



# Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

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**Review of the implementation of the United Nations  
Convention against Transnational Organized Crime  
and the Protocols thereto: Protocol to Prevent,  
Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons,  
Especially Women and Children**

## **Activities of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to promote and support the implementation of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime**

### **Report of the Secretariat**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. The purpose of the present report is to inform the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, at its twelfth session, of the activities of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to promote and support the implementation of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, since the eleventh session of the Conference, in October 2022.
2. The Trafficking in Persons Protocol has a total of 182 parties. During the reporting period, the following countries became parties to the Protocol: Andorra (2022); Pakistan (2022); Bhutan (2023); and Uganda (2024).
3. The Office implements a comprehensive strategy to combat trafficking in persons, promoting and supporting the implementation of the Protocol through normative and policy work, knowledge development, inter-agency cooperation and coordination, and technical cooperation. Technical cooperation activities include providing legislative assistance to States, developing national strategies and coordination, conducting research and collecting data on trafficking in persons, supporting States in strengthening criminal justice responses, promoting international cooperation, advancing crime prevention and awareness-raising and enhancing protection and support for victims.

\* [CTOC/COP/2024/1](#).



4. Under the relevant global programmes, in the period 2022–2024, more than 9,000 practitioners from over 60 Member States received technical assistance in strengthening their response to the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons. In addition, under the relevant global programmes, UNODC provided legislative and policy development assistance to at least 17 countries and two regional organizations. The main focus of that assistance was to strengthen national capacities in order to achieve sustainable results and improve the prevention of and fight against trafficking in persons. The short-term impact of such assistance was demonstrated by the Transforming Alerts into Criminal Justice Responses to Combat Trafficking in Persons within Migration Flows (TRACK4TIP) regional initiative, which strengthens the criminal justice response to trafficking in persons among mixed migration flows across South America and the Caribbean. Through the initiative, 72 investigations into trafficking in persons were conducted and 72 victims were rescued, including at least 35 women. Further examples of the impact of the various UNODC initiatives and projects are provided throughout the present report.

## **II. Activities to assist States in the implementation of the Protocol**

5. In January 2024, UNODC consolidated its existing global programmes against trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants into a new global programme, the “Action against Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling”, marking a paradigm shift in its approach to tackling these crimes. The new programme is the main vehicle for the delivery of the Office’s technical assistance and normative and policy work globally. Under the programme, UNODC is increasing its field presence in order to be closer to the countries that require assistance; forging new partnerships to harness the benefits of modern technology; and creating programming that addresses trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants from different angles, including in the context of sustainable development challenges and climate change.

### **A. Normative and policy work, knowledge development and inter-agency cooperation and coordination**

6. UNODC continued to provide guidance and knowledge-based support to intergovernmental bodies and processes, United Nations agencies and regional and non-governmental organizations in promoting and implementing the objectives of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and in fostering related synergies and partnerships.

#### **1. Support for intergovernmental bodies**

##### *Conference of the Parties to the Organized Crime Convention*

7. In its resolution 11/5, the Conference called upon UNODC to continue its work related to the Protocol and requested the Office to conduct a study on the effects of prevention and awareness-raising campaigns to address trafficking in persons, which would also identify best practices, lessons learned, promising prevention measures and successful awareness-raising campaigns in that regard and benefit from data voluntarily provided by States parties. Furthermore, the Conference also requested UNODC to conduct a study and analysis of the *modi operandi* employed by organized criminal groups in trafficking in persons in order to provide guidance to States parties, in particular with regard to the identification of better prevention practices. However, UNODC has not yet received the extrabudgetary resources required to produce these studies.

8. During the reporting period, UNODC provided substantive support for two meetings of the intergovernmental Working Group on Trafficking in Persons, established by the Conference. To support the Group at its thirteenth meeting, held in Vienna on 2 and 3 October 2023, UNODC drafted substantive background documents on the emerging knowledge and practices regarding the prevention of

and response to corruption in the context of trafficking in persons (CTOC/COP/WG.4/2023/2) and on national issues and priorities concerning child trafficking (CTOC/COP/WG.4/2023/4). The meeting had 453 registered participants from 101 countries and 15 international and intergovernmental organizations.

9. To support the Working Group at its fourteenth meeting, held in Vienna on 8 and 9 July 2024, UNODC prepared substantive background documents on the issue of trafficking in persons for the removal of organs and related conduct (CTOC/COP/WG.4/2024/2) and on national issues and priorities concerning child trafficking (CTOC/COP/WG.4/2024/3). The meeting, which has fully reverted to an in-person format, had 275 registered participants from 97 countries and 12 international and intergovernmental organizations.

10. Furthermore, UNODC continued to strengthen cooperation with civil society organizations and promoted their participation in the second and third constructive dialogues on trafficking in persons, held on 4 October 2023 and 10 July 2024, respectively, following the conclusion of the thirteenth and fourteenth meetings of the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons and in accordance with the procedures and rules for the functioning of the Mechanism for the Review of the Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto.

