

Combating Trafficking in Persons: Cameroon at a Glance



Summary

- According to UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol, trafficking in persons encompasses “recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person by such means as threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud or deception for the purpose of exploitation”
- Any coercion, deception or abuse of power nullifies the manufactured consent of the survivor in cases of trafficking in persons.
- According to the UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2020, between 2016-2017, 12 individuals were convicted of trafficking in persons and 5 individuals were acquitted in Cameroon. During the same period, 31 women and 121 men were detected as suspects of trafficking in persons in Cameroon.
- Pockets of the Cameroonian economy from cotton production, tea plantations, oil and gas production, cocoa production to forestry are all enmeshed in channels of trafficking in persons
- This policy brief adopts the socio-ecological approach to prevent and mitigate trafficking in persons as recommended by the Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons.
- Survivor-centric advocacy requires coalescing of litigators, law enforcement, policymakers and legislators.
- Transnational trafficking in persons augurs for convergence on differential jurisprudences. Regional agreements in better information and intelligence sharing are therefore desirable.
- Adequate systematic data collection, management and analysis regarding cis-men and trans population that is trafficked is required.
- School-based education must be regularised such that potency of recruiting child labour is minimised
- Trafficking channels need to be weeded out entirely rather than individual intermediaries

Developed by: Vani Bhardwaj (Intern at CCID)

Edited by: Numfor William Che, Ph.D (Program Manager for Policy and Advocacy - CCID)

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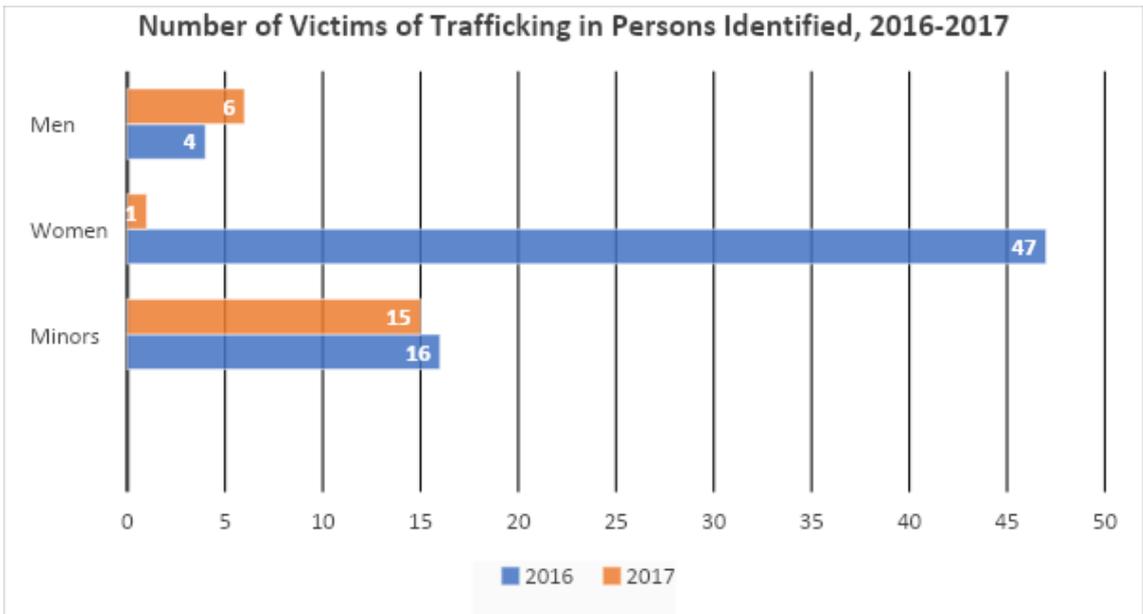
I. What's the Issue?

Article 3 of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children mandates that “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”¹.

In Cameroon as per Law No. 2011/24 of 14 December 2011 Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Person and Slavery, ‘Trafficking in Persons’ implies “the fact of promoting or ensuring the movement of a person inside or outside Cameroon in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or another material benefit of whatever nature”.

