



**ALL-UKRAINIAN
COUNTER-
TRAFFICKING
NGO
COALITION**

**Issue 8
MONITORING
BULLETIN**

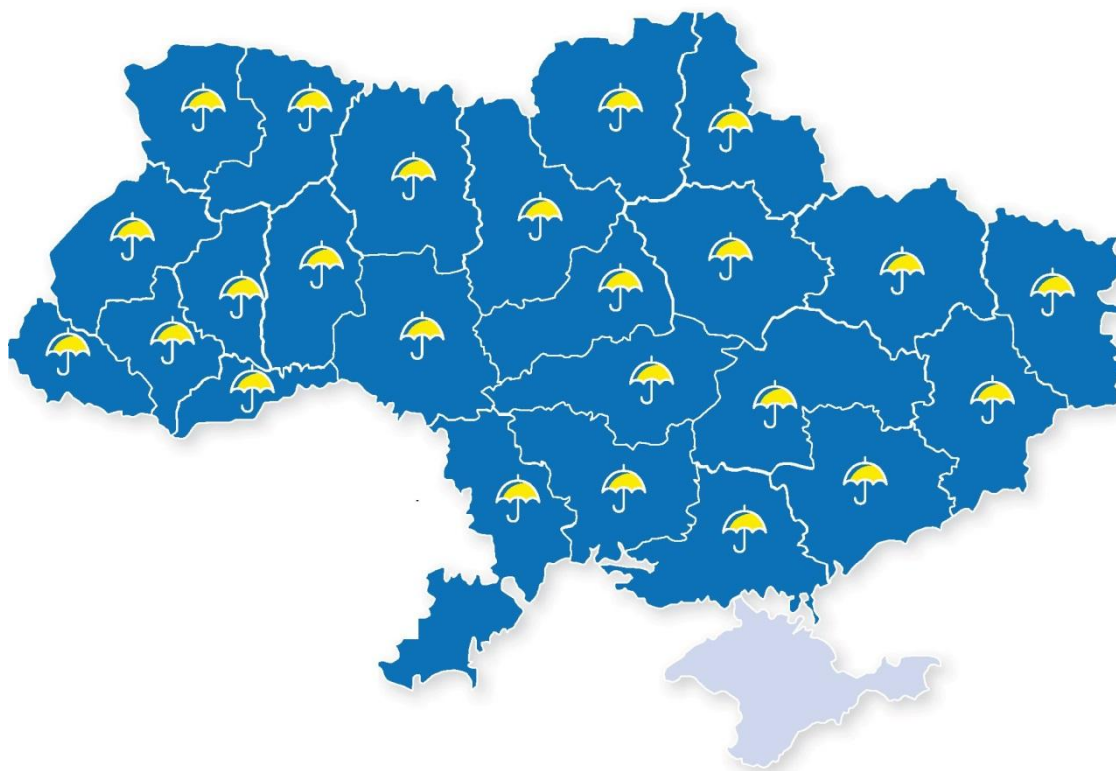
**IMPACT OF COVID-19
ON COMBATING TRAFFICKING IN HUMANG BEINGS IN UKRAINE**

Operating in a condition of spread of COVID-19 has become a real challenge for the entities taking measures in combating trafficking in human beings. Closure of borders, novelties in migration policies, economic crisis, psychological stress, caused by emergence of a new virus, and necessity of the introduction of quarantine restrictions have had a universal effect on a human trafficking situation in Ukraine. The combination of above factors had almost an instantaneous impact on the rates of assistance requests from the victims, their specific needs and practical aspects of provision of rehabilitation services. If they persist, they will dramatically add to vulnerability of Ukrainian citizens to trafficking in human beings, causing additional risks thereof at the same time.

We have considered every factor separately trying to trace back its impact on basic components of counter-trafficking activities and we have to make a point that COVID-19 has really emphasised problems in this sphere. None of them, however, was entirely new. It looked rather like the virus and quarantine in response to spread thereof had created an environment in which all existing faults and systemic weaknesses of counter-trafficking effort had become much more evident.

We believe that the case study, projected trends in a crime involving trafficking in human beings and practical recommendations on addressing the problems described herein will be useful not only for preparation of the civilian sector and public authorities to operating in the uncommon circumstances like those which emerged as a result of spreading COVID-19, but also, they will contribute to reviewing existing practices, established standards and approaches towards counter-trafficking activities.

THE COALITION WAS SET UP IN 2011, OPERATES IN 24 OBLASTS OF UKRAINE AND CONSISTS OF 31 MEMBER ORGANISATIONS.



Information is based on the data received from 24 NGOs from all oblasts of Ukraine, with exception of Kyiv and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

Period: January — June 2020.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON COMBATING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS IN UKRAINE

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DYNAMICS OF APPEALS FROM THE VTHBs

When studying their performance in identification of victims of trafficking in human beings over the period from January to June 2020, the Coalition member NGOs took notice of the fact that rapid spread of COVID-19 in Ukraine and the need in imposition severe quarantine restrictions as a result thereof had had a serious impact on the dynamics of assistance requests from VTHBs. In whole, the Coalition has registered a record number of appeals from the victims of trafficking in human beings.

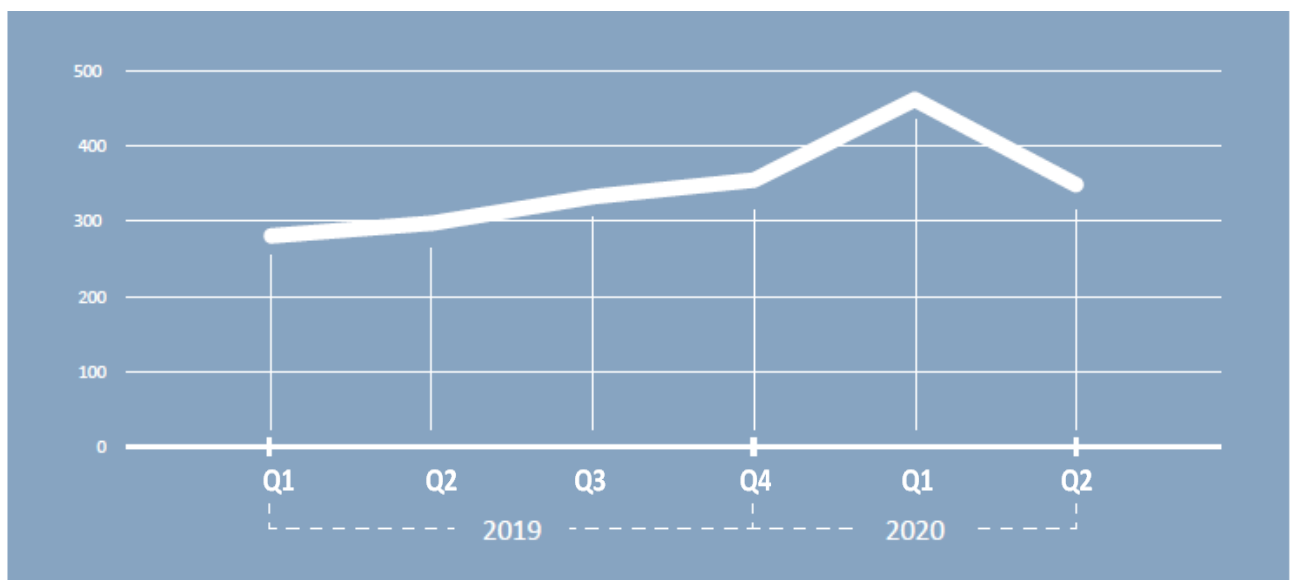
842 INDIVIDUALS, VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING, HAD REQUESTED ASSISTANCE FROM THE COALITION MEMBER NGOS OVER THE PERIOD FROM JANUARY TO JUNE 2020

WHICH IS BY 39% GREATER THAN OVER THE SAME PERIOD IN 2019

Along with that, while acknowledging a trend towards increase in numbers of identified victims, we have to point out that it was not quite uniform in terms of time periods and areas. It is very likely that lack of uniform approach to taking measures aiming at prevention of virus from spreading was the reason for such state of affairs.

