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Egypt: Trafficking in Persons and COVID-19

Emerging trends in Egypt

Author: Alix McIntosh
Supervisor: Balázs Majtényi

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted nearly every aspect of society, and impacted global supply chains of all kinds, including the illicit harboring, trade, coercion, force, and exploitation of human beings, more commonly known as *trafficking in persons.* The global interruption of movement and implementation of COVID-mitigating policies by governments around the world caused interruptions in migration, trade, tourism, and many facets of the economy; at more local levels the pandemic kept people indoors, interrupting or greatly changing work environments for all. This research, which was conducted through primary and secondary means, seeks to understand the impact of COVID and related policies on trafficking in persons in Egypt, a significant country in regional migration and a cross-section of many forms of trafficking. As a data-poor nation, the bulk of the findings were measured through interviews with professionals in the field, resulting in what is a rare collection of insights from various experts from different institutions, academic and professional backgrounds, and thematic interests. The results of this research paint a landscape in Egypt which has shifted greatly during the pandemic, giving rise to new forms of trafficking, such as online exploitation, exacerbating others, such as summer/child marriages, and creating an ever-increasing pool of at-risk and vulnerable peoples.

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Introduction

Research question

The COVID-19 pandemic redefined life on a global scale; nearly every aspect of society and human infrastructure were affected by COVID response: economies, housing, immigration and travel, healthcare, even democratic processes. These effects were largely, if not wholly, negative, creating an immense and nearly immeasurable population of newly or greatly more vulnerable persons. Not even the most remote and isolated nations were immune to the impact of this global disaster, and neither the most illicit nor underground activities. While many avenues of transnational crimes and transnational criminal organizations were disturbed by the global pandemic response, new routes, means, and methods emerged to take their place, taking advantage of a world with protection mechanisms that were overwhelmed or stalled, and with a vastly larger and more vulnerable population on which to prey. Globally, the question has been asked: how did COVID response, particularly COVID-mitigating policies such as lockdown, social distancing measures, and migration policies, effect trafficking in persons? While the answers are complex, difficult to ascertain, and very specific to each country, larger regional trends can be established by looking at key countries who offer a more comprehensive view of demand, supply, opportunity, and range in their trafficking landscape.

Egypt, a country at the nexus of North Africa and the Middle East, has long served as a bridge in the historic and modern migration routes between global south and global north, and a source and destination country for trafficking in persons provides an excellent cross-section through which to observe a variety of trends and patterns in trafficking. (Jureidini, 2018) Domestically, the primary form of trafficking in persons identified is forced labor, and within that, overwhelmingly domestic workers are those exploited and abused, both foreign

and Egyptian nationals. (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; 2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021; 2019 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020) Hiring a live-in or live-out domestic worker for cleaning, cooking, and often childcare, is a nearly ubiquitous social practice in the middle and upper socioeconomic classes in Egypt, including for foreigners living and working there. (Mazen, 2022) The spread of COVID, the global and domestic policy response, and the socioeconomic consequences of international uncertainty created an upset in traditional systems, including routes, recruitment, methods of coercion and manipulation, and other characteristics of trafficking in persons and victims of trafficking.

While the systems designed to respond to and prevent trafficking in persons (such as shelters, international organizations, hotlines, and legal systems) are built to have a certain amount of flexibility to the fluctuations in trafficking in persons that naturally occur over time and in response to external pressure and stimuli, they are not frequently met with such a comprehensive upheaval to the social systems and stakeholders involved. Understanding the changes in the broad characteristics of victims, the methods and means of recruitment and exploitation, and other patterns, allows stakeholders to create more targeted, efficient, and effective interventions which provide protection to victims, prevent new or further exploitation, and allow for the prosecution of traffickers and other criminals related to the abuse and exploitation of victims. Therefore, this research asks of those stakeholders most active in observing and responding to trafficking in persons: how did the landscape (patterns and overarching trends) of trafficking in persons change during and after the pandemic? This question will focus on the trends themselves: characteristics of those exploited, type of exploitation, routes, methods of recruitment, coercion, manipulation, or force. The study will establish and understanding of the pre-COVID trafficking in persons frontier and those changes which have been observed by various stakeholders on the ground.

The study will go further to ask how these changes occurred, whether in response, for example, to the absence of protection service during lockdown, or in response to economic uncertainty and panic. This question will contribute to establishing which trends were/are fleeting, and which appear to have more lasting power or have changed the landscape of trafficking in persons in Egypt outside the influence of COVID, or if these changes can be reversed when COVID-specific policies desist?

The secondary research, a review of the existing literature, sets the backdrop on trafficking in Egypt before the pandemic, including the migration patterns which fed and responded to demand for exploitable labor, the response of stakeholders in Egypt to COVID and COVID-mitigating policies put in place, and the global changes in the demand and supply of trafficking in persons and vulnerable and at-risk persons. The primary research will test what the result of the secondary research posits: that existing international supply and demand chains in trafficking in persons, having been interrupted by COVID-mitigating policies, resulted in the increased exploitation of domestically-available labor sources, including migrants already in Egypt and Egyptians; further, that the economic and social impacts of COVID policies resulted in a correspondingly larger and more vulnerable populations, expanding the supply of potentially-exploitable persons in Egypt.

The primary research, which relies upon the insight and experience of professionals working in the field of migration and trafficking in persons in Egypt, will highlight not only how and why the aforementioned hypothesis came to become a reality, but also how institutional failures during the pandemic of key stakeholders contributed to an increasingly vulnerable population, and new and concerning trends which arose in response to global policies, such as new and dangerous means of irregular migration and exploitation of children online.

Overview

Defining trafficking in persons

Trafficking in persons, also called human trafficking or trafficking in human beings, is widely known as a form of modern day slavery, though according to the United Nations' (UN) protocol on trafficking (hereafter the Palermo Protocol), which set out to "prevent, suppress and punish" trafficking in persons, (Preamble, Palermo Protocol, 2003), trafficking is more broad than slavery, though it also encompasses "slavery and practices similar to slavery". (Article 3, Palermo Protocol, 2003) Communities and states came to recognize the unacceptable moral and human rights violations perpetrated through slavery and the slave trade in the 19th century as the atrocities of the transatlantic slave trade were acknowledged. The transatlantic-trade era concept of slavery, with kidnap, brutal violence, and total domination or ownership of one person or a group over others, was largely outlawed throughout the world within the century, first through a ban on the trade of slaves, and later through the abolition of slavery itself. Though slavery has been abolished in every modern country, traffickers and those willing to exploit other human beings for their own profit have persisted in various forms, and slavery has not been criminalized in nearly half of the world. (Shwarz and Allain, 2020). Often exploitation blatantly flouts local and international laws against slavery in its various forms, though trafficking in persons often manages to find legal grey space and can thrive in areas of legal ambiguity, including through indentured servitude and debt repayment.

TIP is defined as follows by the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children:

> "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat, use of force or other means of coercion, of abduction, of fraud,

> of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the receiving or giving of payment or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."

This definition can be boiled down to three key steps: means, act, and purpose. Act refers to the method of recruitment or transport, means refers to the method of force or coercion, and the purpose refers to the exploitation. In the case of minors, "means" is not required to identify exploitation as TIP, as it is understood that there is an inherent imbalance of power between minors and adults. As an example, a recruiter offers Person X a job in the next town over, the recruiter even buys Person X a bus ticket to get to the town (act – recruitment and transport); later, once Person X has arrived and started the job, they are informed by their new employers that their wages will be kept for the first few weeks in order to pay the recruiter back for the cost of the bus ticket, and Person X is then forced to work without pay for an indeterminate amount of time (means – debt bondage, withholding of pay). All in all, this means that both the recruiter and the employers (both of whom are traffickers) are benefitting from the free labor of Person X (purpose). This case would be classified within the umbrella of trafficking in persons as "forced labor". Other common forms of trafficking include sexual exploitation, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, and trafficking for the purpose of organ removal. These distinctions are important to understanding the line between exploitation which becomes trafficking and other violations, such as labor rights violations or assault, which may not qualify as trafficking in persons; understanding these distinct (though in practice often overlapping) aspects of trafficking is also key to understanding how and why trends change, and will be how the research approaches findings in later chapters.

States struggle to identify traffickers and victims of trafficking, and exact or even comprehensive numbers are impossible to gather. This is in part due to the illicit nature of

trafficking, which is by design conducted underground, under the table, and outside of the view of communities. It is also by design that even victims of trafficking in persons who escape or are released from their situation of exploitation may often fear reporting what has happened to them, whether because they may be in a situation of irregular migration status, they may have been forced or coerced to commit crimes (for example, prostitution or entry into a country on falsified documents) or may be under continued threat by traffickers and criminal organizations. (Kelly, 2005)

The safeguards of human rights under international law, particularly those defined under the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, do not often match with the real-world response from governments in regards to irregular migrants.[1] While international law allows for irregular entry for those seeking asylum, as many are unable to access regular points of entry, national laws are often in conflict with this, with states frequently denying even *prima faciae* refugees[2] access to protection and asylum mechanisms, including dedicated UN agencies or the government's own legal migration channels. The threat of indefinite detention, deportation, even refoulement (when access to asylum and refugee determination procedures are denied), and worse color the perception of potential and actual irregular migrants, making them more susceptible to exploitation and trafficking.

Lastly, there is a lack of general understanding of trafficking in persons and its illegality; often, trafficking in persons skirts a fine line of labor violations, and where it crosses into trafficking in persons can be contested by advocates and professional

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[1] According to the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (adopted 15 November 2000, entered into force 28 January 2004) 2241 UNTS 507) Art. 3(a), "smuggling" is defined as: The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the irregular entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.

[2] According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *prima facie* refugee status is "the recognition by a State of refugee status on the basis of the readily apparent, objective circumstances in the country of origin giving rise to exodus"

organizations, much less government officials who are not trained to identify trafficking, and far less by the general public or victims of trafficking who have experienced it. Often victims of trafficking are identified through arrest or detention for other crimes, such as solicitation or migration status; this can contribute to the hesitation that victims may feel in reporting abuse or exploitation. This understanding must be brought into the analysis of the secondary and primary research, recalling throughout that the fine line between smuggling, exploitation, and trafficking can often be blurred on individual cases and in understanding larger patterns, and the difficulty—and perhaps futility—of attempting to disconnect them. When, later, the trafficking of Egyptians along smuggling routes is discussed, the push and pull factors for smuggling are an important aspect of understanding the trafficking that occurs along these routes, despite there not being complete overlap or distinction between smugglers, traffickers, and the victims of each.

While the word "trafficking" often evokes the concept of transnational movement, trafficking in persons does not require the crossing of borders to qualify, and someone can be trafficked equally by their next-door neighbor or a stranger across the world. Statistically, it is far more likely that victims will be exploited or recruited by someone they know than through kidnap or other efforts by strangers. (Bender, 2017) However, due to the aforementioned difficulties in collecting data, a disproportionate quantity of data collected on trafficking in persons revolves around migrant victims, which in turn leads to a common misconception of trafficking in persons as an issue primarily related to migration, and often conflated with smuggling. Understanding the prevalence of trafficking in persons and how it presents in a community is key to addressing not only the crime itself, but gaps or weaknesses in labor laws and ways in which legal, protection, and prevention structures in governmental bodies and society can be strengthened in order to tackle trafficking.

Relevance of the Case Study

I chose Egypt as a case study because it serves as a country of destination, transit, and origin for smuggling and trafficking, making it uniquely interesting to observe in the context of a global phenomenon such as COVID-19. (Jureidini, 2018) By analyzing the trends and changes in Egypt during COVID, the impacts on each of these three distinct groups can be assessed to the benefit of a maximum number of third countries for whom such an analysis would only touch upon emigrant, immigrant, or transitory migrants who may be subjected to trafficking. Observing changes in Egypt, particularly ones which may be more fundamental to the landscape of trafficking in persons, is highly impactful to the region at large, as Egypt serves as a cultural, geographic, and political bridge between the Middle East and North Africa, including as a transit, destination, and origin country along some of the world's most significant migratory routes both contemporary and historical. Though migration and trafficking have distinct trends and have taken distinct courses during the pandemic, migration is integrally linked to Egypt's trafficking profile, and is one of the most effected aspects of that profile by global and domestic COVID-mitigation policies; understanding Egypt's migration landscape, and how it was effected by pandemic policies, will shine a light on regional trends in both migration and trafficking in persons.

Egypt also presents a unique opportunity to study trend changes and impact more directly: Egypt's pre-COVID trafficking in persons landscape was relatively stable, particularly since the 2011 Revolution. (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; 2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021; 2019 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020) Changes during COVID, particularly to traditionally stable factors such as the demand for imported unskilled laborers including domestic workers and other luxury human services, despite a large supply of unskilled and low-cost domestic labor, should provide stark and clear connection between

the socioeconomic impact of COVID-related policy and sudden changes to these trends. Egypt also faced great economic and social upheaval in response to global and domestic COVID-19 response, considering it is an economy that is largely dependent upon tourism, hospitality, and remittances from Egyptian migrants (skilled and unskilled) abroad, all of which faced immediate impact from lockdowns and migration policy changes around the world.

This type of analysis has not yet been completed; furthermore, it may never be fully completed. Every attempt to look into trafficking in persons, especially observing a contemporary event, will uncover new evidence and cases. This is in large part due to the illicit nature of trafficking in persons which means that a vast number if not majority of victims will never be identified, as well as stigma within victims of trafficking and surrounding them due to immigration status, the nature of the exploitation or coercion (can be debt bondage, blackmail, or intimidation/threats of violence), and oversight or ignorance of the issue within key institutions most likely to come into contact with victims of trafficking, such as police stations, embassies, and hospitals. Victims do not come forward immediately following the incidence of exploitation; often they are initially mis-identified as a smuggled or irregular migrant, until more in-depth interviewing is done; and crucially, it often takes many months, if not years, for the entire process of recruitment, transportation, coercion, exploitation, escape or release, and identification to occur.

While this process is likely curtailed due to the circumstances of COVID (which often hampered the recruitment and transportation stages), a comprehensive picture of trends and patterns of trafficking in persons during COVID cannot yet exist in the field or in academics, it is unlikely that a fully comprehensive picture will exist in the next five to ten years; but the snapshots and analysis provided at this given moment will help to complete a broader picture down the line. Most importantly, the snapshot taken now of the landscape of trafficking in

persons during COVID can change out-of-date practices for outreach and identification of potential victims of trafficking in the field, as well as prevention methods and government response.

Limitations

The very nature of trafficking is elusive and not entirely trackable. Collecting data and conducting research on trafficking in persons is therefore always a labor of some degree of futility. Many actors, from traffickers to victims to the State itself, have vested interests in minimizing and maintaining the secrecy of trafficking in persons. For traffickers, this motivation is the same as the interest of any criminal; for victims, there is often shame, fear of legal consequences (particularly in sex work or in cases which involve irregular migration[3]); for States, rich data on trafficking in persons within their borders (or about their citizens) can signify that trafficking is a larger or less managed problem (when, in fact, it's simply better understood). Additionally, many victims do not themselves understand that their rights, and the laws of the State, have been violated by traffickers, and do not know to, or wish to, report the violations. Those who do make their way to organizations which provide some type of assistance, often only manage to do so some time after their ordeal has ended.