Cameroon is enveloped in regional and global channels of trafficking. The consent of the person stands void. The Law No. 2011/24 indicates evident interlinkages between exploitation of persons, slavery in persons, debt bondage of persons with trafficking in persons.

The national law perceives TIP and associated illicit economies as a financial and material benefit rather than being explorative about the dehumanising aspect of it - the exploitation and abuse of women and children, how the misuse of power dynamics lead to Gender Based Violence (GBV).



Source: Ministry of Justice, Cameroon

Figure 1

¹<https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf>



Methodology

UN Global Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons, Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT) and Global Migration Group are additional UN responses besides the UN Protocol. Trafficking in Persons can occur for:

- Sexual Exploitation
- Forced Economic Labour
- Organ Trafficking

The gendered aspect of trafficking reveals how women and girls are trafficked mainly for sexual exploitation while forced economic labour victimises majority of adolescent boys and men².

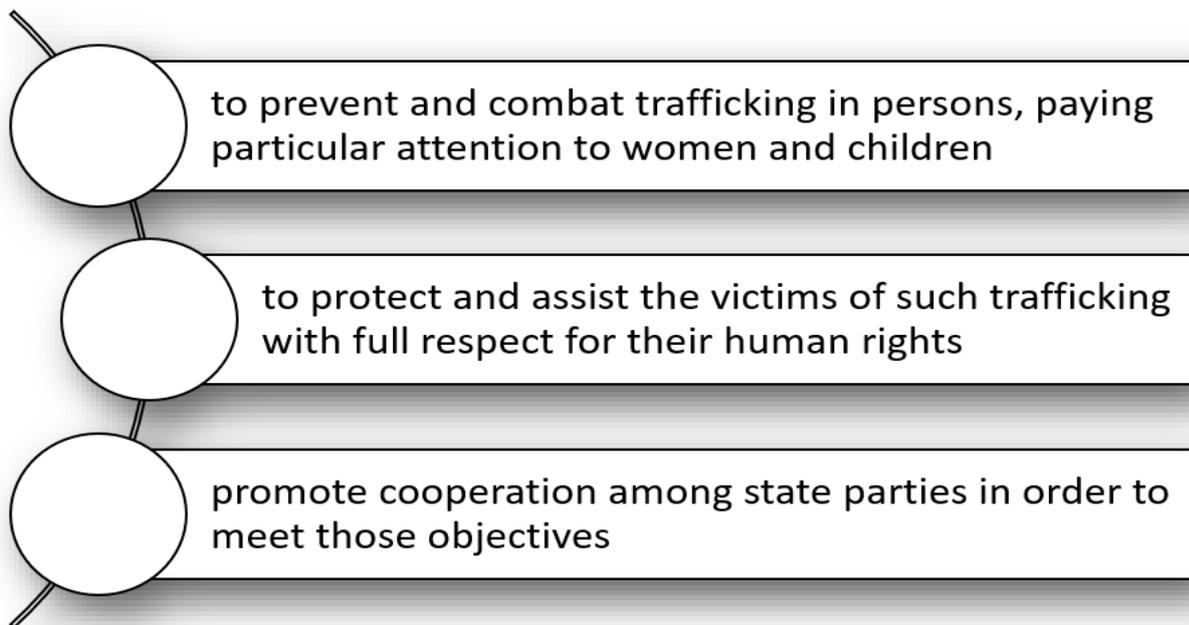


Figure2: Objectives of the UN Protocol Against TIP

The above-demonstrated objectives of the UN Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons have been adopted as the methodology adopted in this policy brief. The intersection of various vulnerabilities makes a conducive ecosystem for Trafficking In Persons. The overlap of personal, situational and contextual vulnerabilities amounts to a higher incidence rate of TIP. Comprehension of such underlying societal vulnerabilities will facilitate prevention of TIP and address the root causes.

²https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf



Fig 3. Overlapping vulnerabilities influenced by variegated dimensions increase incidence of Trafficking In Persons³.

The Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Trafficking in Persons advocates for a socio-ecological approach for preventing and mitigating trafficking in persons. Consolidating resilience among individuals and the communities they are situated with helps address systemic issues that will result in positive spill over effects for individuals, communities and the society at a macro level. Taking from this approach, this policy brief elucidates upon the [driving factors for Trafficking in Persons and the concomitant consequences](#) . Next section, proceeds to the intersectionality between Trafficking in Persons and Gender Based Violence followed by the policy responses adopted in Cameroon against trafficking in persons. The brief is rounded off by the recommendations as to what policymakers can do.

