



United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime



Funded by
the European Union

GLOBAL FORUM FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVORS REPORT



**Voices of
Resilience**

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Part 1: Summary of the Forum discussions and key findings	9
<i>Panel discussions</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Breakout sessions</i>	<i>12</i>
Day 1 Breakout Groups	12
Day 2 Breakout Groups	14
<i>Closing session.....</i>	<i>16</i>
Part 2: The conference process and learnings	18
<i>2.1 Before the conference</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>2.2 During the conference</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>2.4 Learnings from the conference process.....</i>	<i>20</i>
Part 3: Forum findings on survivor-informed and trauma-informed protection responses.....	23
<i>3.1 Benefits of engagement.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>3.2 Areas where survivor input is critical.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>3.3 Different levels and kinds of engagement.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>3.4 Analysis of forum submissions and discussions, by level of engagement.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>3.5 Cross-cutting considerations on meaningful engagement of human trafficking survivors in developing protection responses</i>	<i>37</i>
Closing reflections	42
Annexes.....	43
<i>Annex I – Call to Action.....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Annex II - Agenda</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Annex III – Selected resources on victim protection, including trauma-informed approaches, from states, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Annex IV – Selected resources and initiatives on survivor engagement from states, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Annex V – Selected recommendations, resolutions and decisions adopted by the Conference of Parties to the UN Organized Crime Convention (COP) and its Working Group on Trafficking in Persons (WG), focusing on protection</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Annex VI – Regional Needs Assessment Workshop for Africa</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Annex VII Regional Needs Assessment Workshop for Latin America and the Caribbean</i>	<i>82</i>

Executive Summary

The *Voices of Resilience: Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors*, convened by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vienna on 24 – 25 June 2025, marked a significant milestone in advancing victim-centred and trauma-informed approaches to combating trafficking in persons. For the first time, survivors from all regions sat alongside governments, civil society, and international organizations to co-create solutions that place protection, dignity, and agency at the heart of anti-trafficking responses. The Forum explored and showcased approaches that recognize the impact of trauma on survivors' lives and interactions with institutions, and that seek to avoid re-traumatization by prioritizing safety, choice and respect, hereafter referred to as trauma-informed approaches.

The Forum was grounded in the principle that victims and survivors are indispensable partners in shaping policies and practices that impact their lives. Over two days, 121 participants from 55 countries, participants engaged in plenary sessions, panel discussions, and thematic breakout groups addressing issues such as barriers to justice, long-term recovery, technology-facilitated trafficking, and survivor engagement in policy development. Discussions highlighted the persistent gap between normative commitments and implementation in practice. While international anti-trafficking frameworks affirm victim-centred principles, implementation often falls short. Survivors continue to face obstacles to justice, insufficient long-term support, and harmful stereotypes that undermine protection. Participants called for shift from symbolic inclusion to meaningful engagement and identified pathways to strengthen **survivor-informed** and trauma-sensitive protection responses.

The Forum culminated in the adoption of a **Call to Action**, (Annex I), articulating nine guiding principles for strengthening protection systems. These include the recognition of survivors as experts and leaders; the integration of trauma-informed care across institutions and services; the provision of sustained and holistic support; tailored protections for children; enhanced legal protections and access to justice; strengthened cross-sectoral and cross-border cooperation; and robust accountability mechanisms to address corruption and prevent harm. The Call to Action reflects a shared commitment to align anti-trafficking responses with the objectives of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Trafficking in Persons Protocol.

This report provides a synthesis of the Forum's proceedings and lessons learned from its design and implementation. It is structured in three parts:

- **Part 1** summarizes the Forum discussions and key findings;
- **Part 2** reflects on the Forum process and learnings derived from its planning and implementation;
- **Part 3** presents promising practices for survivor-informed and trauma-sensitive protection responses, drawing on contributions shared throughout the Forum process.

The report is complemented by **seven annexes**, which are:

- The Call to Action adopted at the Forum;
- The agenda of the Forum;

- Selected resources on victim protection, including trauma-informed approaches, from states, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society
- Selected resources and initiatives on survivor engagement from states, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society
- Selected recommendations, resolutions and decisions adopted by the Conference of Parties to the UN Organized Crime Convention (COP) and its Working Group on Trafficking in Persons (WG), focusing on protection
- Regional needs assessment report for Africa; and
- Regional needs assessment report for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Forum marks a renewed global commitment to strengthen protection systems for victims of trafficking. Safeguarding victims is not only a legal and moral obligation but a strategic imperative for dismantling trafficking networks and preventing exploitation. Effective protection requires approaches that consistently centre victims' rights, needs and experiences, respond to the realities of trauma, prioritize safety, dignity and long-term recovery, closing the gap between policy and practice, and making victim protection a lived reality rather than an aspiration.¹

¹ This report was developed in partnership with Collective Threads Initiative through a grant agreement with Azadi Community.

Introduction

The United Nations has increasingly recognized the essential role of survivors and victims in combating trafficking in persons. The General Assembly's *Political Declaration on the Implementation of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons*, adopted on 22 November 2021, marked an important shift towards a more inclusive and victim-centred approach. The Declaration affirms solidarity with survivors, acknowledging them as key agents of change, and calls for their meaningful involvement in shaping anti-trafficking policies and practices. Member States commit to integrating survivors' experiences into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of anti-trafficking efforts, while ensuring care and support that respond to the impacts of trauma and centre victims' rights and well-being.

It is against this backdrop that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) convened the first-ever Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors (hereinafter "the Forum") on 24 and 25 June 2025, in Vienna, Austria. The *Voices of Resilience* Forum sought to promote protection responses that place victims and survivors at the centre of anti-trafficking action and to elevate survivor engagement from ad hoc or symbolic participation to meaningful involvement in policy and practice.

The Forum was organized within the framework of the three-year project "Promoting Action and Cooperation among countries at global level against Trafficking in Human Beings and the Smuggling of Migrants (PACTS)", funded by the European Union. Under this project, the Forum convened 121 experts from 55 countries, bringing together survivor leaders from all regions, alongside governmental, non-governmental, international, and regional actors engaged in victim assistance and protection. This diverse participation aimed to strengthen protection systems by ensuring that responses are informed by the combined lived and professional expertise of participants.

One of the core purposes of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Trafficking in Persons Protocol), as stated in its Article 2, is to protect and assist victims of trafficking with full respect for their human rights. Articles 6, 7 and 8 further outline measures on victim protection, assistance and return, including support for victims' physical, psychological and social recovery, where appropriate in cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

Although victims of trafficking are recognized under international law as rights holders, protection frameworks in practice have often been shaped primarily by a criminal justice focus, and by a narrow interpretation of that focus. Victims may be treated chiefly as instruments of prosecution, with access to protection and support sometimes contingent on cooperation with law enforcement. Such approaches risk undermining victims' dignity, agency and long-term recovery, and tend to overlook that victim protection is essential to achieving effective and fair justice outcomes.

Effective protection therefore extends beyond immediate safety and legal remedies. It encompasses the protection of rights, dignity and agency and requires approaches that take into account the enduring effects of trauma on survivors' interactions (or avoidance thereof) with institutions and official bodies. Such protection approaches seek to avoid re-traumatization by prioritizing safety, choice, respect and long-term well-being, and by engaging survivors as active partners rather than passive recipients of assistance.

While those directly affected by trafficking have long organized to support one another and to develop community-based responses, institutional efforts have not always been developed alongside, or informed by, these survivor-led solutions. As a result, survivors have often felt excluded from the

design, implementation and evaluation of policies and measures intended to support them. However, the meaningful involvement of survivors is essential for developing more effective, relevant and sustainable protection responses, as survivors' insights help identify systemic gaps, challenge harmful assumptions and inform solutions grounded in reality.

At the same time, survivors continue to raise concerns about tokenism, lack of compensation, secondary victimization and the absence of clear accountability within protection and justice systems.

“They only remember you in the trafficking in persons week. They invite you again and again but you get no compensation from the court or the traffickers. They use your story to promote their own work and success and secondary victimization continues.”²

In this context, UNODC convened the Voices of Resilience Forum to explore practical approaches to meaningful survivor engagement specifically within human trafficking protection responses. The Forum was designed as a space for collaborative knowledge production among survivors, governments and civil society actors, recognizing that these roles are not mutually exclusive and that lived and learned expertise - often held by the same individuals - contribute to effective protection systems.



Figure 1: Collaborative knowledge production.

This document provides an overview of the Forum's discussions and outcomes and reflects on lessons learned from its design and implementation. In addition, it analyses principles and practices for survivor engagement in the development of protection responses, drawing on contributions from Forum participants, pre-Forum needs assessment workshops and Forum deliberations. Together, these reflections aim to inform future efforts by States, the United Nations system and other relevant actors, to close the gap between policy commitments and the lived realities of victims and survivors.

Background and scope

It is important to recall that one of the core purposes of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children³ (Trafficking in Persons Protocol), as

² Statement shared by a Forum participant in the context of Forum discussions.

³ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted by General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000.

stated in Article 2, is “to protect and assist victims of trafficking, with full respect for their human rights.” The Protocol further sets out specific obligations relating to victim protection and assistance. Article 6 calls upon States Parties to consider measures for the physical, psychological and social recovery of victims of trafficking, including, where appropriate, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations. Articles 7 and 8 address, respectively, issues related to victims’ residence status and the safe and dignified return of victims to their countries of origin, underscoring that protection extends beyond immediate rescue to include longer-term considerations of safety, stability and well-being.

Together, these provisions affirm that victims of trafficking are rights holders and that protection is an integral component of a comprehensive response to trafficking in persons. At the same time, the Protocol affords States a degree of discretion in the implementation of protection measures. As a result, protection frameworks in practice have often evolved unevenly across jurisdictions and have, in some contexts, been shaped primarily by criminal justice objectives.

In many settings, victims continue to be engaged principally as witnesses in criminal proceedings, with access to protection and support sometimes linked, explicitly or implicitly, to cooperation with law enforcement. Such approaches risk narrowing the scope of protection and may fail to fully address the broader social, economic and psychological harms caused by trafficking, as well as the long-term needs of victims and survivors.

This report adopts a more holistic understanding of protection, consistent with the human rights objectives of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol. Protection is understood as extending beyond immediate safety and legal remedies to encompass the restoration of rights, dignity and agency, as well as measures that support long-term recovery and reduce the risk of re-trafficking. Effective protection responses recognize that victims’ interactions with institutions may be shaped by experiences of trauma and must therefore seek to avoid re-traumatization by prioritizing safety, choice, respect and meaningful participation. Within this framework, survivor engagement is not treated as a separate or supplementary activity, but as an integral element of effective protection. Engaging survivors as active partners in the design, implementation and evaluation of protection responses contributes to more relevant, responsive and sustainable systems, and supports the realization of victims’ rights in practice.

While many governmental and non-governmental organizations have developed toolkits and guidelines for meaningful survivor engagement, research into the lived experiences of affected individuals remains limited, as does formal evaluation of its impact on service quality. Minimal formal evidence notwithstanding, impacted communities are more likely to accept, benefit from, support, and sustain solutions that come from within (and those solutions are more likely to be relevant and practical), and participants in the Forum named numerous benefits of survivor engagement in protection responses. The report therefore also draws on a range of materials, including existing guidance, practitioner resources and inputs shared by Forum participants, to examine how survivor engagement is being approached in practice and where gaps persist.

References in this document to government, non-governmental and survivor stakeholders are not intended to suggest that these roles are fixed or mutually exclusive. Just as some government representatives have worked in the civil society sector and some non-governmental organizations’ staff have experience in government positions, people in both roles may have lived experience of human trafficking. Many survivors hold a variety of academic, professional, clinical, and community credentials, identities, and backgrounds. Whenever this document refers to government, non-governmental, and survivor stakeholders, it is done with the awareness that those with lived experience of human trafficking bring a wealth of both lived and learned experience to their expertise, that both kinds of expertise add value, and that not all survivors working in the field will choose to (or should have to) disclose their lived experience status.

The findings presented in this document are intended to inform future convenings and guide practical action within the United Nations system and beyond.

Report overview

This document is organized into three parts and is accompanied by eight annexes to supplement its findings.

Part 1 provides a summary of the Forum discussions and high-level findings, including an overview of its structure.

Part 2 presents an overview of the planning and implementation process for the Forum, drawing on documentation, conversations with implementation partners, and internal debriefing notes. It concludes with key learnings derived from staff and partner reflections, participant survey responses, and anonymized feedback collected during and after the event. These insights reflect both successful practices and identified areas for improvement.

Part 3 outlines the Forum discussions and promising practices for survivor-informed protection responses based on thematic analysis of pre-conference submissions, reports from needs assessment workshops, and notes from all conference sessions. It begins with discussing the key frameworks for survivor engagement that were submitted during the pre-conference process, followed by the rationale for the selected framework that structures the remainder of the section. Promising practices for survivor engagement in protection responses at each level of this framework are outlined, with implementation highlights providing practical examples. This section concludes with cross-cutting thematic considerations supported by insights drawn from participant submissions, workshop reports, and Forum documentation.

The seven annexes provide supporting documentation for the Forum. Annex I contains the Call to Action adopted by the *Voices of Resilience: Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors*, while Annex II presents the Forum agenda. Annex III compiles selected resources on victim protection, including trauma-informed approaches, from states, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society. Annex IV brings together selected resources and initiatives on survivor engagement from the same stakeholders. Annex V summarizes selected recommendations, resolutions and decisions adopted by the Conference of Parties to the UN Organized Crime Convention (COP) and its Working Group on Trafficking in Persons (WG), with a focus on protection. Finally, Annexes VI and VII present reports from the Regional Needs Assessment Workshops for Africa and for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Please note that in addition to the published documents cited in Annexes III and IV, pre-conference submissions also included unpublished personal and organizational reflections. These non-public materials (as well as raw conference session notes) are not listed in the annexes, although they were included in the thematic analysis and are cited where possible and when consent was provided.

The findings and analysis presented in this report are informed by three main sources of input:

- Written submissions provided by participants prior to the Forum;
- Findings from the two needs assessment workshops conducted by the conference team, and
- Documentation from the Forum.

Part 1: Summary of the Forum discussions and key findings

This section provides an overview of the main discussion points from the Forum, highlighting the approaches and promising practices presented by participants. These insights are intended to inform future policymaking, programming, and collaboration.

The Forum aimed to recognize survivors as agents of change; promote inclusive, victim-centred and trauma-informed practices; facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue and cooperation; and produce actionable, survivor-driven recommendations. To support these objectives, the programme combined plenary sessions and smaller group discussions. While the welcome and panel discussions were held in plenary for all participants, the smaller group discussions took place in dedicated breakout sessions. Each day offered four breakout themes, with participants invited to rank their preferences in advance of the Forum, allowing to pre-allocate participants to groups. For all breakout sessions, each of the four themes was run in two parallel groups, to allow for smaller groups and richer discussions. This approach also helped manage the large number of participants and provided flexibility for language needs. All panels and breakout sessions were facilitated by participants with relevant expertise, following a substantial advance effort to identify and confirm volunteers for these roles. Note-takers were likely assigned ahead of the Forum to ensure that key discussion points were captured for inclusion in this report.

The following section presents key highlights from the two days of discussions held during the Voices of Resilience Forum.

Opening session

Dr Hyab Yohannes, serving as Master of Ceremony in place of Malaika Oringo, (Executive Director of Footprint to Freedom), opened the Forum with a powerful invitation for participants to actively declare themselves welcome:

“To welcome someone is to speak about them or to them. But to invite someone to declare themselves welcome is to shift the power. It is to recognize their agency and affirm that each of us belongs here by right, not by permission. I invite you to stand up, say ‘I am welcome’ in a language of your choice, and take your seat.”

The participants readily embraced the invitation, creating a strong sense of collective strength from the outset. This shared affirmation set the tone for the Forum, emphasizing that all participants, especially survivors, were not guests, but rightful co-creators of the space. Dr Yohannes then invited all participants to declare the Forum open:

“I invite you to join me in declaring the Forum – *Voices of Resilience: Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors* – open. In declaring the Forum open together, each of us claims our space in this shared Forum not as visitors but as co-creators of what unfolds here today and throughout the Forum.”

This momentous opening marked the beginning of a two-day programme dedicated to survivor-led discourse, policy development, and collaborative learning. It affirmed the Forum’s foundational principle: that survivors are not only participants, but leaders and architects of the global movement against human trafficking.

The opening session was livestreamed on **UN Web TV**.⁴

Following the ceremonial opening of the Forum, Ms. Ghada Waly, Executive Director of UNODC, welcomed participants in a video-message, underscoring the importance of placing survivors at the centre of efforts to combat human trafficking. She referenced the 2021 UN General Assembly call for survivor involvement, acknowledged the contributions of governments, NGOs, and advocacy groups, and expressed appreciation to the European Union for its support. She concluded her message with a call to let survivor voices guide future action and reaffirmed UNODC's commitment to justice, dignity, and partnership. Magnus Brunner, EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, also welcomed participants in a video message. He commended the Forum as a vital platform for survivor leadership. He emphasized the need for survivor-informed policies and reiterated the EU's commitment to prevention, justice, and collaboration. During her opening remarks, Diane Schmitt, EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, highlighted the Forum's significance as the first global gathering of trafficking survivors. She stressed that protection is not just a response pillar but a prerequisite for effective prevention and prosecution. She also commended civil society and survivor-led organizations and affirmed that insights from the Forum would inform the upcoming EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Persons. Underscoring the value of lived-experience, John Brandolino, Director of the Division for Treaty Affairs at UNODC, welcomed participants and outlined UNODC's role in global anti-trafficking efforts. He shared his hope that the Forum would result in a shared commitment to justice, protection, and survivor empowerment.

In her keynote address, Sophie Otiende, founder of the Azadi Community and co-founder of the Collectives Threads Initiative and a renowned survivor advocate, opened her keynote by honouring the collective wisdom that shapes her thinking. Drawing from African feminist traditions, she emphasized the importance of citation, not just as academic practice, but as a way of acknowledging shared knowledge and community. She poignantly noted that:

“In a world where everyone wants to be a star, I enjoy being part of a greater constellation.”

She challenged the audience to reflect on the terms *survivor voices* and *survivor-centred*, which she described as increasingly treated as “buzz words”. She cautioned that changes in language do not necessarily translate into changes in practice and posed questions about that it truly means to survive, to be a survivor and to be survivor centred. She explained survivor-centredness both as a value, a core belief, and as a lens, to see better. Using this lens, she described trauma as a “public wound” that survivors are expected to carry privately. She concluded that this perspective highlights the misguided sole focus on rehabilitating survivors without rehabilitating the communities and systems that have failed and will continue to fail to protect them. To illustrate the importance of value driven decision making, Sophie Otiende reminded participants that where it was known that most survivors do not have access to bank accounts, a survivor-centred approach would guide the choice of payment method that are accessible to survivors, grounded in empathy and an understanding of their lived realities. She emphasized that simply bringing survivors into a room does not, in itself, mean being ‘survivor-centred’. To illustrate this point, she referred to a framework developed together with Chris Ash, co-founder of the Collective Threads Initiative, which describes engagement as a spectrum and as a ladder with different steps, showing levels of survivor involvement from limited participation to meaningful engagement in decision-making.

⁴ <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k11/k11rwe6xr6>

Quoting Chris Ash, her address concluded with a call for tangible change in that

“survivor expertise must not only inspire but it must transform systems”.

She expressed hope in the Forum’s collaborative spirit and acknowledged the UNODC’s efforts to implement survivor-centred principles.

The opening session concluded with a musical performance by the tenor Angelo Pollak, performing “Resilience”, a new melody by composer Lauren Bernofsky, that has been created exclusively for the Forum.

Panel discussions

The *Voices of Resilience - Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors* featured a total of three formal panel discussions, each designed to explore key dimensions of survivor-informed anti-trafficking responses. These panels were central to the Forum’s objective of elevating lived experience and fostering multi-stakeholder dialogue, offering structured yet dynamic conversations among different stakeholders participating in the Forum. For names of speakers, see Annex II, “Agenda”.

Panel 1: Survivor-Informed Protection Responses (Day 1)

The panel brought together survivor leaders, government representatives, and international organizations to discuss ethical inclusion and leadership of survivors in anti-trafficking efforts. The discussion emphasized the importance of integrating lived experience into policy design, service delivery, and evaluation, moving beyond *tokenism* toward *meaningful* participation. Speakers shared examples of survivor-led councils and advisory bodies, such as the OSCE’s International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC), which provides guidance to 57 member states. The Organization of American States (OAS) shared its early efforts to build a regional survivor network, noting that most countries lack formal mechanisms for survivor participation and that survivor input is often informal and limited to NGO-led workshops. The OAS stressed the need for capacity-building, scholarships, and compensation to empower survivors to take on leadership roles. A survivor ambassador from Jamaica described how her government moved beyond symbolic engagement to include her in legislative reform, law enforcement training, and community outreach. She emphasized the need to shift cultural mindsets and tailor anti-trafficking responses to local realities.

Audience members raised concerns about exclusion, lack of recognition, and the emotional toll of advocacy. Survivors from Africa and Latin America spoke about being sidelined by national systems and called for international support to hold governments accountable. The panel responded with calls for allyship, cross-border collaboration, and survivor-led advocacy networks.

The discussion closed with reflections on resilience, legacy, and the need for survivors to support one another. Panellists urged survivors to care for themselves, mentor others, and continue pushing for systemic change—even when progress is slow. The forum was framed not just as a moment of visibility, but as a springboard for lasting impact.

Panel 2: Understanding Protection Needs (Day 1)

This session began with a powerful *spoken word* performance by Zainab Emerald Schur, a survivor and poet. The panel explored the multifaceted protection needs of trafficking survivors, shaped by

geography, type of exploitation, and individual circumstances. Experts from Latin America, Europe, and Africa discussed the importance of trauma-informed care, long-term support, and culturally sensitive services.

The panel explored the evolving protection needs of trafficking victims, highlighting the importance of adapting to changing trafficking patterns and technologies. Speakers emphasized that victims, especially women, face complex trauma and require long-term, specialized psychosocial support. Economic reintegration and access to justice were identified as key components of recovery.

Male victims, often overlooked, were discussed as a group needing greater visibility and dedicated services. One speaker described the challenges of identifying male victims and the importance of shelters, legal aid, and medical care tailored to their needs.

Government coordination was presented as essential, with examples of national frameworks that include inter-agency committees, victim assistance funds, and specialized law enforcement units. The importance of political engagement and survivor inclusion in policy-making was repeatedly stressed. The session underscored that protection is not a secondary concern but is foundational to justice and recovery.

