root out forced labour. For example, consumer goods companies like Nestlé and Unilever have mapped their suppliers for trafficking risks and incorporated contract clauses banning recruitment fees. Grievance mechanisms are crucial to these efforts: the ALDI supermarket group partnered with the NGO Issara Institute in 2021 to roll out a worker grievance system in Thailand. Key aspects of this partnership include the development of multi-channel reporting systems through Issara Institute’s Worker Voice Program, which provides a 24-hour multilingual helpline, social media messaging, and the “Golden Dreams” smartphone application to enable accessible communication. Initially focused on food supply chains—especially those involving fish and seafood production—the program is set to expand across ALDI’s production facilities in Thailand, regardless of commodity group. The partnership also supports capacity building at these facilities, with training on grievance mechanisms and ethical recruitment practices, particularly for migrant workers. Notably, the initiative addresses access barriers, especially those faced by women, and prioritises trust-building through both community-based and onsite engagement. As the Issara Institute expands the program into other Southeast Asian countries, ALDI plans to assess its applicability and continue enhancing worker protections across its broader supply network.

Another good practice is independent social audits and hotlines funded by industry coalitions (for instance, the Electronics Industry Citizenship Coalition set up hotlines for factory workers in Malaysia to report forced overtime or document confiscation).

Importantly, new legislation pushes companies further: France’s Duty of Vigilance Law and the proposed EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive mandate large companies to identify, prevent, and remedy human trafficking and forced labour in their global operations. Progressive firms have started publishing annual modern slavery statements detailing steps taken (training suppliers, improving traceability of raw materials, etc.). The key elements of these good practices are *transparency* (companies acknowledging risks), *accountability*

(engaging independent monitors and civil society), and *access to remedy* (grievance channels and compensation for victims).

Annex IV: AI Technologies and Human Rights Assessment Tools

Advances in technology, especially AI are providing new tools to fight labour trafficking – from predictive analytics that flag high-risk activities to satellite imagery that uncovers hidden camps. However, deploying these technologies requires careful human rights safeguards.

Innovative projects are using AI to detect trafficking patterns that humans alone might miss.

1. Big Data & Predictive Analytics

The Traffik Analysis Hub (TAHub) is a global data platform co-developed by IBM and anti-trafficking NGO STOP THE TRAFFIK. It uses AI to analyse *massive datasets* – including financial transactions, travel records, and case reports – to identify trafficking “hotspots” and routes in real time. It pools information from banks, NGOs, and law enforcement and finds correlations (e.g. unusual flows of remittances or recruitment ads clustered in certain areas) that indicate trafficking networks.

This helps direct police resources to likely locations and patterns of exploitation. For example, TAHub might highlight that a specific labour recruitment agency in Country A and a construction firm in Country B have an anomalous pattern of moving hundreds of workers who end up abused – prompting an investigation. Such predictive AI systems can uncover complex, transnational trafficking rings by “connecting the dots” across data silos.

2. Satellite Imagery & Remote Sensing

AI-powered image analysis is exposing trafficking in places difficult to inspect on the ground. A notable example is using satellite data to spot forced labour in fishing and agriculture. In 2020, researchers applied machine learning to global vessel-tracking satellites and identified telltale behaviours of fishing ships likely using trafficked crews (e.g. staying at sea for months without port calls). The study found up to 26% of 16,000 industrial fishing vessels worldwide showed high risk indicators of forced labour, involving an estimated 100,000 fishermen on those ships. In fact, machine learning can detect specific behavioral patterns – such as minimal port visits, extended time at sea, or irregular transshipments – that correlate with forced labour indicators. This enables authorities to flag suspicious vessels in near real-time, even in jurisdictions with limited capacity for inspections.

Similarly, AI has been trained to detect brick kilns from satellite images – thousands of kilns dot South Asia, many staffed by bonded labourers. By automatically mapping kiln locations, authorities can target labor inspections to those. Satellite imagery analysis has also helped reveal remote logging camps and mining sites where indigenous and migrant workers are enslaved. These “eyes in the sky” dramatically expand our ability to find victims who are hidden from public view.