The bulk of assistance requests from the victims fell within the period from January to March 2020 when a large-scale return of Ukrainian citizens from abroad as a result of rapid spread of COVID-19 worldwide on was observed. Having almost doubled in comparison with Q1 2019, it began to drop gradually because of closed borders and imposition of severe quarantine restrictions inside the country.

A number of identified victims over the period from 2019 to H1 2020.



In regional context, impact of the pandemic on identification of VTHBs was also ambivalent. While in some oblasts a substantial rise in the numbers of victims applying to various organisations for assistance to was observed (sometimes, 1.5–2.5 times greater numbers), in the other oblasts the situation was exactly the opposite, and the statistical indicators of numbers of identified VTHBs showed a drop by 13–76% or remained at the same level.



Spread of a new virus in Ukraine and worldwide has caused an emergence of a number of factors which substantially influenced the human trafficking situation. It is pretty likely that in a long-term perspective, it may lead to substantial aggravation of a problem and changes in criminal trends because of emergence of new fraud schemes and exploiter practices to which vulnerability has substantially risen as a result of a crisis caused by COVID-19, and their impact is apparent even now.

MAIN FACTORS OF COVID-19'S IMPACT ON A HUMAN TRAFFICKING SITUATION

- Closure of borders and imposition of the quarantine restrictions in the countries of destination for the Ukrainian labour migrants
- Escalation of an economic crisis and decrease of the demand on a labour market
- Psychological stress caused by long isolation and fear of falling ill with a new virus coupled with general apprehension and feeling of uncertainty
- Imposition of severe quarantine in Ukraine
- Cancellation of public events
- Closure of, or restriction of access to, the public institutions
- Mandatory use of personal protective equipment
- Termination of transport communications

CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19'S IMPACT ON A HUMAN TRAFFICKING SITUATION

Spread of COVID-19, on the one hand, and introduction of the quarantine restrictions, on the other hand, have become noticeable drivers for change in dynamics of assistance requests from VTHBs. To sum it up, escalation of an economic crisis and psychological load have caused substantial growth in numbers of victims who requested assistance.

Combination of factors associated with COVID-19 has emphasised the victims' need in social support, having, at the same time, caused changes in the notion of guaranteed minimum support package, and also, order of priority, procedure and time limits for provision certain types thereof.

Quarantine restrictions introduced in relation with rapid spread of coronavirus have substantially influenced the format of work aiming at counter-trafficking by prompting practical search for alternate approaches to crime preventive activities, identification of victims and provision them with rehabilitation services.

COVID-19 pandemic has substantially increased vulnerability of Ukrainian people to trafficking in human beings, at the same time, calling into existence a number of new risks, and those particularly associated with migration policy, rise in levels of xenophobia, escalation of an economic crisis etc.

COVID-19 AND LABOUR EXPLOITATION ABROAD

LARGE-SCALE RELEASE OF VTHBs FROM LABOUR EXPLOITATION ABROAD

From March to April 2020, the Coalition member NGOs registered a noticeable rise of assistance requests from VTHBs caused by large-scale releases and return to Ukraine of labour migrants who had suffered from exploitation abroad. Such a unique situation was particularly caused by spread of COVID-19 worldwide; fearing a new virus intensely and forced into suspension of their activities because of imposition of severe quarantine, the criminals pretty often willingly freed the victims and helped them to leave the country as fast as possible.

142 PERSONS

VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING ABROAD, WERE RELEASED BECAUSE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Coalition's member NGOs have provided a number of examples of such release of victims of trafficking in human beings caused by spread of COVID-19:

A resident of Lviv oblast who had suffered from labour exploitation in one of private hotels in **Poland** called the National Counter-Trafficking Hotline providing consultations to migrants. For a month, that woman had done all kinds of work through the holidays — until imposition of a severe quarantine was announced. Then, she was taken to the bus terminal and given money sufficient only for her return home.

A group of guest workers intimidated by the exploiters who were forced into working 12–16 hours per day in the workshops near **Polish** capital while receiving no pay were released after some time following the news about a new virus, which frightened the factory owner. The latter, himself, brought them to the border, returned their passports and gave 150 zlotys to each.

Another group of victims of labour exploitation in **Poland** who had also worked overtime in a construction site without pay were also released by the criminals as soon as it was reported about imposition of the quarantine restrictions in the country. The Ukrainians were ordered to gather together, then were put on the minibuses, brought to the railway station and paid their return tickets home.

Over two and half months, a labour exploitation of a Chernivtsi oblast resident in a construction site in **Germany** had lasted, but as soon as they began speaking about imposition of quarantine, the owner brought him and other workers to the bus terminal and gave them money for the trip home.

A person who found himself in a situation of trafficking in human beings in February 2020 in **Georgia** got his chance to escape when a person who held him under the lock fell ill and was hospitalised in March.

Nonetheless, despite numerous cases of victims' release during the pandemic, we are inclined to think that quarantine measures imposed in many countries of the world have hardly positively influenced the situation in general and have likely created additional conditions for the traffickers' control of the victims and limited their opportunities for requesting assistance. Certainly, a great number of Ukrainian nationals dragged into those kinds of trafficking in human beings which are rather latent or who are exploited at the sites outside the control of public authorities, still remain abroad. Besides, restrictions associated with the pandemic may also backfire on the law enforcement authorities' ability to cooperate at the international level.

RETURN OF THOSE WHO SUFFERED FROM HUMAN TRAFFICKING ABROAD DURING THE PERIOD OF THE QUARANTINE RESTRICTIONS

Even under ordinary circumstances, in most cases, the process of arranging for return of the Ukrainian citizens who suffered from trafficking in human beings abroad is complicated and lasting, which is associated, in particular, with the lack of clear international cooperation protocols and existing problems involving consular protection. In the light of information received from the Coalition member NGOs, it is safe to assume that the quarantine measures have complicated the situation even more by having created additional impediments to the victims' return to Ukraine. For example, Chernihiv Public Committee for Human Rights Protection informs about one of such cases.

Chernihiv Public Committee for Human Rights Protection has been, for a long time, dealing with the case of so called 'sailors', the persons who, under the threat to their lives, were drawn into illegal activities involving irregular migrants for which they are currently serving their sentences in **Italy**. Unfortunately, because of the pandemic and restrictive measures, the victim with whom the organisation cooperates is still in prison despite the fact that the Italian court decided to reduce the term of sentence in March 2020 and opened an opportunity for his release from prison in April.

There were certain difficulties involving return home of the persons already sent to Ukraine because of termination of bus and railway communications. Yet it is noteworthy that there are examples where due to professional and coordinated cooperation among the NMI entities, they were addressed successfully.

In **Dnipropetrovsk oblast**, coordinated efforts lead to arrangement of the return of the victim of trafficking in human beings from the territory of **Slovenia** where that person provided testimony against a trafficker and received rehabilitation support but had to urgently leave that country because of the quarantine. Despite the difficulties involved with communication with the Slovenian side, thanks to the efforts of the State administration and local self-governing bodies and IOM and the Ministry of Social Policy, the Ukrainian national was returned to her home city successfully. By that time, quarantine restrictions has already been in place and transport communications had been terminated, so OSA arranged for road haulage, and the representative of CSSFCY accompanied the victim from the border crossing point in Chop to the place of her residence over 1,200 km.

