REGIONAL MAPPING OF TRAFFICKING AND VULNERABLE MIGRANTS' ROUTES:
COLLECTIVE CSO DATA ON MIGRATION JOURNEYS IN CENTRAL ASIA

2023

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Foreword

The Safe Migration in Central Asia Project (SMICA) is a five-year program funded by USAID and implemented by Winrock International (WI). The project aims to increase the capacity of all stakeholders to meet their mutual responsibilities, so they are more self-reliant in their efforts to prevent human trafficking and forced labour, protect victims of human trafficking (VoTs), and promote safe migration. SMICA supports the strengthening of bilateral and multilateral country strategies and actions to promote human rights-based migration, counter human trafficking and forced labour; reduce the vulnerability of at-risk groups to all forms of human trafficking and forced labour; and expand and improve the identification and assistance of victims of trafficking. The project is being implemented in four Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

USAID Asia CTIP is a multi-year program funded by USAID and implemented by WI. The program is a regional activity that focuses on transnational and regional challenges to combat human trafficking. The program aims to reduce the trafficking of persons in Asia through coordinated and consolidated action by governments, civil society and business that will foster cross-border cooperation, develop opportunities for private-sector leadership, and improve the quality of data associated with human trafficking.

Supported by Freedom Collaborative

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About the contributors

- Daris, Kazakhstan

Established in 2013, NGO Daris provides social services to vulnerable categories of people, including migrants, victims of human trafficking and domestic violence, women and children facing difficult life situations, and others. The group has focused on migration and CTIP since 2016, and more than 1,000 vulnerable migrants and 100 victims of human trafficking have received consultations, and humanitarian, legal and psychological support. Daris has implemented more than 20 CTIP projects, protecting the rights and interests of migrant workers and their families in Aktobe and the Aktobe Region of Kazakhstan, with the support of IOM, the U.S. Embassy, the U.S. Department of State, OSCE, and other organizations. Thanks to multi-year cooperation with state bodies and NGO partners, Daris is able to effectively solve issues and address challenges.

- Meierim, Kazakhstan

Established in 2004, Meierim, a public foundation, has been engaged in the promotion of migrants' rights and the protection of victims of trafficking. Since its launch, it has implemented 12 projects including information campaigns and migrant support programs. Meierim works cooperatively with state departments, law enforcement, local authorities, and regional education and health departments.

- Mehrjon, The Center for Social-Legal Support for Women and Children, Uzbekistan

Mehrjon is registered in Uzbekistan and aims to improve the socio-economic situation and protect the interests of women and children, enhancing their civic position, and developing their abilities and opportunities to lead an independent life in a safe environment. As part of its activities, the organization has implemented more than 22 projects. Of these, 16 were aimed at improving the population's literacy and the situation of its most vulnerable groups.

- Rodnik, Kazakhstan

Since 2001, public foundation Rodnik has engaged in protecting and promoting the rights of vulnerable people, including migrants and victims of human trafficking. The organization has implemented around 25 human rights projects, and has operated a TIP hotline for the past 15 years. Rodnik works in conjunction with local authorities in Almaty, Kazakhstan (Departments of Police, Health, Social Welfare, and the Commission on Women and Family Issues), and it has a wide range of experience in conducting information campaigns, roundtables, and public hearings, and cooperating with the media. It has actively partnered with youth, universities, social workers, law enforcement, prosecutors' offices, judges, and others.

- Oasis, Kyrgyzstan

In line with its mission statement – "Transformation of vulnerable communities through education and opportunities" – public charitable foundation Oasis has been promoting the creation of inclusive communities in Kyrgyzstan since 2008, supporting segments of society excluded from social and democratic processes. Oasis works with the most vulnerable children and youth (care leavers, children in conflict with the law, victims of violence and trafficking) to provide alternative support through education, opportunities, socialization and rehabilitation programs.

- Aimira, Kyrgyzstan

The main mission of Aimira, a public fund, is to facilitate assistance to low-income and disadvantaged families, disabled children and their families, people with disabilities, rural women and girls, migrants and their families, victims of human trafficking, and vulnerable migrants. Amira helps create and operate communal and social infrastructure for villages, aimed at improving the lives of the rural population. Since 2000, Aimira has been working closely with groups of people in their communities, with a focus on women, youth, and other vulnerable segments of the population.

- Istiqlol Avlodi, Uzbekistan

The activities of NGO Istiqlol Avlodi are directed at the eradication of human trafficking and violence in society. The center was registered in 2003 (and re-registered in 2014) and, since then, has been a member of the Central Asian Anti-Trafficking Network and the Central Asian Network on CTIP . Nazifa Kamalova, Istiqlol Avlodi's chairperson, is a member of the National Commission on CTIP and Forced Labor under the Senate of Uzbekistan, while its legal adviser and director are members of territorial sub-commissions on CTIP.

- Dap-Dessur, Turkmenistan

Dap-Dessur, an economic society, was established in July 2009 and developed and implemented more than 35 projects in various areas in the following four years, funded by the U.S. Embassy, IOM, and other organizations. The projects aimed to solve and assist with urgent problems in the region, and included social assistance for vulnerable populations, assistance to victims of human trafficking and potential migrants, the opening of resource centers, business start-up assistance for trafficking victims and migrants, consultation on legal and social issues, and the organization of charity events and assistance campaigns, among others.

INTRODUCTION

The countries of Central Asia are characterized by high migration activity, with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees traveling both within the region and across its borders. However, information on migration and exploitation in the area remains scarce, and there tends to be less focus on Central Asia than on other areas in discussions of global anti-trafficking and protection efforts.

Civil society plays a key role in protecting and upholding the rights of vulnerable migrants in the region, promoting safe migration and countering human trafficking. Civil society organizations (CSOs) also advocate for Central Asian governments to strengthen relevant legislation and improve the policy response, in order to more effectively prevent the exploitation of at-risk populations and ensure adequate implementation of protection interventions. However, CSOs in the region face a myriad of challenges in the course of their work, including lack of access to relevant information and data that could support them in meeting the needs of the communities they serve, and allow them to be more effective actors for change. While CSOs are experts in the realities on the ground, there are few mechanisms they can use to share and analyze this information in a way that could allow for strategic decision-making and the strengthening of advocacy efforts.

Safe Migration in Central Asia (SMICA) is a five-year project implemented by Winrock International in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It uses evidence-based practices and cross-border connections to strengthen the mutual accountability and effectiveness of governments, NGOs and the private sector to prevent trafficking in persons, protect survivors, and promote safe migration, as part of USAID's Asia-wide suite of counter-trafficking interventions.

Likewise, Freedom Collaborative is committed to enhancing the ability of CSOs to effectively implement activities and initiatives, while building a collective understanding of human trafficking and exploitation globally. By providing frontline partners with accessible data collection and analysis tools, Freedom Collaborative brings together datasets on

exploitation activity, contextual factors, and the existing response landscape. Together, Freedom Collaborative and Winrock International have worked with CSOs in Asia since 2017, to collect and share comprehensive data on human trafficking and risky migration routes relating to their countries. This report is the first to involve CSOs from Central Asia, and is designed to fill a critical data gap on the global victim journey map.

The analysis not only provides an overview of the locations of origin, transit points and destinations of migrants from the region, but also gives insights into migration drivers and vulnerability factors, as well as details on the modi operandi used to facilitate their journeys. It also details their exploitation experiences, including cases of abuse and missing migrants.