3. Natural Language Processing (NLP)

AI is being used to process text and language data to spot trafficking leads. For instance, tech companies and NGOs have developed algorithms to scan online job postings and social media for red-flag language that suggests a bait-and-switch recruitment (phrases like “no experience necessary, travel papers provided, pay after training” in certain languages could indicate traffickers advertising). Law enforcement has also begun using NLP to analyse victim testimonies and chat communications – an AI can sift through thousands of WhatsApp or

Facebook messages from a trafficking ring and identify coercive patterns or links between recruiters and victims. In one pilot, an AI text classifier helped identify migrant domestic workers in distress by analysing Twitter and Facebook groups where workers described abuse (flagging posts that contained words like “locked in,” “no salary,” “beat” combined with employer references). While still emerging, language AI can greatly speed up the identification of both recruitment attempts and cries for help that would otherwise be lost in the noise of the internet.

4. Risk-Profiling and Screening

Some governments are testing AI to improve screening at borders and workplaces. For example, an EU project is exploring machine-learning models to assess the risk level of visa applicants or cargo shipments for signs of trafficking (using factors like route, sponsor history, inconsistencies in paperwork). Similarly, in supply chains, AI tools digest audit reports, worker feedback, and trade data to assign “risk scores” to supplier factories – highlighting those that require deeper human rights audits. It is important that such models avoid discriminatory profiling, so they must be accompanied by robust checks (see below on impact assessments).

5. Algorithmic Impact Assessments (AIAs)

With the introduction of AI in anti-trafficking operations, organisations are implementing impact assessment frameworks to ensure these tools *do not infringe on human rights or privacy*. Under the EU’s GDPR, any system processing personal data extensively (for instance, an AI analysing migrants’ data) requires a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) – this evaluates how the data is collected, stored, and used, and mandates measures to mitigate risks (encryption, anonymisation, etc.). For example, an NGO developing an AI to predict which migrant workers are at risk first conducted a DPIA that identified potential privacy concerns (such as handling of sensitive data about ethnic origin or health) and adjusted the design to use aggregated, de-identified data only.

Beyond privacy, the EU AI Act explicitly requires a Fundamental Rights Impact Assessment (FRIA) for “high-risk” AI systems (Article 27). Anti-trafficking AI used by police or immigration authorities would likely be classed as high-risk, since they affect people’s rights. Deployers of such AI in the EU public sector will have to document a FRIA and a summary of the DPIA, and register these in an EU database for transparency. The FRIA examines questions like: Could the AI’s outputs lead to biased decision-making against a protected group? How will human oversight be ensured? We are already seeing this in practice – for instance, the Dutch government, after a scandal with an algorithm wrongly profiling welfare fraud (which affected immigrants), now subjects new predictive tools to external review for discrimination. In the anti-trafficking realm, any AI that flags “high-risk” individuals (workers or travellers) must be carefully vetted so as not to penalise or stigmatise lawful migrants or minorities. Algorithmic impact assessments, conducted *before* deployment, thus serve as a check to align AI tools with human rights norms and data protection laws.

6. Ethical AI Deployment Criteria

To ensure AI initiatives help fight trafficking without causing harm, organisations are adopting key ethical criteria for design and use of these technologies.

6.1. Human Rights by Design

AI systems should be developed with a human-rights based approach. This means prioritising the rights and dignity of affected people – e.g., an AI tool should never violate the right to privacy or lead to discriminatory outcomes. Developers must consider international human rights principles (like equality, security, freedom from arbitrary detention) at each step. In practical terms, this involves avoiding algorithmic bias – training data and models should be checked so they do not unfairly target or exclude groups based on race, gender, etc. For example, if an AI is flagging “risky” fishing vessels, it should not over-rely on nationality of crew as a proxy, which could unjustly profile certain migrant groups. Non-discrimination testing and diverse input data are part of this criterion.

6.2. Data Protection and Privacy

Adherence to data protection laws (GDPR in the EU) is mandatory. Only the minimum necessary personal data should be used, and wherever possible data should be anonymised or aggregated. Strong security must guard any victim-related data. A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) should be completed to identify and mitigate privacy risks. For instance, an AI system analysing social media for trafficking leads should not store raw personal profiles long-term, and any sharing of data between agencies must be legal and consensual. Privacy-by-design also builds trust – migrant workers will only use a reporting app if they know their identity is safe and won’t be misused.

6.3. Transparency and Explainability

Ethical AI deployment requires transparency about when and how AI is used. Affected people (and the public) should be informed when decisions or risk scores are generated by an algorithm, rather than a human. The EU AI Act according to Article 49 will create a public database of high-risk AI systems for transparency. Additionally, the AI’s decision-making process should be explainable to a reasonable degree. For example, if an AI flags a certain recruitment agency as high-risk, investigators should be able to trace which factors (e.g., sudden surge in workers, past complaints) contributed to that flag. This helps validate the AI’s output and allows for accountability. Documentation and transparency also mean stakeholders – including civil society – can scrutinise the tool for any inadvertent biases or errors.