11. Participation in the constructive dialogues has increased, from 96 civil society organizations and 51 States in 2023 to 182 civil society organizations and 54 States in 2024. UNODC invited panels of experts from civil society to both the second and third dialogues in order to offer perspectives on child trafficking, the major role of corruption in trafficking in persons and the issue of trafficking in persons for organ removal. Several survivor-led organizations were invited as panellists in 2024 to give presentations on the issue of child trafficking. The discussions resulted in observations identified by the Co-Chairs and included in their summaries of the meetings.

#### *Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice*

12. In May 2023, UNODC supported the preparation and servicing of the thirty-second session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. During the session, the Commission adopted, for the first time, a resolution entitled “Taking action against trafficking in persons in business operations, public procurement and supply chains for goods and services” (resolution 32/1). In the resolution, the Commission requested UNODC, for the first time, to engage in dialogue with members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT) and other relevant international organizations, in close consultation with Member States, so as to enable the Office to improve the collection and analysis of data on instances of trafficking in persons in business operations and supply chains for goods and services. It also requested the Office, in collaboration with other relevant organizations, to continue providing technical assistance and training to Member States, at their request, to assist them in strengthening national capacities to effectively prevent and combat trafficking in persons in business operations and supply chains for goods and services.

13. During the reporting period, UNODC also supported the preparation and servicing of the thirty-third session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, held in May 2024. During this session, the Commission adopted resolution 33/1 on countering trafficking in persons in the context of rapid technological change. In the resolution, the Commission recognized that traffickers were using online tools to facilitate trafficking in persons for various forms of exploitation, including the sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism, and that the use of mobile applications and smartphones by children and adolescents made them potentially vulnerable to trafficking in persons.

14. To promote the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and share promising implementation practices, UNODC co-organized and contributed to expert briefings

on the margins of the two sessions, including an event entitled “Climate, crime and exploitation”, as well as events on preventing unaccompanied children from falling victim to trafficking and on combating trafficking in persons in supply chains, which were co-organized within the framework of ICAT. Trafficking in persons was also discussed at side events organized by States, including the following: “Enhancing our efforts to target the demand that fosters trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation”; “Results and good practices in the fight against human trafficking in Honduras: Menthor”; “Countering trafficking in persons in Burkina Faso: the plan of action”; “Strengthening policies against organized crime networks involved in the smuggling of migrants and related crimes along the central and western Mediterranean routes”; and “Regional and international efforts to effectively combat trafficking in persons and protect victims”. On the margins of the thirty-third session, UNODC also organized an exhibition on how UNODC works to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

#### *General Assembly*

15. During the reporting period, UNODC provided substantive support to Member States in discussions leading to the development and adoption of several General Assembly resolutions related to trafficking in persons and to the implementation of both the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

16. UNODC supported, in particular, Guatemala and Spain, the penholders of General Assembly resolution [77/236](#), which was the latest iteration of the recurring resolution entitled “Strengthening and promoting effective measures and international cooperation on organ donation and transplantation to prevent and combat trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ removal and trafficking in human organs”, through the provision of substantive advice upon those countries’ request. In the resolution, adopted by the General Assembly at its seventy-seventh session, the Assembly urged Member States to consider adopting measures to implement the principle of non-punishment of victims of that form of crime and measures providing access to psychosocial and medical care for them, as well as access to compensation. It requested UNODC to improve data collection and analysis on that issue and, recognizing that the shortage of available organs was related to the crime, encouraged States to progress towards self-sufficiency in the transplantation of human organs by developing preventive strategies aimed at decreasing the incidence of diseases treatable through transplantation, and at ethically increasing the availability of human organs for transplantation purposes, with special attention to maximizing donations from deceased donors and to protecting the health and welfare of living donors.

17. Also at its seventy-seventh session, the General Assembly adopted resolution [77/194](#) on trafficking in women and girls. In the resolution, the Assembly urged Governments to strengthen effective gender-responsive and age-sensitive measures to combat and eliminate trafficking in women and girls and invited Governments to consider establishing or strengthening a national mechanism, with the participation of civil society, including survivors of trafficking in persons, to ensure a holistic approach to anti-trafficking policies. The Assembly called upon Governments to take appropriate preventive measures to address the underlying causes as well as risk factors that increased the risk of trafficking in persons, such as poverty, including the feminization of poverty, gender inequality, gender stereotypes and negative social norms, including discrimination, gender-based violence, violence against women and girls, including impunity for such violence, and the persistent demand that fostered all forms of trafficking and the goods and services produced as a result of trafficking in persons. In the resolution, the Assembly also took note with appreciation, for the first time, of ICAT.

18. It is notable that at its seventy-seventh session, the General Assembly adopted resolution [77/27](#) on sport as an enabler of sustainable development, in which for the first time it called upon Member States and the sport sector to enhance their efforts to fight trafficking in persons and all forms of violence in sports.

19. At the same session, the General Assembly adopted resolution [77/202](#) on child, early and forced marriage, in which it called upon States to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation during humanitarian emergencies, situations of forced displacement, armed conflict, natural disasters and public health emergencies, and to amend laws and policies to curb impunity for sexual exploitation.

20. At its seventy-eighth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution [78/228](#), the latest iteration of a recurring resolution on improving the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons, in which it recognized the important role of ICAT in fostering coordination and cooperation in the global fight against trafficking in persons. It also stressed the need to intensify the efforts to create and strengthen pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration to reduce the exposure of people on the move to trafficking in persons.