The Coalition member NGOs think that, later on, it is to be expected that a number of appeals from the victims of trafficking in human beings abroad, who were prevented by the quarantine restrictions imposed in destination countries from leaving for home, will increase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the problems identified by us, and possible long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Coalition emphasises on the necessity of urgent measures aiming at strengthening of protection of Ukrainian citizens who suffered from trafficking in human beings abroad, and particularly, when developing effective mechanisms of international cooperation and inter-agency coordination aiming at identification thereof and their return home without an unreasonable delay, and also, in compliance with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings which guarantees freeing persons who were engaged in illegal activities committed under duress from punishment.

RETEGRATION AND ADVISORY SUPPORT OF THOSE WHO SUFFERED FROM HUMAN TRAFFICKING ABROAD

Over the period under study, the victims of trafficking in human beings who suffered from labour exploitation abroad had received comprehensive reintegration assistance, and particularly, information and consultation and psychological services, financial and humanitarian support, medical examination and treatment etc.

At the same time, the priority objective in dealing with the victims who have returned from abroad included ensuring their economic soundness and sustainable reintegration into Ukrainian society by way of assistance in employment and self-employment arrangements.

In **Poltava oblast**, medical examinations of a man who had suffered labour exploitation abroad were financed with the support of IOM, and assistance was provided to him with the view to purchase of construction equipment. Having an experience in the sphere of repair of premises, he opened his own business.

In **Ternopil oblast**, for all victims who needed assistance in self-employment arrangements, professional tools or domestic animals were purchased.

In general, over the period under study, arrangements for self-employment were the most widely spread kinds of assistance to those who suffered from human trafficking abroad. With the support of IOM, they were provided with training course, procurement of equipment and receiving grants for opening of the businesses of their own.

716 PERSONS,
VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING ABROAD,
WERE INCLUDED IN IOM REINTEGRATION
PROGRAMME

OF THOSE, 516 PERSONS
RECEIVED ASSISTANCE IN
ARRANGEMENTS FOR
SELF-EMPLOYMENT

However, unfortunately, we must acknowledge that a great number of the victims don't even consider employment options in Ukraine and rekindle dreams of leaving abroad — that despite their previous negative experience.

According to the data received from **Vinnytsia Regional Human Rights Organisation “Spring of Hope”**, over 40 persons who appealed to it in April and May 2020 and reported the crimes committed against them during their guest working and received information and counselling but later, those refused apply for inclusion in a reintegration programme by arguing they were planning to leave abroad to earn money again because they were in debt and unemployed.

Persons who received advice on the matters of employment from **Zakarpattia Public Women’s Organisation “Vesta”** were mainly interested to learn when quarantine restrictions are going to be lifted to make it possible for them to leave abroad for work.

Non-governmental organisation “TCWC “Revival of the Nation” in whose premises National Hotline on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Providing Advice to Migrants operates, during the period of pandemic and quarantine restrictions, had to deal with a great number of requests for information on the options of travelling abroad and seeking jobs, noticing a substantial growth of migration sentiment.

Such attitude towards repeated labour migration arouses a special concern associated with growth of vulnerability of Ukrainian guest workers to trafficking in human beings as a result of economic crisis and long periods of being unemployed, and also, a number of new risks whose emergence was caused by spread of COVID-19.

REDUCED OPPORTUNITIES OF LEGAL EMPLOYMENT ABROAD AS AN ADDITIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING RISK FACTOR

In their response to rapid spread of COVID-19, a number of countries introduced severer rules of crossing their borders and amended their migration and labour laws insofar as those concerned foreigners. On the background of tightened migration rules and scrapping programmes under which Ukrainian citizens could officially find employment, activities of fraudsters who proposed roundabout schemes, thus creating new risks of exposure to trafficking in human beings, greatly intensified.

Chernihiv Public Committee for Human Rights Protection informs that even during outbreak of the pandemic external labour migration at the border with Belarus never stopped. So, over the period from April to June 2020, Ukrainian guest workers departed to European countries seeking work, without labour agreements of having concluded those with fake employers, having availed themselves of the fact that the Republic of Belarus never acknowledged existence of pandemic and never closed its borders.

In **Chernivtsi oblast**, **Non-governmental organisation “Suchasnyk Plus”** adopted several communications concerning fraud schemes in the sphere of employment abroad. Transport operators offered fake employment invitations from European countries for big money. Such a situation arose because of restrictions as to border crossings by seasonal guest workers under ‘visa free’ scheme.

Unfortunately, we may not forecast further developments associated with the spread of COVID-19, but it’s apparent that contraction of the internal labour market and growth of Ukrainian people’s vulnerability will only contribute to increase of the numbers of people who will, in an attempt to find employment abroad, be ready to accept any doubtful offers, and traffickers will use the situation to more actively ‘hunt’ people who have found themselves in hardship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To minimise risks arising from the changes in migration policies and scrapping of official foreign employment programmes for Ukrainian citizens, the following measures are to be taken:

- ▶ Under the conditions of quarantine restrictions, continuous online and telephone consulting of persons intending to leave abroad with the view to employment should be ensured.
- ▶ Awareness-raising activities concerning safe employment rules, entry regimes, stay and transit in countries targeted by major migration flows, and also, concerning new fraud schemes and risks of exposure to a human trafficking situation, should be intensified and carried out on a systemic basis in social networks, on web-portals of public authorities and local self-governments and on the websites of the Coalition member NGOs.
- ▶ With the view to ensuring safety of persons who intend to find employment abroad, the websites of the embassies should post clear and transparent information on the rules of stay, official employment, procedure of issuing labour visas, set out in Ukrainian, and also, an open list of businesses employing foreigners.
- ▶ Cooperation should be restored with the migration service and the State-owned Enterprise “Document” which, when issuing foreign passports will insert therein the leaflets containing rules of safe migration and contact data of the hotlines.
- ▶ The urgent objective is border infrastructure development and increase in the number of border crossing points where systemic consulting of labour migrants as regards their rights and obligations in the country of employment, risks of illegal employment and trafficking in human beings will be carried out, with serving of a reminder card containing telephone numbers to be dialled in case of danger.
- ▶ Upon lifting quarantine restrictions, preventive work among potential risk groups should be launched with the view to raising legal awareness and ensuring up-to-date information on the matters of legal employment abroad and risks of exposure to a situation involving human trafficking.
- ▶ Work with social services and social workers in communities should be carried out on a systematic basis to offer them incentives towards stepping up activities with the view to identification of VTHBs, and particularly, among the persons who have negative experience of labour migration.

OUTBREAK OF XENOPHOBIA AND RISING ALIENATION OF LABOUR MIGRANTS

Serious rise of worldwide xenophobia accompanying coronavirus pandemic has had a noticeable impact on perceptions of Ukrainian labour migrants. The anxious state the local population is in and panic-driven fear of falling ill with COVID-19 have caused prejudiced attitude towards aliens as a source of infection.

A related belief that migrants purportedly occupy workplaces so needed by the local residents who have also found themselves in a difficult economic situation, have given rise to an additional outbreak of negative attitudes towards Ukrainian citizens. Victims of trafficking in human beings with whom the Coalition member NGOs had worked over the period under study told about the cases where they had been fired without whatever explanation and payment. Finding themselves without means of subsistence, labour migrants fell easy prey to traffickers because they agreed to very risky offers to make at least some money.

