



NATIONAL CONSULTATION

Combatting
Trafficking in
Persons in Pakistan
Through Improved
Legal Framework,
Institutional
Coordination for
Referrals,
Rehabilitation and
Social Awareness

December 2024



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Introduction

From October 2021 to December 2024, with the support of the US Mission in Pakistan, SSDO implemented a project in Punjab and Sindh entitled *“Combating Human Trafficking in Pakistan Through Improved Legal Framework, Institutional Coordination for Referrals, Rehabilitation and Social Awareness.”* This comprehensive program aimed to curb human trafficking in Pakistan by strengthening the capacity, coordination, and collaboration among various relevant stakeholders for the implementation of the legal framework to reduce TIP and increase direct referrals of victims for services and rehabilitation. SSDO achieved this target through the formation of multi-party Provincial Parliamentary Working Groups (PPWGs) and the provincial and district-level Stakeholders Working Groups (SWGs) in the two provinces and constitution of special committee of Punjab Assembly to combat trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.

The SWGs consist of a diverse range of stakeholders, including the Human Rights and Minorities Affairs Department, Labor Department, Home Department, District Administration, Social Welfare Department, Women Development Department, Child Protection Authority, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Provincial Police, National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC), Sindh Human Rights Commission, and civil society organizations (CSOs) including the Migrant Resource Centre, legal experts, academia, and media. By conducting capacity building workshops on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for identifying and referring TIP victims, SSDO has witnessed a notable increase in the registration of number of TIP First Information Reports (FIRs), as well as enhanced prosecution and convictions. Simultaneously, through organizing stakeholder dialogues, district advocacy sessions, and mass awareness campaigns through community interventions and various media channels (print, electronic, and social media), there has been a significant improvement in awareness of people about TIP, especially within communities that are potential victims of trafficking.

To collect the lessons learnt and summarize the impact of SSDO’s efforts throughout the three-year project, a project closed group meeting was organized on 5th December 2024, at the Marriot Hotel Islamabad. The meeting was attended by the stakeholders who remained involved throughout the three years of project to deliberate on the achievements and challenges thus far, and then jointly brainstorm a way forward for future work and interventions. The meeting was initiated by Syed Kausar Abbas, Executive Director of SSDO, who first shared the achievements and progress made in alignment with the project objectives. He emphasized on Pakistan's progress in the US State Department's Annual International TIP Report, moving from the Tier II Watch List in 2021 to Tier II countries in 2022. He also acknowledged the valuable support from international partners, including UNODC, IOM, ILO, and ICMPD in achieving this milestone. Dr. Farhan Yousaf, Director at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies at the University of Punjab, served as the moderator for the session, which focused on reflecting on the achievements and challenges encountered so far, as well as discussing the way forward.

The meeting brought together policymakers, representatives from the U.S. Embassy, the British High Commission, UNODC, FIA, the National Police Bureau, provincial police forces, the Sindh Human Rights Commission, provincial prosecution departments, child protection agencies, civil society organizations, and various other government and non-government stakeholders. This report consolidates the achievements, challenges, and recommendations discussed by all participants.

1. Achievements

- Pakistan's ranking in the U.S. State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report improved significantly, advancing from the Tier II Watch List in 2021 to Tier II in 2022, based on multisectoral and collaborative efforts ensuring progress in combating trafficking.
- The number of TIP cases reported has increased dramatically, just 6 cases were reported three years ago when the project started. Initially, law enforcement had a limited understanding of TIP so they would not register an FIR. After training programs and awareness sessions, the number of TIP cases registered has increased to over 3,000 cases today.
- A holistic deployment of the 4P approach (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership) has been implemented, strengthening the overall anti-trafficking strategy. This has involved multi-sectoral collaboration to prevent trafficking, protect victims, prosecute offenders, and form partnerships to address the issue comprehensively.
- Sindh Police developed a specialized training module on TIP, partnering with SSDO to train over nearly 1000 law enforcement officers since 2022. These officers are now registering and investigation TIP cases based on victim centric approach, besides conducting year-round training programs to ensure the sustainability of anti-TIP efforts and to equip officers with the skills to recognize and combat trafficking.
- TIP laws have been integrated into the Punjab and Sindh Judicial Academy's curriculum, ensuring that future legal professionals, including judges and prosecutors, receive proper training on trafficking issues. This inclusion strengthens the legal framework and ensures that judicial officers are well-prepared to handle TIP cases.
- Through multi-sectoral meetings and collaboration, key stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and law enforcement, have successfully worked together to identify key challenges in addressing TIP. These meetings have fostered synergies and created a more unified and effective approach to tackling trafficking in Pakistan.
- The establishment of a Special Committee on TIP within the Punjab Assembly is a significant legislative achievement in advocating for stronger policies and laws against human trafficking, as well as holding government bodies accountable for their actions.
- Awareness on internal trafficking has risen substantially, shifting the focus from primarily transnational trafficking to also address the critical issue of internal trafficking. Efforts to raise awareness have included targeted campaigns and training sessions aimed at local authorities, civil society, and community members.
- New training programs for nurses, IT professionals, and data entry operators have been launched by the government to provide them with the necessary knowledge on legal migration practices, ensuring they are not exploited by traffickers. These courses aim to empower individuals in vulnerable professions to navigate migration processes safely.
- The government has introduced a series of skills development programs targeting youth, particularly in high-demand fields such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, cybersecurity, Python programming, and digital marketing. These programs aim to provide young people with the skills needed to secure decent, sustainable employment and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation.
- In recognition of the need to empower the transgender community, the government has developed special courses for transgender individuals in areas such as IT, arts, drama, cosmetology, and other vocational skills. These programs aim to mainstream the transgender community into the workforce and improve their socio-economic standing by providing them with opportunities to build sustainable livelihoods.