Panel 3: The Way Forward – Advancing Victim-Centred and Survivor-Informed Services (Day 2)

In this panel, featuring survivor leaders and institutional representatives from the Philippines, Uganda, and Latin America, the Forum turned its focus to future action. Discussions included a forward-looking conversation on policy reform, survivor leadership, and systemic change. Panellists urged participants to reconsider foundational concepts such as non-violence, empowerment, and the role of international conventions:

- What does empowerment mean when survivors are denied a “normal” life?
- What is the value of conventions that fail to guarantee rights?
- How to move away from systems of obedience rooted in violence and cruelty, shame, and guilt toward forms of tenderness, care, and dignity?

The panel explored how national systems can support survivors through shelters, referral mechanisms, victim funds, and multilingual hotlines. Government representatives shared examples of co-developing protection guidelines using human-centred approaches. Panellists addressed key challenges including underfunding, stigma, limited access to education, justice, and long-term support. They called for increased financial backing for survivor-led initiatives and sustainable structures. The discussion urged a rethinking of childhood protection, moving beyond abstract commitments toward lived experience and social justice, while confronting colonial legacies embedded in current legal and policy frameworks.

Breakout sessions

In addition to panel discussion, numerous breakout sessions provided space for focused, participatory dialogue. Each group was guided by moderators and rapporteurs, with survivors at the centre of the conversation.

Day 1 Breakout Groups

The first day of breakout sessions at the *Voices of Resilience Forum* brought together participants to engage in thematic discussions across four key areas. Each theme was explored in two parallel groups, with note-takers capturing diverse styles and perspectives. The sessions were designed to foster

dialogue, identify gaps, and co-create actionable recommendations. The summaries below synthesize the discussions, highlighting key insights, survivor contributions, and proposed strategies for change.

1. Beyond the 'Perfect Victim': Survivor-Informed Indicators for Victim Identification

Participants in this session critically examined the enduring stereotype of the “perfect victim”- a submissive, visibly distressed individual in chains - which continues to distort identification practices and exclude many survivors from recognition and support. Survivors emphasized that trauma manifests in diverse ways and that many victims do not self-identify due to psychological manipulation, cultural stigma, or fear. The group called for a shift away from rigid, checklist-based identification methods toward trauma-informed and empathetic approaches that reflect the complexity of lived experiences.

Intersectionality was a key theme, with participants urging recognition of how gender, migration status, and other factors shape victim profiles. Safe spaces for disclosure, especially at borders and transit points, were seen as essential. Survivors advocated for their inclusion as paid experts in policy design and implementation, stressing that their contributions are not optional but vital. One survivor powerfully stated, “Survivor has a meaning to which each survivor contributes individually and collaboratively. We are not optional.”

Recommendations included regularly updating identification indicators, removing ‘profiling’ from training curricula, and ensuring that systems are inclusive and culturally sensitive.

2. Breaking Down Barriers to Access to Justice

This session explored the systemic and institutional barriers that prevent survivors from accessing justice. Participants emphasized that justice must be defined by survivors themselves, not solely through prosecution, but through healing, dignity, and empowerment. Lengthy judicial processes, re-traumatization, and the absence of trauma-informed legal aid were identified as major obstacles. Language and cultural barriers, corruption, stigma within justice systems, and an overreliance on victim testimony further compound the challenges.

To address these issues, participants proposed the establishment of specialized courts staffed by trained personnel, the use of independent advocates and cultural mediators, and the creation of survivor-led advisory councils. Long-term support was seen as essential to prevent re-trafficking and ensure sustainable recovery. Examples from Kenya, Greece, and Bangladesh showcased successful models, including mentorship and peer support programmes, as well as survivor advocate initiatives that centre lived experience in justice processes.

3. Pathways to Empowerment

Empowerment was framed as a dynamic process of restoring agency, dignity, and leadership. Survivors emphasized that protection must be defined with them - not for them- and that support should be non-conditional and tailored to individual needs. Economic empowerment and access to education were highlighted as foundational pillars, alongside survivor inclusion in programme design and policymaking.

Community-based approaches were seen as vital for building resilience and preventing re-trafficking. Participants stressed the importance of recognizing survivors’ diverse aspirations - not all wish to become public advocates, and their paths to empowerment may vary. As one survivor shared, “I’m empowered to be empowering.” Another added, “We are experts in our own experiences, but we don’t know everything. Give us the confidence to speak out.”

The session concluded with a call for comprehensive, multi-dimensional support systems and long-term investment in survivor leadership, including professional development and financial independence.

4. From Survival to Independence: The Financial Sector's Role in Survivor Empowerment and Access to Remedy

Led by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the UNDP FAST Initiative,⁵ this session focused on integrating survivor voices into financial sector practices, particularly in relation to human rights due diligence and grievance mechanisms. Discussions emphasized the need for survivor-informed risk mapping in high-risk sectors such as tourism and agriculture, and the importance of survivor engagement in detecting trafficking-linked financial flows.

Participants advocated for the development of accessible and transparent grievance mechanisms aligned with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Survivors contributed valuable insights into how financial institutions can better identify exploitation and support survivor-led entrepreneurship. Examples from Pakistan highlighted innovative approaches, including microfinance programmes and discounted loans for returnees.

Key takeaways included the promotion of financial inclusion and ethical investment, training financial actors on trafficking risks, and recognizing survivor expertise as essential to systemic change.

Day 2 Breakout Groups

The second day of breakout sessions at the *Voices of Resilience Forum* focused on future-oriented strategies to strengthen survivor-informed protection systems. Discussions were organized around four thematic areas; each again explored in two parallel groups that brought together a diverse range of Forum participants.

1. Invisible No More: Tackling Technology-Facilitated Trafficking

Participants in this session delved into the increasingly pervasive role of digital platforms in facilitating trafficking, from initial recruitment to ongoing exploitation. A shared concern emerged around the invisibility of online harm, particularly affecting youth and marginalized communities who often lack the tools or awareness to recognize and report abuse. The discussion highlighted several pressing challenges, including a widespread lack of awareness among “Gen Z” [*members of the generation of people born between the mid-1990s and mid-2010s, also referred to as “digital natives”*] and vulnerable groups, the stigmatization and fear that prevent victims from reporting digital exploitation, and a limited understanding among law enforcement of survivor experiences in online contexts. Additionally, the inadequate regulation of social media and digital content was seen as a major barrier to effective prevention and accountability.

To address these issues, participants emphasized the importance of survivor-led digital outreach and awareness campaigns that speak directly to at-risk populations. Collaboration with technology platforms was seen as essential to developing user-friendly reporting tools and safety features. Training police and prosecutors in digital evidence collection was also identified as a critical need, alongside the use of artificial intelligence to detect trafficking patterns and monitor cryptocurrency flows linked to exploitation. The session concluded with strong recommendations to create safer

⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Finance against Slavery and Trafficking

online environments, educate families on digital risks, and integrate survivor expertise into tech-based prevention strategies to ensure interventions are both effective and empathetic.

2. *Protecting Childhoods*

This session centred on the urgent need for early intervention, family education, and community-based protection strategies for children vulnerable to trafficking. Participants underscored that children are not merely the future – as they are also ‘the present’ - and must be safeguarded with immediate and sustained action. The conversation explored how domestic exploitation and neglect often serve as root causes of trafficking, and emphasized the critical roles that schools, families, and communities play in prevention. Technology was identified as a double-edged sword, offering both opportunities and risks, particularly in relation to grooming and online abuse.

The need for trauma-informed care and long-term reintegration support was repeatedly stressed. Examples from Argentina, Uruguay, Guatemala, and Côte d’Ivoire showcased innovative practices such as school-based chat services, interministerial cooperation, and early childhood care models. Participants called for legislative reform to address emerging threats like cybercrime and advocated for multidisciplinary responses that centre survivor-informed strategies. As one participant stated, “Children are not assets, they are human beings with rights,” while another noted, “The arsenal of organized crime is enormous; the community response must be equally enormous.”

Key recommendations included investing in families and communities to strengthen protective factors and address underlying risks such as poverty, addiction, and lack of awareness. A shift in mindset was urged to ensure children are recognized as individuals with rights, not as assets. Integrating trafficking awareness into education, covering topics like consent, grooming, and safe technology use, was seen as vital. Participants also advocated for anonymous reporting channels accessible from an early age, trauma-informed judicial practices including the use of *Gesell Chambers*, and the engagement of civil society and grassroots networks. Legislative amendments and strengthened inter-agency collaboration, including partnerships with health and tourism sectors, were also recommended to build a robust and holistic protection framework.

3. *International Cooperation for Victim Protection: Enabling Justice and Healing Across Borders*

This session addressed the transnational nature of trafficking and the critical need for coordinated responses across origin, transit, and destination countries. Participants identified several challenges, including fragmented legal frameworks and referral mechanisms, the criminalization of victims and a pervasive lack of trust and cooperation between institutions. Forced returns without adequate protection was also highlighted as a serious concern.

To overcome these barriers, participants proposed harmonizing laws and establishing transnational referral mechanisms that prioritize victim protection. The institutionalization of survivor advisory councils was recommended to ensure that policies and practices are informed by lived experience. Agreements between civil society organizations were seen as a promising avenue for strengthening cross-border collaboration, and survivor-led monitoring of national systems was suggested as a way to enhance accountability and responsiveness.

4. *Recognizing Survivors as Experts*

This session explored ethical and meaningful ways to integrate survivor expertise into programmes, policies, and decision-making processes. A central insight was that survivor expertise must be defined by survivors themselves, with disclosure being entirely voluntary and supported by informed consent. Creating trauma-informed spaces for all participants was deemed essential to ensure safety and

dignity. Participants emphasized that survivor roles should be clearly named and respected, rather than being reduced to the label of “beneficiaries.”

Recommendations focused on embedding survivors in policymaking and service delivery, providing long-term support and opportunities for professional development, and establishing feedback loops to ensure that survivor input leads to tangible action. The importance of recognizing diverse forms of expertise, including lived experience, advocacy, and peer support, was highlighted as a way to enrich and humanize anti-trafficking efforts. This approach not only empowers survivors but also strengthens the overall effectiveness and integrity of interventions.

Breakout group discussions concluded with reports back to the plenary, facilitating collective reflection and exchange.

Closing session

The highlight of closing session was the adoption of the Forum’s Call to Action, a survivor-driven roadmap for strengthening protection systems and advancing justice for victims of human trafficking.

The Call to Action has been jointly developed by all Forum participants in the lead up to the event and was presented not merely as a declaration, but as a practical and urgent framework for change. It outlines nine core principles, grounded in the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. These principles call upon governments, authorities and communities to:

- Engage and Recognize Survivors as Experts
- Understand and Address the Impact of Trauma
- Provide Sustained Support for Recovery and Independence
- Develop Context-Sensitive Identification Practices
- Ensure Safety of and Prevent Harm to Human Trafficking Victims and Survivors
- Tailor Protection Measures to the Needs of Children
- Strengthen Legal Protections for Human Trafficking Victims and their Access to Justice
- Foster Collaborative, Cross-Sectoral Protection Partnerships
- Confront Corruption and Ensure Accountability in Protection Responses.

A key emphasis was placed on investing in survivor leadership, ensuring that survivors are not only invited to speak but are empowered with resources and decision-making authority.

The closing session also acknowledged the need to confront systemic challenges, including discrimination, corruption, and institutional failures. Participants were urged to carry forward the momentum of the Forum, to honour the voices heard through meaningful action, and to commit fully to building systems that protect, empower, and restore dignity. The adoption of the Call to Action was framed as a step toward justice, healing, and a world where no one is left behind.

The session was led by Malaika Oringo, who stressed that survivors are not the missing piece but are the force reshaping the entire picture. She emphasized that survivors were not simply “stories on legs,” but powerful agents of change. She quoted Benedict Agano from Congo: “Where war once silenced us, we are survivors now. Together, we stand for ourselves and rise as leaders.”, Abdus Salam who urged “Stop babysitting survivors in the name of empowerment.”, and Mixi Cruz who declared, “Freedom is not a gift, it is the result of resistance.”

Ms. Oringo stressed that these were not rhetorical statements, but “marching orders”. She contrasted the promises of Article 6 of the Palermo Protocol, housing, counselling, legal aid, education, and

employment support, with the lived realities of survivors: unsafe shelters, underfunded mental health care, inaccessible legal services, and persistent stigma. One survivor’s reflection resonated with participants: “The system broke me more than the traffickers did.”

Ms. Oringo called for urgent action to close the gap between policy and practice. She challenged all stakeholders to commit to three priorities:

1. Embedding survivor leadership as a foundation, not a formality.
2. Resourcing survivors with funding, infrastructure, and partnership—not just visibility.
3. Making accountability the norm, not the exception.

The Forum concluded with a reflective contribution by Dr Hyab Yohannes, who shared a poem from his then forthcoming book *The Refugee Abyss* in tribute to the lives lost in treacherous waters, reminding participants of the human cost of inaction and indifference:

Sitting on the shore
we gaze out at this vast sea,
full of mysteries
and stories untold.
As we take in the view,
our minds drift to the lives
of friends and strangers
who have perished in the abyss.
We find ourselves wondering,
where are our friends?
With a deep breath,
our thoughts dissolve
into the unknown.

The closing of the Forum was framed not as end, but rather a beginning, having issued a collective call to governments, institutions, civil society, and survivor leaders to respond not through acts of charity, but through a commitment to justice; not merely out of obligation, but grounded in a shared sense of humanity.

Part 2: The conference process and learnings

This conference was planned by the Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section of UNODC. In September 2024, a *Consultant (Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling Technical Expert) - Survivor Engagement*, with experience in developing survivor leadership programming joined the conference team. This expert helped to conceptualize the Forum, proposed the title *Voices of Resilience* and guided the co-creation approach through to its implementation. She supported the development and implementation of two regional needs-assessment workshops to contribute to development of the conference agenda (one in Colombia and one in Uganda), and provided guidance throughout planning on topics, structure, and participants for the Forum. In June 2025, expertise with both lived and professional experience was engaged to further guide the planning for the Forum and prepare this outcome document. Throughout preparations these experts provided feedback on the agenda and concept. In March 2025, a fully qualified behavioural neurologist and clinical psychologist with specific expertise in human trafficking and survivor engagement was contracted as a *Consultant (Human trafficking trauma expert)* to provide expertise on trauma-informed practices for all participants, before, during, and after the conference. These partners brought lived, learned, and professional expertise that strengthened conference preparation. As part of the planning process, a risk assessment was co-developed with lived-experience experts to identify potential risks and corresponding mitigation measures. This exercise proved particularly valuable, enabling the conference team to anticipate and respond to a range of operational, logistical and participant-related challenges that arose before and during the Forum.

2.1 Before the conference

The Forum was intended to be co-created with persons with lived experience; accordingly, UNODC involved survivors well in advance of the Forum. In December 2024, UNODC conducted a needs assessment workshop with 12 survivor leaders from 10 African countries. The workshops aimed to explore approaches for developing truly victim-centred and trauma-informed protection responses through direct engagement with survivors as key stakeholders in anti-trafficking efforts. In April of 2025, UNODC conducted a similar workshop with 8 female survivor leaders and advocates from 7 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Feedback from these workshops shaped the agenda and discussion topics for the Forum. In addition, all conference participants (including governmental and nongovernmental officials) were invited to submit promising practices for consideration. These submissions included toolkits, white papers, and written reflections by the participants themselves. While the call specifically requested practical approaches rather than academic research, it is notable that no peer-reviewed studies were submitted. This absence likely reflects the limited availability of research on survivor engagement practices in the context of human trafficking, highlighting a gap in the existing evidence base.

All this body of knowledge and evidence, as well as recommendations, resolutions and decisions adopted by the Conference of Parties to the UN Organized Crime Convention and its Working Group on Trafficking in Persons that focused on protection, informed the development of a Call to Action that was adopted during the Forum. An initial draft was shared with all participants in early June 2025 for feedback and was revised and reshared the week prior to the conference to allow additional time for reflection and feedback. Final adjustments were made during the conference to reflect points raised by participants.

Participation in the Forum was guided by the objectives of the EU-funded PACTS project (*Promoting global action and cooperation against trafficking in human beings and the smuggling of migrants*) and the need to ensure diverse, practice-based contributions. Due to budgetary constraints, it was not possible to extend invitations to all interested stakeholders. As a result, priority was given to those actively engaged in survivor-informed protection work, with demonstrated practices or tools to share.

This approach aimed to foster meaningful dialogue and practical exchange, while maintaining a manageable and representative group of participants.

As participants had varying levels of experience with international travel and conference participation, pre-conference sessions and support were provided for all participants to help them understand what to expect in relation to travel, the visa process, and the conference itself. Flights were booked for all participants who had been funded by the UNODC to attend (mostly participants with lived experience), and those who requested coaching on the visa process were supported by UNODC staff. Participants whose travel was funded and organized by UNODC, were also provided with a subsistence allowance to cover hotels and meals while in Vienna and were provided names of recommended hotels within walking distance of the conference. The conference team reviewed existing research-based guidance on lived experience engagement in anti-trafficking conferences to anticipate and plan for common needs and challenges.

In the months leading up to the conference participants received additional communications from the conference team about what to expect, including user-friendly logistical guidance such as a short video describing the walk from the train stop to the conference room so that attendees had visual cues rather than just a map or description. Both the navigation video and the emailed notification were named by participants as examples of details that supported participants in knowing what to expect, and were key elements of the conference's trauma-informed approach.

A pre-conference virtual workshop on practices for grounding and care during overwhelming discussions and events was co-facilitated by the UNODC trauma expert and a UNODC team member with psychological expertise. This voluntary workshop was available to all participants with lived experience, and participants expressed gratitude for the practical exercises and non-condescending approach. Participants who expressed a desire for additional support were able to meet with the trauma expert to discuss their concerns in advance of the Forum. All participants also received information about how to access crisis and medical care while attending the conference, as well as a localized and specific handout of potential grounding activities throughout the Vienna International Centre developed by the UNODC trauma expert.

2.2 During the conference

The conference itself was held at the Vienna International Centre, where UNODC is headquartered. Upon entry, conference participants checked in with security and received access badges permitting independent movement within authorized areas of the venue, without requiring escorts. Participants with prior experience of more restrictive access arrangements in other institutional settings, noted that this approach supported a sense of agency, autonomy, and participation as full partners.

Conference team members (including the trauma expert) were present and available throughout the conference and were able to assist in real time. There were two rooms – a quiet room stocked with sensory items for self-care, as well as another quiet room for reflection – available to all conference participants, and a light refreshment and coffee break was provided each morning. While lunch was not provided as part of the conference programme, a generous mid-day break allowed adequate time to make use of the lunch options provided at the on-site cafeteria or a nearby restaurant and the subsistence allowance included sufficient funds for meals (for those who received such allowance).

The conference agenda consisted of opening remarks, a musical performance, and a keynote speech, and several topical sessions, including plenary panel discussions and breakout group discussions, and included poetry, performance, and personal reflections. Notetakers were engaged for every session (including breakout sessions) to capture the dialogue in real time.

As part of the closing session, participants reviewed and adopted a Call to Action, with the intention that it could serve as a first step towards long-term improvements in global anti-trafficking response.

Participants were also offered an opportunity to complete an evaluation survey, and 82 participants did (a response rate of approximately 68%). The Forum was generally well received. A majority of respondents rated the event as either “Excellent” (57.3%) or “Very Good” (37.8%), while a smaller proportion rated it as “Good” (3.7%) or “Average” (1.2%). No respondents rated the Forum as “Poorly”. Many participants appreciated the diversity of attendees and the opportunity to hear directly from survivors. The Forum was described as a unique and empowering space that brought together stakeholders from different sectors and regions in a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect. The breakout sessions were frequently cited as a space for meaningful exchange, and several respondents noted the respectful and inclusive environment. While the overall feedback was positive, participants also identified clear areas for improvement. A recurring theme was the limited time available for deeper discussions, particularly in breakout groups. Some participants also raised concerns about logistical challenges, including long waits during registration.

2.3 After the conference

Immediately after and for the week following the conference, participants who required logistical assistance with disrupted travel were supported by the conference team, and those who requested psychosocial support were provided opportunities to share feedback and process their experiences. The conference team followed up with any participants who had experienced challenges during the preparation for the conference itself to ensure any remaining issues were heard and addressed if possible.

Communication from the conference team continued after the conference to express gratitude and a commitment to continuing the discussion, and conference participants with lived experience were invited to attend a post-conference wellbeing check-in group meeting in August.

2.4 Learnings from the conference process

Meaningful engagement of individuals with lived experience of human trafficking requires a commitment to learning with gentle curiosity, co-creating among and with impacted people, implementing co-created practices, evaluating outcomes, and unlearning incorrect assumptions, harmful practices, and previously unidentified bias. This section closes with a selection of key learnings from the planning and implementation of the conference. Some of these were learned through successful implementation, and some were learned through overcoming or addressing challenges. We acknowledge that any recommendations from our learnings are not exclusive to engagement of human trafficking survivors, but are broadly beneficial, particularly for collaborators from underrepresented and marginalized communities that have not typically been included in such events, but whose presence could greatly impact the relevance and local acceptance of these high-level meetings.

i. Engage a diverse range of partners from impacted communities in the event design.

Even though institutions may have a survivor engagement consultant or advisory council, plan multiple avenues for engagement from different partners or groups of partners.

ii. Co-create criteria for the selection of participants.

For an event that is for selected participants, considerations for the selection of participants goes beyond qualifications and readiness and should include a reflection on group dynamics, event scope,

and the wellbeing of all participants. Expectations may include things like “participants should have skills for self-regulation during challenging conversations”, “participants should have direct experience developing, implementing, or receiving human trafficking protection interventions”, and “participants should consider allowing space for diverse experiences and perspectives, particularly those which are often not heard in official spaces”. As these expectations are not specific to participants with lived experience, all participants can reflect on their readiness for participation. When leveraging networks to reach a more diverse range of possible participants, it is important to ensure that partners assisting with such outreach are provided with clear information on the goals of the event.

iii. Avoid structures that require disclosure of lived experience and integrate survivor expertise throughout.

Not all people with lived experience of human trafficking have ever disclosed that they are survivors in a public or professional setting. Conference events for “survivors” would require those who are not open about their trafficking experience to give up their privacy and freedom of action, in order to belong. Events that honour survivors in the room could acknowledge that not all survivors choose to or are able to be open about their experiences without judgment or praise for either decision. Organizers should ensure that people with lived experiences are integrated throughout all panels, rather than having a “survivor engagement” panel featuring experts with lived experience talking about engagement practices but not on other topical panels.

iv. Handle logistics and financial concerns in advance when possible.

Participants who are newer to professional travel or are from communities in which travel is an inaccessible luxury may find the processes of arranging travel intimidating. Offer to coordinate and book flights and hotels, when possible, both to relieve the pressures of often-confusing logistical processes, as well as to avoid financially burdening impacted people with the delays often associated with travel reimbursements.

v. Provide visa support when possible.

