



INVISIBLE VICTIMS

The nexus between
disabilities and
trafficking in
human beings

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INVISIBLE VICTIMS: The nexus between disabilities and trafficking in human beings

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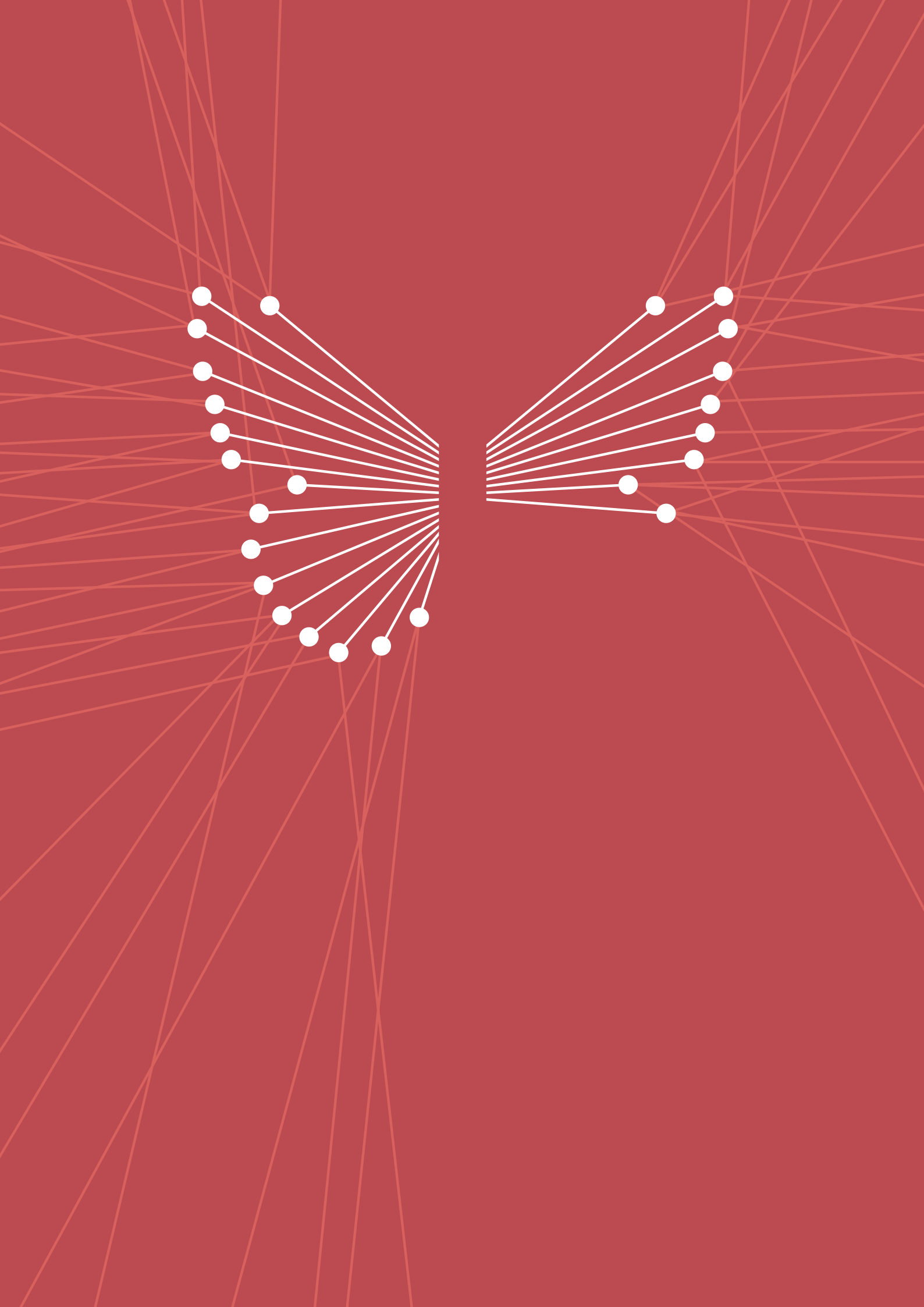


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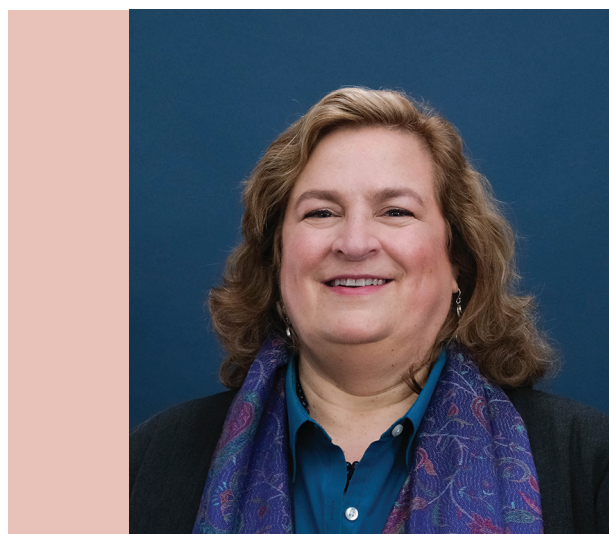
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Kari Johnstone
OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating
Trafficking in Human Beings

Foreword

Kari Johnstone

OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for
Combating Trafficking in Human Beings



The crime of trafficking in human beings is a serious global human rights violation and security threat. Yet it continues to thrive in our modern world.

Numerous organizations and individuals are dedicated to combating trafficking in human beings and protecting victims, including UN organizations, international non-governmental organizations, national law enforcement agencies, victim protection services, experts with lived experience, and civil society organizations. Through the collective work of all these actors, a wealth of knowledge and expertise has emerged to inform efforts to combat human trafficking.

However, amid this commendable progress, a notable gap persists in our understanding of the intersection between human trafficking and individuals with physical, sensory, intellectual, and/or mental disabilities. This is the case despite widespread evidence indicating the potential significance of this nexus, with far-reaching policy implications for prevention, prosecution of traffickers, and victim protection. The OSCE 2021 Survey Report,¹ for example, identified traffickers' specifically targeting people with developmental/physical disabilities as an emerging trend; the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), found that in 10 per cent of the cases analysed in the report, mental, behavioural, or neurological disorders were among the vulnerabilities exploited by

traffickers.² This highlights the urgent need for developing robust and concrete measures that address the unique challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the context of human trafficking.

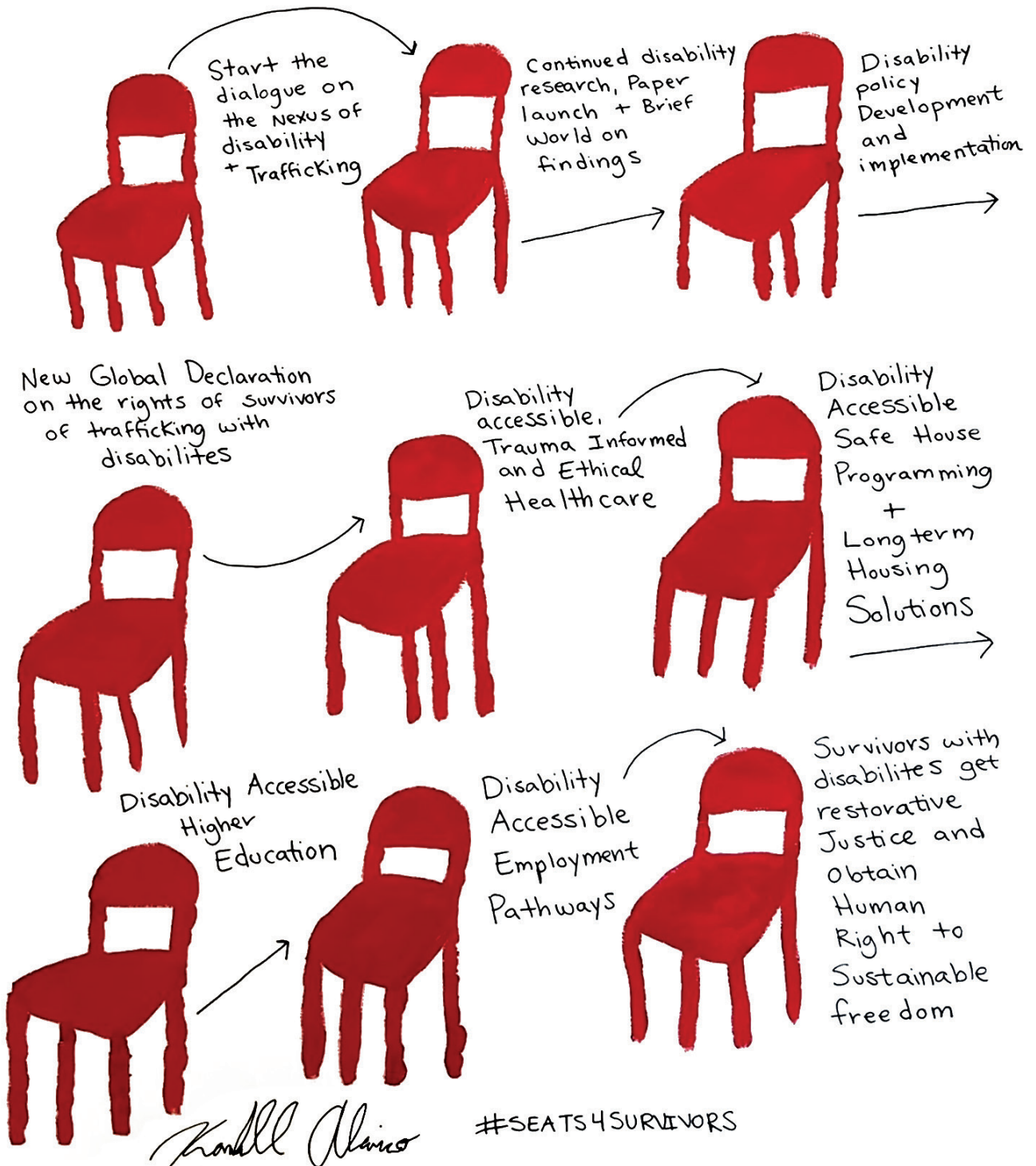
This short paper provides an overview of the existing links between disability and trafficking in human beings, how persons living with disability are affected by trafficking, and to what extent legal standards, policy frameworks, and anti-trafficking measures integrate concerns associated with disabilities. This analysis is approached from four distinct perspectives: disability as an enhanced vulnerability factor that traffickers target; disability as a feature of exploitation (e.g., forced begging, withholding or theft of social security benefits); disability as a result of trafficking and exploitation (e.g., physical injury, PTSD, dissociative disorders); and disability of trafficking survivors as a factor in accessing justice, protection, employment, health and rehabilitation services. Finally, the paper presents a series of recommendations and potential strategies aimed at elevating awareness and prioritizing the disability dimension within efforts to combat human trafficking.

I hope this report will serve as a useful resource to foster much-needed dialogue regarding the nexus between disabilities and trafficking in human beings, and that it will assist policymakers, civil society, and the wider anti-trafficking community in developing targeted responses that address the unique needs and challenges faced by persons with disabilities who have been trafficked, and to assist their recovery with dignity.