6.4. Accountability and Human Oversight

No AI system should operate autonomously in making decisions that impact individuals’ rights. Human-in-the-loop oversight is crucial – AI can provide leads or analysis, but trained personnel must make the final judgement and have the authority to override the AI. Clear lines of accountability must be established: an agency using an AI tool should designate responsible officials and have an audit process. If the AI generates a false positive (e.g., misidentifies an innocent migrant as a trafficking victim or perpetrator), there must be a mechanism to correct that and provide remedy. Redress mechanisms are part of accountability – affected persons should have a way to challenge or appeal decisions that were influenced by AI.

6.5. Inclusivity and Stakeholder Engagement

Ethical deployment means involving those impacted in the design process. Developers of an anti-trafficking AI tool should consult trafficking survivors, migrant worker representatives, or

disability advocates (for tools affecting those groups) to understand potential blind spots. This criterion ensures the AI solutions are grounded in reality and actually address user needs without exacerbating power imbalances. For example, a worker feedback chatbot should be tested with migrant workers of various languages and literacy levels so it's truly accessible.

Annex V: Recommendations

STAKEHOLDER	RECOMMENDATION	URGENCY
<p>STATES (COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN, TRANSIT, AND DESTINATION)</p>	<p>1. Ratify and Implement Key Treaties: Ratify outstanding conventions (e.g. ILO 29, 105, 189; Palermo Protocol; Migrant Workers Convention) and incorporate their standards (forced labour prohibition, victims’ rights) into national law.</p>	<p>Immediate</p>
	<p>2. Strengthen Labour Protections and Inspections: Increase labour inspectorates’ capacity to proactively monitor workplaces (especially in agriculture, domestic work, informal sectors) and detect abuse. Enforce laws against exploitative employers and recruiters with strong penalties.</p>	<p>Immediate</p>
	<p>3. Protect Migrant Workers’ Rights: Establish agreements and national policies for fair recruitment (no worker-paid fees, written contracts in workers’ language) and ensure migrant workers, including women and LGBTQIA+ migrants, have access to information, legal aid, and complaint mechanisms without fear of deportation.</p>	<p>Immediate</p>
	<p>4. Adopt Victim-Centered, Intersectional Approaches: Train police, border agents, and social services on trauma-informed and gender-/child-sensitive identification of victims. Implement the non-punishment principle so trafficked persons (e.g. irregular migrants, forced petty criminals) are not prosecuted. Tailor victim services to specific needs (shelters accessible to persons with disabilities, interpretation for indigenous or minority languages, etc.).</p>	<p>Medium-term</p>
	<p>5. Improve Cross-Border Coordination: Enhance cooperation with other countries on investigations and victim repatriation. Assign labour attachés or liaisons in foreign missions to assist nationals who might be trafficking victims abroad. Participate in regional intelligence-sharing to dismantle transnational trafficking rings.</p>	<p>Medium-term</p>

	<p>6. Data Collection and Monitoring: Disaggregate trafficking data by gender, age, and other vulnerability factors to inform policy. Appoint a National Rapporteur or equivalent mechanism to monitor anti-trafficking efforts, ensuring accountability and a holistic, rights-based strategy that addresses root causes (inequality, discrimination).</p>	Long-term
<p>BUSINESSES (COMPANIES AND EMPLOYERS) AND</p>	<p>1. Human Rights Due Diligence: Conduct thorough due diligence across supply chains to identify risks of forced labour and trafficking. Map supply chains down to raw materials; assess sectors and suppliers for red flags (e.g. excessive overtime, migrant labor dependency). Publicly report on findings and mitigation steps.</p>	Immediate
	<p>2. Ethical Recruitment and Fair Employment: Commit to the “Employer Pays” principle – eliminate worker recruitment fees and reimburse any such fees found. Use only recruitment agencies certified for ethical practices (e.g. through IOM’s IRIS) and require the same of subcontractors. Ensure all workers have written contracts and access to their identity documents.</p>	Immediate
	<p>3. Grievance Mechanisms and Worker Voice: Establish safe, confidential channels for workers to report grievances (hotlines, worker committees, suggestion boxes). These mechanisms should be gender-sensitive and accessible in multiple languages. Guarantee no retaliation for whistleblowers. Use feedback to promptly remedy issues – e.g. if a supplier’s workers report withheld wages, intervene to fix it.</p>	Immediate
	<p>4. Training and Capacity Building: Train procurement officers, factory supervisors, and farm managers on trafficking indicators and prevention. For example, teach HR departments how to spot false age documents (to prevent child labour) or signs of bondage among migrant workers. Include modules on diversity and bias to ensure attention to the needs of women, minorities, and others.</p>	Medium-term
	<p>5. Remediation and Victim Support: If forced labour is found in a company’s operations or supply chain, act to remediate: cooperate with authorities, provide compensation to affected</p>	Medium-term