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[3] According to the International Organization for Migration, "irregular migration" is defined as: *"Movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit, or destination. Note: Although a universally accepted definition of irregular migration does not exist, the term is generally used to identify persons moving outside regular migration channels. The fact that they migrate irregularly does not relieve States from the obligation to protect their rights. Moreover, categories of migrants who may not have any other choice but to use irregular migration channels can also include refugees, victims of trafficking, or unaccompanied migrant children. The fact that they use irregular migration pathways does not imply that States are not, in some circumstances, obliged to provide them with some forms of protection under international law, including access to international protection for asylum seekers fleeing persecution, conflicts or generalized violence. In addition, refugees are protected under international law against being penalized for unauthorized entry or stay if they have travelled from a place where they were at risk (Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954)189 UNTS 137, Art. 31(1))."*

This creates a significant problem in the collection of data and management of emerging trends and issues. What little data is collected often reflects a picture of trafficking in persons that is months, if not years, delayed; furthermore, any image that emerges from the data that is collected can be known to be a partial—far from comprehensive—portrait of trafficking in persons. Even those organizations and government bodies which collect data guard it fiercely, and rightfully so, to protect the data and privacy of those who seek their assistance.

The Republic of Egypt is regarded as a particularly data-poor nation, (Kelly, 2005) with a government that often refuses to support the inclusion of data collection and research in programming, even by the UN. (Abdel Aziz, 2016) From professional experience in Egypt, I observed that these limitations extend almost exclusively from the security and political policies of the Egyptian administration and related agencies; numerous efforts by community-level, international, and inter-governmental entities to collect, analyze, or share data on migration *or* trafficking in persons have been met with direct instructions to cease and desist, or indirect actions to block or otherwise hinder these activities by the Government of Egypt.

The data that is available is largely from three sources: the Government of Egypt's special inter-ministerial body related to trafficking and migration, the National Coordinating Committee for Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons (NCCPIM&TIP); the United Nation's migration agency, the International Organization for Migration (IOM); and the United States of America's Department of Justice annual report on trafficking in persons, the J/TIP Report. NCCPIM&TIP's data collection activities are very limited and not shared externally; IOM's data is primarily focused on migrants (only including Egyptians who have returned from abroad through some of IOM's return and reintegration programs) and the publication of their data is extremely limited and often not disaggregated; finally, the J/TIP

report is a collection of data from various stakeholders, including IOM, the Government of Egypt, NGOs, and community organizations, but does not conduct its own data collection.

With such limited empirical data, the questions that can be asked in this research, and the conclusions drawn, must be somewhat limited and understood within Egypt's data context. The largest source of identification of victims of trafficking in persons is by IOM, whose migrant applicants are most often employed as domestic workers. Though a significant amount of sexual exploitation, trafficking for organ removal, and other forms of forced labor outside of the sphere of domestic work, can be found in Egypt, the prevalence and understanding of the exploitation of domestic workers is by and large at the forefront of data and response for most stakeholders. Therefore, the examination this research will conduct will largely reflect an understanding of trafficking in persons in Egypt that centers, perhaps but not necessarily disproportionately, on the plight of domestic workers.

Additionally, it should be noted that during COVID, protection services, and by extension the primary sources of data collection, were shut down for several months, meaning that the already limited pool of data available was restricted even further during these months. While some NGOs and agencies maintained remote contact with community leaders and organizations, by and large there were little to no identifications made during the first three months of the pandemic.

Research outline

In order to address the questions posed, the research will begin with an examination of existing literature and empirical data on the situation of *trafficking in persons* in Egypt both before and during COVID, in order to create a baseline from which to measure change, as well as of the migration landscape in Egypt more generally, and *trafficking in persons* during COVID globally. These will provide a basis of

understanding from which the findings and changes can be discussed and understood. A section on the conceptual framework of the research will explore those factors which will be examined by the primary research conducted, and how this relates to the literature review. This will lead into the findings of the primary research, and analysis of the implications will be completed in the final sections which conclude and provide recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

Methodology

There will be two elements to the analysis of the question: how have trends and patterns of trafficking in persons in Egypt changed during COVID-19? The first method of analysis will be primary qualitative empirical research done through semi-structured interviews conducted with professionals, practitioners, and academic experts from the field. The responses from these interviews will collect and take advantage of insight and analysis from actors interacting with all the various stakeholders involved in this issue, from whom data cannot or has not yet been collected. This includes perspectives from case work and the identification of victims of trafficking in Egypt before and during COVID; interaction with migrant and Egyptian community leaders from whom insight into smuggling, exploitation, and trafficking of their community members can be further collected; and programmatic and policy work with international organizations, embassies, and the Government of Egypt, from whom quantitative data is not publicly available. As the data and impact of the knowledge from all of these stakeholders is not available to the public or may not be easily quantified, due to the complex and criminal nature of trafficking as well as the Government of Egypt's policy on data collection and sharing from international organs, collecting insights from those who are able to interact with each of these stakeholders will provide a truly unique view of

the changes to trends and patterns in trafficking. The responses will be addressed through thematic analysis in order to draw conclusions on larger trends and patterns.

Subjects will be taken from academic institutions, local and community-level organizations, and international organizations, including the UN, in Egypt, and will all have worked in the respective institution from at least 6 months before the onset of COVID lockdown in Egypt (March 2020) and until at least August 2021 (a year and a half into COVID, and the end of the second wave/beginning of the third wave). Participants will be selected from those institutions, which have been recognized by the Government of Egypt, in order to maintain a level of credibility to their professional opinion; however, their roles, main counterpoints, and areas of focus (all within response to trafficking in persons) vary greatly. Subjects include senior management who have a broader perspective on regional trends and country-wide policy and governmental response; project staff who work with community leaders, public outreach, and preventative measures; academics focused on the study of migration and trafficking in Egypt; and with caseworkers who engage directly with victims of trafficking in persons (both migrants and Egyptian nationals). This should provide a comprehensive portrait of trends with an understanding of both political and regional dynamics as well as on-the-ground insight gathered directly from victims and vulnerable communities.

The secondary aspect of the analysis will include secondary data and analysis of the existing academic literature and international documents and reports, which will aim to achieve two primary goals: the first is to supplement and lend further evidence and credibility to the findings of the primary research, and the second is to understand which factors and circumstances effect the demand, supply, and flow of trafficking in, through, and out of Egypt. To the second point, it is important to understand which factors feed the supply chain of trafficking (migration trends, labor demands, vulnerable populations, and policies) as well

as understanding the current trends against which any potential changes during COVID can be measured.

To examine this question, pre-COVID trends in trafficking in persons will be closely examined and laid out, including characteristics of victims of trafficking, methods of coercion and recruitment, types of exploitation (forced labor, sexual exploitation, trafficking for organ removal, etc.), and trafficking routes; this will serve as a baseline from which to compare COVID-times trends and behaviors. This baseline will extend back to 2011 to provide an idea of those areas of trafficking in persons which were less permeable to changes and temporary fluctuations, allowing a more direct comparison and assessment of impact.

In order to create a picture of trends during COVID, a review of existing literature and empirical data will be conducted; however, this is expected to be very limited. In the past, UN agencies, embassies of concerned foreign nationals, and even members of the Government of Egypt have struggled to access or keep disaggregated data on victims of trafficking in persons. (Kelly, 2005) Data that is available is often incomplete and without the ability to connect different factors (for instance, being able to identify one victims' nationality, sex *and* type of trafficking), of little use for examining wider trends and changes. For example, the US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report (J/TIP)—widely held in the field to be the most comprehensive source of data available on trafficking in persons in most countries—stated in their 2020 analysis of Egypt:

> "The government reported identifying 519 potential trafficking victims during investigations in 2020. Of the 519 victims, at least 362 were Egyptian and three foreign nationals; at least 123 were adults (81 men and 42 women) and at least 242 were children (148 boys and 94 girls). The government reported providing assistance to all potential victims but did not specify what that assistance was.

> The government did not report disaggregated data on the type of trafficking involved." (2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021)

The Government of Egypt's ubiquitous distaste for the collection of data on those elements of society which may damage the reputation of the nation or threaten the perception of the government's strength, no matter the benefits of the data or by whom it is collected, mean that the questions put forth in this proposal could not be answered by the type or amount of quantitative data that is available. The qualitative analysis will rely on targeted, semi-structured interviews which will be conducted online with professionals. These will be invaluable as they will provide necessary links between COVID and changes which data will be unable to show; it will also provide the majority of the understanding of behaviors during COVID as Egypt is data-poor and uninterested and unwilling to provide or seek out data internally or to allow others to do so, even extending to the USA J/TIP report (from which a great deal of American funding to Egypt is derived).

Limitations in the Methodology

Though the limitations in the scope of the research have already been stated, there are additional limitations in the methodology that ought to be addressed before discussing the findings and conclusions of the research. Qualitative research offers significant opportunities to examine relationships, causation versus correlation, and other nuances which may be impossible to discern from quantitative data. It also, however, poses certain challenges and limitations. Though participants were selected for their expert knowledge and experience working on countering trafficking in persons as and with various stakeholders in Egypt before and during the pandemic, the nature of "trends" and "patterns" identified can be colored by areas of special interest or work, past experience, and the types of programing on

which their work has been dedicated (for instance, specialists on domestic workers, or those who work primarily with Egyptians versus migrants).

Additionally, though these professionals are those who themselves are collecting what limited data exists on trafficking in persons in Egypt, and though many have, through bilateral agreement or professional privilege, access to other stakeholders' data which is not publicly available, they are still operating within a context which neither prioritizes nor supports the collection of data or the conducting of research on trafficking in persons. Participants have decidedly not included members of the Government of Egypt; this is due to the nearly nonexistent data collection or victim-centered activities conducted by the government, and the clear and overwhelming political interests of the government in shaping the narrative of trafficking in persons in Egypt. Though no individual can be entirely devoid of partiality or bias when imparting perceptions, insight, and opinion, the input from the government would have to be assessed as information not based on data or empirical observation to any useful extent.

Literature Review

Trafficking Landscape in Egypt

Egypt's trafficking profile is closely tied to its migration profile – it is both a source and destination country for victims of trafficking. (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; 2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021; 2019 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020) Within this profile are both transnational criminal organizations and networks which facilitate the recruitment, transport, and exploitation of migrants and Egyptians in Egypt and abroad, as well as a looser "core group" network which relies on independent individuals or groups to

facilitate different aspects of trafficking, primarily of Egyptians and within Egypt. (Abaunza, 2022) The "core group" configuration is responsible for much of the exploitation of Egyptian children, through sexual exploitation (including summer marriages[4] [also known as child or seasonal marriage] and forced prostitution) (Kelly, 2005) and forced labor (primarily as forced begging, though also in drug trafficking, domestic work, quarrying, and agricultural labor). (Abaunza, 2022, The Borgen Project, 2021) Like much of the region, the most commonly identified form of trafficking in Egypt is the forced labor of domestic workers, usually those from South/Southeast Asia and West/East Africa (Jureidini, 2014; 2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; International Organization for Migration in Egypt, 2018); this is very similar in form and practice with the "kafala" system of Gulf countries such as the UAE (Abaunza, 2022), though similar practices can be found throughout the rest of the Middle East and North Africa.

Sexual exploitation is common to both Egyptian and foreign victims of trafficking, as well as adults and minors (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; 2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021; 2019 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020). One of Egypt's most repudiated trafficking routes, and perhaps one of it's greatest counter trafficking successes, was the smuggling route through the Sinai Peninsula into Israel/Palestine. (Abdel Aziz, 2016) Smugglers, primarily within criminal organizations, are often working with or as traffickers as a secondary form of income. (Humphris, 2013) Rashaida, an organization in the Sinai known to act as smugglers to Eritreans and Ethiopians seeking to enter Egypt, Sudan, and Israel/Palestine, became known after 2010 for recruiting and kidnapping migrants and

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[4] Summer/seasonal/child marriages are identified as a form of trafficking for the purposes of child sex tourism wherein children (primarily girls) are sold into temporary marriages with men from the Arabian Gulf. (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022)

refugees into sexual exploitation, as well as forced labor and organ removal. Though the organization, and the route through Sinai, were shut down by Egyptian military intervention, these communities continue to face exploitation, and sexual exploitation and forced labor persist along migration routes through and in Egypt. (Reisen and Rijken, 2015) To a lesser extent, perhaps due to greater difficulty in victim identification, trafficking for the purpose of organ removal occurs throughout Egypt, primarily targeting highly vulnerable migrant and refugee communities, particularly South Sudanese, Sudanese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Somalis. (Abdel Aziz, 2016; Reisen and Rijken, 2015)

The state of trafficking in Egypt is often attributed to the socioeconomic condition of the poorest strata of Egyptian society, which is closely linked to a lack of education and employment opportunities which result in a desperation to meet economic demands. This results in families voluntarily participating in the aforementioned "core group" networks of trafficking, often being responsible for selling their own daughters into sexual exploitation and forced labor in the form of summer or child marriages, or forcing their children to street beg, work as cleaners, or toil in agriculture jobs. (Abaunza, 2022)

Domestic work and informal labor in Egypt

Examining the motivations of this strata of society can only answer for the drivers of those who recruit or force victims into trafficking. To understand how trafficking is enabled, and why it is demanded, however, requires an understanding of the social practices in which trafficking commonly takes place, and the legislation which protects or fails to protect victims.

In the case of domestic workers, the demand and opportunity are relatively clear. To begin, Egypt's labor laws very specifically do not extend to foreign domestic workers; they also consider the relationship between a domestic worker and employer a "personal"

relationship, further distancing domestic work from the oversight and protections of labor laws and standards. (Jureidini, 2014; Le Coz and Newland, 2021) These relationships are most often part of the informal economy, and therefore unregulated and under-protected by government officials. (Mazen, 2022)

Socially, the practice of having a domestic worker (this includes both live-in and live-out domestic help, cleaners, nannies, cooks, and other in-home assistance) is commonplace and a mark of economic achievement and status. This marker is important not only in being able to employ a domestic worker, but also in the nationality of the domestic worker. In terms of salary, domestic workers from the Philippines and South/Southeast Asia are considered the most "prestigious", bringing in the highest salary or recruitment costs; domestic workers from East and West African countries (including Egyptians) at the lowest end of the spectrum. (Mazen, 2022)

Domestic workers from South/Southeast Asia and West Africa are most likely to be used as live-in help, being recruited specifically for exploitative work conditions and sometimes under false or misleading premises. (Jureidini, 2018) Domestic workers are often manipulated through the use of "debt bondage" by which they are forced to pay off or reimburse the cost of their travel or recruitment fee through labor. (Jureidini, 2018) As with the Gulf kafala system, this practice is considered commonplace and socially acceptable; attempts to escape or report abuse or bad practices often result in returning the victim to their employer with little or no understanding of the potential human and labor rights violations that these behaviors entail. (Jureidini, 2018)

Domestic workers, as well as other forced laborers (including those being exploited in agriculture, construction, and other sectors) are coerced and controlled in a myriad of ways, most prevalent in Egypt are debt bondage, the confiscation of personal identity documents,

withholding of wages, restriction of movement, no time off/excessive working hours, and sexual and/or physical abuse. (Guirguis, 2012) Often for migrant victims, their irregular migratory status is used to intimidate and strand them, making escape seem impossible. Employers may threaten to turn errant migrant victims in to the authorities or may simply count on the victims' inability to pay the fines that would be charged if they attempted to leave on an expired tourist visa or without any visa. This is also true in cases of sexual exploitation, where asylum seekers and refugees, some without status, may fear discriminatory treatment from authorities. (Guirguis, 2012)

Based on these circumstances, it could be expected that social distancing measures, lockdown, work-from-home policies, and general fear and uncertainty around the communicability of COVID would effect the treatment, or means of coercion or forced used by employers, of victims of trafficking, both those who were being exploited before the pandemic and domestic workers who found themselves in increasingly abusive situations during the pandemic.

