Anti-Trafficking in Humanitarian Responses

A brief overview and analysis of current practices and challenges in addressing trafficking in persons based on interviews with protection cluster and AOR coordinators

Background

Trafficking in persons (TIP) is a crime and a grave violation of human rights defined in Article 3(a) of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons[1]. It takes place in every region of the world, in both ordinary times and in times of crisis. Its root causes can include poverty and economic inequality, homelessness, structural or interpersonal violence, gender inequalities, armed conflict and post-conflict factors. TIP manifests in multiple forms affecting women, girls, boys and men who are exploited for domestic servitude, sex, forced labor, and forced marriage, among others.

A growing body of research[2] has shown that humanitarian crises may exacerbate pre-existing trafficking trends and give rise to new ones. While some forms of trafficking are a direct result of crises, such as exploitative sexual services demanded by armed groups or the forced recruitment of child soldiers, others are less evident, with traffickers thriving on the widespread human, material, social and economic losses caused by crises. Moreover, conflict and displacement have a stronger impact on trafficking risks due to the general erosion of the rule of law and the breakdown of social safety nets or the lack of other protection systems.

Despite the identification of a link between TIP and emergency contexts, trafficking prevention and response is frequently overlooked or not addressed in a comprehensive manner in humanitarian responses.

Purpose and Methodology

Between October 2017 and June 2018, the Global Protection Cluster Anti-Trafficking Task Team conducted semi-structured interviews with Protection Cluster Coordinators, and where possible, with Child Protection (CP) and/or Gender Based Violence (GBV) Areas of Responsibility (AOR) Coordinators in 29 humanitarian responses. The purpose of the interviews was to assess if and how TIP is being addressed in the existing cluster coordination mechanisms, while identifying gaps and recurring challenges, and considering opportunities in addressing TIP in the humanitarian response. The

exercise also aimed to gather recommendations from field protection cluster coordinators for the Anti-Trafficking Task Team's to prioritize activities and develop the work plan for the upcoming period.

The stock-taking exercise gathered strong information but it also had some limitations. Scheduling and telecommunication challenges meant the Task Team was not able to reach every active cluster. Of those clusters interviewed, it was not always possible to have cluster and AOR coordinators on the calls, thus impacting the information gathered regarding AOR practices, as in some responses trafficking might be addressed by either CP or GBV colleagues, but not in the wider protection cluster. Other calls benefitted from the presence of relevant actors addressing TIP in the response, such as NGOs or other UN agencies, which provided more detailed information on anti-trafficking efforts and specific activities.

CURRENT PRACTICES BY PROTECTION CLUSTERS

The interviews with protection and AOR coordinators indicate the multiple forms in which TIP is coordinated through the existing systems. As reflected on Figure 1, **19% of the surveyed clusters said they have mechanisms in place**, such as a TIP working group. These working groups are either embedded in the cluster or report their discussions in the cluster meeting. Some countries included TIP in the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). This happens either to support existing projects which are already addressing trafficking or to pave the way for partners to start engaging on the issue. Following the same intent, certain responses

have added trafficking in key planning documents such as the cluster, AOR and/or the Humanitarian Country Team protection strategies.
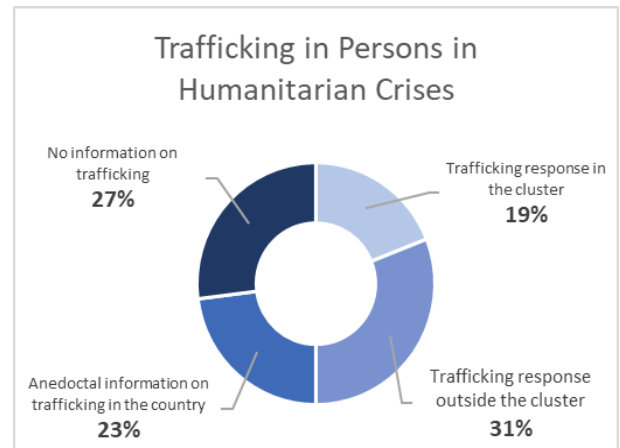

Figure 1

Respondents mentioned that, although in most contexts baselines on the scale of trafficking in persons are non-existent, certain forms of trafficking are more likely to have evolved due to the crises themselves, such as sexual slavery and exploitation of minority groups. Other forms of trafficking that are likely to have existed before proliferated in the volatile environment.

Nearly one third of respondents reported being aware of existing anti-trafficking efforts in the country of operation, but those are not discussed within the cluster meetings. Even if these activities are conducted by organizations who are cluster members, they are not reported within the humanitarian response. It was unclear in the calls if these anti-trafficking activities were targeting crisis affected populations, or were simply open to providing assistance to them. Some coordinators expressed frustration that this was not reported to the cluster, while others did not see the non-reporting as an issue, given that trafficking was not a subject under their portfolio.