Inna Sabadosh

Zakarpattia Public Women's Organisation "Vesta"

Unfortunately, today, we observe rise of xenophobia towards Ukrainian labour migrants. All VTHBs with whom the organisation worked encountered manifestations of discrimination and enmity based on hatred on grounds of nationality, irrespective of a country where they suffered from exploitation. They were regarded as the "Third World" nationals, their rights, including the right to respect for human dignity, were contemptuously violated. For example, a victim who worked in a bakery in Poland tells in her interview: "Every day, there were reproaches, again, and humiliating and insulting words: "sluts", "whores", "Ukrainian slaves". The bullying was getting worse every day. We were mocked. If a bun fell on the floor, a penalty was 200 zlotys, if operation of the line was delayed, a penalty was 500 zlotys".

Degrading treatment, double standards and open aggression the Ukrainian labour migrants experienced abroad, unfortunately, awaited them after their return home.

Halyna Kravets

TCWC "Revival of the Nation" NGO

On multiple occasions, VTHBs faced prejudiced attitude from their relatives, neighbours and friends, after their return to Ukraine. They heard unfounded accusations of importing a virus. Threats, suspicion or an openly negative attitude towards them as to potential vehicles of disease and as a reason for deterioration of social and economic situation will, as soon as in the nearest future, become one of the factors of forcing the victims out of the country.

We must remark that the pandemic didn't create a problem of prejudice towards Ukrainian labour migrants, in and of itself, but only exposed it, with renewed vigour. Deprived of the protection from the State abroad, and alienated in their own country, they had always been a target for xenophobic attacks and enmity and open neglect, and that made them potential victims of trafficking in human beings.

Elvira Mruchkovska

NGO "Suchasnyk Plus"

The State still turns a blind eye to the labour migrants, unless they start to create trouble for it. That is exactly what happened during the pandemic. Because of dissemination of fake information about the channels of infection by COVID-19, the level of anxiety and enmity towards the migrants have been sky high till now. That was why the guest workers came 'under fire'. At that time, Ukraine, again, was unprepared to provide protection to its citizens abroad.

An outbreak of xenophobia will apparently have a substantial adverse effect on a situation of human trafficking. Combined with economic effects of the pandemic which led to a situation of hardship in which the majority of migrants and a substantial part of immobile population found themselves, it will be a cause for a substantial rise in vulnerability of Ukrainian citizens to exploitation and trafficking in human beings abroad.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To prevent risks of exposure to a situation of human trafficking associated with growing manifestations of xenophobia and prejudice towards labour migrants, the Coalition member NGOs propose the following measures:

- ▶ Intensification of awareness-building and outreach work among the persons intending to find employment abroad, aiming at raising awareness regarding their human and labour rights, and also, laws and socio-cultural traditions of target countries.
- ▶ Building up international cooperation in holding information campaigns aiming at establishing tolerant attitudes towards labour migrants, understanding their contribution to development of world economy and establishing a positive image of Ukrainian guest workers.
- ▶ Ensuring prompt response of the State to the cases of violation of Ukrainian citizens' rights in the territory of foreign countries and proper protection of their rights and freedoms. There should be insistent demands to hold liable those guilty of xenophobic statements, hatred on grounds of nationality, dissemination of fakes and inaccurate information which leads to stigmatisation of labour migrants.
- ▶ Diplomatic and consular missions of Ukraine in most popular trade migration target countries should be strengthened, Ukrainian diaspora should be more actively involved in cooperation of Ukrainian diaspora, migrants' self-organisation and development of Ukrainian education and culture abroad should be facilitated.

ECONOMIC EFFECT OF COVID-19 AND ASSISTANCE TO VTHBs DURING THE CRISIS

REDUCED ABILITY OF THE VTHBs TO INDEPENDENT OVERCOMING THE EFFECTS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

General deterioration of economic situation and closure of the borders and dropping demand in the domestic labour market driven by the spread of COVID-19 have influenced the VTHBs' ability to independent overcoming the effects of human trafficking. As a result, there was a noticeable increase in a number of assistance requests to the NGOs from the victims who would have been able of addressing their own problems on themselves under different circumstances. Left in destitute and not being able to find any sources of income during the pandemic, they were forced to seek support from the outside.

In **Poltava oblast**, a man who had returned to Ukraine from abroad; working in a condition which didn't meet any standards, he lost his health and, besides, became completely broke. At home, he was awaited by his wife and a minor child who needed financial support from him. Because of quarantine, he couldn't find job, so the victim didn't see any way out except requesting assistance.

In **Donetsk oblast**, a VTHB was outside her home city at the moment of imposition of quarantine and termination of transport communications. Being far away from her home, without a permanent home and having no means of subsistence, the woman was forced to request assistance.

On the other hand, if earlier, the victims, in their attempts to find the way out of material hardship, had often been inclined to accept the proposals of doubtful employers and, again, got into the hands of the traffickers, but under the quarantine, being deprived of an opportunity to find a job comparatively quickly and easy, they had the time to give a thought to what had happened, study a situation and listen to the advice concerning safe employment.

In **Volyn oblast**, a woman who had suffered from labour exploitation in Poland telephoned to a non-governmental organisation. Having returned home, she could not recover from her experience for a long time: the woman was not paid, the working conditions were unbearable and the workers were unable to leave the territory of production facilities until the time the exploiters simply expelled them because the imposition of quarantine. Some time later, having assessed her situation and finding a flyer of NGO "Volyn Perspectives" she had received during the workshop at the employment centre, the victim decided to request assistance.

Halyna Kravets

TCWC "Revival of the Nation" NGO

Increase in the numbers of appeals is due to the fact that the persons who received an opportunity to return home because of the quarantine while staying in self-isolation and observation, had spent much time in information space. They had an opportunity to learn about trafficking in human beings and analyse their own situation, and then, request assistance.

Therefore, a unique situation which has arisen in Ukraine and in the world because of virus spread, and restrictions associated therewith despite the gravity of the situation in which the most vulnerable groups of population, including victims of trafficking in human beings, found themselves, made it possible for non-governmental organisations and other entities taking measures in the sphere of combating trafficking in human beings to work with VTHBs who would have otherwise been left outside their purview. Having requested assistance, they obtained material, consultative and psychological support which would subsequently make it possible to adjust their life choices and prevent risky behaviour and repeated exposure to a situation of human trafficking. In these circumstances, especial attention must be paid to provision of a full package of social services in maximum compliance with quality standards to ensure sustainable reintegration of the victims of trafficking in human beings into society.

MEETING URGENT NEEDS OF VTHBs

As a result of spread of COVID-19, already dire situation of victims of trafficking has become even more glaring, with many of those put on the brink of survival, which has significantly affected the priority of certain types of assistance provided under rehabilitation programs.

The primary need during that period was material assistance, but the process of obtaining it from the state, already bureaucratic and time-consuming, has quite naturally grown even more complicated with the introduction of quarantine restrictions. It became obvious to take into account the specifics of trafficking in human beings, which causes severe socio-economic consequences, completely uprooting the victim from the normal rhythm of life and leaving the latter without basic means of subsistence when forming the assistance package for VTHBs and determining the procedure for provision thereof.

The following items are among the VTHBs' basic needs, without fulfilling which complete rehabilitation is impossible:

- Foodstuffs
- Hygiene products
- Medicaments
- Personal protective equipment
- Clothes
- Residential lease
- Payment for utilities
- Daily expenses, and particularly, travelling expenses to work and social security establishments

Unfortunately, no provision is made for such kinds of assistance to be provided by the State to VTHBs. Besides, for the period of quarantine, no provision was made to meet the need of the victims of trafficking in human beings in personal protective equipment without which they are prevented from visiting the institutions providing rehabilitation services. Non-governmental and international organisations appeared to be more flexible in that respect and provided VTHBs, during the pandemic, with humanitarian aid and financial support expended to cover those particular urgent basic needs mentioned above.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the view to ensuring fast and optimal process of rehabilitation, it is necessary to review certain aspects of provision of support to the persons who suffered from trafficking in human beings and to take the following measures:

- Minimum package of assistance to VTHBs should be expanded, and also, time limits and procedure for provision thereof should be reconsidered with the view to high-priority and timely meeting urgent basic needs of the victims.

