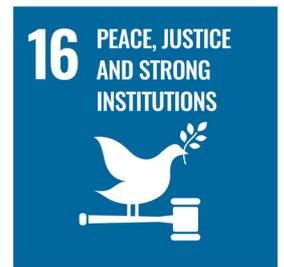


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VIRTUAL MEETINGS

**“COVID-19, CRIME PREVENTION AND
CRIMINAL JUSTICE PRIORITIES:
A SPOTLIGHT ON VULNERABLE GROUPS”**

SUMMARY REPORT

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“COVID-19, CRIME PREVENTION AND
CRIMINAL JUSTICE PRIORITIES:
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SUMMARY REPORT

30 November – 3 December 2020

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Abbreviations | III |
| Executive summary | IV |
| CHAPTER 1 The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism, violent extremism and counter terrorism | 1 |
| CHAPTER 2 Women’s rights and the COVID-19 pandemic | 3 |
| CHAPTER 3 Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people | 6 |
| CHAPTER 4 Use of technology by terrorist groups and organized crime during the crisis | 11 |
| CHAPTER 5 New opportunities for organized crime to infiltrate into legal economy and new corruption risks | 16 |
| CHAPTER 6 How COVID-19 impacted human trafficking | 22 |
| CHAPTER 7 Impact of COVID-19 on tourism-driven economies | 26 |
| CHAPTER 8 Impact of COVID-19 on human rights and rule of law, with particular focus on people deprived of their liberty | 29 |
| CHAPTER 9 CBRN risk mitigation initiatives to prevent and respond to potential CBRN threats | 33 |
| CHAPTER 10 COVID-19 and Substance Use Disorders | 37 |

ABBREVIATIONS

AI – Artificial Intelligence

CBRN – Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear

CERN – Conseil européen pour la recherche nucléaire

CS – Civil Society

CVE – Countering Violent Extremism

OC – Organized Crime

PVE – Preventing Violent Extremism

R&R – Rehabilitation and Reintegration

SUD – Substance Use Disorders

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In these extremely challenging times, when people all around the world are experiencing health, economic and social crises simultaneously, the United Nations is on the frontline with vulnerable communities, facilitating priority responses to limit the negative consequences of the pandemic and supporting Member States to plan for recovery after the pandemic.

With more than 50 years of international action, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) has acquired a unique experience in dealing with crime and justice issues within broader policies for socio-economic change and development, the protection of human rights and the promotion of peace. UNICRI is supporting the global community through research, knowledge dissemination, technical assistance, legal reforms, training and capacity building.

UNICRI is proudly contributing to efforts to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, by enhancing resilience, preventing crime and promoting peaceful, safe, and inclusive communities, in line with its Strategic Programme Framework¹ and Sustainable Development Goal 16.

The Institute is working with 62 partner countries on biological risk mitigation in the fight against the pandemic by ensuring knowledge sharing and dissemination of good practices. It is also analysing organized crime investments in the legal economy, protecting vulnerable populations and promoting supply chain security, as well as addressing emerging crimes such as the malicious use of social media and the risks and opportunities of new technologies, including artificial intelligence.

In this context, UNICRI organized a forum on “COVID-19, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Priorities: a Spotlight on Vulnerable

¹ http://www.unicri.it/in_focus/on/unicri_strategic

Groups”, held online from 30 November to 3 December 2020. The aim of the forum was to better frame the emerging threats and trends resulting from the pandemic, and to look at vulnerable populations through the lens of crime prevention, justice, human rights, rule of law and development.

The forum served as an opportunity to identify practical measures to protect the most vulnerable people and to reduce their risk of victimization. Key recommendations, for use by UN agencies and by Member States, were identified to more effectively respond to the crisis, as well as to enhance preparedness for future crises.

Protecting human rights, upholding the rule of law and ensuring justice for all were considered to be essential crosscutting issues throughout the forum. In all, more than 200 individuals participated in the event, including those from Diplomatic Missions, Government Institutions, Academia, International Organizations and civil society; experts from different organizations including UNICRI, CTED, ICCT, UN Women, UNODC, the OSCE, CARICOM and UNDP also contributed to the forum.

This report presents a summary of the presentations, discussion and feedback from experts and other participants, collected during the four-day event.

One of the issues addressed by experts and participants was the fragility of the economic sector (as consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic), exploited by organized crime to expand business and influence. Criminal groups have demonstrated how opportunistic they have been during the pandemic, particularly in the area of counterfeiting and infiltration into the legal economy. Organized criminal groups have exploited the vast amount of resources allocated and distributed by States in response to the pandemic, and have used this dynamic to corrupt public officials, siphoning funds away from key sectors, such as health care, education and social protection services.

The forum also highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic has been integrated into terrorist groups' narratives and propaganda, how these narratives have spread across social media platforms and how young people – with increased time spent online – have been impacted by extremist ideas.

The event further revealed how online and digital activities during the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the use of social media as a breeding ground for the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation by non-state actors. The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation has jeopardized the efficacy and credibility of governmental responses to the pandemic.

Experts also demonstrated how the most vulnerable – including women and children – have been disproportionately affected by the crisis, subjecting these groups to a greater incidence of human trafficking. Human trafficking has opened up economic opportunities for organized criminal groups, in light of pandemic-induced limitations on criminal justice responses. Support services for victims have also been inhibited during the pandemic. Although traditional systems and venues of exploitation were thrown into disarray due to movement restrictions and the interruption of numerous economic activities, traffickers identified other modalities to maintain their revenue through new or expanded forms of exploitation. Trafficking and online sexual exploitation are examples of how traffickers have kept their revenue intact and have enhanced their control over victims, particularly women and girls.

Online child sexual exploitation has drastically increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, creating a dangerous enclave for pedophiles, abusers and other malicious actors. Many children across the world have become “at risk” to criminal predators who have adapted to the crisis and exploited the vulnerability of young people, generating a parallel pandemic.