The following chapters break down these data insights on routes and contextual factors for cases submitted by the participating CSOs, including demographics, risk factors, the facilitators involved, and payments, and the abuse and exploitation experienced in these cases. Finally, it showcases data collected on missing migrants and the responses to this.

The commitment and support of the participating CSOs in this initiative is tremendously encouraging as it highlights a willingness to work across organizations and countries for a common goal. Together, CSOs have made a great step forward in increasing access to ground truth that can inform operational, tactical, and strategic decisions by relevant actors to strengthen the protection of vulnerable migrants across the region and beyond. Even though the dataset cannot show a complete picture, the available information still highlights potential trends and patterns, and increases shared knowledge on these complex issues with the potential to improve our collective efforts to address unsafe migration and human trafficking.

METHODOLOGY

In addition to the collective data gathered by CSOs, Freedom Collaborative collected contextual data relating to cases of human trafficking and vulnerable migrants in the region. The data collection instrument used includes data points which relate to the three key elements of trafficking (act, means and purpose), plus other information that helps us understand the context of experiences along specific routes.

To collect the data for this report, Freedom Collaborative worked closely with the USAID Safe Migration In Central Asia Project, and participating CSOs, to adapt its Victim Journey Tracker tool for their data needs and the regional context. The CSOs provided information on specific data points that help build up a detailed understanding of the journeys and experiences of vulnerable migrants from the region and that are most useful to support their programmatic and advocacy activities.

For each submission, the organizations indicated the source of information – 34 submissions relate to cases of human trafficking, and 13 submissions relate to cases of vulnerable migrants to whom the organizations provided support.

All the data relates to cases that the participating CSOs worked on during 2022 and includes route location information (origin, transit, destination) as the primary unit of analysis, plus other information that guides our understanding of the context of migrants' experiences on specific journeys.

The CSOs added details on the following data points:

- Gender of the client
- Adult or minor client
- Nationality of the client
- Vulnerability factors
- Year that the client took the route
- Recruitment channels
- One vs. multiple facilitators
- Relationship to first facilitator/trafficker
- Solo travel vs. group travel
- Transportation modes
- Duration of the journey
- Payment and payment methods
- Industry of exploitation (if VoT)
- Means of coercion (if VoT)
- Assistance received before CSO intervention (if vulnerable migrant)
- Any additional details or background information

The following chapters provide an overview of the collected data on movement as it relates to the countries in the region. The information also highlights contextual trends and patterns of migration within and from Central Asia.

DATA SUMMARY

Together, the eight organizations contributed 47 submissions pertaining to routes which relate to cases from the beginning of 2022 onwards. Ten countries of origin and ten destination countries were identified, while eight countries were mentioned as transit locations.

The following were the most reported international origin and destination combinations:

- Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan (6 submissions)
- Tajikistan to Kazakhstan (3 submissions)
- Kyrgyzstan to Russia (3 submissions)
- Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan (transit) to Uzbekistan (2 submissions)
- Uzbekistan to Russia (transit) to Turkey (2 submissions)
- Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan (2 submissions)

In addition, three submissions each were made for internal migration and trafficking within Kazakhstan and Turkey. The map below displays all the routes identified based on submissions by the contributing CSOs.

Location totals

- outgoing ≅ incoming
- more outgoing
- more incoming
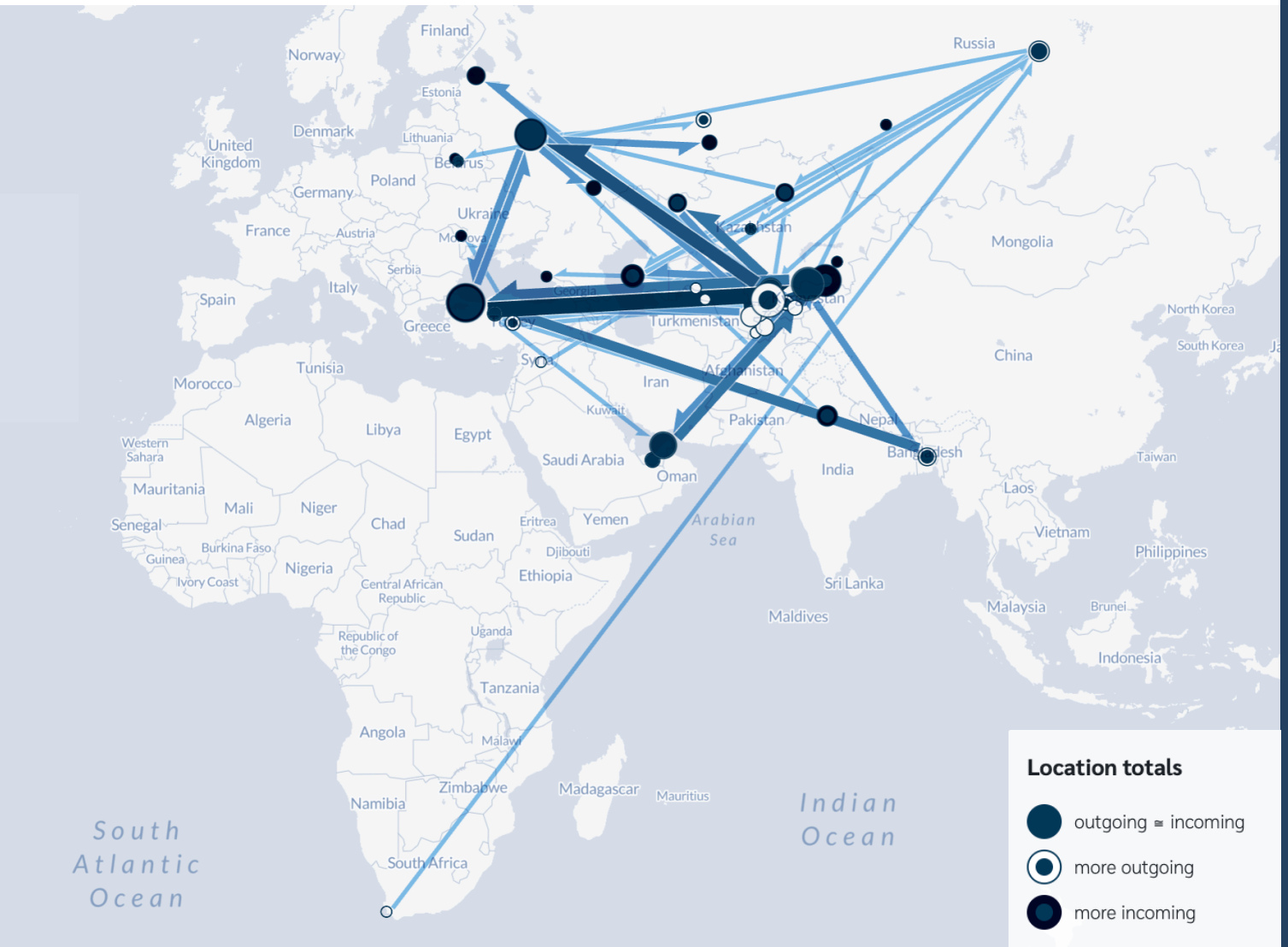
COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN, TRANSIT AND DESTINATION

The illustrations below provide an overview of the countries of origin, transit and destination identified through the data submissions.