¹ Survey Report 2021 of Efforts to Implement OSCE Commitments and Recommended Actions to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings | OSCE.

² The UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020.

THE PLAN



The artwork is done by artist and survivor Kendall Alaimo. Kendall's mission is to create positive social impact with her art. She is known for her iconic red #seats4survivors which calls for social inclusion of survivors of slavery and stands as a symbol of freedom.

Preface

Kendall Alaimo

International Activist, Artist and Survivor of Trafficking



Both empirical research and self-reporting from trafficking survivors has created a growing awareness in the global community about the nexus between disability and human trafficking. The links between disability and human trafficking are substantial and cannot be overlooked. In all OSCE participating States, solutions are urgently needed for protecting persons with disabilities from trafficking.

Those working in the field of combating human trafficking have long known that individuals with disabilities are more vulnerable to being trafficked. We are thus calling for increased protection of such persons. Here I would also like to point out that we are also seeing cases of disability as the direct result of trafficking. This should be flagged as an emerging concern: disabilities, including permanent disabilities, that are the result of exposure to cycles of exploitation and re-exploitation, as well as the compacted trauma inflicted by such re-exploitation.

To prevent the trafficking of persons living with disabilities and to stop the re-exploitation of survivors, the focus must be broader than just crime prevention; it must also include the protection of human rights. I recommend basing the protection of survivors of human trafficking with disabilities on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons.

Disabilities resulting from trafficking and exploitation can be both mental and physical. It is known that the higher the level of trauma a person has endured, the higher the levels of clinical symptomatology that person will pres-

ent. Among trafficking survivors with disabilities, we see a prevalence of severe cases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociative disorders and comorbid pathology. We must also recognize the link between these conditions and the development of physically debilitating diseases later in life.

If survivors with disabilities have no accessible resources enabling their personal independence, they remain in a state of hypervigilance, fear, uncertainty, desperation and hopelessness. This guarantees their vulnerability to re-exploitation. Moreover, the impact of complex trauma on their minds and bodies reduces their life expectancy – including the danger of suicide.

Trafficking survivors with disabilities face unacceptable standards of aftercare, as well as ongoing barriers to disability accessible housing, treatment, education and employment.

For survivors with disabilities who remain destitute, their only resource may be their own dreams. But trafficking survivors' dreams are just wishes without plans. I urge the world to prioritize plans to ensure the human rights of survivors of human trafficking who live with disabilities.

A special thank you is due to the OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings for fostering dialogue, undertaking research, and constructing a globally needed action plan on behalf of these resilient survivors of human trafficking.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEDAW	(UN) Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPRD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
ILO	International Labour Organization
NAP	National Action Plan
NRM	National Referral Mechanisms
OAS	Organization of American States
OCHA	(UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODIHR	(OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	(UN) Sustainable Development Goal
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Definitions of disability and human trafficking

The analysis in this paper is based on the commonly endorsed international definitions of disability and human trafficking. **Persons living with disabilities** are defined by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in a comprehensive manner.³

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”⁴

This broad and inclusive definition encompasses a wide variety of disabilities that render persons living with these disabilities vulnerable to trafficking in human beings. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 1.3 billion people – or 1 in 6 people worldwide – experience significant disability.⁵



³ The CRPD has been ratified by all OSCE participating States, with the exception of the United States, the Holy See and Tajikistan. For ratification status, see: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CRPD.

⁴ Article 1, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; available [here](#).

⁵ World Health Organization (2022), Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities: Executive summary. Geneva. Significant disability refers to moderate and severe levels of disability associated with underlying health conditions and impairments.

Trafficking in human beings is defined in Article 3 of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime Supplementary Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (hereafter the Palermo Protocol), adopted in 2000.⁶ This definition specifies that the crime of human trafficking is a process constituted by three distinct elements:

- An **act** involving recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons;
- By **means** of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person);
- **For the purpose of exploitation**. Exploitation may take various forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging, organ removal, slavery, and slavery-like practices.

When an **act** is perpetrated by one of the **means** to get a victim into an exploitative situation, actual exploitation does not need to happen for a trafficking crime to have taken place (in other words, intent is sufficient even if the end result did not occur – a key consideration for law enforcement and prosecution).⁷ The trafficking of children is a process comprised of two distinct stages: the act and the purpose. The means element is not required to establish the crime of child trafficking. In other words, in the case of children no means at all, including coercion, deception or threat, are required to establish the victim status of a child.

⁶ The Palermo Protocol has been ratified by all OSCE participating States.

⁷ Article 3, Palermo Protocol; available [here](#).

Sensitivity to disability in the main applicable international legal instruments

Despite facing significant challenges, persons living with disabilities as an especially vulnerable group are mostly invisible in international legal standards on human trafficking. However, various other international instruments contain provisions addressing the vulnerability of persons with disabilities and their non-discrimination, which are highly relevant for the prevention of human trafficking of persons with disabilities as well as for ensuring their protection, assistance and support.⁸



The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) does not specifically refer to human trafficking, but it prohibits other forms of exploitation, violence and abuse. **Art. 6** of the CRPD recognizes the cumulative forms of discrimination that women with disabilities face and requires State Parties to take measures to ensure women's full and equal enjoyment of their human rights. In **Art. 16**, the Convention requires State Parties to put in place legislation and policies and to ensure that instances of exploitation, violence and abuse against persons with disabilities, including women and girls, are identified, investigated and prosecuted. It also requires all appropriate measures to promote the physical, cognitive and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration of persons with disabilities who have been victims of any form of exploitation, violence or abuse, including through the provision of protection services. **Article 13** of the Convention emphasizes the importance of making necessary adjustments in legal proceedings to ensure that individuals with disabilities have fair and equal access to justice.

The UN Committee that supervises the implementation of the CRPD in its **General Comment No. 3 on Women with Disabilities** noted that “women with disabilities may be targeted for economic exploitation because of their impairment, which can in turn expose them to further violence. For example, women with physical or visible impairments can be trafficked for the purpose of forced

begging because it is believed that they may elicit a higher degree of public sympathy.”⁹



The **UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, in its **General Recommendation No. 38 on Trafficking of Women and Girls in the Context of International Migration**, makes specific references to trafficking of women and girls with disabilities. It notes that sex- and gender-based discrimination, gender-based structural inequality and feminization of poverty are root causes of trafficking, and that women and girls with disabilities are at particular risk of trafficking. In the context of the protection of victims and their access to services, CEDAW singles out women and girls with disabilities as a particularly vulnerable group in need of adequate assistance.¹⁰



Art. 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child addresses the rights of children with disabilities, stating that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life in conditions that ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. In its **General Comment No. 9 on the rights of children with disabilities**, the Committee on the Rights of the Child noted that children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to different forms of economic exploitation, including child labour, sexual exploitation and forced begging. The Committee noted the special vulnerability of girls with disabilities, requesting State Parties to take extra measures to ensure their protection, access to all services and full inclusion in society.¹¹

⁸ In this section, the focus is on international treaties and similar instruments which legally bind the countries that have ratified them.

⁹ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General comment No. 3 (2016) on women and girls with Disabilities, para. 34.

¹⁰ Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, General recommendation No. 38 (2020) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration, para. 20.

¹¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 9 (2006) on the rights of children with disabilities, paras. 75, 76, 77, and 79.

The **Palermo Protocol** does not explicitly refer to disability but sets forth requirements on the protection of victims that are relevant to persons living with disabilities. **Art. 6** requires that State Parties shall consider implementing measures to provide for the physical, psychological and social recovery of victims of trafficking in persons, including, in appropriate cases, in co-operation with non-governmental organizations, other relevant organizations and other elements of civil society. In particular, State Parties shall consider the provision of:

- a. **Appropriate housing;**
- b. **Counselling and information, in particular with regard to legal rights, in a language that victims of human trafficking can understand;**
- c. **Medical, psychological and material assistance; and**
- d. **Employment, educational and training opportunities.**

In taking these measures, the age, gender and special needs of victims of human trafficking, including appropriate housing, education and care, are to be taken into account.

Although the vulnerability of persons with disabilities to human trafficking is acknowledged in various documents, the provisions often remain insubstantial and fail to offer comprehensive strategies for effective responses. At the same time, international and regional standards regarding trafficking in human beings occasionally recognize disability as a vulnerability and protection factor, but not unexpectedly, references to disability are often brief and general, or absent.¹² The **EU Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (2011)**¹³ includes protection requirements for victims of human trafficking with special needs, including health, disability, physical or mental illness, but does not provide further details.

¹² See, e.g., the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (available [here](#)), which contains general non-discrimination provisions and takes a human rights-based approach to prevention policies and programmes and victim protection. See also the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (available [here](#)), which requires criminalization when an offence involves a victim who is particularly vulnerable, among other reasons, because of a physical or mental disability or condition.

¹³ EU Directive 2011/36/EU; available [here](#). At the time of writing, a new Directive was under preparation. EU Directives are binding as to the result to be achieved in the EU Member States to which they are addressed (one, several or all of them), while leaving national authorities the power to choose the form and methods to achieve the result (Article 288 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union).

The **EU Directive on establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime (2012)** offers a general elaboration on the special needs of victims.¹⁴

At the OSCE level, in the Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (1991),¹⁵ participating States decided to ensure protection of the human rights of persons with disabilities (41.1), although no reference was made to trafficking in human beings. In Decision No. 15/05 on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women (2005),¹⁶ participating States expressed concerns regarding the particular targeting or vulnerability of women and girls, and reiterated the need for protection of these groups, including women with disabilities. The 2003 OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings¹⁷ does not refer to disability, although the 2013 Addendum¹⁸ requires special attention to, among others, children with disabilities in promoting targeted awareness-raising and public education.

In sum, in both international and regional standards on trafficking in human beings, linkages with disability are either general, of low visibility, or non-existent. While it cannot be expected that high-level standards go into great detail on specific vulnerabilities, this gap should be closed to ultimately improve prevention, protection and access to justice for people with disabilities.

¹⁴ Victims are entitled to specialist support services based on their specific needs, which implies that victims of human trafficking as a minimum have the right to appropriate shelter, trauma support and counselling based on their special needs. At the time of writing, a new Directive on this topic was under preparation. Among the revisions in the new draft Directive are: enhancing safety measures tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable victims and improving the individual assessment of victims' protection needs; providing access to specialized support services for vulnerable victims, including those living with disabilities, such as free psychological support for as long as necessary depending on the victims' individual needs; and facilitating access to justice by ensuring victims are sufficiently assisted in court and are empowered to challenge the criminal proceedings' decisions affecting their rights, independently of their status during these proceedings.

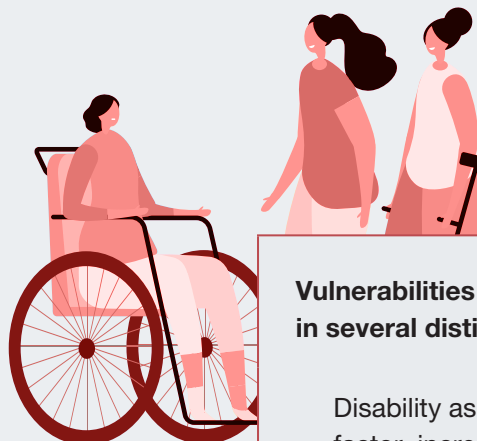
¹⁵ Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE; available [here](#).