The forum also highlighted how basic human rights, including the right to education, have been impacted during the pandemic. For many, family life during lockdowns has been highly stressful: schools have closed, and socialization has been significantly limited. This has exacerbated the harm of the crisis on young people and children. Increased stress at home for entire families has served to exacerbate already-unstable relationships, with implications on children's well-being.

Experts from multiple backgrounds also emphasized how the pandemic has impacted gender inequality; this has posed serious human rights challenges,² principally evidenced by increases in domestic violence. Considering that a significant percentage (40%) of all employed women work in key sectors most affected by COVID-19, women have become more dependent on public resources and require more urgent access to a limited supply of essential goods.

Equally, emergency measures taken by States to cope with the pandemic have, in some cases, negatively impacted individuals, sometimes violating some human rights, such as the right of access to justice and the right to a fair trial in a timely manner. Other liberties have been curtailed, including the freedom of assembly and the freedom to peacefully protest. In some cases, governmental responses to the pandemic have had a disproportionate impact on citizens' ability to obtain or maintain gainful employment (and income), as well as their ability to access many needed social and health care services.

The pandemic also created crises within justice sectors. Courts, justice systems and security systems experienced a significant slow down, with interruption of activities, reduction of available staff and suspension of hearings; this dynamic occurred with a concomitant rise in family disputes, gender-based violence, labour disputes, increased obstacles in access to social security benefits, housing disputes, evictions and bankruptcies. In many countries,

² From insights to action: Gender equality in the wake of COVID-19. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19#view>

already-overloaded justice systems face an increasing backlog of cases, and individuals and businesses seeking resolution of their cases are becoming increasingly frustrated with the inability of justice systems to address their grievances.

For people in prisons and detention centres, the suspension or limitation of court activities has resulted in extended stays in detention and has affected the right to a fair and timely trial. Access to lawyers and legal aid has also been affected. Basic health and safety requirements of physical distancing, in already-congested detention centres and prisons, have not only jeopardized the health of detainees, but have brought into question how to handle such dynamics in the future. Governmental responses to the pandemic have meant that prison systems and incarceration centres have taken measures to restrict visiting rights, imposing greater isolation and mental health challenges on detainees, as well as their family members.

Key takeaways from the forum included the importance of bolstering support to vulnerable groups in times of major health crises, the sharing of lessons learned and good practices, and the need to further strengthen international collaboration to ensure the provision of continuous support and technical assistance to Member States (particularly to Member States with fewer means to protect vulnerable groups). It is crucial that Member States continue to allocate proper resources to prevent the dynamics mentioned above, and to seek the assistance and support of the private sector as well as local communities and civil society organizations in a joint effort to build resilience, and to support conflict resolution.

In times of crises, optimization of resources and complementarity of actions and responses from key actors and stakeholders is of utmost importance, as well as the need to collect reliable data and context-based information, as this latter tool will inform and guide decision-making processes.

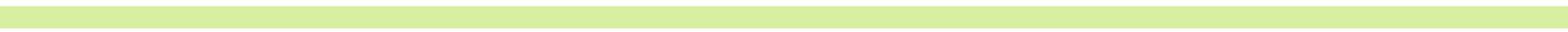
In this context, COVID-19 should be considered as an opportunity to emerge from the pandemic with improved tools and greater resiliency, particularly with respect to gender equality and child-sensitive interventions. Policy and decision-makers must take into account holistic approaches to protecting – in normal times and during crises – vulnerable groups when considering access to justice and social protection policies and programmes, as well as empowering women and youth to become engaged members of society. Participatory approaches are essential to increase interaction between institutions and civil society in order to ensure that policies and measures adopted reflect local realities, as well as to ensure that there is community “buy-in” and a sense of unity.³

³ Policymakers can also benefit from understanding the negative and positive effects of technology during times of crises; while, for example, organized criminal groups can use technology to exploit those most vulnerable, deploying technology to maximise information sharing as well as to prevent crime can also be useful.



1

THE IMPACTS OF THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC
ON TERRORISM, VIOLENT
EXTREMISM AND
COUNTER TERRORISM



Highlights

- The reallocation of resources, due to a necessary re-correction of priorities to face the health crisis, could negatively affect a broad range of national and international responses in CVE/PVE. For example: many R&R programmes have been halted due COVID-19 restrictions.
- Travel restrictions have had negative impacts on resources particularly in remote areas, (such as food, medicine, money). They have also led to increased border security, affecting the movement of terrorist actors as well as terrorist activities.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has already been integrated into terrorist groups' narratives and propaganda, as they seek to exploit existing grievances for their own purposes. The misleading propaganda has been spread across social media platforms among young people. In fact, during the lockdown, young people in particular have spent, and are currently spending, more time online with an increasing exposure to extremist ideas.
- To face the effects of the health crisis, an increasing number of states have been normalizing exceptional powers which are not always in compliance with human rights obligations. The adoption of these restrictive measures has been used by violent extremist propaganda to exacerbate existing grievances, making individuals more vulnerable to recruitment into violent groups.

Key Takeaways

- It is essential to consider both short-term and potential long-term implications on terrorist actions and on counter terrorism measures, in order to implement effective policy responses, targeted to each region and the different contexts.
- It is important to consider that States' responses to the pandemic could have, in the long term, negatively affected the existing counter-terrorism and CVE programmes, jeopardizing progress and improvements achieved.
- Promoting trust between institutions and communities is particularly important during this time of crisis, considering that increased vulnerability can make people more exposed to misinformation and propaganda conducive to violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism.
- It is essential to engage local communities, including grassroots organizations, independent civil society organizations and women's CS organizations, to build resilience and support conflict resolution and development during the crisis.
- Civil society needs to be supported by States through more sustainable and long-term measures that integrate the roles and involvement of communities, religious leaders, educators, psycho-social care providers, local governments, media, and parents.