The 10 countries of origin included in the data set are Uzbekistan (20 submissions), Kyrgyzstan (10 submissions), Turkey (4 submissions), Kazakhstan (3 submissions), Tajikistan (3 submissions), United Arab Emirates (2 submissions), Russia (2 submissions), South Africa (1 submission), Bangladesh (1 submission), and Syria (1 submission).

- 20 submissions
- 10 submissions
- 4 submissions
- 3 submissions
- 2 submissions
- 1 submission

In addition, transit points located between countries of origin and migrants' final destinations were identified in eight countries.

These are Kazakhstan (7 submissions), Turkey (6 submissions), Kyrgyzstan (3 submissions), India (3 submissions), United Arab Emirates (2 submissions), Uzbekistan (1 submission), Russia (1 submission), and Belarus (1 submission).

7 submissions
6 submissions
3 submissions
2 submissions
1 submission
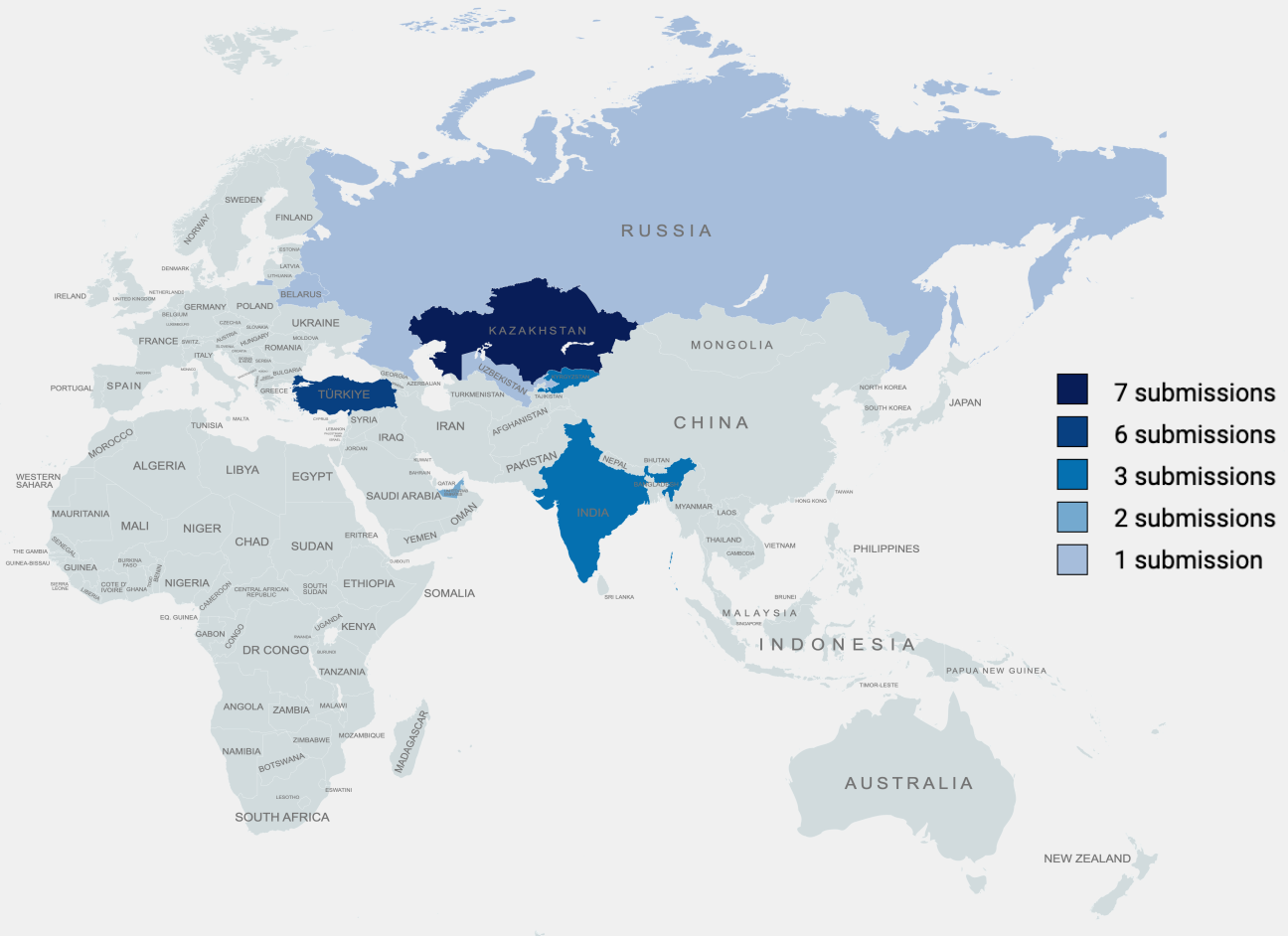
Ten destination countries have been named in the route submissions by the participating organizations: Kazakhstan (17 submissions), Russia (10 submissions), Turkey (6 submissions), Kyrgyzstan (5 submissions), India (3 submissions), United Arab Emirates (3 submissions), Uzbekistan (3 submissions), Bangladesh (1 submission), Belarus (1 submission), and Moldova (1 submission).
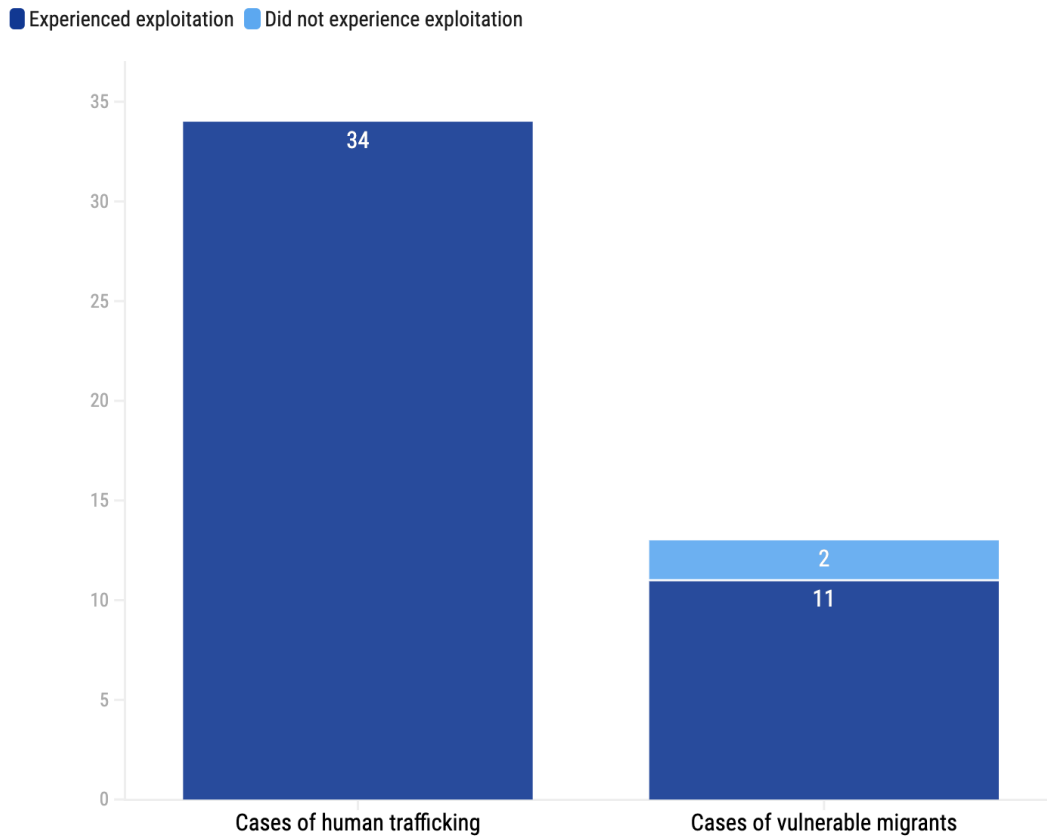

- 17 submissions
- 10 submissions
- 6 submissions
- 5 submissions
- 3 submissions
- 1 submission

DATA INSIGHTS ON CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Types of cases

For each submission, the organizations indicated the source of information – 34 submissions relate to cases of human trafficking, and 13 submissions relate to cases of vulnerable migrants to whom the organizations provided support. For the purpose of this report, we defined cases of human trafficking as cases in which the international legal definition of trafficking applies (according to the contributing organization). In contrast, cases of vulnerable migrants refer to other cases of exploitation, including forced labour.

