

**THE PANDEMIC IS THE TIME TO INCREASE COUNTER-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS, —
IOM PARTNER NGOs REPORT**



The COVID-19 pandemic has a dual effect on victims of trafficking from Ukraine. While some traffickers considered quarantines and lockdowns and let their victims go, socioeconomic challenges and psychosocial distress make people more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. These are the key findings of a report, released by the IOM-supported All-Ukrainian Counter-Trafficking NGO Coalition.

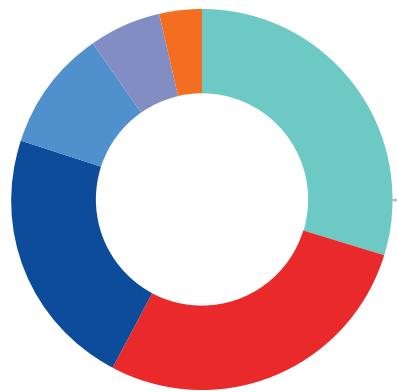
IOM partner NGOs are concerned that the possibilities for reintegration of former victims of trafficking could become more limited due to the pandemic-related challenges faced by medical facilities, social services and government institutions. There are also similar concerns about the international law enforcement cooperation challenged by border closures and national lockdowns.

“Some Ukrainian nationals still could be exploited abroad, having no options to ask for help, as the sites of their exploitation remain invisible for local authorities. The return of those who were released or managed to escape is problematic due to border closures,” says Maryna Pasechnyk, Head of the All-Ukrainian Counter-Trafficking NGO Coalition.

Over 800 Ukrainians have been identified as victims of trafficking and assisted by IOM from January to June 2020. This is a striking 40 per cent increase compared to the first half of the previous year. IOM [surveyed](#) some of the assisted victims in March and June — to learn that for over 84 per cent of the respondents the financial situation deteriorated during the lockdown.

While IOM beneficiaries said that the provided assistance helped them to prevent conflicts in the families, build psychological resilience, and restore confidence in the future, migration intentions of risk groups remain high. The IOM partner NGO from Vinnytsia reported that over 40 victims of trafficking they have identified and counselled refused to enter the IOM rehabilitation programme — they said that their debts and lack of jobs in their home region pushed them to once again look for employment abroad.

EMPLOYMENT INTENTIONS OF IOM-ASSISTED VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING*



*292 IOM-assisted victims of trafficking were interviewed in March–May 2020



29.8% of the respondents indicated they **had already returned to their previous jobs**;



28.1% of the respondents **still did not have jobs and planned to look for a job in their professional area**;



22.3% of the respondents **expressed the wish to develop their existing businesses, start new enterprises, or become self-employed**;



10.2% of the respondents **planned to look for a job in a new field**;



6.1% of the respondents **were either on maternity leave or renewed their study**;



3.5% of the respondents said they **would try to find a job abroad** once the restrictions were lifted.

Over the first months of the quarantine, the IOM-supported National Toll-Free Counter-Trafficking and Migrant Advice Hotline received over 5,500 calls — a 15 percentage points increase compared to March–May 2019.

When official opportunities for employment abroad are limited, criminals are keen to benefit from the situation. IOM partner NGOs report an increase in cases of fraud: sales of forged invitations from employers, etc.

Another negative factor during the COVID-19 pandemic is the growth of anti-migrant sentiments due to the increased anxiety and fear of infection both in the countries of destination and in Ukrainian migrant workers' home communities.

To mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic for countering human trafficking, the NGO Coalition recommends a number of steps, including the following:

- to foster trafficking prevention activities at the level of amalgamated territorial communities;
- to adjust the system for monitoring trafficking trends;
- to immediately start uncovering the newly emerged fraud schemes;
- to develop new prevention information materials for different risk groups, reflecting realities of the pandemic content- and form-wise.



A woman from **Lviv Oblast** suffered from labour exploitation in a private hotel in Poland for about a month. When the introduction of a severe quarantine was announced, the exploiters took her to a bus terminal and gave her money enough only for returning home.



Severe quarantine restrictions were imposed in **Chernivtsi Oblast** due to epidemiological situation. Movement of intercity transport was terminated, and public institutions cancelled all in-person consultations. As a result, victims of trafficking were unable to apply for official status, granted by the State.



A man from **Poltava Oblast** returned to Ukraine from abroad where he had suffered from exploitation and developed a chronic illness. At home, he was awaited by his wife and a minor child, while he had absolutely no funds. Because of the quarantine, the man couldn't find a job. Fortunately, he learned about the IOM reintegration programme for victims of trafficking and applied for assistance.



Chernihiv Public Committee for Human Rights Protection informs that as the Republic of Belarus did not close its borders, from April to June 2020, Ukrainian migrant workers were leaving to the EU countries through the Belarusian territory, without any contracts or having concluded those with fake employers.

VULNERABLE ENTREPRENEURS IN DONETSK AND LUHANSK OBLASTS SUPPORTED TO MITIGATE QUARANTINE IMPACT

Funded by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), IOM gives a hand to 170 small family-owned businesses in conflict-affected areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. These micro-enterprises, already vulnerable before the introduction of the quarantine, faced painful losses when the pandemic prevention measures topped up the existing economic decay. Not able to pay their rent, cover their utility bills, taxes and production materials, they had to take loans and run into debts to maintain their operations.

Many businesses are actively changing their work modality now, shifting to online sales, delivery and remote service provision as well as diversifying the existing services and product lines to reattract the lost clientele. IOM will provide them with two cash grant instalments, equal to USD 500 each. The assistance will help these businesses to get on their feet after the initial shock, pay off some of the most urgent debts and restock to continue their work and return some of the working capital.

Before the outbreak of conflict, Dmytro Igoshyn lived in Horlivka and ran a small pet shop. He was displaced to Novoluhanske, Bakhmut district, and decided to try beekeeping to provide for his family. The new business turned out to be successful: with 75 beehives Dmytro reached annual honey production of 2.5 tons. Dmytro did not give up even when a shell hit his garage and destroyed some beehives a few years ago (Novoluhanske is close to the contact line).

He used to sell honey and other bee products to his neighbours, as well as through the internet and at the street markets in the nearby towns. With the quarantine, street markets were cancelled, which was a painful shock for Dmytro's business. Some of them recently started reviving, but the sales are still far behind the prequarantine level. Therefore, Dmytro decided to invest more in his side business — a carpentry shop. He started it to have DIY-beehives instead of buying them.



Now, with IOM support, equipment and additional funding received from the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Dmytro will cover his most urgent

expenses and make more beehives for sale. He also plans to start producing furniture to diversify his small business.



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