Sexual exploitation and exploitation of minors

Sexual exploitation can often occur in conjunction with forced labor (there is a large debate as to where sexual exploitation, particularly forced prostitution, falls in terms of labels, as some believe it is more conducive to the discussion around both sex work and trafficking to consider it a form of forced labor), particularly in the case of domestic work, where sexual abuse or harassment may be used as a means of control or coercion, or as the purpose itself of the exploitation (whether as an additional means of income generation or personal service/satisfaction, both to the benefit of the trafficker). (Jureidini, 2014)

Sexual exploitation also occurs independently of domestic work, in the form of forced prostitution, including sexual tourism and summer or child marriages, both of which target

Egyptian and foreign women and children. Traffickers have historically exploited Asian, Sub-Saharan, and Middle Eastern women and children for sexual exploitation, often targeting the most vulnerable, particularly refugees and irregular migrants, including the substantive Syrian and Palestinian refugee populations, as well as the Ethiopian, Eritrean, Sudanese, South Sudanese communities, and Nigerian and other West African migrants. (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; 2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021; 2019 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020)

Coercion into prostitution, sex tourism, and summer or child marriages are common phenomena for Egyptian women and girls. While they are primarily found in Alexandria, Cairo, and Giza, many are brought in from rural areas by their own families or facilitators to capitalize on the opportunities in the larger cities, notably tourists and foreigners. (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; 2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021; 2019 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020) It is noteworthy that the majority of those soliciting these exploitative services are foreigners; the primary consumers of summer or child marriages are travelers from Gulf countries, including Kuwait, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, while those soliciting victims of sexual exploitation as part of sex tourism come from a variety of countries. (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2010; The Borgen Project, 2021)[5]

Some 1 million children between the ages of 7 and 12 (with 12 being the legal age to work in Egypt) are estimated to be working in the agriculture industry; an additional 200,000 – 1 million are estimated to be forced into begging or some form of sexual exploitation. (The

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[5] According to a survey conducted by UNICEF in 1999, young girls in five very poor villages in Egypt were married off to much older men from oil-rich Middle Eastern countries via brokers; see “Early marriage in selected villages in Giza Governorate”, a study carried out by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Egypt, and supported by UNICEF Egypt, 1999. (Kelly, 2005)

Borgen Project, 2021) Though trafficking of minors does not require that methods of control/coercion/force be used (with the idea being that the imbalance in the power dynamic, authority, physicality, and trust between minors and adults being more than sufficient), (Arab Republic of Egypt's Law regarding Combatting Human Trafficking, 2010) and while the labor of children under the age of 12 is against Egyptian labor regulations, the exploitation of children in Egypt is often accompanied by excessive working hours, exhaustive labor, dangerous conditions, and abuse from traffickers and gangs. (The Borgen Project, 2021)

Having earlier hypothesized that the economic and social responses to the pandemic would create larger and increasingly more vulnerable groups in Egypt, I would here posit that sexual exploitation will be an area of key interest in the primary research, particularly for domestic workers (for whom sexual exploitation is often used as a means of force or coercion) and also for already at-risk and vulnerable groups, such as refugees and migrants, children, and irregular migrants moving through and out of Egypt.

Government of Egypt response

The Government of Egypt has enhanced their counter trafficking response, largely measured through the United States' annual Trafficking in Persons Report (J/TIP), which ranks countries in a tier system which can both embarrass countries into stricter counter trafficking action and impose sanctions on those countries which fail to improve. (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; 2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021; 2019 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020) Egypt's 2010 trafficking law has been widely lauded for its comprehensiveness and means-centric approach; combined, these make the law one that is easy to prosecute as well as one which recognizes (rather uniquely for the region) the sometimes-domestic nature of trafficking, where many lay too narrow a definition of trafficking as a transnational crime.

(Abaunza, 2022) Additionally, Egypt's 2008 amendment to the Child Law (National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, 2008) formalized growing social concerns over various forms of child exploitation, particularly those addressed by Egypt's Grand Mufti Aly Gomaa, in his *fatwa* on sexual exploitation of minors through prostitution, pornography, and 3orfi/'urfi marriages (temporary marriages performed by imams which do not involve filing legal paperwork with the state, and can be dissolved by destroying the marriage certificate; these are often issued in the case of summer or child marriages). (Abdel Aziz, 2016; National Coordinating Committee for Combatting and Persecuting Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons, 2019) Still, the Government of Egypt is reticent to implicate or directly address potential complicity of religious figures in these marriage schemes, and we will likely see increased demand for and supply of potential victims in response to economic factors and less stringent migration and COVID policies which attracted many potential buyers, particularly from the Gulf.

The Government of Egypt's main body in charge of counter trafficking policy and interventions, the National Coordinating Committee for Combatting and Persecuting Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons (NCCPIM&TIP), is an inter-ministerial committee which works with and regularly seconds representatives from the Ministries of Social Solidarity, Justice, and the Office of the Prosecutor General; they also work closely with the National Committee for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM), another inter-ministerial body which works on social issues for Egyptian women and children. NCCPIM&TIP is housed within the Ministry of Justice but maintains a direct reporting line to the Prime Minister, highlighting the import placed on the issue by senior officials. (Abdel Aziz, 2016)

NCCPIM&TIP, NCCM, and various ministries also work closely with UN agencies in the country which specialize in countering trafficking, including the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the UN Office

for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), conducting awareness raising interventions, capacity building for government officials, judiciary, and civil society on Egypt's trafficking and child laws, and strengthening protection and social care institutions for victims.

NCCPIM&TIP and NCCM, primarily through UN funding, have established in recent years several protection and social care institutions and mechanisms, including a hotline for reporting potential cases of trafficking, and a shelter, which currently is only available to Egyptian victims. (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; 2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021; 2019 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020) Criticism of these institutions, however, highlights the lack of follow-through, referrals to more comprehensive services, and limited availability and accessibility. (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; 2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021; 2019 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020)

Perhaps one of the Government of Egypt's greatest weaknesses in countering trafficking in persons in the country is the lack of research or data collected on trafficking within Egypt. The US Trafficking Report, perhaps the most comprehensive collection of data and information on government response to trafficking in persons, has noted since its first report for Egypt that the lack of data, much less any disaggregated data, is an enduring hindrance to comprehensive counter trafficking response. (2021 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2022; 2020 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2021; 2019 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2020; Kelly, 2005)

Migration Landscape in Egypt

Understanding Egypt's migration landscape is intrinsically linked to our understanding of Egypt's trafficking profile, particularly when discussing supply chains, demand, push and pull factors, and other key elements which drive trafficking patterns and trends. The most dominant trend in trafficking in Egypt—the forced labor of domestic workers—is itself overwhelmingly populated by migrants recruited in response to demand for a specific victim profile. Perhaps one of the other most concerning trends is the exploitation of migrants and Egyptians migrating irregularly from Egypt. These factors create two important elements to consider in the coming review: what are the push and pull factors which drive migrants to come to Egypt and drive Egyptians to migrate from Egypt (thus making them more susceptible to the recruitment or exploitation of smugglers and traffickers), and how did global and national migration policies during COVID effect these flows, or change the way in which recruitment or movements took place?

Egypt's migration profile has changed dramatically over the past century. Where Egypt was, until the 1950's, a country of destination for migrants rather than one of origin, a booming population (which doubled in only 30 years between 1947 and 1976) (Awad and Zohry, 2005) and an economy that could not match this growth rate quickly made the country into a source country for Egyptian migrants seeking economic opportunity. As the 20th century progressed, conflicts in the eastern Horn of Africa and sub-Saharan countries and ensuing refugee populations seeking the promise of economic opportunity and security in Europe meant Egypt also became a country of transit. (Zohry, 2005)

Today, Egypt continues to be a source, destination, and transit country in both traditional and emerging migratory routes, hosting and producing economic migrants,

housing refugees and asylum seekers, and maintaining a complex relationship with the thousands of once-hopeful migrants now stranded and unable to continue on to their intended destinations. (International Organization for Migration in Egypt, 2019) Egypt has absorbed refugees from some of the most disruptive contexts in the region, including Palestinian, Iraqi, Syrian, Eritrean, and South Sudanese refugees, alongside asylum seekers and irregular migrants from Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia, as well as some West African nations, primarily Nigeria and Senegal. (International Organization for Migration in Egypt, 2019)

Egypt is also a nation highly dependent upon its own diaspora community; in 2021, Egypt received nearly 30 billion US dollars from its emigrant population. (McCarthy, 2021) Over the past decade, the importance of remittances spiked, with Egypt's 2016 currency devaluation and the ensuing economic shock meaning that remittance as a percentage of the country's GDP rose from around 5% to nearly 11% between 2016 and 2017. (World Bank, 2022) The majority of Egypt's expatriate community works in the Middle East/North Africa region, particularly Gulf countries and Libya, with whom Egypt shares a complex history of cyclical migration and labor migration. (Zohry, 2005) In light of the conflict in Libya and between the two nations, the safety and viability of traditional migration routes is more than ever in question, with temporary migrant workers moving across the border at great risk of exploitation and abuse from smugglers and traffickers.

Egypt has faced growing pressure from Europe in the past decade to halt the stream of Egyptians, migrants, and refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean into Europe from the North Coast. The efforts to halt irregular migration, primarily through blunt force, have largely rerouted, rather than fully cutting off, streams north. (International Organization for Migration in Egypt, 2019) European humanitarian and development funds have poured into these efforts, training border and customs officials, providing "voluntary return and reintegration" programs for stranded migrants to return to their countries of origin, as well as

reintegration projects for Egyptian migrants who have returned from Europe to discourage future migration. (International Organization for Migration in Egypt, 2019) Efforts to stem migration flows have left thousands stranded and without status in Egypt, a situation of heightened vulnerability, particularly to exploitation and trafficking.

Egypt as a destination country

Egypt's historical role as a destination or receiving country for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers stretches back to antiquity, and is evident in the very DNA of its citizens, descendants of Greek, Berber, Persian, Arab, and African communities. (Zohry, 2021) This trend continued through the 21st century, with Palestinians fleeing into Sinai in the face of Israeli occupation and the wars over Palestinian land throughout the second half of the 20th century, Iraqis seeking shelter from both Saddam Hossein's reign and the later war with the United States, Syrian refugees poured in after the breakout of their civil war, and newer refugee groups such as Yemenis have begun to seek refuge in Egypt in recent years. (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Egypt, 2020) Refugees and irregular migrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan have poured in through traditional migration routes between neighboring countries as well as due to conflict and forced displacement. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has some 270,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt (UNHCR in Egypt, 2020), though it is estimated that the actual number is some 5-6 million or more unregistered refugee and asylum seekers. (International Organization for Migration in Egypt, 2021)

The situation of refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt is not the most comfortable; even UNHCR-recognized refugees are unable to work legally, and the vast majority of this vulnerable population survive off of humanitarian aid and assistance from international organizations and UN agencies. It is estimated that some 84% of this population live below

the poverty line. (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2022) This leads many refugees, asylum seekers, and irregular migrants (who lack even the basic protections afforded to refugees, and fear deportation or detention due to their irregular status) to work in informal labor, often subjected to racism, xenophobia, physical abuse, underpay or entire withholding of wages, and other forms of exploitation. (El Abed, 2003; Grabska, 2005)

Migrants who enter legally do not necessarily fare better; many foreigners who enter Egypt for work are recruited for domestic work. Filipino and Indonesian workers, as well as Nigerian and other West African nationals, are among the most common nationalities recruited for domestic work; it is difficult to assess the precise proportion of those who are subjected to trafficking, but abusive and exploitative behaviors and practices with domestic workers are commonplace. (Jureidini, 2009)

Egypt as a source country

In the 1950s, emigration from Egypt was curtailed by then-president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who wanted to ensure a sufficient labor pool for his vision of a self-sufficient and independent Egypt; (Pettit and Ruijtenber, 2019) this vision, alongside Egypt's economy and Nasser's presidency, came to an end in the 1970s. With his successor, Anwar el-Sadat's efforts to open Egypt and its labor market to foreign investors, emigration became accessible and practical for Egyptians, with Sadat removing all restrictions on labor mobility, this was accompanied by a greater demand for Egyptian labor, in the wake of drastic economic changes from oil in Libya and Gulf states. (Zohry, 2006) Between 1974 and 1983, the number of Egyptian emigres went from some 375,000 to over 3.28 million. (Zohry, 2006)

Though greater patterns of emigration from Egypt are a more recent phenomenon, cyclical or temporary migration patterns between Egypt and its neighbors has been a

traditional part of nomadic communities and agricultural laborers. Among the most important of these routes is the historic cycles of Egyptian farmers and laborers along the western border with Libya. However, these routes were heavily disturbed in 2011 during the Arab Spring; the breakout of civil war in Libya meant an influx of refugees that Egypt was uninterested in taking, alongside some 2 million Egyptians who had been working there before the violence. (Hafez and Ghaly, 2012) Of the 2 million, nearly 800,000 returned to Egypt by 2012, a year after the unrest began. (Hafez and Ghaly, 2012)

The civil unrest, and subsequent exchange of power in Libya left the state of traditional migratory patterns in question, as Libya and Egypt imposed new regulations on migration and work visas in their respective countries, limiting the regular pathways that had been used for generations by Egyptians. (Fayyed, 2011) The Arab Spring, and ensuing revolutions and unrest that spread across North Africa and the Middle East, meant not only a disruption of traditional migratory routes, but a new push towards Europe, as well as a return of Egyptians who had been living and working in other countries that faced destabilization in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Egyptians returning from Libya, Europe and Gulf states face massive challenges when reintegrating in Egyptian society. Many have experienced some form of exploitation or abuse, (Ortensi and Kingston, 2022), and the economic opportunities and limitations in Egypt challenge the ability of returning migrants to meet social and gender expectations and norms, particularly for the ability of men to provide financially for their families. (Pettit and Ruijtenberg, 2019) These circumstances make Egyptian returnees more susceptible both to additional exploitation and abuse in Egypt as well as return (irregular) migration. (International Organization for Migration in Egypt, 2021)

Egypt as a transit country

Alongside those seeking to leave from or arrive in Egypt, there is a significant population of migrants and refugees in transit, some stuck for decades, others passing through quickly as they make their way to Libya, Israel or Europe. (Sika, 2011) Egypt's location and size, as well as it's connection to Israel, make it a premier point of departure for the continent, with migrants from across sub-Saharan Africa, but also particularly from Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, making their way across the Mediterranean, into Israel, and into Libya (Zohry, 2014; Fatth and Mattes, 2014) In limbo, many refugees and asylum seekers who have or will spend decades, even the rest of their lives, in Egypt continue to view it as a transit country in their migration journey, hoping that at the end of their refugee status determination there will be opportunities for resettlement in a third country. (Thomas, 2010)

While "transit" in the context of migration once exclusively referred to those asylum seekers and refugees awaiting resettlement, (Howaida, 2006) it has expanded in recent years to encompass a broader spectrum of migrants, and a looser interpretation of the concept of both migrants in transit and countries of transit:

> "There is a notion of temporariness in the concept of transit. However, for many migrants, particularly those migrating irregularly, the journey to the intended destination can take months or years. This challenges the very notion of transit and triggers the question on how much time needs to pass for the country of transit to be considered as a destination." (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Situation of Migrants in Transit,* 2015)

However, migrants who do not view Egypt as their destination, but are nonetheless stuck or stranded inside its borders, constitute a significant portion of the 6 million estimated foreign nationals hosted by the country. (International Organization for Migration in Egypt,

2021) These migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, are often without visa or regular means of entry or egress, and therefore without license to work; moreover, among the forcibly displaced migrants are other highly vulnerable groups, including LGBTQ+, religious and ethnic minorities, and those fleeing war, persecution, and other traumatic circumstances. All of these factors place this population in the most vulnerable and precarious position for exploitation, abuse, and trafficking.