¹⁶ Decision No. 15/05 on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women; available [here](#). OSCE Decisions are adopted by consensus by the participating States and reflect their agreed views. They are politically but not legally binding.

¹⁷ Decision No. 557, OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings; available [here](#).

¹⁸ Decision No. 1107, Addendum to the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings: One Decade Later; available [here](#).

Human trafficking and disability¹⁹



Why are persons living with disabilities more vulnerable to human trafficking?

Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol states that the abuse of a position of vulnerability is a means to bring persons into a trafficking situation.²⁰ Research on the role of disability as a vulnerability factor in trafficking is limited, indicating that there is inadequate global and national attention to the issue. However, information from court cases, existing research and testimonies from survivors²¹ indicate that disability as a vulnerability and protection issue in the context of human trafficking is a real concern.

Vulnerabilities due to disability manifest in several distinct ways:

- a. Disability as an enhanced vulnerability factor, increasing the likelihood of individuals becoming victims of trafficking;
- b. Disability as a feature of exploitation (e.g., forced begging, withholding or theft of social security benefits)²²;
- c. Disability as a result of trafficking and exploitation (e.g., physical injury, PTSD, dissociative disorders);
- d. Disability of trafficking survivors as a barrier in accessing justice, protection, health or rehabilitation services, or employment.

¹⁹ Throughout this paper, the term vulnerability mainly signifies vulnerability to trafficking, i.e., the additional vulnerabilities that persons with disabilities face that make them more likely to fall victim to trafficking. However, the term is also used to indicate that the general vulnerability of persons with disabilities is made worse if they have been exposed to trafficking.

²⁰ Vulnerability takes many forms. This needs to be assessed in each individual case of trafficking. A 2012 Guidance note by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime states that the physical or mental disability of a person is a form of personal vulnerability that can be pre-existing, but can also be created by a trafficker. UNODC, Guidance Note on 'abuse of a position of vulnerability' as a means of trafficking in persons in Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Available [here](#).

²¹ The information in this section has been collated from many sources, including the Polaris Project, On-Ramps, Intersections, and Exit Routes: A Roadmap for Systems and Industries to Prevent and Disrupt Human Trafficking, pp. 22ff. (available [here](#)); National Mobility Rights Network/University of Illinois Chicago/National Trafficking & Disabilities Working Group: Introduction to Human Trafficking: What It Is and How it Impacts the Disability Community (available [here](#)); European Disability Forum, Combatting Trafficking in Persons with Disabilities – Position Paper March 2022 (available [here](#)); US Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center, Human Trafficking Task Force E-guide: Victims with Physical, Cognitive, or Emotional Disabilities (available [here](#)); Human Trafficking Legal Center, Fact sheet: Trafficking of Persons with Disabilities in the United States (available [here](#)). Information was also provided from interviews with survivors.

The first two categories are particularly relevant for the prevention of trafficking, since they identify how persons with disabilities are or become vulnerable to trafficking. The latter two categories are especially important for victim identification and protection, the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases as well as access to assistance and justice for survivors with disabilities.

²² "Those who are forced to beg are made to hand over their earnings to their exploiters and commonly suffer abuse if they fail to reach the monetary targets they have been set. Children forced to beg experience serious violations of their rights, and are often exposed to severe physical, psychological and emotional abuse. In some cases, the victims are deliberately maimed, or their clothes or shoes are taken away to attract more sympathy. Traffickers will deliberately target mothers with children or persons with visible disabilities." Anti-Slavery International (2014), *Trafficking for Forced Criminal Activities and Begging in Europe: Exploratory Study and Good Practice Examples*, p. 68. In a 2022 Sector Review on child labour and disability, UNICEF observed: "Disability is considered an advantage in begging since children with disabilities receive more sympathy and money. Studies from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan show how a child's disability is often exploited by their parents, families or begging gangs to create sympathy among the general public. In some instances, children are trafficked and forcefully mutilated by criminal gangs." United Nations Children's Fund South Asia, 'Child Labour and Disability: A Sector Review' UNICEF ROSA, Kathmandu, 2022.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PREVENTION: FACTORS THAT INCREASE VULNERABILITY TO FALL VICTIM TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Persons with disabilities are at increased risk of being targeted by traffickers due to their disability, possible reduced capacity to give informed consent, and the power imbalance that exists between them and their traffickers. This can be due to various factors, including physical, cognitive, sensory, developmental, or emotional impairments that might make it difficult for such victims to give consent or to refuse to go along with traffickers, to escape exploitation, to advocate for themselves, or to protect themselves from exploitation. Persons with disabilities often have reduced capacity to access support networks and may face discrimination, which in turn leads to social and economic exclusion, as well as isolation. Because human traffickers seek people with perceived vulnerabilities, victims of previous violence and social discrimination are especially targeted. For such victims, violence and abuse may be normalized, and beliefs of shame or unworthiness may heighten future risk of human trafficking.²³ Among the specific vulnerabilities that increase the risk to fall victim to human trafficking are:

a. Dependence on caregivers or support systems:

People with disabilities often rely on caregivers, family members or friends to provide them with basic needs, such as transportation, housing and medical care. This dependence can make them more vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers, who may offer these services or such assistance in exchange for labour or other forms of exploitation.²⁴ Cases are also known in which traffickers specifically target individuals with a disability to gain access to their government-issued benefits.²⁵

b. Limited access to information and resources:

Limited access to quality education impacts the ability of persons with disabilities to gain the skills or knowledge they need for making informed decisions or judgements about potentially exploitative situations. When people with disabilities lack accessible or understandable information about human trafficking, they typically also have limited access to information and resources that would protect them from being trafficked. For example, they may not have access to information about their rights, including their sexual and reproductive health rights, or may not know how to report abuse. Lack of sex education for persons with disabilities also enhances their vulnerability to trafficking and sexual exploitation.²⁶

c. Difficulty communicating or advocating for themselves:

Due to language barriers, people with disabilities may have difficulty communicating or advocating for themselves, which can make it difficult for them to seek help or report abuse.²⁷ Isolation can also heighten dependency on exploiters and reduce the ability of people with disabilities to report abuse.

d. Stigma and discrimination:

People with disabilities frequently face stigma and discrimination in their communities, which can make them more vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers. Low access to education and employment, exposure to violence, and high risk of poverty are factors contributing to their social and economic exclusion and increasing their dependence, making them more likely to be targeted by trafficking networks.²⁸

²³ See, e.g., Adult Advocacy Centers (2020), Needs Assessment: Human Trafficking and People with Disabilities.

²⁴ Polaris, p. 122.

²⁵ Polaris, p. 122; US Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center E-Guide, Human Trafficking Legal Center Fact Sheet.

²⁶ European Disability Forum, p. 5.

²⁷ European Disability Forum, p. 7; US Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center E-Guide.

²⁸ Polaris p. 112; European Disability Forum, p. 7.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESPONSE: DISABILITY AS A RESULT OF TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

Victims of human trafficking with disabilities face many new or exacerbated vulnerabilities after experiencing exploitation. Traffickers may target victims because of their disability or abuse their disabilities for particular forms of exploitation (e.g., street begging or theft of social security benefits). Survivors may also have suffered violence and abuse inflicted in the course of trafficking, or illnesses and conditions that have caused them to develop disabilities, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other dissociative disorders.²⁹ Hence, their vulnerability may be enhanced due to the trauma and abuse they have experienced, as well as the specific challenges and barriers they face as people with disabilities. These include:

a. Physical and mental health issues:

Survivors may experience a range of physical and mental health problems as a result of the abuse and exploitation they have endured. This can include physical injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociative disorders, depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions.

A fact sheet published by the Human Trafficking Legal Center in 2017 highlights the important role of health care systems in combating trafficking in human beings. Medical personnel and health professionals have frequent contact with patients in health care settings and are therefore uniquely placed to identify and safely respond to human trafficking. Additionally, medical personnel can document injuries, offer expert testimony, and provide affidavits for use in legal proceedings.³⁰

b. Invisibility of some forms of disability:

Some disabilities may not be immediately apparent or identifiable and thus require diagnosis by a specialist. Lack of awareness of “invisible” disabilities means that they often go undiagnosed, with survivors thus not getting the services they need, or for as long as they need them. This brings the real risk of leaving survivors of trafficking vulnerable to further victimization and exploitation. In the United States, a survey revealed that the majority of disability providers do not have screening in place for human trafficking. In turn, less than half of anti-trafficking service providers screen for disabilities. The survey also revealed that very little collaboration exists between human trafficking services and disability service providers.³¹

c. Stigma and discrimination:

Victims of human trafficking who have disabilities may face stigma and discrimination due to both their disabilities and their experiences as survivors. Stigma surrounding disabilities, as well as the fact that people with “invisible” disabilities may not have a formal diagnosis, may also mean that persons with disabilities do not disclose their disability at the time of identification. This can make it difficult for them to access justice and specialized support services, including long-term reintegration support.³²

d. Challenges related to screening and victim identification:

Victims of trafficking with disabilities may not be identified because most anti-trafficking actors (service providers and law enforcement) are illiterate about disabilities and/or may not have the necessary skills or knowledge to identify persons with disabilities – particularly those with “hidden” disabilities. Furthermore, victims are not systematically screened for disabilities, as most tools currently used in screening processes typically do not include a process to identify disabilities. As a result, victims of human trafficking might not be identified as such by service providers or law enforcement services, increasing the likelihood that victims with disabilities do not receive

²⁹ OSCE/ODIHR 2022, p. 89, n. 13.

³⁰ The Human Trafficking Legal Center, Medical Fact Sheet: Human Trafficking & Health Care Providers: Lessons learned from federal criminal indictments and civil trafficking cases; available [here](#).

³¹ National Human Trafficking And Disabilities Working Group (NHT-DWG), National Data and Assessment Survey 2020; available [here](#).

³² Polaris, p. 112.

adequate accommodation or referrals to disability-related services.³³

e. Lack of access to resources and support:

Care and support services for trafficking victims often do not offer specialized support services to victims with disabilities. Moreover, given the long-term nature of many forms of disabilities, short-term services available to trafficking victims often do not meet the needs of victims with persistent disabilities. Victims of human trafficking who have disabilities may have limited access to resources and support, as well as difficulties in navigating access to services and benefits. This includes accessible and appropriate housing, healthcare, education, employment, psychiatric and psychosocial support services, and other services essential for recovery and well-being.³⁴

Accessibility concerns also take the form of physical access problems, such as:

- access barriers for persons with physical disabilities,
- sign language not being provided for persons with hearing impairments,
- Braille or other services not being available for persons who are blind,
- buildings not accessible for wheelchairs or other assistance equipment,
- access barriers for persons living with mental/cognitive disabilities (such as support service providers not using inclusive language or special applications).³⁵

The duration of assistance provided for trafficking victims often does not meet the long-term needs of victims with disabilities, and/or medical costs are often too high for victims and may not be reimbursed by (social or health) insurance.³⁶

f. Difficulty advocating for themselves:

Victims of human trafficking with disabilities may have difficulty advocating for themselves and communicating their needs, particularly if they have cognitive or communication impairments. This can make it harder for them to access services and support.³⁷

Victims of human trafficking with disabilities may also face compounded vulnerabilities due to a combination of factors such as gender, minority status, or socioeconomic background. These intersecting vulnerabilities make them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and less likely to be able to acquire support and protection.