2

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Highlights

- The COVID-19 pandemic stressed already existing gender inequalities and reinforced discrimination against women, posing serious human rights challenges⁴, principally evidenced by the increase in domestic violence.
- Governments' response to the crisis, imposed to curb its effects, included several measures that have hampered access to justice, to security institutions and basic services⁵, highlighting some shortcomings of gender mainstreaming.
- The decrease of women's rights and their absence from the public space could be considered as one of the early warning signs of an advent of violent extremism.

Key Takeaways

- COVID-19 should be considered as an opportunity to build back better by promoting gender equality and child sensitive interventions in a comprehensive and inclusive manner, ensuring access to justice and social protection policies and programmes, as well as empowering women and youth to become engaged members of society.
- Women's participation and representation in decision-making processes is important from the onset and should be considered as a human rights issue. Therefore, it is essential to ensure women's participation in decision making processes, through

⁴ From insights to action: Gender equality in the wake of COVID-19. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19#view>

⁵ Spotlight on gender, COVID-19 and the SDGs: Will the pandemic derail hard-won progress on gender equality? <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/spotlight-on-gender-covid-19-and-the-sdgs>

the representation of all the vulnerable categories at local level:
e.g. female refugees, female youth, female law enforcement, etc.

- A participatory approach is essential to increase interaction between institutions and civil society in order to ensure that policies and measures adopted reflect local realities.
- Civil society has the knowledge, experience and capacity to work towards building inclusive and peaceful societies, reflecting not only the needs and priorities of the local context, but also the solutions, resulting in responses that are relevant to the community at large.



3

IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Highlights

- The COVID-19 pandemic is a health crisis which has been quickly become a child rights crisis⁶; in this regard, one of the main concerns is how to combine effective national and global security with policies and measures designed to fulfil children's rights.
- Online child sexual exploitation has drastically increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created a dangerous enclave for abusers and malicious actors. Many children across the world are at risk from criminal predators who have adapted to the crisis and exploited the vulnerability of young people.
- Child sexual abuse is really a parallel pandemic; millions of students engaged in remote learning combined with more adults online has created more opportunities for children to be exploited. Children, much like their parents, have been spending more time unsupervised online during lockdowns: everything from school to socializing activities has taken place over video, through apps or on social media.
- The rise of the online sexual abuse of children has been facilitated by advances in technology⁷, which has allowed the rampant proliferation of online file sharing platforms. Indeed, technology is very much responsible for hosting child abuse related crime perpetrators, providing them with the necessary infrastructure to thrive, making it easier for predators to reach children faster and more efficiently, while remaining anonymous.
- Contrary to TV broadcasters that have strict rules and liability when it comes to the content they release, social media

⁶ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063822>

⁷ Malicious Uses and Abuses of Artificial Intelligence. <http://www.unicri.it/node/3278>

platforms and most big tech companies do not have the same regulatory standards, thus they can act with impunity over the toxic content that is published on the online ecosystem, benefiting from the protection of outdated laws.

- There has been a marked increase in child sexual abuse material (CSAM) as well as in the trafficking of children for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Illegal images of children have been uploaded to the Internet every day and the number of reports of URLs containing child sexual abuse material has increased.
- Children and young people are facing practical family problems such as economic shortages and food poverty, even in the EU.
- Due to the lack of data collected and released to the public, the true effects of pandemic on children are not yet clear, but it is painfully evident that the impact of these types of child abuse as well as the risk of sexual exploitation can be devastating.

Key Takeaways

- It is important to promote child-sensitive approaches, based on multidisciplinary and multisector interventions, including social protection measures and the strengthening of judicial system through the adoption of community-based alternative measures for young offenders.
- Particular attention must be paid to the recruitment of children by criminal groups, which leads to their exploitation and has consequences on the well-being of the children's families, communities and society at large⁸. This issue has deep economic and social origins, so it cannot be addressed only as a crime

⁸ Report on Children and Counter-Terrorism. <http://www.unicri.it/report-children-and-counter-terrorism>

problem. In this regard, priority measures should be focusing on prevention, taking into account the role of the families. Such programmes should include three categories: families, children without families and children already in conflict with law.

- Governments should consider the potential role of AI in safeguarding children from sexual exploitation and abuse⁹.
- Working with law enforcement to build capabilities for the use of artificial intelligence to combat the spread of online child sexual abuse material, also during the ongoing pandemic¹⁰.
- While technology is a source of the problem, at the same time, it can also be the effective solution we are striving for. New technologies such as AI, in fact, may be able to reverse the trend, and can be applied to tackle exploitation of children by providing adequate tools for better prevention, detection and prosecution of these crimes¹¹.
- Developing AI tools is important to prevent and detect crimes against vulnerable children, in particular: i. To prevent online child grooming by intercepting explicit words in conversations on a gaming website which have become a breeding ground for predators; ii. To fight against the dissemination of online child sexual abuse materials; iii. To use image recognition to detect abuse on the Internet.
- The importance of collecting data, global collaboration, sharing of good practices and experiences and establishing new forms of collaboration across sectors and borders was highlighted.

⁹ Artificial Intelligence and Robotics for Law Enforcement. http://www.unicri.it/in_focus/on/interpol_unicri_report_ai

¹⁰ A collaborative transnational network, the International Security Alliance (ISA) has been created with the aim to combat online sexual exploitation of children. This network includes nine countries: France, the United Arab Emirates, Italy, Singapore, Spain, Bahrain, Senegal, Morocco and Slovakia. Ministries of Interior and law enforcement agencies of the countries have collaborated with private companies, by promoting international cooperation, to acquire and share data on sexual offenders.

¹¹ Artificial Intelligence – Combating online sexual abuse of children, Bracket Foundation, 2019

- Law enforcement agencies need to share intelligence on perpetrators and criminal activity trends, and civil society actors must offer their deep understanding of issues faced by victims.
- Stakeholders, public authorities and private actors must collaborate closely. It is crucial to accelerate multi-stakeholder cooperation involving law enforcement, policymakers, and big tech companies and support law enforcement through responsible AI innovations.
 - AI cannot be effective and could likely be dangerous without the proper legal framework to regulate it. Therefore, it is important to redefine legal frameworks and cooperation agreements to enable the secure use and sharing of data.