Where this information has been submitted, the following types of vulnerable migrants have been identified: Migrant in Transit (6), Internally Displaced Person(s) (2), Smuggled Migrant (1), Stateless Person (1), Asylum Seeker (1), and Migrant worker in Debt Bondage (1).

■ Experienced exploitation ■ Did not experience exploitation

Demographics

The data relates to the cases of 25 female and 21 male migrants and VoTs. Within the data set, 43 submissions refer to cases of adults, and three submissions to cases of children. In one submission, these details weren't provided.

These statistics should not be considered as an accurate reflection of the prevalence of exploitation among vulnerable population groups, e.g. that more adults than children experience exploitation.

As the data is based on the submissions of CSOs, these demographic statistics are heavily influenced by the specific work of the participating organizations. This is particularly important when considering this data compared with that from other regions. Where organizations primarily focus on children and women as their target populations, the dataset will show the opposite pattern as a result. Generally, it is unwise to conclude that CSOs are interacting with or providing services to a representative set of trafficking victims and at-risk populations. Their data is still informative, but should not be seen as an accurate representation of the scope of exploitation per demographic group.

Female 25 / Male 21

Minor 3 / Adult 43
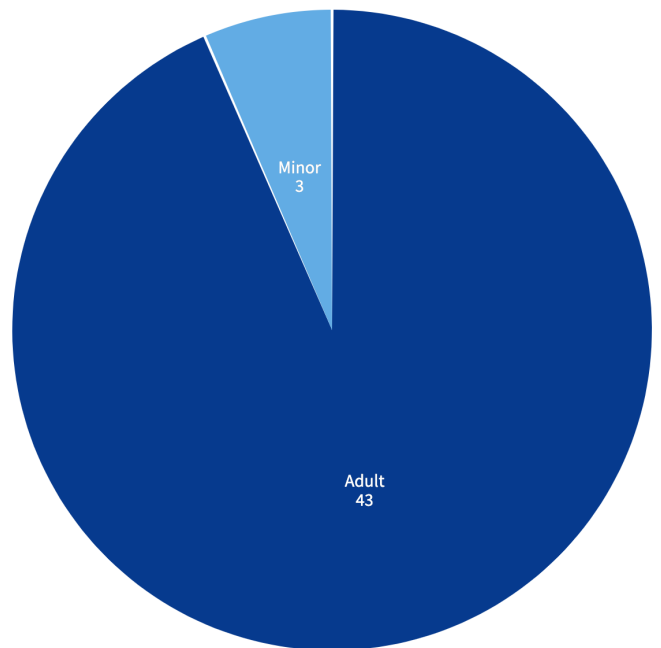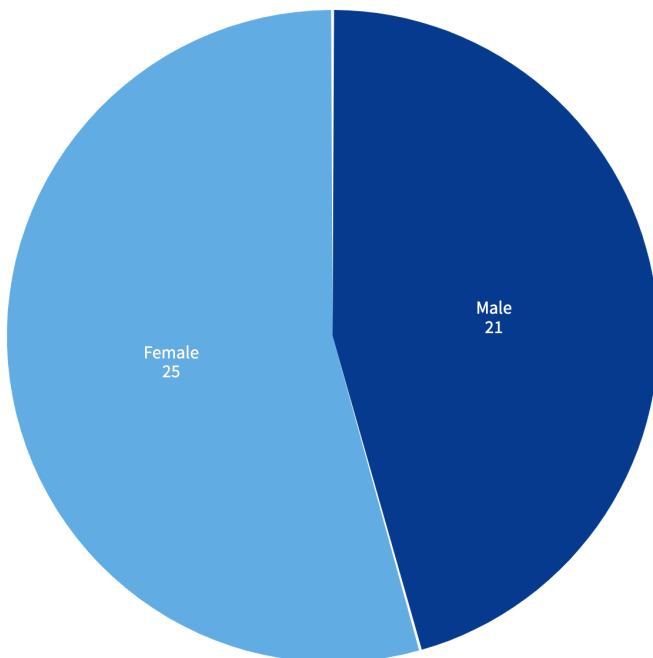
Vulnerability factors

Although anyone can fall victim to human trafficking and other types of exploitation, several – often overlapping – risk factors may contribute to the vulnerability of migrants from the region.
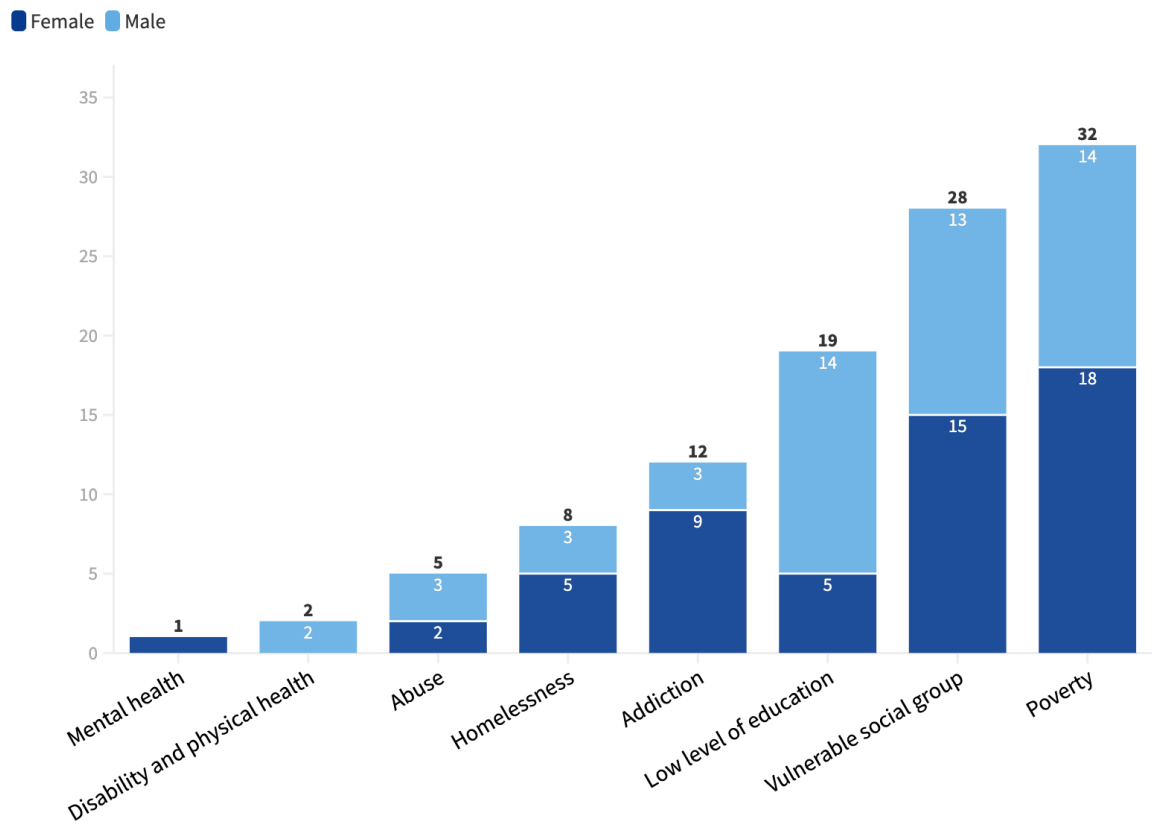
According to the data submitted by the contributing organizations, by far the most common vulnerability factors are poverty and unemployment. When people struggle to pay for food, rent, education or healthcare, they become desperate for solutions.

