

# Identification of Victims/ Persons 'At-Risk' of Trafficking in Human Beings



Practical Guide for  
Frontline Responders

## Acknowledgments

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## WHAT is this?

Due to the conflict in Ukraine, large-scale refugee movement of millions of people have taken place into neighbouring countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Most of them are children, many of whom are 'unaccompanied' or 'separated'. The armed conflict is posing severe distress for children, whilst placing both women and children at an increased risk of gender-based violence, abuse, family separation, and exacerbating their vulnerabilities to human trafficking.



This **Practical Guide** is aimed at providing simple guidelines on screening and identification of trafficked victims/ any person who may be 'at-risk' of trafficking. It is however, specifically focused on providing indicators on child trafficking and information on child-friendly communication.

It aims to provide basic information to those most likely to encounter trafficked persons/ those 'at-risk' of trafficking, and help to make the difficult task of identification of Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) cases easier.

It can be used as –

- **A practical tool** with information on what Trafficking in Human Beings is, with a list of indicators, and recommended questions for interviewing trafficked persons/ those 'at-risk' of trafficking.
- **As training material** on identification of trafficked victims/ persons who may be 'at-risk' of trafficking.
- **As a concise guide** for child-friendly communication with practical techniques and facilitators.

## WHO can use this Practical Guide?

This Practical Guide is designed for **Frontline Responders who would most likely come into contact with trafficked persons/ those 'at-risk' of trafficking in their everyday work**. The various stakeholders who are deemed as Frontline Responders for purposes of this Practical Guide are –

- Border and immigration officers;
- Front-line police officials;
- Child protection authorities;
- Social workers;
- Staff of Blue Dots Hubs;
- Other relevant government and non-government service providers.



This Guide makes a distinction between frontline responders (such as, border officials, child protection authorities and any others), who are legally mandated through their national legal frameworks to screen and identify cases of THB, through a formal interviewing process, and those who are not legally mandated (staff of Blue Dots Hubs, social workers and any others). Even without the legal mandate to screen and interview children to identify cases of child trafficking/ children 'at-risk' of trafficking, these frontline responders can utilize information from this **Practical Guide** during their contact with children.

The techniques and facilitators for child-friendly communication suggested in this **Practical Guide**, would be especially helpful for **all frontline responders** to build trust and rapport with children, either during the formal screening and interview process or for other professionals who may be in contact with children while offering them other services.

# PART I: The Identification, Screening and Handling of Human Trafficking Instances

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# 1 What is Human Trafficking?

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**Human Trafficking** is a serious crime and **involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit.** Men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds and income groups can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world. The perpetrators of this crime are called ‘traffickers’ who often use violence, threats, deception, irregular status of migrants and false promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims to engage with them.

**Trafficking in Persons, Trafficking in Human Beings (THB), and Modern Slavery** – are some other names for this crime.

The Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (UNODC, 2020) highlights that migrants make up a significant share of the detected victims in most regions: 65 per cent in Western and Southern Europe and 50 per cent in Central and South-Eastern Europe. The Report further identifies the pre-existing vulnerability factors among the victims that traffickers have taken advantage of globally as – economic need; children with dysfunctional families; children deprived of parental care; immigration status; and others.

More than half of the victims of trafficking in the European Union (EU) are EU citizens, and a significant number of them are trafficked within their own country. However, non-EU victims have increased in recent years and in some EU countries, they outnumber domestic victims and victims with an EU citizenship. The majority of victims in the EU are women and girls who are mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation.



**Around every fifth victim of trafficking in the EU is a child.**

## 2 International and National Legal Framework on THB

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The main international legal instrument on THB is **the United Nations (UN) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children**, that was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000. The UN Trafficking Protocol, which supplements the UN Convention against Transnational

Organized Crime, is the only international legal instrument addressing human trafficking as a crime. The purposes of the Protocol are to prevent and combat trafficking, protect and assist the victims, and promote cooperation among its Member States. The Trafficking Protocol provides the world's first definition of human trafficking, and it requires ratifying States to criminalize such practices.