- Funds for covering such needs and taking measures aiming at facilitation of involvement of public and members of socially responsible businesses in provision of humanitarian aid to victims of trafficking in human beings should be provided for in the local programmes.

PROVISION OF EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO VTHBs DURING THE PANDEMIC AND QUARANTINE RESTRICTIONS

During quarantine, provision of employment assistance to VTHBs has become much more complicated. The main reasons for those difficulties were as follows:

- Termination of businesses and substantial part of enterprises.
- Termination of transport communications which deprived VTHBs of whatever opportunity to make it up to their work.
- Close-down of educational institutions and kindergartens, which made it difficult for VTHBs who bring up minor children to employ.

Now, the Coalition member NGOs from **Donetsk and Zhytomyr oblasts** inform that although state employment centres never refused employment assistance to the victims, in practice, addressing that issue is currently impossible because of the closure of, or operational changes in, the enterprises. The organisations of **Zakarpattia, Lviv, Odesa and Sumy oblasts** also indicate difficulties associated with seeking jobs for VTHBs.

In **Lviv oblast**, because of the closure of kindergartens under quarantine, there were problems with employment of a VTHB who raised two pre-school children. Add to this that over a long time, there had been no transport communications with the raion administrative centre, and those have been irregular until now.

Unfortunately, quarantine restrictions became the reason for losing jobs by the victims of trafficking in human beings who had been employed and received assistance for self-employment even before outbreak of COVID-19 in Ukraine. Never having a chance and not being able to find new vacancies or sources of orders, they, again, found themselves in a vulnerable position.

59 VTHBs

WHOSE REHABILITATION PERIOD FELL ON THE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 2019 TO MARCH 2020 LOST THEIR JOBS BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC.

Such state of affairs necessitates development of new approaches to provision of assistance for occupational retraining and employment, which must raise the VTHBs' resilience to future emergencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Coalition member NGOs think that in a long-term perspective, assistance to VTHBs must aim at ensuring their economic sustainability, and propose that the following measures be taken:

- In the circumstances where a substantial part of services is in transit to online format, it is advisable to include grounding online entrepreneurship, financial awareness and work on promoting of own services and products via Internet, in the VTHB rehabilitation programme.
- As part of provision of occupational guidance services and assistance in advanced training or retraining, it is reasonable to pay more attention to the opportunities for VTHBs to master modern professions in demand on the labour market, which include distance working, which, in its turn, may be particularly essential for the residents of distant settlements or women with minor children.

RISE OF PEOPLE'S VULNERABILITY TO EXPOSURE TO SITUATIONS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION DUE TO DETERIORATION OF ECONOMIC SITUATION

The economic crisis into which Ukrainian and world economy collapsing even more because of the outbreak of COVID-19, brings a number of risks of exposure to a situation of human trafficking. A substantial expansion of the risk group is to be expected, as, on the one hand, vulnerability of the persons already in that group will increasingly rise, and, on the other hand, people who have never been in the risk zone will become more vulnerable.

- Virus spread and imposition of the quarantine restrictions associated therewith have substantially weakened financial capacity of a great part of people. Jobs lost, long-term leaves without pay, inability to provide for a family, incurring of debts, including for utility services, and the need to apply for a consumer credits, will lead to notable expansion of the risk group or persons vulnerable to exposure to a situation of human trafficking.

Stanislav Litvinenko

Non-governmental organisation "Professional League of Social Workers of Sumy Region"

The pandemic will result in a substantial increase in a number of victims of human trafficking because during the quarantine, people didn't earn money and expended their savings. Many people have incurred debts. Moreover, because of the tensions roused by the expectations of the second wave of COVID-19 and reimposition of quarantine, people will try to find well-paid jobs within a short period of time, thus exposing themselves to the risk of falling into the exploiters' hands.

- Moreover, weakening of financial situation and deterioration of social and economic situation generally increase risks of domestic trafficking in human beings among vulnerable groups of population.

Inna Sabadosh

Zakarpattia Public Women's Organisation "Vesta"

Pandemic will subsequently lead to changes in trends of trafficking in human beings; such kinds of exploitation as using disabled persons or lone, vulnerable and dependent persons in beggary and forced labour within Ukraine will be intensified.

- Spread of COVID-19 has resulted in a substantial drop of demand on the labour market because of closure of some companies and businesses and return of a great number of labour migrants to Ukraine, which only surged deficit of quality vacancies. If such state of affair persists long enough, the Ukrainian citizens will be forced to accept whatever job offers, which poses a potential threat of involving persons not falling into risk groups in labour exploitation.

Olena Morhun

NGO "Promin Dnipro"

The economic crisis which was only reinforced by COVID-19 means further dwindling of opportunities for getting high paying jobs. Cases of employment of Ukrainian citizens without formalisation of labour relations will increase in numbers not only abroad, but also, inside the country, which will result in rising risks of exposure to situations involving trafficking in human beings.

- The crisis of small and medium-sized businesses, will, in its turn, strengthen the entrepreneurs' motivation to offer illegal employment for a purpose of tax evasion, and will possibly lead to numerous cases of refusals to pay salaries to the employees.

Elvira Mruchkovska

NGO "Suchasnyk Plus"

As we observe termination of activities of a number of companies because of the pandemic, the risk that someone will seek to use slave labour will rise even more, so, the risks of exposure to a situation involving trafficking in human beings will rise accordingly.

- Spread of COVID-19 in many countries of the world has, for a long time, deprived the exploiters of an opportunity for using slave labour. Therefore, there is a substantial risks that after lifting the quarantine, they will double their efforts in this field.

Tetiana Melnyk

NGO Centre for Supporting Civic Initiatives "Chaika"

Because of migrant outflow caused by quarantine, the traffickers have, for a time being, lost an opportunity to exploit people and after quarantine has been relaxed, they will try to make up for the lost profits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To mitigate an adverse effect of the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on the vulnerable groups of population and to prevent aggravation of the problem of trafficking in human beings and illegal labour migration, it is necessary to:

- Take measures to strengthen social security of vulnerable groups of population and to restore economic well-being of families which suffered from the pandemic most.
- Ensure continuous information and consultancy and psychological support of persons who appeared to be the most vulnerable to the economic effects of the spread of COVID-19, to ensure that they are prevented from using negative models of overcoming hardship.
- Urgently intensify awareness-building work among the risk groups, including among the people who applied to the employment centres and CSSFCYs.
- Strengthen responsibility for illegal employment and people's involvement in fraud schemes.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE OF THE VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

GROWTH OF THE VICTIMS' NEED IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

The COVID-19 pandemic and severe quarantine imposed in response to spread thereof have led to substantial deterioration of psychological state of population of Ukraine, and it hit the persons who suffered from trafficking in human beings even more. Reinforcement of people's feeling of uncertainty and anxiety which emerged as a result of economic insecurity, fear of falling ill, strengthening of isolation and social distancing, were multiplied by psychological problems they already had as a result of experienced situations of human trafficking, which had made them even less resilient do an additional stress caused by the pandemic.

According to the data received from the Coalition member NGOs, over the period under study, a number of the VTHBs' requests for psychological support and crisis consulting services had grown substantially and become one of the most desired kinds of assistance.