21. In December 2023, the Office participated in the second Global Refugee Forum, held in Geneva, and contributed to four multi-stakeholder pledges, covering, inter alia, refugee protection and risks of trafficking in persons. The Forum was established to take stock, every four years, of the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees.

22. During the reporting period, the Office also continued to provide substantive input and drafting support for relevant reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on issues related to trafficking in persons, including on international cooperation in combating transnational organized crime and corruption; trafficking in women and girls; Non-Self-Governing Territories; strengthening the rule of law; the threat posed by Da'esh; migration off the coast of Libya; and conflict-related sexual violence.

#### *Security Council*

23. In its resolution [2652 \(2022\)](#) on the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons into, through and from the Libyan territory and off the coast of Libya, the Security Council condemned all acts of trafficking in persons into, through and from the Libyan territory and off the coast of Libya and reaffirmed the necessity of putting an end to the ongoing proliferation of, and endangerment of lives by, the smuggling of migrants and trafficking of persons in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya. It further reiterated this in its resolution [2698 \(2023\)](#) on the maintenance of international peace and security. Furthermore, in its resolution [2702 \(2023\)](#), the Council expressed its grave concern about trafficking in persons through Libya and underlined the importance of tackling the root causes.

24. The Security Council also expressed grave concern and condemned the extremely high levels of criminal activities in Haiti, including trafficking in persons, in its resolutions [2653 \(2022\)](#), [2692 \(2023\)](#) and [2699 \(2023\)](#). Subsequently, in its resolution [2700 \(2023\)](#), the Council demanded an immediate cessation of violence, criminal activities and human rights abuses, including trafficking in persons, which undermined the peace, stability and security of Haiti and the region.

25. UNODC continued to assist the authorities of Haiti and Libya in strengthening their criminal justice responses to tackle organized criminal groups involved in the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons, as described in greater detail under section B.2 below.

#### *Human Rights Council*

26. During the reporting period, concern was also expressed regarding trafficking in persons in the Human Rights Council. In its resolution 53/6 on human rights and climate change, the Council recalled the report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, focusing on addressing the gender dimensions of trafficking in persons in the context of climate change, displacement and disaster reduction. The Council recognized the link between the

adverse impacts of climate change, including on livelihoods, and displacement and migration, and the need for adaptation measures that benefited the most vulnerable, facilitated safe and voluntary movement, minimized forced movement and addressed human rights protection gaps in order to, inter alia, reduce the risk of trafficking and exploitation of people on the move, especially women and girls.

27. In its resolution 53/9 on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Council urged States to protect, respect and fulfil the human rights of victims of trafficking through enhanced protection and empowerment of and support and assistance for victims, including survivors of trafficking in persons, including in high-risk sectors for trafficking in persons such as the agriculture sector.

## **2. Participation in inter-agency and regional coordination and cooperation mechanisms**

28. UNODC collaborates closely with other intergovernmental organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system, and is active at both the international and regional levels. The Office has signed several memorandums of understanding and partnership agreements with organizations with key mandates and expertise in preventing and combating trafficking in persons. The Office also engages extensively with relevant civil society organizations, including survivor-led organizations, and academia to advance anti-trafficking strategies, and has continued to contribute to international and regional forums.

29. An example of such cooperation is a new joint statement of partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which was signed on 2 July 2024 by the principals of UNODC and IOM and which is based on the common interest of both agencies in ensuring holistic, people-centred responses to contemporary challenges posed by transnational organized crime in the sphere of migration. As part of this renewed partnership, UNODC and IOM will, inter alia, engage in joint efforts to protect women and children, advocate for regular migration pathways and develop opportunities for joint data collection and analysis on trafficking in persons.

### *Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons*

30. During the reporting period, UNODC led efforts to develop, expand and coordinate ICAT, in close cooperation with the Group's Co-Chairs, IOM and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, which chaired ICAT in 2023 and 2024. In 2024, ICAT welcomed the Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children as a new partner, while the United Nations University left ICAT.

31. ICAT continued to meet annually at the level of principals of the relevant United Nations agencies and other regional and international organizations, with UNODC, as coordinator, convening the meetings. During the reporting period, ICAT met twice at the level of principals, on 2 December 2022 and 8 November 2023, on both occasions releasing calls for States and relevant stakeholders to, first, address trafficking in persons in humanitarian crises and conflict situations (2022) and, second, accelerate action by 2025 to prevent and end child trafficking (2023). In line with its intention to mainstream a child protection focus in all its work through 2023 and 2024, ICAT has also produced a child-friendly version of the 2023 call to action to seek to inform children of what is necessary to address child trafficking.

32. In 2023, ICAT introduced a six-part webinar series on data collection and research related to trafficking in persons aimed at advancing discussions on data collection and research in line with the first priority, at that time, of the ICAT Plan of Action. The webinar series, held from June to November, showcased ongoing initiatives, including by ICAT members, to collect, analyse and visualize data on trafficking in persons, and covered better practices, including the framing of research questions and ethical considerations. The webinar series was attended by close to 1,000 persons in total. UNODC supported the organization of the series, including by hosting it on the Knowledge Hub on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling

platform. A detailed account of the work of ICAT in 2023 is contained in the *ICAT Annual Report 2023*.