Provide direct visa support when possible. Offer participants transparent advice in advance about challenges with visa processes, including those that might arise if visitors apply outside of their home country or have additional international travel directly before or after the conference.

vi. Consider offering pre-conference preparation for participants on how to engage with survivors as equal stakeholders.

For some participants, this might have been their first time in a space with survivors as equal stakeholders, and even well-intentioned professionals can sometimes be unaware of power dynamics experienced by survivors in professional spaces.

vii. When subsistence allowances are possible, consider multiple payment options.

Providing funding for food and incidentals allows equitable participation. If organizational financial policies and administrative constraints prevent electronic transfer of funds directly to the participant, it could be considered to offer choices between cash, prepaid cards, or a combination of both. Some participants may feel unsafe carrying around large amounts of cash in a potentially unfamiliar city, and others may prefer cash that can be easily exchanged for different currencies (as prepaid cards do not typically allow cash withdrawals).

viii. Provide specialized wellbeing support.

This can be as simple as offering sensory items and recommendations of wellbeing activities on site or could involve having peer counsellors or trained clinicians available. The kinds of wellbeing and trauma-management coaching and support needed by participants from impacted communities engaging as full partners in the work may look different from the therapeutic support offered in early recovery. Ensure that wellbeing support is tailored for the kind of event and expected attendees. When wellbeing support is framed as relevant to all professionals, rather than as specialized support for survivors, all participants benefit from access to preparatory sessions and materials, reducing distinctions between “survivor leaders” and other professionals.

ix. Plan for media engagement that consider privacy needs of attendees.

For conferences that are not public, all participants deserve the right to choose whether or not to be photographed. This right is an essential consideration given the unique safety and security needs of human trafficking survivors, particularly those whose cases are active or whose movements may be tracked. Implement a system for participants to indicate whether or not they consent to being included in photography (e.g. different coloured lanyards or wristbands), and ensure all media and communications staff are briefed on the system and its importance.

x. Explain any logistical details that may be unfamiliar to participants.

At the beginning of the event (and repeated at key transitions) announce technical details such as how to access translation, how to use the microphone, how to raise your nameplate to add a comment, how to access the wellbeing room, and how to request support from the trauma counsellor.

Part 3: Forum findings on survivor-informed and trauma-informed protection responses

To tailor protection to real needs, those responsible for protection responses must develop solutions together with victims and survivors. To do this effectively, protection actors need to understand frameworks and approaches that enable participation. Building on this understanding, the Forum provided an overarching framework for examining such approaches. Drawing on insights gained through the preparation and organization of the Forum, including pre-Forum exchanges with participants and the submission of existing practice examples, the following analysis provides an overview of the benefits of survivor engagement and highlights key areas where such engagement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of protection responses is essential - yet often overlooked.

The analysis examines three primary models for framing survivor engagement presented in pre-conference submissions and explains the approach used to categorize them. It further outlines mechanisms, practices, and guidance shared by Forum participants, organized by levels of engagement, highlighting practical application. Finally, cross-cutting findings relevant to all levels of engagement are presented as considerations for developing survivor-informed protection responses.

The analysis draws on a thematic review of multiple sources:

- i. Existing literature, scholarly publications, practitioner toolkits, and white papers, as well as reflections submitted by participants;
- ii. Reports from the two UNODC regional needs assessment workshops conducted in Uganda and Colombia; and
- iii. Documentation from all Forum sessions, including raw and consolidated notes.

3.1 Benefits of engagement

The Forum's underlying concept was informed by key resources highlighting the value of survivor engagement. The Council of Europe's *Guidelines for Policymakers on Engaging with Victims and Survivors of Child Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse* identifies benefits such as improved understanding and awareness, increased visibility through respectful dialogue, real-time feedback, greater policy efficiency, and stronger mutual relationships. Similarly, the International Justice Mission's *Survivor Leadership in Programming: A Toolkit* underscores that survivor leadership can drive more impactful advocacy, enhance program effectiveness, and accelerate project momentum. These insights shaped the Forum's approach to promoting meaningful survivor participation.

Implementation Highlight

Abdus Salam, of the Humanity Research Consultancy (HRC) in the United Kingdom described HRC's model as leadership across all work, co-design of services and processes, built-in feedback and accountability, ethical storytelling, and sustained investment in survivors' economic and leadership development. This model, he said, "is a working proof that when survivors are treated as partners, not beneficiaries, change accelerates... HRC approached their work with integrity. When they began addressing human trafficking related to scam compounds in Southeast Asia, they actively involved survivors to ensure their work was survivor-centred. After assisting in my repatriation, they offered me a job - even though I had very few skills at the time. They invited me to take part in a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, where I

was encouraged to lead the fieldwork because the project involved a survivor-led organization in Bangladesh. They told me, ‘You are also a survivor, and that’s the best way to approach this partnership.’ HRC made these investments in me without any expectation of immediate return - remarkably, even though they are a private company. Eventually, they promoted me to the role of Survivor Empowerment and Communication Officer, giving me the responsibility to lead all survivor-related work on the team. I was trusted to make decisions and lead with full support from my colleagues. I was never underestimated or treated differently because of my lived experience. Most importantly, they never tried to ‘babysit’ me simply because I am a survivor.” As a result of this investment and engagement, he has been able to assist in the exit and repatriation and reintegration of over 50 survivors from Southeast Asia’s scamming compounds, speak at conferences and governmental bodies, and establish a survivor-led organization in Bangladesh that now conducts regular awareness activities in border areas.

- **Abdus Salam, Forum participant, pre-conference submission**

3.2 Areas where survivor input is critical

The two regional needs assessment workshops, pre-conference submissions, and Forum discussions highlighted several key areas for engagement of survivors that are often overlooked. *Unless otherwise indicated, all feedback referenced below is drawn directly from the discussions of the Forum.*

- Engage survivors in choices about imagery and representation choices, noting that “images of victims handcuffed or chained, for example, often misrepresent the reality of how traffickers operate.” (Regional needs assessment workshop, Colombia)
- Engage survivors in decisions about sentencing policies. (Regional needs assessment workshop, Colombia)
- Engage survivors in bilateral processes, where survivors’ voices are often absent. In contexts where formal cooperation between governments may be limited or absent, partnerships between non-governmental organizations can serve as an effective mechanism to advance survivor engagement. Such collaborations may facilitate the integration of survivor-led organizations and staff from affected communities into anti-trafficking systems, thereby strengthening inclusive and locally informed responses. Engage survivors in developing partnerships and collaborations between countries of origin and destination to ensure access to services for victims.
- Engage youth survivors in developing responses to technology-facilitated trafficking.
- Engage survivors in identifying compliance gaps as well as financial and money-laundering practices common in human trafficking.
- Engage survivors in the intake, identification, and service processes as part of destigmatizing human trafficking victimization, particularly in regions and/or cultures where there is extreme and isolating stigma that hinders the possibility of reintegration.
- Engage survivors in the development of culturally specific indicators and identification processes, as indicators developed in the Global North may not be relevant for other regions (or even marginalized populations and insular communities in their own regions).

3.3 Different levels and kinds of engagement

In order to strengthen survivor engagement in anti-trafficking efforts, it is essential to understand the range of models and frameworks that guide how such engagement can be structured and implemented. Resources submitted to the conference reflect diverse approaches, from targeted strategies such as storytelling and safeguarding, to comprehensive organizational guidance for integrating survivor perspectives across programmes. Analysing these models helps clarify the varying degrees and types of engagement, and provides practical tools for governments, civil society, and international organizations seeking to build inclusive, ethical, and effective systems. This section presents two key frameworks that emerged from the submissions and conference discussions, offering a foundation for understanding how survivor engagement can be meaningfully incorporated into the development, implementation, and evaluation of human trafficking protection policies and practices.

Arnstein's ladder

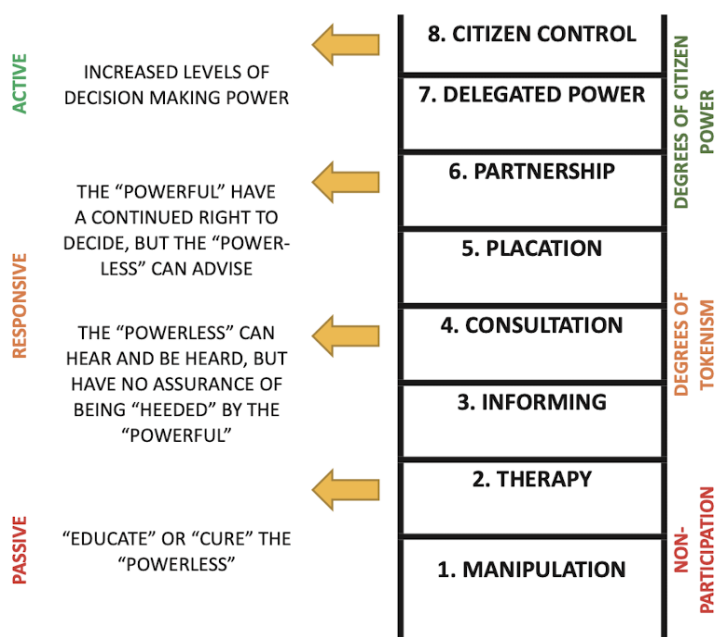


Figure 2: Arnstein's Ladder. Source: Based on 360° Participation.

The first model is based upon Arnstein's ladder, which outlines eight levels of citizen engagement in decision-making. While this framework has been adapted in various anti-trafficking efforts, it does not outline levels of meaningful engagement and instead outlines a linear progression from manipulation to full decision-making. While Arnstein's work is the original foundation of this ladder model of participation, the best-known adaptation is Roger Hart's 1992 adaptation in *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* – a UNICEF publication that offered a framework for children's participation. For this reason, some survivor leaders have criticised the use of this ladder, which presumes certain power dynamics and reduced agency as

inevitable, to human rights ecosystems describing adult participation.

Stages of involvement in the public participation process

The second model is based upon the International Association for Public Participation's Spectrum of Public Participation. This spectrum, first adapted for anti-trafficking protection use in a 2019 publication,⁶ is comprised of five levels of engagement that is (i) inform, (ii) consult, (iii) involve, (iv) collaborate, and (v) empower.

In adaptations published by the Council of Europe, the Australian Attorney General's Office, and Collective Threads Initiative, the "consult" level has been renamed "ask" level, to avoid confusion with "consulting" as a form of contract labour. While survivor leaders may commonly be engaged as consultants, these consulting engagements often fit the definition of the "involve" level while non-

⁶ Croft and Dunkerton, 2019. *Expanding Our Reach: Equipping North Carolina's Rape Crisis Centers to Serve Survivors of Human Trafficking*, NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Raleigh, NC. Revised and republished in 2020.

consultant engagements such as participant surveys more often fit the definition of “consult” in the spectrum.

For this reason, this report refers to engagements at the second level of the spectrum as engagements at the “ask” level, and to the spectrum itself (when applied to the anti-trafficking space) as the “lived experience engagement spectrum”.



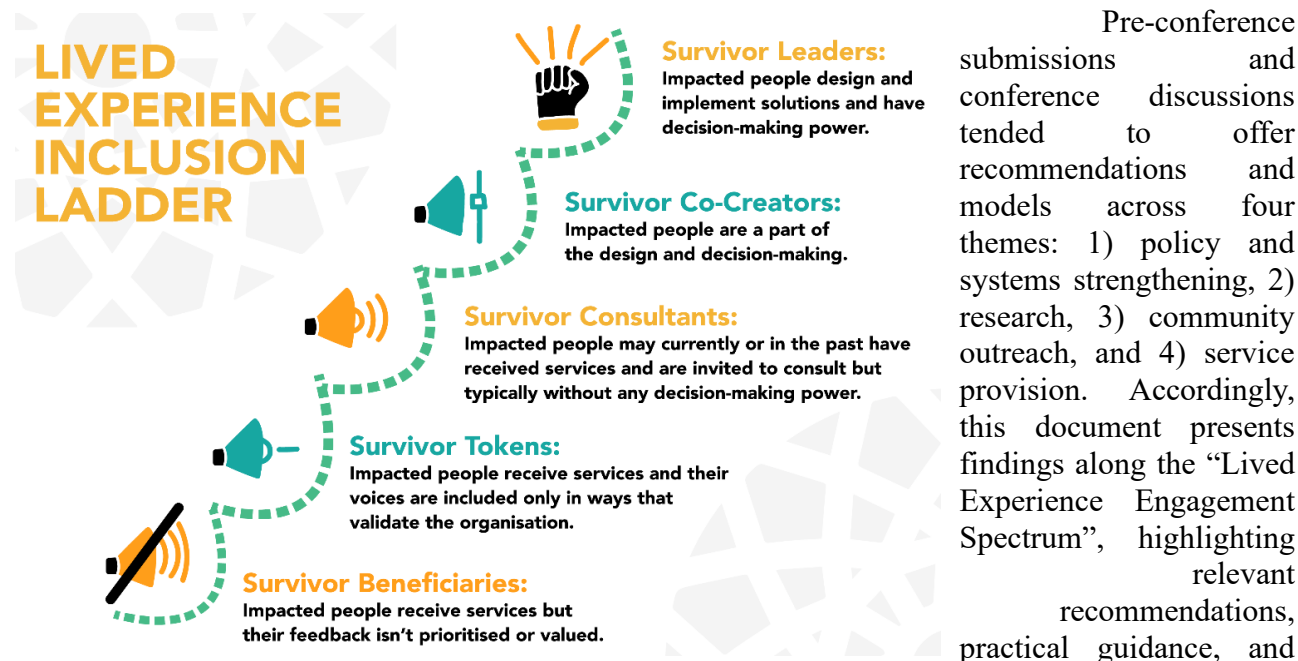
Figure 3: Stages of involvement in the public participation process. Source IAP2

While decision-making power increases at each level of the spectrum, all levels of engagement are important and it is essential to do them ethically and well.

This means, for example, informing consultants of how their feedback will be used, being transparent about the framing of a media engagement, and reporting back to workshop participants about the impacts of their work are all at the “inform” level, and yet all are essential to excellent implementation of higher levels. A ladder framework has thus been developed to accompany this framework, with guidance for implementers to ensure that the highest levels of engagement possible are used in any given anti-trafficking structure.

Abdus Salam’s implementation highlight earlier in this section is an example of how an organization can use multiple levels of survivor engagement across its work, and of how one survivor can shift through multiple levels over time as he builds skills and learns more about different areas of work.

3.4 Analysis of forum submissions and discussions, by level of engagement



Pre-conference submissions and conference discussions tended to offer recommendations and models across four themes: 1) policy and systems strengthening, 2) research, 3) community outreach, and 4) service provision. Accordingly, this document presents findings along the “Lived Experience Engagement Spectrum”, highlighting relevant recommendations, practical guidance, and

illustrative examples within each of these four areas of anti-trafficking work, where applicable. It is important to note that individual engagement models may operate across multiple levels of the spectrum simultaneously. For the purposes of this document, examples are categorized according to the predominant level of engagement reflected in their structure.

“Inform” level of engagement

Models for survivor engagement at the *inform* level will not be specifically addressed here as this level is not “survivor leadership” or “survivor-informed services”, but it models respect for people who have experienced trafficking in a way that encourages respect at all levels. Ensuring that people have access to user-friendly information about the decisions and policies that affect them demonstrates a belief in their inherent dignity – a value that is essential to meaningful engagement at higher levels as well.

Additionally, while many examples were offered that highlight survivor engagement in the development and delivery of *prevention and community outreach*, this report focuses primarily on community outreach strategies most closely aligned with supporting awareness of and access to *protection* resources.

“Empower” level of engagement

At the *empower* level, “impacted communities and people with lived experience have final decision-making power [including fiscal] over policies, programming, research, and implementation.”

Implementation highlight

In 2022, a small convening of funders, civil society leaders, and advocates was gathered to discuss needed change in anti-trafficking in the United States to generate support for increased protection responses. Over a third of the participants had disclosed lived experience of human trafficking,⁷ and those survivors were from more than eight countries across North America, South and Central America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. All had extensive experience mentoring other survivors. At this meeting, some funders and civil society leaders were confused when the survivor leaders present named that victims and survivors may experience harm as a result of their engagements in anti-trafficking, even as they access services or are offered leadership opportunities. In the weeks after the meeting, an informal gathering of the survivor leaders resulted in a concept note for a self-administering focus group that would explain the kinds of harms survivors experience in anti-trafficking and offer recommendations for prevention and mitigation. The concept note was funded, and all individuals with lived experience were invited to join the focus group.⁸

Once funded, the survivor leaders (a group whose collective expertise included activism, advocacy, research, funding, government, mental health clinical work, nonprofit executive leadership, training, and policy) maintained full autonomy over the project and its outcome document. One member who had both project management experience and time to spend took point on communications, planning meetings, and ensuring findings were recorded. The first few meetings involved collaboratively developing the scope, safety plan, and project plan. The group engaged a social worker with lived experience who had not been part of the original group (and

⁷ In some contexts, rather than saying that a percentage of individuals have lived experience we instead say that a percentage of individuals have “disclosed lived experience” of human trafficking. This is to honour that not all professionals who have lived experience have ever shared that openly in a professional setting. For example, if 40% of individuals in a gathering are open about their survivorship but 10% of the participants in the same gathering are survivors working in other roles in the field who do not publicly identify as survivors, noting that 40% of the participants have “disclosed lived experience” is a way to honour that we can never know how many participants in a room are themselves survivors. Some survivors’ lived experiences are disclosed, and others are undisclosed.

⁸ A small number of executives at the meeting had undisclosed lived experience, known only to the event convener. They were contacted separately by the convener to ask if they were interested in getting emails about the focus group as it would imply their survivorship to the other survivor leaders, and they were only connected to the work if they consented.

who had less experience in anti-trafficking leadership but was a strong writer) to join as the notetaker and copyeditor. In each group, questions were presented to generate discussion on the collectively determined topics. Some participants attended every meeting, others attended only a few, and some participated primarily through comments on project documents.

As the project neared conclusion, the project manager synthesized all the notes from over three months of weekly meetings into an outcome document, which all participants were invited to edit and revise. Participants were given the opportunity to be named as authors or anonymous, and the group chose a collective name for the time-bound gathering (“Lived and Professional Experience Working Group”) to highlight the diverse kinds of experience survivors bring to their work and to capture that this report was not owned by any one group, but by the collective.

We Name It So We Can Repair It: Rethinking harm and accountability in the anti-trafficking sector was offered back to the civil society leaders and funders who had been at the original gathering, and they formed an accountability group with intentionally-rotating leadership that met quarterly to discuss challenges related to implementing recommendations, brainstorm solutions, and report back on progress. As the accountability group continued to meet, new members from other national and international organizations joined.

- **Lived and Professional Experience Movement-Building Working Group, pre-conference submission by a Forum participant.**

In the above implementation highlight, note that the overall engagement level could be described as *empower* even though not all participants engaged at that level.

Survivor-led organizations often operate at this level, particularly when their engagement of other survivors in the work is primarily at the *collaborate* level or higher. Azadi Community (Kenya),⁹ for example, requires that staff have an apprentice from the community for each role in the organization, to ensure that any positions currently without lived experience leadership are mentoring toward that goal.

“Collaborate” level of engagement

At the *collaborate* level, “the organization or movement works closely with people with lived experience on each aspect of programme development and implementation, from exploring options to making final decisions.”

○ ***Collaborate: Policy and Systems Strengthening***

During the Forum, it was suggested that Member States may consider including survivors in their official delegations in international fora and in national policy development processes. One example of such inclusive practice was shared by the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking Secretariat of the Philippines, where survivors participate alongside government officials and member agencies. This model demonstrates a promising approach to integrating lived experience into national anti-trafficking responses, contributing to more informed, responsive, and survivor-centred policy development. Collaboration in policy-making “implies that victims and survivors are included and well-represented in policy-making bodies” and not just in an advisory capacity.

⁹ Represented at the *Voices of Resilience – Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors*

○ **Collaborate: Research**

Action **research**, like that explained in the below implementation highlight, provides models for engaging impacted people at the *collaborate* level.

Implementation highlight

Different & Equal is “an organization in Albania that supports abused and trafficking young men and women on their journeys to justice and recovery.”¹⁰ In this project, six young women (ages 17-26) who were beneficiaries of Different & Equal were trained as young researchers and supported to gather evidence on “young people’s perspectives about seeking justice and support from the criminal justice and victim protection systems in Albania in relation to trafficking and sexual violence.” At the start of the project, four young researchers were in independent living arrangements and two were in Different & Equal’s safe shelter programme, though all had transitioned into independent living by the end of the project.

Two of the young researchers had been previously involved in participatory initiatives, and a UK-based academic partner with a strong interest in “research ethics, trauma-informed approaches, and youth participatory methods” was engaged to support the researchers. The facilitation of the project was shared between a trauma-informed social worker and a researcher with in-depth expertise in working on sensitive issues of trafficking and abuse.

The young researchers were engaged in all aspects of the research process: “from conceptualization and research design, to implementation and dissemination.” They note that they each were engaged in different ways (presumably based on interest, skill, and care): “We participated in all phases of the study: all six of us decided on the research questions and designed the questionnaire; some of us interviewed peers as part of the survey; some analysed the information we collected; and three co-wrote the report.” Rather than revise the report to ensure strict alignment with academic writing norms, the project team utilized a transparent approach that explained both why the report may read differently and the intentions that underpinned that decision:

We recognize that the report may not read as cohesively as a report that has gone through multiple rounds of peer review and professional proofing. Perfection and ‘linguistic flow’ were compromised in favour of authenticity. The report may challenge traditional notions of what a research report looks like. We present it, with pride, as a genuinely co-produced product that was led by young people. In many ways, the report mirrors and encapsulates the realities of youth participatory processes as inherently messy, highly time- and resource-intensive, unpredictable, deeply rewarding and utterly exciting ways of doing things differently, and more collaboratively.

The findings identified experiences of bias and discrimination against young people in anti-violence institutions and inappropriate interviewing practices during criminal investigations. The study report provides recommendations on how to increase trust and access to healing and justice through youth-friendly, victim-centred practices.

- **Different & Equal, Forum participant, pre-conference submission.**

¹⁰ This project is described in detail in its study report, “*The Evidence Speaks for Itself*”: Findings from the “*Small steps can make a big difference*” youth-led action research project into young people’s perspectives on seeking justice and support in relation to child trafficking in Albania, published in 2022 with the Safer Young Lives Research Center at the University of Bedfordshire in UK. All quotes from this implementation highlight come from the study report.

In the above implementation highlight about engagement in research about protection responses, note that the overall level of engagement could be described as *collaborate* even though the youth researchers participated at different levels and in different ways.

