RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONSULTATIONS

For The National Strategic Action Plan To
Monitor And Combat Human Trafficking (2026-2030), Sri Lanka

IOM
UN MIGRATION

FOREWORD

The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) acknowledges that human trafficking constitutes a gross violation of some of the most fundamental values of society, such as the fulfilment of human rights, respect and equality and recognises that women and children are particularly vulnerable. The GOSL also acknowledges that men also fall victim to human trafficking and that the hidden nature of the crime and the increasing use of the internet to recruit and exploit victims is bringing increasing challenges.

The GoSL has articulated a vision titled "A Thriving Nation, A Beautiful Life", which serves as the cornerstone of its policy framework and has outlined several strategies to prevent and combat human trafficking. While the policy document does not explicitly mention human trafficking, its comprehensive approach addresses the root causes and contributing factors that make people vulnerable to trafficking. Through its commitment to foster a prosperous, equitable, and harmonious society the GoSL prioritises the protection of all its citizens through promoting accountability and strengthening the rule of law.

The proposed recommendations for the National Strategic Action Plan (NSAP) to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking (2026 -2030) fully support the Government's commitment to prevent and combat trafficking and protect those who fall victim. The recommendations have been developed through a participatory and consultative process and build on the action plans developed in 2015-2019 and 2021 – 2025. The consultation involved the active participation of members of the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force (NAHTTF) and included an internal review of the 2021-2025 action plan, and a desk review of national laws, policies, regional and international instruments and current trends and best practices. Consultations were held with members of the NAHTTF to discuss the implementation of the plan, its results and to identify any limitations and constraints.

In support of GoSL policy and to ensure a whole of Government, whole of society approach, and to improve coherence, efficiency, and effectiveness, consultations were also held with civil society and non-government stakeholders to gather key input. This national consultation workshop was attended by over 50 CSO representatives from different districts in Sri Lanka. Further, a separate consultation was conducted with the development partners. These consultations with non-government stakeholders, were aimed at ensuring that the recommendations were representative of all stakeholders and relevant to meet the new challenges and trends. The consultation was guided by a structured methodology to gather standardised information.

In 2006, the GoSL introduced the Penal Code (Amendment) Act No. 16 of 2006 which comprehensively defines human trafficking in line with the provisions of the Palermo protocol which was ratified in 2015. The Government has also aligned its policy framework with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Global Compact on Migration (GCM).

The recommendations for the National Strategic Action Plan (2026-2030) have been developed in adherence with the aspirations of the Palermo Protocol of 2000, Penal Code (Amendment) Act No. 16 of 2006 and other relevant legislation. It is predicated on five pillars – namely, prevention, protection, prosecution, partnership and policy and will be a guiding tool for implementing actions to combat trafficking in persons in Sri Lanka in the coming years.

Human trafficking is increasingly facilitated through digital platforms - from online recruitment and social media grooming to encrypted communications used by trafficking networks. Women and children are also subject to Cyber Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (CSGBV) for the purpose of exploitation. As trafficking increasingly shifts online, the NAHTTF is very much aware that it must integrate cybercrime prevention tactics and leverage artificial intelligence (AI)

technologies to stay ahead of the evolving threats.

The proposed recommendations for NSAP 2026-2030 respond to the emerging challenge of cybercrime, related scams and SGBV and trafficking for forced criminality. Collectively they aim to strengthen national and community action and institutionalise ownership and commitment from all Government and non-government stakeholders, the private sector, technology companies and from those at risk of trafficking. It details the strategies and activities, mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation and measurement of performance of the proposed interventions.

Even as progress is being made, it is essential that the GOSL's understanding of this complex issue continues to evolve so that it can respond effectively. The nature of human trafficking is not static; traffickers prey on those in mostly rural communities who are most vulnerable and marginalized and the increasing use of the internet to commit cybercrimes, is creating new categories of victim. The work that takes place on the ground in communities remains but so now is the priority to secure digital environments that foster economic stability and ongoing awareness and digital education that protects not just the vulnerable, but all citizens from online crime.

CONTENT

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Attorney General
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BRAC	Border Risk Assessment Centre
BSU	Border Surveillance Unit
CERT	Computer Emergency Readiness Team
CID	Criminal Investigations Department
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSGBV	Cyber Sexual and gender-based violence
DoI&E	Department of Immigration and Emigration
DoME	Department of Manpower and Employment
DoL	Department of Labour
DPCCS	Department of Probation and Child Care Services
DS	Divisional Secretariat
FBR	Family Background Report
FE-DO	Foreign Employment – Development Officer
FM	Foreign Ministry
GCM	Global Compact on Migration
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
HTSIMCID	Human Trafficking, Smuggling Investigations and Maritime Crime Investigations Division
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ICT	Information & Technology
JMO	Judicial Medical Officer
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LEAs	Law Enforcement Agencies
MiGOF	Migration Governance Framework
MoD	Ministry of Defence

MoDE	Ministry of the Digital Economy
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoL&FE	Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment
MoM	Ministry of Mass Media
MoWCA	Ministry of Women and Child Affairs
NAHTTF	National Anti-Human Trafficking Task force
NCPA	National Child Protection Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
NTT	National Training Team
NSAP	National Strategic Action Plan
RAC	Risk Assessment Centre
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLBFE	Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
UN	United Nations
UNCTOC	United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime
VOT	Victim of Trafficking
VTA	Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka

I.

INTRODUCTION

The proposed recommendations for the revised National Strategic Action Plan (NSAP) to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking (2026-2030) fully support the Government of Sri Lanka's (GOSL) commitment to prevent and combat human trafficking. The recommendations have been developed to assess the implementation of NSAP (2021-2025) and in response to the emerging challenge of cybercrime, related scams and technology facilitated Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and trafficking for forced criminality. In turn, they aim to further strengthen national and community action, and institutionalise ownership and strengthen cooperation from all related Government agencies, civil society and non-government stakeholders to provide a whole of government, whole of society approach.