33. In May 2024, ICAT held a session to exchange information on the emerging issue of trafficking in persons for the purpose of exploitation in online scamming centres. The discussion revealed that this form of exploitation is no longer confined to South-East Asia but has become a global issue. In 2024, ICAT produced guidance on how sustainable finance can be leveraged to counter trafficking in persons.

34. ICAT also continued efforts to keep States abreast of its work, including by organizing briefings to States on the margins of the intergovernmental meeting of the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons in 2023, and in cooperation with the Group of Friends United against Human Trafficking in December 2023.

#### *United Nations Network on Migration*

35. During the reporting period, UNODC continued to engage as a member of the Executive Committee of the United Nations Network on Migration. The Network continued to give visibility to and strengthen coordinated efforts to counter trafficking in persons in the context of international migration. Notably, UNODC co-led, with IOM, a new thematic workstream on migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons. The workstream provides policy guidance, facilitates the exchange of best practices and promotes joint initiatives against trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants. It also facilitates coordination with similar platforms at the regional and global levels.

36. In June 2023, the workstream hosted the talk of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration entitled “Towards effective solutions: addressing the complexities behind the smuggling of migrants”. This was the first virtual event held as part of the workstream, and it was chaired by UNODC. It provided an opportunity to present the first policy output under the workstream – a policy brief entitled “Mapping the landscape of the smuggling of migrants: an overview of key concepts, trends, challenges and areas for action”. In October 2023, UNODC disseminated a policy brief entitled “Countering trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants in mixed migration movements”, which details the role and relevance of UNODC mandate areas under the Global Compact for Migration.

37. In 2023, UNODC received funding from the United Nations multi-partner trust fund for three projects. The first project was a joint initiative of the UNODC Office in Costa Rica, IOM and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women to strengthen law enforcement and criminal justice agencies against human trafficking and migrant smuggling. The second project, implemented in Nigeria by UNODC and IOM, focused on strengthening fact-based and data-driven migration governance and management. The third and most recent project was a joint initiative of UNODC and the United Nations Children’s Fund to address irregular migration and combat transnational crime and trafficking in persons along maritime and land routes from Togo to Gabon. UNODC was appointed to the steering committee of the United Nations multi-partner trust fund, which is the fund’s decision-making and governance body, and charged with determining how the fund can best support collaborative work by members of the Network with national partners.

#### *Cooperation with regional organizations and processes*

38. UNODC participated in and moderated a panel on the prevention of trafficking in persons during the twenty-fourth Conference of the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons, hosted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and held in April 2024.

39. In 2023, following a prior collaborative regional exchange among selected non-governmental organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean that was facilitated by UNODC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for

Human Rights, a regional network of civil society organizations advocating for victims of trafficking in persons in criminal proceedings was established. Since then, UNODC has actively collaborated with the network, known as RED-LACTRA, which serves as a platform for sharing information and fostering collaborative efforts among civil society organizations with the primary goal of fortifying victims' access to justice in cases of trafficking in persons across Latin America and the Caribbean through legal counselling and representation.

40. In the Asia-Pacific region, UNODC continued to contribute to the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime.

### **3. Development of knowledge, normative and policy guidance and tools**

41. UNODC continued to produce standard-setting, specialized materials for practitioners that provide guidance on how to detect, investigate and prosecute cases of trafficking in persons and on how to provide protection and assistance to victims of the crime.

#### *Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime knowledge management portal*

42. The Office also expanded the Human Trafficking Knowledge Portal, within the Sharing Electronic Resources and Laws on Crime (SHERLOC) knowledge management portal. The Portal consists of three databases: a case law database, containing, as at July 2024, 1,591 trafficking in persons cases from 115 jurisdictions; a legislation database containing 648 pieces of legislation from 156 countries; and a bibliographic database containing 329 entries. SHERLOC serves as a practitioners' tool for police investigators, prosecutors and judges; a monitoring tool for government policymakers; an awareness-raising tool for the public and the media; and an information tool for researchers and all those responding to trafficking in persons. It also stands as testament to the experience of thousands of trafficked persons, as an official acknowledgement of their exploitation and a public record of State responses.

#### *Knowledge Hub on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling*

43. The Office's Knowledge Hub on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling (KNOWTS) provides an online, interactive learning management system to support the UNODC global community of practice, and functions as a one-stop shop for practitioners, offering instant access to training material, recorded training sessions, audiovisual resources, publications, insights from peers and case studies. During the reporting period, KNOWTS became an increasingly useful tool for promoting adherence to and implementation of both the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. As at July 2024, the platform has 1,703 users from 114 countries and territories, of whom 55 per cent are female. Since July 2022, KNOWTS has facilitated more than 39 events, both online and in a hybrid format, related to trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants.

#### *Publications*

44. In October 2022, UNODC published a policy brief entitled *Climate, Crime and Exploitation: The Gendered Links Between Climate-related Risks, Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants*, which recognizes that the fragility of natural environments and the adverse consequences of climate change are increasingly pushing people worldwide to move from and across territories, and that these migratory patterns have complex intersections with trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants.