Various studies on trafficking and disability flag the importance of including survivors' perspectives when developing guidance materials, capacity-building, and professional training to improve the identification of trafficking situations among persons with disabilities. Front-line responders who usually serve as the first point of contact should be particularly targeted for such training and capacity-building efforts.³⁸ Learning from experts with lived experience and taking into account survivor-led solutions are crucial components for establishing effective anti-trafficking responses.

To date, there is still no comprehensive source document mapping out the various vulnerability factors related to disability that could inform international and national anti-trafficking policy, prevention efforts and overall practice. However, prevention initiatives, responsive victim protection mechanism and criminal justice processes should take into account such disability factors. A comprehensive mapping of vulnerabilities is crucial, since persons with disabilities are often beyond the reach of mainstream prevention efforts, such as public information campaigns or awareness-raising materials disseminated in schools. Healthcare professionals working in healthcare systems or people working directly with persons with disabilities are often the only points of contact and should thus be the primary target audience for prevention efforts.

³³ Adult Advocacy Centers, n. 11.

³⁴ European Disability Forum, p. 8.

³⁵ US Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center E-Guide.

³⁶ Interviews with survivors.

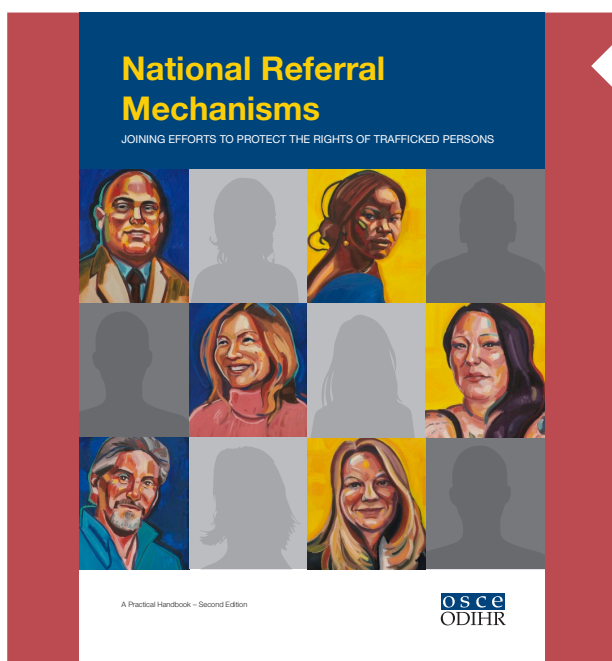
³⁷ See fn. 15, above.

³⁸ See, e.g., Jagoe, Caroline et al. (2022), n. 16.

Such efforts should include sex education for persons with intellectual disability, including education about healthy relationships, consent and sexual boundaries. Moreover, targeted information and professional training should be provided in health centres. The Polaris Project,³⁹ an NGO committed to combating human trafficking, recommends providing information in places that are accessed by people with disabilities, including in waiting rooms of healthcare offices and clinics, behavioural and mental health centres, residential care facilities, and vocational training centres. Furthermore, equipping professionals in these environments with training in human trafficking, which includes engaging with survivors with disabilities, can enhance their ability to effectively engage with and support vulnerable individuals. For example, the NGO HEAL Trafficking has launched a webinar that serves as an introduction to steps combatting trafficking for service providers who may come in contact with youth with disabilities who have experienced trafficking. The webinar aims to increase the understanding of the vulnerability of youth with disabilities to human trafficking and to improve the ability of service providers to identify and support potential or confirmed youth survivors of human trafficking with disabilities.⁴⁰

The 2022 revised *Handbook on National Referral Mechanisms (NRM)* published by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is an important new policy guidance tool. It seeks to advance progress in addressing disability within national frameworks to protect and promote the human rights of victims of trafficking.⁴¹ The newly revised NRM handbook addresses the intersection between trafficking in human beings and disabilities, particularly within its NRM protocol, which provides essential procedures for all professionals working with victims of trafficking, including survivors who have disabilities.

The handbook maps out several vulnerability factors related to disability,⁴² and provides important guidance for working with trafficking survivors with disabilities.⁴³ The handbook focuses on helping NRMs provide effective ways to identify, protect and support victims of trafficking. It is less targeted towards prevention efforts to make persons with disabilities less vulnerable to trafficking. Nonetheless, for OSCE participating States as well as other countries, the handbook is the most comprehensive tool available on the nexus between disabilities and human trafficking, and could serve as a basis for developing a dedicated guidance tool.



³⁹ See: <https://polarisproject.org/>.

⁴⁰ See: <https://healtrafficking.org/2021/02/trafficking-of-youth-with-disabilities-what-human-trafficking-service-providers-need-to-know/>.

⁴¹ ODIHR (2022), *National Referral Mechanisms – Joining Efforts to Protect the Rights of Trafficked Persons, A Practical Handbook – Second Edition*; available [here](#).

⁴² E.g., vulnerability due to marginalization and discrimination within communities; vulnerability due to health conditions, injuries or disabilities; vulnerabilities due to dependency to have basic needs met; vulnerabilities due to isolation.

⁴³ ODIHR (2022), *National Referral Mechanisms*, p. 88f., n. 31.

The role of “means”

The Palermo Protocol, which establishes the definition of trafficking in persons under international law, requires trafficking crimes involving adult victims to include three elements: the act, the means, and the purpose (Article 3-a). For children, the means are inherently irrelevant and thus, establishing the act and its purpose is sufficient in legal proceedings (Article 3-c). As with any other child, this principle also extends to children with disabilities. In contrast, when addressing adults with disabilities, the relevance of means is contingent upon the type of disability and the individual’s capacity, since persons with disabilities cannot be treated as a homogenous group. Rather, considerations must be tailored to the specific circumstances of the individual.

Traffickers often raise a claim that a victim “consented” to their exploitation. However, the Palermo Protocol is explicit that “consent is irrelevant” when any of the means have been used, meaning a victim cannot consent to be compelled into exploitation (Article 3-b.).



The guilt or innocence of a trafficker is determined by the conduct of the offender, not the predisposition or acquiescence of an intended victim. What matters is whether the trafficker used one of the prohibited means. The protocol does not specify the degree to which the means must be proven. However, national authorities should consider requiring the means be sufficient to compel a reasonable person with the same circumstances, background, and vulnerabilities as the victim. This is where disabilities should come into play. A victim's physical or intellectual disability may make them more vulnerable to force, fraud, coercion or abuse of position of vulnerability. The victim's vulnerability should be considered in assessing the means used by the offender and be considered as an aggravating factor in sentencing.

The general term “disability” encompasses a wide variety of conditions that impact or limit a person’s physical, mental, or social well-being. Disabilities may be long-term or temporary; some disabilities are apparent at birth or become manifest during childhood, while others are acquired later in life as a result of physical trauma, illness or old age. Some individuals have multiple disabilities. While some people with disabilities are largely self-sufficient and need minimal accommodations to manage daily life, many require varying degrees of assistance of one kind or another to engage in certain activities. The disability of a trafficking victim often plays a significant role in how they were selected or exploited by a trafficker for victimization, how a report regarding that trafficking case is received and investigated, and how the related case is tried in court.

The abilities and limitations of those with intellectual disability will vary from person to person: not everyone with an intellectual disability will have the same vulnerabilities, needs, degree of independence or intellectual capacity. It is critical to understand that while a victim with intellectual disability may have been evaluated as having the developmental age of a child, they are not a child. They have the life experience of their chronological age and should not be infantilized.

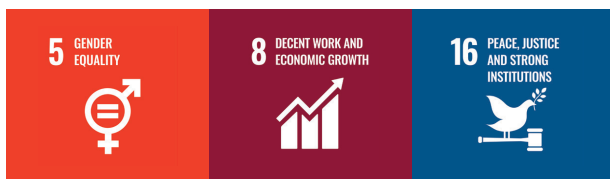
An intellectual disability may affect the victim's competency (the ability to testify in court) and capacity (the ability to make informed decisions). These are two separate issues: a person may be competent to testify in court, but still lack the capacity to appreciate or understand the nature of conduct at issue, which never extends to exploitation, to which, under the Palermo Protocol, an individual can never consent.⁴⁴

Many in the criminal justice community suggest dispensing with the necessity of proving means in cases of victims with disabilities to facilitate prosecuting more cases and supporting more survivors. While well intended, this would send an underlying message that is counter to the dignity and empowerment of persons with disabilities. It is unjust to categorize all individuals with intellectual disabilities as lacking the fundamental capacity to make choices. Assessing the impact of an individual's disabilities on their vulnerability to prohibited means must be done on a case-by-case basis. This is challenging and takes time and patience. It also requires collaboration with experts to understand the circumstances of a disability and its impact on an individual's capacity, by including their ability to appreciate, understand or control their conduct. Traffickers strip humans of their dignity and agency. Significantly, capacity in this context does not imply that victims can consent to their own exploitation. Rather what must be addressed is their unique vulnerability to trafficking.

⁴⁴ See: UNODC (2014), The Role of 'Consent' in the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, UNODC Issue Paper, Vienna; available [here](#). While victims with intellectual disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation, it is important to note that many people with intellectual disabilities have the capacity to consent to sexual activity under non-exploitive conditions. People with intellectual disabilities that do not prevent them from making informed decisions about engaging in sexual activity are equally entitled to enjoy non-exploitative intimate relationships as people without disabilities. Protective parents, family members or others may find it difficult to accept that such a person has acted freely.

Disability in trafficking data and reports⁴⁵

The international community has recognized the crime of human trafficking as a serious violation of human rights and a threat to global development. In the **UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, the global community has committed itself to eradicating forced labour, ending modern slavery and human trafficking, and eliminating child labour by 2030 (Target 8.7); to eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation (Target 5.2); and ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children (Target 16.2).



Seven SDG targets make explicit reference to disabilities⁴⁶ and disability-sensitive indicators. However, under the indicators for the above-mentioned trafficking targets, data on disability is not collected. The indicator 16.2.2 on trafficking⁴⁷ does not measure disability status.

Available data on human rights violations and crimes that often manifest as trafficking – forced labour, sexual exploitation, forced marriage and child labour – clearly indicate that the phenomenon is widespread. In its 2021 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicates that some 27.6 million people are in forced labour worldwide. While it notes the enhanced vulnerability of children with disabilities to trafficking for sexual exploitation,⁴⁸ it otherwise offers no specific mention of disability as a vulnerability factor in trafficking.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, raised the importance of collecting data and information on disability status in comments made in 2021 to the 24th Session UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

“ The intersections of disability and human trafficking is an area that has been neglected in international law, policy and practice on human trafficking. This gap should be addressed as a matter of urgency. Limited disaggregated data is available on experiences of persons with disabilities of human trafficking, or prevalence of forms of exploitation. This contributes to the lack of visibility, and a lack of knowledge and good practice. ”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ See section 7 below for specific data on trafficking and disability in justice systems.