○ ***Collaborate: Community Outreach***

For **community outreach**, survivors may be engaged indirectly (through development of messaging and materials) or directly (through outreach field work in the community). A pre-conference submission from Betty Pedraza Lozano of Espacios de Mujer (Colombia) described that “Survivors are also engaged in prevention work through the development of comics, podcasts, and stories that challenge social stigmas and share survivor experiences with the wider community.” Different & Equal (Albania) collaborates with impacted people on awareness-raising campaigns even in the design stage, and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) guidelines describe trainings, theatre, and educational talks offered by survivors and survivor-led organizations. In each of the examples referenced, the level of engagement is *collaborate*, when engaged participants are partners in developing the models they will implement and maintain full control over how they share their own stories.

○ ***Collaborate: Service Provision***

In **service provision**, survivors and survivor-led organizations can support the development and implementation of protection practices indirectly, such as through helping to raise awareness of service gaps, facilitating quality development of care services, developing training for caregivers, and advocating for human rights. (ICMPD, 41, describing the survivor-led organization “Footprint to Freedom”). They may also be engaged in direct service provision as clinicians, case managers, or peer mentors.

Implementation highlight: Peer mentoring programmes

The Centre for Protecting Victims and Preventing Trafficking in Human Beings (PVPT) in Kosovo “has established a peer-to-peer training and support programme for survivors” of trafficking. In this model, those who have completed the organization’s rehabilitation programme later provide basic training, educational support, and computer skills training to survivors currently in the programme”. Reported benefits are “raising the self-confidence and the development of personal skills of the participants.” (ICMPD, 35)

In their pre-conference submission, Different & Equal (Albania) also described a peer mentoring system in which “a former victim of trafficking in an advanced stage of reintegration” serves as a mentor to “a newly identified victim who has recently emerged from an exploitative or violent situation.” Mentors receive a tailored training on how to support, guide, and empower their mentees and were provided with ongoing supervision. The trusting and supportive relationships foster benefits such as improving their self-esteem and social networks, strengthening independence, a sense of being understood and valued, and building of practical skills and knowledge.

As with all models at this level, peer mentors function at the *collaborate* level if impacted people were partners in developing the peer mentoring models, training, and supervisory structures they are implementing. Note that peer mentoring programmes should not require mentors to share their personal trafficking stories or place undue emphasis on expectations to serve as a role model or inspiration, as the former can remove survivor agency and the latter can misrepresent healing as a linear and place harmful expectations on mentors. Peer mentor programmes, like all direct service programmes, should have clear conflict of interest policies and conduct guidelines.

“Involve” level of engagement

At the *involve* level, organizations work closely with people with lived experience throughout planning and implementation to co-create policies and programmes.

○ *Involve: Policy and Systems Strengthening*

For **policy and systems strengthening**, strategic storytelling can fall at the *involve* level when the survivors have full choice over if, when, in what settings, for what purposes, and by whom their stories are shared. NGO ANTHUS (Mexico) notes in its pre-conference submission that survivors' stories can save lives and give meaning to their suffering, and the power of survivors' stories can be achieved indirectly through case studies, but survivors must agree to share them. Shelters have to be careful and conscious not to force survivors to share their stories. Good practices include always ensuring that survivors fully consents to use of their stories directly or indirectly, ensuring that invitations to share stories publicly do not come from anyone who is or was directly involved in the survivors' service provision, that they are adequately prepared for the dynamics of public storytelling, and that practices are in place to ensure they retain protections when their image and story directly impact their livelihood and can revoke consent if desired. Models for preparation for public storytelling include the Global Survivor Network's *Advocacy and Power of Story* workshop and Frequently Asked Questions, and the National Survivor Network's *Survivor Storytelling Workbook*. Additionally, the *Ethical Storytelling Toolkit* by the Antislavery Knowledge Network provides guidance for organizations and agencies on implementing ethical storytelling practices, as do various research reports from the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre.

Implementation highlight

In developing the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre's report *A review of current promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and human trafficking* the research team was expanded early in the project to include six regional consultants from impacted communities. Some of these consultants have lived experience of human trafficking and one consultancy was filled by a survivor leadership community modelling shared knowledge production. These consultants co-developed the research design, including the interview questions and ethics and consent processes, and then interviewed 4-6 stakeholders each for their regional assessments (many of whom were also survivors). The research team also conducted additional interviews with survivors and survivor-led organizations for the global report. These processes, as well as the desk review of guidance, shaped a final report that was developed out of multiple levels and layers of survivor engagement.

- **Chris Ash, Forum participant, pre-conference submission**

Another commonly discussed policy and systems strengthening engagement at the *involve* level is an advisory board or council. Advisory boards may also be engaged for research projects, nongovernmental service providers, policy development and community outreach projects. National and international advisory councils may have some tasks that are at other levels of engagement (and individual members may engage at varying levels in their other roles), but the structure of an advisory council is fundamentally at the *involve* level. Example of such an advisory council is the International Survivor Advisory Council of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), that assists ODIHR's work in combatting trafficking in persons since 2021. It provides advice, guidance and recommendations to

ODIHR, and through ODIHR, to the OSCE participating States, on anti-trafficking legislation, policies, practices and training. At national level, another example is the United States Survivor Advisory Council (USAC) on Human Trafficking, established through federal legislation in 2015 under the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA). It serves as a federal advisory body composed exclusively of survivors of human trafficking, appointed by the President of the United States of America for two-year terms. The Council provides expert advice and recommendations to the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (PITF) and the Senior Policy Operating Group (SPOG).

A growing body of guidance has emerged to support the establishment of survivor advisory councils. These frameworks offer practical tools for governments, international organizations, and civil society actors seeking to integrate lived experience into decision-making processes in a meaningful and ethical manner. Much of this guidance has been iteratively adapted from the model set forth in the United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking (USAC). The survivor advisory council model was established before survivor integration across systems work was as present in global dialogues. Approaches to community engagement in policymaking vary significantly across regions, shaped by differing cultural norms, governance structures, and institutional practices. As a result, models for survivor participation in anti-trafficking efforts may take diverse forms. While detailed toolkits for establishing survivor advisory councils are available, this document does not seek to replicate existing guidance. Instead, it focuses on considerations and challenges that are specific to survivor-led advisory bodies, drawing on analysis of pre-conference submissions, literature review and Forum discussions. Through reflection on these and other issues and developing a plan for anticipating and responding to challenges, the development and work of advisory councils can be strengthened and amplified.

Considerations for national and international survivors advisory councils

Consider conducting a regional needs and readiness assessment prior to initiating work towards a National Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (NSTAC).

- The Organization of American States conducted a mapping exercise in eight countries in the region and learned that there was no formal mechanism in those states for participation of survivors. This exercise also determined a need for capacity building on leadership skills to build survivors' confidence towards participation, but also that is a need for more scholarships and access to formal education to reduce disparities that disadvantage survivors.

It is important to remember that a survivor advisory council is not mutually exclusive with other integrated mechanisms for survivor engagement in policy and systems strengthening.

- The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights guidance on National Referral Mechanisms lists the National Expert Advisory Group to the National Referral Mechanism as a separate advisory body from the NSTAC.
- In the Philippine model, survivors also hold seats and voting rights on the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking.
- Regions that institute a NSTAC should be careful that the NSTAC does not become a replacement for fully integrated engagement of otherwise qualified survivors in other advisory groups, policymaking bodies, and administrative positions. As a reminder, not all survivors of human trafficking are open about this aspect of their lived experiences, and integrated models allow their input and participation without the presumed

disclosure of membership in a body defined for survivors.

Survivor advisory councils “should operate as fully independent bodies, autonomous from government and any other organizations or entities it is meant to advise.” (OSCE, 16) Below follow insights from conference submissions on the United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking (USAC) which highlight both good practices and identified challenges.

- To prevent tokenisation or the instrumentalization of survivors on the advisory council to advance a pre-existing government agenda that may not reflect their own, ensuring the council’s independence is essential. This independence, however, is complicated when the government advised must support logistics, compensation, or policies and procedures. For example, the United States Department of State (DOS) is the federal agency responsible for supporting the USAC, while also being one of the entities the council is mandated to advise. While power dynamics cannot be entirely eliminated, DOS has implemented several practices aimed at mitigating them. DOS acts as a liaison to facilitate meetings between USAC and other federal agencies, but does not provide guidance on the content of USCA’s reports beyond the standard feedback process available to all agencies within the President’s Interagency Task Force (PITF) prior to publication. Additionally, DOS engages an independent contract agency to provide logistical and coordination support, scheduling, writing, contract management, travel planning, and writing and/or editing support for the annual report. Staff involved in this process are conscious of the USAC’s role as a self-governing body.
- As part of the annual report-writing process, it is standard practice for the federal agencies that USAC is legislatively mandated to advise, namely, those within the President’s Interagency Task Force (PITF) to review and provide feedback on recommendations for that department as well as on the final report content. This structure exists to ensure that recommendations fall within the operational and legal scope of the respective agencies or to refine recommendations that might otherwise be irrelevant or unactionable. Agencies have even offered sample wording for recommendations they disagreed with in order to ensure legal accuracy of the report. Advisory councils are still encouraged to develop protocols for: 1) explaining to agencies which kinds of feedback are within their scope and which are inappropriate, 2) determining how to respond if inappropriate feedback is submitted by government agencies, and 3) navigating power differentials when agencies criticise or signal unwillingness to implement reasonable, evidence-based recommendations.

Advisory council governing documentation should include (but is not limited to): Professional ethics and conduct policy, including on bullying, sexual harassment, discrimination, confidentiality, etc.; Procedures for resignation or member replacement; and a Complaints policy and oversight mechanism.

- These policies should be applicable to all council members as well as all support and implementing staff of any agencies or organizations that engage with the council, with equitable trilateral accountability mechanisms between council members, governmental (or intergovernmental) staff connected to the council, and non-governmental staff support.
- Accountability policies should be survivor-driven and implemented consistently, impartially, and transparently.

Advisory councils should be supported to develop leadership structures that reflect the shared values of its members and the communities it serves.

- While some may choose hierarchical or corporate officer roles, not all councils will choose to structure in hierarchical ways, and in many regions (including in regions seeking full inclusion of indigenous and/or formerly colonised populations) other culturally-reflective leadership models may be better suited to the communities reflected.

Selection of advisory council members and candidates for leadership positions within it should be based on a combination of skills and experiences needed to fulfil the role.

- Selection based solely on lived experience leads to tokenisation of and paternalism towards members, and can lead to frustration when they are asked to do things without proper support. Not all skills are gained through formal education or paid professional experience, and the presence of these skills and experience can be determined without reliance on inaccessible or exclusionary measures.
- While some guidance presents selection of advisory council members as a prerequisite to determining the roles and jobs of the council, co-creating the job descriptions for council members with a mix of partners (including people with lived experience) allows for job descriptions to be developed based on the skill and experience needed to perform the tasks, which helps avoid tokenisation.¹¹

○ ***Involve: Community Outreach***

For **community outreach**, survivors may participate at the *involve* level through engagement in advocacy and awareness-raising sessions. During one of the Forum breakout sessions an organization coordinated awareness-raising session about human trafficking in a region of Pakistan with a high incidence of irregular migration and human trafficking. The sessions were presented by survivors, and survivors were also involved in designing the session.

○ ***Involve: Service Provision***

Multiple pre-conference submissions on good practices discussed involvement of survivors in **service provision**. A participant from Malawi, for example, provided the example of “involving survivors in the design of reintegration programmes and awareness campaigns,” and added that “survivors serve as peer educators and provide input into programming.” This kind of engagement spans across the *involve* and *collaborate* area, depending on the kinds of engagements survivors had in designing the interventions they support.

Some pre-conference submissions excluded children from their meaningful engagement guidance or explicitly stated that their framework applies only to adult engagement. However, conference discussions and other pre-conference submissions provided a wealth of information about engagement of children and addressed children as rights-holders and not just service recipients. Similarly, the pre-conference submission of ECPAT International highlighted that young survivors are capable of offering thoughtful and specific insights into the changes they wish to see. The submission further mentions that when they are treated with respect and offered real opportunities to shape decisions, they help build services that are safer, more effective, and rooted in lived experience. This approach is further reflected in the recent guidance on ethical survivor inclusion from the Inter-

¹¹ See the Lived Experience Advisory Board Job Description Worksheet for ideas.
<https://collectivethreads.org/document/lived-experience-advisory-board-job-description-worksheet/>

Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT).¹² ICAT’s guidance acknowledges that approaches and safeguarding practices for working with children may be different than adults, but that inclusion of children (including those who are often hardest to reach) as key partners from the beginning is essential.

Implementation highlight

Hope for Justice has developed a distinctive model for child participation within its shelter programmes in Uganda. In addition to implementing standard victim-centred care feedback practices that engage children in their own services based on their own needs, the organization has introduced “child parliaments” - structured forums through which children can collectively advocate for their interests. The Chairperson of the Children’s Parliament also serves as a peer liaison to whom other children may raise concerns. This approach promotes transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making.

- **Hope for Justice, Forum participant, pre-conference submission.**

During the Forum breakout session on protecting childhoods, participants noted the need to raise awareness within communities and families that children are not assets but human beings with rights. They added that children must be involved in all capacity-building and awareness-raising activities, using a co-creation approach that fosters critical thinking and enables them to identify risk factors themselves. They emphasized the value of involving children meaningfully in co-creation processes, noting that such engagement can yield authentic insights into complex and often overlooked dynamics. One example shared involved a children’s wellbeing club, which facilitated discussions around topics such as consent and exploitation. Through this initiative, children were empowered to recognize and report instances of human trafficking occurring within their own families. This example highlights how the co-creation process at the *involve* and higher levels can become a mutual learning process for everyone involved, and how non-traditional solutions must be sought particularly when exploitation occurs within the family unit.

This framing was repeated in the breakout session on technology, with participants noting that parents and other adult caregivers and community members may not fully understand the intricacies and functioning of the online and mobile apps that children are using where recruitment and exploitation happen. This opens opportunities to engage youth in the solutions that allow organizations and policymakers to use the same platforms and technologies for prevention and support.

Implementation highlight

KEOOGO is a nongovernmental organization in Burkina Faso that provides protection services to street-living children, women, and other vulnerable groups. Keoogo mainly works to provide protection services to children and training on their rights, aiming to achieve better integration into society. Their pre-conference submission highlights that children are among the stakeholders involved in their children’s rights training. Children are supported in setting up children’s clubs for self-protection and child-friendly spaces and are prepared to provide and access peer support as needed.

¹² Issue Brief: Ensuring Ethical Survivor Inclusion, Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons: https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/publications/icat_ib14_ethical_survivor_inclusion.pdf

Notably, KEOOGO’s list of strategic partners includes “children and their relational systems on the streets,” responsively acknowledging that formal support systems are not always where vulnerable people, including children, turn first for help.

- **KEOOGO, Forum participant, pre-conference submission.**

“Ask” level of engagement

At the *ask* level, organizations and agencies “intentionally seek out and review lived experience feedback and incorporate it when possible. This is a common way to engage people with lived experience in review of existing policies, programmes, and research.” Listening to individuals, particularly those receiving services, requires overcoming biases that may question their capacity to articulate their own needs. These same biases often undermine the credibility of survivors participating in protection responses. Recognizing and addressing these biases is essential to ensuring that all forms of participation, including those at the *ask* level, are treated as meaningful contributions to decision-making and response design. However, for maintaining the scope of this report, we focus on actions at the *ask* level that engage survivors in the development and delivery of protection models.

○ ***Ask: Service Provision***

“The main practice for inclusion of survivors in the operational response appears to be the provision of consultations and feedback,” and this was reflected in numerous pre-conference submissions and conference sessions. Some submissions described approaches to lived experience engagement in **service provision** through feedback-based advisory panels composed of beneficiaries or former beneficiaries of the programmes. Others noted the challenges that can come with advisory panels limited to current or former beneficiaries, such as long-term power dynamics and closed-loop feedback circuits that lose the opportunity to learn from people who have experienced different programme models. Advisory panels operating at the *ask* level are those that get panellists’ feedback on existing policies at a similar level of engagement to surveys, whereas advisory panels operating at the *involve* level include a higher level of ongoing co-creation of solutions.

Implementation Highlight

According to ICMPD, Bulgaria evaluated the implementation of its National Referral Mechanism (NRM) through interviews with anti-trafficking stakeholders, including survivors who had accessed the services provided by the NRM. Through referrals from service providers, the assessment team interviewed 10 people who were either “users of long-term reintegration services or had already exited the NRM system.”

The primary questions of the evaluation were:

- 1) If all procedures formulated within the NRM and adequate to the victim were followed, as well as all necessary services were offered?
- 2) The level of usefulness of the procedures and services according to the victim.
- 3) The most useful experience for the victim and the most inadequate one.
- 4) Recommendations for improvement.

While this kind of information is standard in evaluation surveys among current participants, formal evaluation of those who are in a later stage of their reintegration process allows for evaluation of services according to longer-term outcomes. Countries hoping to replicate this model might consider adding an additional question that assesses how long-term needs are

addressed, and may also use methods of referral that identify potential interviewees while avoiding the inherent bias that may come with organizational referrals.

3.5 Cross-cutting considerations on meaningful engagement of human trafficking survivors in developing protection responses

In this section cross-cutting findings relevant to all levels of engagement are presented as considerations for developing survivor-informed protection responses. Review of pre-conference submissions highlighted the diversity of approaches to meaningful engagement. Findings from the two UNODC regional needs assessment workshops, as well as discussions held during the conference, revealed a shared sense of frustration among participants regarding the limited and often prescriptive models of “survivor leadership.”

Concerns were raised about the lack of diverse and flexible engagement pathways, insufficient trauma-informed and accessible support mechanisms, and the ways in which prevailing practices can inadvertently foster a sense of othering rather than inclusion. Participants also emphasized the critical role of long-term care in enabling meaningful participation and the importance of aligning practice with theory. These considerations will be addressed in the following section drawing upon the findings of the two regional needs assessment reports, pre-conference submissions, and Forum discussions.

Not all survivors need, want, or know the same things, or want to engage in the same ways.

Participants cautioned that efforts to standardize language and indicators used to define or identify victims, while often well-intentioned, may inadvertently reflect colonial approaches and fail to account for diverse cultural contexts. For example, the UNODC regional needs assessment workshop for Africa highlighted how expectations that survivors are “culturally ready” for services and that they “self-identify” as victims preclude inclusion of diverse survivor voices. Similarly, indicators for victim identification are often not context-specific or culture-sensitive and are often simply copied from Global North contexts. In her intervention during the panel discussion, Carolina Ferrari Romero indicated that survivors can play a key role in shaping indicators for regional contexts, and the pre-conference submission by Lucia Lynch of Footprint to Freedom noted that “content and delivery methods are shaped around local, community-informed mental health needs – particularly in African contexts... Healing is approached as non-linear, with no expectations around disclosure or progress.”

When determining kinds of engagement needed and who should participate, it should be determined if opportunities would best be open to all victims and survivors or if they require a specific combination of lived experience and specific skills. Additionally, requirements that survivors need to wait for a specific amount of time, before engagement is allowed, does not account for healing not being linear and that not all engagements require the same things from impacted people.

NGO Cavoequiva’s submission noted that education should be low-barrier and not replicate exclusions in some educational systems, and described an apprenticeship model that included roles within and beyond survivor leadership. During the Forum, a participant shared, “I think a lot of institutions think, that survivors are made survivor leaders automatically, that they really want that role. But some people don’t want that. They want to lead a regular life.” This highlights how long-term care and investment make multiple levels of engagement in human trafficking protection responses possible but don’t mandate it of any individual.

Implementation highlight

Guidelines for policy makers on engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and abuse describes a case study of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales as an example of engaging with victims and survivors in multiple levels as part of the same overall process. Testimonies and experiences were gathered from thousands of victims and survivors (*Ask level*) allowing for the publication of summary reports on specific processes. A Victims and Survivors Consultative Panel was convened consisting of “seven victims and survivors with professional experience of providing specialist services, advocacy, and support for victims and survivors” (*Involve level*). This panel also advised the Chair and Panel of the inquiry and “offered guidance across all areas of the Inquiry’s work.”

Providing multiple levels of engagement across the same project allows for survivors with different skill sets, places in their healing, and kinds of experience in advocacy work to engage in ways that align with their needs, and for institutions to include diverse perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked.

Similarly, International Justice Mission’s *Voices of Empowerment: Mapping Key Lessons in Survivor Engagement* outlines how survivors engaged in the work of IJM’s Center to End Online Sexual Exploitation of Children over several years. The report outlines multiple levels and kinds of engagements available to survivors. A survivor is quoted as saying “Being able to choose my role and level of participation... was good because I felt like my role was really fit for me and my script was exactly what I wanted to say and share out.” This report is notable among other promising practices resources for its transparent reporting of criticisms of its approach: “It was very helpful that the participants didn’t have to make their own scripts from scratch, but it would be good if participants are informed that some messages are the same with other participants. It should be explained to us more why some of the roles have to reiterate someone else’s scripts as it confused to participants who will present the after them.” Transparently modelling the practice of learning from critical feedback is itself a good practice in survivor engagement. As with the forementioned implementation highlight submitted by Abdus Salam, *Voices of Empowerment* notes how survivor engagement was able to increase over time – by the third of three roundtable discussions two of the survivor leaders co-hosted the discussion along with those who had hosted the first two.

Professional development for different kinds of anti-trafficking work should be made available to survivors (but not mandated) alongside other vocational training to honour the diversity of survivor career aspirations. As also mentioned in the UNODC regional needs assessment workshops, assuming all survivors want to be “survivor leaders,” entrepreneurs, or hairdressers, etc. or that all survivor leaders aspire to the same types of roles, is misleading. Forum participants stressed that naming the specific roles impacted people hold, (e.g. researchers, advocates, and policy advisor), rather than broadly referring to the “participation of survivor leaders” better recognizes their diverse skills and knowledge. “Many of us have academic backgrounds in addition to what we’ve experienced,” one Forum panellist said. “We can design methodologies that address the specificities of certain situations.”

Engagement can take both direct and indirect forms, with indirect engagement not requiring public disclosure of lived experience. Similar to the “*Lived Experience Engagement Spectrum*”, this allows for survivors with different skill sets, desires, and healing needs to engage in ways that are mutually beneficial. It also allows survivors to engage in ways that do not require public disclosure. Professionals working in anti-trafficking may have lived experience of trafficking without ever

disclosing it publicly, and different approaches to engagement may allow for greater feedback without it coming at the expense of the survivor's choice over disclosure. A lack of disclosure does not automatically equal a lack of experience, and some professionals in the field may never even disclose their survivorship to other colleagues.