II. [Driving factors for trafficking in persons](#)

Inadequate healthcare, education, poverty and lack of social protection systems compound the irregular passageways for escaping violence and armed conflict; as a result families get separated and children become extremely vulnerable to channels of human trafficking⁴.

Trafficking in women and children gets exaggerated by derived demand from employers across multi-sectoral niches embedded in cheap, exploitative labour⁵. Products and services made by trafficked labour have an end market consumer.

³https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/publications/icat_issue_brief_12_vulnerability_to_tip.pdf

⁴https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/publications/icat-ib-06-trafficking_in_children.pdf

⁵https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/publications/preventing_trafficking_in_persons_by_addressing_demand_2014.pdf



Women are often positioned in low skilled and undervalued jobs in the informal sector of the economy. Resultantly, women become gullible to trafficking networks.

Climate Crisis and Human Trafficking

Climate change is fuelling distress migration from Cameroon to Chad. Such displacement has recorded that 8 in 10 are women and children⁶, with many women being pregnant at the time of fleeing. The shrinking of River Logone as a resource and erosion of their livelihoods has amounted to intercommunal tensions erupting between farmers, herders and traders in Far North of Cameroon.

In particular, migrants are vulnerable to forced labour, human trafficking and modern slavery⁷. Non-trafficked migrants confront lesser socio-economic issues. Failure of crops due to droughts and erratic rainfall can deteriorate conditions of economic security for households. Health related emergencies in the household push entire family members into making tough decisions to accept getting trafficked at face value⁸. Local agents and intermediaries for trafficking consolidate the inter-state illicit economy and transnational trade of human flesh. Victims of trafficking enter from Cameroon to Nigeria and are trafficked in forward linkages to Western Europe and Gulf countries⁹. It has been revealed through recounting of survivors' ordeal¹⁰ that in Cameroon, the trafficker is familiar to the potential victim and belongs to their neighbourhood or community.

Armed conflict

The deterioration of the Anglophone conflict has made the cocoa farmers flee. Meanwhile, smuggling of cocoa has become normalised¹¹. Very often, human trafficking facilitates the cultivation of onions, gold mining, livestock, tea production and gravel quarrying; thereby leading to child labour. Herders of Northern Cameroon exploit children from across the border in their spare parts shops¹². Reports of food producers transforming into food beggars have been covered widely by international media¹³. Displaced migrants in refugee camps are more likely in danger of getting trafficked, particularly the youth and women.

The lure of education in urban centres for children results in the smuggling of children, their kidnapping and an exaggerated rise in underage prostitution¹⁴.

⁶<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1107622>

⁷https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/migrants_and_their_vulnerability.pdf

⁸https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2022-05/20936IIED_0.pdf

⁹<https://d-nb.info/100760199X/34>

¹⁰<https://humantraffickingsearch.org/resource/how-this-human-trafficking-survivor-gives-women-a-future-at-home/>

¹¹<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cameroon-cocoa-conflict-exclusive/exclusive-cameroon-cocoa-exporters-farmers-flee-crisis-in-anglophone-region-idUSKCN1LE1KC>

¹²<https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-trafficking-in-persons-report-2/cameroon/>

¹³<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cameroon-conflict-environment-idUSKCN1UP0KR>

¹⁴U.S. Embassy- Yaoundé. Reporting. January 15, 2020.



This has become prevalent in regions with Internally Displaced Persons within Cameroon. Inability to access justice and underlying economic instability make the IDPs vulnerable to labour and sex trafficking.

Transboundary trafficking of young girls and boys by Boko Haram has taken root particularly in North Cameroon. While boys have been recruited into Boko Haram, girls have been used as suicide bomber, sex slaves, cooks and porters¹⁵. Forcible marriage of young women to militants of Boko Haram have found it difficult to reintegrate into society after they are abandoned by the militants with unwanted pregnancies. Abduction of women for such marriages and ostracisation of children born from such wedlock are ostracised and exploited¹⁶.