4

USE OF TECHNOLOGY BY TERRORIST GROUPS AND ORGANIZED CRIME DURING THE CRISIS

Highlights

Misinformation and disinformation on social media are not new problems, but the pandemic has amplified them creating new opportunities for violent/criminal non-state actors.¹²

- The increase in the use of online and digital activities, including the Internet, social platforms and mobile phones, during the COVID-19 pandemic has represented a breeding ground for the proliferation of fake news by non-state actors.
- Malicious use of social media by non-state actors has affected government strategies to mitigate and contain the impact of COVID-19, jeopardizing the efficacy and credibility of response measures put in place.
- The most active violent non-state actors in disseminating fake news are:
 - Right wing extremist groups, which use common messages of hate and racism toward minorities, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and the promotion of race war.
 - Groups associated to Islamic State, which use violence as a legitimate tool to impose their views and values.
 - Organized crime, motivated by profits and money.
- Criminal/violent groups are trying to take advantage of the crisis by using social media incitement as well as conspiracy theories for the following main strategic objectives:
 - To undermine trust in governments.

¹² Stop the virus of disinformation: the malicious use of social media by terrorist, violent extremist and criminal groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. <http://www.unicri.it/index.php/node/3279>

- To reinforce their narrative for recruitment, using the pandemic situation to motivate new persons and integrate them into their groups.
- To instigate/inspire terrorism, in particular by disseminating the idea of intentionally spreading COVID-19 and to use it as an improvised biological weapon.
- To promote a positive image of the organization; this is particularly connected to organized crime.

Key Takeaways

- Leveraging technology, and especially big data tools, can be of great support to implement effective strategies to prevent and counter online disinformation and misinformation, to monitor organized crime activities, including human trafficking-related activities, and to identify potential scenarios.
- Data science and big data can support the identification of large-scale disinformation and misinformation themes as well as, potentially, tracking down the origin of false narratives.
- Artificial intelligence tools and platforms can be useful to detect, through specific algorithms, online fake news in a timely manner.
- Ensuring knowledge sharing and dissemination of good practices in the framework of technology innovations (Big Data and AI) to prevent crime and safeguard vulnerable groups.
- The results of a test carried out by UNICRI, CERN and Italian Antimafia National Directorate (DNA) to understand how concretely big data can be used to monitor complex organized

crime¹³ demonstrated that digital platforms and big data can help governments, investigators and prosecutors to conduct intelligence activities in a faster way, speeding up the process though which data can be analyzed. Some of the analysis that can be conducted using big data tools are:

- Geo-localization of different assets (e.g. representation of the assets confiscated according the social network analysis and then the geo-localization though Google Maps);
 - Mapping of the assets, studying their historical evolution, how assets have been confiscated in different periods;
 - Complex analysis using different indicators (e.g. assets confiscated per Regions) or choosing one Region and selecting one particular money laundering activity;
 - Possible analysis to identify the structure of mafia groups, trace back the origin of specific mafia groups and their evolution;
 - Analysis using social network indicators to identify the leaders of the criminal network but also people who play an important role in connecting different groups (brokers);
 - Analysis to identify alliances and fragmentations of different groups (particularly important for organized crime, such as Camorra in Italy or Narcos in Mexico, where alliances and fragmentations can change very rapidly).
- Although big data can speed up and increase the capacity of humans to conduct intelligence analysis and to identify patterns and trends, they cannot replace the work of human beings (the analysis can only be done by the investigators); The

¹³ For the test, a digital platform for big data developed by CERN for scientific purposes was used. The platform was fed with data coming from governments on assets confiscated from organized crime (e.g. restaurants, apartments, enterprises).

combination of a domain expert, in this case, the organized crime expert (investigators, law enforcement, prosecutor bodies) responsible for carrying out the analysis, and the data scientist, who provides support on the technical elements on the use of big data, is of utmost importance.

- By identifying trends and patterns with big data, although it is not possible to anticipate a crime, it is possible to make some predictions, in terms of understanding the likelihood that certain scenarios may become real (e.g. predictions on where OC will make investment, in which sector, which region, what modalities, what front name type of companies will be using)
- Big data can also provide an overall picture of the problem that can help anti-mafia bodies to provide strategic inputs.
- In the context of COVID-19 and the malicious use of social media by non-state actors, big data tools can be used to detect fake news and false information present on social media. This is considered particularly important in view of the COVID-19 vaccine, given that organized crime could use false information for selling the counterfeited vaccine.
- In the context of human trafficking, big data is increasingly becoming a valuable and relied-upon tool for combatting trafficking because it can be used, for example, to look at patterns in sexual service advertisements or to measure and scale the impact of different policies as they relate to the online marketplace; it permits, for example, the detection of what happens to the traffic when a law is passed or when criminal justice operators conduct an operation.



5

NEW OPPORTUNITIES
FOR ORGANIZED CRIME
TO INFILTRATE INTO
LEGAL ECONOMY
AND NEW CORRUPTION
RISKS

Highlights

- During the pandemic, organized crime has proven its ability to adapt to the new socioeconomic situation. Criminal groups have demonstrated how fast and flexible they are when grasping every profit opportunity that COVID-19 has created, especially in the area of counterfeiting and infiltration into legal economy.
- Organized crime is able to profit from supply chain shortcomings and set up an illegal parallel trafficking of specific goods¹⁴. For instance, in the beginning of the pandemic, while countries experienced shortages of specific products (e.g. protective masks, hand sanitizers, etc.), many law enforcement agencies seized unauthorized products in this specific category.
- INTERPOL and EUROPOL also warned about how criminal organizations are capitalizing on the disruption of food chain caused by COVID-19 to infiltrate it with their fraudulent products. In 2020, the seizures of expired food products or products with modified expiration dates skyrocketed; such products were ready to be inserted into the legitimate supply chain as food.
- The fragility of the economic sector as consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic represents an open door for organized crime. Criminal groups have already started to take direct or indirect control over those activity sectors in financial distress due to restrictive governments measures, in order to diversify the type of activities (mixing licit and illicit activities) employed for money laundering purposes, or to channel counterfeit and fraudulent goods into the legitimate supply chain¹⁵.