In some countries, **parallel coordination systems** have been established which include

mechanisms such as working groups or joint strategies. According to interviews, this is particularly the case in countries with multiple crises in different geographical areas. For example, the parallel system might focus specifically on internally displaced persons (IDPs), local populations, migrants, refugees or different combinations between these groups. In some countries, despite the same agencies being involved in multiple in-country responses, anti-trafficking efforts target only specific populations, leaving aside other potentially vulnerable groups. This being partially due to the complete separation between the structures responding to different crises and population groups.

Furthermore, **23% of clusters reported being aware of anecdotal information of TIP prevalence** received from community and government counterparts, referring to incidents of women, men, and children victims of sexual exploitation or domestic servitude abducted and/or deceived about work conditions.

27% of the interviewees reported not working on TIP nor being aware of other agencies doing so in the country of operation. In some of these interviews, after the trafficking definition was further explained, it was mentioned that possibly some of the activities currently done within the cluster might be defined as TIP, such as the work done

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to address forced marriage and forced labor.

At the time of the calls, most clusters engaged in some level of anti-trafficking work mentioned that their anti-trafficking coordination initiatives have just been established or were in the process of being set up. As these activities and mechanisms are still at the inception stage, respondents reported not being able to measure effectiveness thus far.

Existing anti-trafficking activities seem to focus on awareness raising, sensitization and training for local officials, and to some extent, provision of direct assistance to identified victims. This appears to be the case both whether activities are formally reported into the cluster or the coordinator is aware of them being conducted by partners. According to the information gathered through the interviews, in certain countries different UN agencies, such as IOM and UNODC, are also working with the government at the national level to establish country-wide systems such as National Referral Mechanisms and governmental coordination bodies. The collaboration with the government in some countries also includes trainings for law enforcement and judiciary officials. Other activities cited were inclusion of TIP as an issue monitored in a GBV hotline, trainings for community leaders, and the establishment of NGO networks to work on anti-trafficking.

According to the interviews in a few countries, TIP is believed to be one issue recorded within **rights monitoring bodies** such as Human Rights departments of Peace Keeping Missions[3] or the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism[4] (MRM) on grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict. No detailed information, however, is available on whether TIP has indeed been recorded by these bodies and, if identified, how it has been addressed.

As for **promising practices,** the following

ones have been identified through the exercise:

Promising Practices
One of the interviewed CP AORs is in the process of developing a TIP manual for front-line workers, focusing on child trafficking. In this country, the police has a unit dedicated to Family and Children issues, which has also requested an anti-trafficking module to be added to their own training.
In another country, a CCCM manual is currently being produced and it will contain chapters on protection, including anti-trafficking responses.
More than one country reported the addition of TIP indicator questions in their protection assessments. These can then pave the way for a more in-depth TIP specific assessment and response.

GAPS AND CHALLENGES CITED BY PROTECTION CLUSTERS

The interviews exposed a multitude of challenges faced by field clusters in operationalizing a response to TIP in humanitarian crisis. Interviews revealed TIP is often perceived as a **too complex** issue to be addressed in areas with limited rule of law, especially where national anti-trafficking laws, specialized shelters for victims or dedicated anti-trafficking law enforcement are absent.

Respondents also mentioned that in some countries where national systems for the assistance of victims of TIP are in place, **government-led structures might be reluctant to include displaced populations in their anti-trafficking referral and response mechanisms**. While humanitarian actors continue to advocate for the existing services to be extended to all populations, in some contexts parallel mechanisms were established to meet immediate needs of victims of trafficking. These mechanisms include

identification strategies, referral systems and organizations providing services which are not linked with the existing national response. Furthermore, interviews revealed that in certain contexts where national authorities are reluctant to acknowledge the existence of TIP, humanitarian actors are prevented from either using the terminology or working on the issue altogether. As an example, in one country the government-led structure is focused on combatting TIP for organ removal but does not engage in responding to TIP for sexual exploitation. In this context, TIP for sexual exploitation is addressed by humanitarian workers on a case by case basis relying on the existing GBV response structure.

One of the most recurring challenges mentioned by the interviewees is the **lack of knowledge on TIP**. Respondents mentioned uncertainties on defining TIP in their context, and on **how to identify victims, prevent and respond**. Lacking the basic technical skills and tools, clusters are limited in their ability to assess prevalence or monitor indicators of TIP within the communities they serve.

Linked to this, several respondents mentioned the **lack of data and evidence on TIP prevalence** as a key constraint in operationalizing anti-trafficking efforts. According to the interviews, the limited knowledge and evidence, along with human and financial resource constraints, often lead to anti-trafficking efforts not being prioritized. The gap in information is related not only to the forms of TIP prevalent within the humanitarian crisis and the country in general, but also the lack of mapping of actors who already respond to the issue. Given the often-limited resources, it was highlighted the importance of ensuring that activities target the correct areas and populations.

According to the interviews, when some cluster members are aware of other actors providing services to victims of trafficking in the area of operation, they tend to **refer victims outside the cluster** for specialized services. It has been noted, however, that while such an approach ensures that identified victims receive the adequate services, the lack of a systemic response might lead to other victims falling through the cracks. In addition, when this happens, the TIP case may not be recorded in the humanitarian reporting system, thus contributing to the limited evidence of the scale of TIP in humanitarian crises.