- According to a British High Commission representative present at the meeting, Pakistan's immigration laws are now considered stronger and more comprehensive than those of many comparable countries. However, there remains a need for enhanced implementation to ensure the laws are fully effective in practice.
- The FIA's Management Information System has become fully operational, providing a platform for tracking and managing TIP cases. This system is part of the *National Referral Mechanism*, which enables real-time data sharing and enhances collaboration between departments such as child protection, social welfare, and prosecution.
- The FIA has developed and implemented Standard Operating Procedures for identifying TIP victims to guide law enforcement and other stakeholders in the identification process and ensuring consistent and effective responses to TIP cases. Police and other relevant authorities are encouraged to follow these procedures to ensure that victims are appropriately identified and assisted.
- One of SSDO's significant achievements was its advocacy for child trafficking victims Fatima Fariro and Rizwana in Sindh and Punjab. SSDO actively raised awareness by organizing press briefings, awareness protests, and engaging with stakeholders including police, FIA, prosecution and protection authorities and celebrities to amplify the issue. Their efforts played a key role in Rizwana being admitted to the Child Protection Bureau, the inclusion of TIP clauses in the FIR and SSDO further supported her by arranging a monthly stipend, ensuring her welfare and safety.

"A child is brought to our city for forced labor, for forced begging. What happens? This multiplicity of laws is causing problems. Who is there to apply these laws? How to implement them? We can add TIP clause, we can add PPC clause. How many clauses are there in a single FIR? How many courts will deal with this matter? The police do not have this clarity. Even I don't have full clarity yet." – Representative, Child Protection Department

"Punjab is an overly legislated province. You'll be amazed, but Punjab has more than a hundred laws for the protection of women and children. Normally what happens is that when we start from the top, we make the law. However, as we go down, somehow the rules get lost along the way, the implementation mechanism is not in place and the ones in actual need are not able to benefit from these laws." –Member, Punjab Assembly

"I represent people from those hotspot areas, Gujrat Division, Gujranwala Division, where migrant smuggling is almost a trend. Daily, people come to me, telling me how they have spent \$20,000, \$30,000. We refer this to the FIA, but these traffickers have strong social networks, and they often prey on the most vulnerable segments. As a society, we have failed to work on the prevention of TIP. Additionally, young girls are transported from their own homes and these wealthy people abuse and torture their young maids. This is often done by the so-called elite. As a society, we have simply failed to regularize this practice." –Member, Punjab Assembly.



2. Challenges

2.1. Legal Framework:

- The multiplicity of laws covering trafficking makes it difficult for stakeholders to navigate the legal system. For example, Section 3 of the Prevention of *Trafficking in Person Act 2018* overlaps with provisions in the *Pakistan Penal Code*, particularly Sections 371-A, 371-B, and 374, which causes confusion about which law should be applied in different cases. The annual TIP report by the US State Department even highlights these duplications, which contribute to a fragmented response to trafficking cases.
- Multiple laws cover trafficking, but the issue is that different departments are responsible for different aspects of trafficking, for instance FIA for transnational trafficking, police for internal trafficking and labor departments for bonded labor. There is a need to define a clear jurisdiction, so it is clear whether the police, FIA, or labor departments will handle particular aspects of a case. A clear division of responsibilities is crucial to streamline the legal process.
- From a practitioner's perspective according to the participants present at the meeting, the *Trafficking in Persons Prevention Act 2018* does not align well with Pakistan's established legal framework.
- Current punishments under the PTPA-2018 are insufficient to deter trafficking. For example, the law allows either fines or imprisonment, but both penalties should be enforced together to increase the deterrence effect. Additionally, punishment clauses need to be amended to ensure stronger deterrence.
- Provincial governments have yet to make the necessary rules for the implementation of the PTPA 2018, creating a gap in coordination and clarity of roles across different levels of government. While provincial governments control key departments like police and child protection, the absence of a clear legal framework at the provincial level means that the roles and responsibilities of different departments are not properly delineated. This leads to inefficiencies in case handling and insufficient legal support at the district level.