Also applicable, is the **Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings of 2005** which, in support of the UN Trafficking Protocol, strives to prevent and combat all forms of human trafficking; protect and assist victims and witnesses of trafficking; ensure effective investigation and prosecution; and promote international co-operation against trafficking. In particular, the Convention requires ratifying States to implement national co-ordination measures, awareness raising, measures to identify victims and periods of protection from expulsion for trafficked persons.



# The Three Elements of Trafficking in Human Beings

It is possible to identify a case or incident of human trafficking by establishing if three key elements of the definition (in Article 3 of the Trafficking Protocol and from the national legal framework) are present. The three elements are, **The Act** – what is done, **The Means** – how it is done, and **The Purpose** – why it is done. **Any one** of each of these three elements is sufficient to identify a potential case of THB.

**The Act** – Recruitment or Transportation or Transfer or Harboring or Receipt of Persons.

**The Means** – Threat or Use of Force or Coercion or Abduction or Fraud or Deception or Abuse of Power or Abuse of Position of Vulnerability or Giving or Receiving Payments or Benefits.

**The Purpose** – Exploitation which includes, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, and servitude or the removal of organs.

If **one or more of each element** is present, it is likely that you are dealing with an incident of human trafficking.

During the screening and identification process, it is possible to find those who may already be 'victims' of human trafficking; and those who may be potentially 'at-risk' of trafficking.

**Trafficking of children** - Under international law, a child is a person under the age of 18 years. In child trafficking cases it is not legally required to prove '*the Means*', that is, how it was done, because of a child's particular 'vulnerability'.

The UN Trafficking Protocol states that, "*The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means*" [Article 3 (c)].

**Trafficking of adults** - In some cases of human trafficking, it may be apparent that there was some form of agreement or contract established between the victim and the trafficker, especially during the initial (recruitment) stages of the trafficking process. This consent is irrelevant if the victim was recruited by any of the means set out in the Trafficking Protocol [Article 3 (b)].

## 3 Identifying Human Trafficking

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### 3.1 Chronology of the Identification Process

Victims of trafficking including those ‘at-risk’ of trafficking can be discovered or identified at any stage of the trafficking process, but frontline responders must know what to look for. **It is highly unlikely that a person being trafficked will ‘self-identify’ as a victim. It is therefore, crucial that the signs of trafficking are spotted at the first opportunity.**

Frontline responders may encounter victims or persons ‘at-risk’ of trafficking at various places. Some of these may be premises where victims are likely to be exploited, for example - brothels, massage parlours, bars, factories, agricultural locations, household settings, etc., – where victims may either be visible in plain sight, or may be hidden.

Other places where frontline responders may come across potential cases of THB are –

- border checkpoints;
- immigration counters;
- during routine police activity whilst attending incidents that may not be directly related to trafficking (e.g. stopping people and vehicles to check documents or for general inquiries, reports of public order disturbances, etc.);
- through direct reporting by victims and reporting by other people;
- referrals by NGOs to law enforcement authorities;
- during community policing and community interactions by other frontline responders;
- enquiries into missing children reports;
- within health care settings where victims come/ are brought for medical aid/ treatment;
- in refugee camps and reception centers;
- prisons and detention centers, where victims/ those 'at-risk' of trafficking may be held; despite the legal provisions on the principle of non-punishment\*;
- other places.



## \*Principle of Non-punishment or Non-criminalization

Victims of trafficking are subjected to exploitation in various ways. Sometimes, as a result of their victimization, they engage in illegal conduct. Common examples include involvement in child sexual exploitation activities often referred to as child prostitution,<sup>1</sup> in drug production or trafficking, petty crime, possession or the use of fraudulent documents or entering another country in a manner that does not comply with its immigration laws. In many cases, victims are forced or otherwise compelled by traffickers to commit these crimes or other illegal conduct. This fact is then used by traffickers as a means of maintaining further control over their victims. In some cases, a victim may be unaware that they have broken the law.