Combined with other, often structural, factors that prevent them from earning money in their home provinces, this desperation makes people susceptible to fraudulent job offers and false promises. Low levels of education have been identified as another relevant vulnerability factor, followed by addiction, homelessness, and the experience of abuse.
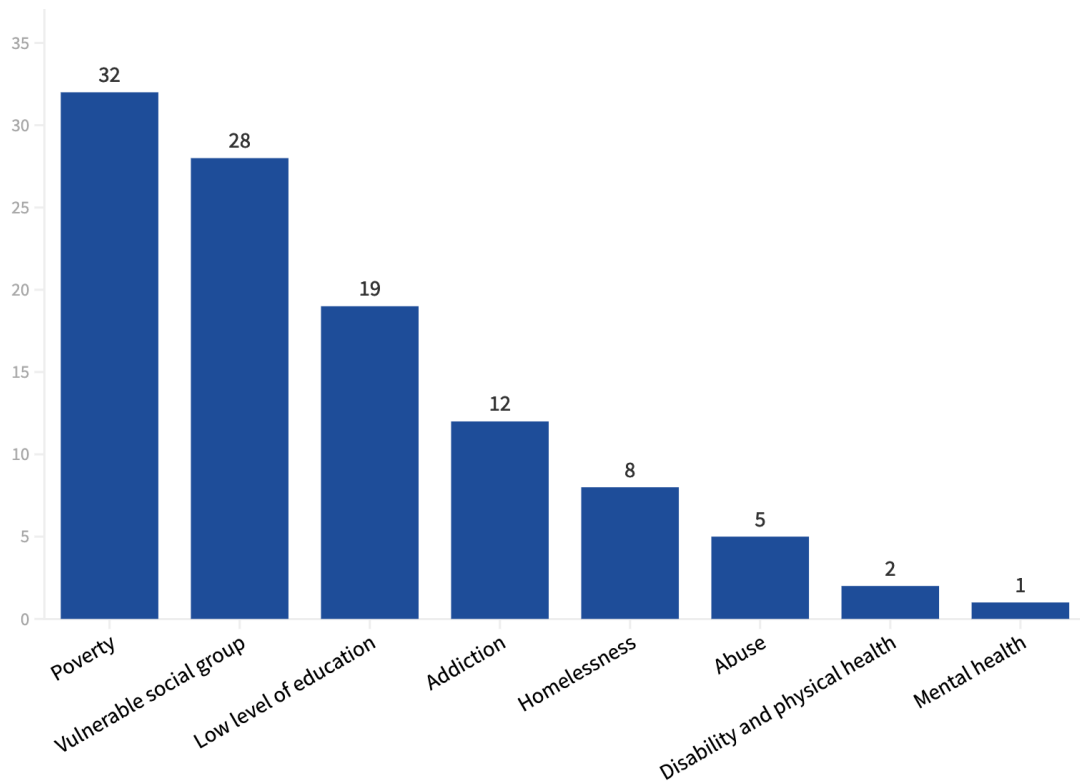
When looking at vulnerability factors across the genders, it becomes clear that poverty and unemployment have been identified in a similar number of submissions relating to male and female VoTs and migrants.

In contrast, the next two most frequent vulnerability factors are heavily gendered. Within the dataset, addiction is a more prevalent vulnerability factor for females, while a proportionately greater number of submissions were made relating to male migrants and VoTs with low levels of education.

Female **Male**

Factor	Female	Male	Total
Mental health	1		1
Disability and physical health		2	2
Abuse	2	3	5
Homelessness	5	3	8
Addiction	9	3	12
Low level of education	5	14	19
Vulnerable social group	15	13	28
Poverty	18	14	32

Reasons for the migration decision

The dataset also provides insights into migration decision-making, in particular the pull factors which attracted the target populations to their new destinations.

Employment opportunities present the most common reason behind the decision to migrate, and it is noteworthy that in most of these cases migrants traveled for concrete job offers versus potential job opportunities.
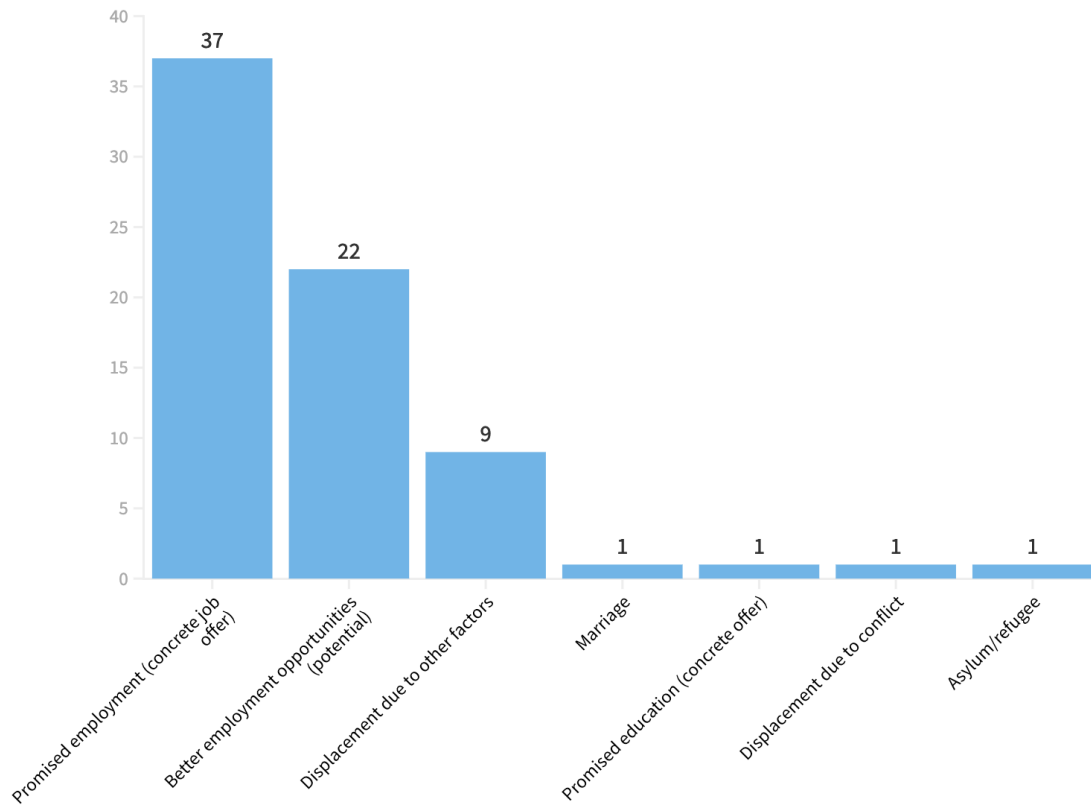
Recruitment

According to the information submitted by contributing organizations, in most cases the victims were recruited through friends or at social events. Fourteen submissions specified that the recruiter/trafficker was known to the victim, and nine submissions stated that the recruiter/trafficker was living in the same household.