COVID in Egypt

Economic impact

Egypt is the most populous country in the Middle East, with over 102 million inhabitants—and over a third of that population was estimated to be living in poverty pre-pandemic. (Wu, 2021) During the pandemic, the Egyptian government estimated another quarter of the population, which had been living on the brink of poverty before 2020, had fallen below the poverty line. (Wu, 2021)

Despite 2019 pre-pandemic projections for economic growth in Egypt, global lockdown and the effects of a complete shutdown of the tourism and hospitality sector, which represents 4% of Egypt's GDP, resulted in an estimated loss of nearly 1 billion USD per month in 2020 for Egypt. (Salem, Elkhwesky, and Ramkissoon, 2022) It was estimated that during lockdown, Egypt's GDP dropped by nearly 1% per month. (Mazen, 2022) Unemployment increased from 7% to 9% in the same year, with female unemployment reaching over 16%; as a result, household income dropped by nearly 10% in urban areas and nearly 7% in rural areas, with 74% of households reporting decreases. (Wu, 2021; United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2020)

Perhaps the greatest effects of this were felt by those working in the informal sector, which accounts for approximately 63% of Egypt's labor force and nearly 50% of the

country's GDP. (Mazen, 2022; Wu, 2021) This sector, dominated by physical labor and domestic workers, is more susceptible to economic shocks and uncertainty, while also facing increased saturation in times of financial insecurity in the formal sector. (Mazen, 2022) In Egypt, the lack of social security for informal workers came to a head during the pandemic, with a multitude of pandemic-response government programs attempting to bridge the gap. For domestic workers, both fear and social distancing measures caused by the pandemic resulted in, on both ends of the spectrum, the loss of work and increasingly unsafe and exploitative conditions of work. As families cut both unnecessary economic expenditure and attempted to reduce interaction with persons outside of their households, many domestic workers lost key sources of income, with many reporting willingness to accept lower-paying jobs where they were more vulnerable to exploitation. (Mazen, 2022)

Social impact

Alongside the financial repercussions of the global lockdown and domestic measures, social protection infrastructures, which faced the same restrictions as all other sectors, were no longer available to vulnerable individuals. This meant that the vulnerable individuals, who were increasing in number and in vulnerability, at the height of the pandemic, were unable to access shelter, reporting mechanisms, and other forms of protection assistance from traditional institutions.

For Egyptians, access to social care institutions such as shelters, hotlines, and government institutions as well as informal points of access to protection (such as schools and religious institutions) came at a time of increased unemployment, domestic violence, and food/shelter insecurity. Due to stigma, restrictions to movement, and decreased income/increased unemployment, many Egyptians, particularly in the informal sector, reported high incidence of food insecurity in the early months of 2020 and Egypt's lockdown.

(Baraka, 2021) For those institutions which were not closed down, such as orphanages and some religious and civil institutions which were unofficially allowed to remain open, as well as prisons and detention centers, the risk to those who accessed services or were sheltered by those institutions of contracting COVID was greatly increased, with few if any resources for protective and preventative equipment provided by the government in the beginning months of the pandemic. (EuroMed Droits, 2020)

For victims of trafficking, informal workers, and other marginalized groups (including refugees and migrants, women, and the LGBTQ+ communities), (EuroMed Droits, 2020) the lack of access to social care institutions and other social security networks meant increased exploitation, sustained food and shelter insecurity, and, as with the rest of the global population, increased exposure to COVID coupled with low to no access to healthcare. (EuroMed Droits, 2020)

For migrants, traditional points of access to protection and reporting services were also cut off, as embassies, international organizations (such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, Save the Children, St. Andrews Refugee Services, and others) and other civil society actors (which serviced both Egyptians and migrants) were forced into remote work alongside the rest of the country during the initial lockdown and social distancing measures imposed in March 2020. (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2020; Gaye, Agbajogu, and Oakley, 2020) For migrants and refugees, this meant an inability to seek shelter from abusive or exploitative domestic or labor environments, low to no access to repatriation flights, and severely reduced access to food, financial, psychosocial, health, and other services upon which many refugee and migrant families rely.

This meant that though there were few cases of trafficking identified in the early months of the pandemic, it can be concluded that this is in large part due to the inability of victims to access reporting mechanisms due to remote work and not due to fewer incidents of exploitation and abuse.

Egyptian government response to COVID

The Egyptian government instituted a multitude of fiscal and policy interventions to attempt to mitigate the socio-economic effects of the pandemic and lockdown, including massive awareness raising campaigns regarding COVID information as well as to attempt to reduce the incidence of domestic violence, (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2020) social welfare programs (including cash transfers), and social services, particularly for women and children. (Wu, 2021) Additionally, the government poured 50 billion Egyptian pounds—50% of the government's anti-COVID stimulus plan—into the tourism industry and tax relief for related companies in an attempt to reduce job losses and keep the sector afloat. (Gaye, Agbajogu, and Oakley, 2020)

The Central Bank of Egypt also implemented a multitude of monetary policy initiatives designed to stave off drastic inflation and stimulate the economy, including changes to policy rates, discount rates for mortgages and manufacturing, increased debit and credit limits, and the allocation of 20 billion Egyptian pounds insulate the stock market. (Abdel-Moneim and Rizk, 2020)

Furthermore, the government created and increased several emergency social protection and unemployment schemes, most notably the Takaful ("solidarity" in Arabic) and Karama ("dignity") programs, in an attempt to alleviate the effects of widespread job loss and income reduction, particularly for women and those in the informal economy. (Wu, 2021) While these programs, run by the Ministry of Social Solidarity, as well as additional

programs funded by the Ministry of Manpower, were infused with billions of Egyptian pounds (including funds from both the EU and USAID) (Delegation of the European Union to Egypt, 2021; United States Agency for International Development, 2022) and distributed to thousands of households, the programs were only given enough funding to support an additional 60,000 households, despite vastly higher numbers reporting partial or total loss of income. (Mazen, 2022) The combined social protection schemes of the Egyptian government provided assistance to an estimated 0.03% of Egypt's own population, (Oxfam, 2020) and none of the schemes were made accessible to migrant and refugee communities.

Social protection programs and services created by the Government of Egypt were likewise limited to Egyptian nationals and were largely focused on women and children. This included providing shelters for homeless children (despite the closure of many shelters for adults), national awareness raising campaigns regarding violence against women, and humanitarian support (in the form of food and medical supplies). (Wu, 2021) These services often merely redirected existing social safety networks to groups of concern (women and children), leaving behind other increasingly vulnerable groups (refugees and migrants). (Habersky and Damir, 2021)

Additionally, the government invested billions of its anti-COVID stimulus package to healthcare response, including protective and preventative equipment, medical supplies and equipment for hospitals, and wages for new employees and the overtime required to meet the increasing demand under the pandemic. (Gaye, Agbajogu, and Oakley, 2020) However, in order to meet the need for healthcare workers on COVID response, the Egyptian Ministry of Health shut down out-patient clinics and redirected medical professionals to understaffed and overwhelmed hospitals, resulting in lowered access to healthcare for many individuals, and increased vulnerability for those with preexisting medical conditions. (Abdel-Moneim and Rizk, 2020) For non-Egyptians, especially higher-vulnerability categories such as refugees

and irregular migrants, access to healthcare was threatened greatly by the loss of mobile and pop-up clinics due to redistribution of healthcare workers and social distancing and lockdown policies. (Baraka, 2021; Habersky and Damir, 2021)

In short, despite an extensive stimulus package and the creation or enhancement of multiple social protection mechanisms, the Government of Egypt's response was neither inclusive or comprehensive enough to begin to mitigate the socio-economic effects of the pandemic and lockdown, nor the drastic increase to the vulnerability of many sectors of the population.

Effects of COVID on Egypt's migration landscape

Another important factor to consider is the effects of the pandemic and global lockdowns on migration trends and patterns in and out of Egypt, which both influence and respond to the supply and demand of victims of trafficking and traffickers.

While data in Egypt is limited at the best of times, there is little available on either migration from or to Egypt of foreigners or Egyptian emigres during the pandemic; however, it can be noted that towards the end of 2020 there was an increase in remittances to Egypt, from which it could be supposed that a significant number of emigres remained abroad or were able to return to their work abroad by late 2020. (Awad, 2021) Furthermore, the grounding of the vast majority of flights in and out of most countries limited the opportunity of many to return to Egypt, though limited repatriation flights, particularly from some Gulf countries, were noted to have helped some thousands of stranded Egyptians return home. (Arab News, 2020) Considering the millions of Egyptian expatriates living and working in the Gulf and other countries, these repatriations represent a very small portion of the diaspora.

For migrants attempting to enter or pass through Egypt, the factors pushing them out of their countries of origin and into migration pathways were not stalled by the pandemic, but rather increased or intensified, as countries around the world faced increased economic uncertainty, increases to unemployment, and widespread food and housing insecurity. (Gaye, Agbajogu, and Oakley, 2020) The increased demand for irregular entry meant greater risk of exploitation for those attempting to enter Egypt or migrate through it during the early stages of the pandemic, when Egypt and most of the world had severely restricted travel. The Egyptian government recognized that migrants already in Egypt and those attempting to enter were at increased vulnerability during the pandemic, being both more likely to lose work and more likely to be exploited, both by employers and smugglers. (Al-Ahram Online, 2021)

The Pandemic and Trafficking in Persons

Global impacts of pandemic on trafficking in persons

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the policy, economic, and migration responses from every country and continent, has been profound and universal. From mass job loss to housing crises, lockdowns, and restrictions to both domestic and international travel, the pandemic has also driven and affected the global demand and supply for trafficking in persons. However, despite changes to the supply and demand, traffickers have sought new ways and means of exploiting human beings in order to maintain profits, creating a pool of higher-risk potential victims, lower visibility exploitation, and fewer resources to address trafficking (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2021). The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) highlighted only a few months into the pandemic the risks posed by COVID response:

> "Lockdowns, travel restrictions, resource cutbacks and other measures to curb the spread of the new coronavirus are putting victims of human trafficking at risk of further exploitation while organized crime networks could further profit from the pandemic." (UNODC, 2020)

In addition to the effects of policy response to the pandemic and other interventions designed to reduce the spread of COVID, the implications of wide-spread economic panic, job loss, and the decrease of household income have pushed many families and individuals into poverty and situations of greater vulnerability and susceptibility to exploitation and abuse. The UNODC statement on COVID and trafficking in persons also highlighted the risks to migrants and children, particularly those who came from lower socio-economic backgrounds pre-pandemic. (UNODC, 2020)

Lockdowns, which imposed various restrictions to where, when, and how people could move in many countries, proved to further exacerbate or create new environments of exploitation and abuse for victims of trafficking and persons in high-risk and vulnerable situations. This is particularly notable for workers in informal labor sectors, including many migrants and domestic workers, as well as other high-risk sectors, such as sex work. In countries which imposed lockdowns, sex workers either lost their source of income or had to resort to more underground and dangerous ways of accessing work, putting them at risk of trafficking and sexual and physical violence. (International Organization for Migration in Egypt, 2021) In April 2020, just two months into the pandemic, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that some 2.7 billion workers had been affected by the lockdowns. (International Labor Organization, 2020) While 81% of the world's workforce faced varying degrees of fallout, informal laborers were without the protections from employers and the government those formal laborers were afforded; furthermore, informal laborers, who were more likely to be in socio-economic strata of higher vulnerability, were

more likely to lose work or experience a reduction of wages, further increasing their vulnerability. (United Nations Office of the Secretary General, 2020)

For domestic workers, many of whom are hired as live-in help, the lockdown and inability to leave the home presented a multitude of risks. Live-in workers faced longer working hours, additional work due to the household being present in the home rather than in the workplace or school, and increased vulnerability to sexual and physical abuse at the hands of employers. (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020) Sexual and physical violence, two of the most ubiquitous means of control or coercion in Egypt and globally, increased drastically during the pandemic, with reports of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence under lockdown skyrocketing. (UNODC , 2021) Domestic workers were also often tasked with providing care for members of the household who became ill, without access to preventative and protective equipment, or healthcare services in the case that they themselves became ill. (UNODC, 2021)

For both live-in and live-out domestic workers, the risk of delayed or withheld payment also increased during the lockdown, and with many domestic workers losing all or parts of their employment, the vulnerability to this kind of exploitation increased. (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020)

Experts have also noted an increase in exploitation and abuse online, especially of children, linked to the increased use of technology during lockdown, including e-learning and remote work. (Council of Europe, 2020) So-called “webcam exploitation”, which the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) defines as “production and forced production photography”, whereby traffickers sell photos of individuals, often children, that are obtained without their knowledge or through coercion, and sold through

online platforms where consent is impossible to verify, making it both harder to prevent or prosecute. (UNICRI, 2020)

Resources from counter trafficking initiatives were reallocated as law enforcement agencies and criminal justice systems shifted focus during the pandemic to maintaining and enforcing pandemic regulations. Likewise, protection and prevention mechanisms specifically dedicated to countering trafficking and victims support in both government and civil society institutions were affected by lockdown and social distancing measures, as well as budget cuts and other restrictions. (UNICRI, 2020) According to UNICRI, the absence of these protection and prosecution systems and services have led to a 90% decrease in the prosecution of traffickers and a 200% increase in the incidence of online child exploitation reported during the pandemic. (UNICRI, 2020)

Victims of trafficking reported difficulties in accessing basic needs during the pandemic due to the lack of service providers or difficulty in accessing online services. (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021)

These services, provided to identified survivors of trafficking, included health, housing, childcare, psychosocial, and employment assistance, among forms of support. The services provided to survivors and victims of trafficking are designed to help to prevent survivors from being re-victimized, or placed in high-risk situations of vulnerability, and without access to these services, many face abuse from partners, employers, as well as food and shelter insecurity. For those services which were still available online, many reported lacking access to internet or the technology necessary to connect with the services and service providers. (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021). Reduced access and availability of services for victims and potential victims also meant a

decrease in reporting and identification of victims during the pandemic and made escaping from situations of exploitation and abuse significantly more difficult for victims.

