



Online Consultation
Effects of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons
Background Information Note

The COVID-19 pandemic has now gripped the world for almost two years. The impact of this pandemic has been evident at an unprecedented scale in every sphere of people's life. The damage wrought on developed and developing countries has exposed the fragility of our systems and structures. The widening gap in socio-economic and health sectors has created deep insecurity since the onset of COVID-19. Worrying reports from Asia have noted an increase in trafficking and exploitation of people since the onset of the pandemic. Economic determinants—such as poverty, unemployment and lower income levels—have become the main factors that influence victims' vulnerability to trafficking in persons. The COVID-19 crisis has had multiple effects on people's lives; and now with a spike in debt bondage and forced labour, many across the world are susceptible to becoming victims of human trafficking.

Rises in unemployment and reductions in household and individual incomes mean that those who were already at risk of trafficking before COVID-19, in particular, low-wage and informal sector workers are more likely to find themselves in extreme vulnerability. People in economic need coming from disadvantaged population groups may be more exposed to trafficking in persons. Families that were surviving as day labourers are forced to stay at home and they face debt-bondage. Women and girls are most likely to be affected as they bear the brunt of the impacts of this ongoing crisis, making them more vulnerable to exploitation. Women's jobs have been disproportionately cut from the economy, and many mothers have no options to work while children cannot attend schools. Often, trafficked persons may feel that they have no other alternative to meet their economic needs and they tend to take risks in the hope of improving their economic situation.

Women and girls constituted the most detected victims of human trafficking before the outbreak, and now they are being specifically targeted by traffickers during the pandemic. Restrictions of movement, which is already inherent to trafficking for sexual exploitation, is further amplified by lockdown measures and travel prohibitions. The COVID-19 crisis has changed the patterns of sexual exploitation.

Although trafficking for sexual exploitation is more likely to be detected and is more often prosecuted, most prevalence studies suggest that trafficking for forced labour is the most common form of the crime. Labour trafficking, both within a country and beyond borders, has increased; due to school closures and loss of parents' jobs, children are being forced to work and are being trafficked. It is also more difficult to identify child trafficking networks amidst the pandemic, as traffickers usually masquerade as trustworthy or familiar acquaintances while transporting the child.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created new risks and challenges to victims and survivors of human trafficking, especially women and girls. Violence against women and girls is emerging as a persistent feature of this pandemic, severely undermining women's fundamental rights and security at a time when the wellbeing of women and girls is critical. Although many governments have failed to respond to this

crisis, grassroots organisations and communities have played a critical role in preventing and responding to trafficking in persons.

It is in this context that the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) will organise a consultation titled, '**The Effects of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons**' to understand the ground reality and respond to the crisis of trafficking in persons as the body of Christ.

Representatives of the CCA's member churches and councils who attend this Consultation will learn from the resource persons, receive up-to-date information, and engage in timely situational analyses about the nature, contexts, current situation, human rights violations, exploitation, emerging trends and patterns of trafficking in persons as well as relevant policy developments, as they relate to their countries. Participants shall identify the trafficking-impacted sectors in different contexts such as domestic labour, agricultural labour, manufacturing and construction, mining and stone quarrying, fishing and seafaring, sex tourism and other service sectors, and other extractive industries.

The continual call to all Christians through the biblical tradition to serve the least among us. Christians are called to respond to the realities of those who are oppressed and marginalised in the society by being relevant to the prophetic call to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the captives, sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18). The COVID-19 pandemic makes it more important to be relevant to witness the gospel to those in need and whose voices are not heard. Churches in Asia have a great role to play in the prevention and response to trafficking in persons.

Theme: "The Effect of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons"

Dates: 29 and 30 March 2022

Time: 10:00 to 15:30 Bangkok (Thailand) time

Objectives:

- To build competent churches and communities to respond to the impact of COVID-19 on trafficking in persons;
- To provide a forum for participants and resource persons to share information on how to respond, prevent, rescue, restore, and reintegrate survivors and on other forms of relief and rehabilitation to trafficked persons especially during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- To affirm and reinforce the responsibility of the churches to be prophetic witnesses challenging human trafficking and advocate for the dignity and rights of victims and survivors.

Outcomes:

- Churches in Asia are sensitised to reaffirm and uphold their commitments to be in solidarity with trafficked persons;
- Churches in Asia are oriented and trained to identify, combat, and deal with human trafficking in the post-COVID-19 era;
- Churches in Asia develop relevant plans and an ecumenical call to action which are communicated and shared to all constituencies;
- The CCA promotes the prevention of human trafficking through a reduction in demand, protection of survivors, and prosecution of human traffickers.

Proposed Sessions

29 March 2022	
10:00 – 10:15	Opening Worship
10:15 – 11:00	Welcome and Opening Remarks
11:00 – 12:00	The Effects of COVID-19 on Trafficking in Persons: An Overview
12:00 – 13:00	Break
13:00 – 14:00	The Gendered Nature of Trafficking amidst COVID-19
14:00 – 15:00	Asia's Labour Markets: Labour Trafficking amidst COVID-19
15:00 – 15:30	Open Space: Voices from those Affected
30 March 2022	
10:00 – 11:00	Biblical Theological Reflections on Human Trafficking
11:00 – 12:00	Ensuring Comprehensive Services during COVID-19: Protection Strategies
12:00 – 13:00	Break
13:00 – 14:00	Ensuring Comprehensive Services during COVID-19: Coordination and Response Strategies
14:00 – 15:00	Mitigating the Impact of Human Trafficking: Role of Churches and Faith-based Organisations
15:00 – 15:30	Discussion and Closing Session