¹⁴ In 2020, in a joint operation conducted by INTERPOL and EUROPOL specifically targeting fraudulent food products, products related to the healthcare sector (counterfeit medical products, disinfectants and 17,000 fake test kits for COVID-19) were also seized.

¹⁵ A study carried out by UNICRI in 2016 unveiled a wide range of tactics used by organized crime to control these operators. They were controlling different stages of the supply chain including, for instance, entire supermarket chains, or imposing specific products in specific commercial activities.

- Since the attention of States is now concentrated on the healthcare sector, COVID-19 can also open opportunities for lower-profile activities. Organized crime may choose to target, for example, low priority areas or low priority activities for law enforcement¹⁶, such as small, independent businesses.
- Vast amounts of resources allocated and distributed in response to the economic crisis have generated new opportunities for corruption, exacerbated by the speed at which States had to respond to the crisis, with the risk of sacrificing transparency and accountability.
 - Manipulation of procurement processes for crucial health sector resources
 - Falsified medicines or medical supplies and bribes to obtain preferential treatment or access
 - Embezzlement, diversion and misallocation of emergency response funds
 - Petty corruption in fraudulent sales and price-gouging in essential commodities
- Corruption can mitigate the impact of remedial measures targeted to address and respond to the needs presented by the crisis, reducing access to health care, education and social protection services, therefore increasing vulnerability.
- Corruption in public service delivery can exacerbate poverty and inequality by increasing the cost of essential goods, decreasing the quality of such goods and distorting the allocation of resources.

¹⁶ An example is an Operation called “Gomorra” conducted by the Italian law enforcement which showed the modus operandi of Camorra. They were renting vans to sell fraudulent food at small supermarkets or door-to-door in the countryside of Italy and Germany.

- Corruption disbursement processes can take place through the misappropriation of funds or the abuse of function by a public official.
- People who routinely lack access to essential services, appropriate sanitary conditions and consistent food supplies are particularly vulnerable in this crisis (e.g. individuals in remote rural areas, in conflict areas or those without documentation).
- Corruption can further exacerbate women’s exclusion. Forty per cent of all employed women work in the four sectors most affected by COVID-19. In addition, 740 million women work in informal sectors, which have also been impacted by COVID-19 due to movement and economic restrictions¹⁷. These conditions make women more dependent on public resources and require more urgent access to that limited supply of essential goods.

¹⁷ The COVID-19 response: Getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work ILO Policy Brief, May 2020

Key Takeaways

- Since organized crime is managing a portfolio of different illicit and sometimes licit activities, the major challenge is to connect the dots, creating connections to understand if they are part of the same strategy.
- It is important to consider all the elements potentially exploited by OC and monitor emerging trends.
- Waste medical products may become subject to manipulation by organized crime (e.g. they can change the expiration date of medicine or other products and put them back into commerce).
- The vaccine will also become a huge opportunity for OC, especially if the demand will exceed the offer. Organized crime will be ready to infiltrate the market with the counterfeit vaccine.
- To ensure that those in greatest need of assistance receive adequate and qualified support; it is fundamental in this regard:
 - To establish clear objectives and transparent criteria for the qualification of intended beneficiaries.
 - To develop and/or strengthen open and clear communication and outreach channels; using digital tools can help governments in determining who needs what and where. It can also help to ensure that the distribution of such essential services is equal.
 - To establish clear and effective communication channels to ensure that beneficiaries are aware of their eligibility, the amount and scope of the benefit and how they will be made known to disbursement authorities; time frames for the delivery of benefits should also be provided to the public so that if expectations aren't met, they can be reported and addressed.

- Administrative procedures should be simplified using online platforms to the greatest possible extent.
- Expanding whistleblower protection through secure inclusive channels to help encourage the reporting of potential acts of corruption and increase accountability is crucial. Such channels should be gender sensitive, considering the particular issues related to the protection of women and other vulnerable groups who may be worried about reporting.
- Anti-corruption measures should be prioritized in all Response and Recovery plans, strengthening, integrating and mainstreaming the expertise and work of encryption bodies.
- Clear, feasible emergency response frameworks should be developed, while ensuring that institutions have the necessary capacity to fulfil their functions; these plans should ideally engage in public consultations to make sure that the needs and interests of vulnerable groups are being recognized and incorporated.
- Due to weaker management structures, it is recommended to conduct risk assessments and identify mitigation measures for the disbursement of funding, in terms of, for example, disbursement methods by international donors.
- It is necessary to engage in international donor coordination to harmonize methods of disbursing funds and ensure that funds reach countries and populations most in need.



6

HOW COVID-19 IMPACTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Highlights

- Although the COVID-19 thread is universal, the negative consequences of the crisis are being shouldered disproportionately by the most vulnerable in our societies; this is particularly the case for victims of trafficking. With movement restrictions and the interruption of numerous economic activities, traditional systems and venues of exploitation were thrown into disarray. However, traffickers started looking for other ways to maintain their revenue through new or expanded forms of exploitation. Trafficking and online sexual exploitation are pertinent examples of how traffickers can keep their revenue intact and enhance isolation and control over victims, particularly women and girls, exploiting not only economic vulnerability but also gender inequalities.
- Webcam exploitation or production and forced production photography are hugely profitable and are increasing in this time. There is a whole host of platforms where it is possible to sell these items, which are almost entirely unregulated. On these platforms there is not any consent verification, so it is impossible to know if the person is being exploited or not. Traffickers take advantage of this loophole to expand their operations.
- In addition, anti-trafficking responses, particularly criminal justice systems, have experienced widespread issues with maintaining operational continuity. Generally, law enforcement agencies are shifting their priorities to dealing with enforcing lockdowns.