Only in four case submissions was the recruiter/ trafficker not known by the migrant. In two cases, recruitment took place through online social networks, namely Telegram groups.
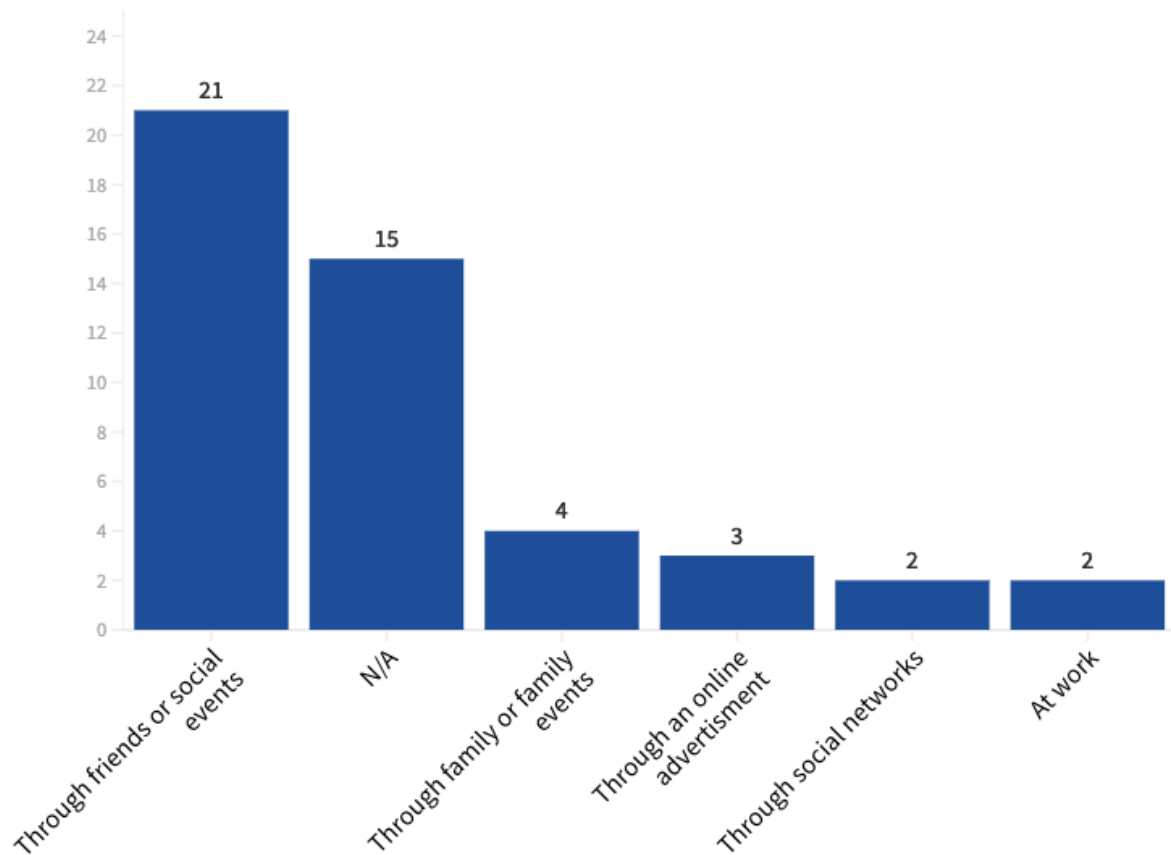
Facilitation of and payment for migration journey

The contributing CSOs indicated that in 21 submitted cases, a system of facilitators and/or traffickers was involved, while in 13 submissions the migrants interacted with only one facilitator.

There was little information given about methods of payment to journey facilitators within the dataset. In only five cases was it indicated that payments were made, and this was done in cash. While this information is often not recorded in case files, such insights are important for gaining a greater understanding of the financial situation of migrants and how debt may contribute to their vulnerability and potential inability to leave exploitative situations, as well as to understand money flows related to trafficking and smuggling.

Multiple facilitators
13

One facilitator
21
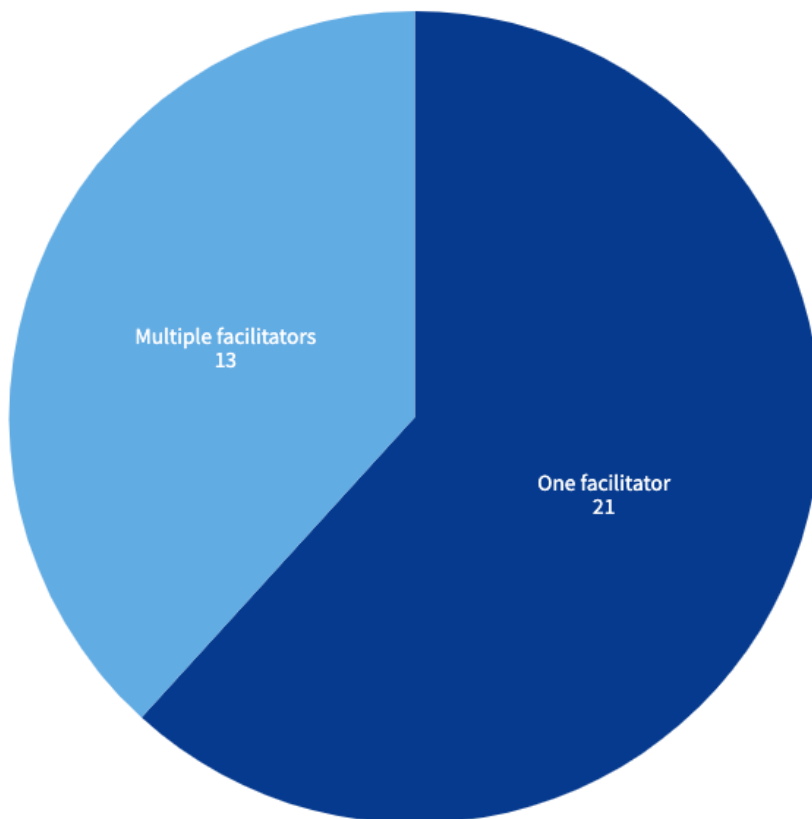
Migration journey

In order to understand more about the migration experiences of the clients the CSOs served, data points relating to the migration journey were included. This included information on whether migrants traveled alone or in a group, and on the mode of transport used.

Within the dataset, 24 submissions stated that the migrants traveled alone and 22 submissions stated that the migrants traveled in a group.