### **The non-punishment principle means:**

*Trafficked persons should not be subject to arrest, charge, detention, prosecution, or be penalized or otherwise punished (which also includes, immigration removal or denial of access to benefits) for illegal conduct that they committed as a direct consequence of being trafficked.*

**Article 26 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings** (hereinafter referred to as the European Convention on THB) provides that:

Each Party shall, in accordance with the basic principles of its legal system, provide for the possibility of not imposing penalties on victims for their involvement in unlawful activities, to the extent that they have been compelled to do so.

1 As per the Luxembourg Guidelines, “child prostitution” should be mentioned as “exploitation of children in/ for prostitution!” (Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, 2016)

Frontline responders have an obligation and a unique position to observe and report signs of human trafficking encountered in their daily work. Your role is not to formally identify victims of trafficking but to recognize or spot certain signs that may indicate a potential case, and REFER/ REPORT the case to the relevant authorities or the police.

**The formal identification is the responsibility of the police.**

The chronology of the identification process can be roughly divided into three steps:



**First contact** (which could be at the border by the border officials; or by the frontline police officials during the course of their routine duties; or by any NGO staff in contact with children; or by the government/ NGO service providers whilst providing services to children);



**Initial interview\*** (which should help to ascertain whether a person has been trafficked/ or is 'at-risk' of trafficking);



**Referrals and further steps** (which includes reporting your suspicion through the established formal procedures, and to provide immediate support to the person upon their consent).

\* Frontline responders with a legal mandate to screen and identify cases of THB would conduct a more formal interview with the child (or an adult); whilst the other service providers (for instance, social workers/ staff of Blue Dots, etc.) in contact with children could communicate with children in case they become aware of any red-flags indicating a case of THB/ child 'at-risk' of THB/ child who may have suffered abuse, violence or exploitation. This formal interview/ communication with the child would help to establish the next steps with regard to the child.



## Remember

Informed consent - Reporting and referrals should always be done with the informed consent of all victims (whether adults or children, and especially migrant women and girls due to their enhanced vulnerabilities). Victims of THB are often worried about reporting and referrals to the police, mostly because of their immigration status, fear of deportation, and fear of real and credible reprisals from the traffickers.

The European Convention on THB makes it incumbent upon State Parties to provide in their national laws –

- *A recovery and reflection period of at least 30 days*, when there are reasonable grounds to believe that the person concerned is a victim, to enable the person to recover and escape the influence of traffickers and/or to *take an informed decision on cooperating with the competent authorities*. During this period, the person concerned shall be authorised to stay in the country (Article 13).
- Assistance to such a person/ victim is *not made conditional* on his or her willingness to act as a witness/ cooperate with authorities [Article 12 (6)].

## 3.2 Indicators of Human Trafficking

Steps 1 and 2 could be facilitated with a [Checklist of Indicators of Trafficking in Human Beings](#).

Not all of the given indicators are present or obvious in every case. Equally, each of these indicators on its own does not always equal a trafficking case. It is however, the combination of indicators, which will help determine whether a person has been trafficked or not/ or is 'at-risk' of trafficking.

If you can tick one or more statements in each section, it is reasonable to suspect that this might be a trafficking/ potential trafficking case.



### Remember

Indicators are not proof of trafficking, they are meant to assist in the identification process, but will require further investigation.

They can, however, be used to justify a high probability scenario of a trafficking situation and create a presumption in favor of the victim to improve their access to assistance and protection.

### 3.2.1 General Indicators of Trafficking in Human Beings

This range of general indicators are not exhaustive and there are likely to be other regional and local indicators that can be added in order to refine and improve the identification process.