39 VTHBs

WHOSE PERIOD OF REHABILITATION FELL ON THE PERIOD FROM DECEMBER 2019 TO MARCH 2020 QUALIFIED THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT AS THE MOST URGENT NEED

Sharp growth of the need in the above type of assistance was particularly preconditioned by the fact that during quarantine the victims had aggravation of their mental disorders caused by the exposure to the situations of trafficking in human beings.

The victims of trafficking in human beings had problems with complying with the quarantine restrictions; that reminded them of being under control during exploitation, and caused aggravation of their mental disorders.

PARTICULAR FEATURES OF PROVISION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE DURING THE PANDEMIC AND QUARANTINE RESTRICTIONS

Pandemic and quarantine not only emphasised the VTHBs' need in psychological assistance, but also, influenced its scope and format of provision thereof. The Coalition member NGOs note that victims not only needed continuous psychological support, but also, began to contact and telephone them simply because they needed communication and primarily sought emotional support, information and advice. Under severe quarantine, almost all non-governmental organisations had completely switched over to distance working and provided advice online, via Viber and Skype, or by using telephone communications.

19 NGOs provided distance consulting, and the rest combined those also with in-person counselling while complying with stricter security measures provided for during quarantine.

The Coalition member NGOs noted that in the condition of the VTHBs' growing needs in psychological support, the formats of distance working appeared to be pretty convenient. Along with that, they pointed out to a number of problematic aspects. First of all, because of high demand for such kind of support, load on the employees of non-governmental organisations had risen substantially, and they had a strong sense of specialists who could adequately meet that demand.

Elvira Mruchkovska

NGO "Suchasnyk Plus"

During quarantine, only non-governmental organisations, including "Suchasnyk Plus", opened free-of-charge telephone and online counselling in compliance with the requirements of confidentiality and service standards. Public authorities don't provide that service so far.

Despite advisability of distance psychological support of VTHBs under the conditions of limited mobility during quarantine, priority, after relaxation thereof, should be given to traditional forms of working with the victims, because their complete rehabilitation is impossible without regular in-person contacts with a specialist who is dealing with a particular case on a continuous basis, tracing changes in the person's psychoemotional state and behaviour.

Account should also be taken of the fact that because of the absence of electronic devices, access to Internet or poor mobile communication, not all victims are able to make use of distance psychological services. Therefore, a need in in-person consulting will remain high and may be met by way of establishment of a psychological support network. However, obtaining such support from the public authorities so far is problematic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the view to meeting the VTHBs' needs in continuous quality psychological support, the following measures should be taken:

- ▶ Expansion of a psychological support network at a local level.
- ▶ Ensuring teaching particular features of provision of support to the victims of trafficking in human beings to the psychologists working at public institutions being NMI entities.
- ▶ Making provision for a possibility of introduction of online formats of psychological support of VTHBs in practical activities of the public authorities being NMI entities which must provide relevant services.
- ▶ In case of shortage of specialists, social services commissioning should be used.

GROWTH OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AS HUMAN TRAFFICKING RISK FACTORS

Increased vulnerability of Ukrainian citizens to trafficking in human beings because of deterioration of their mental state will likely to be one of the consequences which may result from the outbreak of COVID-19.

- ▶ Longtime psychological stress caused by fear, anxiety, uncertainty and social and economic difficulties caused by quarantine will most likely become a reason for weakening capacity for adequate risk assessment and will result in opting for negative strategies of overcoming hardship. It particularly concerns women on whose shoulders a double load was placed: distance working and family care and raising children who could not attend schools and

kindergartens. Therefore, a number of persons whose vulnerability to human trafficking will be preconditioned by their inability to critically assess risks when seeking a way out of a crisis situation.

- ▶ Necessity of compliance with the regime of isolation and restriction of social contacts in the condition of spread of COVID-19 became an additional stress, and it particularly concerned persons who belonged to most vulnerable categories continuously suffering from poor financial and psychological conditions. A desire to break out of a difficult situation in whatever way, upon lifting the quarantine restrictions, will likely lead to increase in the cases of exposure to the situations involving trafficking in human beings.
- ▶ Since because of quarantine and restrictions in labour activities, many families found themselves in isolation while suffering from material restrictions; during the pandemic, a sharp increase in the cases of family violence which was often than not a precondition for exposure to a situation of trafficking in human beings.

A NUMBER OF ASSISTANCE REQUESTS ASSOCIATED WITH CASES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN UKRAINE HAS INCREASED **BY 30%** FROM THE BEGINNING OF QUARANTINE

Therefore, spread of COVID-19 and such quarantine measures as mobility restrictions and self-isolation have ruined ordinary ways of life and created new factors of stress. Depression, pessimistic view of the future, disorientation lead to lowering of the level of people's defencence, and increase vulnerability to exposure to a situation involving trafficking in human beings. On the background of outbreak of family violence and manifestations of aggression, and social conflicts which often trigger hasty decisions, those factors will substantially increase risks of such crime in the closest future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the view to prevention of risky behaviour of persons suffering from continuous psychological stress as a result of spread of COVID-19 and quarantine restrictions, the following measures should be taken:

- ▶ Under quarantine, persons belonging to the risk groups should be provided with psychological and consultative support with the view to prevention of risky behaviour.
- ▶ With the view to substantial increase of risks of exposure to a situation involving trafficking in human beings associated with increase in the cases of family violence, free-of-charge psychological support and family crisis consulting to the families which appeared to be most vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic.
- ▶ Protection and legal support of persons suffering from family violence should be stepped up and a network of institutions providing safe refuge and other social services should be expanded.

COUNTER-TRAFFICKING UNDER QUARANTINE

IMPACT OF RESTRICTIVE QUARANTINE MEASURES ON THE VTHBs' ACCESS TO ASSISTANCE

Implementation of a package of restrictive quarantine measures including termination of transport communications, closure of, or restriction of access to, the public institutions and mandatory use of personal protective equipment, have created a sheer belt of obstacles to requesting assistance by VTHBs.

- Restrictions to functioning of public transport and termination of intercity communications have caused serious problems. Since many victims stood no chance to use the means of Internet communications because of poor coverage in distant settlements or had no modern electronic and mobile devices, the above factor had, in fact, deprived them of a chance to apply for assistance to the organisations and institutions located in raion and oblast centres. Yet we have to acknowledge the absence of authorised persons and qualified specialists familiar with the matters of counter-trafficking and algorithms of interaction.

In **Lviv oblast**, a young woman who lived in a small village at 30 km from the raion centre, was unable to personally apply to DSW during the pandemic because until the end of June no suburban shuttle buses and electric trains operated in Lviv oblast. The female victim was able to find a way to request assistance from a Coalition member NGO. But extension of the quarantine restrictions prevents her from personal attendance of the responsible subdivision.

- The fact that during quarantine, public authorities and local self-governments, and particularly, structural subdivisions of state administrations responsible for implementation of the state policy in the sphere of counter-trafficking, cancelled or restricted personal reception of citizens became another obstacle to the VTHBs' access to assistance.

For example, in **Chernivtsi oblast** where severe quarantine restrictions were imposed because a rate of incidence being the highest in Ukraine for a long time, and as a result of complete termination of movement of intercity transport and cancellation of personal reception of citizens by public institutions, VTHBs were unable to apply for acknowledgment of status. Only on 15 June the situation started to gradually change but it is still early to state it has been remedied.