- The issue of trafficking is likely much worse as the economic opportunities for traffickers increase, the criminal justice response shrinks, and the support services for victims are severely impacted. In many countries, civil societies have been defunded, so they are unable to provide the services that they previously did, or their services are restricted due to lockdown measures. The results of the three factors together led to an increase of 200% in reports of online child exploitation during the pandemic. At the same time, prosecution of traffickers has declined by 90%¹⁸.
- Another crime that has significantly increased is domestic violence, which is a push factor for human trafficking victimization.

Key Takeaways

- Addressing vulnerability at a systematic level to prevent a public health crisis from becoming a human trafficking crisis;
- Ensuring universal access to essential economic and social welfare services including unemployment aid, regardless of recent employment history¹⁹;
- Granting or extending temporary residence permits to migrants and asylum seekers regardless of their legal status²⁰;
- Prioritizing access to services in high-risk sectors such as the commercial sex industry;

¹⁸ As reported by OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, Valiant Richey

¹⁹ This measure would help, for example, millions of unregistered domestic workers who might lose their positions or be sent back to their countries through the lock down but have no other support system.

²⁰ This measure would increase their resilience by facilitating access to health care and welfare services, identifying victims of trafficking.

- A multipurpose hotline for human trafficking, domestic violence and child abuse. Such a hotline is important not only for reporting purposes, but also for conveying information about services available or enhancing identification of victims;
- Planning and implementing short-, midand long-term measures in terms of responses. Short term: ensure that courts are running and law enforcement is investigating, place a greater focus on online work; ensure protection measures for victims, safe accommodation, safe access to immediate crisis services and other type of services (e.g. psychological assistance, drug treatment, medical treatment, etc.). In terms of midand long-term responses, it is important to focus on prevention activities looking at the demand side and to adapt measures to the supply chain in order to anticipate the intersection between massive economic vulnerability and demand for labour, goods and service. The priority is not to allow traffickers to fill this gap with exploitation.



7

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TOURISM-DRIVEN ECONOMIES

Highlights

- Considering that in CARICOM States tourism is a key driver of regional sustainable development and a vital contributor to job creation and poverty alleviation, COVID-19 has had very tangible economic and social consequences for many people, places and businesses and for the wider economy of the Caribbean²¹.
- The COVID-19 crisis has hit the tourism economy hard with unprecedented effects on jobs and businesses. Tourism accounts for one in six jobs in the region, compared to tourism accounting for one in ten jobs globally, a majority of which are held by women.
- The World Travel and Tourism Council has projected that in the worst case scenario, visitor numbers to the region in 2020 could fall by as much as the 71% compared with 2019, with a loss of two million jobs.
- The outlook for the Caribbean in 2020 prior to the pandemic, based on projections from the Caribbean Development Bank, was an average growth rate of 4.2% in 2019. However, for 2020 the projection for most countries in the region would be a negative growth, of 5% and above in terms of GDP.
- While the COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a health crisis, it poses significant threats to peace and security in the Caribbean.
- The critical measures implemented by CARICOM Member States, such as social distancing, restrictions, border closures, suspension of non-essential services and increased surveillance

²¹ In 2019, the tourism industry contributed 59 billion dollars in total GDP contribution in the region and, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), travel and tourism contributes around 10.3 percent of global GDP.

at the national, regional and international levels have impacted, and will continue to impact, the crime and security landscape. Shortly after the implementation of government measures to slow down the virus, many countries witnessed declines in some types of crimes and increases in others.

- As more people stayed home, murders, violent assaults or residential burglaries decreased. On the other hand, as the confinement of people to their homes increased exposure to abusive partners, reported domestic abuse and gender-based violence increased. As many businesses' activities are now being conducted online, the pandemic has led to an increase in credit card fraud cybercrimes. Other criminal activities have also increased (e.g. increase in fraud).
- Further research is needed to understand the long-term impact of the pandemic on crime.

Key Takeaways

- Ensuring a whole of government approach from a financial perspective. The global institutions do not take into consideration the vulnerability of small island states in terms of concessionary loans.
- Ensuring that countries with tourism-based economies have crisis management plans and tools, prepared before crisis occurs, not during or afterwards. Considering the competitiveness of the tourism industry, the communication in times of crisis is vital.



8

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND RULE OF LAW, WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY

Highlights

- Emergency measures taken by States to cope with the pandemic had an impact on individuals, generating new challenges and sometimes violating some human rights (e.g. right of access to justice and the right to a fair trial in a timely manner) and liberties (not only the liberty of movement, but also the freedom of speech, association and demonstration).
- In some cases, measures have had a disproportionate impact, especially on the most vulnerable people, not only in terms of economic vulnerability, but also in terms of difficulties in accessing social and health care services due to lockdowns and other restrictive measures.
- The role of justice systems is crucial in the design, implementation and enforcement of those measures. Justice systems are responsible for interpreting these measures, applying them and making sure that they adhere to international standards²².
- The pandemic has created a justice crisis. Courts, justice systems and security systems experienced a real slow down, with interruption of activities and suspension of hearings. On a global scale, courts were not prepared to cope with the situation.
- As a result of the pandemic, in many countries, there has been a rise in: family disputes; gender-based violence; labour disputes

²² To ensure the measures against the COVID-19 pandemic encompass the respect of human rights, UNDP promoted some initiatives in different countries. For instance, to limit the risk of spreading the virus among detainees in Mali, UNDP has involved the National Human Rights Commission to support and ensure that the human rights dimension is taken into account by the government while they are dealing with the ongoing crisis. In Sierra Leone, the national human rights institutions have been supported, to ensure that the management of the crisis was respectful of international standards. In Ukraine, UNDP revised how to address some of the restrictive measures that were introduced by the government with the office of the Ombudsman and reinforced the capacities of State officials in dealing with such measures. They also supported the launch of an advocacy campaign for the prevention of discrimination and the promotion of tolerance in COVID-19 related communications.

because of the economic crisis; problems of access to social security benefits; housing disputes; bankruptcies; insolvency, etc. Although the need for justice is growing, it will be impossible to absorb new cases in the near future. For many countries, the backlog of cases is increasing, as is the pressure on justice systems, which still have reduced or limited capacities.