	workers (e.g. back pay, rehabilitation support), and improve conditions. Develop contingency plans (with NGO partnerships) so that if workers are liberated from a supplier factory, they can receive shelter and assistance.	
	6. Collaborate and Lead by Example: Join industry initiatives to collectively fight trafficking (e.g. Responsible Business Alliance, Consumer Goods Forum priority on forced labour) and share best practices. Large companies should use their leverage to push smaller suppliers to also adopt due diligence. Advocate for strong regulation (e.g. support due diligence legislation) to level the playing field.	Long-term
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS (UN AGENCIES, ILO, IOM, ETC.)	1. Capacity Building for States: Provide technical assistance and training to governments on implementing anti-trafficking measures. For example, ILO and UNODC can train labour inspectors and law enforcement in victim identification and investigation techniques, while IOM can help set up victim referral systems. Prioritise aid to developing countries and high-risk regions.	Immediate
	2. Guidelines and Tools: Develop and disseminate guidelines that integrate intersectionality into anti-trafficking work (e.g. an OHCHR toolkit on protecting LGBTQIA+ trafficking victims, or IOM guidelines on accommodating migrant women with children in shelters). Create practical tools like model bilateral agreements for safe migration, or checklists for businesses to monitor supply chains.	Medium-term
	3. Data and Research Coordination: Strengthen global data collection by harmonising indicators and supporting national data efforts. For instance, continue initiatives like the Counter-Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) to pool victim data (with privacy safeguards) for analysis of trends. Encourage research on understudied groups (indigenous victims, persons with disabilities) by funding studies and promoting knowledge exchange.	Medium-term
	4. Facilitate International Cooperation: Use convening power to bring countries together – e.g. annual regional meetings under the Bali	Medium-term

	<p>Process, or UNODC fostering more joint investigations and information-sharing agreements. Support the development of transnational referral mechanisms to ensure victims are safely repatriated and receive support across borders.</p>	
	<p>5. Advocacy and Monitoring: Hold States accountable to their commitments. Bodies like the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons and treaty committees (CEDAW, CRC, etc.) should continue to monitor and issue recommendations on countries' anti-trafficking performance, including how well they address gender and intersectional vulnerabilities. Use platforms (UN General Assembly, Global Forum on Migration) to keep political focus on modern slavery (SDG 8.7) and encourage funding.</p>	<p>Long-term</p>
	<p>6. Support Victim Services and Reparations: Through agencies and programs (UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking, IOM's assistance programs), channel resources to on-the-ground NGOs providing shelters, medical care, psycho-social support, and legal help to victims. Develop international funding mechanisms so that impoverished victims can access compensation – for example, a global fund that can pay out court-awarded damages which traffickers fail to pay.</p>	<p>Long-term</p>

Note:

Immediate actions are those that are feasible now and address urgent gaps – e.g. enacting laws, launching due diligence – which set the foundation for further progress.

Medium-term implies implementation that requires planning or capacity building over the next couple of years – e.g. training hundreds of officials, scaling grievance systems.

Long-term goals involve systemic change – cultural shifts, full enforcement, international coordination – that will evolve over several years but should remain in focus. All stakeholders are urged to approach these recommendations in a coordinated manner, with human rights and survivor dignity at the center.

Annex VI: Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

“3P” Paradigm: The well-known framework of Prevention, Protection, Prosecution used to structure anti-trafficking efforts. Sometimes a fourth “P” for Partnership is added (as in the US Trafficking in Persons Report framework). Prevention includes addressing root causes, awareness, reducing demand; Protection covers identification, assistance, and reintegration of victims; Prosecution involves criminalisation and law enforcement action against perpetrators; Partnership emphasises the multi-stakeholder and cross-border collaboration needed to combat trafficking effectively.