45. In the same month, UNODC launched, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, the *Toolkit on the Investigation and Prosecution of Trafficking in Persons for Organ Removal*, which is aimed at encouraging proactive investigations



into such trafficking. Since its launch, the Toolkit has been viewed about 10,000 times online and practitioners have made numerous requests for access to the restricted modules.

46. Furthermore, UNODC published its biennial Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022, which provides a snapshot of the trafficking patterns and flows detected during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. It covers 141 countries and provides an overview of the response to trafficking in persons at the global, regional and national levels by analysing trafficking cases detected between 2018 and 2021. The findings are further informed and enriched through the analysis of summaries of 800 court cases adjudicated between 2012 and 2020, providing greater insights into the crime, its victims and perpetrators, and into how trafficking in persons comes to the attention of authorities.

47. In 2023, UNODC published a policy brief entitled “Accessing justice: challenges faced by trafficked persons and smuggled migrants”, which provides an insight into the obstacles faced by smuggled migrants who are victims of crime and trafficked persons in their attempts to access justice. Furthermore, it provides recommendations to Member States on how to best ensure unhindered access to justice for victims of the crime.

48. Also in 2023, UNODC launched a manual entitled *Trainer’s Manual: How to Conduct Mock Trials and Investigation Simulations Based on Trafficking in Persons Cases*, which enables the planners of mock trials on and simulated investigations into trafficking in persons to better conceptualize, prepare and implement them around the globe. The manual has since been used in several activities, including in Sierra Leone.

49. The Office also published the *Study on Illicit Financial Flows Associated with Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons from GLO.ACT Partner Countries to Europe*. The study focuses on the trends, nuances and complexities surrounding illicit financial flows associated with the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons in specific countries, and puts forth a set of recommendations aimed at informing future technical assistance.

50. In Pakistan, UNODC released a training manual on the prevention of human trafficking and migrant smuggling for civil judges and judicial magistrates, which is aimed at strengthening the capacity of civil judges and judicial magistrates to fight these two crimes in the country, and which was developed in cooperation with the Government of Pakistan.

51. In August 2023, the Office released a policy brief entitled “Casinos, cyber fraud and trafficking in persons for forced criminality in Southeast Asia”, which details an emerging crime that has expanded in recent years, namely trafficking in persons for the purpose of online scams and fraud in South-East Asia. Immediately prior to the publication of the policy brief, UNODC had published a related practical tool, entitled “Key indicators of trafficking in persons for forced criminality to commit cyber enabled crimes”.

52. The Regional Report on the Existing Capacities to Measure Trafficking in Persons in the Pacific Islands presents information collected on six Pacific countries and was published in 2023. The report assesses trafficking patterns and flows in the region and includes the results of prevalence studies conducted in two of the States. The report is the result of vast capacity-building activities carried out by UNODC over the course of three years to improve the national capacities of Pacific island States to record cases of trafficking in persons and to estimate the prevalence of the crime.

53. In Honduras, the Guía de mentoría para autoridades en materia de trata de personas (*Mentoring Guide for Law Enforcement on Trafficking in Persons*) (available in Spanish only) was designed to provide guidance to judicial, prosecutor and police training schools and other entities that have competencies in matters related to trafficking in persons, in order to sustainably build on the mentoring programme developed under the Menthor programme.

54. In Brazil, UNODC published several reports in 2024 based on research related to trafficking in persons for forced labour in gold mines, such as a report on the prevalence of forced labour in small-scale gold mining in the Tapajós river basin, State of Pará, Brazil, a report entitled, in Portuguese, “‘The gold that grows on trees’ – gold supply and value chain in the Tapajós river basin, State of Pará, Brazil” and a report on the intersection of criminal activities in the gold mining sector in the Tapajós river basin (available in Portuguese only).

## **B. Promoting and supporting the implementation of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol through technical cooperation**

### **1. Legislative assistance and development of national strategies**

55. In support of national efforts to achieve adherence to the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, UNODC assisted in the development of new and the revision of existing domestic legislation and policies on trafficking in persons in Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, the Comoros, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Turkmenistan and Uganda, as well as in the Caribbean Community and the European Union.

56. With the expert assistance of UNODC, Burkina Faso developed its first National Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons in March 2023 and Malawi launched its National Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons in October of that year. In 2024, UNODC supported the Government of Brazil in developing its fourth National Plan of Action to Counter Trafficking in Persons. The Office was also actively engaged in and supported the drafting of the National Action Plan to Counter Trafficking for the period 2024–2026 of Turkmenistan.

### **2. Strengthening criminal justice responses**

57. Under the Mentor programme, Honduras has received support in developing and implementing a long-term mentoring programme on trafficking in persons for investigators and prosecutors, focusing on exploitation for forced labour or services. As part of the programme, a pool of mentors was established to undertake professional visits to Argentina, Colombia and Guatemala in order to exchange best practices in their respective legal systems, which they later implemented in Honduras.