Finally, impacted people are best prepared to choose if or how they want to engage in anti-trafficking work when they have access to informed consent for the engagement, especially for public-facing survivor leadership activities. While potential benefits and risks may be anticipated there is a lack of peer-reviewed research on survivors' experiences of public engagement. Engagements where information can be aggregated (such as in reporting the findings of focus groups and surveys) have more layers of review and deidentification before release of information, but public-facing events do not have that protection.

Victim-centred and trauma informed practices not just for service provision but for the way all anti-trafficking work is done

Victim-centred and trauma-informed practices are essential to the provision of protection services for victims and survivors of human trafficking to foster their recovery. Victim-centred care means that victims and survivors have choice and agency over the kinds of services they receive, and trauma-informed practices are those that account for and mitigate the impacts of trauma in a given setting. While victim-centred care is not survivor leadership, it is a form of survivor engagement in developing, implementing, and evaluating *one's own* human trafficking protection services. Similarly, trauma-informed environments are not only essential to service provision, but are also essential to sustainable anti-trafficking work. This is true for creating trauma-informed workplaces for survivors of human trafficking in the work, but also for survivors of other forms of trauma in the work.

Frehewot Abiy (Ethiopia) notes in a pre-conference submission a challenge shared by survivor leaders and non-survivor practitioners, that is that in many regions “traffickers often embed themselves in communities, leveraging trust, while remaining unaccountable.” Community leaders (including those with lived experience) need to feel “protected and well-informed about how to protect themselves and the community from traffickers.” The pre-conference submission from Abishagy Ndirangu (Kenya) emphasises that attending to basic needs, like access to first aid supplies, menstrual products, and pain medication, “is critical to ensuring dignity and care,” as is providing stress relief tools and fidgets that offer “gentle sensory support to manage stress in the moment.” During the Forum discussions, Victoria Nyanjura, Founder and Executive Director of Women in Action for Women emphasized the importance of respecting survivors' dignity during engagements, including funding for transportation and food during long events. Patricia Ann Montano of the Philippine Survivor Network noted that care should be normalized while describing the human-centred design approach that they used in their work. The pre-conference submission from ANTHUS (Mexico) acknowledged that “full-time day care centres are needed with the necessary security so that survivors with children can work freely once they leave the shelter.” All of these basic needs are needs that can be experienced by anyone engaged in protection work at different times, especially those with lived experience but also those recovering from other traumatic or precarious situations or those from underrepresented communities.

Long-term care is making meaningful engagement more likely.

Both regional needs assessment workshops conducted by UNODC prior to the Survivors Forum showed that protection responses need to include long-term emotional and psychosocial support, mental health support, economic stabilization, and education. Many survivors experience setbacks on the journey to reintegration, which “should not be viewed as a failure of the individual but rather as a symptom of the lack of support systems meant to support sustainable recovery.” The pre-conference

submission of NGO KEOOGO included a best practice: “The Village Beeoog-Teinbo, a specialized transitional centre for mothers and girls aged 12 to 24, with a nursery and a biological garden. The centre offers education, vocational training, medical care, childcare, agroecological learning, and psycho-social support.” This kind of care makes ongoing, increasing, and future engagement (including in human trafficking protection responses and leadership if desired) possible, and increases the likelihood that people with lived experience will have choice and agency over the ways they choose to engage.

“Othering” practices

With the growing focus on “survivor inclusion” in human trafficking responses, people with lived experience have gained access to systems and spaces that had previously excluded them, often requiring them, however, to disclose their survivorship. Participation in an advisory panel, a feedback or a focus group, or a storytelling engagement can offer a low-barrier entry point for survivors who want to engage in the development, implementation, and evaluation of protection responses. However, this disclosure can also create certain challenges. Conference participants noted that survivors are seen as “walking stories or statistics”. Even in their engagements as advocates, and survivor leaders they may face unique stigmas: “There is this treatment given to you that you’re a beneficiary. I didn’t share I was a survivor in my country, because of the stigma attached to it and because you’re labelled as a survivor and not seen as anything else”. Even in regions with high levels of survivor engagement, professionals with lived experience report that disclosing survivor status often leads to being taken less seriously as a professional and differential treatment.¹³ In the report *“We Name It So We Can Repair It”* it is noted that “Because there have been harmful, top-down criteria about who is ‘recovered enough’ to participate in movement leadership, survivors often feel that they are under the microscope in ways that other sector leaders are not. For example, a survivor who has a bad day in the workplace will be seen as ‘not being cut out for the work,’ while someone who doesn’t have (or doesn’t disclose) lived experience will be seen as simply having a bad day”.¹⁴

Given these impacts, it is understandable that many people with lived experience will want to engage in the work without ever disclosing their survivorship, and protection actors should be conscious to not reinforce assumptions that maintain regimented distinctions between “survivors” and “allies.” Survivors should not have to disclose their traumatic experiences in order to access meaningful work, particularly given the breadth of skills and expertise different impacted people bring to their work (which may include nonprofit leadership, clinical skills, community organizing, and policy work, for example). Surveys that require stakeholders to choose whether they are a direct service provider or a survivor disregard that some stakeholders may be both, when allowing stakeholders to “check all that apply” honours the complexity of lived and professional experience. Policies that mandate staff with lived experience to use emotional support services risk undermining their agency and reinforcing a sense of “otherness” among survivor leaders. In contrast, offering voluntary access to support for all staff acknowledges that the nature of this work can affect anyone - regardless of whether they have lived experience of trafficking. Mandating that survivors’ readiness for the work be assessed via an external evaluation by a service provider (particularly at higher levels of engagement where people with lived experience are collaborating as full partners) is “othering”, especially when other protection professionals come with diverse backgrounds of trauma and may have unique emotional or behavioural needs as well. Similarly, practices that separate survivor leadership groups from other leadership groups can end up reifying the belief that survivors and professionals are two separate

¹³ The Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre, “Engagement of lived experience in international policy and programming in human trafficking and modern slavery: reflections from North America“, Chris Ash, November 2022.

¹⁴ Lived and Professional Experience Movement-Building Working Group, “We Name It So We Can Repair It: Rethinking harm, accountability, and repair in the anti-trafficking sector”, 2023.

groups of individuals when there is often overlap. Survivor advisory councils (national or otherwise) can be integrated at least in part into the activities of expert advisory groups, and vice versa, where appropriate and beneficial.

Assumptions that survivors are “walking stories” are often paired with practices that suggest survivors’ primary contributions are through storytelling. Storytelling is a powerful practice for survivor healing, and yet the context matters. Lucia Lynch’s pre-conference submission (on behalf of the NGO Footprint to Freedom) notes that “survivors are encouraged (never required) to share their stories in safe, non-judgmental environments as a path to reclaiming their voice”. This may not be in a public space, or even a reasonably safe professional space, particularly in contexts where even perceived survivorship can lead to stigma, ostracization, and loss of access to community and resources. Sharing *any* details of ones’ personal traumatic experiences should never be mandated in professional engagements, and victims and survivors who choose to share their stories should be provided with adequate information about the potential risks, benefits, safety planning measures, and decision-making processes.

Intention vs. practice

Good intentions require theoretically aligned and transparently implemented practice, and the disconnect between intention and practice was a regular theme in conference discussions. For example, survivors should be recognized as experts, and that may mean different things in different contexts. A Forum participant shared: “Survivor expertise may stem from lived experience, acquired skills, or both. What matters most is genuine understanding and meaningful engagement. Anyone [who wants to] can become an expert if provided with a safe and supportive environment that fosters growth.” Another added that survivors are not experts in human trafficking by virtue of their personal victimization (though they are experts in their own lived experiences), but that they build enhanced expertise over time through participation in community efforts, independent or structured learning, and opportunities to grow as advocates based on their interests. This was reflected in Abdu Salam’s panel commentary, which he introduced by affirming that he was speaking “not only from my experience, but what I have seen and learned from CSOs across the region.” This honours that individual experiential knowledge has value, as does collective knowledge that can only be gleaned in community.

Another recommended area for practice improvement is greater transparency and follow-up about the aims, limitations, and outcomes of lived experience input. Forum participants expressed frustration at being invited to engagements without having the full scope of the project shared to assist them in framing their responses: “The input should have an aim. To what end are we providing all this input?” This is reflected in the *Council of Europe’s Guidelines for policy makers on engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, in relation to transparency*: “Policy makers need to provide clarity about the level of influence the feedback and engagement of victims and survivors will have on the outcome of the engagement process.” An individual engaged to participate in a survey, for example, may individually have less final decision-making power than an individual whose role it is to collate and analyse all survey responses, particularly given that survey responses do not always present the same findings or recommendations. Forum participants recommended giving opportunities for follow up after engagements and being transparent about what was not included or could not be so that engaged individuals do not feel they were simply disregarded or consulted only as part of a meaningful engagement checklist.

Participants expressed a desire for engagement practices to include voices that are typically excluded from meaningful engagement initiatives. The pre-conference submission of Francisca Awah (Cameroon) named a key best practice as “actively expanding the scope of survivor engagement to include individuals with a wide range of lived experiences, social statuses, and geographic

backgrounds. This involves identifying and supporting survivors not only in urban areas but also in rural and marginalized communities.” Another often overlooked population is survivors of human trafficking in contexts where trafficking is not formally acknowledged or where corruption and collusion of state actors is involved.

Finally, while many published guidelines for meaningful engagement reference the participation of “survivors-led organizations,” few offered definitions for what that means in their context. Protection actors may consider various models of “survivors-led” in organizational settings, and develop engagement models that account for the decision-making structures in any given organization.¹⁵ For example, an organization that has a singular survivor at the helm but otherwise has not practiced integrated co-creation and engagement at other levels may provide a different range of feedback than one that is a collaboration between several survivors with diverse backgrounds.

Closing reflections

During the Forum, Carolina Ferrari Romero reminded participants that survivors do not need to be empowered - “they already have power and do not need permission. They want co-building.” The role of meaningful engagement of victims and survivors of trafficking in human trafficking protection responses is not to empower survivors, but rather to honour their intrinsic power and support them in reclaiming it. It is not to foster their feelings of self-worth, though increased confidence may be a by-product, but about affirming their inherent human dignity and their rightful place as knowledge holders and partners in shaping solutions. It is not to demonstrate a commitment to meaningful engagement, but to understand that any “solutions” developed without their leadership and full partnership will be inadequate to the task of addressing human trafficking. The Forum laid a strong foundation for future work on meaningful engagement of victims and survivors in governmental, intergovernmental, nongovernmental, and community responses to human trafficking protection needs. The next steps will require sustained collaboration across all sectors to advance more inclusive, equitable, and survivor-led approaches to protection and justice.

¹⁵ C. Ash and S. Otiende. *The Meaningful Engagement Handbook: A guide for understanding, measuring, and increasing lived experience leadership across the spectrum of engagement*. Collective Threads Initiative, Nairobi, Kenya (2025).

Annexes

Annex I – Call to Action

Call to Action

Voices of Resilience - Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors

24-25 June 2025, Vienna

“We come as few but carry the stories and wisdom of thousands.”

The voices of victims and survivors of trafficking in persons are **testimonies of resilience** and **sources of wisdom**. Emerging from unimaginable circumstances, victims and survivors deserve our unwavering support and commitment to safeguard their rights, well-being, safety and dignity. Their experiences should prove the power of compassion in shaping society but also recount the profound impact of justice. When this is not so, their hard-earned insights will be minimized.

When we work with victims and survivors to develop our responses we can amplify their voices, honour their experiences and transform the pain of their experience into a powerful testament of humanity, solidarity and dignity. More than that, though, we ensure that responses are just relevant and impactful.

The listening sessions of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) with survivors in preparation for this Forum confirm that, despite the progress made in the global fight against trafficking in persons, **protection responses often fall short** and can be **disconnected from the experiences of victims**. As a result of this disconnect, current anti- trafficking measures are struggling to respond effectively to emerging threats and victims face obstacles in accessing justice and exercising their rights.

To address these challenges, governments, authorities, civil society, international organizations and communities, must act without delay.

This Call to Action aims to enhance protection responses for victims of human trafficking by moulding these around the experiences and needs shared by victims and survivors. Leveraging the insights of those who have endured exploitation allows us to identify gaps, challenge prevailing assumptions, and design responses that are sustainable, effective and accountable.

Protecting victims is **not just a moral and legal imperative**; it is a **strategic necessity** in the fight to end human trafficking. This means centring victims’ protection needs but also victims’ and survivors’ experiences and expertise in the development and implementation of our anti- trafficking efforts. By centring their needs and expertise across the span of their experiences, we prioritize protection and early detection, thus creating a more just and effective system that **empowers survivors, dismantles trafficking networks, prevents further exploitation and reduces the prevalence of crime**. Victim protection is essential to **breaking the cycle of trafficking**.

To this end, the *Voices of Resilience - Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors* calls upon governments, authorities and communities to Anchor

their Protection Responses for Victims and Survivors of Human Trafficking in the Following Guiding Principles, aligned with the objectives and obligations of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and its parent instrument, the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime:

1. Engage and Recognize Survivors as Experts

Survivors bring invaluable perspectives shaped by both lived and learned experiences. Their lived experience expertise is essential for shaping effective anti-trafficking strategies. When survivors are meaningfully included in policy and programme development, within safe, ethical and respectful environments, the outcomes are not only compassionate but also impactful. It is also important to recognize that survivors are more than their trauma or victimization – many are experts, advocates and leaders in their own right. Survivors can shape national anti- trafficking responses through advisory processes and functions and with fair remuneration.

2. Understand and Address the Impact of Trauma

Trafficking can leave deep and often invisible scars. Recovery is rarely straightforward, and trauma manifests uniquely in each individual. Protection responses that prioritize trauma- informed care and embed victim and survivor well-being at their core are more likely to be effective. Compassionate, respectful and personalized support is key to allowing victims and survivors heal and rebuild their lives.

3. Provide Sustained Support for Recovery and Independence

Long-term, consistent support is vital for victims of trafficking to achieve true recovery and independence, promoting their agency and preventing re-victimization. Holistic care that addresses the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of survivors, including access to safe housing, healthcare, legal aid, social protection, meaningful educational and vocational training, as well as economic development, creates a foundation for empowerment. Access to an independent advocate and/or, in the case of children, a person who has the legal authority to make decisions on behalf of a child, can help victims and survivors in understanding their rights, in navigating the complexities of both legal and support systems and in practically accessing all forms of justice. Support should be needs-based and independent of participation in criminal justice processes. Predictable, sustained funding for these efforts delivers lasting benefits not only for survivors and their communities but also for society as a whole. One mechanism for delivering sustained, long-term support to grassroots organizations and survivors is the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons. Its continued effectiveness, however, depends on predictable and reliable contributions.

4. Develop Context-Sensitive Identification Practices

The diversity and complexity of survivors' experiences often defy standard checklists and do not conform to the 'perfect victim' stereotype. Some victims may not recognize their exploitation due to normalized violence or systemic hardship. Others may see trafficking as part of broader socio-economic struggles. Identification and early detection efforts that are informed by local realities and survivor insights - including in cases of technology-facilitated trafficking, where victims often remain unseen - are more likely to be safe and effective.

5. Ensure Safety of and Prevent Harm to Human Trafficking Victims and Survivors

Safety is fundamental to healing as well as to ethical engagement. Survivors need to feel secure throughout their recovery and in any involvement with anti-trafficking efforts. When protection

measures are comprehensive, cognisant of the impact of trauma, community-based, designed to empower, and include survivors, they help prevent further harm and foster trust.

6. Tailor Protection Measures to the Needs of Children

Children affected by trafficking face unique challenges related to their developmental stage, emotional vulnerability and dependency on adults. They require specialized care that adapts to their pace and helps them stay engaged with protection responses rather than being pushed away or disengaging due to inappropriate or inflexible systems. Extending support beyond the age of majority helps ensure a smooth transition into adulthood and long-term well-being.

7. Strengthen Legal Protections for Human Trafficking Victims and their Access to Justice

Survivors must be protected from punishment for acts committed as a result of being trafficked. States should, for example, provide criminal record relief, including immediate expungement, when victims are convicted as criminals rather than identified as trafficking victims. Access to justice should encompass the provision of remedies and the possibility for victims and survivors to receive compensation. Legal and administrative processes need to be trauma-informed, transparent and predictable, including timelines, potential outcomes, and the steps involved. Victims of trafficking also need to be supported through the criminal justice journey and informed of their rights and the protections available to them, including compensation. Victims should be updated on the progress of legal proceedings - whether that is investigation, trial, sentencing, detention, release, or post-release - regardless of their participation in the process. This reinforces their rights and builds confidence in the justice system.

8. Foster Collaborative, Cross-Sectoral Protection Partnerships

Effective protection requires coordinated efforts across sectors and borders. Involving community stakeholders, such as professionals in healthcare, education, social work, law enforcement, related protection fields, those in faith-related roles and private sector counterparts, enhances the reach and relevance of protection responses. Transborder cooperation between protection and assistance agencies helps bridge protection gaps and ensures cohesive, victim-centred support and care.

9. Confront Corruption and Ensure Accountability in Protection Responses

Corruption undermines trust and allows exploitation to continue. Strong oversight and safe, accessible and anonymous reporting channels for victims, witnesses and whistleblowers are essential. Enforcing accountability at every level ensures the integrity of protection systems and safeguards the rights of victims. This also builds trust in those systems and enhances efforts to bring traffickers to justice.

By implementing these principles in national protection responses, we can create a more just, compassionate and effective framework for supporting victims and survivors of trafficking - one that empowers them to rebuild their lives with dignity, autonomy and hope.

Annex II - Agenda



United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime



Funded by
the European Union

Voices of Resilience: Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors

24 - 25 June 2025, Vienna

Vienna International Centre, Boardroom D (C Building, 4th floor)

ANNOTATED AGENDA

One of the explicit purposes of the United Nations Trafficking in Persons Protocol is to protect and assist victims of trafficking in persons, with full respect for their human rights. As early as 2002, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking highlighted the need to recognize “the important contribution that survivors of trafficking can, on a strictly voluntary basis, make to developing and implementing anti-trafficking interventions and evaluating their impact”. In addition, an analysis of the recommendations and decisions by the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons and the Conference of the Parties of the UN Organized Crime Convention, show a growing understanding of the needs of trafficking victims and the importance of a holistic, victim-centred and trauma-informed approach to their protection and support through multi-stakeholder cooperation and inclusive policymaking. Most recently, on 22 November 2021, the General Assembly adopted the “Political Declaration on the Implementation of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons”, which expresses “solidarity with and compassion for victims and survivors, [...] recognizing their role as agents of change in the global fight against trafficking in persons” and acknowledged the need to integrate their experiences into all anti-trafficking efforts. In that resolution, United Nations Member States also declare that they “aim to actively involve victims of trafficking in persons in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating such efforts” and that they “will provide victim-centred and trauma-informed care”. Terms like trauma-informed and survivor-informed carry the potential to help us deepen our practices, but also the risk to become empty phrases, if not grounded in real, lived meaning. The Forum aims to enrich a victim-centred approach with the insights and realities of those directly affected by human trafficking.

Day 1, Tuesday 24 June 2025	
07:30 – 09:00	<p>Registration and security clearance at Gate 1 of the Vienna International Centre (VIC)</p> <p>Participants can collect their access badges on Monday, 23 June 2025, between 14:00 and 16:00 (local time), as well as between 07:30 and 09:00 on 24 June 2025. Early collection preferred.</p> <p>Registration will take place at Gate 1 of the Vienna International Centre (VIC), after the security check. Participants are requested to bring their passports for registration at Gate 1.</p> <p>Transition to conference room (Boardroom D, in C Building, 4th floor)</p> <p>We kindly ask participants to please be seated before 9:30.</p>
09:30 – 10:30	<p>High-level opening – livestreamed on UN Web TV bit.ly/VoRLive – media presence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official opening by Malaika ORINGO, Executive Director, Footprint to Freedom & Director of Development, African Survivor Coalition (Master of Ceremony) • Video messages from <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ghada WALY, Executive Director, UNODC ○ Magnus BRUNNER, EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration • Welcoming remarks by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ John BRANDOLINO, Director, Division for Treaty Affairs, UNODC ○ Diane SCHMITT, EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator • Keynote speech by Sophie OTIENDE, African feminist, educator, survivor advocate and founder of Azadi Community and Collective Threads Initiative <p><i>Intention: Set the stage for the importance of integrating lived experience expertise across anti-trafficking work.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Musical performance by Angelo POLLAK, Tenor, performing “Resilience”, a new melody by composer Lauren Bernofsky, created exclusively for the Forum. <p>End of UN Web TV livestream – media leaving the conference room</p>
10:30 – 11:00	<p>Short break</p> <p><i>Refreshments will be served outside Boardroom D.</i></p>
11:00 – 12:30	<p>Panel discussion: Examples of survivor-informed protection responses</p> <p><i>Intention: Outline how survivor engagement improves anti-trafficking protection responses and present examples of this from different regions of the world.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panellists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Andrew GARDNER, Acting Head, Human Rights Department, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, (ODIHR), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) ○ Jane LASONDER, Vice Chair, International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC) ○ Jane PIAZER, Specialist, Section of Crime and Violence Prevention of the Department of Public Security, Organization of American States (OAS) ○ Danissa RAMIREZ, Executive Secretary, Secretariat Against Sexual Violence, Exploitation, and Trafficking in Persons (SVET), Guatemala

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shamere MCKENZIE, Anti-Trafficking Ambassador, Jamaica & Founder Sungate Foundation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussion <p>Moderator: Dr Kari JOHNSTONE, Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, OSCE</p>
12:30 – 14:00	<p>Lunch break (self-funded)</p> <p><i>Snacks, beverages and food stations available at VIC: Cafeteria (F Building) and coffee corners on 4th floor and 7th floor of C Building</i></p> <p><i>Sponsored participants will be guided by UNODC colleagues to collect their daily allowance from Bank Austria (at the UN premises).</i></p>
14:00 – 15:00	<p>Panel discussion: Understanding protection needs</p> <p><i>Intention: Outline different kinds of protection needs individuals may encounter (which will differ based on region, type of trafficking, etc.).</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introductory performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Zainab Emerald SCHUR, Survivor of Human Trafficking, Chairperson of the Board of Hope Now, Slam Poet and Founder/CEO of Patches of Dreams Performance Arts ● Panellists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Betty PEDRAZA, Director, Corporación Espacios de Mujer ○ Manfred BUCHNER, Clinical & Health Psychologist, Head, MEN VIA ○ Shirley BEN, Acting Chief Administration Officer, Anti-Human Trafficking Unit, Ministry of Justice and Correctional Services, Botswana ● Discussion <p>Moderator: Diane SCHMITT, EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator</p>
15:00 – 16:15	<p>Breakout groups (short breaks included)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beyond the ‘perfect victim’ – survivor-informed indicators for victim identification (Boardroom D & Room C0427) <i>Intention: Evaluating more than checklists to identify victimization.</i> 2. Breaking down barriers to access to justice (Room C0417 & Room C0419) <i>Intention: Highlight the importance of trauma-informed, equitable justice systems that can respond effectively to victims.</i> 3. Pathways to empowerment (Room C0431 & Room C0435) <i>Intention: Discuss and identify long-term, comprehensive support and assistance, building strong partnerships across sectors and the community (government, private, NGO, and grassroots communities).</i> 4. From survival to independence: the financial sector’s role in survivor empowerment and access to remedy (Room C0225) <i>Intention: Explore mechanisms for survivor empowerment through engagement with the financial sector, the right to remedy, and the enhancement of operational grievance mechanisms in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs); and how ‘survivors as experts’ can strengthen the financial sector’s role in identifying and addressing human trafficking through meaningful survivor engagement.</i>