**Age** - Younger persons (children, adolescents, and young adults) are more likely to be trafficked due to their higher 'demand' for sexual and labour exploitation. Children are particularly vulnerable as they can be more easily deceived/ manipulated and can be exploited in all forms of trafficking.



**Gender** – All people, irrespective of their gender are vulnerable to trafficking. Trafficked victim/ person vulnerable to trafficking could be of any gender, ethnicity, and nationality. Women and young girls are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation.



**Disability, ethnicity, minority group, or sexual orientation** – Along with the personal vulnerability factors of age and gender - disability, ethnicity, belonging to a minority group, or sexual orientation could also be indicators of THB. A personal characteristic should not be understood as a vulnerability in itself, but it may become a vulnerability factor when it interacts with other personal and situational factors, therefore increasing the risk of being trafficked.



**Unaccompanied or separated children** - A child who is not in the overnight care of at least one of their parents, for whatever reason and under whatever circumstances, is referred to as **a child without parental care**. Unaccompanied and separated children both fall into this category. While these terms are often used interchangeably, there is an important distinction to be made between unaccompanied children (who are travelling without their parents or other family members and who are without a caregiver) and separated children (who may be accompanied by a family member or other adult who is caring for them, but who does not necessarily have parental responsibility for them).

An unaccompanied or separated child arriving in the EU or to a non-EU country may be in an informal or formal care arrangement. Even when the person accompanying them is their caregiver, they may not have custodial responsibilities for the child. In this regard, a caregiver may or may not be the child's legal guardian and able to exercise parental responsibility.

Irregular migrant status exacerbates vulnerabilities to trafficking of both adults and children, in transit and destination countries. Unaccompanied, separated, or undocumented children on the move (either leaving their country or trying to enter another country), are at the highest risk of human trafficking, whether during conflict situations, or at other times.



### **Gender-based violence and its intersections with human trafficking**

–There is a strong intersectionality between gender-based violence and human trafficking and its impact on each other. The experiences of violence, abuse, and exploitation within families, such as, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, mental/ physical/ sexual/ emotional/ economic abuse, abuse of children within families, unfounded trust on strangers, unregulated exposure of children and adolescents to the internet and social media platforms are some predominant risk factors that exacerbate vulnerabilities to human trafficking.



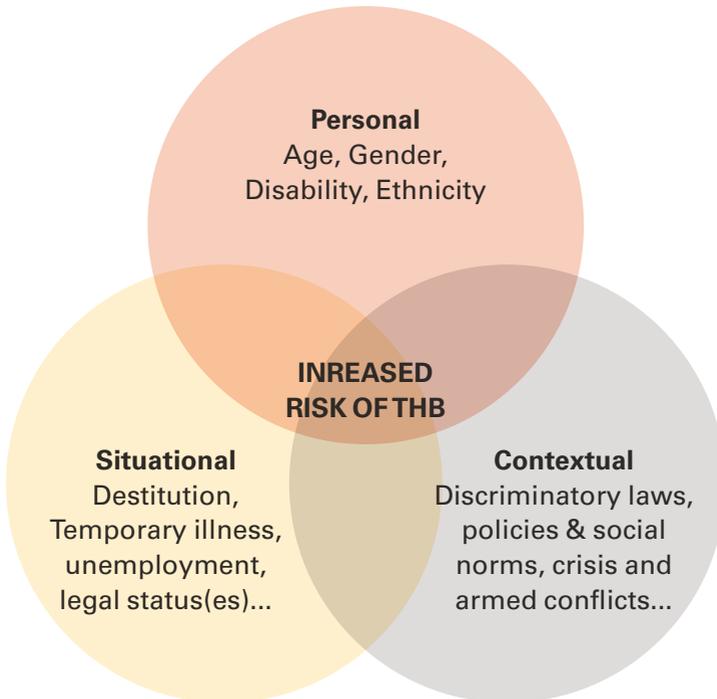
**Behaviour** - Victims of trafficking/ those 'at-risk' of trafficking often share a scripted or inconsistent story, maybe unwilling or hesitant to answer questions or may give ambiguous answers to questions. They may also appear to behave in a suspicious manner, look frightened, aggressive, angry, suspicious or depressed, which may often be a consequence of the trauma due to the exploitation and violence suffered by them.