Most migrants from the region traveled via passenger plane, as well as by bus and train. The CSOs also submitted information about the airlines, if known, and Uzbekistan airlines was the most commonly mentioned (14 submissions), followed by Pegasus (3), Avia Traffic (2), Flydubai (2), Aeroflot (2), Air Astana (1), Turkish Airlines (1) and Fly Emirates (1).
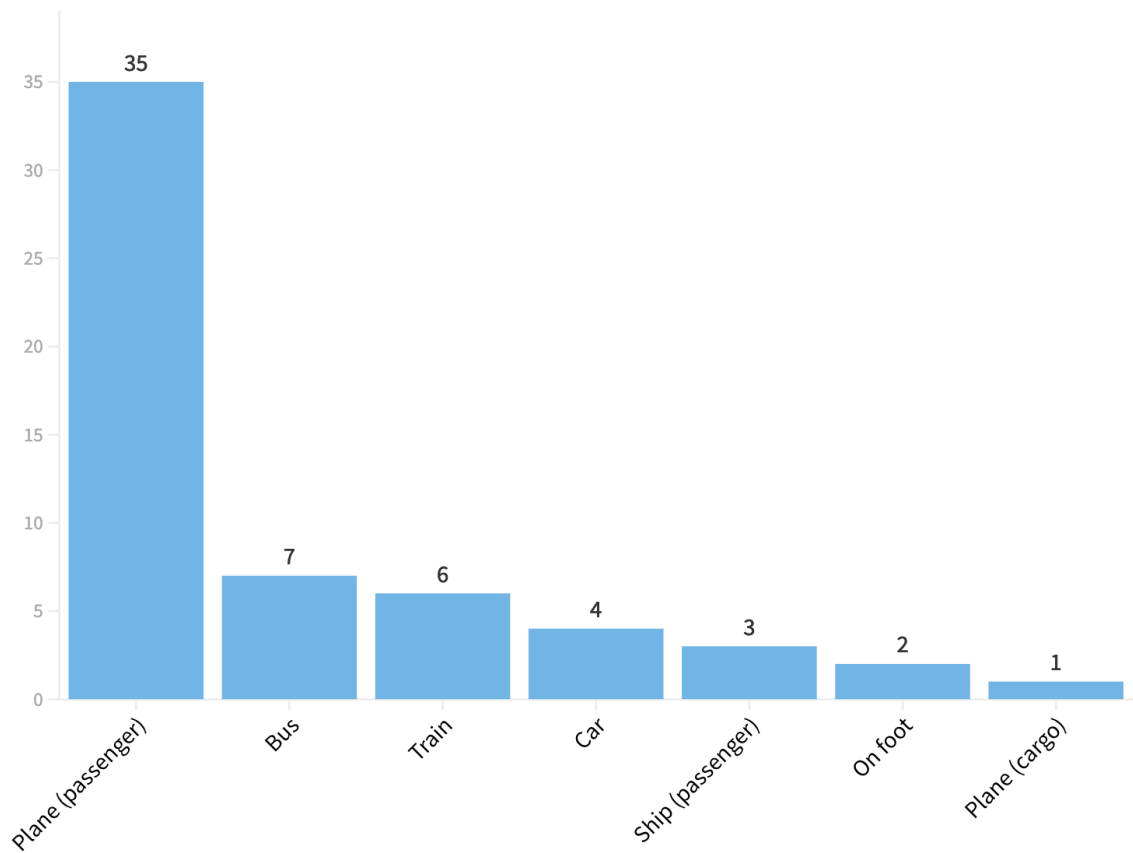
Industries of concern

At their destinations, migrants from the region worked in a number of industries. The greatest number of submissions relate to cases in the construction industry, followed by commercial sex, agriculture, hospitality/food service/tourism, and domestic work.
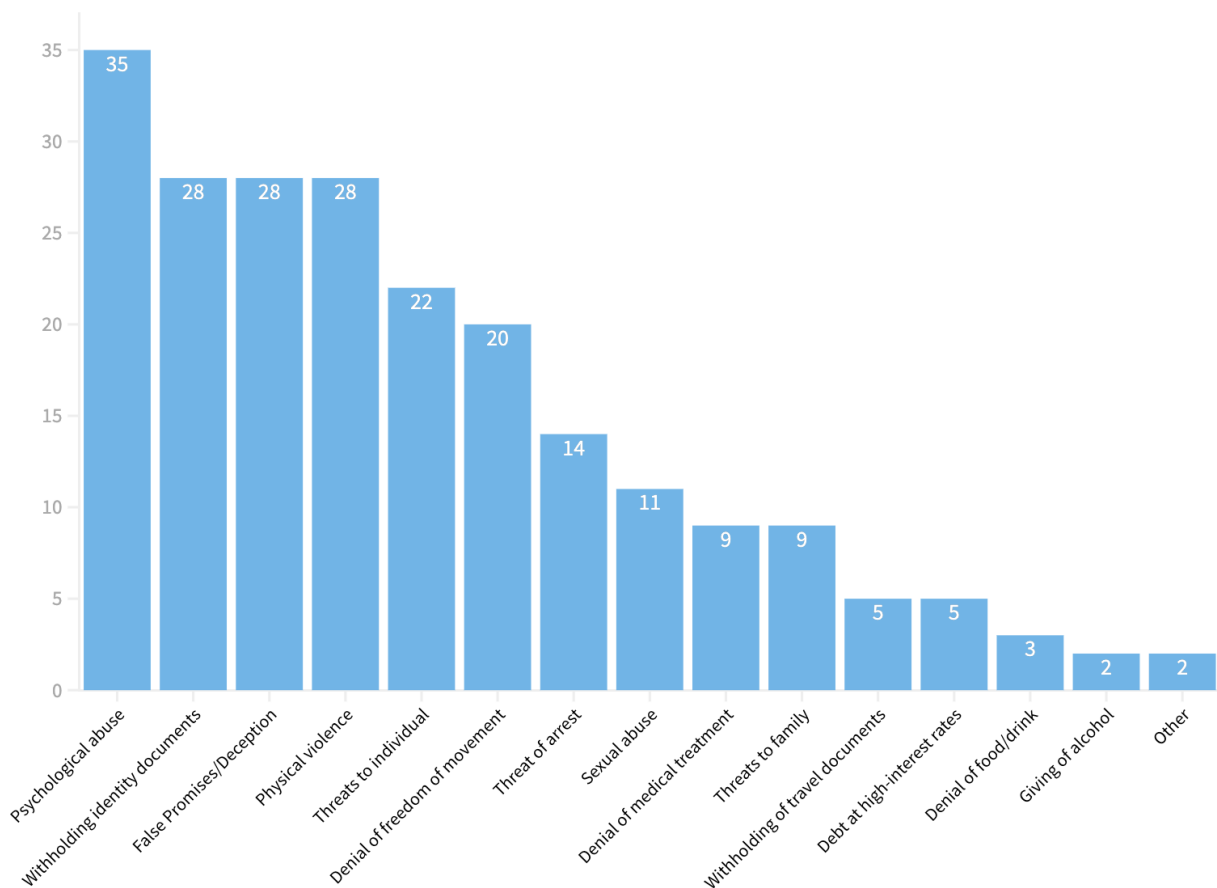
Analysis across genders showed, as expected, higher correlations between male victims in the construction industry and female victims in the commercial sex industry, however, for a large number of submissions of female victims' cases, we received no information on the relevant industry and type of work.
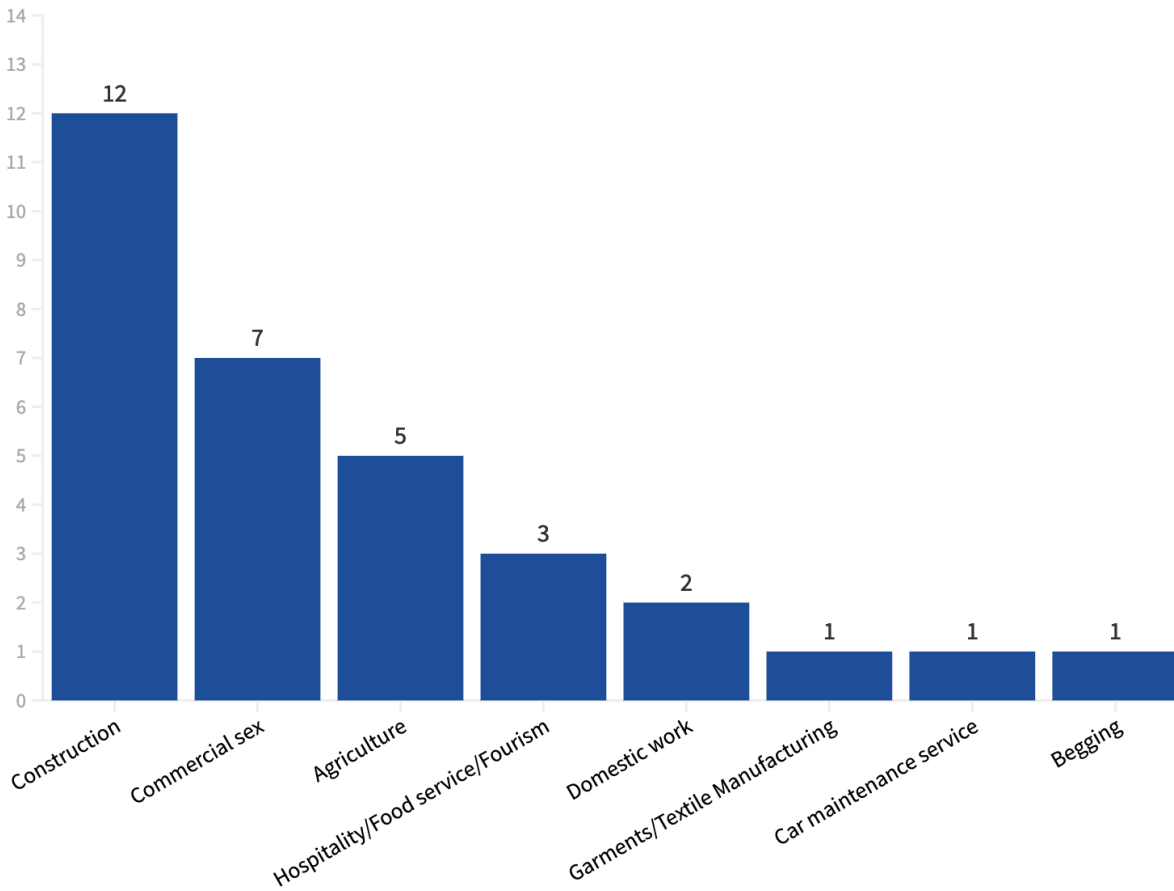
Types of abuse and coercion