16:15 – 17:00	<p>Key takeaways of the breakout groups</p> <p><i>Intention: Rapporteurs of each breakout group will present the findings of their breakout group discussion. This session will be moderated and followed by discussions.</i></p> <p>Moderator: Afasi KOMLA, Director of Sub-Saharan Africa, Engage Now Africa (EMS)</p>
17:45	<p>Departure from the Vienna International Centre to the optional social event</p> <p><i>The Office of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator and Head of the Austrian Task Force on Combating Human Trafficking is kindly sponsoring a tram ride and refreshments.</i></p>
Day 2, Wednesday 25 June 2025	
07:30 – 09:30	<p>Security clearance at Gate 1 and transition to the conference room (Boardroom D)</p>
09:30 – 11:00	<p>Panel discussion: The way forward – what needs to change to advance victim- centred and survivor-informed anti-trafficking services</p> <p><i>Intention: The second day looks ahead. How to offer solutions and practical steps for improving services and empowerment of victims? The panel will reflect on common themes that will be further discussed in breakout groups. The discussion will contribute to shaping conclusions and recommendations that will form part of the Forum’s outcome document.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening by Marcela LOAIZA, Founder, Fundación Marcela Loaiza • Panellists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Victoria NYANJURA, Founder and Executive Director of Women in Action for Women (WAW) & Chair of the Board of Trustees of the UN Trust Fund for Victims of Human Trafficking (UNVTF) ○ Hannah Lizette MANALILI, Officer-In-Charge Executive Director and Chief Operations Division, Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) Secretariat, Department of Justice, the Philippines ○ Patricia Ann MONTANO, Leader & Public Relations Officer, Philippine Survivor Network (PSN), International Justice Mission (IJM) ○ Salam ABDUS, Survivor Leadership Specialist ○ Carolina FERRARI ROMERO, Teacher Specialized in Early Childhood, Vulnerability and Violence • Discussion <p>Moderator: Ambassador Naela GABR, Chairperson of the National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons (NCCPIM&TIP), Egypt</p>
11:00 – 11:15	<p>Short break</p> <p><i>Refreshments will be served outside Boardroom D.</i></p>
11:15 – 12:30	<p>Breakout groups (short breaks included)</p> <p>5. Invisible no more – tackling technology facilitated trafficking (Room C0417 & Room C0419)</p> <p><i>Intention: Analyze ways that technology-facilitated trafficking across legal and illicit commercial sectors complicates efforts to identify victims and offer potential solutions.</i></p> <p>6. Protecting childhoods (Boardroom D & Room C0431)</p> <p><i>Intention: Explore the critical importance of childhood in preventing and responding to</i></p>

	<p>victimization; it will explore the role of families and communities and also look at the transition from childhood to adulthood, to shed light on the end of child protection measures by the reaching of age of maturity.</p> <p>7. International cooperation for victim protection – enabling justice and healing across borders (Room C0427 & Room C0435) <i>Intention: Discuss challenges and solutions to provide adequate, sensitized services to survivors who experienced cross-border exploitation.</i></p> <p>8. Recognizing survivors as experts (Room C0225 & Room C0227) <i>Intention: Examine the barriers and potential solutions for integrating lived experience across all levels and categories of anti-trafficking response and understand why it is essential to do so.</i></p>
12:30 – 14:00	<p>Lunch break (self-funded)</p> <p><i>Snacks, beverages and food stations available at VIC: Cafeteria (F Building) and coffee corners on 4th floor and 7th floor of C Building</i></p>
14:00 – 15:00	<p>Key takeaways of the breakout groups</p> <p><i>Intention: Rapporteurs of each breakout group will present the findings of their breakout group discussion. This session will be moderated and followed by discussions.</i></p> <p>Moderator: Dr Marieke JASPERSE, Survivor, Cross-Cultural Psychologist, and Consultant Specializing in Trauma-Informed Anti-Trafficking Initiatives</p>
15:00 – 15:15	<p>Adoption of Call to Action</p> <p>Facilitator: Ilias CHATZIS, Chief of the ‘UNODC Action against Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling’</p>
15:15 – 16:30	<p>Closing ceremony</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening of “Voices of Resilience” video, recorded at the Forum • Reflection from Hyab YOHANNES, Lecturer in Forced Migration and Decolonial Education at the University of Glasgow • “Unity as a Way of Protection”, African Survivor Coalition <p>Facilitators: Zoi SAKELLIADOU, Substantive Lead-Human Trafficking Survivor Engagement & Silke ALBERT, Team Leader, UNODC</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Not an end but a beginning...!</i></p>

Annex III – Selected resources on victim protection, including trauma-informed approaches, from states, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society

This annex presents a non-exhaustive list of resources on victim protection, primarily received in connection with the Survivors Forum.

Resource	Country/ Geographical Scope	Organization / Institution / Supporting Entity	Year	Description
Guidance on Trauma-Informed National Referral Mechanisms and Responses to Human Trafficking	Global	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)	2023	The Guidance on Trauma-Informed National Referral Mechanisms helps countries develop frameworks to identify victims of trafficking and modern slavery, ensuring they receive trauma-informed support. It promotes a multi-disciplinary approach that prioritizes survivors' psychological safety, empowerment, and protection.
National Referral Mechanisms: Joining efforts to protect the rights of trafficked persons- A Practical Handbook (2nd Edition)	Global	OSCE/ODIHR	2022	It equips countries to fight human trafficking sustainably, addressing children's needs, gender and health issues, and showcasing evidence-based practices. It centres survivors and survivor leaders, emphasizing trauma-informed communication.

Regional Action Guidelines for a Coordinated Response to Trafficking in Persons from the Security and Justice Sector: Introductory Guide	Regional	Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), UNODC	2025	The IDB–UNODC guide focuses on coordinating responses to human trafficking from the security and justice sectors in Latin America and the Caribbean. It provides practical recommendations, checklists, and frameworks for prevention, investigation, victim protection, and international cooperation. The guide promotes gender-sensitive, digital, and cross-border strategies to strengthen regional anti-trafficking efforts.
Trafficking Victim Protection and Support: A Practitioner Guide. Bangkok: Regional Support Office of the Bali Process (RSO) and Washington	Regional	NEXUS Institute	2021	This Practitioner Guide presents existing research and evidence on the protection and support of trafficking victims, including issues and challenges faced and practices that may enhance it.
NEXUS Institute and Bali Process (2021) Recovery and Reintegration of Trafficking Victims: A Practitioner Guide.	Regional	NEXUS Institute	2021	This guide offers practical, evidence-based recommendations for supporting trafficking victims’ recovery and reintegration in Asia. It draws on research and field experience to help practitioners improve outcomes, and forms part of a broader series strengthening victim identification, protection, and support across Bali Process member states.
Policy Guide on Protecting Victims of Trafficking. Bangkok: Regional Support Office of the Bali Process (RSO).	Regional	Bali Process	2015	This guide offers non-binding advice to help governments identify and protect trafficking victims, outlining international standards, good practices, and practical recommendations. It promotes agency collaboration and rights-based, victim-centered protection.
National Plan to Combat Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons (2020-2022)	Argentina	Executive Committee on Trafficking and Victim Protection	2022	The National Plan to Combat Trafficking (2020–2022) carried out 100 actions across four areas of work: prevention, assistance, prosecution, and institutional strengthening, aiming to shaping public policies to protect victims’ rights and guarantees.

Guide to institutional guidelines. Assistance to victims of human trafficking and sexual and labour exploitation	Argentina	Ministry of Social Development of Argentina, National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and Families	2022	This Guide to Good Practices takes a federal, inclusive, human rights– and gender- based approach to support victims’ recovery. It unifies approach criteria, prevents over-intervention, and avoids re-victimisation, while serving as educational material with practical knowledge for professionals.
Intervention Manual in cases of trafficking in persons in Argentina. Practical protocol for the actions of judicial authorities, public ministries and security forces.	Argentina	United for Justice	2015	The Manual establishes modern procedures for the prevention of trafficking in persons and adequate assistance to victims, especially women and children.
Standard Operating Procedure for the Identification, Screening, Protection, Assistance, Return and Reintegration of Victims of Human Trafficking in Aruba	Aruba	International Organization for Migration (IOM), Coordination Center on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Aruba (CMMA)	2023	This is a framework for Aruba’s authorities and partners to identify, protect, assist, and reintegrate victims of human trafficking. It outlines clear procedures for screening, providing shelter and services, and coordinating return and reintegration efforts in a victim-centered approach. Developed by CMMA with IOM, it ensures consistent collaboration among law enforcement, NGOs, and social services.
Protocol for specialized care for victims of Trafficking and Smuggling	Bolivia	Ministry of Justice	2012	The Protocol standardizes procedures and tools to ensure coordinated care for trafficking and smuggling victims. It focuses on prevention, protection, assistance, prosecution, and punishment within institutional frameworks. Its goals are reducing re-victimization, promoting justice, repairing harm, and supporting reintegration, guided by dignity, human rights, and efficiency.

Technical Guidance: ‘Detection, care and first health response to victims of trafficking, smuggling of migrants and sexual and commercial exploitation of children and adolescents’.	Chile	Ministry of Health	2018	The Technical Guidance sets criteria for health care, response, and referral of trafficking, smuggling, and exploitation victims. It promotes rights- and gender-based approaches, victim detection, and comprehensive care to prevent re-victimization, repair harm, and guide local health protocols and intersectoral support.
Guide of Good Practices in the Criminal Investigation of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons and the Assistance and Protection of Victims	Chile	Ministry of the Interior and Public Security	2014	The document compiles experiences from actors involved in prosecuting trafficking crimes, highlighting successes, challenges, victim-centered practices, and recommendations from Chilean institutions, NGOs, civil society organisations and international bodies like the UN, OAS, and IOM.
Practical guide for inter-agency coordination and proactive investigations of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.	Colombia	Organization of American States. Department against Transnational Organized Crime	2023	This Guide supports Colombian authorities in detecting, investigating, and prosecuting trafficking crimes to achieve more effective results. It also strengthens coordination and proactive investigation among specialized agencies—police, prosecutors, immigration authorities, and victim assistance providers— complementing the 2023 Manual on International Legal Cooperation on Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants.
Institutional protocol for the care of minors who are victims and survivors of the crime of human trafficking and minors dependent on a victim of human trafficking	Costa Rica	National Children's Trust	2020	The Protocol seeks to standardize the care process that is developed at an institutional level with minors who are victims and survivors of the crime of human trafficking and minors who are dependent on an adult who is a victim of the crime of trafficking. It seeks to provide a quality service in a timely manner to guarantee the comprehensive protection of minors who are victims, survivors and dependents of human trafficking.

<u>Protocol for the detection and referral of possible situations of human trafficking</u>	Costa Rica	Ministry of Public Security, IOM, United Nations Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (ILANUD)	2021	The manual provides guidance for detecting and referring potential human trafficking situations, ensuring that victims are identified early and connected to appropriate support services. It outlines principles such as immediate response, empathy, active listening, and risk analysis. The document also reinforces the State's responsibility to provide a coordinated, rights-based approach to victim care, emphasizing safety, confidentiality, and comprehensive assistance throughout the process.
<u>Protocol for the Detection, Assistance and Referral of Children and Adolescents who are Victims of Human Trafficking</u>	Dominican Republic	National Council for Children and Adolescents, Public Prosecutor's Office, IOM	2015	This Protocol aims to establish a reference mechanism for appropriately addressing the protection of minors who are victims of human trafficking. It seeks to strengthen institutional capacities to safeguard children's rights, improve coordination and communication for documenting, monitoring, and evaluating cases, and serve as a guide for both governmental and civil society organizations.
<u>Protocol for inter-institutional action for the comprehensive care and protection of victims of human trafficking</u>	Ecuador	Ministry of Government of Ecuador	2020	The Protocol is a tool for inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination, with clear procedures to operationalize institutional commitments. It ensures victims of human trafficking can access State services based on human rights, gender, intergenerational, intercultural, mobility, and territorial approaches, prioritizing their basic needs.
<u>Guide for the care and protection of victims and possible victims of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants</u>	Ecuador	Ministry of the Interior	2022	The Guide educates the public on efficiently assisting victims by coordinating State services. To reinforce this, it includes a playful exercise with hypothetical cases based on real ones, helping officials practice adequate, coordinated responses through clear learning and attention routes.

Inter-institutional Action Protocol for the Immediate Comprehensive Care of Victims of Human Trafficking	El Salvador	National Council against Human Trafficking	2018	The National Council Against Human Trafficking developed this Protocol to coordinate institutional action for the immediate and long-term care of victims. It defines referral processes among Salvadoran public institutions, fosters collaboration with NGOs, and emphasizes confidentiality for victims and their dependents across judicial, administrative, and non-governmental bodies.
Care Manual. Shelter for the Care of Victims of Human Trafficking in El Salvador	El Salvador	IOM	2009	The IOM Manual provides guidelines for the proper care of human trafficking victims in shelters in El Salvador. It highlights ethical principles such as confidentiality, privacy, and informed consent, and sets security measures to protect victims, in shelter situation, including limits on information sharing and staff diligence with data. These measures also safeguard shelter personnel.
Inter-institutional Action Protocol for the Immediate Comprehensive Care of Victims of Human Trafficking	El Salvador	National Council against Human Trafficking	2018	The Protocol sets coordinated guidelines for immediate and long-term care of trafficking victims under the National Council Against Human Trafficking. It defines referral processes, promotes NGO collaboration, and enforces strict confidentiality for victims and dependents across all institutions.
Guide for comprehensive care for LGBTQ+ adults who are victims of human trafficking in Guatemala	Guatemala	Organization of American States (OAS)	2019	The Protocol provides coordinated guidelines for immediate and long-term care of trafficking victims across Salvadoran institutions. It defines referral processes, promotes collaboration with NGOs, and underscores strict confidentiality of victims' data, extending this duty to dependents and applying to all judicial, administrative, and non-governmental bodies involved in support.
Protocol for Action in the Specialized Temporary Shelter for the Care of Adult Migrant Women Victims of Human Trafficking	Guatemala	Secretariat against Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Trafficking in Persons.	2019	The Protocol establishes guidelines for shelters serving adult women in mobility who are trafficking victims. It specifies requirements for physical space, multidisciplinary teams, and care routes, while outlining principles, victim rights, and strict rules on data collection, deletion, or anonymization. Security measures must safeguard victims' information, the shelter, and its staff.
Protocol of the immediate response team for the care of victims of commercial	Honduras	Inter-Institutional Commission	2016	The Protocol seeks to recognize, guarantee, and restore the human rights of victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking through a comprehensive care route involving relevant actors and procedures for

sexual exploitation and human trafficking in Honduras		Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking in Persons		women, men, and children at risk. It establishes a complementary framework for victim protection and serves as a guide for identifying victims, assessing their needs, and referring them to specialized resources.
Human trafficking survivors handbook a guide to rights and support services in Jamaica	Jamaica	Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons (ONRTIP), British High Commission Kingston	2020	It is a practical guide for Jamaican responders to identify trafficking victims, recognize exploitation indicators, and apply the National Referral Mechanism. It explains legal protections under the Trafficking in Persons Act, confidentiality principles, and penalties for offenders, especially in cases involving minors. The handbook provides step-by-step protocols for victim support, including initial contact, needs assessment, referral to services, and reintegration, emphasizing a coordinated, victim-centered approach.
Protocol for the Use of Procedures and Resources for the Rescue, Assistance, Care and Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Persons.	Mexico	Government of Mexico	2016	The Protocol establishes procedures for detecting, assisting, caring for, and protecting victims of trafficking. It promotes collaboration and communication among federal agencies and provides tools that can be adapted by federal entities and Civil Society Organizations to deliver a comprehensive, human-rights-focused response.
Simplified guide for the care of victims of human trafficking	Mexico	Inter-ministerial Commission to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Crimes in Human Trafficking and for the Protection and Assistance of	----	The simplified Guide and its care route propose immediate assistance and reparation actions for victims, indicating the entities responsible to ensure respect for their human rights under the Constitution. It also establishes follow-up to verify the care provided.

		Victims of These Crimes		
Minimum Standards and Guidelines for Service Providers Rendering Assistance to Victims of Trafficking	Nigeria	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP)	2023	It sets uniform rules for providing safe, trauma-informed care to trafficking survivors in Nigeria’s shelters. They standardize procedures for protection, referral, and service delivery, covering legal, medical, and psychosocial support. The document aims to ensure compliance and improve victim care nationwide under the Trafficking in Persons Act.
Framework Protocol for Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking	Spain	Ministry of Equality of the Spanish Government	2011	The Protocol establishes operational guidelines for detecting, identifying, supporting, and protecting trafficking victims. It fosters coordination among institutions and defines mechanisms for cooperation amongst authorities with responsibilities in the field and organisations with experience in attending to victims of trafficking, particularly those providing comprehensive support within public victim assistance programs.
Protection of victims of trafficking in persons	Spain	El PACTO Programme	2020	The Report includes a series of complementary proposals from a group of experts, in which they have delved into the treatment of people who are victims of trafficking to find ways to achieve personal, healthcare and legal protection and, at the same time, guarantee that the evidence, including the statements of the victims, can have effects in the framework of a trial with all the guarantees.

Psychosocial Intervention Guide for direct assistance to Victims of Trafficking	Spain	IOM; Save the Children	2007	The Guide supports service providers in strengthening victims' personal and social processes. While the scope of support varies by service and location, core objectives and tasks remain the same. That is, border, port, and primary health personnel perform essential duties in approaching victims, while specialized recovery tasks are handled by professionals trained in psychosocial care.
Protocol for the protection of victims of human trafficking in the community of Madrid	Spain	General Directorate for Women	2017	The Protocol emphasises the preventive phase (through the adoption of prevention, awareness, and public information measures) and victim recovery, enhancing resources such as safe accommodation, psychological, health, socio-labour, and legal support to ensure adequate reparation for victims of human trafficking.
Guide for caring for victims of trafficking in persons in residential child care centers	Peru	Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations	2016	The guide is a practical tool to improve care for trafficked children in Residential Care Centers, promoting their rights. It helps public operators understand care routes, ensures timely and quality assistance, and prevents re-victimization. It aims to reduce abandonment rates, provide tailored support, and minimize physical and emotional consequences, improving children's health, family life, and future opportunities.
Tool for specialised care of LGBTI child victims of trafficking in Peru	Peru	International Labour Organization (ILO)	2024	It is a training guide focused on the development of competencies for specialised care for LGBTI children and adolescents who are victims of human trafficking.
Intersectoral Protocol for the prevention, detection, care and reintegration of persons affected by the crime of trafficking in persons	Peru	Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations	2022	The Protocol has three chapters: the first covers target population, scope, principles, services, and rights of those affected by trafficking and users of the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations services; the second outlines prevention, detection, reporting, care, reintegration, and monitoring to ensure continuous improvement; the third presents the Glossary of Terms.
Technical guidelines for comprehensive mental health care for child and adolescent victims and survivors of human trafficking	Peru	Ministry of Health	2021	The Guide supports the care and family and social reintegration of child victims and survivors of human in health facilities through comprehensive mental health care. It also sets guidelines for health personnel providing this care nationwide.

Protocol of the public prosecutor's office for the care of victims of the crime of human trafficking, people in a situation of smuggling of migrant and victims of migration crimes	Peru	Public Prosecutor's Office	2019	The Protocol seeks to establish standard guidelines for action that guarantee the Public Prosecutor's Office protection to victims of the crime of human trafficking, people in a situation of smuggling of migrant and victims of crimes in the context of migration by the roles assigned by the Law and international standards on the matter, to avoid re-victimization.
Intersectoral Protocol for the prevention, detection, care and reintegration of persons affected by the crime of trafficking in persons	Peru	Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations	2022	This protocol sets out a coordinated State response to protect, assist, and reintegrate victims of human trafficking. It emphasizes a rights-based approach and clear institutional responsibilities to ensure victims receive comprehensive care. It also strengthens intersectoral collaboration to guarantee timely protection and support.
Intersectoral protocol for the prevention and persecution of the crime and the protection, care and return of victims of trafficking in persons	Peru	Ministry of the Interior	2023	This updated protocol strengthens a coordinated, intersectoral system to ensure victims of human trafficking receive protection, assistance, and reintegration services. It standardizes procedures across government levels and institutions to guarantee a rights-based, timely, and comprehensive response for victims. It also emphasizes special protections for children and adolescents, ensuring their needs are prioritized throughout the process.
Victim-centred approach to the care of trafficked persons	Peru	Alternative Human and Social Capital	----	The brochure explains the victim-centred approach as a systemic method addressing victims' needs, prioritizing their interests, and ensuring sensitive, unbiased delivery of services. Originally aimed at avoiding re-victimization in criminal proceedings, the LCA now extends to all aspects affecting trafficking victims, ensuring care that prevents mistreatment, discrimination, and re-victimization.
Victims Protection Programme trafficking	Serbia	NGO ATINA	----	Atina's Victims Protection programme aids trafficking survivors' rehabilitation and social inclusion through services like a Temporary House, Open Club, and Field Support Team. It provides psychological, legal, and social support to meet immediate needs, restore independence, and foster reintegration via close institutional collaboration.

Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation- Protocol for Action by the Victims and Witnesses Unit of the Attorney General's Office	Uruguay	Attorney General's Office of Uruguay, University of the Republic – Faculty of Psychology, UNFPA	2020	The protocol guides the Victims and Witnesses Unit in criminal investigations of trafficking of adults for sexual exploitation, carried out by the Attorney General’s Office. It is intended for the Unit’s technical staff and sets the main guidelines for handling these cases.
Implementing a Victim-Centered, Trauma-Informed Approach to Address Labor Trafficking for Law Enforcement Executives (US specific)	USA	Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, Institute for Inter-governmental Research	2021	The document explains trauma-informed principles and why trafficking victims may struggle to engage with law enforcement. It lists U.S. justice and community partners, urging officers to seek avenues beyond prosecution. Victims decide when and how to participate, with officers advising on options. Law enforcement can also help with immigration by connecting victims to providers or filing “Continued Presence.”
Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach	USA	U.S. Department of State	2018	This resource explains why survivors of human trafficking require trauma-informed support, noting that complex trauma and polyvictimization can profoundly affect their behaviour, memory, trust, and emotional regulation. It emphasizes that a trauma-informed approach must guide all anti-trafficking efforts, including victim services, justice processes, prevention, and survivor engagement. It also underscores the need to avoid re-traumatization and prioritize stability, safety, and understanding, so victims can meaningfully access support and participate in recovery.
Trauma-Informed Case Management with Foreign National Children and Youth Survivors of Trafficking	USA	The US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Project TRUST	2021	Intended for case managers, this toolkit provides an understanding of how trauma affects survivors, specifically children, and practical advice and examples on how to work with children and youth survivors of human trafficking using a trauma-informed approach, whose main principles are also explained.

Trauma-Informed Practice in the Field: Recommendation for Human Trafficking Service Providers	USA	Institute for Economic and Racial Equity, Brandeis University	2021	This report provides trauma-informed guidance for trafficking service providers, focusing on survivor autonomy, cultural responsiveness, and collaboration. It identifies implementation gaps that can limit victim protection and offers practical steps to strengthen safety and empowerment for survivors.
---	-----	---	------	---

Annex IV – Selected resources and initiatives on survivor engagement from states, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society

This annex presents a non-exhaustive list of resources and initiatives on survivor engagement, primarily received in connection with the Survivors Forum.

Tool	Country/ Geographical Scope	Organization / Institution / Supporting Entity	Year	Description
Including the voices of hate crime victims in policymaking	Global	OSCE/ODIHR	2024	It's a practical guide on how to involve hate crime victims in shaping policies and implementing them. It explains why their input is crucial for victim-centred, effective responses and offers clear steps to ensure participation is safe, meaningful, and not tokenistic. The goal is to help governments, law enforcement, and civil society create inclusive, rights-based approaches to tackling hate crimes.
International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC)	Global	OSCE/ODIHR	2021	The International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC), created in 2021 by OSCE/ODIHR, is the first survivor-led advisory body within an intergovernmental organization. It brings together survivor leaders to inform trauma-informed, rights-based anti-trafficking policies. ISTAC advises OSCE and States on victim protection, justice, and recovery, while promoting ethical survivor engagement, including the creation of national survivor councils.

Survivor Leadership Fund	Global	Freedom Fund	2021	The Survivor Leadership Fund offers unrestricted grants of up to \$20,000 to survivor- led organizations to support their growth and capacity building, including programmes, staff, and office costs. Organizations must have at least one leader with lived experience, though anyone may apply. No formal objectives or reports are required upfront, but recipients share how the funds were used after 12 months.
Assessment of Survivor Outcomes (ASO)	Global	International Justice Mission (IJM)	2018	The Assessment of Survivor Outcomes (ASO) tool, developed by International Justice Mission, measures survivors’ progress toward restoration after violence or exploitation. It serves two purposes: guiding case management by identifying strengths and vulnerabilities to tailor support, and measuring the impact of services by tracking survivor progress.
Code of Practice for Ensuring the Rights of Victims and Survivors of Human Trafficking	Global	OSCE/ODIHR	2023	The Code of Practice guides States on including victims and survivors in all aspects of anti-trafficking responses. It values survivor leaders’ lived experience in shaping approaches that are trauma-informed, child-friendly, age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, and rights-based. It also outlines State commitments to identification, protection, services, justice, redress, social inclusion, and survivor engagement.
Global Survivor Network	Global	Global Survivor Network	2019	The Global Survivor Network empowers and equips survivors as leaders, meets with local, national, and global leaders to speak into policy, programmes and decisions and convenes survivors to amplify their voices.
The Meaningful Engagement Handbook	Global	Collective Threads Initiative	2025	This resource help organizations work collaboratively with people who have lived experience, such as survivors or directly affected individuals. It shows how to move beyond tokenism by giving them real influence and leadership roles, offering practical tools for respectful, empowering, and sustainable engagement. Its goal is to ensure that lived experience is valued and integrated throughout decision-making and project development.
The Lived Experience Leadership Analysis: Part of the Meaningful Engagement Toolbox	Global	Collective Threads Initiative	2025	It is designed to help organizations assess and strengthen how they include and support people with lived experience in leadership roles. This tool helps to determine if something is lived experience-led or not.

Survivor-Informed Indicators for the Identification of Victims and Survivors of Trafficking in Human Beings	Global	OSCE/ODIHR	2025	It presents survivor-informed indicators for identifying victims of THB aim to help address the gap in identification tools, by reflecting the knowledge, professional expertise and lived experience of survivor leaders from ISTAC.
Ensuring Ethical Survivor Inclusion	Global	Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT)	2025	The brief calls for trauma-informed, equitable engagement of trafficking survivors as paid experts in policy, training, and awareness, with protections like consent, non-punishment, and mental health support. Ultimately, it advocates systemic change that empowers survivors as leaders and partners in combating trafficking.
Lessons from the Survivor Inclusion Initiative	Global	United Nations University - Centre for Policy Research	2024	The document outlines the Survivor Inclusion Initiative (SII), which helps modern slavery and human trafficking survivors access financial services. Drawing on pilots in Canada, the UK, and the US, it highlights bank-NGO collaboration to remove barriers and offers guidance for global scaling, stressing financial inclusion as vital for recovery and independence.
Survivor-Centric Platform Practices	Global	Tech Against Trafficking	2025	It's a guideline for online platforms to protect trafficking survivors through reporting, education, support, and survivor engagement, ensuring policies reduce harm and empower and protect individuals during and after exploitation.
Developing Survivor Leaders	Global	Global Survivor Network	2019	The “Developing Survivor Leaders” initiative is about empowering survivors of human trafficking and violence to become advocates and leaders in their communities. It provides training in storytelling, leadership, and advocacy so survivors can influence justice systems and policy. The program also fosters survivor-led networks globally to amplify their voices and drive systemic change.
Regional Guidelines For The Social Inclusion Of Survivors Of Trafficking In Persons In The Americas	Regional	IOM, OAS	2023	It focuses on providing practical recommendations for governments, civil society, and service providers to help survivors of human trafficking reintegrate into society. It emphasizes rights-based approaches, access to healthcare, education, employment, and social protection to ensure long-term recovery and prevent re-victimization.

Inclusion of Survivors in the Policy Development Process and Operational Response to Trafficking in Human Beings Practical Guidance	Regional	International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)	2022	A framework that involves the engagement of survivors in the police development and organizational process in response to trafficking in persons, aimed at enhancing the referral mechanism for trafficked persons.
Guidelines for policy makers on engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse “Nothing About Us Without Us “	Regional	Council of Europe	2004	These guidelines are designed to support policy makers in engaging with victims and survivors in a meaningful way. By implementing these guidelines policy makers will take important steps towards establishing a victim-survivor centred framework based on prevention, healing and justice.
Learning from victims and survivors of childhood sexual violence to inspire policy change	Regional	Council of Europe	2023	The guide highlights the importance of including victims and survivors of child sexual violence in discussions on this issue and considers how the Council have been engaging with them. It also provides examples of forms of victim and survivor engagement.
Towards A Survivor Engagement Model: Challenges And Lessons Learnt Through Voiceover Project	Regional	Voice Over Project at the University Iuav of Venice	2025	It outlines how the EU-funded VoiceOver initiative developed a structured model to meaningfully involve trafficking survivors in anti-trafficking efforts. It details practical steps—like peer-to-peer engagement, logistics, training modules, and trauma-informed approaches—along with insights into successful practices and common challenges during implementation.
Advisory Board for Potential and Identified Victims of Trafficking	Albania	Office of the National Anti-Trafficking Co-ordinator	2023	The Advisory Board of Victims of Trafficking, composed of three survivor leaders, guides one state-run and three NGO-run shelters on victim identification, protection, and support. It advises on police coordination, communication, legal procedures, housing, and meets twice yearly with national anti-trafficking bodies.
The Lived Experience Engagement Programme (LEEP)	Australia	Salvation Army	since 2022	The Salvation Army’s LEEP, launched in 2022, empowers modern slavery survivors with training, peer support, and pathways to the Survivor Advisory Council. It offers interpreters, psychological help, and covers travel and childcare, but not legal or housing services. Initially focused on labour exploitation, it now includes all slavery-like situations and runs through June 2025.

Modern Slavery Lived Experience Engagement and Empowerment	Australia	Australian Government (Attorney-General's Department)	2024	This document aims to promote the inclusion of people with lived experience of modern slavery and anti-trafficking interventions in the development, implementation and review of policies and programmes.
Modern Slavery Lived Experience Engagement and Empowerment: Values, principles and practical guidance to support trauma-informed engagement and empowerment in Australia.	Australia	Commonwealth of Australia	2024	It's a guide from the Australian government that helps organizations involve survivors of modern slavery in shaping policies and programs. It focuses on ethical, trauma-informed engagement to ensure participation is safe, respectful, and empowering. The aim is to amplify survivor voices while minimizing harm and re-traumatization.
Practical Guide for Meaningful Survivor Engagement	Romania	ELiberare Association	2023	The guide shows how organizations can safely and respectfully engage trafficking survivors in decision-making, offering trauma-informed practices like training and confidentiality. Rooted in Romania, its principles are adaptable worldwide. Though rooted in Romanian experience, its principles are adaptable for global use.
A guide to meaningful survivor engagement	Scotland, United Kingdom	Women's Aid Federations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales), Imkaan	2024	It explores practices to enable diverse survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) to have increased opportunities to influence local practice and national decision-making.
Safeguarding survivor-led organizations	Sweden	Beyond Survivors, Protection International	2025	It provides guidance to help survivor-led organizations protect their members and operations from harm, emphasizing strong safety practices, emotional support, and sustainable structures so survivors can lead and participate safely and effectively.
Hand-out: Safe Speaking Engagements	Sweden	Beyond Survivors, Protection International	2025	This practical guide is intended to help survivors safely participate in public speaking or advocacy events. It outlines the potential risks survivors may face and provides strategies to prepare for and manage these risks.

Hand-out: Safe Media Interactions.	Sweden	Beyond Survivors, Protection International	2025	It's a guide for survivors on how to safely engage with media by setting boundaries, reviewing questions, and understanding risks. It aims to prevent retraumatization, protect privacy, and reduce exploitation. The focus is on empowering survivors to share their stories on their own terms.
Safeguarding survivor advocates	Sweden	Beyond Survivors, Protection International	2025	This guide helps organizations protect survivors who wish to become advocates against human trafficking and exploitation by outlining measures to ensure their physical, emotional, legal, financial, and social safety. Developed by a survivor-led group with Protection International, it advises on identifying risks, managing stigma or retaliation, and creating tailored safety plans. It also promotes ethical engagement—recognizing survivors as experts, providing trauma-informed support, and preventing re-traumatization while amplifying their leadership and agency.
A review of current promising practices in the engagement of people with lived experience to address modern slavery and human trafficking	United Kingdom	University of Liverpool	2022	The project sought to meaningfully involve survivors of modern slavery and trafficking in co-developing and co-producing the research. Participation did not require disclosure, allowing a diverse team to form that combined professional expertise with lived experience, enriching the research process.
Towards principles for equitable engagement: six research projects	United Kingdom	University of Liverpool	2023	This research summary covers six research projects from the 'Towards Principles for Equitable Engagement' network. Together the projects show how ethical and equitable involvement of lived experience can improve policy and practice in efforts to address modern slavery and human trafficking.
Meaningful Survivor Participation. An engagement toolkit for organisations.	United Kingdom	Welsh Women's Aid	2022	This resource, developed by Welsh Women's Aid with survivors, supports meaningful survivor participation and engagement by offering values and principles, questions for practitioners, and survivors' recommendations for good practice. Based on workshop insights, it guides organizations in creating survivor-centred engagement plans.

Exploring Lived Experience Involvement in Anti-Trafficking Conferences	United Kingdom	Survivor Alliance	2024	This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the practices and impacts of anti- trafficking conferences, with a particular focus on the involvement and support of individuals with lived experience.
Ethical Storytelling Toolkit	United Kingdom	Anti-Slavery Knowledge Network	2022	This tool supports practitioners in ethical storytelling within the anti-slavery and human trafficking sector. Inspired by Antislavery Knowledge Network partners, it offers key principles from their inclusive, participatory practices and includes a resources section with wider guidance and good practice.
Knowledge for Change? Lessons from co-developing a research agenda on survivor engagement	United Kingdom	University of Liverpool	2023	The report shows how survivor engagement strengthens research on modern slavery and human trafficking. It emphasizes ethical, trauma-informed methods and local adaptation. Six regional studies— from Kenya, India, and the U.S.—demonstrate how survivor-led approaches shape design, terminology, and policy. It highlights collaboration among survivors, researchers, and practitioners to co-create inclusive agendas.
Toolkit for Building Survivor-Informed Organizations	USA	National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center	2023	This toolkit supports anti-trafficking organizations, coalitions, task forces, and volunteer programmes in collaborating with trafficking survivors. A trauma- and survivor-informed workplace fosters safety, inclusivity, and collaboration while broadening applicant pools to include survivor leaders and those with trauma histories.
Voices of Empowerment. Mapping Key Lessons In Survivor Engagement.	USA	IJM	2024	This report, co-authored by survivor leaders, offers insights and a practical guide to working and interacting with survivors
We Name It So We Can Repair It. Rethinking Harm, Accountability, and Repair in the Anti-trafficking Sector	USA	Lived and Professional Experience Movement-Building Working	2023	This a report highlights how harm can persist within the anti-trafficking movement, even from well-meaning efforts. It shares survivor-led insights, identifies key forms of harm, and offers practical recommendations to promote accountability, equity, and survivor leadership.

The Survivor Storytelling Workbook	USA	National Survivor Network	2023	It's a workbook designed to help survivors prepare for sharing their stories safely and effectively. It provides tools for setting boundaries, understanding risks, and making informed choices about when and how to speak publicly. The goal is to empower survivors to tell their stories in ways that protect their well-being and agency.
Employment Pathways Programme	USA	Survivor Alliance	2020	The Survivor Alliance Employment Pathways Programme helps trafficking survivors access professional development leading to meaningful work and financial independence. It offers fellowships in the anti-trafficking sector with full-time roles, mentorship, advocacy, and support groups. It also develops consultants through contract work in research and training, with contract management guidance. These initiatives aim to increase survivors' access to stable, secure employment.
Meaningful Engagement of People with Lived Experience: A framework and assessment for measuring and increasing lived experience leadership across the spectrum of engagement	USA	Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, and National Survivor Network	2023	A framework and assessment for measuring and increasing lived experience leadership across the spectrum of engagement is a first-of-its-kind resource that offers guidance and tools to support organizations' progress toward meaningful survivor engagement.

Annex V – Selected recommendations, resolutions and decisions adopted by the Conference of Parties to the UN Organized Crime Convention (COP) and its Working Group on Trafficking in Persons (WG), focusing on protection

Category	Session/Meeting	Key Elements
Victim-Centred Approach	Tenth Session COP (Oct 2020)	Encouraged training specialized units with expertise in victim-centred and human rights-based approaches, considering the impacts of trauma.
	Eleventh Session COP (Oct 2022)	Recognized the need for a victim-centred approach to ensure victims are treated with respect and dignity and are not penalized for acts committed as a direct consequence of their trafficking situation.
Victims' / (Survivors') Perspectives and Inputs	Seventh Meeting WG (Sep 2017)	Recommended integrating victims' perspectives into policymaking and ensuring equal access to assistance and protection measures.
	Ninth Meeting WG (Sep 2019)	Advocated for consulting victims and survivors in developing strategies and incorporating their input into training materials for diplomatic and consular officials.
	Twelfth Meeting WG (Jun 2022)	Suggested assessing policies to eliminate practices contributing to revictimization and consulting a wide range of stakeholders, including victims.
Trauma-Informed Approach	Fourth Meeting WG (Oct 2011)	Emphasized raising awareness among national authorities to identify situations involving abuse of power or vulnerability and respond appropriately to victims' trauma.
	Eighth Meeting WG (Jul 2018)	Recommended integrating trauma-informed and gender-, age-, and human rights-sensitive approaches to victim protection measures.
	Ninth Meeting WG (Sep 2019)	Suggested sharing best practices for trauma-informed approaches and consulting victims in developing prevention strategies.
	Eleventh Meeting WG (Oct 2021)	Highlighted the need for protection and assistance schemes that consider the harm caused by crime, including trauma.
	Twelfth Meeting WG (Jun 2022)	Encouraged providing victim-centred support with a trauma-informed approach to build trust between law enforcement and victims.

Comprehensive Support and Protection Measures	Fourth Meeting WG (Oct 2011)	Emphasized the need for comprehensive victim protection measures, including addressing trauma and providing legal guardians for child victims.
	Fifth Meeting WG (Nov 2013)	Highlighted the role of civil society in protecting and assisting victims and the importance of specialized training for criminal justice practitioners.
	Sixth Meeting WG (Nov 2015)	Focused on multi-stakeholder cooperation, including involving civil society and survivors in developing anti-trafficking strategies.
	Seventh Meeting WG (Sep 2017)	Stressed the importance of providing support to victims independent of their immigration status and ensuring gender-specific protection measures.
	Eighth Meeting WG (Jul 2018)	Continued emphasis on non-punishment and non-prosecution of trafficked persons and the importance of trauma-informed approaches.
Legal and Policy Frameworks	Various Sessions/Meetings	Adopt and enforce the principle that survivors should not be punished or prosecuted for unlawful acts committed as a direct consequence of their trafficking situation.
		Establish procedures to allow survivors to obtain compensation and restitution for the damages they have suffered.
Awareness and Prevention	Various Sessions/Meetings	Launch awareness-raising campaigns directed at vulnerable groups and the general public to increase understanding of trafficking and its traumatic impact.
		Implement measures to prevent trafficking by addressing the root causes, such as poverty and lack of equal opportunities, which can contribute to the vulnerability of potential victims.
International Cooperation and Coordination	Various Sessions/Meetings	Encourage coordination among various stakeholders, including government ministries, non-governmental organizations, and civil society, to develop comprehensive policies that address the needs of trafficking survivors.
		Foster international partnerships to share best practices, resources, and knowledge to combat trafficking more effectively.
Research and Data Collection	Various Sessions/Meetings	Support research and data collection on trafficking to inform evidence-based practices and policies. This includes studying the effectiveness of different support models and identifying emerging trends in trafficking.
		Encourage and fund research led by survivors to ensure that their perspectives and experiences are central to the understanding of trafficking and the development of solutions.
Economic Empowerment	Various Sessions/Meetings	Provide vocational training and employment opportunities to help survivors achieve economic independence and stability.
		Implement financial literacy programmes to help survivors manage their finances and build a secure future.

Annex VI – Regional Needs Assessment Workshop for Africa



ACTION
Against Human
Trafficking and
Migrant Smuggling



United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime

Listening to survivors of human trafficking:

A report of the regional needs assessment
workshop for Africa

11-12 December 2024

Kampala, Uganda



“As the African Survivor Coalition, we left the workshop invigorated and determined to continue advocating for policies and practices that reflect our realities, ensuring that survivors across Africa have access to justice, protection, and meaningful empowerment. Together, we are redefining what it means to combat trafficking—centered on the voices of those who have lived it”.

Introduction and background

This workshop was a global first for UNODC: For the first time, UNODC organized a workshop with survivor leaders as stakeholders to discuss better protection responses. The aim of the workshop was to start reflecting on how to build truly victim-centred and trauma-informed protection responses by engaging with survivors. The two-day workshop, part of the EU funded project "Promoting Action and Cooperation among countries at global level against Trafficking in Human Beings and the Smuggling of Migrants (PACTS)", brought together Frehewot Abiy, Francisca Awah, Ayi Herve Aziamadje, Chyliah Azuh, Abdoul Aziz Ba, Erica Rosamond Johnson, Joy Kingsley, Afasi Komla, Victoria Nyanjura, Malaika Oringo, Abishagy Wambui Ndirangu, from Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, the Gambia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Kenya, Togo, Uganda. The participants are members of the African Survivor Coalition, an initiative led by Footprint to Freedom, a grassroots survivor-led organization, and some are grantees of UNVTF.

The workshop preparation, framework of principles and strategy for engaging with survivor leaders were informed and co-created with Ms Malaika Oringo, who was contracted by UNODC as an international expert consultant on lived experience of human trafficking and who is also the Chairperson of the African Survivor Coalition (ASC) and CEO of Footprint to Freedom. Ms Oringo co-facilitated the workshop together with Ms Zoi Sakelliadou from UNODC. Additional support was also provided by Ms Silke Albert, Team Leader, Mr Alexandre Schick, Associate Expert Criminal Justice and Crime Prevention and Mr Hexin Liu, Programme Management Assistant from the Child Trafficking, Survivor Engagement and Partnership Team of HTMSS, UNODC. Despite the significant efforts that countries have made over the years to prevent and combat them, they continue to plague modern societies, destroy people's lives, enrich criminals, and undermine trust in public institutions.

Sharing, exchanging, engaging

The group brought together survivor leaders who are in different stages of their healing journey. Some were for the first time sharing their experiences or aspects of their stories; others were participating for their first time in such an event, and others were for the first time in a room with other peers in the community.

The first sessions of the workshop focused on breaking the ice and fostering a safe space built on trust, acceptance and respect. Safeguarding measures were discussed from the outset and facilitators emphasized the participants' freedom to choose if, how much, and when to engage, share, or step away from the workshop. Consequently, the group felt safe and ready to share experiences, emotions, dreams, hopes and challenges.

It quickly became clear why survivors embody resilience. The workshop participants have persevered and endured horrific forms of violence, such as torture, sexual slavery, domestic servitude, kidnapping, and war crimes; they live with the resulting trauma, and yet they persevere. They were all unanimous: trauma persists even once trafficking ends, affecting both the body and mind. The healing journey is non-linear and often lonely. Survivors shared being treated as strangers both by authorities and families, and revealed that the systems meant to protect, assist, and support them often revictimized them.

Below follows a thematic categorisation of the main takeaways from the discussion.

Inequality and discrimination

The geographical context is of paramount importance. Participants stressed that African victims carry the burden of systemic discrimination and inequalities, noting that identification systems are not culturally sensitive but rather expect the victims to be “culturally ready” and “self-identify” as victims. Of note, they flag that trafficking happens also within their own countries and in the continent, not just outside.

Effect of trauma

Participants expressed that pain and trauma never go away; survivors must instead find ways to live alongside them. As trauma has lasting physiological and psychological effects, even survivor leaders that appear strong and composed, are humans carrying an invisible load. When in private, in their rooms, grief and trauma resurface.

