



# Operational guidance to detect possible cases of forced labour or trafficking in persons

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Task Force for Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Labour in Supply Chains

ILO, UNOPS, OSCE, ICAO, IOM, UNDP, UN/EOS, UNFPA, UNGM, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, UN/PD, UNRWA, UNWOMEN, WFP, World Bank Group.

# Key Information

There are many different forms of forced labour and trafficking in persons and many different ways people are affected by it. However, there are some common features or indicators that can serve as “red flags”. However, no one indicator can confirm or discount that a person has been trafficked or is in a situation of forced labour.

Some of these may be observed visually, whereas others may only become clear through if/ when you interact more closely with individuals who are in situations of forced labour or trafficking in persons, such as through conversations. Depending on your role, you may or may not be in a position to observe/ gather information across the areas listed below. Consider what’s appropriate and relevant, according to your role and its limitations and seek advice where needed, including from counter-trafficking/protection focal point in your organization (if available).

“If you spot some of the following signs, it does not mean automatically that the person is in forced labour or has been trafficked. However, if you have concerns that someone might be in a situation of trafficking or forced labour, you can consider doing the following, if it is safe to do so:

- Share details with them of where they can seek help and/or where they can report the case;
- Reporting the case to the relevant authorities.

Any decision to report the case should observe the 'do no harm principle' and respect the privacy, confidentiality, safety and informed consent of the alleged victim, as well as taking into consideration any applicable mandatory reporting requirements, according to national context.”.

**Always proceed with care** when interacting with/ asking questions to individuals who may have been trafficked or be in situation of forced labour. This is to ensure that these interactions don’t cause harm or put the individual, or yourself, at risk.

Being prepared ahead of time, and pre-empting potential risks, and what to do if they occur (i.e. preparing referral information, including contacts of specialized actors/service providers available in relevant location), is essential. You can do this by finding out:

- What the most common kinds of trafficking and forced labour are where you are located, and if there are any new or emerging trends or sectors of work that are affected. Useful resources to that aim include: [Forced Labour Observatory](#); [ILO Global Business on Forced Labour](#).
- What systems are in place to protect and assist victims of trafficking/ forced labour, as well as their limitations, and what the main contact points are (this could be social services, victim support units, UN actors, NGOs among others);
- Who is the best person/ organization to contact if you need to refer potential victims (find a way to discreetly share this information if needed - i.e. using contact cards, or displaying helpline numbers);
- Who to contact in case of emergency, i.e. first-line responders.

## Important principles:

- **Do no harm:** always keep this in mind during any interaction that has the potential to affect someone who has been trafficked or in a situation of forced labour. Keep their needs at the centre of all actions (victim-centered approach). Do not ask questions that have the potential to cause harm and pick up on non-verbal cues, such as anxiety, anger, or signs of trauma.
- **Always provide a clear explanation of what information you are asking for, why you are asking, and what it will be used for.** Check if they have any questions and seek informed consent before proceeding.
- **Follow a non-judgemental and non-discriminatory approach** at all times and recognise that the experiences and needs of each individual may differ (no one-size-fits-all – consider age, gender and other factors).
- **Respect privacy and confidentiality,** and only share information on a need-to-know basis.
- **Put in place special measures for any interactions or concerns involving children,** including through involving of child protection authorities/ specialists. If you need to use an interpreter at any time, make sure they are trusted and bound by confidentiality).
- **Be perceptive** when having in-person interactions: look out for facial expressions and body language, and the tone of what is being said. Sometimes what a person does or the way something is said is a better indicator of what they are trying to communicate than the words that are used.

## Indicators Based on a Victim's Appearance

### Individual indicators of physical or sexual violence

- Wounds, bruises, burns or broken bones
- Suffer injuries that appear to be the result of an assault or typical of certain tasks or control measures
- Malnutrition or poor personal hygiene
- Emotional stress or psychological manifestations of trauma such as depression, anxiety, inability to speak, catatonic state, incessant crying, fear
- The individual is prevented from speaking for themselves
- Untreated illness or infections
- Signs of sexual assault
- Have no access to medical care
- Ragged or inadequate clothing
- Signs of forced abortion
- They display fear of the person accompanying them and/or of the authorities or employer
- Use of drugs or drug addiction

## Circumstantial indicators based on the premises where victims reside or work

These are mainly observed visually (may or may not be clearly visible)

### Indicators of bad / abusive working or living conditions

- ▶ Be found in or connected to a type of location could be used for exploiting people (e.g. factory, construction site, agricultural setting, hotels etc)
- ▶ Degrading, substandard or hazardous working or living conditions, including:
  - Lack of running water
  - Lack of adequate sleeping conditions
  - Inhuman or degrading accommodation
  - Lack of proper ventilation
  - Lack of protection against the elements
  - Lack of electricity or exposed electrical wires
  - Lack of basic safety equipment
  - Infested work or living quarters
  - Lack of heating or cooling apparatus
  - Dangerous conditions

### Indicators of restriction of movement

These may be observed visually (may or may not be clearly visible) or through interaction (i.e. conversation, interview, other)

- Show signs that their movements are being controlled at work, or when being transported to/from work, and/or during recruitment: curfew, locked work premises or accommodation;
- Time away from the workplace is restricted/ timed/monitored;
- Security measures (i.e. cameras, guards, dogs) disproportionate to the setting.