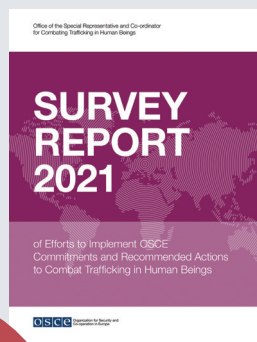
⁴⁶ Targets 4.5 (ensure equal access to education and vocational training); 4.a (build and upgrade education facilities that are disability sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments); 8.5 (achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for persons with disabilities); 10.2 (empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of disability); 11.2 (provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, with special attention to persons with disabilities); 11.7 (provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for persons with disabilities); and 17.18 (enhance capacity-building support to developing countries to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by disability).

⁴⁷ Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

⁴⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, COM(2021) 171 final, April 2021; available [here](#).

The **OSCE Survey Report 2021 of Efforts to Implement OSCE Commitments and Recommended Actions to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings** identified specific targeting of people with developmental/physical disabilities by traffickers as an emerging trend. According to survey information provided by OSCE participating States regarding trafficking involving people with disabilities, 13 of 41 respondents (31%) reported cases in the judicial process or under investigation. Another 8 (20%) noted unconfirmed reports of trafficking of persons with disabilities. Of the remaining 20 respondents, 7 did not know and 13 had no reports. In 5 of these 13 countries, NGOs stated that they had reports of targeting of people with disabilities.⁵⁰



At the level of OSCE participating States, there is little mention of the question of disability and trafficking in data or reports. While many countries publish annual or periodic reports on trafficking,⁵² little attention is given to disability. A positive sign is that in some countries, such as Switzerland and France, disability indicators are included in data collection on trafficking.⁵³ Also, a study was carried out in the United States in 2022 that analysed

the content of 18 federal and 17 state cases of human trafficking with the aim of increasing understanding of sex and labour trafficking involving survivors with disabilities.⁵⁴

The lack of comprehensive and disaggregated data, and the even less visible question of what role disability status plays in terms of vulnerability to trafficking, is a significant barrier for policy making, prevention, and remedial action to protect persons living with disabilities. Poor data collection and visibility

of the nexus between trafficking and disabilities undermine efforts to portray the extent that trafficking involves persons with disabilities. This in turn undermines efforts to build capacities among criminal justice practitioners and service providers, or to allocate appropriate budgets for effective prevention efforts and comprehensive, inclusive support services for survivors. The importance of data collection on disability status is also recognized in the *ASEAN Baseline Report 2020* on trafficking, which makes the case that collecting sex, age and disability disaggregated data is critical for an understanding of who the victims are and what types of support are needed.⁵⁵

In July 2023, GRETA⁵¹ launched the fourth evaluation round of the Council of Europe Anti-Trafficking Convention, with a thematic focus on addressing vulnerabilities to human trafficking. The questionnaire focuses on addressing vulnerabilities to human trafficking, including which measures State Parties have taken to reduce the vulnerability to human trafficking of persons with disabilities, as well as levels of assistance and access to justice for such victims.

⁵⁰ OSCE (2022), *Survey Report 2021 of Efforts to Implement OSCE Commitments and Recommended Actions to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings*; available [here](#).

⁵¹ GRETA is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by the Parties, following a procedure divided in rounds.

⁵² See, e.g., Germany, *Menschenhandel und Ausbeutung Bundeslagebild, 2021*; Netherlands, *Slachtoffers van mensenhandel in beeld bij CoMensha 2017–2021*; Switzerland, *Evaluation des Nationales Aktionsplans (NAP) gegen Menschenhandel 2017–2020* (the Swiss indicators for identifying trafficking victims do provide for a disability indicator); France, *La Traite des Êtres Humains en France, 2021*; United Kingdom, *Modern slavery in the UK: March 2020*; USA, *2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: United States 2022*.

⁵³ Switzerland, *Evaluation des Nationales Aktionsplans (NAP) gegen Menschenhandel 2017–2020*. See also France, *La Traite des Êtres Humains en France, 2021*: this report notes that 4% of victims of domestic labour had a disability.

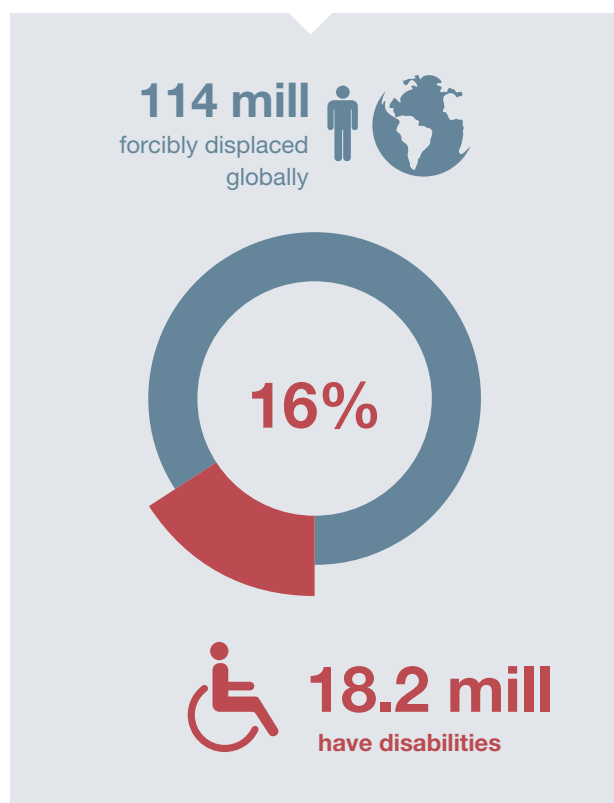
⁵⁴ Nichols, Andrea and Erin Heil, "Human Trafficking of People with a Disability: An Analysis of State and Federal Cases", *Dignity 7/1* (2022); available at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1302&context=dignity>.

⁵⁵ ASEAN, *Baseline Report 2020*, p. 19; available [here](#).

The intersection of disability and natural and human-made disasters

Natural and human-made disasters further exacerbate the vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities, leading to heightened exposure to risks of human trafficking.

In **October 2023**, an estimated 114 million⁵⁶ people were forcibly displaced globally. While official statistics on disability prevalence among displaced populations are lacking, applying the World Health Organization's global disability prevalence rate of 16 per cent⁵⁷ suggests that approximately 18.2 million forcibly displaced individuals have disabilities.



In 2022, UN human rights experts expressed concern about the situation of children with disabilities in Ukraine, noting their heightened risks of human trafficking and exploitation.⁵⁸ The Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children highlighted that

“ ... as a result of discrimination, harmful stereotypes and failures to ensure reasonable accommodation, people with disabilities, in particular women and girls, are at heightened risk of violence, including trafficking in persons, during climate-related disasters and emergencies, especially in emergency shelters. Constraints imposed on decision-making and situations of dependency may limit mobility, including opportunities for migration, planned relocation or resettlement, and increase risks of harm and human rights violations, including trafficking in persons. ”⁵⁹

This underscores the critical necessity of investing in comprehensive research and data collection efforts. As an example, a 2023 OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) report estimates that 15 per cent of 15.4 million individuals in Ukraine in need of protection services have a disability, and that women and girls with disabilities are at high risk of human trafficking.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Filippo Grandi, “High Commissioner’s Statement to the United Nations Security Council”, UNHCR, 31 October 2023. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/news/speeches-and-statements/high-commissioner-s-statement-united-nations-security-council>.

⁵⁷ World Health Organization, Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities (Geneva, WHO, 2022).

⁵⁸ UN (2022), Ukraine: UN experts sound alarm on situation of children with disabilities [press release]; available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/08/ukraine-un-experts-sound-alarm-situation-children-disabilities#:~:text=*The%20experts%3A%20Gerard%20Quinn%2C,Jimenez%2DDamary%2C%20Special%20Rapporteur%20on.

⁵⁹ Submission on the Draft General Comment on Persons with Disabilities in Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies (Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities); available [here](#).

⁶⁰ OCHA Services, Reliefweb (2023), Ukraine Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 [webpage]; available [here](#).

While disaggregated data on persons with disabilities leaving the country are not available, the UNHCR estimates that 13 per cent of families fleeing the war have at least one member with a disability.⁶¹

Furthermore, the nature of war often exposes individuals to various forms of physical and psychological trauma, which can result in severe and/or permanent impairments and possible lifelong disabilities. According to the OHCHR, in the first year of the war, 13,287 people in Ukraine sustained complex injuries linked to the war.⁶²

Anti-trafficking strategies inclusive of disability are therefore urgently needed for identifying the distinct vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities, and to mitigate the risks of human trafficking they face amidst conflict.

In 2020, the European Disability Forum released a useful toolkit containing insights into global and European legal and policy frameworks, good practices, and recommendations to improve the inclusion and protection of refugees and migrants with disabilities.

This toolkit offers guidance and practical advice tailored specifically for organizations of persons with disabilities, aiming to enhance their active participation in international and regional efforts to safeguard and integrate refugees and migrants with disabilities.⁶³

Similarly, little is known about the intersection of climate, disability and human trafficking. According to the UNHCR, 80 per cent of persons with disabilities reside in low- and middle-income countries, with a significant portion of these countries being highly susceptible to climate-related risks. For a population already facing significant risks, natural disasters greatly elevate the vulnerability to all forms of violence, including human trafficking. Limited access to early warning systems and disaster preparedness programmes, the absence of disability inclusive evacuation plans or initiatives tailored to the specific requirements of persons with disabilities further exacerbate the challenges and risks of persons with disabilities.



According to a 2024 report published by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and UNHCR, persons with disabilities are frequently excluded from disaster preparedness measures, early warning systems and evacuation planning. This hinders the ability of persons with disabilities to safely evacuate, while also exposing them to compounding risks and barriers during displacement. For example, the *2023 Global Survey on Persons with Disabilities and Disasters* revealed that 92 per cent of persons with disabilities in Europe and Central Asia do not have a personal preparedness plan for disasters, and 44 per cent reported facing difficulties or being unable to evacuate without assistance.⁶⁴ In the absence of a focus on disability in disaster preparedness and response policies and programmes, persons with disabilities will continue to face significant impact and trafficking risks from both natural and human-made disasters.

⁶¹ UNHCR, Operational Data Portal (2022), Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine #1; available [here](#).

⁶² UNHCR (2023), Türk deploras human cost of Russia s war against Ukraine as verified civilian casualties for last year pass 21,000 [press release]; available [here](#).

⁶³ European Disability Forum, Migration and refugees with disabilities [webpage]; available [here](#).

⁶⁴ UNDRR (2023), 2023 Global Survey Report on Persons with Disabilities and Disasters; available [here](#).



13%

families fleeing the war

families have at least one member with a disability

source: UNHCR



13,287

people in Ukraine sustained complex injuries in the first year of the war

source: OHCHR

92%

persons with disabilities in Europe and Central Asia do not have a personal preparedness plan for disasters



44% unable to evacuate without assistance

source: UNHCR



80%

persons with disabilities reside in low- and middle-income countries

source: UNHCR

“Without an understanding of the vulnerabilities of disabled people around climate, human trafficking, and displacement, it’s impossible to adequately respond. But by connecting available data points, we see a clear picture illustrating the urgent need for study, planning and action around the issue of disability, trafficking, and natural disasters.”