Often, authorities do not understand how trauma affects individuals. Participants shared they felt that the authorities meant to protect them questioned their victimhood because they could not understand how trauma manifests. Participants stressed that officials likely to come in contact with victims have no understanding and training of how trauma impacts individuals and how coping mechanisms for survival develop. Trauma and coping mechanisms affect the way victims will give testimony, how the victim will recount a traumatic experience or even the memory of events. There is a misconception that a credible testimony must be raw, detailed and linear, but in reality, this is not the case. There is a need for trauma-informed training of all such officials by experts in this field.

Emotional, psychological and mental support

Participants were unanimous: above all, victims need long-term emotional and psychological support. It is crucial that they are supported throughout the entire legal process, both inside and outside the courtroom, during the proceedings and long after. Though mental health is often overlooked, it plays an integral role in the healing process.

Need for long-term health care support

Victims suffer emotionally and physically. Trauma manifests both in the body and mind, and the effects of trauma linger forever. Participants stressed that health care is not always available and does not always cover their illnesses, and it is short-term. Participants emphasized that survivors often face long-lasting physical and emotional health impacts. In particular, chronic illnesses such as HIV and other diseases acquired during exploitation require ongoing and specialized care. It was recommended that healthcare systems adopt a survivor-centred approach, ensuring access to long-term treatment and mental health support tailored to these unique needs. Survivors highlighted the importance of integrating comprehensive healthcare frameworks that address both immediate and sustained medical and emotional challenges. The mental, emotional, and physical health of survivors must be considered a long-term issue and should be seen as part of protecting and empowering them.

Improved access to compensation, restoration and survivor-centred justice

According to participants, traffickers stole time from victims, and time is the most important element in one's life. Stolen time can never be returned. Justice systems should reflect on this element of time when imposing deadlines for exercising rights and legal action, penalties (commensurate to the harm and not conditional) but also on compensation granted to the victims. Traffickers cause grave trauma that continues even when exploitation is over. Compensation for this harm should be taken into account. How can we compensate for serious illness, mental or physical, ranging from infertility to post-traumatic stress, caused by the harm traffickers pose to the victims and their loved ones? Participants stress that healing from trauma is not a linear process. It takes time. Legal processes do not take this reality into account, especially when statute of limitations and deadlines for filing legal actions are considered.

Survivors shared their experiences of being revictimized by legal and bureaucratic systems. They stressed the need for streamlined and trauma-informed processes to access compensation. Legal frameworks should acknowledge the profound and ongoing harm caused by trafficking, including health-related impacts, and provide mechanisms to ensure fair and timely compensation. Participants also called for the development of survivor-friendly guidelines to navigate legal systems, including simplified procedures and access to quality legal aid.

Identification of victims and indicators

Participants stressed that identification indicators are not context-specific or culture-sensitive and often are just copied from the Western world. As a result, they are not applicable in local contexts and create unrealistic expectations about the perfect victim. In addition, participants mentioned that there is an expectation that victims would "self-identify", but often, victims are not aware of being exploited, due to the normalisation of violence and exploitation. Indicators need to be trauma-informed and context specific. Indicators need to be developed by persons with lived experience in trafficking because they have unique knowledge of what it means to be trafficked and how trauma affects individuals.

Transition from childhood to adulthood for victims

Participants stressed that when exploitation begins in childhood, transition to adulthood is problematic. Often, there are no measures to support this transition and protection measures are not extended beyond the age of majority. This abrupt change creates vulnerabilities and increases the risk of revictimization.

Role of family

Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of understanding the role of family within local contexts. Often, trafficking is enabled in the family system and protecting family honour can silence victims, precluding them from accessing assistance, protection

and support. When victims return, their families do not show understanding, so victims choose not to disclose their experiences. Additionally, victims are often returned to the same family context that led to the exploitation, allowing for revictimization. Participants stressed the need to work with families and communities to promote prevention of (re)victimization and healing. Rural communities must be particularly targeted.

Victim protection programmes

Participants shared that often, victims are placed in the same settings as perpetrators, such as police vehicles or return flights. They underlined the lack of victim protection programmes that genuinely value the security and safety of victims and their loved ones.

Corruption and accountability for government and law enforcement

Participants discussed the systemic failures and corruption within law enforcement and governmental structures that perpetuate trafficking. To address this, they recommended establishing independent oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability. Regular evaluations, survivor-led audits, and anonymous reporting systems were highlighted as critical measures. Governments were urged to implement mandatory anti-trafficking training for officials, ensuring they understand the complexities of trauma and exploitation and hold individuals accountable for lapses in victim protection or complicity in trafficking networks.

Participants stressed the links between various levels of corruption and trafficking in persons. They spoke about the influential role of government-affiliated individuals or those with ties to powerful local actors, ranging from travel and recruitment agencies to religious leaders and community elders.

Role of consular staff

Consular staff are very likely to come in contact with victims. Survivors shared their experiences with consular and diplomatic staff who lacked awareness on critical issues. Including the impact of trauma on victims, the complicity of individuals with trafficking rings and the fact that some seek to profit from the victims' plight by demanding bribes. As a result, victims were not able to access vital documentation and, subsequently, protection.

Persistent lack of awareness

The definition of trafficking in persons is still not understood by officials likely to come in contact with victims. As a result, victims often had to face officials who either lacked basic understanding or who were even personally complicit. From consular staff to law enforcement to the justice sector, survivors felt they were met with disbelief and stigma.

Harmful gender stereotypes

Participants stressed how harmful gender stereotypes hinder victims from being identified and accessing assistance, protection and support. Male victims are confronted with gender stereotypes that construct them as strong and not expressing emotions, while female victims face stigma and prejudice.

Need for international cooperation

Participants stressed the need for more international cooperation and bilateral agreements between countries. Such frameworks must place the protection of victims at their core. The current frameworks allow traffickers to profit from the vulnerable circumstances in which migrant workers find themselves. The protections are limited. Participants shared testimonies of deceased migrant workers whose bodies were unable to be repatriated. In addition, participants stressed the importance of upholding labour rights and standards in bilateral agreements and creating specialised task forces to protect migrant workers abroad and help them repatriate.

Reintegration

Reintegration programmes should be developed only after a meaningful needs assessment exercise. Victims must be heard in this process. Economic empowerment of survivors is crucial. But not every victim wants to become an entrepreneur, a hairdresser, a cook, or participate in a micro-credit scheme. Sometimes, the agendas of donors influence real needs on the ground. Participants shared that survivors would benefit from fellowship programmes, education and scholarships, and long-term trauma-informed psycho-social support.

Safe and trauma-informed accommodation

Participants stressed the importance of ensuring trauma-sensitive shelters. Participants have experienced homelessness, false imprisonment and detention, and being bought and sold from within structures of detention and accommodation.

Remuneration

Survivors should be treated like any other professional and expert in a field. Often, survivors are not remunerated for their engagement and expertise. Sometimes, they have to take time off their jobs to participate in events, and this is not compensated.

The role of victim in criminal justice systems and empowerment of victims

Participants stressed that there is a disconnect between victims and the criminal justice systems. Victims feel objectified and not empowered in the legal process. Victims should be able to understand the framework and be provided with quality pro-bono legal support. However, legal terminology is often incomprehensible to victims. Justice processes are not understood by victims, while justice is supposed to serve victims, too. Criminal justice

systems look at victims as entities of exploitation, but the trauma caused from trafficking lasts well after the exploitation ends.

Lack of documentation

Participants stress the plight of victims to produce the required documentation to prove their identity. Some are at risk of being de-fact stateless. As a result, they are stranded in situations of violence and exploitation.

Power of the collective

Participants stressed the importance of the workshop in bringing together peers from across Africa. Such measures foster the power of the collective; they empower survivors and help them heal.

Secondary traumatization

Participants stressed the importance of addressing secondary traumatization for those supporting victims.

Role of media

Participants noted previous bitter experiences with media and journalists who are not trauma-informed and do not follow ethical standards in reporting. Often, testimonies are turned into sensationalistic coverage, and the privacy of survivors is jeopardized.

Multilateral processes

Participants expressed keen interest in being heard by policymakers. Interest was expressed in being involved in UN processes and exploring possibilities for exchanges with the African Union and the European Union.

Recommendations regarding the Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors – Voices of Resilience

In the last session, participants discussed the Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors – Voices of Resilience that was to take place on 24-25 June in Vienna. Participants reflected on potential agenda structure, thematic discussions and recommendations that could emerge from the workshop.

Participants proposed that the Forum should help to rethink the protection of victims as the empowerment of victims. Videos of survivors could be screened and the keynote speeches could be delivered by survivors themselves. The exchange of best practices would be highly valued, as well as discussion in working groups on the following topics: access to justice and protection, national referral mechanisms and indicators, survivor-led practices and movement building, trauma-informed care and protection, accountability of traffickers and ending impunity.

Some recommendations for follow-up actions could include:

1. Developing guidelines for empowering countries to build capacities for national survivor advisory councils.
2. Encouraging states to take into account the perspectives of survivors in policy formulation and implementation.
3. Develop tailored long-term support for survivors with chronic health issues.
4. Improve access to compensation through survivor-centred justice frameworks.
5. Capacity building on trauma-informed responses.
6. Funding should be made available, and survivors should be included in donors' decision-making processes.
7. Needs assessments should be delivered with survivors.
8. Monitoring and evaluation should be reconsidered. Survivors should be part of this process.
9. Witness protection systems need to be developed, taking into account the real needs of victims and the effects of trauma on individuals.
10. Development of context-specific and trauma-informed indicators.
11. Organize more meetings with survivors and for in local and regional contexts.
12. Promote and fund research with survivors.
13. Treat survivors as equal citizens.
14. Develop trauma informed compensation guidelines.
15. Develop guidelines for trauma informed judicial processes.
16. Accountability mechanisms for government and law enforcement to address systemic failures.

Annex VII Regional Needs Assessment Workshop for Latin America and the Caribbean



ACTION
Against Human
Trafficking and
Migrant Smuggling



United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime

Listening to survivors of human trafficking:

A report of the regional needs assessment
workshop for Latin America and the
Caribbean

7-8 April 2025



“I am a stone in the ocean moving with the waves, I am a woman of pain, and I AM HERE”.

“All I want is to have a normal life like any other person.”

Introduction and background

Protection, assistance and support are the cornerstones of victim empowerment.

The UNODC Regional Needs Assessment Workshop, held on 7-8 April 2025 in Bogotá, Colombia, was the first of its kind in the region and aimed to create a safe space for assessing the needs of survivors and the overall level of engagement with survivors for building victim-centred and trauma-informed anti-trafficking protection responses in Latin America and the Caribbean. This workshop was a crucial step towards the preparation of the “Voices of Resilience” - Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors, scheduled to be held in Vienna on 24-25 June 2025. The regional workshop brought together Mixi Cruz, Carolina Ferrari Romero, Estefania Gómez, Shamere McKenzie, Claudia Montes, Delmarine Morris-Williams, Flora Pinina Laura Bautista, Malaika Oringo, Melanie Thompson from Colombia, Mexico, the Honduras, Jamaica, Uruguay, Bolivia, Uganda/Netherlands, and Jamaica/USA.

The workshop preparation and implementation followed the approach taken with the first UNODC regional needs assessment workshop in Kampala, Uganda (11-12 December 2024). Participants were identified through consultation with UNODC field offices and through outreach to survivor leaders and advocates.

This report takes into account the notes prepared by Estefania Gómez, a participant of the workshop, whom UNODC wishes to thank for their initiative. A draft was shared with participants and modified in accordance with their feedback.

The UNODC team present in-person included Zoi Sakellidou, Gilberto Zuleta-Ibarra, and Paul Piedra-Vasquez. Other UNODC members involved in the preparations of the workshop included Naife Allpas, Silke Albert, Alexandre Schick, and Joanna Mileva.

Sharing, exchanging, engaging

The group brought together survivor leaders and advocates who are in different stages of their journeys. Some were sharing their stories or parts of their experiences for the first time, others were participating in an event like this for the first time, and some were already collaborating with authorities in their advocacy work.

The first sessions of the workshop focused on breaking the ice and fostering a safe space built on trust, acceptance and respect. Safeguarding measures were discussed from the outset, and facilitators emphasized the participants' freedom to choose if, how much, and when to engage, share, or step away from the workshop. Following the participants' recommendations from the Uganda Workshop, a forensic psychologist was present in-person as a part of UNODC's team, and a trauma specialist was available online. As both psychologists were male, participants shared the importance of having female trauma experts available on site as well due to either personal preference or as a result of past experience.

Below follows a thematic categorization of the main takeaways from the discussion.

Families and communities

Participants emphasized the critical role of families and communities in both enabling and preventing trafficking and exploitation. Rather than providing love and stability, some families are the source or origin of trafficking and exploitation with offenders found within the victim's own family. Additionally, victims are often stigmatized and ostracized by their families and communities due to their trafficking experiences to the extent of participants sharing stories of being stoned upon their return. As a result, participants highlighted the urgent need to work with families and communities to reduce (re)victimization and promote healing, with a particular focus being given to rural and indigenous communities.

Long-term care and support

Survivors stressed the need for long-term care and support, noting that current assistance is often short-term while the impacts, both physical and psychological, can last a lifetime. Survivor leaders, in particular, are faced with significant responsibilities yet lack the necessary resources. Aftercare services remain extremely limited despite the potentially lifelong effects of the violence inflicted and trauma endured. Chronic illnesses, disabilities, scars, and various illnesses that manifest later in life as a result of the trafficking experience are common and yet, survivors are often left without adequate care.

Participants noted that access to services and support often felt like a pathway to institutionalization rather than empowerment. They shared that support systems often resembled residential care where survivors felt they lacked autonomy and experienced limited opportunities for active participation in decisions about their recovery.

In the absence of long-term support, survivors are at a heightened risk of relapsing. This relapse may include returning to exploitative environments out of necessity, experiencing a resurgence of mental health deterioration and trauma symptoms such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, or turning to substance use as a coping mechanism. These setbacks should not be viewed as a failure of the individual but rather as a symptom of the lack of support systems meant to support sustainable recovery.

Mental and emotional health

The workshop underscored the necessity of mental and emotional care, particularly for understanding trauma and complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD). Participants shared that receiving a diagnosis can take years, and there is a significant need for better mental health support. Many survivors shared negative and painful experiences, mounting to re-victimization, in available mental health services due to lack of understanding and knowledge.

Education and Prevention

Education was repeatedly identified as a key factor in preventing both trafficking and re-trafficking. Participants called for addressing the barriers that survivors and victims face such as the lack of formal qualifications (e.g. degrees or certifications) and limited financial literacy. Access to higher education should be facilitated and opportunities like scholarships or job-skills training should be available.

Theory and practice

Participants stressed that while systems appear effective and fully functioning on paper, the reality is much different. For instance, there is no formal system that monitors how cases reported to hotlines or referral mechanisms are tracked or acted upon.

Victim identification

Participants explained that the current accepted identification indicators are not context-specific or culture-sensitive. Authorities are still looking for the “perfect victim” and disregard trauma and the cycle of violence. Survivors can help develop context-specific indicators because they understand how traffickers function.

Children are the most vulnerable

Participants emphasized that children are victimized in their own families and communities. These children are frequently unseen and have learned to understand violence and exploitation as normal. Without intervention, they risk becoming trapped in ongoing cycles of abuse and revictimization. Participants also stressed that health care professionals are not adequately trained and dismiss child victims, even after repeated encounters with medical staff.

The recruitment of at-risk children by organized crime groups for the purpose of criminality, including trafficking, needs to be addressed. Often, these children, especially boys, have suffered abuse themselves, and without proper support or intervention, they may go on to perpetuate cycles of violence and become abusers themselves. By investing in child protection, we can prevent trafficking and other forms of criminality.

Witness protection and safety

Participants emphasized the importance of robust witness protection programmes. They highlighted the challenges survivors face when perpetrators are part of their communities or families, often forcing victims to relocate for safety. Furthermore, participants stressed that authorities still require physical evidence of violence on victims' bodies.

Corruption and impunity

Corruption, complicity, and impunity were identified as significant barriers to effective anti-trafficking responses. Participants discussed the challenges of reporting crimes when

traffickers are often those in positions of authority. Participants called for true accountability backed by measurable outcomes.

Harmful gender stereotypes

Participants stressed that harmful gender stereotypes hinder victims from being identified and accessing assistance, protection and support. Misogyny and patriarchal norms may affect all victims, regardless of gender. Male victims are often perceived through stereotypes that depict them as strong and invulnerable with socialization often dictating that they should be stoic and emotionless. Female victims, on the other hand, face stigma and prejudice and are viewed as responsible for their own victimization. Social norms frequently reinforce the idea that women's value is tied to purity and obedience. Intersectionality also needs to be addressed. Participants highlighted the need to recognize that men and members of the LGBTQIA+ community are also victims of trafficking (sexual exploitation, forced labour, etc.) and require programmes that address cultural barriers and stigmatization. Vulnerable men are often recruited to become perpetrators or collaborators in criminal networks. Early prevention and rehabilitation of victims and their communities are, therefore, critical.

Safe accommodation

Participants emphasized the need for longer-term accommodation that supports survivors in rebuilding their lives and achieving independence, as homelessness and revictimization are often linked. Furthermore, safe and appropriate housing and shelter should be tailored to the specific needs of survivors of different forms of exploitation.

Victims need protection, assistance and support

Participants stressed the need to reconceptualize what protection means and to approach it more holistically, as there is currently no clear continuum of protection and services. Victims must be believed, and they must be truly involved in decisions about their recovery. Instead, authorities often retraumatize survivors through forced repeated statements, testimonies and interviews. Assistance and support should also be extended to the whole family and community of the victim. Community-level social work was highlighted as a critical tool for preventing revictimization and trafficking in the first place. Victims also need support when entering the job market, where they often face discrimination and stigma.

Victims should not be punished

Participants called for an end to the criminalization and punishment of victims. Too often, it is the victims who are treated as the offenders and are the ones to face arrest, detention, and prosecution instead of protection. This is exacerbated by the lack of training and understanding of trauma within the criminal justice system. For example, survivors may struggle to remember details or timelines as a result of trauma's effects on the brain. This is then misinterpreted as dishonesty or non-cooperation. Survivors also continue to face victim-blaming attitudes that may discourage survivors from seeking help.

Remuneration and advisory role for survivors

Survivors should be treated like any other professional and expert in a field. Often, survivors are not remunerated for their engagement and expertise. Sometimes, they have to take time off their jobs to participate in events, and this is not compensated. There is a need to recognize the expertise of survivors and the emotional labour put into it. Additionally, survivors noted the importance of having their expertise recognized in advisory functions, such as councils.

Empowerment and representation

The participants highlighted the lack of survivor input in decision-making processes and the misrepresentation of trafficking victims in media and public discourse. Images of victims handcuffed or chained, for example, misrepresent the reality of how traffickers operate and should cease to be used in anti-trafficking campaigns and materials.

Legal and justice system: from access to justice to sentencing of offenders

The legal system's response to trafficking was a major concern. Participants called for trauma-sensitive justice, quality legal aid, and sentences that reflect the severity of the harm caused. They also stressed the prevalence of structural racism, the need for training judges on trauma, and the importance of restorative justice. Participants called for the involvement of survivors as expert-witnesses in trials.

Justice is oftentimes pre-defined for the victims, leaving little room for their lived realities and instead creating unintended retaliation. Some victims experienced more harm than healing when deciding to file a complaint. Justice systems should not retraumatize victims but instead prioritize restoration, healing, and human dignity. Justice should be rooted in freedom, equity, and opportunity.

Victims should be included when sentencing policies are developed. Participants stressed the need for penalties and sentences that are commensurate to the seriousness of the offence. Often, traffickers get away with no punishment or very light sentences that are even suspended. They also called for increased monitoring of the sentences and ensuring communities are safe after convicted traffickers return.

Survivors expressed the need for empowerment within the protection system. Empowerment is about creating long-term opportunities for victims for growth, autonomy, and full participation in society.

The sex industry

Participants highlighted that the sex industry remains marked by systemic abuse, violence, and trafficking. They alluded to authorities entrusted with regulation of the sex industry

turning a blind eye to exploitation and showing no interest or care and that this stems from, in part, the devaluation and dehumanization of women in prostitution. Consequently, these women are then excluded from protective systems. Participants stressed the importance of addressing demand and the role of users of sexual services from victims of trafficking. Those who purchase sexual services from victims are perpetuating violence and should be punished, while the victims are protected. Penalizing those who knowingly purchase sex from trafficked persons shifts the focus onto the systemic drivers of exploitation, rather than placing undue burden or blame on the victims.

Participants noted that children, out of desperation for food or basic needs, are coerced or forced into what is mischaracterized as "prostitution." These children are then subjected to the same neglect and mistreatment and are treated as offenders rather than victims. As a result, they do not receive the urgently needed care, protection, based on the detection of their victimization.

Migration

Participants underscored the importance of granting special visas and residency permits to victims who were trafficked into another country, so they can receive protection wherever they are, and if they choose, safely return to their country of origin. Foreign victims often face difficulty legalizing their status, leaving them more vulnerable and limiting their access to governmental protection or support programmes.

Recommendations

1. Develop Comprehensive Witness Protection Programmes

- Ensure safety and security for survivors within their communities.
- Provide long-term relocation options when necessary.

2. Enhance Long-Term Support and Care

- Establish sustainable support systems for survivors.
- Invest in long-term mental health and emotional care.

3. Empower Survivors in Decision-Making

- Include survivors in high-level conversations and policy-making.
- Address misrepresentations of trafficking victims in media.

4. Improve Access to Tailored Services

- Develop tailored approaches for rural areas and specific survivor needs.
- Ensure services are empowering and transformative, and not revictimizing.

5. Strengthen Legal and Justice Responses

- Implement trauma-sensitive justice practices.
- Provide quality legal aid and appropriate sentencing for traffickers.
- Adopt appropriate statute of limitations policies.

6. Promote Education and Financial Literacy

- Address educational gaps for survivors.
- Provide financial literacy training to support long-term independence.

7. Combat Corruption and Impunity

- Strengthen mechanisms to report and address corruption.
- Ensure accountability for those in positions of authority.

8. Address the sex industry

- Penalise those who use the services of victims and don't punish the victims.
- Look at systemic factors that push persons into the sex industry.



ACTION
Against Human
Trafficking and
Migrant Smuggling

UNODC

Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section

P.O. Box 500, 1400 Vienna, Austria

Tel. (+43-1) 26060-5687

Email: unodchtmss@un.org

✕ [@UNODC_HTMSS](https://twitter.com/UNODC_HTMSS)

For more information visit www.unodc.org