58. In the Dominican Republic, UNODC trained law enforcement officials and prosecutors to investigate cases of cyber-enabled trafficking in persons, and in Honduras, UNODC conducted a workshop in March 2024 entitled “Information management by the media in cases of human trafficking” for communication representatives from various institutions. The workshop included presentations on the significance of the media in combating trafficking in persons. In Peru in October 2022, UNODC organized the first National Congress of Prosecutors Specialized in Trafficking in Persons Offences to unify the interpretation of the crime and facilitate investigations into and the prosecution of cases. As a result, a circular letter for mandatory compliance was disseminated nationwide, which elaborated on victims’ right to remedy and the criteria to be used to quantify damages suffered.

59. In Central Asia, UNODC has carried out a variety of activities to counter trafficking under two projects to strengthen criminal justice responses to trafficking in persons in the region through capacity-building and mentoring, in particular in Uzbekistan, as well as in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The Office’s regional adviser in Uzbekistan continues to offer on-the-job mentoring and specialized advice to law enforcement officers and prosecutors in the region on dealing with trafficking in persons cases to enhance their skills in this field. The regional adviser has also been working on the creation and strengthening of national pools of expertise from which authorities could draw to further expand knowledge and train responsible officers.

60. Under the Transforming Alerts into Criminal Justice Responses to Combat Trafficking in Persons within Migration Flows regional initiative, which covers eight countries in South America and the Caribbean (Aruba, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Trinidad and Tobago), efforts have been deployed to strengthen the criminal justice response in cases of trafficking in persons involving Venezuelans migrating in the region. The initiative has been successful and, since its inception in 2019, more than 450 investigations have been initiated, with more than 100 traffickers arrested and over 1,000 victims, mainly Venezuelans, identified.

61. During the reporting period, UNODC, through its UN.locking Impunity of Traffickers and Supporting Justice for Victims of Trafficking in Persons in South-Eastern Europe project, analysed and reviewed concrete trafficking in persons cases, from early warnings to adjudication, to provide a foundation for the development of training and stakeholder engagement. The mock trials subsequently implemented under the project have been recognized as an efficient training methodology. The project has led to the initiation of investigations in over 100 trafficking in persons cases and the identification of over 100 victims across the project countries, which are Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia. The initiative seeks to secure justice for victims of trafficking in persons in the region and to train criminal justice professionals to strengthen responses and reinforce measures to protect victims of this crime.

62. In 2023, within the framework of the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants – Asia and the Middle East project, criminal justice systems, including in Iraq and Pakistan, benefited from cutting-edge approaches to training on responses to trafficking in persons for organ removal through the utilization of the virtual operating theatre in the Toolkit on the Investigation and Prosecution of Trafficking in Persons for Organ Removal during training and simulation exercises.

63. In January 2024, UNODC organized a study visit for Ethiopian criminal justice officials to Kenya. Eight Ethiopian officials participated in the visit, including the Director of the Witness Protection Unit, judges from the Federal High Court and members of prosecution units. Kenya was represented by 12 officials, including heads of units within the Kenya Witness Protection Agency, led by the Director of the Agency, and technical experts.

64. In Libya, since January 2023, UNODC has cooperated with local authorities to support maritime safety and security actions with the aim of tackling all forms of transnational organized crime, including trafficking in persons, in line with human rights principles.

65. With the aim of addressing the current security situation in Haiti, in particular the criminal activity of gangs that engage in or facilitate the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons, UNODC has worked to strengthen the capacity of Haitian law enforcement authorities to dismantle organized criminal networks that engage in trafficking in persons and other forms of organized crime, through capacity-building activities and the procurement of operational equipment and infrastructure.

66. During the reporting period, UNODC also strengthened the capacity of a range of officials in Bangladesh to better address the situation of the Rohingya people, who often become victims of crimes in the hands of smugglers and traffickers. In July 2022, UNODC organized a regional consultation on addressing trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. A refresher workshop for public prosecutors and humanitarian agencies on trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants was held in Bangladesh in August 2023.

### **3. Promoting international cooperation**

67. UNODC, through the Transforming Alerts into Criminal Justice Responses to Combat Trafficking in Persons within Migration Flows regional initiative, organized

three bilateral meetings between Ecuador and Peru during the reporting period. As a result, the two countries created a binational immediate response team at their joint border. The team aims to strengthen the countries' joint response to trafficking in persons and to identify the immediate needs of victims that are referred to it. UNODC has provided technical assistance to the team in relation to cases of cross-border trafficking in persons. Since the Team's creation in April 2022, nine trafficking in persons cases have been initiated and six female victims have been identified and supported through the technical assistance provided to the Team.

68. In 2023, UNODC launched Project Turquesa, a joint initiative with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), to better combat trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean, where organized criminal groups make enormous profits from these crimes. The project draws on the strengths of both organizations to ensure a whole-of-justice approach to addressing the crimes, ensuring that the rights of smuggled migrants and victims of trafficking are fully respected. The project also provides critical research and operational and strategic analysis to improve the understanding of the routes, trends and modi operandi of traffickers and smugglers. Through the Office's efforts, gender considerations have been integrated throughout the project. Under the project, UNODC has provided specialized mentoring support to 32 prosecutors and law enforcement officials from the region, 56 per cent of whom were women. One result has been the increased capacities of trainees to combat trafficking in persons through the misuse of new technologies.

69. Since 2023, INTERPOL, with support from UNODC, has been conducting Operation Turquesa V, in which nearly 50,000 checks have been carried out at migration checkpoints in 33 countries. The operation has resulted in the arrest of 348 suspected traffickers and smugglers and the rescue of 166 victims up to March 2024.