Trafficking in Persons is a crime with interlinkages to migration, social development and security, conflict and climate induced displacement¹⁷. Nexus amongst terrorism, sexual violence and trafficking has also been recognised by the UN.

III. Consequences of Trafficking in Persons

Cocoa and gold mining slavery

The consequent effects of trafficking are the sexual exploitation of children working on cocoa farms, given that the government has not made use of children in the trafficking of drugs as prohibitive¹⁸. Informalised sector of the economy aggravates the conditions of child labour resulting in debt bondage and rings of trafficking for illicit activities.

Refugee children from Central African Republic (CAR) are trafficked for sex trafficking and artisanal gold mining in the East and Adamawa regions. The scope for better economic opportunities allows the potential for fraudulent labour recruiters to traffic Cameroonian women to Middle East in the guise of domestic economic slavery. Most Cameroonians that are trafficked for purposes of sexual slavery and forced labour are drawn from rural parts of the country and smuggled illegally across Kuwait, Lebanon, Switzerland, Cyprus, Nigeria, Chad among other countries¹⁹. Trafficking networks from Cameroon reach prostitution rings in Morocco.

An issue concerning public health

Trauma in trafficked boys is hard to mitigate mainly due to gender stereotypes that stops them from becoming emotionally grounded by psycho-social healing²⁰.

¹⁵<https://institute.global/policy/boko-haram-cameroon>

¹⁶<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroon-confronting-boko-haram>

¹⁷https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/publications/icat_analytical_paper_2020_final_0.pdf

¹⁸https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2020/Cameroon.pdf

¹⁹<https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-trafficking-in-persons-report-2/cameroon/>

²⁰<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5006aa262.pdf>

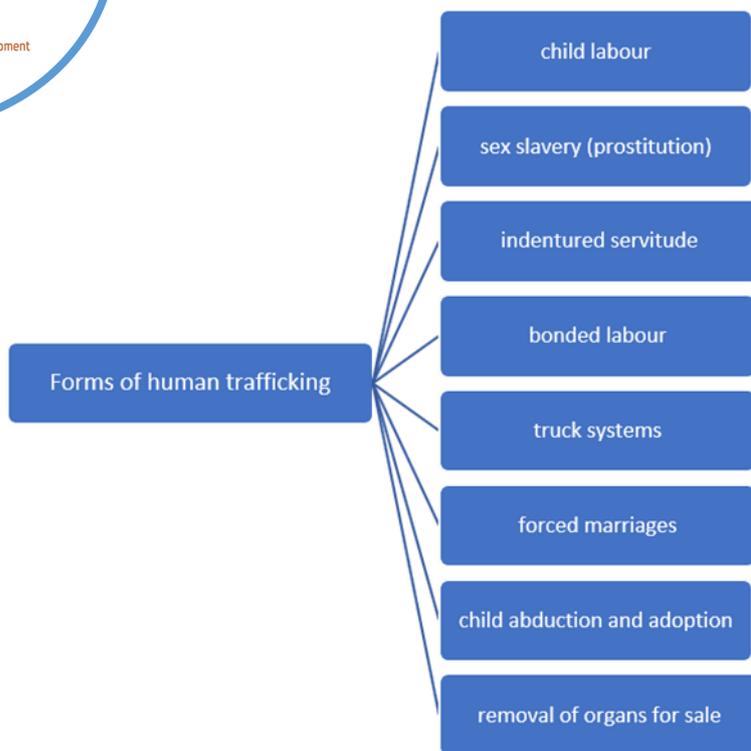


Figure 4: Few forms of human trafficking have been listed above

Trafficking in Persons and Forced Marriages

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states in Article 16 that “marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”. In the anti-trafficking legislation, exploitative and forced marriages are subsumed under “practices similar to slavery”. Such marriages are utilised as a method of recruitment²⁷ to trafficking channels. Marriage as a tool for transboundary trafficking to get the bride to the destination country and then exploiting her for domestic servitude and sexual slavery. Fraud, intimidation and abuse of gendered power dynamics are misused by agents, husbands, recruiters for trafficking prospective brides or in lieu of bride price²⁸.