Policy frameworks and strategies against trafficking

With varying degrees of clarity, twenty OSCE participating States refer to the connection between trafficking and disabilities in their National Action Plans (NAPs) (see Annex 2). These references to disabilities are often part of a listing of various vulnerabilities. In several cases they are limited to specific groups (e.g., children, or women and girls). In some cases, these NAPs⁶⁵ point out specific interventions, such as developing guidelines and action protocols (Portugal), steps to improve assistance, support, and protection of victims with disabilities (Spain), or identification of research needs (United States).

At the regional level, most references to disability are also quite modest. The *Third Work Plan on Trafficking in Persons* of the Organization of American States (OAS) includes several related recommendations, including on data collection and comprehensive, inclusive prevention and protection efforts that address the needs of victims with disabilities. In 2023, the OAS issued *Regional Guidelines for the Social Inclusion of Survivors of Trafficking in Persons in the Americas*, which recommend that “accessibility to services should not be restricted by any physical and/or mental, visible or invisible, disabilities or abilities.”⁶⁶ The EU *Common Anti-Trafficking Plan to address the risks of trafficking in human beings and support potential victims among those fleeing the war in Ukraine* contains one reference to children with disabilities, but no indication of a more systemic approach to disabilities.⁶⁷ The 2021–2025 EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings⁶⁸ recognizes disability as a special vulnerability factor and refers to the EU Strategy on Persons

with Disabilities.⁶⁹ This second strategy contains brief references to human trafficking, but does not translate this into specific policy recommendations or proposed actions. In other regions, the picture is similar. The 2016 Policy Brief of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on Trafficking in Persons in the SADC Region recognizes the special vulnerability of persons with disabilities, but does not translate this into implications for trafficking policy.⁷⁰ The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children⁷¹ makes no reference to disability.⁷²

While the above references to disability are encouraging and may point to a growing recognition that disability is a vulnerability factor in combating human trafficking, there is still no systematic integration of disability in national or regional anti-trafficking policy frameworks, nor are there specific guidelines for addressing disabilities in prevention and response. Likewise, there appear to be no references in national action plans to specific capacities to develop prevention responses or appropriate care and assistance to trafficking victims with disabilities. Further research on the topic and development of guidelines for trafficking prevention strategies, as well as victim-centred responses and protection approaches for human trafficking survivors with disabilities may be of particular relevance for OSCE participating States. Such research would help them develop more targeted approaches to trafficking and disabilities in their national response plans.

⁶⁵ See below, Annex 2.

⁶⁶ OAS (2023), *Regional Guidelines for the Social Inclusion of Survivors of Trafficking in Persons in the Americas*; available [here](#).

⁶⁷ EU, *A Common Anti-Trafficking Plan to address the risks of trafficking in human beings and support potential victims among those fleeing the war in Ukraine*; available [here](#).

⁶⁸ EC (2021), *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, on the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings*; available [here](#).

⁶⁹ For more information, see: *European Disability Strategy 2021–2030*; available [here](#).

⁷⁰ SADC (2016), *Trafficking in Persons in the SADC Region*, Policy Brief, August 2016; available [here](#).

⁷¹ ASEAN, *ASEAN Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*; available [here](#).

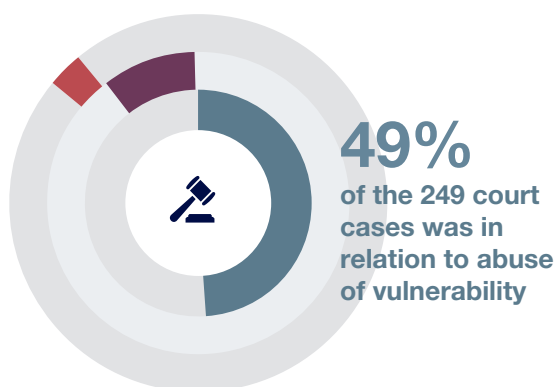
⁷² Also within the reviewed documents of other regional organizations (such as the Economic Community Of West African States [ECOWAS]), no references to disabilities in policy plans or statements could be found.

Visibility of disability in justice systems

A ccording to figures on human trafficking provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the abuse of vulnerability or a combination of abuse of vulnerability and deception was a recruitment element in 49% of the 249 court cases examined in its 2020 Global Report on Trafficking.⁷³ Physical disability (3%) and mental, behavioural or neurological disorders (10%) were among the vulnerabilities exploited by traffickers in these cases. While it is likely that court cases are not an adequate indicator for the overall prevalence of abuse of disability by traffickers, these figures suggest that disability is a real and significant concern in the trafficking of human beings.

3%
physical disability was exploited by traffickers

10%
mental, behavioural or neurological disorders were exploited by traffickers

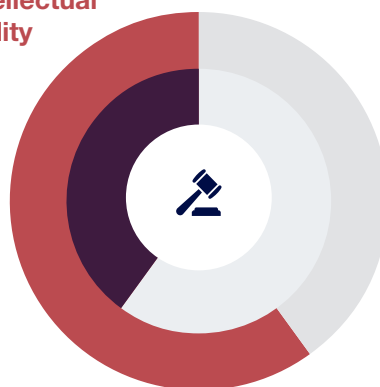


2020 Global Report on Trafficking UNODC

A number of judicial cases were recently reviewed in two significant studies. A review of state and federal cases in the United States examined 35 court cases. The majority of these cases involved situations in which the disability was an intellectual disability (21 of the 35 identified cases) and of these, 14 involved sex trafficking.⁷⁴

60%
of court cases involved situations in which the disability was an intellectual disability

40%
court cases involved sex trafficking



Federal cases in the United States

⁷³ UNODC (2020), *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020*, p. 52. The 2022 Global Report does not provide similar data on disability.

⁷⁴ Nichols, Andrea and Erin Heil (2022), "Human Trafficking of People with a Disability: An Analysis of State and Federal Cases", *Dignity* 7/1; available [here](#).

Similarly, another study reviewed 22 cases available in the UNODC's Case Law database involving trafficking and disability from across Europe, the United States, and certain South-East Asian and Latin American countries.⁷⁵ These studies provide valuable insights into the risk factors and vulnerability to human trafficking for persons with disabilities and how these intersect with other factors such as social disadvantage, exclusion, and gaps in the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, these studies provide lessons and indicators for prevention and response, including expanded education and training regarding disability for professionals in social, legal, and healthcare services as well as prevention education focused on sexual boundaries and healthy relationships for persons with intellectual disabilities. National court cases involving trafficking and disability available in the UNODC Case Law Database from other countries may yield additional valuable information on vulnerabilities and for prevention and response (see below, Annex 1).⁷⁶ Reliable data on disability in trafficking cases would allow for a more systematic picture of the nature and extent of rights violations of persons with disabilities and enable an assessment of gaps, which in turn would lead to addressing the specific vulnerabilities and needs of individuals with disabilities. Accordingly, given the importance of court cases for setting policy and practical action, systematic collection of court cases on trafficking and disability would be a significant asset.



Addressing vulnerabilities within law enforcement and justice responses: prioritizing a victim-centered approach

Justice is often viewed through the lens of conventional criminal justice systems, where the path to justice follows a clearly structured pattern, from police investigations to prosecution, judgment and punishment. Far too often, criminal justice responses tend to be one-sided and prioritize holding offenders accountable. Although fundamental, in some cases this may not be the most important aspect for the victim. A victim-centred approach to the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases aims at upholding and supporting human rights, while at the same time fostering the victim's safety and security and prioritizing their best interests at all stages of the process. This involves focusing on building a relationship of trust by paying paramount attention to victims' needs, safety and protection, and by setting aside stigma and stereotypes.

This paper recognizes that persons with disabilities who are victims of human trafficking may face unique challenges and vulnerabilities. It seeks to address these challenges while empowering victims to regain control over their lives. This includes providing accessible support services that accommodate the unique communication, mobility or accessibility requirements that victims with disability may have as well as assisting them to understand their legal rights, providing them access to legal representation, and helping them navigate the criminal justice system if they choose to pursue legal action against their traffickers.

⁷⁵ Jagoe, Caroline, Pei Ying Natalie Toh and Gillian Wylie (2022), Disability and the Risk of Vulnerability to Human Trafficking: An Analysis of Case Law, *Journal of Human Trafficking*; available [here](#).

⁷⁶ See also, e.g., South Africa, *State v. Eze*, Case no. 14/546/2013 (exploitation of mental/emotional disability); *State v. Matini*, RC 123/13 (exploitation of two children with mental disabilities).

Partnerships between service providers and law enforcement are critical for a comprehensive victim-centred response to human trafficking. Such partnerships should include organizations with expertise in reaching vulnerable populations, as well as those with expertise in trauma, emotional bonding, addressing fear, and other circumstances. Employing a victim-centred approach to criminal investigations is fundamental to successful criminal cases of human trafficking.

Among the elements of a victim-centred, trauma-informed approach are avoiding court proceedings that are open to the public, unnecessary repetition of interviews, visual contact between victims and defendants, and unnecessary questioning concerning the victim's private life not related to the criminal offence.⁷⁷

In terms of a victim-centred law enforcement approach to combat human trafficking, persons with disabilities face multiple obstacles.



Specific vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities in the law enforcement process relating to human trafficking include:

- **Communication barriers:** Persons with disabilities may have difficulty communicating with law enforcement officers or other authorities, which can make it difficult for them to report trafficking or provide evidence and information;
- **Lack of trust:** Persons with disabilities may have heightened fear or mistrust in authorities or the perception that authorities will not help or believe them;
- **Lack of accessibility:** Law enforcement and justice systems may not be fully accessible to persons with disabilities, which can make it difficult for them to participate in legal processes or to access necessary support or services;
- **Stereotypes and discrimination:** Persons with disabilities may face negative stereotypes and discrimination, which can affect how they are treated by law enforcement and justice systems. This may also make them less likely to report crimes.

A victim-centred approach for survivors with disabilities requires law enforcement and other authorities to be aware of the specific vulnerabilities connected with disability. This may include providing accessible communication tools, ensuring that facilities and services are fully accessible, and providing training to officers on how to identify and respond to trafficking involving persons with disabilities.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Article 12(4) of the Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and Article 23 of Directive 2012/29/EU of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

As far as it could be determined in this desk review, while a few tools are available for applying a victim-centred approach to persons with disabilities,⁷⁸ currently no comprehensive guidance tools for a victim-centred approach for survivors of trafficking with disabilities are available. Some promising practices have been identified,⁷⁹ including:

- Developing strategies to address service barriers that prevent crime victims with disabilities from reporting incidents to authorities or seeking assistance from social service agencies;
- Working with law enforcement to address the need for better training, collaboration and awareness of the issue, and reviewing forensic interviewing techniques for ways to enhance their appropriateness for people with disabilities.
- Working with victim service agencies, crisis service providers, medical personnel, and other community partners to eliminate gaps in identification and services, and to make services more accessible to people with disabilities (interagency collaboration and referral systems, education and training on physical and procedural accessibility issues, case review processes, and improved and increased outreach to persons with disabilities).