Algorithmic Bias: Systematic bias or *inequity in the outcomes* of an algorithm or AI system, often resulting from biased training data or design. Algorithmic bias means the AI’s decisions disproportionately harm or favour particular groups (e.g. based on race, gender, or other characteristics) without justification, thereby reproducing or amplifying discrimination. In the context of human trafficking detection, an example would be a predictive model that flags mostly immigrants from certain countries as “risks” simply because historical data was skewed – this could lead to profiling of those nationalities. Avoiding algorithmic bias is a cornerstone of ethical AI: it requires careful dataset selection, fairness testing, and ongoing audits. The EU AI Act and other frameworks demand that high-risk AI systems be evaluated for potential impacts on equality and non-discrimination to mitigate algorithmic bias.

Benefits Trafficking: An emerging term describing the trafficking and exploitation of individuals for the purpose of misappropriating their government benefits. In benefits trafficking, traffickers target at-risk adults who receive public benefits (such as pensions, disability payments, or welfare checks). The traffickers often pose as caretakers or offer housing to the elderly, disabled, or homeless individuals (who may also be migrants), then gain control of their benefit cards or checks. The victims are typically kept in poor, sometimes prison-like, conditions – confined, neglected, and sometimes moved between locations to avoid detection. They are forced to sign over benefit payments or are not allowed to access their own funds. This constitutes human trafficking because the traffickers are essentially exploiting the person (through fraud, coercion, or abuse of vulnerability) for financial gain. Benefits trafficking has been reported in the United States and Europe targeting the elderly and people with disabilities living alone. It overlaps with concepts of forced begging and financial exploitation. Combatting it requires cross-sector cooperation (social services, law enforcement, healthcare) to identify unusual living situations where vulnerable beneficiaries are isolated or controlled by someone not acting in their interest.

Debt Bondage (Bonded Labour): A form of forced labour where a person’s work is demanded as a means of repayment for a loan or debt. The victim (and sometimes their family) is bound to work for little or no wages, as the cost of their labour is applied against the debt – which is often manipulated to be never-ending. Debt bondage is common in South Asia and other regions: for example, workers in brick kilns or agriculture might inherit a small debt and then be compelled to labour for years under brutal conditions to “pay it off,” while the employer continues to inflate expenses, so the debt never resolves. It is considered the most prevalent form of modern slavery. International law (Supplementary Convention on Slavery 1956) explicitly prohibits debt bondage. Key characteristics: the terms of the debt are exploitative or unclear, and the person’s freedom of movement or employment is restricted until the debt is ostensibly repaid.

Forced Begging: A form of exploitation where traffickers compel people to beg in public spaces and confiscate the money earned. Victims of forced begging can include children, persons with disabilities, or other marginalised people whom traffickers consider “profitable” because their appearance can inspire pity and donations from the public. The traffickers often

orchestrate groups of victims (for example, placing children at busy intersections or transit hubs to beg) and set daily quotas of money. If victims do not meet these quotas, they face punishment – physical violence, deprivation of food, etc. In severe cases, traffickers intentionally injure or mutilate victims to increase their effectiveness at begging (a documented horror in some criminal networks). Organised begging rings have been uncovered across Europe and South Asia, often involving family-based trafficking operations forcing children (sometimes their own or kin) to beg. Forced begging is explicitly recognised as a form of human trafficking in EU law and elsewhere. It often overlaps with forced criminality – for instance, making someone beg or pickpocket falls under exploitation. Key indicator: the person begging cannot keep their earnings and is being controlled or abused by someone overseeing the activity. Anti-trafficking responses include public awareness (so people know organised begging might be trafficking) and training police to distinguish voluntary beggars from those under duress.

Intersectionality: A concept and analytical framework recognising that individuals may face multiple, overlapping forms of oppression or disadvantage due to their combined social identities. Coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality in practice means that, for example, a migrant woman of colour may experience vulnerabilities not just as a migrant, or as a woman, or as a racial minority, but as a combination of all three. In anti-trafficking, using an *intersectional approach* means understanding how factors like gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, and migration status intersect to shape a person’s risk of being trafficked and their experience afterwards. Intersectionality moves us beyond one-dimensional profiles of “victims” to see, for instance, that transgender youth of an ethnic minority could be far more at-risk than others due to transphobia + racism + poverty acting together. Through the acknowledgment of intersectionality, policies and support can be better tailored – for instance, recognising that an indigenous girl with a disability will need different prevention and rehabilitation measures than a non-disabled urban male youth. It essentially highlights the complexity of social inclusion and exclusion, ensuring no one is left invisible in anti-trafficking efforts.