## Remember

Sometimes victims (both children and adults) who were already in situations of exploitation may not exhibit either of the behaviours outlined above, as they may have been tutored by their traffickers. It is important to remember and recognize the inter-personal power dynamics between victims and traffickers for purposes of correctly identifying them. This could challenge assumptions/ stereotypes that the first responders may hold about how victims should be/ behave. Regardless of such assumptions, first responders should apply all the principles mentioned hereunder.

**Figure: Intersection of vulnerability factors to increase risk of THB<sup>2</sup>**



<sup>2</sup> Source: Addressing Vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons; Issue Brief 12/ 2022; The Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons

## 3.2.2 Specific Indicators of Trafficking in Children

### Special Indicators for Border Police (and other relevant stakeholders) that a child may have been trafficked/ 'at-risk' of being trafficked<sup>3</sup>

1. The child does not appear to be the age given in the passport (i.e., appears older or younger);
2. The child says she or he has a different name or other personal details to those in the passport;
3. A child is unaccompanied and is not participating in a group visit organized by a recognized school, church or sporting organization;
4. When asked whether she or he is being met on arrival, the child says she or he has to make a telephone call;
5. A child is unable to produce their passport;
6. The child is 'unaccompanied' or 'separated';
7. The child looks intimidated and behaves in a way that does not correspond with behaviour typical of children their age;
8. Claim made by an adult that he or she has "found" an unaccompanied child;
9. Child presenting the accompanying adult as a relative different than his/ her parents (uncle, cousin, etc.);
10. Infants found with people of other nationalities indicating illegal adoptions/ trafficking.



<sup>3</sup> Reference guide on protecting the rights of child victims of trafficking in Europe; UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS, Geneva; 2006

### 3.3 Some specific indicators and guiding questions for all frontline responders<sup>4</sup>

Recruitment and Migration Experience – Indicators	Some Guiding Questions
<input type="checkbox"/> Come from a place known to be a source of human trafficking	→ Why and how did you leave your country/ home?
<input type="checkbox"/> Inconsistencies in the description of the migratory journey, blanks in the story, lack of awareness of the travel route from place of origin to destination	→ What happened since you left your country/ home?
<input type="checkbox"/> Changing her/his migration story, evasiveness, denial, minimizing the situation, telling exactly the same story as other migrants from the same area	→ What other countries did you cross before arriving here?
<input type="checkbox"/> If traveling as a part of group, do not appear to know the other members of the group	→ Did you choose/ know your destination?
<input type="checkbox"/> Not knowing what country, they are in	→ How did you get to this country/ place?
<input type="checkbox"/> Has unrealistic or false expectations about life in the country of destination, has been deceived by false promises	→ Has anyone taken and kept your personal documents such as I.D. card or passport?
<input type="checkbox"/> Have had the fees for their transport to the country of destination paid for by traffickers, whom they must pay back by working or providing services in the destination	→ How did you pay for the travel costs? → Did you or someone else arranged your travel?
<input type="checkbox"/> A person presenting another person’s identity and travel documentation at a border crossing or other checkpoint	→ What did you expect before you came here?
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of documentation or travel documents on a suspected victim and fraudulent identity or travel documentation	→ What were the promises made to you about your living conditions or about a job here?
<input type="checkbox"/> The claim made by an adult that he or she has “found” an unaccompanied child OR Child presenting the accompanying adult as a relative different than his/ her parents (uncle, cousine, etc.)	