Conclusions and recommendations

Despite a growing awareness of the intersection between trafficking in human beings and disabilities, the present review highlights the under-researched nature of this phenomena and underscores the pressing need to address existing gaps in anti-trafficking responses at national, regional and international level. Disabilities are largely invisible in data and statistics, and the absence of a systematic mapping of the specific vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities complicates more targeted policy and regulatory approaches to protect persons with disabilities from trafficking.

Victims with disabilities need tailored prevention programmes and effective and appropriate assistance. Information about disabilities available from judicial cases indicate that disability is a documented risk for trafficking. Thus more systematic collection of jurisprudence involving such cases may help inform national responses.

The significant number of references to disabilities by OSCE participating States in their National Action Plans, as demonstrated in Annex 2, is an encouraging sign that points to a growing recognition that disability is a concern in trafficking. At the same time, there is still no systematic or targeted approach to address disabilities in trafficking responses. The OSCE/ODIHR *Handbook on National Referral Mechanisms (NRM)* addresses disability within national frameworks to protect and promote the human rights of victims of trafficking. In order to build on this and better assist participating States address the nexus between disability and trafficking in human beings, the following recommendations are offered.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., the training resources of Office for Victims of Crime Training & Technical Assistance Center (OVC TTAC), which include Victim Assistance Training Online; available [here](#). Module lessons include assessing victims' needs, collaboration, trauma-informed care, cultural competence, diversity and inclusion. One 45-minute online training module covers victims of crime with disabilities.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., the OVC Promising Practices in Serving Crime Victims with Disabilities (available [here](#)); and National Trafficking & Disabilities Working Group: Applying Trauma-Informed Care and Disability Justice to Working with Survivors of Sex Trafficking (available [here](#)).

Recommendations

National responses should be holistic and inclusive

National measures to protect persons with disabilities, in particular in National Action Plans, should integrate specific risks and needs across the 4Ps:

- Prevention (tailored awareness-raising, data collection);
- Protection (comprehensive, tailored national referral protocols and long-term assistance, training/capacity-building, disability-inclusive indicators for victim identification);
- Prosecution (training/capacity building, application of the concept of abuse of a position of vulnerability [APOV] and non-punishment principle);
- Partnerships (survivor engagement, national and international collaboration, collaboration between anti-trafficking experts and disability advocates and experts).

Policies and response measures should also take into account the compounded vulnerabilities of trafficking victims with disabilities that make them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and less likely to be able to access support and protection.

Better data and information for policy formulation

The absence of comprehensive data poses a significant barrier to formulating effective policies addressing the intersection of human trafficking and disability. This gap hinders both preventive measures and remedial actions aimed at safeguarding persons living with disabilities from becoming trafficked and to assist survivors with disabilities. Additionally, inadequate data collection and limited visibility regarding trafficking and disabilities erodes endeavours to enhance the capacity of criminal justice practitioners and service providers, and obstructs the allocation of budgets for proactive initiatives and support services.

To address the data gap, the OSCE and other relevant international organizations should support:

- the development of practical guidelines to collect **better data and information** on disability and trafficking to inform policy and national action, and capture good practices for collecting data that pertains to trafficking and disabilities. Collecting data and information should include:
 - › how disability increases trafficking risks;
 - › how disability is a factor in exploitation or is caused by exploitation;
 - › how disability affects trafficking victims' ability to access protection, justice, health, and employment as well as long-term rehabilitation services.
- Data should be disaggregated by physical and mental disabilities, as well as other factors (e.g., gender, age, origin, type of exploitation);
- Increased **survivor engagement** and collaboration with disability organizations to inform policies and contribute to policy design;
- The development of a **comprehensive mapping of vulnerabilities** related to trafficking and physical and mental disability to:
 - › inform prevention strategies aimed at reducing trafficking risks for persons with disabilities;
 - › inform comprehensive identification and service responses, referral systems, and protection approaches to address the specific vulnerabilities of trafficking victims with disabilities;
 - › support access to justice and a disability-sensitive criminal justice response.

Awareness-raising

Attention to disability is low or non-existent in both, international, regional and national standards as well as in policies on trafficking in human beings.

Modern human rights responses to trafficking should pay more attention to the special vulnerabilities and needs of specific groups, including adults and children with disabilities. To support more attention to disability, international agencies and national authorities should collaborate and develop informational and promotional materials that highlight the nexus between disabilities and human trafficking and thus help to set future standards and policy formulation at national, regional and international levels. These materials should be developed in partnership with civil society organizations, advocates and experts in the field, including those with lived experience.

In 2021, the European Disability Forum and the CERMI Women’s Foundation organized a webinar titled “Women and girls with disabilities in the face of trafficking and sexual exploitation”. The webinar was aimed at raising awareness among organizations of persons with disabilities and other participants on relevant instruments and policies for combating trafficking and sexual exploitation in women and girls with disabilities.⁸⁰

Effective information campaigns on human trafficking and disability should identify specific target audiences (decision makers, anti-trafficking practitioners, the general public), incorporate data and facts, highlight solutions and success stories, and propose actions to prevent trafficking and protect victims with disabilities.

Furthermore, it is imperative to extend awareness and training to anti-trafficking professionals, but also among medical personnel, to bridge the gap in disability literacy and to enhance awareness on trafficking indicators. This will ensure that identification, prevention and protection efforts are designed to meet the unique needs of individuals with disabilities. Such efforts should involve inclusive and accessible prevention campaigns, as well as the development of protection services tailored and accessible to all persons living with a disability.

Effective law enforcement

National authorities should consider requiring the means be sufficient to compel a reasonable person with the same circumstances, background, and vulnerabilities as the victim. This would significantly ease the burden of proof and facilitate more effective prosecution of traffickers of persons with disabilities. Authorities should also enhance disability literacy among law enforcement and consider appointing victim advocates to guide survivors with disabilities through criminal justice procedures.

Tools for policy formulation and capacity-building

There are no comprehensive disability-sensitive trafficking policies or response plans, and there is limited guidance available for developing victim-centred approaches to support trafficking victims with disabilities. The anti-trafficking community should assess the extent to which disability is incorporated in current training tools and materials, and support the development of guidance tools and training materials incorporating disability for practitioners on victim/survivor-centred law enforcement and justice approaches, as well as inclusive, accessible victim identification and care. In particular, support should be provided for the development of:

- Guidelines for tailored prevention strategies focused on persons with disabilities to reduce their vulnerability to trafficking;
- Policy guidelines for a victim-centred response and protection approach to support victims of human trafficking with disabilities through proactive identification, and comprehensive, inclusive assistance that addresses the specific needs of victims/survivors with disabilities;
- Training and capacity-building of professionals working with people with disabilities, such as healthcare, social work and education professionals, to build their knowledge about human trafficking to improve prevention and identification;
- Expand awareness-raising and training of anti-trafficking professionals to sensitize them to the vulnerability and needs of persons with disabilities to ensure that prevention and protection efforts are tailored and effective, and that specific needs of victims with disabilities are addressed during criminal justice processes.





⁸⁰ European Disability Forum, CERMI Women’s Foundation-European Disability Forum webinar on Women and girls with disabilities in the face of trafficking and sexual exploitation [webpage]; available [here](#).






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ANNEX 1 – EXAMPLES OF COURT CASES ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING INVOLVING DISABILITY

Country	Fact summary	Purpose
Albania 	A female adult citizen with physical and mental disabilities was exploited for begging by her two brothers, who took advantage of her vulnerable condition. A psychiatric/legal assessment stated that the woman showed problems of intellectual development and presented the mental age of an uneducated 13- to 14-year-old, after which the First Instance Court found the defendants guilty of “maltreatment of minors”. Following the decision, the Appeals Prosecution Office submitted the case to the High Court, requesting the defendants be charged with “trafficking of adults”, as defined in the Criminal Code of Albania. The defendants were subsequently charged with “trafficking of adults”.	Forced Begging
Belgium 	The defendant was accused of trafficking three victims from Slovakia to Belgium. All three victims were physically disabled and moved around in wheelchairs. None of them spoke French. The defendant brought them to Belgium to beg on several occasions, leaving them in the car park of a supermarket at opening times and picking them up when the store closed, 6 days a week. The defendant took all the money they collected, as well as the social benefits received by the victims in Slovakia. It appears that the victims and the defendant all slept in the car during their stay in Belgium. The defendant was convicted of two crimes: trafficking in persons, and exploitation of the begging of others; with several aggravating circumstances (abuse of a situation of vulnerability; usual activity; use of fraud, duress or violence).	Forced labour, forced begging
BiH 	In the period between September 2008 and 13 January 2010, two defendants organized the sexual exploitation of mentally disabled victims in order to obtain financial benefit. They kept the victims under their control in a rented apartment for more than 17 months and took advantage of the victims’ mental disability to force them into prostitution. They forced their victims to have approximately 10 customers per day. The defendants were found guilty of trafficking in persons, as they had organized the sexual exploitation of mentally disabled victims.	Sexual exploitation
Finland 	The members of an Estonian-Finnish criminal organization were accused of compelling an Estonian woman to engage in prostitution in a manner that was considered to meet the statutory definition for an aggravated human trafficking offence. A woman who was being threatened with fines for not repaying a debt was forced to travel to Finland, where she was locked up in a flat in Helsinki and directed to engage in prostitution as a means by which to pay back the debt. The woman was mentally disabled. Several members of the organization were found guilty of aggravated human trafficking.	Sexual exploitation

Country	Fact summary	Purpose
Netherlands 	The defendant forced the victim to work for him and provide services without remuneration through the use of force and the threat of using force. The adult victim was mentally handicapped, and was described before the court as someone who had the mental ability of a ten year old. The defendant came to dominate the victim's life completely. The defendant physically abused the victim and made use of force to exert control and abuse the victim. The defendant was found guilty and convicted of human trafficking.	Forced labour/ domestic servitude
Romania 	The two victims were disabled persons transported to France with the purpose of earning money for the defendants by begging. The courts determined that the defendants each committed two crimes, instead of determining that each of them committed a single crime, but in a continuous form.	Forced begging
Romania 	The defendant (together with other people, including his brother, nephew, wife, son and daughter) perpetrated various forms of human trafficking. With the help of family members, the defendant recruited persons suffering from various disabilities in order to force them to perform street begging in France. One victim suffered from the disability of missing the lower left leg. He was recruited through false promises to the effect that he would benefit from a prosthesis and receive free meals, and would also benefit from half of the revenues earned from begging once he paid his debts to the defendant. The victim begged for approximately 60 days. The defendant was found guilty of aggravated form of human trafficking, since it was perpetrated by two or more persons together.	Forced begging
Serbia 	The defendant promised to take the victim to Italy to buy him prosthetic hands. Instead, he took the victim to Bosnia and Herzegovina and forced him to beg for money on the streets. He hired the other defendants to take the victim to the places where he begged, to monitor him and to collect the money he received. The victim was also physically harassed several times when he tried to escape from the defendant. All defendants were found guilty of the criminal offence of trafficking in persons.	Forced begging
Sweden 	The victim was physically and mentally disabled Romanian man. The defendants (a married couple) brought him on a journey through Europe with the purpose of him begging for money on the couple's behalf. The man and the couple were arrested in Stockholm. The District Court of Stockholm court sentenced the couple to two years imprisonment for human trafficking. The defendants were found to have recruited, transported, harboured and taken control over the victim with the purpose of exploiting him.	Forced labour/ forced begging