70. With the support of UNODC, a new collaborative regional platform has been established, namely, the Central Asian Law Enforcement Network Against Trafficking in Persons, with the aim of strengthening the law enforcement response to trafficking in persons and related crimes in the region and beyond. The Network meets on a regular basis, enabling its members to learn about new and emerging trends and patterns in trafficking in persons and establish dialogue with participating destination countries in Europe and South Asia.

71. In December 2023, UNODC facilitated a study visit by representatives of competent authorities of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to Portugal in order to exchange best practices on combating trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants and to establish contacts for future cooperation.

72. In April 2024, UNODC organized an expert group meeting for representatives of Bangladesh, the Comoros, Kenya, Malaysia, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and the United Republic of Tanzania on promoting South-South cooperation to identify joint courses of action in the Indo-Pacific region to combat human trafficking more effectively, in order to respond to an emerging trend involving the exploitation by criminal networks of maritime routes in the Indian Ocean for trafficking purposes.

73. Within the framework of the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants – Asia and the Middle East project, major breakthroughs were made in bilateral relations between Bangladesh and both Libya and Malaysia, which constitute key transit and destination countries for trafficking in and the smuggling of Bangladeshi nationals, with the establishment of focal points for direct judicial and police cooperation and of pathways for improved international cooperation with Libya.

74. In a sector that is still overwhelmingly dominated by men, UNODC, through the Global Action project, also focused during the reporting period on supporting female law enforcement professionals, including through the Women's Network of Gender

Champions against Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling. This was achieved both by increasing the number of female law enforcement professionals trained and by developing training sessions in close cooperation with beneficiaries. The project thus built skills among female police officers that would improve community-police relations. To address the gendered nature of trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants and the serious impact of inequality on women in the institutions responding to these crimes, the Network launched, in February 2024, two gender-related training modules to enable those providing training and driving institutional reform to incorporate a strong gender perspective into their work.

75. During the reporting period, the second phase of implementation of the project was completed and the third phase concurrently initiated under the Protect Project, which covers Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Central Asia, with a focus on Tajikistan. Also during the reporting period, UNODC embarked on the fourth phase of the project, covering South Asia, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The core objective of the third and fourth phases is to support partner governments in developing evidence-based strategies and legal and policy frameworks, enhancing the capacity of practitioners to better respond to trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling, fostering international cooperation and improving protection and assistance measures for victims of trafficking and migrants in vulnerable situations.

#### **4. Data collection and research**

76. During the reporting period, UNODC documented a sharp rise in online scams and fraud and in trafficking in persons for the purpose of online scam offences committed in South-East Asia. In early 2021, an increasing number of stories started to emerge of trafficking victims escaping from scam compounds in, inter alia, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam. Several Governments in the region also voiced concerns to UNODC and other United Nations agencies regarding citizens being trafficked and severely mistreated, primarily in scam compounds.

77. The Office has documented the fact that organized criminal groups have established extensive criminal operations in countries in the region. They have taken advantage of the existing casino and special economic zone infrastructure, and of the widespread unemployment in the region, to set up sophisticated operations that coerce trafficked people into committing online scams and fraud.

78. The Office observed that trafficking in persons for forced criminality in South-East Asia is often intertwined with high levels of money-laundering and various forms of cyber-enabled crimes. It is significant that trafficking in persons for forced criminality would not have reached its current scale and level of operational sophistication if not for the corruption and complicity of some public officials who have enabled, profited from or been passive in addressing the illegal activities of organized criminal groups. The *modus operandi* of criminal operations is similar across countries. Organized criminal groups have developed and implemented sophisticated arrangements to defraud people around the world, utilizing trafficked victims to perform various criminal acts. This lucrative illicit business continues to expand, utilizing the latest artificial intelligence tools, including face swapping and voice replication, to bypass banking security systems.

79. Victims are being recruited from regions around the world, including Asia, Africa, South America and the Middle East, and the victims being scammed are also from different parts of the world, including Asia, Europe, North America and Oceania, making it a global issue. The people rescued from scam compounds are, for the most part, victims of trafficking in persons for forced criminality, and they have reported similar stories of being deceptively recruited into situations of forced criminality in casino complexes or highly guarded buildings in South-East Asia. After travelling to or within the destination country, they were confined to large casino or hotel complexes, or other secure buildings designed to harbour and confine victims (known

as “scam compounds”), where they were forced, for up to 15 hours a day, to commit online scams and fraud.

80. These online scams and fraud, committed primarily by trafficked persons under duress, have defrauded thousands of people around the world. Victims of trafficking should be able to access protection and assistance, reintegration support and justice, which is at present largely being denied to people victimized by this form of trafficking. Despite recent efforts by States and civil society, trafficking in persons for forced criminality is not slowing down. Scam compounds continue to expand in size and operation. UNODC has observed that countries’ efforts to combat this form of exploitation have a limited impact due to a lack of coordinated efforts across jurisdictions.