- For people in prisons and detention centres, the fact that the courts were not operating normally, with interruption of activities and even suspension of hearings, implied extended stays in detention, affecting also their right to have a fair trial and have their cases reviewed in a timely manner. Also, access to lawyers and legal aid was affected. Where prisons or detention facilities are already very difficult places in terms of overcrowded spaces and sanitary conditions, the real impossibility to organize physical distancing has had a direct impact on the health and safety of detainees. In addition to that, to limit the spread of the virus, prison systems and incarceration centres have taken extraordinary measures such as restricting visiting rights, and limiting or interrupting family visiting, which has imposed a heavier burden on detainees.
- Governments have taken different measures to limit the impact of this situation. The approach of some countries was more focused on the sanitary aspect (UNDP supported the provision of hygiene kits, hand wash sanitation stations, definition of guidelines to address the situation or guidelines on preventive measures to avoid massive dissemination of COVID-19 in the criminal and juvenile justice systems). Other countries have tried to decongest prisons and reduce the prison population through pardon laws, early releases for specific groups of detainees (e.g. people with health problems, elderly people or minors), the use of alternatives to detention such as electronic bracelets. Some countries also decided to limit the number of new arrests for some minor offenses.

Key Takeaways

- Any measures taken to limit the spread of the virus must show respect for human rights, the rule of law and international standards. They must be transparent, and our governments must remain accountable for them. Communication is also very important.
- The rule of law and respect for human rights must be upheld despite the safety and health challenges related to the pandemic. The crisis highlighted the important role of justice systems when managing the pandemic, as well as the need for continuity of justice services and responsive and fair systems in order to maintain public trust.
- The importance of collecting data for evidence-based policymaking is a point that emerged in this and other interventions²³.
- A need for more coordination and systemic, solution-driven approaches also emerged.
- Create and promote spaces for discussion and exchange of best practices (examples of other countries can help to inspire and fine-tune solutions).
- Encourage a global coverage conversation about the future; stop concentrating on short-term emergency measures, but rather look at this crisis as an opportunity to transform the justice sector, identifying alternative ways to deal with justice and making sure that the justice system does not collapse with the demand.

²³ A special initiative on COVID-19 digital mapping on justice and the deprivation of liberty has been developed in Latin America and Caribbean. This online tool includes 31 countries of the region with the aim to monitor the responses and policies from the States in that area and to keep systems accountable for data collection. In this regard, another example of a data collection tool is the COVID-19 related gender tracker tool, a UNDP initiative in collaboration with UN Women.



9

CBRN RISK MITIGATION INITIATIVES TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO POTENTIAL CBRN THREATS

Highlights

- For the past ten years, the European Union has supported UNICRI with the implementation of CBRN Centres of Excellence, an international cooperation programme that brings countries together to work on the mitigation of risks related to chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials (CBRN)²⁴.
- In the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic, the threat posed by dangerous CBRN agents and materials remains high, with a special need to focus on biological threats.
- The risk of possible use of potential CBRN agents by terrorists continues to pose serious concerns for governments and to threaten civilian populations worldwide.
- There is a need to expand the risk mitigation communication with regard to biological threats to include society at large.

Key Takeaways

- It is important to involve children, as one of the most vulnerable parts of society, in risk mitigation communication²⁵.
- Countries should learn from the current crisis in terms of CBRN, as well as from previous pandemics (i.e. the Ebola crisis) to protect communities. Countries must endeavour to adapt

²⁴ The programme involves 62 partner countries, relevant National Focal Points, and members from all relevant Ministries and agencies involved in CBRN risk mitigation. Needs assessments at the national level have been conducted, in order to evaluate and determine the national risks, vulnerabilities and systems in place to address their needs. National action plans and policies are then created to address the country's needs.

²⁵ Despite the large number of persons in the CBRN programme and the excellence initiative within the EU and in other partner countries, one important group – the youth – was missing. For this reason, the original Secretariat in Central Asia devised a plan to involve the youth in risk mitigation.

previous lessons learnt to the current situation and to the next potential crisis.

- There exists a need to raise awareness among stakeholders, the wider public, and younger generations, (e.g. local CBRN stakeholders, NGOs, local mass media, universities, students, teachers and parents of schoolchildren) on CBRN and other security threats and risks.
- Strengthening the capacities of countries in terms of awareness, risk assessment, monitoring and control of vector borne diseases is crucial.
- Reinforcing the international network including relevant scientists and public health institutions, to prepare concrete National Action Plan for countries.
- It is essential to foster comprehensive international cooperation models and standards based on a universal perception of risks and a global commitment to jointly share responsibilities. In this regard, the UNICRI CBRN initiative has proved to be an effective network for international cooperation, acting around three foundational pillars:
 1. Structure of the programme: to facilitate dialogue and cooperation between different UN Member States, the CBRN Centres of Excellence were not created as a physical structure, but as a decentralized network, easily adaptable to different challenges²⁶, national and regional conditions.

²⁶ The initiative is based on eight regional hubs or Regional Secretariats, each led by a Head of Secretariat, appointed by the host country, and an international UNICRI staff member who performs the role of Regional Coordinator. Together with the Head and the rest of the Secretariat Team, the Regional Coordinator is in daily contact with all National Focal Points, each of them representing a UN Partner Member State in the region.

2. Ownership of the partner countries: the participation of Member States in the CBRN programme is not based on politically or legally binding agreement but is on a voluntary basis; this is essential to ensure that the countries are not simply beneficiaries, but owners of the initiative.
3. Country driven approach: UNICRI and the European Commission (EC), throughout the years, have embraced and promoted a country driven approach, meaning that resources were allocated based on the needs identified by the partner countries.