4 The Indicators pertain to Acts and the Means from the definition of THB.

Means of Control used by Traffickers - Indicators	Guiding Questions
<input type="checkbox"/> Always accompanied by a person or a group, reluctant to one-to-one interviews (for minors, permanent accompaniment by adults and prohibition to speak to unknown adults)	→ Were you forced by someone to perform certain tasks or offer services against your will?
<input type="checkbox"/> Signs of control by another person (limited freedom of movement, someone else possesses the person's personal documents or s/he has been given false documents)	→ Has anyone threatened you or your family if you try to leave or if you disclose about your work?
<input type="checkbox"/> It seems that the person previously received instructions on what to say	→ Have you been injured in any way?
<input type="checkbox"/> Cannot speak alone and freely, always is accompanied by someone who speaks on their behalf	→ Do you have access to the money you earn? → Is it used to repay a debt?
<input type="checkbox"/> Show fear or anxiety / Shows signs that her/his movements are being watched, constantly looks at someone who seems to be watching her/him	→ Do you have a mobile phone? Who has bought the SIM card? Can you change the SIM card whenever you want?
<input type="checkbox"/> Be unfamiliar with the local language	→ Are you allowed to go out by yourself or talk to other persons? If yes, are there any conditions?
<input type="checkbox"/> Signs of visible injuries (bruises, cuts, burns, specific tattoos, work related injuries etc.) without previous access to medical care to treat them, reluctant or unable to explain how s/he had been hurt	→ Can other people visit your workplace or is the access restricted?
<input type="checkbox"/> Isolation, confinement or surveillance	→ Are the doors and windows locked so you are unable to leave by yourself from the place you work/live?
<input type="checkbox"/> Threat of denunciation to authorities /Threats to inform family, community or public	→ Are you hosted by someone? If yes, are there any conditions? Have you been deprived of food, water, or sleep? Do you have to ask for permission to eat, drink, sleep or go to the bathroom?
<input type="checkbox"/> Have no access to their earnings	

## 4 Initial Screening Interview OR Communication

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The purpose of the initial screening interview/ communication in human trafficking cases, is to identify if there are any reasonable grounds to suspect that a person has or is being trafficked. It is likely that the decision to conduct a screening interview by legally mandated frontline responders has been taken as a result of some indicators of trafficking already being identified.

Initial screening interviews or interactions are limited in nature and therefore, should be conducted as a 'managed conversation' using open questions; i.e. 5WH - *Who, What, Where, When, Why* and *How*, allowing the person to provide a free narrative of their situation.

Simple techniques and facilitators for Child-Friendly Communication are provided in **Part II** of this **Practical Guide**.

### Before the Interview/ Communication

The information on preparatory steps before a formal screening interview or an interaction with a child/ adult could be used by all frontline responders, as deemed appropriate/ relevant.

- Ensure the interview/ interaction will be conducted in a safe and quiet space. Take the person to a place of safety and put them at ease.
- Set a supportive tone for the interview at the outset, which will be instrumental in rapport building with the person.
- Find out whether the person to be interviewed has a preference to speak with a frontline responder of their own gender.
- Ensure a verified interpreter is available, if needed.
- Seek assistance from a counsellor/ child protection specialist trained in child-friendly communication, if required.

- Clearly and simply introduce yourself and explain your organization's role.
- Provide an opportunity for the interviewee to ask questions before the interview starts.
- Explain basic confidentiality principles.
- Respond to immediate needs (i.e., emergency medical, physiological and psychological needs).
- Be aware that victims of trafficking may be traumatised by their exploitation, which may impact their responses during the interview. Ensure that questions are framed in a trauma-informed, child-friendly language so that the person feels supported. Avoid using jargon, complex language, abstract language or language that may be perceived as attributing blame to the person for their actions/ decisions, or their inability to recall events/ provide clear answers to the interview questions.
- Separate victims/ people 'at-risk' from possible traffickers to speak in private (separating the potential victim from the possible traffickers is necessary because the former will not speak openly in front of the latter due to threat or coercion or other factors).