81. This emerging form of trafficking in persons is an issue of growing concern and was addressed for the first time in resolution 33/1, adopted at the thirty-third session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. In the resolution, the Commission encouraged Member States to counter human traffickers’ use of technological advancements and new methods to target potential victims, including for the purpose of the forced perpetration of online scams.

82. During the reporting period, UNODC published the Study on Illicit Financial Flows Associated with Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons from GLO.ACT Partner Countries to Europe. The study focuses on the cross-border movement of money from several countries in Asia and the Middle East to Europe, and reveals that highly organized criminal groups, as opposed to individuals and small criminal networks, make the highest financial gains from the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons. Criminal networks frequently use payment and transfer methods that are not easily traceable by the authorities, such as direct cash payments and hawala – a money or value transfer system in which money is not transferred through any actual movement of cash but through transactions between hawala brokers, who operate on a system of trust. In some cases, illicit finances are registered as the legal income of legitimate businesses and are processed and transferred together with legal funds. The study shows that the illicit income made by smugglers and traffickers is largely spent in one of the following three ways: it is either sent back to the country in which the trafficking or smuggling originated, used to support a lavish lifestyle or registered as the legal income of legitimate businesses.

## **5. Crime prevention and awareness-raising**

83. In 2023, under the theme of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons “Reach every victim of trafficking, leave no one behind”, UNODC called on Governments, law enforcement, public services and civil society to assess and enhance their efforts to strengthen prevention, to identify and support victims and to end impunity. In 2024, the theme is “Leave no child behind in the fight against human trafficking” and is dedicated to advocating for accelerated action to end child trafficking. The fight against child trafficking is a priority for UNODC and ICAT, with the holding of several awareness-raising events, the development of strategies and the release of publications and public statements since the Conference last met.

84. During the reporting period, UNODC launched the “Women Can” campaign under the framework of the Women’s Network of Gender Champions against Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling of the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants. The campaign presented profiles of women and men in leadership positions in Asia and the Middle East and focused on sharing advice for women from female and male leaders in the criminal justice sector. It also sought to mobilize leaders of institutions that addressed trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants to promote institutional-level reform to ensure the better representation and promotion of women.

## 6. Protection and support of victims and survivors

85. A notable element of the new Action against Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling is its aim to better support victims and survivors of these crimes. Key aspects of programmatic support include enhancing access to justice and other means of support, including victim and survivor perspectives in the design and delivery of anti-trafficking and migrant smuggling responses; creating and sustaining partnerships with civil society organizations, including survivor and youth-led organizations; and developing and delivering trauma-informed models to support victim and survivor care and engagement. In 2023, the Office, through the Action, included 26 survivors in its various programmatic activities and workshops. In 2024, UNODC established the Child Trafficking, Survivor Engagement and Partnerships Team in its Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section to advance the Office's work on engaging and partnering with survivors of trafficking and amplifying their voices, in line with the Action.

86. In Malawi in 2023, UNODC supported the Ministry of Homeland Security in conducting intelligence-led operations at the Dzaleka refugee camp by providing mentoring and operational case support on trafficking in persons. As a result, 87 victims of trafficking were identified and rescued by law enforcement authorities in January and February 2024. In the future, the Office will continue to support the identification and referral of victims at the Dzaleka refugee camp in 2024 through the training of faith leaders, law enforcement officers and civil society members to raise awareness of trafficking in persons.

## III. Conclusions

87. The continued relevance of global discourse on trafficking in persons and the need to prioritize enhanced responses and adopt better practices are clear. Trafficking in persons is an issue of global significance, with more challenges and forms of exploitation emerging, such as trafficking for sexual exploitation facilitated by the misuse of new technologies and trafficking in persons for forced criminality. Despite the progress made to date, trafficking in persons remains a pressing issue, victimizing people and affecting all regions. States parties continue to consistently seek technical assistance and policy-oriented and standard-setting guidance to support the implementation of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol.

88. In promoting the implementation of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, in particular by providing mentoring and capacity-building to Member States and fostering inter-agency cooperation, UNODC has consistently sought the active participation of all relevant stakeholders at the international, regional and national levels. Its active involvement in ICAT as its permanent coordinator and secretariat, despite a shortage in funds to undertake these functions, is a testament to the Office's commitment to harmonizing policy approaches to the crime of trafficking in persons among United Nations and other key entities and to enhancing coordination between them.

89. UNODC will continue its efforts to promote and support the implementation of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol and work jointly with Member States and international organizations, civil society and persons with lived experience of the crime towards increasing the effectiveness of the response to trafficking in persons. The work, despite its continued success and increasing impact globally, remains under-resourced, therefore the Conference's invitation, in its resolution 10/3, for Member States to provide extrabudgetary resources for those purposes, remains pertinent.

90. The timely implementation of the Review Mechanism, early preparation by States parties for their own reviews and the related efforts of States parties to benchmark their national implementation of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol are key to making progress in global efforts to respond to the crime, including through

the formal identification of gaps and shortcomings. Increased engagement by all States parties, in particular through the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons, as well as by civil society organizations, through the constructive dialogue on trafficking in persons, in the exchange of thematic challenges and experience will also improve understanding of and responses to the crime.

91. UNODC remains committed to promoting and supporting the implementation of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, and to working jointly with all stakeholders to find innovative and more effective ways to counter this crime.

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