10

COVID-19 AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

Highlights

- People with substance use disorders (SUDs) may be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, mostly with risks and consequences among young people.
- Young people who use drugs and are in the criminal justice system are the most vulnerable²⁷.
- The pandemic has caused many families deep suffering in terms of stress, mainly due to economic distress and difficulties in managing daily life. For many, family life during the lockdown was a real challenge: schools closed, and socialization was limited. This has exacerbated the harm of the crisis on young people and children. In many cases, those families already experiencing unstable relationships, have become more exposed to the effects of the crisis with implications on children's well-being. Substance use is often a part of these families and the context for the young people is quite often embarrassing or frightening, and definitely stigmatizing and unsafe on occasions.
- Despite very little information available on drug use among young people and the very varied situation across different countries, it is undeniable that vulnerable young people are facing a lot of increased risks during the pandemic, with a potential risk of increase in mental health and emotional problems, particularly boredom, loneliness, depression, stress

²⁷ Research was conducted with six countries altogether, looking at the narratives from 189 young people and 68 practitioners. All of these young people were experiencing a wide range of difficult problems, which covered drugs crime, mental health, social problems of various sorts, and a lot of practical needs. The research also pointed out there has been an involvement of young people in criminal activity, in the UK for example, and an increase in drug related violence. The research was conducted and finished just as COVID-19 was starting, the effects of COVID-19 on this particular group have come from a variety of sources, including family services, NGOs and charity groups, as well as correspondence and brief discussions with a whole range of key informants and practitioners. EPICC Exchanging Prevention Practices on Polydrug Use among Youth in Criminal Justice Systems – <http://eppic-project.eu/>

and self-harm. Mental health can also negatively impact other members in the family.

- Research in the drug field reveals some changes in the patterns of drug use: party drugs are not being used so frequently, but cannabis use, for example, has increased amongst some young groups. Some groups are drinking more and in greater quantities.
- Due to funding restrictions, in some countries there has been a reduction in youth services and in the relevant staff available to assist young people. This situation was made worse during COVID-19, when in many cases relevant services have closed.
- Some of the young people and children were very high risk and very vulnerable to exploitation and coercion, becoming more involved in criminal gangs.
- There has also been a massive increase in domestic abuse, child sex abuse and neighbourhood disputes. Many have also experienced a lack of routine; all their normal ways of structuring their days have been disrupted and this has been a factor in increasing drug and alcohol use. Many young people were out of school for at least five months and it became easier for them to use substances, including cannabis, with less consequences.
- Family dynamics are also suffering and need support. COVID-19, in fact, has had some severe effects on family dynamics, increasing tensions, conflict and violence. In some instances, young people have reported increasing drug use, alcohol use, and gambling among other members in the family.
- COVID-19 has had a very negative effect on young people in touch with the criminal justice system. There has been a backlog in court cases where young people have effectively been left in limbo.

- For those who are in custody, there has not been any face-to-face contact during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are not in physical contact with family, social workers or anyone else. Educational efforts with young people in custody have stopped, therapy has stopped and there has been limited planning for their release. This has had an extremely negative impact, with the risk of long-term psychiatric and developmental harm for young people.
- However, many services have tried to adapt and to do something positive over this period²⁸. Although there have been distinct risks to this particularly vulnerable group, social care services, at least in the UK, have tried to address it and to see if they can find ways of providing support, which they can continue to offer after COVID-19 has been resolved.
- Although a large amount of literature highlighted the importance of working with families in the prevention field, the gap between theory and practice is still too big and the crisis is making this gap much bigger.

²⁸ For example, there has been an extension of outreach work, and Walk and Talk has been used. Visiting young people in the spaces where they are congregating and trying to rebuild the relationships that have been lost with practitioners. Practitioners in the UK have also tried to provide food and snacks as this has been really important for this particular group of young. They have also increased phone contact with parents in order to offer support. Reaching parents has been a real problem for most practitioners when they are involved with families, and, over the COVID-19 pandemic, they have tried to address this. They have used social media to message young people and to check in with them, finding that this has been preferred to video calling. During full lockdown, a UK-based service was phoning families to check on their children and to see if they needed anything. It became apparent that no one was checking on the children (schools, social workers, etc.). At first, parents were paranoid about the questions, the service had never worked with parents before lockdown, so this was something new for them. Eventually, they were able to build relationships over time with parents. Again, this is a positive development and something they would like to continue.

Key Takeaways

- Scientific evidence has shown the potential role of the family in the prevention of drug use among young people and children and also in the rehabilitation process. Therefore, it is fundamental to support families with adequate tools to recognize or deal with behaviours considered at risk, including substance use. In this regard, UNICRI conducted a research project²⁹ with the aim to:
 - identify the essential policy elements for strengthening the support offered to families for the prevention of drug use;
 - gather useful information to improve the selection of services available to families, as well as to refine policies that focus on their needs.
- The family represents, the “environmental factor” that, in combination with the external social environment, guides, directs and influences the attitudes and actions of children and young people. Therefore, it is important to understand how families can be better supported and empowered and how their resilience can be strengthened.
- International organizations are very well positioned in data collection and data sharing. Data regarding the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on families and young people, how the crisis has affected the consumption in drugs and if it has changed in patterns consumption is particularly important.

²⁹ The project “What are the needs of families in the prevention of drug use among children and adolescents” included research activities in three countries (Italy, Lebanon and Tunisia) involving families, government institutions, civil society organisations, national experts and other key stakeholders currently working in the field of drug prevention and treatment. Questionnaires were developed and adapted to collect relevant information, which were further discussed during the focus groups held in the three selected countries. The description of the activities implemented, as well as the findings, are included in the report developed for each country involved in the project which will be available on the UNICRI website in January 2021.

- It is essential to raise awareness on the importance of providing adequate support to families in general and to allocate adequate financial and human resources.
- It is necessary to invest in research activity in order to assess the needs and priorities of countries and to develop policies and actions specifically targeted to local communities and communities at large.