Trafficking in Persons and Domestic Violence

Involuntary servitude, emotional manipulation, commercial sex, forced labour and often times living with the trafficker, trafficked individuals undergo intimate partner trafficking as well²⁹. The complex environment of abusive behaviours perpetuates domestic violence.

Trafficking in Persons and Sexual Violence

Power and control equations determine whether victims get lured by lucrative employment opportunities or many times victims get romantically involved with perpetrators of trafficking. Oftentimes, commodification of children and women is encouraged by family members for financial gains³⁰.

²⁷<https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/rip/rip32>

²⁸https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2020/UNODC_Interlinkages_Trafficking_in_Persons_and_Marriage.pdf

²⁹https://nnedv.org/latest_update/intersections-domestic-violence-human-trafficking/

³⁰<https://safevoices.org/what-domestic-violence/sex-trafficking-and-exploitation>



The caregivers, guardians or parents keep silent as they have poor bargaining power juxtaposed to local agents and intermediaries carrying out trafficking.

The importance of addressing structural violence against women and girls cannot be denied to implement counter-trafficking interventions. This will reduce entrenched gender inequalities, foster community re-integration and eliminate community stigmatisation for survivors³¹.

Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labour

Stalling of wages, fraudulent and devious ways of creating debt traps which make it difficult to escape for the workers, withholding of official documents highlight the living conditions devoid of human dignity and respect³². Economic exploitation most often involves manufactured consensus.

V. Responses to trafficking in persons in Cameroon

Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, 2015 advocates for ending of forced labour, human trafficking, modern slavery and all forms of child labour. Target 16.2 espouses end of abuse, trafficking and exploitation and all forms of violence against and torture of children. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) prohibits number of trafficking-related practices – modern slavery, forced labour and servitude. General Recommendation 19 in The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that trafficking positions women at particular risk of abuse and violence. Article 5 of the Palermo Protocol, 2000 mandates States to criminalise attempted trafficking, actual trafficking or any other typology of deliberative participation in an organisation in a trafficking scheme. Article 8 of the Palermo Protocol is concerned with the safe and preferably voluntary repatriation of trafficked persons. Trafficking in Persons cannot be addressed from solely a criminal vantage point or treated solely as an immigration issue.

Table 1: Status of Ratification of International Convention by Cameroon

International Conventions	Ratified or Not
ILO 29 Forced Labor, 1930	✓
ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, 1948	✓
ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining, 1949	✓
ILO 97 Migration for Employment, 1949	✓
ILO 100 Equal Remuneration, 1951	✓
ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor, 1957	✓

³¹ <https://winrock.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Addressing-inter-linkages.pdf>
³² <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/definition/lang--en/index.htm>



ILO 111 Discrimination, 1958	✓
ILO 138 Minimum Age, 1973	✓
ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies, 1997	✗
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor, 1999	✓
Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, 2000	✓

In Cameroon Penal Code, 2016:

- Section 342: Whoever subjects a person to debt bondage shall be punished with imprisonment for 5-10 years and with a fine from CFAF10,000 to CFAF 500, 000
- Section 342-1: Whoever engages even occasionally in the practice of trafficking in persons or slavery shall be punished with imprisonment from 10-20 years with fine from CFAF 50,000 to CFAF 1,000,000.

Box 1: Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery, 2011

Section 2-6 of the Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery delineates the prohibition of child trafficking and the prohibition of child labour. As we will see, child trafficking and child labour are intertwined.

Section 2:

- a) A person : human being of either sex regardless of age
- b) Trafficking in persons: the fact of promoting or ensuring the movement of a person inside or outside Cameroon in order to obtain , directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit of whatever nature
- c) Slavery in persons: defined as the recruitment transfer, accommodation or reception of persons for exploitation, through threat, the use of force, or other forms of coercion, kidnapping, fraud, deception, abuse of authority or taking advantage of a state of vulnerability or through offer or acceptance of benefits to obtain the consent of a person having authority over the victim.
- d) Exploitation of persons: shall include at least the exploitation or promotion of prostitution of persons, or any other forms of sexual exploitation, exploitation of labour or forced labour , slavery or practices similar to slavery, serfdom or the removal or organs.
- e) The consent of the person is void: where acts of violence were committed on the victim himself or on persons having legal or customary custody over him.