Country	Fact summary	Purpose
Ukraine 	The defendants jointly recruited disabled persons with substance abuse issues or persons found themselves in difficult family or personal circumstances. The defendants arranged for the victims' transportation to the Russian Federation, and their transfer and receipt in Moscow, and forced them to engage in begging near metro stations in Moscow. The victims agreed to go to Moscow because they were deceived about the nature of the activity they would engage in once in Moscow (they were told that they would sell mobile phones or act as caregivers for elderly people), as well as about the terms of their stay and payment conditions in Moscow.	Forced begging
USA 	The defendants persuaded the victim, an 18-year-old woman with mental disabilities, to move in with them by telling her that they would help her get her babies back and would take care of her. Once she moved in with the defendants, the victim was told that she had a debt to pay, and that she would have to pay it back by giving up her monthly social security disability check. The victim was also forced into prostitution and involuntary servitude. The defendants were both found guilty, but were given different sentences, ranging from sex trafficking, fraud, and coercion.	Sexual exploitation, forced labour/ servitude
USA 	The defendant, together with other conspirators, targeted mentally challenged individuals who were estranged from their families and offered them a place to stay. Once the defendant convinced the victims to move in, she became their representative payee with Social Security and began to receive their disability benefits, and in some instances, their state benefits. The victims were kept isolated and in the dark in designated locations. The female captives were also forced into prostitution.	Sexual exploitation/ servitude
USA 	Two vulnerable individuals, a developmentally disabled young woman and her minor daughter, were held in subhuman conditions and subjected to continual and prolonged abuse. The mother became acquainted with the defendants through their mutual association with a group of people in their small town who abused narcotics and shoplifted together. They moved in together and the defendant forced the victim to involuntary servitude	Servitude

ANNEX 2 – REFERENCES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND DISABILITIES REPORTED BY OSCE PARTICIPATING STATES IN NATIONAL ACTION PLANS⁸¹

Country	Mentioning of disability
Azerbaijan	<p>Section 4, Implementation of the National Action Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 4.5.: Improving the assistance provided to and protection of children who have been or are likely to become victims of human trafficking, or who are potential victims of human trafficking. ▶ 4.5.3. With juveniles, especially health opportunities progressive of social work institutes working with children with disabilities. Undertaking this work on the basis of international legislation, taking into account improvement features.
Belarus	<p>Chapter III, Ensuring gender-responsive health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 24.: Implementation in institutions of adult education, health system and education system projects aimed at the formation of youth, including young people and people with disabilities, of knowledge and skills regarding healthy reproductive, sexual and mental behaviour, as well as maintaining equality in family and personal relationships. ▶ 31.: Development of new forms and methods of medical, psychological assistance to women with disabilities, including adolescent girls, in the area of reproductive and sexual health. <p>Chapter IV, Countering domestic violence and human trafficking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 35.: Creation of information materials about assistance to victims of domestic violence among the elderly and people with disabilities and spread among them. ▶ 41.: Development and implementation at the district level recommendations (algorithm of actions) for the organization of comprehensive assistance to people with disabilities and older people affected by domestic violence and abuse.
Bulgaria	<p>Chapter 6, National objectives and priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 6.3. Measures: Prescribing procedures and measures to ensure respect for children's rights, victims of trafficking in human beings, as well as those with special needs (physical and mental disorders/disabilities, migrants, refugees).

⁸¹ DISCLAIMER: Some content may not be accurately translated due to limitations of the software used.

Country	Mentioning of disability
Canada	<p data-bbox="400 685 1026 712">Appendix II. Relevance of human trafficking in Canada</p> <ul data-bbox="400 745 1406 902" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="400 745 1406 902">▶ Individuals at greatest risk of victimization in Canada generally include women and girls and members of vulnerable or marginalized groups such as: Indigenous women and girls; migrants and new immigrants; LGBTQ2 persons; persons living with disabilities; children in the child welfare system; at-risk youth; and those who are socially or economically disadvantaged.
Estonia	<p data-bbox="400 969 1326 996">Chapter 3. Overview of the spread of violence and prevention of violence to date</p> <ul data-bbox="400 1030 1406 1249" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="400 1030 1406 1249">▶ Violence is not a problem of a single narrow target group, because people can be exposed to different forms of violence throughout their life, regardless of age, special needs and background. However, studies show that some target groups are more vulnerable: in Europe, young people aged 16–29 years old (23%), members of some minority groups (22%), people who identify as other than heterosexual (19%) and people with disabilities (19%) are victims of physical violence; in Estonia, young people (36%) and disabled people (19%).
Finland	<p data-bbox="400 1312 1310 1339">Chapter 4.5: Child trafficking is combated through multi-authority co-operation</p> <ul data-bbox="400 1373 1390 1467" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="400 1373 1390 1467">▶ Child trafficking is combated through multi-authority co-operation, where it is underlined that “the plan takes into account children and young people in special positions of vulnerability, such as those with disabilities or limited capacity to function (...).”
Georgia	<p data-bbox="400 1529 1038 1556">Objective 1.1: Prevention of trafficking in human beings</p> <ul data-bbox="400 1590 1382 1684" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="400 1590 1382 1684">▶ Activity 1.1.9.: Holding informational meetings in an online format concerning the risks of trafficking for internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, ethnic/national minorities and, <i>inter alia</i>, due to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.
Ireland	<p data-bbox="400 1747 855 1774">Section 2.3.3: Reduction of vulnerability</p> <ul data-bbox="400 1807 1390 1901" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="400 1807 1390 1901">▶ Irish Aid currently supports a programme through the ILO which works to eliminate child and forced labour, promote the inclusion of people with disabilities, and support women’s entrepreneurship.

Country	Mentioning of disability
Italy	<p>Section 9.3: Protection and assistance of trafficked or severely exploited persons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Disability is mentioned. Provide for co-ordination measures between the reception system offered by the programmes ex art. 18 TUI and that under the SAI, with regard to what concerns the access to the latter system of persons holding residence permits ex Art. 18 and Art. 22 co. 12 quarter TUI, as well as persons recognized as refugees who have not been previously identified as victims of trafficking, also taking into account the current need for adequate facilities for the reception and for the integrated care of victims with psychiatric pathology, addiction pathology, disabilities, or mothers with dependent children.
Latvia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Action 1.6.: Provide information work (on human exploitation, victims' rights and access to assistance) in day centres, group homes, half-way homes, shelters and other institutions for people with mental disabilities, dependent persons, and persons with social needs, as well as persons against whom debt recovery is directed
Luxembourg	<p>Chapter I. Victim detection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ In general, people at risk (i.e., vulnerable people, immigrants, refugees) are often the least advantaged in socio-economic terms, to which can be added other factors, such as age, sex, disability, origin.
Moldova	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Objective 3.3.3.: Implement programmes for the development of entrepreneurial, professional skills and re/integration of victims and presumed victims with disabilities on the labour market.
Montenegro	<p>Disability is mentioned in the introduction, which states that "victims of traffickers are more and more people with disabilities, including physical disabilities."</p>
North Macedonia	<p>Strategic area 2: Prevention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 3. Action 1: The media and media workers are trained and sensitized about the consequences of the exploitation of children with disabilities and vulnerable categories of migrants for the purpose of providing sensitive information aimed at the best interest of the child. <p>Strategic area 3: Identification and referral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 8.: Improvement of the capacities and possibilities of competent institutions for timely and efficient detection and identification of children with disabilities. <p>Strategic area 4: Direct assistance, protection and voluntary return of IDPs/migrants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 9. Action 1.1: Increase the housing capacities, material and technical means and conditions of the Centre for the Protection of Children, for the safe accommodation, assistance and support of identified children, and children with disabilities, taking into account the special needs of gender, age, disability and addiction diseases, and in the best interest of the child.

Country	Mentioning of disability
Poland	<p>Trafficking in the territory of Poland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Romanian citizens – women, men and children – are the most frequent victims of exploitation for begging. The offenders seek out persons with visible disabilities, are uneducated, or in a difficult financial situation. Long-term assistance and support in education, social integration and professional skills must be also be provided in this specific area.
Portugal	<p>Strategic objective 2: Ensuring victims of trafficking better access to their rights, and to consolidate, strengthen and qualify interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 2.3.2. Elaboration of guidelines and action protocols related to interventions with children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Preparation of a reflection document by the CNPDPCJ regarding the potential collaboration of this National Commission and CPCJ, in order to define respective competences and contribute to the prevention of trafficking, namely, by improving knowledge about the particularly vulnerable situation of unaccompanied minors and undocumented minors, as well as minors with some degree of disability.
Spain	<p>Action 2.4.: Guarantee the protection and recovery of all victims of trafficking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 2.4.A.: Take steps to improve assistance, support and protection of victims, whatever the type of exploitation they have suffered, taking into account their circumstances and personal characteristics, with special consideration for those who may be in a situation of special vulnerability due to their age, disability, refugee status, applicant for international protection, or any other circumstance of similar relevance. ▶ 2.4.G.: Promote the necessary legislative changes facilitating access to pre-constituted evidence for victims who are in a situation of special vulnerability due to age, disability, administrative situation, socioeconomic position, or any other circumstance of similar significance
Sweden	<p>Prostitution and human trafficking for sexual exploitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Some risk groups in prostitution have attracted attention through increased knowledge in the field. (...) People with physical or mental disabilities are a risk group that has been highlighted in recent years.
UK (Scotland only)	<p>Action Area 1: Identifying victims and support them to safety and recovery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 may therefore be considered in relation to certain human trafficking or exploitation incidents when the adults at risk are adults who: a) are unable to safeguard their own wellbeing, property, rights or other interests; b) are at risk of harm; and, c) because they are affected by disability, mental disorder, illness or physical or mental infirmity, are more vulnerable to being harmed than adults who are not so affected.

Country	Mentioning of disability
USA	<p data-bbox="400 349 1337 409">Principle 4.1.: Strengthen understanding of human trafficking affecting the United States.</p> <ul data-bbox="400 443 1401 981" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="400 443 1353 504">▶ 4.1.2: Identify research gaps to better serve vulnerable populations and underserved victims:<ul data-bbox="437 521 1390 645" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="437 521 1390 645">▶ The SPOG Research and Data Committee will convene federal agencies to determine what additional research is needed to understand the impact of human trafficking on underserved, underrepresented, or vulnerable groups of victims, such as (...) individuals with disabilities(...).<li data-bbox="400 678 1294 707">▶ 4.1.3: Solicit research to identify effective interventions to combat forced labor:<ul data-bbox="437 725 1401 981" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="437 725 1401 981">▶ More research is needed to understand forced labor and how best to address it. (...). Additional research is needed to better understand the most at-risk industries, needs, and specific vulnerabilities of victims. This research should include an analysis of gaps in agency authorities to address at-risk industries and in programs to assist victims of forced labor. The analysis will be disseminated to law enforcement and other first responders for integration into training. This research should reflect demonstrated expertise working with underserved or vulnerable groups of victims, such as (...) individuals with disabilities (...).

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Wallnerstr. 6, 1010 Vienna, Austria
Tel: + 43 1 51436 6664
Fax: + 43 1 51436 6299
email: info-cthb@osce.org

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