For migrant victims, additional accessibility issues created by the pandemic, lockdown, and travel restrictions posed new and daunting challenges, as countries across the world implemented restrictions on entry and egress, even restricting or halting asylum and refugee applications. (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020) For regular migrants, the process of extending visas or applying for new travel documents became delayed by months or years, pushing some into irregular status and into a higher-risk group for exploitation. For victims, the difficulty of returning to one's country of origin was exacerbated by restrictive migration and travel policies, both domestic and international. (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020)

Conceptual Framework

Understanding trafficking in persons in Egypt, the factors which push peoples into vulnerability, and which create demand for exploitation, as well as the social systems and policies which fail to protect or otherwise allow exploitation to occur, can highlight in the primary research the ways in which COVID policies and response may or may not have changed these systems. The primary research will build on the foundations laid out under the Literature Review, as experts from the field connect Egypt's pre-COVID landscape to the shifting environment of Egypt under and after COVID-mitigating policies, including lockdown, migration and mobility restrictions, and cutbacks to social protection mechanisms. (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2020)

As highlighted under the Literature Review, the effects of COVID-mitigating policies have had profound impact on the vulnerability of populations across the world, exacerbating

the risk of already socio-economically vulnerable groups, and pushing many others into poverty and desperation. (Gaye, Agbajogu and El Oakley, 2020; International Labor Organization, 2020; United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2020) Economic shocks, decreases to household income, and the loss of jobs globally have also effected the demand for informal labor, which poses a higher risk for exploitation, and sources of unpaid labor; the effects of lockdown and migration restrictions on the tourism and hospitality sector in Egypt (along with most other sectors of the economy) have also led to widespread job loss for heads of household, increasing the desperation of families and communities to meet their basic needs and forcing many to consider illicit and exploitative alternatives. (Abaunza, 2022; Salem, Elkhwesky and Ramkissoon, 2022; United Nations Office of the Secretary General, 2020) These circumstances also pushed other high-risk sectors of labor in Egypt into further peril, primary amongst those being children and domestic workers, for whom the means, act, and purpose of exploitation were greatly effected by COVID policies, as well as the populations targeted and effected by traffickers and exploitative employers. (Council of Europe, 2020; Gaye, Agbajogu and El Oakley, 2020; Mazen, 2022)

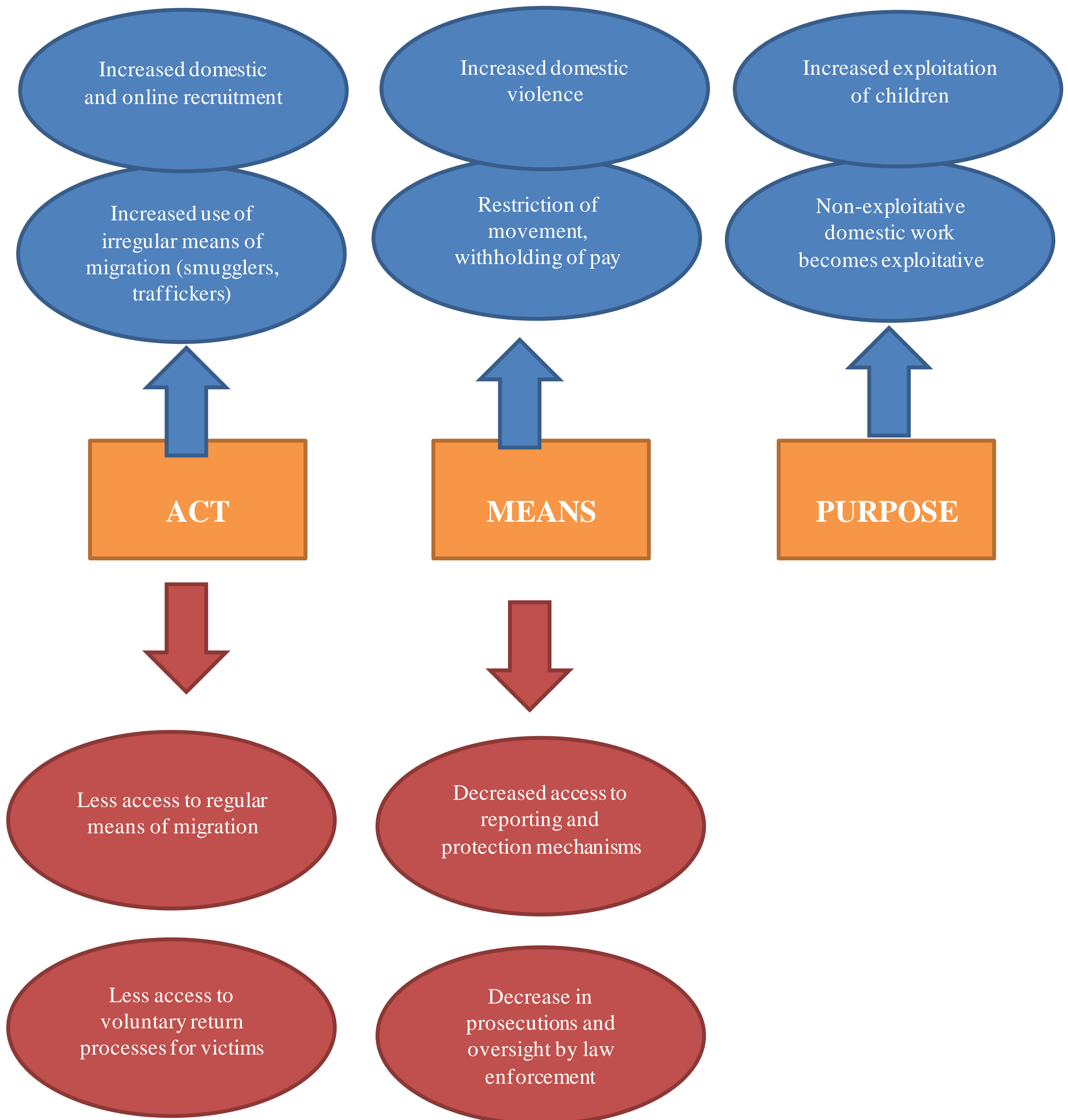
In order to understand the changes to trends and patterns of trafficking in persons in Egypt during COVID, the primary research explores the changes (or lack thereof) to each part of the trafficking process: the act (recruitment, movement, or hiring), means (methods of coercion, force, or control), and purpose (type of exploitation), as well as the characteristics of victims, and notable policy and social protection system changes during the pandemic. As little primary data exists on the nature and characteristics of trafficking in persons in Egypt during COVID, the bulk of connections made and conclusions drawn on the nature of trafficking in persons during COVID, as well as the changes to trends and patterns, and how they may or may not be related to COVID mitigating policies have been done so by the

expert participants of the primary research, and through analysis of the secondary research conducted in the Literature Review.

The changes to these elements of trafficking (act, means, and purpose) are discussed in relation to various aspects of COVID mitigation policies, including lockdown and social distancing measures, migration and mobility restrictions, and cutbacks or accessibility issues with social protection mechanisms. The changes and effects of these policies on trends and patterns in trafficking can largely be understood in two categories: changes to the demand for exploitation and trafficking, and changes at the supply end, i.e., levels of vulnerability and risk.

This Conceptual Framework is designed to tie the concepts of the Literature Review to the findings of the primary research which will be discussed in the coming chapters, connecting the landscape of pre-COVID Egypt to the trends and patterns which have emerged since the beginning of 2020. In order to discuss the findings of the primary research from both the perspective of changes to trends and patterns in trafficking and the effects of COVID-mitigating policies on those changes, the Conceptual Framework reflects two models that will be used to approach the discussion around the primary research.

The Finding and Conclusions & Recommendations chapters will take these concepts a step further, connecting changes in act, means, and purpose to recommendations for policy changes and programmatic responses and interventions, as well as a discussion of what can be anticipated from the trafficking landscape in Egypt moving forward, according to the expert participants.



Increased domestic and online recruitment
Increased domestic violence
Increased exploitation of children
Increased use of irregular means of migration (smugglers, traffickers)
Restriction of movement, withholding of pay
Non-exploitative domestic work becomes exploitative
ACT
MEANS
PURPOSE
Less access to regular means of migration
Decreased access to reporting and protection mechanisms
Less access to voluntary return processes for victims
Decrease in prosecutions and oversight by law enforcement

SUPPLY/VULNERABILITY	DEMAND
Lockdown	**Lockdown**
Loss of jobs or income sources for migrants/informal laborers and others pushed into poverty	Employer job loss or decrease in income (withholding pay for domestic workers, laborers, etc.)
Restriction of movement	Loss of work for heads of household, leading to recruitment within families/communities
Increase in domestic violence	Decrease in household income leading to increase in use of children for forced begging, child marriage, etc.
Increased working hours	Increased demand for childcare (increase to the working hours and responsibilities for domestic workers) in the home
Increased responsibilities (with entire families in the home, rather than in school/offices)	Xenophobia and racism toward Asian migrants leading to increased demand for Egyptian and other nationalities of domestic workers
Increased use of technology/time online	Access to children and other vulnerable groups online
Migration/Mobility	**Migration/Mobility**
Difficulty escaping situations of exploitation/abuse by returning to communities or countries of origin	Lack of access to international markets for recruitment of victims leading to increased recruitment domestically
Lack of regular and safer routes of migration	Increased demand for smuggling and irregular migration routes
Internal migrants from rural areas stranded in Cairo, Alexandria, and other larger metropolitan areas without access to support networks	After easing of migration/mobility restrictions, Egypt becomes haven for Gulf countries seeking child/temporary marriages
Protection Mechanisms	**Protection Mechanisms**

Lack of access to embassies, police, government protection mechanisms for victims and potential victims	Less visibility and enforcement of anti-trafficking legislation as law enforcement focuses on COVID mitigating policies
Lack of access to shelters, food and necessary nonfood items, healthcare, psychosocial support, and other forms of direct assistance (which also reduce the vulnerability of victims to repeated exploitation)	
Lack of access to reporting mechanisms for situations that are abusive/exploitative	

Findings

The primary research, conducted via interviews with experts from the field of trafficking in persons in Egypt, sought to understand both if and how trends and patterns in how people were trafficked in, out, and through Egypt during COVID changed from pre-pandemic trends, and if and how those changes were related to COVID mitigating policies. The backgrounds of interviewees were all within the context of trafficking in persons, though there was a variety to the specific areas of focus or expertise for each (including child protection, migrant workers, domestic workers, Egyptian returnees, smuggling, and labor rights, among others). Quotes have been edited for clarity and anonymity.

The findings of the interviews suggest that changes in the demand for exploitative labor as well as the vulnerability of at-risk groups increased as a result of specific COVID related policies at national and global levels, and that adaptations to restrictions during the pandemic by traffickers and vulnerable persons effected the pre-pandemic methodology of recruitment, control, coercion, force, in addition to the type of trafficking and typology of

those targeted. The organization of traffickers in Egypt did not appear to change, with pre-COVID "core group" behaviors persisting. Most of the interviewers noted that alongside adaptations to COVID policies and restrictions, most noteworthy in the changes to patterns and trends was the increase in the number of highly vulnerable persons, as well as the degree of vulnerability, and that most pandemic policies exacerbated situations of risk and gave rise to an increase in the occurrence of violence and abuse in exploitative situations.

The following Chapter will delve into the responses of interviewees first to the changes in the act, means, and purpose of trafficking, exploring along the way the linkages to various pandemic policies and restrictions, and the insights from experts on how these trends are expected to continue or evolve as society moves from COVID-mitigation toward a reality in which we learn to live with it. It is important to note that many larger national and global trends, including economic hardships faced by Egyptian and migrant populations, xenophobia and racism, and political shifts cannot be entirely understood as a response to COVID or COVID policies, nor the fallout as being entirely causational; for the purposes of this chapter and the following these trends will be discussed in their relation to the pandemic and mitigating policies.

Changes to "act"

Questions in this section revolved around the pre- and during-pandemic trends and patterns in forms of recruitment, transport, harboring, and receipt of victims of trafficking, including linkages to COVID and COVID-mitigating policies.

Recruitment from within the family and community

Several of the interviewees discussed the impact of financial insecurity on recruitment within families and communities. Interviewees highlighted the social mores surrounding the role of men within the family unit as providers and the toll that losing work or a portion of

income could have for breadwinners whose income was meant to support multiple families, as is common in rural communities in Egypt.

> "Large families rely on one income, sometimes multiple families, the parents of the mother and father, all of the children, […] sometimes even other members of the community [also rely on the one income]. For those employed in the informal sector, the loss of work meant loss of livelihood for large number of people in the community, making new vulnerable groups and pushing families to look for more people to bring in sources of income." (Interviewee #1)

Furthermore, interviewees noted the increase in the use of women and children in forced begging and other forms of forced labor, most often at the hands of family members. While forced begging and forced labor were not uncommon within communities and at the hands of family members, (Abaunza, 2022) experts saw COVID as a period of marked increase in the recruitment of these groups by family and community members. Speaking to the impact of the economic hardship and uncertainty for Egyptian families during COVID (particularly the early months of 2020, during Egypt's lockdown), Interviewee #2 commented:

> "There is a general feeling that the economy is on the brink of collapse, and that people are more desperate to make ends meet than they previously were […] so many are resorting to sources of labor within their communities and families […] unfortunately, many of them are children."

Families, both in rural governorates and metropolitan areas like Cairo and Alexandria, for whom adult male figures were primary breadwinners noticed "significant decrease in monthly earnings […] or lost [their] jobs altogether", forcing families "to resort to different

sources of income”. (Interviewee #1) As a result, there has been a notable increase in the occurrence of child begging, particularly in rural areas.

Interviewees from Cairo did not report as great a change in the number of children seen begging but observed a shift in those who were being forced to beg. While orphanages and social care institutions were hotspots for recruitment of child beggars who were often under the control of criminal organizations, pre-pandemic, (Interviewee #4) the lockdown and curfew from the beginning of 2020 was reported to have shifted the territory from the use of these criminal organizations to local children who have been forced to beg on behalf of their families.

The majority of trends related to community and family recruitment in Egypt seem to stem from economic motivations rather than as a response to or result of specific COVID-related policies and mitigation measures; however, lockdown, curfew, and social distancing measures were reported by some of the interviewees to have had an effect on the backgrounds of those begging in more urban areas. Later in the Chapter these issues will resurface in more in-depth discussions on summer and child marriage, where community and family recruitment also play a key role.

This trend was also increasingly common for victims recruited from outside of Egypt. Interviewee #4 commented:

> “International networks were in some ways more [organized and] sophisticated [during COVID] because of all the regulations they had to navigate. [There was] a lot more planning involved because of travel restrictions and COVID issues. Still, more than half of the cases of Africans [trafficked and identified in Egypt during COVID] were recruited by someone they knew: family, friends, or neighbors.”