- f) Debt bondage of persons: the fact of pledging a person as security before a creditor of a loan or a debt for the purpose of exploitation.

Section 3:

- (1) Whoever subjects a person to debt bondage shall be punished with imprisonment for from 5 to 10 years and a fine of from 10000 to 500000 CFA francs.
- (2) The penalties provided for in Section 3(1) above shall be doubled where the offender is either an ascendant, a guardian or a person having even customary custody over the victim.
- (3) Whoever boards a person in debt bondage shall be punished with imprisonment for 10 years and with fine of from 10000 to 1000000 million CFA francs.

Section 4: Whoever engages even occasionally in the practice of trafficking in person or slavery shall be punished with imprisonment of from 10 to 20 years and with fine from 50000 to 1000000 million CFA francs.

Section 5: whoever engages in trafficking in persons and slavery shall be punished with punishment from 15 to 20 years and with fine from 100000 to 10000000 CFA francs where:

- the offence is committed against a minor of 15 years
- the perpetrator is a legitimate, natural or adopted ascendant of the victim
- the offender has authority over the victim or is expected to participate by virtue of his duties in the fight against slavery or peacekeeping
- the offence is committed by an organized gang or an association of criminals
- the offence is committed with the use of a weapon
- the victim sustains injuries as described in Section 277 of the penal Code
- where the victim dies as a result of acts related to the offence

Section 6: offenders, co-offenders and accomplices of crimes of debt bondage, trafficking in persons and slavery shall, in addition, be sentenced with the accessory penalties provided for under Section 30 of the Penal Code.

National Committee to Combat Child Labour (CNLCTE) is the coordinating body that implements the National Plan of Action to Combat Child Labour and Trafficking in Children. Inter-Ministerial Committee on Trafficking in Persons is chaired by the Secretary General of the Office of the Prime Minister, includes members of eight ministries, law enforcement personnel, civil society organizations, and NGOs.



Oversees Regional Task Forces on Trafficking in Persons in Northwest, Southwest, and Littoral Provinces.

Through its Minors Brigade, the Ministry of Social Affairs, supports local police in their investigations of child trafficking and the use of children in hazardous work.

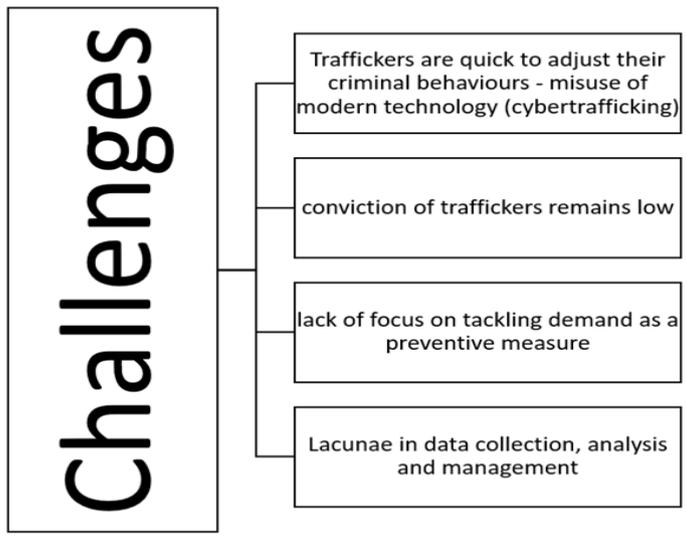


Figure 5. Challenges regarding redressal of Trafficking in Persons (TIP)

VI. What should policymakers do?

The below mentioned four themes are adopted by the UN Global Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons³³:

1. Prevention of trafficking in persons.
2. Protection of and assistance to survivors of trafficking in persons.
3. Prosecution of crimes of trafficking in persons.
4. Strengthening of Partnerships against trafficking in persons.

