



Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary –
Loreto Generalate NGO Office
777 United Nations Plaza New York, New York 10017



Position Paper: Migration, Labour Exploitation, and Human Trafficking

The Congregation of Jesus (CJ) is present in over 40 countries. We educate more than 70,000 women and girls worldwide each year, partnering with local communities to promote sustainable development and uphold the human rights of all people. Through our global network, we work closely with communities on the ground to eliminate human trafficking by strengthening prevention efforts, providing care and rehabilitation, and supporting the restitution of rights for victim-survivors.

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Loreto Generalate (IBVM-Loreto) NGO to the United Nations is the global justice and advocacy mission of the CJ, bringing the voice of faith-based civil society to multilateral decision-making processes. The IBVM-Loreto NGO¹ serves as a key coordination mechanism, connecting CJ grassroots initiatives with global advocacy. It facilitates collaboration across regions, amplifies local voices, and ensures that our collective actions contribute effectively to international efforts to eradicate human trafficking in all its forms.

This policy paper outlines the experiences of our network and corresponding recommendations in relation to migration, human trafficking and labour exploitation in the areas of 1) Technology and Human Trafficking; 2) Human Trafficking Routes; 3) Vulnerability of Women and Children; 4) Labour Exploitation; 5) Access to Legal Justice and Human Rights; and 6) Human Trafficking and Climate Change.

Technology and Human Trafficking

Emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs) and artificial intelligence (AI) play an increasingly central role in human trafficking, especially in recruitment and exploitation.² Traffickers manipulate social media, dating apps, and fraudulent job postings to exploit victims. AI intensifies these risks by enabling large-scale, automated recruitment.

Open-source AI agents scan networks, detect vulnerable users, and initiate conversations. Advanced multimodal systems combine text, images, audio, and video to produce convincing and manipulative content. Voice cloning and synthesis allow traffickers to impersonate trusted figures. Encrypted messaging apps facilitate undetected communication. Technology separates the

¹ The IBVM NGO received Associate Status with the Department of Global Communications of the UN in September 2023. And, in 2015 IBVM NGO was granted special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

² GRETA report, Study on online and technology-facilitated trafficking in human beings <https://rm.coe.int/online-and-technology-facilitated-trafficking-labour-in-human-beings-summary-/1680a5e10c>

location of abuse from the location of coordination, complicating law enforcement efforts. With AI-driven automation, traffickers can sustain realistic interactions, making detection and intervention difficult.³ Digital platforms enable the advertisement, sale, and coordination of forced labour and sexual services. Live-streaming platforms, webcams, and pay-per-view chats are used to market adult and child victims. Digital tools are used to control victims, often through blackmail with compromising content.

Reliable data on the technological dimension of trafficking is scarce due to the difficulty of detecting cybercrime and the need for sophisticated investigative resources. Nonetheless, our IBVM/CJ global network corroborates that the use of ICTs and AI in trafficking is a growing and alarming trend.

Recommendation 1: Use large-scale digital campaigns to provide accurate information about immigration programs and legal procedures, and the rights of migrants and refugees, as a strategy to counter scammers and disinformation from human trafficking networks. Target the most vulnerable populations: youth, girls and women, migrants and migrant workers.

Human Trafficking Routes

Human trafficking networks use a variety of internal and cross-border transit routes to transport victims. While trafficking routes differ across regions, shaped by geographic, legal, and economic factors, they share common patterns of deception. The use of legal entry mechanisms, such as tourist or student visas and work permits, becomes exploitative once the victim arrives at their destination.

In 2022, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) recorded at least 162 different nationalities trafficked to 128 countries of destination and of the total cross-border flows detected, 31% involved citizens of African countries, making Africa the trafficking origin with the most destinations both within and outside of the region. Victims are mainly trafficked to Europe and the Middle East. Victims from East Asia and South Asia are detected in countries across the globe, suggesting that these flows have a global reach. Trafficking out of Europe and out of Latin America tends to remain within a limited geographical reach.⁴

Recommendation 2: Increase cross-border collaboration along known trafficking routes. Strengthen surveillance and intelligence-sharing between countries to allow law enforcement agencies to exchange information on international trafficking routes and intercept criminal groups.