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject; rather, four of the interviewees believed the situation to be worsening as concerns of economic recession on the ground increase.

Online recruitment

An additional area of concern noted by multiple interviewees is the emergence of online recruitment and exploitation, particularly of children. Due to lockdown and social distancing measures, schools and workplaces in Egypt were forced to operate remotely during the first year of the pandemic, and to varying extents since then. The move to online classes and work meant a massive increase to the time spent online by most of the population, but particularly for children who would otherwise be in school. Traffickers and predators used this increased access to children online both as a method of recruiting new potential victims for exploitation in various forms in person, and as a means of exploitation online (particularly through webcam hacking, selling nude photos unknowingly taken of women and children on the dark web, or blackmailing families to prevent the release of the nude photographs).

> "The biggest change to recruitment [of victims of trafficking during COVID] was the risk to children over the internet [...] due to everyone spending more time at the home and online, as well as a desperation for income [...] this effected children and women the most." (Interviewee #4)

Other subjects observed an increase in the recruitment of potential irregular migrants over the internet, commenting that Egyptian youth, particularly from rural areas, who are "desperate to make a living and find work" (Interviewee #5) are turning increasingly to smugglers online in the hopes of reaching Europe and other, ostensibly more lucrative markets. Interviewee #6 found evidence of new and more sophisticated means of recruiting

potential victims and irregular migrants, including video ads of migrants living in Egypt, featuring expensive cars and beautiful, European wives, as well as the participation of influencers from North African countries who would video blog their journeys on the boats across the Mediterranean.

According both to the primary and secondary research, smugglers often have links to organized trafficking networks, or are otherwise willing to exploit or traffic those they are smuggling for their own financial benefit. (Humphris, 2013) This will be explored in more detail later in this Chapter.

Pre-COVID trends in online recruitment were difficult to assess. While several interviewees mentioned that it was an area of concern to the Government of Egypt, the United States J/TIP report, and other international and United Nations agencies, neither interviewees nor any significant data resources reflect real-world cases of identified victims or trafficking networks in Egypt. Though the abundance of anecdotal evidence from interviewees and the interest of the Government of Egypt, J/TIP, and other agencies suggests that there was likely a not insignificant and growing trend of online recruitment and trafficking, the lack of empirical evidence makes stricter comparisons and conclusions more difficult. It is, however, very clear that there has been a significant increase both globally (United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, 2020) and in Egypt during the pandemic.

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject; as it is an emerging method of recruitment, and as it is hard to trace, it is difficult to assess specific periods of higher or lower activity, though the general trend since 2020 has been substantively increasing.

Summer and child marriages

Before the pandemic, the Government of Egypt had focused significant resources to tackling summer and child marriages, specifically in the Sinai, Cairo, and Alexandria, (National Coordinating Committee for Combatting and Persecuting Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons, 2019) with preliminary reporting (according to interviewees #2 and #3) pre-pandemic indicating a slight decline in the occurrence of these marriages in the targeted areas.

However, the effect of the pandemic on families across Egypt, but particularly in hard-hit rural areas, meant an ever-increasing pool of potential victims and families pushed to the brink of desperation and willingness to enter into these temporary marriages in an effort to survive. Pre-pandemic prices for summer or child brides were around the 2,000 US dollar mark, but over-saturation of the market and economic desperation created an increased supply of potential victims and willing families, which pushed prices as low as 500 US dollars by 2021. (Interviewee #2)

As before COVID, buyers were primarily from Gulf countries (Abaunza, 2022) though now seeking refuge from even harsher lockdown restrictions in their own countries by staying in Egypt. The lowered prices and increased market meant that these buyers were able to enter into multiple summer or child marriages for the same price they would have paid pre-pandemic for one forced bride. Reports from interviewees suggest that one girl could be married up to 40 times by the age of 18, and many were taken back to the buyer's country of origin to work as domestic help or to continue to be exploited sexually after the initial marriage. Shorter marriages are often encouraged by the family and community members (usually religious leaders who perform the 3orfi/'urfi marriages and act as intermediaries

between willing families and potential buyers) who benefit financially from each new marriage that a girl is able to enter into. (Interviewees #2, #3, #5)

> "[In Egypt] the women are much younger and much less expensive [than in other countries], and even more so since COVID […] this attracted demand to Egypt for these marriages." (Interviewee #2)

Another unsuspecting beneficiary of this form of trafficking is the tourism and hospitality industry. While hotels do not allow unmarried couples to stay together if one or both of the couple are Egyptian, holding an 3orfi/'urfi marriage certificate allows couples to circumvent this rule without a legally binding marriage. (SOURCE) Hotels that are willing to turn a blind eye to the exploitation of underage girls in summer and child marriages are able to benefit from the often months-long stays of foreigners from the Gulf and other countries. During the pandemic, when Egypt's tourism and hospitality industry took a massive hit from both domestic and international restrictions to travel, this willingness to look the other way only increased. (Interviewee #2)

> "Despite all other indications that seasonal [summer or child] marriages were increasing, reports from hotels identifying or suspecting cases of trafficking decreased after the pandemic … [according to] the Government [of Egypt]." (Interviewee #5)

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject; two of the interviewees stated that as shelters release data and more victims are able to access protection resources and reporting mechanisms, numbers are estimated to increase and more accurately reflect the situation on the ground.

Exploitation of domestic workers in previously non-exploitative situations

Another area of emerging recruitment of victims noted in the research is that of previously non-exploitative employers of domestic workers. While the means of exploitation will be discussed in a later section, it is worth noting here the convergence of both demand and supply in this form of trafficking. Interviewees, including those who work closely with domestic workers and informal laborers in Egypt, commented that the pandemic presented employers who lost jobs or sources of income with the opportunity to "let [domestic workers] go or to exploit them" while for domestic workers, the choice was to "be exploited or lose all income [...] food and medicine" (Interviewee #1). For the large portion of informal laborers who lost work in the first months of the pandemic, a cut to wages or more abusive work environments were often preferable to the prospect of entirely losing their source of income.

> "Particularly for Egyptians, and especially those working in the informal sector, many became exploited [during the pandemic]. Even in households they had worked in [without exploitation] for many years." (Interviewee #1)

Fear of contact with persons outside of the household, as well as xenophobia and racism, cost many foreign and live out domestic workers their jobs at the beginning of the pandemic, and though many Egyptians also lost their jobs in the informal and domestic work sector, Egyptian domestic workers were "seen as a better alternative" to Asian workers or other nationalities. In times of increasing economic uncertainty and vulnerability, this led many domestic workers, particularly Egyptians, to accept more abusive and exploitative conditions, including cut or entirely withheld wages, longer hours, and sexual and physical violence.

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject. Interviewees observed both an increase in the demand for exploitative labor

(resulting from less disposable income for hiring households) and a similar increase in the vulnerability and thus supply of potential victims.

Smuggling and irregular migration

As mentioned earlier in this section, online recruitment by smugglers (who often work with or as traffickers as well) increased significantly during lockdown. (Humphris, 2013; Interviewees #1 and #6) Another contributing factor to this noted in the research was the lack of access to regular migration channels. Interviewee #6 commented that the number of irregular Egyptian migrants arriving in Europe increased during COVID, a nearly sevenfold increase between 2020 and 2021 according to Frontex. (Frontex, 2022) While air travel and other means of migration through regulated points of entry were restricted in global efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID, the root causes and drivers of migration did not decrease – and arguably increased.

> "Parents often aren't fully aware of the risk of trafficking and dangers of irregular migration, so many encourage [young men] especially to irregularly migrate [in the hopes that] they'll make more money overseas." (Interviewee #5)

With social norms in Egypt – particularly in rural areas – dictate that men must be able to keep a home and have a means of income before marriage, job opportunities during COVID dwindled and unemployment skyrocketed, pushing many to turn to irregular migration. According to interviewees, the increased difficulty in moving internationally meant that larger numbers sought out the assistance of smugglers, and many were subjected to various forms of trafficking along their migration journey or in their country of destination.

> "The reasons that compelled them to move [are that] COVID exacerbated their vulnerabilities [affecting] income levels and unemployment. […] They see the

> videos and posts from those people who have made it to Europe, and they dream that it is possible. Some of the villages were hit so hard during COVID, that there is no way to survive except to get out and [make money] somewhere else. [Egyptian migrants] hope that it won't be them who get trafficked." (Interviewee #6)

Interviewee #6 also made clear that alongside push factors compelling many Egyptians to migrate irregularly out of Egypt, there was significant evidence of increased recruitment from Italy, saying:

> "There is a specific reason why Egyptians are picking Italy to migrate to [irregularly]. It's because there's a certain labor demand and certain networking that's happening. There was a shortage of certain types of labor in Italy that led to a lot of recruitment of cheap [or] forced labor. The groups in Italy that recruit [Egyptians] are called "agents" or "brokers", but they have links to traffickers, and many [of the Egyptians they recruit] wind up in trafficking."

The interviewee also noted the desperation was also leading many Egyptians to "more and more dangerous routes", and to seek help from "more dangerous groups", with many Egyptian migrants found by humanitarian organizations in the Sahara Desert, often showing signs of torture and physical abuse. Further details of the means used against victims will be explored in a later section.

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject.

Changes to "means"

This section deals with the pre- and during-pandemic trends and patterns of coercion, threat, or force (including abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or position of

vulnerability, or the giving of payment or benefits to achieve consent of a person having control over another person) for the purpose of exploitation of victims of trafficking, including potential linkages to COVID and COVID-mitigating policies.

Implications for domestic workers

Several COVID-mitigating policies had profound effects on the means of control used by employers in respect to domestic workers, according to the interviewees. While the previous section briefly touched upon the effects of job loss and reduction of household incomes on the vulnerabilities of informal workers and the demand for unpaid or exploitative labor, particularly of Egyptians, within households which retained domestic help there was also reportedly significant changes during COVID, triggered particularly by the lockdown and curfew.

The first most common change noted by participants was reports of longer hours, particularly for live-in domestic workers, who were deprived of time off during the days, when families would (in pre-pandemic times) have normally been out of the home for work or school. Live-in domestic workers were also frequently deprived of previously allocated days off, as families feared allowing members of the household out of the home and risking exposure to the virus. For live-out domestic workers, additional hours were purportedly of less concern.

Additional and sometimes risky tasks were of increased concern for both live-out and live-in domestic workers, however, with participants reporting observing an increase in the number of domestic workers who were tasked with providing at-home healthcare or assistance to elderly family members. Not only were these additional tasks added to the domestic workers' workloads, but they came at often great personal risk to the workers, who were not provided with personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, etc.) and were exposed

to COVID and other diseases. Besides being tasked with providing new care services, domestic workers reported increases to their normal workload as more people spent more time in the home, requiring increased cooking, cleaning, and childcare assistance. The additional workload was not met with a corresponding increase to wages; on the contrary, many domestic workers found their wages cut or withheld entirely, particularly during the government-imposed lockdown and curfew.

Domestic workers, and women in the home generally, were also exposed to an increase in domestic violence and sexual violence, touched upon by all but one of the interviewees (and observable on a global scale). Interviewee #6, a career expert in migration and counter trafficking in persons commented:

> "Domestic violence and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence are big indicators of exploitation, and greatly [increase] the risk of [individuals] to trafficking and other forms of abuse."

Interviewee #2 stated of domestic workers identified (from 2020 until early 2021):

> "While sexual abuse didn't amount to the majority [of cases], there was a significant increase [...] more than 20 percent of cases [identified during COVID] reported sexual abuse."

Lastly, domestic workers' and other victims of sexual and gender-based violence ability to seek protection from authorities or social care institutions were curtailed due to the lack of services and social distancing measures during the pandemic; this will be touched upon further in a later section of this chapter.

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject.

Implications for children

While the instances of various forms of child trafficking increased in several areas, including child begging and other forms of forced labor, and summer or child marriages and other forms of sexual labor, the interviewees did not note any significant change to the means of control or force used on children during the pandemic. It is worth noting again that "means" are not considered a necessary element in identifying child trafficking victims; the imbalance of power and authority in adult-child relationships is considered the de facto means of control for all cases involving minors.

Trafficking along irregular migration routes

As irregular migration and smuggling routes morphed due to both increased demand and COVID regulations, the means used by traffickers and smugglers to force migrants, many of them from Egypt, changed as well, and primarily toward more violent means. While pre-COVID trends showed small numbers of Egyptian migrants facing kidnap for ransom and other forms of abuse along Egypt to Libya migration routes, trends during COVID showed a massive increase in these reports, alongside gruesome accounts of torture and physical abuse.

> "Smugglers and traffickers would take migrants along the route between Egypt and Libya, kidnap them, hold them against their will in warehouses [...] there were many reports of torture, and abuse, and [kidnapping for] ransom. [...] They were pushing them into forced labor." (Interviewee #6)

Egyptians' willingness to go through more dangerous routes, often through the Sahara or territory held by militia groups, coupled with the emergence of more desperate and militant-related groups working to smuggle migrants out of North Africa and into Europe, meant an increase in the occurrence of Egyptian migrants' reports of torture and physical violence to force them into trafficking or other criminal activities. (Interview #6)

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject.

Economic factors

Many of the interviewees mentioned economic desperation in light of soaring unemployment, income uncertainty or loss, and economic recession as a major coercive factor for Egyptian and foreign victims of trafficking. One interview observed that:

> "Economic recessions mean less profit and employers will always choose first to lessen the benefits [and rights] for workers, worsen conditions, even abuse […] or even exploit their own workers. What will employees say or do to stop it? It's an economic recession. They will stay, even if they are being exploited or trafficked. They don't have a choice." (Interviewee #1)

Several other interviewees echoed this and similar sentiments, noting that a combination of economic factors during COVID led to potential pools of victims who were more vulnerable and susceptible to trafficking, and more willing to stay in situations of abuse and exploitation due to the economic outlook in the country. This could be considered a crosscutting or underlying condition of vulnerability in cases of potential trafficking (much like the power dynamics between minors and adults is a crosscutting "means" in any child trafficking case), considering the global nature of the economic fallout during COVID.

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject, and several interviewees suggested that this will become a more and more prevalent threat to larger portions of the population as Egypt's economy teeters on the edge of economic instability.

Changes to “purpose”

This section deals with the pre- and during-pandemic trends and patterns in the forms of trafficking and exploitation of victims of trafficking, including potential linkages to COVID and COVID-mitigating policies.

Children

Child trafficking in Egypt far predates COVID and has long been a growing area of concern for the Government of Egypt and relevant organizations and stakeholders in the country, especially concerning forced (summer or child) marriages and sexual exploitation. COVID did not so much see the emergence of new forms of trafficking and exploitation as it did subtle increases in the demand for and mechanics of various forms of exploitation. For several of the interviewees, the increase in the supply of families prepared to exploit or allow for the exploitation of their children, coupled with an increase in demand for cheap or free labor, as well as the continued demand for children in various areas of sexual exploitation, are signifiers of a lasting and only worsening problem in the country, particularly as economic conditions (the primary motivator on the supply end, according to Interviewee #2) do not show signs of improvement.