### During the Interview/ Communication

- Establish trust and rapport as soon as possible.
- The identification questioning should be confined to and included in the interview.
- Initial questions should establish the child's biographical data (name, age, date of birth, address)
- Gather information about different elements of human trafficking (act, means, purpose).
- Take clear and detailed notes on names, address, phone numbers, nationalities, transportation, accompanying person, etc.
- Make notes of body language, or non-verbal communication of person being interviewed.
- Use the indicator list above to guide your interview (see list above).
- The child should only be interviewed once.



## 5 Referrals and Further Steps

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### Remember

As a frontline professional, your role is **not to determine** whether a person is a victim of human trafficking. Your role is to **report your suspicion** (with the informed consent of the person) through the established procedures and to provide support to the individual upon their consent.



### DO's

- ✔ Follow internal procedures for your organization and in accordance with local laws (i.e., inform your manager/ human trafficking focal point).
- ✔ Provide the person with as much information as possible about any next steps. In case of children, provide age-appropriate information in a child-friendly language.
- ✔ Ensure the person has an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on the interview process.
- ✔ Inform the person of her/ his rights (especially about the recovery and reflection period, and the non-punishment principle) and explain about other services that can provide relevant support.
- ✔ Refer the child (unaccompanied, separated, or with any member of the family) as per the local laws to the relevant child protection authorities (including refugee or migrant centres, Blue Dots Hubs, safe homes, any others) for further care and necessary steps.

- ✔ Arrange contact for adult victims of trafficking/ persons 'at-risk' of trafficking with their consent, with local assistance service providers.
- ✔ Follow SOPs, National Referral Mechanism or any other guidance on making contact with victim support services.

## **DON'T's**

- ✘ Use unofficial or non-vetted interpreters, as they may have a different agenda.
- ✘ Treat identified victims or people 'at-risk' of THB, as suspects or immigration offenders.
- ✘ Expect identified victims people 'at-risk' of THB to have access to their identity or travel documents.
- ✘ Assume that all documents produced are genuine – check!
- ✘ Expect identified victims to disclose immediately. Some victims/ persons may not know they have been trafficked/ or are being trafficked; some may have been told to lie; and some victims may not disclose as they are still in fear of their traffickers and any threats received.
- ✘ Blame an identified victim if they have been complicit in part of their circumstances.

## 6 Useful Resources

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**116 111** is the child helpline number currently operating in 23 out of 27 European Union Member States, and additionally in 7 other European States. More information on this number, and which countries use it, can be found here: <https://childhelplineinternational.org/helplines/116-111-eu/>

Some countries may have dedicated hotlines for reporting suspected cases of trafficking in human beings and for assistance to victims. Countries in the European Union can refer to this website for further information: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/national-hotlines\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/national-hotlines_en)

## PART II: Child Friendly Communication in Instances of Human Trafficking

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## 7 Techniques and Facilitators for Child Friendly Communication

### 7.1 Significance and challenges of communicating with children

The range of symptoms that may be exhibited by traumatised child victims of trafficking/ other forms of abuse, violence and exploitation, has very serious implications for the ability of all frontline responders to accurately identify trafficked victims and to communicate with them. It is challenging to conduct a formal interview/ communicate with child trafficked victims who are likely to be:



- Distrustful, fearful, sceptical, and suspicious of the interviewer, and possibly even hostile towards them;
- Traumatized, which may exacerbate these reactions;
- Unpredictable;
- Talking about events that are both intensely personal and painful, which may involve a significant risk of further trauma.

On the other hand, frontline responders will have to deal with cases of children who have not yet been trafficked, but who may be very vulnerable and 'at-risk' of trafficking, and who would therefore, be completely unaware of their situation.

## 7.2 Basic Principles of Child Friendly Communication

→ The “**best interest of the child**”

shall remain the paramount consideration at all times.

The ‘best interest’ of the child means that when adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. It is the responsibility of all stakeholders, both from the government and non-government, to make sure that children are protected, when it is needed. Children also have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them.