³ OSCE Policy Brief, New Frontiers: The use of generative artificial intelligence to facilitate trafficking in persons <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/d/579715.pdf>

⁴ Global Report on Trafficking in Persons https://www.unodc.org/documentalabourts/data-and-analysis/glotip/20labour24/GLOTIP2024_BOOK.pdf

Vulnerability of Women and Children

Gender inequality, socio-economic exclusion, and systemic marginalization consistently place women and children at the centre of trafficking risks. Their vulnerability is reinforced by cycles of poverty, family dysfunction, discrimination, and restrictive cultural or social norms. In 2022, 61% of trafficking victims detected worldwide were female. Women make up 39% of all detected victims, whereas girls comprise 22% of the total detected victims.

The majority of women and girls identified among victims continue to be trafficked for sexual exploitation; however, female victims are also trafficked in large numbers for forced labour, such as domestic work, as well as for forced marriage and forced criminality. In 2022, 38% of detected victims were children, as compared to 13% detected in 2004.⁵

Recommendation 3: Develop and invest in programmes that offer livelihood options, including basic education, skills training and digital and financial literacy. Ensure that every child has access to education and school attendance, especially girls.

Labour Exploitation

In 2024, the UNODC reported increasing incidences of labour exploitation, which “account[s] for the biggest share of all victims around the world.”⁶ The International Labour Organization (ILO) stated in 2022 that 27.6 million people are victims of forced labour exploitation.

Trafficking for labour exploitation is linked to a perception of migrants as a source of cheap labour.⁷ Victims of labour exploitation are deceived by promises of high-paid jobs and a better life. Recruiters charge exorbitant fees, which fosters debt servitude. They confiscate passports, manipulate residence permits, and force isolation. Reporting of cases remains low due to victims' perceptions of themselves as persons without the right to report or seek legal protection. Victims may be considered illegal in the country where they are exploited, and they may continue to work in exploitative conditions as the only means of survival.

In some regions, labour exploitation is linked to bilateral government programs that provide temporary migrant workers with low-paying jobs.⁸ Temporary or seasonal migrant workers often face detrimental conditions, including lower salaries, work hours exceeding legal limits, precarious housing conditions, lack of access to legal support and medical assistance, among other issues. Closed work visas tie temporary migrant workers to a single employer and treat them as program beneficiaries rather than as contractors with human and labour rights who contribute to the host country's economic development. These closed work permits enable employers to exploit workers

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ As reported by the CJ network Albania, Canada, and Spain.

⁸ As reported in CJ network in Canada and Spain.

with little recourse. Victims fear reporting such employers due to the risk of deportation and program cancellation without the opportunity to seek alternative employment. Worldwide, millions of people perform legal jobs in legal companies but work under illegal conditions.

Labour exploitation is linked to longstanding internal historical social hierarchies and cultural factors, evident in rural and remote areas.⁹ Victims experience sexual abuse, and domestic workers become servants with no pay or freedom. Refugee camps are locations of all forms of human trafficking. Men, women and children are exploited, particularly in the hospitality and tourism industries.¹⁰

Recommendation 4: Treat workers who are victims of labour exploitation as victims of human trafficking, rather than as criminals—ensuring full access to the restitution of their human rights.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen measures to reduce transnational crimes involving the exploitation of workers through fraudulent recruitment strategies.

Recommendation 6: Replace closed work permits for temporary foreign workers with open permits that guarantee their human and labour rights, and allow them to change employers when they deem it necessary.

Access to Legal Justice and Human Rights

Most countries have legal frameworks that address and criminalize human trafficking and exploitation; however, judicial procedures are often slow due to a lack of expertise in processing cases and low priority given to cases of human trafficking. This results in inconsistent perpetrator identification and low levels of convictions, which undermines the credibility of the legal system and support for victims' representation and compensation.

Migrant victims and survivors are more vulnerable to human trafficking networks, yet they face increased barriers to accessing legal services and support. There is no guarantee that all victims will receive the equitable and full support to which they are entitled in accordance with international standards or the legal provisions of the respective country. Increasingly, governments resort to deportation as a first response, instead of offering protection, support and representation for victim-survivors.

Positive actions taken by certain governments, such as ensuring fair working conditions through workplace inspections,¹¹ increased identification and prosecution of labour exploitation cases, or

⁹ Cases reported by the CJ network in India and Kenya. In India, servitude is prevalent in sectors such as agriculture, brick kilns, and domestic work, through the "Chukri System" and bonded labour with deeply rooted practices justified due to fabricated debts. Children and tribal populations are disproportionately affected (West Bengal).