> “The major forms of exploitation of children in Egypt are child labor, child begging, forced marriage (especially for girls), and sexual exploitation. During COVID, each of them were exacerbated in some way [mostly due to] increased economic hardship and desperation in communities who had to turn a blind eye to exploiting of children in order to survive.” (Interviewee #4)

Online exploitation also became more prevalent during COVID, and, according to several interviewers, entirely new forms of online exploitation emerged during the pandemic. These new forms included often hacking into webcams of children (and sometimes adults) in

order to take and sell (unwitting) nude photographs, or in order to blackmail (with nude photographs or videos taken through the webcam) minors and women particularly into performing other unwanted sexual acts via webcam, for the profit of the hacker. Though this was not entirely new, reports of these cases have increased to the point of far more significance during COVID than at any point pre-pandemic. Interviewee #4 noted that it is also suspected that this is an area in which there are exponentially more unknown victims. As many of the photos, posted on the dark web or other illicit websites, have been taken without the knowledge of the subject, victims are often unaware that there is a crime to report, even content that is found and investigated by law enforcement is difficult to identify, and the willingness and consent of subjects impossible to discern.

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject; interviewees forecast continued increase of all forms of child exploitation, as it is often motivated in Egypt by economic hardship, which has not eased since the onset of COVID.

Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation was mentioned by Interviewees numbers 2 and 3 as an area both of current and future interest. Sexual exploitation in Egypt was present pre-pandemic, but not nearly to the extent of forced labor. While forced labor was reportedly still the most prevalent form of trafficking identified during the pandemic, sexual exploitation increased exponentially by comparison, with many cases of forced labor extending to sexual exploitation as another means of income for traffickers, and cases of forced marriages and sexual exploitation of children skyrocketing. Cases of forced prostitution and child sexual exploitation surged particularly in rural areas where fewer of the Government of Egypt's

social protection programs were put into effect, alongside cases of seasonal/child marriages in rural areas and the Sinai.

While the line between purpose and means of control in the sexual abuse of domestic workers is often blurred, it is also worth noting in this section that the number of reports of sexual abuse of domestic workers increased drastically during the pandemic. Whether viewed as a means of control or force, or as the purpose of exploitation more generally, this trend was noted by Interviewee #3 as an area where "[we are] seeing more reports of this every day, and [I think] it will only get worse as time goes on", noting that there are still many victims from earlier in the pandemic that will continue to be identified as time goes on, and that traffickers and abusers are unlikely to cease sexual abuse, despite easing of COVID-related policies and restrictions. For those making financial profit from the sexual abuse of domestic workers, the continued instability of the global and local economies will "likely mean a lot more sexual abuse [when identifying domestic workers who are victims of trafficking]." (Interviewee #3)

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject, though Interviewee #1 said they believed there would soon be a return to pre-COVID trends in child sex trafficking, four of the five other interviewees expressed that they would predict the inverse, expecting sexual exploitation of children to continue to increase.

Changes to Characteristics of Victims

This section deals with the pre- and during-pandemic trends and patterns in the characteristics of victims of trafficking, including potential linkages to COVID and COVID-mitigating policies.

Xenophobia and racism

Lockdown and the global spread of COVID saw an increase in xenophobia and racism towards Asians (the increase in racism and xenophobia towards Asians cannot be entirely understood as a response to the pandemic, however, there is certainly correlation between the drastic increase in hate crimes targeting Asians and—importantly for this research—the discrimination faced by Asian migrants in Egypt, due to the origin of the pandemic in China); but these attitudes also effected African migrants working and living in Egypt. Migrants, according to Interviewee #5, who were often subject to racist beliefs that they are “less clean” or “carriers of diseases” before COVID found these attitudes even more persistent and widespread under COVID. This resulted in increased vulnerability to exploitation, increases in the reports of instances of violent and abusive behavior towards Asians, and reports from Asian and African migrant workers of the loss of work due to race.

> “Asians and migrants are the ones bringing COVID [to Egypt] – that’s what was being said by a lot of people. […] Even people from embassies reported being harassed, can you imagine what’s happening for migrants and domestic workers? Their opportunities were even more limited, their vulnerabilities compounded. Many were […] abused at their places of work and even in the streets.” (Interviewee #5)

While Egyptians had access to some protection and social security measures from the Government of Egypt, protection assistance for migrants was non-existent in the early stages of the pandemic, which saw embassies and international organizations shuttered and pushed online. For those able and willing, many embassies arranged repatriation flights for their citizens; however, this left those who remained in Egypt even more isolated, from both community, reporting, and protection mechanisms.

> “[COVID] put Asian migrants in Egypt who weren’t vulnerable before in a position to be abused and subject to fewer economic opportunities. On top of that, they didn’t have access to protection [services] from their embassy or from international organizations.” (Interviewee #3)

There were some indications of a return to pre-COVID trends from some of the interviewees on this subject; one of the interviewees stated that there had been, in their opinion, no noticeable change in the recruitment or hiring of Asian domestic workers since the onset of COVID, while two others reported that social acceptance of racist attitudes towards Asian and African migrants (triggered by the pandemic) are still persistent.

Women and children

All of those interviewed highlighted increases to the instances of exploitation of both women and children in various circumstances and in varying forms. The most prominent of these, discussed in previous sections, were increases to the instances of summer or child marriages, exploitation online, domestic workers (who are predominantly female), as well as increases to reports of sexual exploitation of both adult women and minor girls, and various forms of forced labor of children (particularly forced begging). While these have been discussed at length in previous sections, it is important to address the bulk of these as a change to the trafficking profile of Egypt as a larger trend. Though Egypt’s pre-COVID trafficking landscape was dominated by the exploitation of women, the increases to the exploitation of both women and children, particularly increases in the instances of sexual violence as both a means of control and the purpose of exploitation during COVID mark a significant shift that was noted by all participants. The increased vulnerability and risk to these groups is of great concern and will be addressed further in the final chapter.

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject.

Egyptians

Besides the increase to the exploitation of women and children, the most commonly mentioned change in profiles of identified victims of trafficking in Egypt was an increase in the exploitation of Egyptians. While this did not coincide with a significant or long-term decrease in the exploitation of migrant workers, it was notable in other ways: the first is the increase in recruitment and trafficking of Egyptians abroad, and the second is the evolution of previously non-exploitative employment situations to exploitative or abusive ones.

In the case of the first, the increase in the number of Egyptian youth irregularly migrating (particularly those reaching Libya and Italy) and facing exploitation along their journey or at their destination, illuminate a concerning trend, particularly as international response focuses on securitization approaches rather than protection ones:

> "Egyptian youth have no hope. They know that irregular migration is dangerous – they know they are likely to be exploited – but they choose to go anyway. It won't stop if or when COVID is over. And [stopping them] at the border or turning them back isn't going to stop them or change why they're [choosing to irregularly migrate]." (Interviewee #3)

The exploitation of Egyptians within Egypt also presents a noteworthy change in victimology in some forms of trafficking. While victims of summer or child marriages and various forms of child exploitation were predominantly Egyptian pre-pandemic, the increase of instances of sexual exploitation and exploitation of domestic workers present a shift from pre-pandemic victim profiles and an interesting glimpse into trends moving forward. For several interviewees, reports of Egyptian informal workers (predominantly domestic workers)

whose pre-pandemic work was non-exploitative but became exploitative under COVID, were cause for concern,

> "Now [there is] a whole new pool of exploitative employers, whose economic situations haven't changed […] they will continue to exploit [Egyptian] workers because the Egyptians are still desperate for work [and have] nowhere else to go." (Interviewee #3)

There was no notable return to pre-COVID trends from the interviewees on this subject; it was predicted by several participants that as the economic situation in Egypt continues to prove unstable, these trends are likely to be exacerbated.

Institutional failures during the pandemic

Returning to the questions posed in the Introduction, this section will question the complicity of various international and governmental institutions in the failures of protection and prevention of trafficking during the pandemic.

Lack of social protections from international and domestic institutions

The initial stages of the pandemic witnessed the shut down of many in-person services, including consular services from embassies, case work-based services from international and community-based organizations, and government social care institutions, in response to COVID-mitigating policies around social distancing and work-place health requirements. (Brookings Doha Center, 2021) While these measures were part and parcel of the global efforts to reduce infections and in line with the World Health Organization's recommendations, (World Health Organization, 2020) the absence of already-limited protection mechanisms and resources for potential victims of trafficking led to plummeting numbers of identifications and the increased vulnerability of large groups of people, including the already extremely vulnerable victims of trafficking and exploitation. Key

among these groups were migrants, whose protection and social security were of far lower priority to the Government of Egypt, and for whom traditional mechanisms for reporting and protection, such as their embassies and migrant-focused organizations like the International Organization for Migration, were suddenly no longer available.

> "[Informal workers'] options became limited, they became subject to harsher treatments. The Egyptian [protection] system is not capable of protecting Egyptian workers under the best circumstances, and certainly not capable enough to provide protection to foreign ones during a global pandemic. COVID exacerbated the vulnerabilities of many, but migrants were most certainly on the backburner for protection from [the Egyptian] government." (Interviewee #1)

This meant that migrants were unable to return to their communities of origin, some were unable to access healthcare assistance, and victims generally were unable to access shelters, legal reporting mechanisms, financial assistance, or other forms of psychosocial support. This led, according to interviewees, to many victims remaining under exploitative conditions longer than they would have had protection mechanisms been available, and to repeat exploitation for many who were able to escape preliminary situations of trafficking due to their continued vulnerability.

Poor response from the Government of Egypt

Many governments have faced critique for their efforts during COVID and the fallout of COVID-mitigating policies, such as economic instability and the threat of recession, accusations of violations of civil liberties in the name of public health, and failures of social protection and security nets in the wake of a massive global economic and health crisis. It is unreasonable to expect any government to have been capable of a response to such a

widescale crisis without some socioeconomic fallout, but it is, by the same token, a reasonable expectation for serious reflection on how policies failed to protect or potentially exacerbated the vulnerability of various groups, and certainly it still valuable to assess the response and potential areas of improvement.

The Government of Egypt made clear early in 2020 that their priority in this global health crisis would be the economic survival of the nation, (Brookings Doha Center, 2021) but for an economy centered largely on service, tourism, and hospitality, even the most basic social distancing and curfew regulations and other countries' responses to the pandemic played into the ongoing depression of the Egyptian economy:

> "A ton of people lost their jobs, so many were dependent on tourism-related supply chains. The government tried to pressure hotels and other parts of the tourism sector to keep people employed, but so many were employed informally. The government couldn't, and didn't even try, to make an order or regulation that would protect the informal workers." (Interviewee #1)

The Government of Egypt's efforts to mitigate the economic fallout, particularly for informal workers, was spectacularly inefficient. Two pre-pandemic programs, Takaful and Karama, were bolstered to provide for informal workers who had lost employment, but fell grossly flat of reaching the necessary numbers: while the programs were given funding by the government to include an additional 100,000 households, an estimated 600,000 lost their jobs in the first months of the pandemic (though official unemployment numbers show nearly 3 million Egyptians lost their jobs in 2020, and considering it is estimated some 63% of the labor force is informal, this number is likely much higher). (Khalil & Megahed, 2021; Mazen, 2022) According to the Ministry of Manpower, some 1.6 million of 2.5 applicants for government assistance were provided with the meager 500 Egyptian pound monthly grant

(for a total of three months). (Khalil & Megahed, 2021) The applications were considerably low, likely in response to strict requirements for recipients, most notably that their household not be receiving any other government grants. (Mazen, 2022)

Of concern to many of the interviewees was the Government of Egypt's focus on Cairo and other metropolitan areas, to the detriment and neglect of rural governorates and communities; many highlighted that these areas were particularly susceptible to job loss due to the lack of tourism and were more likely to have youth seeking to irregularly migrate. Interviewee #3 noted that the combination of massive job and income loss, coupled with government oversight of rural areas in social protection programs led to levels of vulnerability to recruitment by traffickers and smugglers that were highly avoidable:

> "You never find [irregular migrants] and people that were trafficked coming from the capital city of governorates, or from Cairo, where all the jobs and the financial programs are. You find that they are from the rural villages, and they have been forgotten."

And, from interviewee #5:

> "The government has done barely anything that offers Egyptians and migrants any social safety nets. In rural governorates, there are almost no economic opportunities. Irregular migration becomes the only logical solution, despite trafficking and dangers on the road."

The findings of the primary research indicate that there are pervasive new patterns and trends, some which were exacerbated by and others which were triggered by pandemic-related policies and issues. There was no indication from any of the secondary research or interviewees of any overall slowing or decrease in trafficking in persons during the pandemic; if any specific areas or methods of exploitation were thwarted by pandemic-related

policies, it appeared that traffickers were able to find new ways of moving, forcing, or coercing victims, including exploitation online, the trafficking of victims of smuggling, and the exploitation of nationals rather than foreign workers. These and other trends will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Reflecting upon the findings of the previous chapter and the original hypothesis (that interrupted international supply and demand chains resulted in the increased exploitation of domestically-available labor sources, including migrants already in Egypt and Egyptians; and, that the economic and social impacts of COVID policies resulted in a correspondingly larger and more vulnerable populations), it is clear that there was, in fact, and increase in the vulnerability of communities in Egypt, leading to an increase in the supply of potentially exploitable persons, alongside the domestication of previously migrant-dominated forms of trafficking. However, it is also apparent from the findings of the primary research that there were unpredicted elements of response to particular pandemic-related policies that gave rise to new and unprecedented behaviors and patterns in trafficking, including the dramatic increase in irregular migration and correlated trafficking, online exploitation, the increase to sexual exploitation within domestic work, and the effects on summer or child marriages.

Ongoing trends and new areas of concern

While understanding temporary changes to trends and patterns in trafficking in, through, and out of Egypt are vital for practitioners in the field for whom identification of those who were exploited during the early COVID period is ongoing, for the purposes of this research, and understanding what kinds of programmatic and policy responses may be useful in tackling trafficking in its current forms, those trends which have continued beyond COVID-mitigation policies will be of primary concern. These trends are relevant to new and

responsive policy and interventions, in addition to their relevance to practitioners seeking to identify and respond to ongoing cases of exploitation.

Online recruitment and exploitation

Various forms of trafficking online were highlighted as areas of increased and ongoing concern to interviewees, including the recruitment of irregular migrants and the exploitation and recruitment of children online. While this was a growing trend pre-pandemic, the rates of online exploitation, particularly the sexual exploitation of children, skyrocketed globally, with watchdog organizations reporting a 168% increase in reports of online child sexual exploitation. (Internet Watch Foundation, 2022)

This global trend was present in Egypt, where the online exploitation of children – by means of recruitment for purposes of forced labor or sexual exploitation, child pornography and webcam hacking, and recruitment of minors for irregular migration (by smugglers and traffickers) – increased drastically under COVID, contributing to the 2021 intervention of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi and Egypt's parliament, who revised the country's sexual harassment laws, quintupling the minimum prison sentence and increasing minimum fines from 20,000 Egyptian pounds to 300,000. (Eltahir, 2021) Changes to the penal code also included stronger language around online harassment and exploitation, in response to widespread outrage surrounding well-publicized cases of sexual harassment and blackmail of young Egyptian women in 2020. (Ibrahim, 2022).