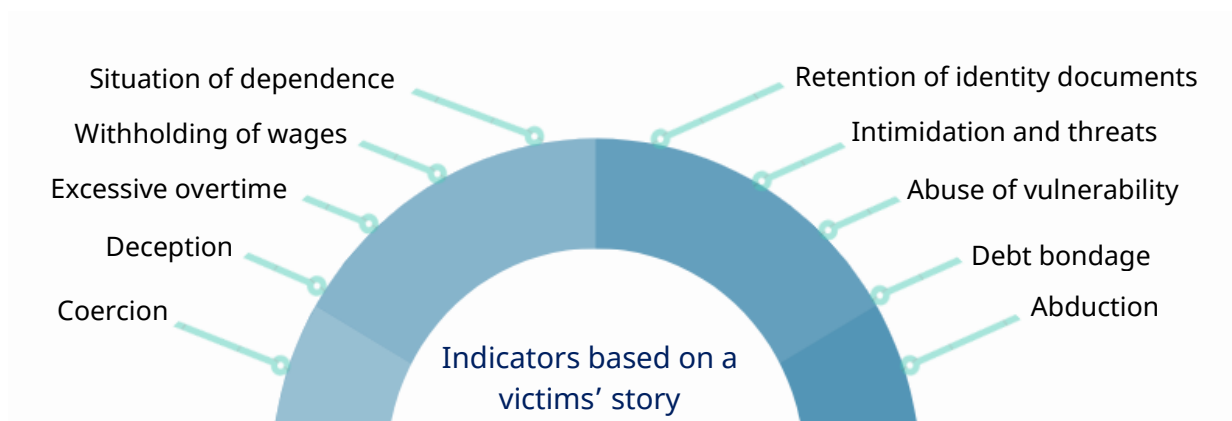
### Isolation

These may only be apparent through interaction (i.e. conversation, interview, other)

- Be unfamiliar with the local language;
- Not know their home or work address;
- Have limited or no social interaction;
- Communication is limited or monitored.

## Indicators based on a victims' story

These may only be apparent through interaction (i.e. conversation, interview, other)



### Deception

- Deceiving the person with regard to nature of work, conditions of work or payment
- False promises about nature of work, working or living conditions, housing, wages, education, regular status, for example

### Abduction

- The person was abducted

### Intimidation and threats

- The individual has been subjected to violence or threats of violence against themselves or against their family members and loved ones
- They have faced threats of withholding payment, of deportation, of arrest, of witchcraft, magic or juju
- Violence used against them as a disciplinary or controlling measure
- They are unable to negotiate working conditions
- Ignorance of their own rights
- Psychological violence such as constant humiliation and undermining

### Abuse of vulnerability

- Employer/ trafficker takes advantage of a person's vulnerable position (these vulnerabilities may pre-exist the trafficking/ forced labour situation, or be caused as a result of it):
  - Personal vulnerability such as physical or mental disability, pregnancy, childhood, age, or family circumstances
  - Situational vulnerability for instance in the case of irregular migrant workers, lack of documentation
  - Circumstantial vulnerability, such as lack of access to education, employment or basic services (including social protection), for instance

### **Coercion**

- An individual is working against their will
- A person is forced to use drugs or other substances, causing them to become addicted, as a means of control
- Forcing the person to commit criminal acts

### **Retention of identity documents**

- A person's personal documents, such as passports or ID documents, are confiscated or not freely available to them

### **Withholding of wages**

- Wages systematically and deliberately withheld as a means to compel the workers to remain working and prevent them from leaving for another employer or to return home (in case of migrant workers)
- Due wages
- Repeated deductions
- Significant portion of the salary paid in kind
- Double accounting system
- Personnel of the company that has a contract with UN is asking to be paid directly by UN instead of through the company

### **Debt bondage**

- Manipulation of debt: falsified account, extremely high interest rates
- Terms of repayment are not clear
- Recruitment fees charged to the workers
- Inflated prices for food, housing, work equipment, ... from a sole provider

### **Excessive overtime**

- Overtime above national limit
- Paid on a piece rate with impossible production targets
- Forced to do overtime to reach minimum wage
- Sanctions if refuse to do overtime (blacklisted)
- Work on call, 24 hours a day without breaks or days off

### **Situation of dependence**

- Be in a situation of dependence

Multi-dependence: Depend on the employer not only for work but also for accommodation, food, clothes, etc. or other family members depend on the same employ

# Useful references

## **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**

**Website:** [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime \(unodc.org\)](https://www.unodc.org)

- UNODC - Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling
- UNVTF ([unodc.org](https://www.unodc.org))
- Human\_Trafficking\_8\_Indicators\_of\_human\_trafficking.pdf ([unodc.org](https://www.unodc.org))

## **International Labour Organization (ILO)**

**Website:** [ILO Homepage](https://www.ilo.org) | [International Labour Organization](https://www.ilo.org)

- Hard to see, harder to count: Handbook on forced labour surveys | International Labour Organization ([ilo.org](https://www.ilo.org))
- Forced Labour Observatory (country profiles)
- ILO Global Business on Forced Labour
- ILO E-learning tool on Forced Labour
- ILO Indicators of Forced Labour
- ILO Profits and Poverty: the Economics of Forced Labour
- ILO Topic portal on Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Trafficking in persons

## **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

**Website:** [International Organization for Migration](https://www.iom.int) | [IOM, UN Migration](https://www.iom.int)

- Labour Migration Process Mapping Guide: Understanding and Assessing Human and Labour Rights Risks to Migrant Workers During Recruitment, Employment and Return | MBHR Asia ([iom.int](https://www.iom.int))
- IOM Case Management Guidelines (2023)
- IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance of Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse (2019)
- IOM Guidance on Referral Mechanisms (2019)
- IOM Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking (2007)
- IOM Caring for Trafficked Persons, Guidance for Health Providers (2009)

## **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

**Website:** [UN Human Rights Office \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org)

- OHCHR Human Rights and Human Trafficking (2014)
- OHCHR Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking

## **World Health Organization (WHO)**

**Website:** [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](https://www.who.org)

- WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for interviewing Trafficked Women

## **The Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT)**

**Website:** [The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org)