The submitted cases highlight the wide range of abuse and coercion that migrants from the region experienced during their journeys and at their final destinations. Psychological abuse is the most common among the referenced cases, followed by withholding of identity documents.

Migrants also experienced false promises and deception, physical abuse, denial of freedom of movement, threats to the individual or to their family, and denial of food and/or drink. Withholding of travel documents and debt at high interest rates were also mentioned.

Category	Value
Psychological abuse	35
Withholding identity documents	28
False Promises/Deception	28
Physical violence	28
Threats to individual	22
Denial of freedom of movement	20
Threat of arrest	14
Sexual abuse	11
Denial of medical treatment	9
Threats to family	9
Withholding of travel documents	5
Debt at high-interest rates	5
Denial of food/drink	3
Giving of alcohol	2
Other	2

CASES OF MISSING MIGRANTS

This data collection project also gathered information regarding routes of especially high risk, where migrants had died or disappeared during their journey, according to details given to organizations by their clients. Four high-risk routes were identified, where migrants had gone missing "often", according to the information CSOs were given:

- Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan to Almaty, Kazakhstan
- Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan to Istanbul, Turkey
- Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
- Dhaka, Bangladesh to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

In cases of missing migrants, the CSOs stated that they keep a record of these deaths and disappearances, refer the case to local/national authorities which help recover migrant remains or resolve missing person reports, and provide psychosocial support to beneficiaries.

CONCLUSIONS AND DATA APPLICATIONS

The collected data reveals high migration activity across borders throughout and beyond the region. For both male and female migrants, poverty and unemployment were the main reasons to leave their homes, with the hope of better economic prospects as the major pull factor. Most of the migrants traveled via plane and ended up in a range of different industries, with a significant proportion working in construction (males) and the commercial sex trade (females). Psychological abuse and withholding of identity documents were the most common forms of exploitation.

Ways in which this report could be utilized in order to inform responses to human trafficking and the exploitation of vulnerable migrants include the following:

- Better understanding of push and pull factors, recruitment strategies, employment abuse, and trafficking indicators could allow a greater number of practitioners to know what signs to look out for and which authority to contact for help.

- The CSO response in Central Asia appears to be targeted fairly equally at both male and female VoTs and migrants, particularly in contrast to other regions where we observe a greater focus on support services for women and children. However, promoting and integrating a gender and social inclusion approach in programming would allow greater improvements to be made to these services.

- According to the data, poverty and unemployment represent the most significant factors in the decision to migrate. This should be a major focus when considering which prevention and protection strategies would be the most effective.

- In most cases, migrants were recruited through friends or family members, many of whom were deceived about the true intentions of the facilitator/trafficker. Awareness training and education, as well as further investigation into the backgrounds and motivations of traffickers themselves, could help to break this initial link in the process.

- Planes were the most frequently used method of transport. This could inform outreach and prevention interventions to better target potential VoTs and vulnerable migrants at the point of transit, particularly when combining this information with the insights on high-risk routes and airlines used.

- Caseworkers could be trained to ask a broader range of questions around both the migrant's journey and employment experience, in order to fill knowledge gaps, for instance about payment amounts and methods, and for improved victim identification.

As stated in the introduction, the commitment and support of the participating CSOs in this regional initiative is very encouraging. This effort not only demonstrates the power of collaboration when working across organizations and countries for a common goal, but also constitutes a great step forward in increasing access to valuable information that can inform the prevention and protection strategies of stakeholders across the region and beyond. It is further hoped that the data can support relevant actors to:

- Identify at-risk communities and recruitment hotspots in order to better target prevention programming and protection messaging.

- Identify civil society and community-based organizations along the identified routes which could provide emergency services.

- Identify destination hotspots in order to guide the development of bilateral partnerships and to foster collaboration, so that more robust protection and after-care services can be provided.

- Identify critical transit points in order to design more effective monitoring, outreach and intervention programming, and to inform the development of law enforcement/border protection and public-private partnerships (e.g. identify training needs for airport staff).

- Identify industries at higher risk of involvement with exploitative labour, in order to improve outreach and identification efforts and inform engagement with industries.