The research participants highlighted the continued threat of online exploitation, particularly of children, as internet usage by Egyptians shows no signs of returning to pre-COVID rates. (Kemp, 2022) This threat is especially potent as the true number of victims is particularly difficult to ascertain due to the nature of much of the exploitation.

> "We'll never know how many children have been exploited [online]. Some are blackmailed with nudes, others never know that their [web] cameras have been hacked and these photos of them are online. It's hard to know based on photos [on the dark web] how old some of them are, and whether there was consent." (Interviewee #5)

In addition to the continued threat posed by child exploitation online, those being recruited online, both minors and adults, for the purposes of irregular migration and smuggling (often resulting in trafficking and exploitation along migration routes) presents a challenge both to efforts in Egypt and abroad to curb irregular migration pathways into Europe, and to combatting trafficking networks, particularly along routes through Libya. By the estimation of several of the interviewees of this research, the ongoing economic uncertainty and instability in rural governorates and amongst the lower socioeconomic echelons of the Egyptian population coupled with the COVID-era successes in recruitment and advertisement by smugglers and traffickers mean we are unlikely to see a decline in the high numbers of Egyptians arriving in Libya and Italy, nor the reports of torture and exploitation suffered by many along these routes.

According to Interviewee #5:

> "Incentive outweighs the risks. [Irregular Egyptian migrants] never know there's probably a high chance of them being trafficked or tortured, but they know there are risks. They know there are militia controlling the routes [in Libya]. They know there is a very small chance of being able to bypass Egyptian and Libyan authorities and border guards, the militias, then make it to the coast, get on the boat and it does not sink on the way, make it to Italy, and be accepted. […] There are a lot of minors on the boat taking these risks, but

> there are also a lot of adults. We're seeing the numbers increasing during COVID, but it's the trigger, not the reason. They'll keep taking the risks. The incentive is too high. They think, despite all the risks, something has to be better there."

Sexual exploitation

Another area of continued concern in Egypt's trafficking landscape is the increase across several forms of trafficking and for multiple at-risk groups of sexual abuse and exploitation, including amongst children (both online and through seasonal or child marriages) and domestic workers.

The dramatic increase in the number of women and girls put forth by their families and communities for seasonal and child marriages during the pandemic is reflective of changes during COVID to both demand and supply: neither of which, according to the interviewees, show indication of reverting to pre-pandemic figures or decreasing. Despite positive indications for Egypt's economy from the World Bank, the reality for many in rural communities and for those existing in Egypt's poorest households is a steadily worsening inflation (the worst since the onset of the pandemic) and rising prices and cost of living. (Kassab, 2022) Higher prices for bread, meat, and other household necessities (Mada Masr, 2021) come on the heels of two and a half years of decimated tourism and government moves to limit, reduce, or fully cut subsidy programs, (Arafat, 2021) leaving many households in greater economic uncertainty than at previous points in the pandemic.

Looking forward, interviewees highlighted the need to curb growing trends in sexual exploitation, especially as trends of multiple marriages for young women and girls, are beginning to push seasonal and child marriages into practices similar to prostitution and moving away from pre-pandemic methodologies in seasonal and child marriage. Child

exploitation is abundantly clear to both professionals in the field and the Government of Egypt:

> “There have been increased reports from NCCPIM&TIP (the Government of Egypt’s inter-ministerial coordinating committee on trafficking and illegal migration) that use of the hotlines have gone up, especially for reports of child exploitation: child marriage, child begging, and sexual abuse.” (Interviewee #2)

Yet, interviewees warn that the combination of the young age of the girls being put forth in Egypt for these marriages, and the low prices of the marriages (due to the market being flooded with potential victims in light of widespread economic desperation), will bring about an unprecedented trend towards forced prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation of minors, which have hitherto represented a negligible part of the trafficking landscape in Egypt.

For domestic workers, sexual abuse or exploitation suffered alone or in conjunction with forced labor has long been a statistically less prominent, though not insignificant, pattern in the domestic trafficking profile; increases to these behaviors during COVID present concerning but not conclusive indications for the future. As victims from more recent months continue to come forward and are identified, it will be important for practitioners to be aware of the increased likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation being found in conjunction with other more traditional means of control and force used in this form of trafficking, and to determine whether this is part of the new trafficking profile for Egypt’s domestic workers, or part of temporary trends that represented a reaction to COVID-mitigating policies and circumstances.

Forced begging

The streets of Cairo, Alexandria, and many other Egyptian cities speak plainly of another trend which shows no signs of slowing down: forced begging, especially the use of children. Interviewees mentioned that, alongside other forms of child exploitation which continue to grow in prominence, forced begging presents an evolving challenge to counter trafficking efforts in Egypt.

> "The number of poor and needy in Egypt certainly increased; it isn't always visible or direct, but in the case of begging, it is there in your face. There have always been children begging in Egypt, but during COVID who and how this happened changed, and the number [increased]." (Interviewee #2)

Exploitation of Egyptians in traditionally migrant-dominated forms of trafficking

The final trend most widely commented upon by interviewees was the increased exploitation of Egyptians in several different forms of trafficking, most notably domestic work, in which migrants were traditionally most commonly identified, pre-COVID. This trend, which interviewees linked to the effects of COVID-era traveling restrictions, xenophobic reactions to traditionally more commonly-recruited nationalities (such as Filipino and Indonesian domestic workers), and the economic desperation of both employers and potential Egyptian informal workers, is also considered by interviewees to be unlikely to revert to pre-pandemic trends moving forward. Interviewees highlighted the continued economic uncertainty as a reason for the continued prevalence of this trend, though some questioned, in light of the rising numbers of migrant workers returning and the lack of a major decrease in the number of migrant victims identified, whether this was a reflection of a shift or a widening of the pool of potential victims.

Programmatic and Policy Recommendations

Having considered those notable and ongoing trends and patterns which continue to shape the trafficking landscape in Egypt and having parsed which aspects of COVID policies and institutional responses played a part in the formation of these new realities, this section will, in looking forward, present potential programmatic and policy interventions to address and combat trafficking in persons. These recommendations are formulated in part by the responses of interviewees and in part through the analysis of the author.

Economic interventions

Perhaps the most apparent, and likewise most difficult change that could be made to tackle trafficking in persons in Egypt is economic development, for both rural and urban areas of the nation. For interviewees, these changes include increasing the availability of technical training and skills development opportunities for youth (particularly in rural areas), tackling unemployment, creating more inclusive government social security programs, and expanding the economy into sectors more resilient to minor economic shocks. Interviewee #4 stated:

> "The first thing they should have done and should do now is to create more programs for social safety nets against these times of shocks, especially villages, and youth programs."

Others drew links to Egypt's brain drain, raising concerns that while the informal sectors will always have room for laborers (to varying degrees), jobs requiring advanced degrees are increasingly rare, driving Egyptians out of the country, by regular or irregular means:

> "Youth unemployment is rising in Egypt. It is highest with those who have tertiary education, according to CAPMAS (Egypt's statistical agency). People

> who opt for hard labor can find jobs, but people with higher education levels are finding it harder to get employment." (Interviewee #1)

Alleviating the economic pressures for communities in Egypt's lowest socio-economic strata, particularly the growing burden of the rising cost of living and basic necessities, could drastically reduce the supply of potential victims of trafficking and highly vulnerable populations, in some of the most concerning areas of Egypt's trafficking landscape, including irregular migrants subject to trafficking along migration routes, seasonal and child marriages, forced begging, and domestic work.

Data and awareness

While Egypt's data-poor trafficking profile is not COVID-related, it is without a doubt one of the most significant steps the nation could take to tackle trafficking of its own citizens and foreigners. Three of the interviewees mentioned improving access to data and data collection as a top recommendation for ways to combat trafficking and curb a variety of the areas of concerned spawned by institutional failures during the pandemic. Both IOM and UNODC—the two primary UN agencies with counter-trafficking in persons mandates—consider the collection and sharing of disaggregated data on migration and trafficking to be one of the key elements of successful counter trafficking strategies and efforts:

> "Data on trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants save lives. In the trafficking context, understanding locations where trafficking occurs and specific populations most at risk of becoming victims of trafficking supports creating targeted responses, and ultimately prevents people from becoming victims. In the smuggling context, data can help identify the modus operandi of migrant smugglers so key to dismantling smuggling networks is, particularly

those that risk migrant lives for lofty financial gains." (Migration Data Portal, 2020)

According to interviewees from non-governmental, international, and community-based organizations, as well as academics, the Government of Egypt has long thwarted attempts to collect data and is not forthcoming in sharing or disseminating data collected by government institutions, even with global reports and counter trafficking mechanisms.

Egypt could make great headway in more targeted interventions to prevent and prosecute trafficking cases if international and domestic organizations had access to disaggregated data on migration, trafficking, and smuggling cases identified and prosecuted by the Government of Egypt, as well as the ability to collect data of their own through various means that are currently inaccessible. The loosening of security policy on data collection by domestic and foreign organizations, as well as investment in national data collection tools and mechanisms would allow for targeted and more efficient counter trafficking interventions and programs.

Migration policy

Migration is an ancient and inevitable part of human existence. Managed and governed correctly, with care for the dignity, protection, and safety of people, migration can facilitate the exchange of culture, ideas, goods, skills, and create linkages and connections between communities and nations. However, the politization of migration has resulted in migration governance which focuses on securitization rather than protection or the maximizing of the potential benefits that migrants bring to communities. Securitization approaches, in which migration is regulated and viewed as a threat to the nation, (Huysmans, 2000) or governance approaches which focus on exclusion and "protecting" citizens from

potential threats brought or caused by migrants, (Farny, 2016) do not prevent irregular migration, often, on the contrary, making it more deadly.

> "Implementing a securitization approach puts more people in danger…evidence shows migrants are taking more and more dangerous routes, taking more remote routes across the Sahara Desert, they're falling more prey into the hands of traffickers. Areas where Egyptians [victims of trafficking] were found in were extremely dangerous spots, some of them were tortured. They're falling into more dangerous routes, more dangerous groups, because there is no effort to manage migration, just stop it." (Interviewee #5)

Interviewees shared how often organizations, particularly those funded by European Union member states and working in conjunction with the Government of Egypt focus on responses to irregular migration which uses securitization language such as "preventing" irregular migration and raising awareness on the "dangers of irregular migration". Interviewees felt that these responses, which are, as evidenced by the increased numbers of irregular Egyptian migrants arriving in Europe during COVID, missing the mark, were failing to address push and pull factors which drive irregular migration.

> "There was a man who lost two members of his family on one of the boats. When [my organization] spoke to him, he said, 'As soon as I'm able I will make the journey again'. He had watched people he loved die. He knew he might die. But he was willing to make the journey again. We have to consider that just telling people how dangerous irregular migration is won't work. We have to find alternatives." (Interviewee #6)

The securitization of the issue of migration ignore the push and pull factors, which are often deeply entrenched in historical migration behaviors, issues of economic development,

and often in response to demand for informal labor and recruitment in countries of destination. At the same time, securitization of migration results in the closure of safer and often traditional routes (as discussed in the Literature Review), forcing migrants (for whom push and pull factors for irregular migration have not changed) to take more dangerous routes and seek assistance in migrating irregularly from more dangerous individuals and organizations, including smugglers involved in trafficking in persons.

Addressing these issues requires complex policy change and international cooperation to address pull factors and recruitment of irregular migrants and demand for trafficking and exploitation, through the creation of regular migration schemes and pathways which can provide educational and employment opportunities to Egyptians and other nations for whom there are limited migration opportunities. The European Union and individual member states pour billions into border security and "migration management" (which is an extension of border security), with the European Union alone earmarking 16 billion Euro for its Asylum, Migration and Integration (AMIF) and Border Management Funds for 2021 – 2027. (European Parliament, 2021) Despite the abject failure of the European Union to prevent or reduce irregular migration, much less to reduce the fatalities along migration routes in and through its borders, the funds which go toward reinforcing these failing efforts have doubled from the previous seven-year budget of 2014 – 2020 and tripling for the AMIF alone. (European Commission, 2021) It is hard not to question to what better use – for both irregular migrants and European citizens – those funds could be put if the focus of migration governance were on the protection of asylum seekers, refugees, and irregular migrants. Under legal pathways and schemes, migrants could be integrated into tax systems, would be more easily managed under time-restrictive visas and programs, and would not be subjected to the gross human rights violations so often associated with irregular migration, including torture, trafficking, indefinite detention, and, in far too great a number, loss of life.

Egypt's trafficking profile continues to remain in flux, changing daily as new cases are identified, but the overarching themes and changes during the course of the pandemic are neither revolutionary nor unexpected; the repercussions of poorly-executed COVID-mitigation policies, which jeopardized the livelihoods and safety of a nation of informal laborers, migrants, and refugees, could have been foreseen by governments and international institutions, and response has been slow to take hold, if it has at all. The burden of these failures is felt by the victims, their families, and the communities flailing in the tug-of-war of between their own survival and international demand for exploitative labor. We can only hope that these failures are recognized by practitioners, institutions, and governments, and addressed to the best of their ability in interventions and responses which prioritize the protection, dignity, and safety of those individuals who are most vulnerable.

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Appendix

Surveys

Dear participants, thank you so much for agreeing to share your time and professional insights and perspectives; they are invaluable. The following questions will be the basis for the semi-structured interviews, and there may be some questions that are not relevant to your experience or perspective, in which case we can skip them. Your participation will be entirely anonymous.

BACKGROUND

1. Please describe your work with trafficking in persons, victims of trafficking, domestic workers, and/or labor rights.

ACT

1. How would you describe the primary trends or patterns of recruitment and/or transport of VOTs or potential VOTs in Egypt **pre-pandemic** (before March 2020)?
2. How would you describe trends or patterns of recruitment and/or transport of VOTs or potential VOTs in Egypt **since March 2020** (current/since onset of COVID)?
3. What, if any, were the changes to domestic or international trafficking routes going in to, out of, or through Egypt?

MEANS

1. How would you describe the primary trends or patterns of coercion, threat, or force for the purpose of exploitation of VOTs or potential VOTs in Egypt **pre-pandemic** (before March 2020)?
2. How would you describe trends or patterns coercion, threat, or force for the purpose of exploitation of VOTs or potential VOTs in Egypt **since March 2020** (current/since onset of COVID)?

PURPOSE

1. How would you describe the primary trends or patterns in the forms of trafficking or exploitation employed in Egypt **pre-pandemic** (before March 2020)?
2. How would you describe the trends or patterns in the forms of trafficking or exploitation employed in Egypt **since March 2020** (current/since onset of COVID)?

General

1. Have you noted a significant shift in the nationalities or other personal characteristics of VOTs or potential VOTs?
2. What, if any, are groups you asses to be/have been made more vulnerable to exploitation during or because of COVID and COVID-related policies?
3. To what extent, if any, do you assess that the abovementioned changes are related to the effects of COVID or COVID-related policies (i.e., lockdown, remote work, reduction of protection services, travel restrictions, economic insecurity)?
4. How could new or existing interventions or programs be created or adjusted to reflect changing trends in trafficking in Egypt?

Thank you!