2.2. Prosecution

- The jurisdiction for TIP cases is inconsistent, with some laws assigning authority to magistrates, others to additional sessions judges, and some to specialized courts.
- There are significant gaps in convictions related to TIP cases, and jurisdictional conflicts between various agencies—such as the police, FIA, and immigration authorities—often complicate the investigation and prosecution processes. The conflict between the PTPA, PPC, and immigration ordinances adds to the confusion, as it is unclear which investigating and prosecuting agency should take the lead.
- The prosecution of trafficking cases remains weak due to challenges in law enforcement's understanding and implementation of these laws. Police often fail to invoke the law properly, and courts have shown inconsistency in applying it.
- Lack of post-legislative scrutiny means that effective implementation and oversight of the law are insufficient. Vigilance committees, which are supposed to monitor the enforcement of these laws, are still not actively engaged.
- The law claims to be victim-centric, but in practice, this has not always been the case. For example, victims of trafficking, particularly women and children, often face challenges in court proceedings, as seen in the two stories shared by Senior Superintendent of Police from Sindh:
 - A trafficked girl from Punjab, who was forced into prostitution in Larkana, was required to appear in person in court. However, the victim was under extreme trauma, stressed, and wanted to return home. The court insisted on her in-person

presence instead of allowing a video testimony, further traumatizing her and causing her extreme distress.

- In another case, two Kenyans trafficked into Pakistan were rescued by the police. The court demanded they be present for the entire trial, which could take years, before agreeing to allow their return home, whereas they wanted to just go back home safely.

2.3. Police and Law Enforcement

- Children are often trafficked internally within Pakistan, but the police resistance to acknowledging these cases as trafficking is a major roadblock. In some instances, children are brought from different cities, and even when TIP is applicable, law enforcement denies its application due to lack of capacity and understanding at the lower levels of the police force.
- Many Investigation Officers are often unaware of what constitutes trafficking, as they have not received proper training in TIP-specific legal frameworks and victim identification procedures. Therefore, when trafficking cases are reported, IOs may fail to recognize them as trafficking cases, especially when they involve internal trafficking or smuggling of migrants.
- Criminals exploit digital platforms to facilitate TIP and SOM, creating a new frontier for law enforcement to address. Cyber-based trafficking requires specialized skills and coordination between different agencies to tackle.
- The lack of a consolidated national database on trafficking cases hinders effective monitoring and analysis.

2.4. Other Stakeholders and the Community

- A severe capacity issue exists across all relevant stakeholders, including government departments, law enforcement, and civil society. For example, district-level TIP committees are not as effective as provincial ones due to lack of resources and insufficient training.
- Internal trafficking in Pakistan is a significant concern, especially for vulnerable groups such as women, children, religious minorities, and the transgender community. Young girls are trafficked for domestic labor, and many of them are exploited and abused by the elite. The lack of regularization of domestic labor practices perpetuates this form of exploitation.
- Society's widespread acceptance of TIP and SOM continues to be a major barrier to prevention efforts. In many communities, practices like using children for domestic labor and engaging in irregular migration abroad are normalized, which contributes to the perpetuation of trafficking.
- Trafficking in Persons (TIP) is a complex issue requiring a collaborative approach, as no single department can address it alone. Breaking silos through inter-agency coordination, shared resources, and joint training is essential to create an effective, victim-centered response.



3. Recommendations

3.1. Legal Framework

- TIP needs to be firmly embedded within Pakistan's broader human rights framework. This integration should include developing systematic monitoring mechanisms, creating regular publications on progress and challenges, and ensuring transparency and accountability in TIP-related efforts. A robust approach will help track progress, identify gaps, and ensure continuous improvement in combating trafficking.
- Service providers such as massage parlours, beauty salons, hospitality and other businesses that may employ trafficked workers should be TIP-certified. Establishing a national registry of TIP-compliant businesses will help ensure that these industries adhere to ethical standards and do not exploit vulnerable workers. A certification process should be put in place, with regular audits to verify compliance.