→ Adopting a “**child-sensitive approach**” which balances a child’s right to protection and that takes into account the special needs, views and concerns of an individual child victim/ child ‘at-risk’ of trafficking.



### Remember

Follow a ‘Victim-centric Approach’ with:

- Systematic focus on the **needs and concerns** of a victim.
- Ensuring a **sensitive** dealing with them in a **non-judgmental** manner.
- Minimizing further **trauma** associated with the identification process.



## 7.3 Facilitators to Child-Friendly Communication



### What questions to ask?

- There are no magic questions – it’s not primarily in the wording, it’s in the situation. Use a simple language: use fewer words, avoid multiple questions, avoid suggestions. Open invitations generally provide more detailed responses than closed or specific questions.
- Examples of open invitations:
  - Tell me /about.../
  - Say more /about that/
  - Go on...
  - Explain...
  - Can you describe...

### Understand the situation

- Imagine yourself in the child’s position – stand in their shoes
- What might prevent them from talking to you? (obstacles)
- Can you remove immediate obstacles? For example, separate the child from the possible perpetrator before talking to the child
- Accommodate the preference of the child to be interviewed/ to speak with a frontline responder of their own gender

# Five steps that may facilitate communication with children

## 1. Take a breath

Why is this important? → Self awareness

- a. You need to manage your own stress levels in order to be able to support the child
- b. Stress affects your abilities to perceive, to take in and to process information, to plan and to remember. Stress also impacts your ability to make decisions. It impairs your social ability and your ability to keep focus on the assignment
- c. When in distress you also lose empathy and facial expressions become flatter; less vivid

## 2. Squat down

Why is this important? → Balance of power

- a. Understand that you might be perceived as the threat
- b. How can you level out power? Use your body language, positioning, tone of voice
- c. You can actually squat down, but it can also be an internal image. Try to find alternative ways to give the child a sense of control over something. Offer them a simple decision: "Is it OK with you to sit here, or would you like to walk a bit?"

## 3. Ask what they need (or anticipate it)

Why is this important? → Obstacles, control

- a. If the child gets to ask questions and gets information the sense of control increases and the level of stress decreases. While in distress the child won't be able to process what you say
- b. Motivation is the key. Stand in their shoes! The first thing you need to do is to solve questions or issues that might obstruct the child's ability to talk to you
- c. Answer questions, stick to the truth. If you don't know you don't. If you know how to find out, try to do that

Anticipating needs: These seven questions are a way for you to anticipate children's need for control, order & safety. Fill in the blanks about these things. You can provide this information even if the child hasn't asked you:

1. What is going to happen? (What am I going to do?)
2. Where will I be?
3. Who is going to be with me?
4. For how long am I going to do this?
5. What will happen afterwards?
6. What do I need to bring?
7. Why shall I do this?

#### 4. Wait

Why is this important? → Gain time by spending time!

- a. Waiting attentively communicates genuine interest, it helps to establish rapport
- b. Don't interrupt
- c. Ask one thing at a time - then wait for the answer
- d. It may be useful to reflect back what the child is saying

#### 5. Be gentle

Why is this important? → Establish rapport

- a. Use verbal emotional support. Reassure, normalise. Show that you care.
  - i. "You have done nothing wrong"
  - ii. "I want to help"
  - iii. "What are you thinking right now?"
  - iv. "I imagine this must be hard"
  - v. "What might happen to some children is..."
- b. Ask nothing in return – rejection is not proof that your support was in vain



## Remember

- Never promise anything that cannot be delivered/ provided either immediately or in due course without following the due process and legal procedures (for example, “I will send you home right now”; or “The person who caused you harm will be sent to prison” etc.).
- Ensure that the interview ends appropriately and not terminated abruptly. Communicate with the child on the next steps and what happens from hereon.

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**Practical Guide for  
Frontline Responders**