Some respondents also cited the **inadequacy of tools and materials** in use for addressing TIP and assisting victims of trafficking. For instance, tools and materials that have been developed in the same country prior to the crisis might no longer being suitable as the crisis completely changed the operational context or those tools and materials currently available are difficult to adopt and/or adapt to their context, as they have not been designed for emergencies.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The interviews revealed that TIP is being partially addressed or, to the very minimum, perceived as an issue in the cluster architecture by many country responses and that engagement in anti-trafficking efforts in the cluster architecture does not have a consistent approach. Through the interviews it also became evident there is no such thing as a "one size fits all" approach. The scale of the TIP phenomenon and the structure of existing response systems are the key determinants to identify an effective mechanism for the specific context.

The interviews also revealed that TIP has been receiving an increased focus in the cluster response. Addressing TIP, however, is often not prioritized due to the numerous challenges described in the previous section. Some reluctance to addressing the topic derives from its criminal justice aspect that pursues prosecution of traffickers. While some respondents perceive TIP as an issue to be addressed by development and law enforcement actors, others expressed concern on the complexity of the issue and the limited specialized knowledge and skills available in the field. Some protection cluster members perceive some forms of TIP are being addressed under different "labels", thus believing that protection services has been provided. However, certain population groups may be overlooked by the existing system. For instance, whereas a female victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation might be identified or assisted by GBV actors, victims of trafficking for domestic servitude and male victims of trafficking for labor exploitation may not be identified or assisted.

Through the interviews, the Task Team has identified a possible learning opportunity between different responses within the same country. This can include sharing learning materials across response teams and adapting existing tools which have already been partially contextualized for the country and will need only to be adapted for the targeted population group. For example, in those contexts where in-country anti-trafficking expertise is already focusing on a certain population group (e.g. refugees), such expertise could be used and adjusted to a different response (e.g. IDPs) in the same country.

When asked for **recommendations**, many respondents emphasized the need for technical support, which could be provided in the form of simple and concise trainings and tools, including:

• introductory training on the definition and elements of TIP,

• specific technical trainings for field staff, such as outreach officers, protection monitors and case managers,

• training on context analysis, victims of trafficking identification, and awareness raising and prevention activities development,

• operational tools that could be easily contextualized.

As the lack of data and evidence have been frequently mentioned as a key challenge, the Task Team could support clusters by identifying and introducing TIP indicator questions in protection assessments, to be used for key informant interviews or individual surveys. These questions do not offer a definitive answer but suggest an area for further consideration.

Sample indicator questions for an assessment of TIP for labor exploitation
"Have children/men/women in this location been approached with offers of employment outside the camp/country?"
"Have you worked or performed activities without getting the expected payment?"

Although there was no specific interview question about what types of coordination was believed to be the most effective, there were spontaneous opinions regarding how to improve coordination modalities. Some respondents were concerned about increasing the number of coordination meetings which already consumes too much staff time and might not be the most productive process, whereas some others were supportive of the establishment of anti-TIP working groups either under the cluster or independent of it.

A few interviewees suggested TIP to be addressed at the GBV or the CP AOR levels, making sure that it is an issue referred to in

case management. While this can be a good starting point, ideally TIP would also be addressed at strategic levels to ensure prevention measures are put in place and eventually it is included in the systems build within the national organizations, both NGO and governments.

Lastly, respondents showed high interest in receiving the Task Team's support in the following areas:

• Building the capacity of cluster coordinators and other key protection actors to understand TIP and how it can occur or change during a humanitarian crisis through core trainings and customized country-level sensitization sessions.

• Avoiding a duplication of efforts by supporting the inclusion of TIP as an issue in existing mechanisms and tools, including protection assessment tools and case management SOPs.

• Increasing the capacity of cluster members to respond to possible cases of TIP by identifying referral pathways, whether new or existing outside of the humanitarian response.

• Strengthening the response to and understanding the scope of TIP through assessments and protection monitoring

• Support in identifying the most effective coordination mechanism according to the context.

REFERENCES

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING TASK TEAM

Recognizing the need to systematize the inclusion of a response to TIP in humanitarian emergencies, the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) Anti-trafficking Task Team convenes to discuss how to integrate TIP concerns in existing efforts towards improved response and outreach. The Anti-Trafficking Task Team is co-lead by the Heartland Alliance International, IOM and UNHCR. Its membership includes 9 civil society organizations and 7 UN agencies. The Anti-Trafficking Task Team aims to develop a guidance on anti-trafficking interventions in humanitarian responses and to provide recommendations on how to best mainstream it in the existing cluster activities. The Anti-trafficking Task Team Terms of Reference can be found here.

Over the last 12 months the Task Team has held quarterly coordination meetings. In addition, it has presented to PC and AOR field coordinators the overview of the initial identified trends and recurring challenges drawn from the stock-taking phase in humanitarian settings at the GPC Protection Conference 2018.

Global Protection Cluster