3.2. Prosecution and Court System Reforms

- The prosecution and court systems need significant improvements to ensure TIP offenders are held accountable. Police and prosecutors should be trained on how to handle TIP cases, and courts should be more flexible in their approach to victim testimony, including options like video conferencing for traumatized victims.

3.3. Training and Capacity Building

- To tackle TIP effectively, it is crucial to train personnel across all relevant sectors, including law enforcement, child protection, social welfare, and labor departments. Ensuring that these personnel understand the complexities of TIP and its intersection with other social issues (e.g., child labor, terrorism, and irregular migration) will create a more cohesive and informed response.
- A detailed, accessible and easy to understand manual on TIP should be developed for police officers, particularly those at the grassroots level such as constables, assistant sub-inspectors, and sub-inspectors. These manuals should be available in local languages to ensure clear communication and understanding. The training material should focus on how to identify TIP, how to handle victims, and how to navigate the legal and procedural steps involved in TIP cases.
- Female police officers and FIA officials should be appointed to handle TIP cases involving vulnerable groups, especially women. These officers would be better equipped to manage cases involving female and child victims, offering a more empathetic and effective response. Increasing the number of female officers will ensure that victims feel more comfortable and supported throughout the legal process.
- UN Women, the European Union, UNICEF, INL, and ILO should support capacity-building initiatives for law enforcement, labor inspectors, and service providers. This will enhance the effective implementation of TIP laws and ensure victim-centered approaches. Collaboration can strengthen prevention, identification, and response efforts in line with global standards.

3.4. Collaboration and Coordination

- TIP is an intersectional issue that connects child sexual exploitation, terrorism, organ trafficking, and irregular migration. To address this complexity, agencies must streamline data sharing and collaborate more effectively. By breaking down silos, agencies can share vital information on trafficking patterns, traffickers, and victims, improving the ability to track and prevent TIP across various sectors.
- Pakistan needs to strengthen its international partnerships, especially with neighboring countries and key international organizations, to identify and disrupt trafficking networks.

Collaboration with international law enforcement agencies, including through joint operations, can help capture traffickers and dismantle organized crime rings that operate both within Pakistan and abroad. This collaboration would also assist in tracking traffickers across borders.

- Interagency coordination must be improved to ensure that all relevant departments—police, FIA, child protection, labor, and social welfare—work together to combat TIP. Law enforcement agencies, particularly at the district level, need additional capacity building to effectively address TIP cases. Reactivating and strengthening district-level TIP committees will facilitate better data sharing, improved communication, and more efficient victim support.

3.5. Grassroots Prevention and Behavior Change

- Prevention efforts should focus on grassroots initiatives aimed at changing community behaviors and attitudes towards irregular migration. These programs would include awareness campaigns, workshops, and direct engagement with communities, highlighting the risks of TIP and promoting safe, legal migration options. Behavior change at the local level is essential for long-term prevention and reducing the demand for traffickers.
- A cultural shift is necessary within communities and law enforcement agencies to better recognize and respond to TIP. This includes breaking down societal acceptance of practices like child labor, domestic servitude, and irregular migration. Public awareness campaigns, targeted training, and community engagement programs should focus on changing harmful attitudes and behaviors that enable trafficking.
- Transgender individuals are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. It is essential not only to raise awareness about their vulnerability but also to increase their participation as service providers. By empowering transgender individuals as key players in TIP prevention and victim support, we can ensure that their needs are properly addressed and that they play an active role in combating trafficking.
- UNFPA, Population Council, and UNICEF should address child vulnerabilities to bonded labor, beggary, forced marriage, and domestic servitude by tackling root causes such as population growth, poverty, and lack of health and education facilities. Their efforts should focus on data collection, awareness, advocacy, and community programs to protect children.

3.6. Support for Victims and Legal Aid

- TIP victims often face financial barriers to legal representation. Introducing pro bono advocates within bar councils can provide free legal aid to victims, ensuring that they have the support necessary to navigate the legal system. This will also help ensure that victims' rights are upheld and that they have access to justice.
- UNHCR, WHO, and other UN agencies should collaborate with local CSOs to provide comprehensive support for TIP victims, including legal protection, healthcare, psychological services, and trauma-informed care. UNHCR can facilitate to ensure rights of refugees vulnerable to trafficking and repatriation, while WHO ensures access to health services. Other agencies, such as UNODC and IOM, can support with legal assistance, reintegration programs, and advocacy, promoting long-term social and economic reintegration through education, vocational training, and employment opportunities.

3.7. Research and Academic Engagement

- Universities should initiate research programs focused on TIP, its causes, consequences, and potential solutions. This research could include policy analysis, best practices, and recommendations for improving the legal and enforcement framework surrounding TIP.



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