In **Chernihiv oblast**, quarantine also influenced the situation involving appeals from VTHBs, having virtually denied their access to the authorised officials. The problem associated with the decentralisation reform has become more glaring. While the communities lack authorised officials, psychologists and other specialists engaged in NMI, transition of public authorities to stand-by mode led to complete loss of trust of the victims in any possibility of obtaining assistance. In accordance with the new rules, appointment should be prearranged, and entering the premises via a security desk is possible only if a person exactly knows whom he or she visits and complies with the requirements of epidemiological response.

- Moreover, in the light of quarantine imposed, the State obliged everybody to use personal protective equipment which, unfortunately, remains not readily available for the persons who suffered from trafficking in human beings, and usually, are in economic hardships.

- Mandatory character of self-isolation became another barrier to access of VTHBs to assistance, and especially for those who had returned from abroad. Besides, having found themselves in hardship as a result of being caught by the criminals, VTHBs were unable to overcome their fear of falling ill with a new virus which could have only aggravated a seriousness of a situation and rejected assistance having learnt about the fact that provision thereof required personal presence in a number of institutions. Having obtained consultative and psychological support, they didn't show their intention to be included in whatever rehabilitation programmes by avoiding unnecessary contacts.
- Unfortunately, the pandemic and quarantine requirements had an adverse effect both on the VTHBs' opportunities to gain unimpeded access to necessary services and on the non-governmental organisations' ability to gain access to people in need of assistance.

For example, NGO "Successful Woman" informs that in **Kherson oblast** the worst cases of exploitation of child labour were registered. Over 10 Romani children from Zakarpattia, with their parents, worked in local landfills. However, in connection with the pandemic, access of the representatives of the non-governmental organisation to them was restricted.

- Imposition of quarantine restrictions even more complicated the VTHBs' access to certain kinds of assistance getting which had earlier been problematic. In particular, the Coalition member NGOs observed that most healthcare institutions dealt with urgent cases only, and some hospitals were re-purposed to infectious hospitals. Accommodation of VTHBs in social welfare institutions was only possible provided testing for COVID-19 had given negative result, and the latter was made on a paid basis, and therefore, was inaccessible to victims of trafficking in human beings.

Elvira Mruchkovska

NGO "Suchasnyk Plus"

The State is failing to ensure social services to VTHBs it guaranteed because it has failed to draw up relevant guidelines and to establish alternative options for activities. Legislation on NMI must be analysed from the standpoint of its functioning in the condition of the pandemic or other crisis situations.

So, imposition of the quarantine restrictions caused by the spread of the coronavirus emphasised a number of long familiar problems by demonstrating inadequacy of existing system of provision of assistance to VTHBs. Therefore, an urgent task is development of new approaches and procedures to ensure the victims' unimpeded access to necessary services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clear guidelines for NMI entities as regards acceptance of appeals from the victims of trafficking in human beings, in crisis situations, and particularly, by way of practicing online appeals, should be drawn up.
- The process of introduction of NMI in ATCs should be accelerated and a contribution should be made with the view to establishing its effective functioning to ensure the maximum proximity of various social services to VTHBs.

- ▶ Provision should be made for a possibility of free-of-charge provision of VTHBs with personal protective equipment, including during their attendance of the organisations being NMI entities.
- ▶ Provision should be made for carrying out free-of-charge testing for COVID-19 for victims of human trafficking.

PARTICULAR FEATURES OF NMI FUNCTIONING UNDER QUARANTINE RESTRICTIVE MEASURES

Spread of COVID-19 and imposition of severe quarantine restrictions in Ukraine exposed systemic problems surrounding functioning of NMI which appeared to be unstable in crisis situations.

- ▶ Following guidelines on the procedure for provision of assistance to victims of trafficking in human beings, which provide for both mandatory in-person forms of interaction with the victims and interaction among the NMI entities, appeared virtually impossible under quarantine. So, the necessity of in-person interviewing, submission of supporting documents, VTHBs' personal presence in institutions providing assistance, and particularly, in CSSFCYs and social security bodies, created great obstacles to obtaining of rehabilitation services by the victims during the period of spreading COVID-19. Given this, the vast majority of VTHBs flatly gave up any attempts of obtaining State support anticipating serious difficulties.

ONLY 7% OF VTHBs

WERE ABLE TO OBTAIN ASSISTANCE FROM THE STATE FROM JANUARY TO JUNE 2020

- ▶ Under the quarantine measures, restrictions were imposed on access of all people, including VTHBs, to services of the employment centres, hospitals, CSSFCYs, educational institutions and other bodies which were NMI entities. Therefore, none of them, in fact, carried out identification of VTHBs.

For example, in **Chernihiv oblast**, public authorities, over H1 2020, had been unable to identify a single VTHB. As far as the specialists of a Coalition member NGO in Chernihiv oblast know, NMI entities are taking no measures in facilitation of identification of VTHBs under quarantine.

In **Ternopil oblast**, the same situation arose: public NMI entities, except for the Department for Combating Crime Relating to Human Trafficking, didn't identify victims of trafficking in human beings, during quarantine.

Non-governmental organisations appeared to be more flexible and more adapted to activities in the condition of crisis and actively used new formats.

So, in **Sumy oblast** where most victims were identified, identification was carried out via Internet and social networks.

Work in **Vinnitsia oblast** under quarantine had to be done online, as far as possible: telephone conversations and consultations, working meetings by means of Internet platforms, electronic correspondence, individual surveys, legal and psychological counselling of likely victims by means of Internet platforms Skype, Zoom etc. It is planned to introduce online surveying and electronic polling of likely victims.

- ▶ Some NGOs registered problems associated with the procedures of acquiring of a VTHB

status and payment of a one-time state welfare assistance.

On 21 February 2020, in **Ternopil oblast**, a victim applied to Ternopil OSA for acquiring status of a victim. On 28 February 2020, documents were sent to the Ministry of Social Policy. However, the response containing its decision came with a significant delay — only on 15 April 2020. There were also problems with receiving one-time state welfare assistance. On 16 March 2020, a female victim filed a complaint with the raion Department of Social Welfare. But she never received payment within the time limits set by law. The responsible person repeatedly contacted the authorised body on that matter, but the latter explained that due to the current situation, there was a delay in funds. As a result, the victim received one-time state welfare assistance only in early June 2020.

At the same time, a number of the Coalition member NGOs noted that they did not observe significant complications in NMI operations, and the problems were most likely related to the desire and willingness to work in a crisis and to find some non-standard means of addressing them.

Tetiana Melnyk

NGO Centre for Supporting Civic Initiatives “Chaika”

During the pandemic, there were some difficulties in the work, but we tried to solve them together. With the view to the timely provision of comprehensive assistance, it is important to strictly adhere to existing laws and regulations, without trying to profit from the difficulties caused by quarantine.

In order to provide VTHBs with the opportunity to receive comprehensive assistance from the state during the period of quarantine restrictions, NMI entities in some oblasts have already applied new formats of interaction.

In the **Kherson oblast**, during the quarantine restrictions, work was carried out by telephone, as well as such forms of interaction as video conferencing in Skype and Zoom were introduced.

In the **Ternopil oblast**, negotiations are underway with the administration to strengthen coordination of activities and coordination of measures aiming at identification and making arrangements for provision of assistance to VTHBs. The working group composed of the members of NMI entities will work via Viber. At the same time, work with VTHBs has already been done by telephone and via Viber and Skype.