In light of above, we provide the following recommendations:

- ⇒ Survivor-centric advocacy requires coalescing of litigators, law enforcement, policymakers and legislators.
- ⇒ For addressing human trafficking related to commercial agriculture and mining activities, a task force with stakeholder Multi-National Companies (MNCs) and business lobbies is desirable in order to weed out variants of Gender-Based Violence that enable trafficking in persons.

³³[https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/United_Nations_Global_Plan_of_Action_to_Combat_Trafficking_in_Persons.pdf)

- ⇒ Digital education to the youth, especially women, to navigate cyberspace in a secure manner.
- ⇒ Awareness building for prospective migrants to trafficking-intensive nations. Women survivors with their lived experiences can forewarn future migrants to be wary of cases of recruitment fraud such as in gulf countries.
- ⇒ Survivor empowerment and GBV mitigatory strategies are interrelated.
- ⇒ Transnational trafficking in persons augurs for convergence on differential jurisprudences. Regional agreements in better information and intelligence sharing are therefore desirable.
- ⇒ Reintegration and social exclusion of trafficked persons into societies is the responsibility of states of origin, state of transit, state of destination.
- ⇒ Work with local survivor driven local organisations
- ⇒ Induct high quality of cyber safety technologies in devices particularly meant for child use
- ⇒ Non-national child survivors of trafficking are treated equally with nationals.
- ⇒ technology can be used productively for fighting incidents and channels of trafficking. Using blockchain, facial recognition and artificial intelligence to encourage traceability of survivors of trafficking as well as intermediaries and local agents facilitating trafficking channels³⁴.
- ⇒ Orphaned and abandoned children should be given protection by assigned guardians or child care homes. Their official documentation should be made on a priority basis by the state authorities.
- ⇒ Consumer based boycotting of products and services rooted in trafficked labour.
- ⇒ Trafficking channels need to be weeded out entirely rather than individual intermediaries.
- ⇒ School-based education must be regularised such that potency of recruiting child labour is minimised.
- ⇒ Adequate systematic data collection, management and analysis regarding cis-men and trans population that is trafficked is required.

³⁴ <https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/>

[human trafficking and technology trends challenges and opportunities web.pdf](https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/human_trafficking_and_technology_trends_challenges_and_opportunities_web.pdf)



About Us

Constituted on 6th April 2016 as a non - profit organisation and recently being awarded an ECOSOC status by the United Nations, we work with communities to bring diverse groups together and leverage their abilities, interests, and resources to engender shared values and benefits. We ensure local ownership of initiatives by working with communities to drive program design and implementation. We highly value developing a comprehensive understanding of the social, cultural, political, and economic dynamics in the communities where we implement our programs and interventions. At CCID, we aim to empower individuals and communities to uplift women, young people—especially girls—and the wider community to be leaders for positive change. We are an organisation made up of community development experts who recognise that to create a sustainable world, we must harness communities’ potential. We strongly believe that women and young people in Cameroonian communities are central assets whose full potential remains untapped. We are also cognizant that the majority of indigenous people in communities across Cameroon live under the poverty line and work with community - based organisations to meet their needs. CCID has been working in several areas to advance women’s rights and gender equality set by BPFA +25, namely sexual harassment, community development, SRHR advocacy and policy management. We have held campaigns called “Safe Schools for All” to promote an academic and community culture that effectively and strategically addresses and prevents sexual harassment in learning environments. We have fellowship programs to educate and train young leaders regarding gender issues, development and capacity building at the grass - root level so that there can be a bottom to top change, and last but not least, we devote time and energy toward developing policy and advocacy documents that provide readers with an understanding of key issues regarding human rights and community development in Cameroon especially in the context of women and girls. We also use these briefs to urge community leaders, local policymakers, government officials, and other authorities to reform policies, traditions, and norms that interfere with Cameroonians’ basic rights.

Contact Us

Community Centre for Integrated Development

Auberge Entrance, Bunduma – Buea South West Region Cameroon

P.O.Box 1505 Molyko – Buea South West Region Cameroon

Tel : +237 233 324 360 /+237 666 952 306 / +237 670 222 514

Whatsapp: +237 6 85 99 80 65

Mail: info@comuceid.org Website: www.comuccid.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/comuceid

Twitter: [CCID_Official](https://twitter.com/CCID_Official)