Kafala: A *sponsorship system* used in several Middle Eastern countries (Gulf states, Jordan, Lebanon) that ties migrant workers’ legal residence and employment to a local sponsor (*kafeel*). Under kafala, the employer has near-total control over the worker’s visa status – workers cannot change jobs or exit the country without permission. This dependency often facilitates exploitation, as workers who flee abuse become “undocumented” and subject to detention. Kafala most commonly applies to domestic workers, construction labourers, and other low-wage migrant jobs. Due to widespread human rights abuses (non-payment of wages, confiscation of passports, physical abuse), there have been calls and some efforts to reform or abolish kafala.

Sources

- Al Jazeera, Satellite data used to track forced labour on fishing vessels' (22 December 2020)
- ALDI SOUTH Group, ALDI and the Issara Institute roll out grievance mechanism project in Thailand |
- Algorithm Watch, 'EU's AI Act fails to set gold standard for human rights' (2024)
- Anna Thomas, Heather Strickland, 'Benefits Trafficking: human trafficking of older adults and adults with disabilities', *Front Rehabil Sci* (2024)
- Anti-Slavery International. "Indigenous peoples and climate change: multiple crises drive modern slavery." (2021)
- ASEAN Magazine. "Invisible Exploitation: Disability and Human Trafficking" (Feb 2025)
- ASEAN-Australia Counter-Trafficking. "Understanding experiences of LGBTQIAN+ vulnerability to human trafficking." (2021)
- BBC, 'More slavery network gang members convicted' (28 June 2021)
- Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 'Saudi Arabia: Dozens of Sri Lankan women wrongfully detained for months due to abusive kafala system' (2021)
- Cheryl Teh, 'Man pleads guilty to exploiting a worker who lived in a garden shed for 40 years with no light or heating, UK authority say' *Business Insider* (2022)
- Council of Europe GRETA. *Reports concerning domestic servitude cases*.
- Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims. (2011)
- European Commission. *Proposal for an Artificial Intelligence Act – High-risk AI in law enforcement*. (2023)
- Freedom Network USA. *Human Trafficking Explained: The Issue*. (2022)
- G.G. McDonald, C. Costello, J. Bone, R.B. Cabral, V. Farabee, T. Hochberg, D. Kroodsma, T. Mangin, K.C. Meng, & O. Zahn, Satellites can reveal global extent of forced labor in the world's fishing fleet, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 118 (3) (2021)
- Hope for Justice. "Who is vulnerable to human trafficking?" (2023)
- IBM, *Banking on data to disrupt human trafficking* (2020)
- Indira Boutier, Emmanuel Maganaris, *Artificial Intelligence in Anti-Trafficking Efforts: Can Human Rights and Technological Progress Be Reconciled?* UN Human Rights Office (2025)
- International Labour Organization, *Data and research on forced labour*
- Katie McQue, 'Every day I cry': 50 women talk about life as a domestic worker under the Gulf's kafala system', *The Guardian* (25 April 2024)
- Mattha Busby, 'Rescued 'slave' thought to have lived in a shed in Cumbria for 40', *The Guardian* (3 October 2018)
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) – data on online enticement (2021)
- Omar Martinez, 'Sex Trafficking of LGBT Individuals: A Call for Service Provision, Research, and Action' *ABA Journal* (2013)
- Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV). "Human Trafficking and Older Adults" (2019)
- Plataforma de proteccion de migrantes, 'Combating Human Trafficking in the Digital Era: Innovative Approaches from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans' (2024)
- Polaris Project. "Individuals with Disabilities Face Increased Risk of Trafficking." (2018)
- Politico, 'Dutch scandal serves as a warning for Europe over risks of using algorithms' (2022)
- Sectoral Partnerships and Engagement - IRIS Ethical Recruitment

Trafficking in human beings statistics - Statistics Explained
UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007).
UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*. (2020)
UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, supplementing the UN
Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000)
United Nations – Office on Drugs and Crime, ‘Forced into marriage, abused and sexually
exploited: child trafficking in South Eastern Europe’ (2024)
United Nations – Office on Drugs and Crime, ‘UNODC global human trafficking report:
detected victims up 25 per cent as more children are exploited and forced labour cases
spike’ (2024)
United Nations – Office on Drugs and Crime, 16 Days of Activism: Awareness-raising of the
risks of human trafficking with indigenous youth in Colombia
World Economic Forum, ‘How AI and satellite imaging can stamp out modern slavery’ (2020)