In the **Lviv oblast**, online meetings as part of a project for combating family violence have become a good practice. In some raions, the entities conferred online every week with the oblast services and the non-governmental organisation working out new mechanisms of interaction. It is planned to also try such online conferences when holding joint meetings of NMI entities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the problems we have identified and striving to ensure sustainable functioning of NMI in crisis situations similar to those that have arisen in connection with the spread of COVID-19, we consider it appropriate to take the following measures:

- ▶ Positive experience of interaction among NMI entities in the conditions of restrictive quarantine measures should be studied, and successful developments should be generalised to be replicated in all oblasts of Ukraine.
- ▶ New algorithms for interaction among NMI entities, which will provide for simplified procedures for acquiring VTHB status, payment of one-time welfare assistance and other social benefits, providing victims with temporary shelter, hospitalisation etc., and appropriate amendments to existing regulations in the field of counter-trafficking should be made.
- ▶ A possibility of translating the services of the government agencies involved in the provision of assistance to VTHBs into an online format (counseling, training, acceptance of applications, etc.) should be considered.

AWARENESS-BUILDING ACTIVITIES UNDER NEW CHALLENGES

The introduction of quarantine restrictions in Ukraine, part of which was a ban on holding public meetings, led to the need to abolish almost all awareness-building activities scheduled for the period from January to June 2020. However, given significant increase in the level of vulnerability of the population, amendments to migration and labour laws of European countries, intensification of trafficking, emergence of new fraudulent schemes and exploitation practices, timely information of Ukrainian citizens on the risks of trafficking in human beings becomes especially important.

During the period of quarantine restrictions, most Coalition member NGOs completely translated their preventive activities into an online format. Using various online platforms, they provided consultations, conducted trainings and webinars, distributed textual and visual information materials etc. Specifically:

A team of **Vinnytsia Regional Human Rights Organisation “Spring of Hope”** is successfully introducing such online forms as group awareness-building webinars and trainings. On Facebook and Instagram, as well as on the website of the organisation, there is constant awareness-building work which includes placement of various textual information related to counter-trafficking, and videos, interviews on that topic, and success stories of former victims

In Chernivtsi oblast, non-governmental organisation “Suchasnyk Plus” is actively carrying out individual and group online-consulting, and also, regularly publishes topical postings in social networks.

Chernihiv Public Committee for Human Rights Protection carries out, during quarantine, all preventive work in online format on the organisation's website and via Facebook.

Kherson Regional Centre “Successful Woman” carries out outreach work via social networks and local mass media. And specifically, they are practicing informal communication via Instagram for a purpose of involving volunteers. The NGO has already established a school of volunteers who disseminate information on trafficking in human beings through acquaintances and personal connections.

Unfortunately, human traffickers have also recently stepped up their activities in Internet, luring into their webs gullible and vulnerable people. Cyber technologies allow criminals to easily access potential victims and to greatly simplify the process of recruiting them, and also provide opportunities for exploitation directly on the Internet, in particular through involving them in the porn industry.

Elvira Mruchkovska

NGO "Suchasnyk Plus"

Trafficking in human beings has become more active in cyberspace. Sale of sexual services online, opening of online porn studios, online advertising of illegal establishments providing sexual services, including those of minors, is gaining momentum. In this regard, it is quite likely that the age of victims will decrease, and at the same time, the latency of these types of human trafficking will increase, including due to the fact that children and minors virtually do not seek assistance.

In response to the increasing presence of organised crime related to human trafficking on the Internet, the Coalition member NGOs plan to further develop and improve online formats of preventive work.

At the same time, NGOs emphasise the need in strengthening of the traditional forms of awareness-building activities, as the popular trend of transition to online activities does not always work because some risk groups either do not have access to modern electronic devices or are severely limited in their use, and this primarily applies to persons who are in hardship or are in public welfare institutions, or suffer from family violence, etc. In addition, with the intensification of cyber life and the saturation with digital content, one cannot be sure that anti-trafficking materials will not be lost in the information flow.

Taking into account all the positive and negative aspects of certain forms of outreach work, we believe that only a harmonious combination of new and traditional methods can produce optimal results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In our opinion, the following measures will help to eliminate the negative consequences in the field of counter-trafficking caused by the curtailment of awareness-building activities in the conditions of a pandemic and quarantine restrictions.

- ▶ Using relaxation of quarantine restrictions, it is necessary to intensify *in situ* awareness-building activities, establish and strengthen contacts with ATCs in order to maximise the effectiveness of preventive work among the risk groups whose vulnerability to trafficking in human beings has increased due to the spread of COVID-19.
- ▶ It is necessary, by consolidating the efforts of all actors involved in combating trafficking in human beings, to immediately start preparation to, and implementation of, a new effective system for monitoring of crime trends, the results of which can be used in development of relevant and adequate strategies of counter-trafficking.
- ▶ Work should begin immediately to identify and study fraudulent schemes that facilitate involvement of Ukrainian citizens in trafficking in human beings, including through the use of Internet technologies; and to implement measures of criminal prosecution for any participation in such schemes.
- ▶ An appropriate step at this stage will be development of new educational materials taking into account current trends and specific aspects of the current state of human trafficking, including those related to the spread of COVID-19, whose communication and content

would target specific risk groups.

- ▶ In the context of expanding activities of fraudsters aiming at the exploitation and trafficking of human beings which are carried out through the use of modern digital and marketing technologies, special attention should be paid to search for new forms of awareness-building activities. Modern, bright, interesting materials that will attract attention and can be distributed by all members of the online community, will cover a huge audience and reduce the risks associated with the intensification of traffickers in the Internet. In particular, the Coalition member NGOs propose to start developing online games that would develop in an exciting way the practical skills of safe travel, labour migration, etc., as well as releasing thematic comics, given that this kind of art is not only easy to understand, but currently, it is extremely popular with both children and adolescents and adults.
- ▶ Opportunities should also be developed for online dissemination and targeting, via social networks, of educational information (texts, visual art, videos) and other online resources dedicated to identification of victims, types of crimes associated with human trafficking, and also, of official information on current border crossing rules, and employment conditions.
- ▶ In our opinion, an effective alternative to traditional preventive awareness-building measures aiming at counter-trafficking would be their partial transfer to online environment and active use of popular social networking platforms making it possible to conduct outreach campaigns on an ongoing basis. Such an approach will make it possible to expand the target audience by reaching populations that spend a lot of time in cyberspace and remain uncovered by traditional forms of prevention.
- ▶ An urgent task is creation of a public all-Ukrainian Internet portal on the issues of prevention of crimes associated with trafficking in human beings. Such a platform will be capable of presenting a maximum of important, verified and structured information, combining it with useful functionality that will allow you to read the regularly updated official data and receive round-the-clock online consultations. Work on the development and further promotion of such an online resource in search engines has an extremely great potential for preventive work.
- ▶ Use of additional communication channels with maximum audience coverage — television, online radio, popular video hostings, etc. particularly intended for the placement of educational video blocks and short social videos warning about current risks of human trafficking — will become an effective way to mitigate the risks associated with a long break in the mass preventive measures.
- ▶ In case of re-introduction of quarantine, thematic booklets, which in case of restriction to mobility can be printed on the spot and distributed among the population, should be distributed through ATC members, activists, partners, volunteers.
- ▶ In order to prevent Ukrainian citizens belonging to the risk groups, and particularly, those who are ready to re-migrate immediately after the borders have been opened, from being trafficked, the Coalition member NGOs consider it appropriate to provide an opportunity and authorise traditional awareness-building work at the local level with observance of quarantine norms.

The bulletin is prepared by the All-Ukrainian Counter-Trafficking NGO Coalition.
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“Public Control over the Implementation of the Counter-Trafficking Policy in 2020 in Ivano-Frankivsk, Zakarpattia, Ternopil and Chernivtsi oblasts” project is implemented by the All-Ukrainian Counter-Trafficking NGO Coalition with the assistance of the International Organisation for Migration Mission in Ukraine and funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Canada with the generous support of the American people through the project of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).