¹⁰ In Kenya for example 85% of the human trafficking cases are classified as labour exploitation.

¹¹ CJ network in Hungary, Slovakia and Spain.

low incidence of labour exploitation.¹² In other countries, governments do not undertake workplace inspections nor do they take a multisectoral approach to ensuring better interventions and transparency.¹³

Recommendation 7: Strengthen strategies for victim identification and referral, including actions such as training for frontline officials as well as those working in victim care centres, or as labour inspectors, asylum petition officials, and health workers.

Recommendation 8: Ensure victims receive adequate legal representation, including protection from criminal persecution and prosecution. Strengthen collaboration between the government and civil society organizations to enhance prevention measures and support to victim-survivors.

Climate Change and Human Trafficking

Climate change and natural disasters are drivers of large-scale migration. Growing numbers of displaced individuals face economic hardship, especially women and children. They may lack safe shelter and resources, making them vulnerable to traffickers. In addition, regions in the Global South that are rich in natural resources and minerals are exploited by mega corporations through resource extraction.

Local communities are forced into subsistence living and often migrate to urban areas or other countries to make a living. According to the International Organization on Migration, 1 in 3 people do so.

Recommendation 9: Laws and policies on internal displacement and migration should recognize climate change as a factor and explicitly address the needs of affected victims by ascribing to them fundamental rights, social protections, and compensation.

¹² Slovakia has strong standards of legislation to address human trafficking, including a program to support and protect victims and survivors, including legal representation, which is considered to be one of the best in the European Union. Hungary shows positive examples of a legal system to address human trafficking prevention and support for victims. Its roundtable is open to proposals put forward by anti-human trafficking NGOs during discussions. It has also opened numerous shelters in the past 6-8 years across the country to support victims of human trafficking or domestic violence. Spain has seen an increase in the identification and prosecution of labour exploitation cases through inspections by authorities and cooperation with NGOs (203 victims in 2023).

¹³ Canada, Kenya, India, Albania.

Full Set of Recommendations to End Human Trafficking and Responsible Actors

The following tool displays all recommendations, along with proposals for implementing organizations and bodies. This allows visualization of lines of collaboration between sectors.

Recommendation	Civil society	Multilateral Organisms and supranational bodies ¹⁴	United Nations	Governments
R1. Use large-scale digital campaigns providing accurate information about immigration programs and legal procedures, and the rights of migrants and refugees, as a strategy to counter scammers and disinformation from human trafficking gangs. Target the most vulnerable populations: youth, girls and women, migrants and migrant workers.	☒	☒	☒	☒
R2. Increase cross-border collaboration along known trafficking routes. Strengthen surveillance and intelligence-sharing between countries to allow law enforcement agencies to exchange information on international trafficking routes and intercept criminal groups.	☐	☒	☐	☒
R3. Develop and invest in programmes that offer livelihood options, including basic education, skills training and digital and financial literacy. Ensure that every child has access to education and school attendance, particularly for girls.	☒	☐	☐	☒
R4. Treat workers who are victims of labour exploitation as victims of human trafficking, rather than as criminals—ensuring them full access to the restitution of their human rights.	☒	☐	☐	☒
R5. Strengthen measures to reduce transnational crimes involving the exploitation of workers through fraudulent recruitment strategies.	☐	☒	☒	☒
R6. Replace closed work permits for temporary foreign workers with open permits that guarantee their human and labour rights, and allow them to change employers when they deem it necessary.	☐	☐	☐	☒
R7. Strengthen strategies for victim identification and referral, including actions such as training for frontline officials as well as victim care centres, labour inspectors, asylum petition officials, and health workers.	☐	☐	☒	☒
R8. Ensure victims receive adequate legal representation, ensure protection from criminal persecution and prosecution, and strengthen collaboration between the government and civil society organizations to enhance prevention measures and support to victim-survivors.	☒	☐	☐	☒
R9. Laws and policies on internal displacement and migration should recognize climate change as a factor and explicitly address the needs of affected victims by ascribing to them fundamental rights, social protections, and compensation.	☐	☐	☒	☒

¹⁴ Interpol, agencies of cooperations, regional organizations working on human trafficking prevention and criminal persecutors and prosecutors (REDTRAM, STRADA).