Building on the foundation of NSAP 2015–2019 and NSAP 2021–2025, the recommendations were developed through a participatory and consultative process with Government and civil society. Leveraging the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) extensive experience in supporting the Ministry of Defence (MOD) as Chair of the National Anti- Human Trafficking Task Force (NAHTTF), the consultation had two primary objectives:

I.   To reflect on the implementation of NSAP 2021–2025, including its action plan and the achievement of its stated goals.

II.   To provide well-defined recommendations for consideration by the NAHTTF, which may be incorporated into the revised NSAP 2026–2030 action plan.

As the nature of human trafficking evolves, Sri Lanka faces emerging challenges that require a more adaptive and comprehensive response. The rise of cybercrime-related trafficking trends and the increasing use of social media and artificial intelligence (AI) for recruitment and exploitative purposes highlight the urgent need for improved technology-based tools and broader stakeholder engagement, including stronger civil society participation. Communities urgently need to be more knowledgeable about use of technology and social media and to that end technology is part of the solution rather than the problem.

In addition to addressing the emerging trend of technology facilitated trafficking, institutional gaps, such as the absence of a national training team (NTT), inconsistent Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and a lack of a centralized trafficking database, hinder effective coordination and victim identification. Vulnerability factors, including poverty, lack of skills, and indebtedness, continue to drive irregular migration, further exposing individuals to exploitation. Meanwhile, inadequate victim services, prolonged legal proceedings, and reliance on victim testimony weaken law enforcement efforts. Strengthening partnerships, securing adequate funding, and enhancing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential to ensuring a more effective and sustainable response. Addressing these challenges will be critical in shaping a more resilient and proactive NSAP for 2026-2030.

In addition to addressing national priorities, challenges and trends, the proposed recommendations draw on current best practices in counter trafficking and fully support the Government's commitment to ensure the rights of victims through a comprehensive legal and policy framework that places the victim at the centre of its counter trafficking efforts. The recommendations adhere to Sri Lanka's international obligations and commitments including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[1] and the Global Compact on Migration (GCM)[2] and the United Nations General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/78/228), calling for the improvement of the coordination of efforts against trafficking in persons[3]. The recommendations have also been developed in the context of the adoption of the Convention against Cybercrime by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 24 December 2024[4].

The Convention is the first comprehensive global treaty which provides States with a range of measures to be undertaken to prevent and combat cybercrime. It also aims to strengthen international cooperation in sharing electronic evidence for serious crimes including human trafficking.

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[1] *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sri Lanka https://www.statistics.gov.lk/sdg/index.php/sdg/page/SDG_Indicators*

[2] *Sri Lanka. Global Compact on Migration (GCM) - https://srilanka.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1601/files/documents/LM%2520-2520MGU%2520Brochure_ compressed_0.pdf*

[3] *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2023*

[4] *United Nations Convention against Cybercrime; Strengthening International Cooperation for Combating Certain Crimes Committed by Means of Information and Communications Technology Systems and for the Sharing of Evidence in Electronic Form of Serious Crimes: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/cybercrime/ convention/home.html*

2.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

THE SRI LANKA CONTEXT

Human trafficking in Sri Lanka is a serious and complex issue that involves the exploitation of men, women, and children for forced labor, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude. As a source, transit, and destination country, Sri Lanka faces challenges in combating human trafficking due to factors such as poverty, lack of awareness, and gaps in law enforcement.

Sri Lanka is cited mainly as a source and to a lesser extent, a destination country and a country of transit for human trafficking and is associated with international labour migration. Labour migration has been central to Sri Lanka's development since the 1970s and the dynamics of migration are constantly adapting to emerging trends in the local, regional and global labour market environments.

Sri Lankan women and men migrate for employment under different skill categories primarily as domestic workers, garment factory workers and construction site workers. In 2021, the total number of departures for foreign employment declined from 211,211 in 2018 to 122,264 in 2021 which is a significant decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the number of labour migrants increased significantly in 2022 with a total departure of 311,161.[4]

It is recognised that in the future, technological advancements such as AI, robotics and automation will significantly change the dynamics of the labour market including, the type and category of worker that will be in demand and how future migrants are recruited. Technology is also playing an increasingly key role in how migrants and ordinary citizens are being deceived into exploitative situations.

Given the importance and prevalence of labour migration, the majority of the trafficking trends observed are in conjunction of cross border mobility and linked to labour exploitation in countries of destination where migrant workers have been subjected to unfair long hours for little to no pay, physical abuse, restrictions with regard to freedom of movement and communication with families. Labour exploitation and incidents of sexual exploitation have also been reported among Sri Lankan women who have been employed as domestic workers. Regular migrants who travel under the umbrella of the Sri Lanka Bureau for Foreign Employment (SLBFE) can also fall victim to contractual issues and trafficking, however, it's often poorer, vulnerable migrants who do not possess the necessary skills and qualifications and who cannot afford the associated costs (including fees) who fall victim. These migrants frequently use irregular pathways - increasingly tourism and student visas to leave the country- and it is recognised that deception often begins close to home.[5]

Within the country, individuals can be deceived through false promises for better job opportunities and trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation from rural to urban areas. Along the coastal belt, young boys can be trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation. There are also indications of foreign women being trafficked into Sri Lanka for commercial sexual exploitation.[6]

The Government has been active in its response and in 2023, the Criminal Investigation Department's (CID) and Human Trafficking, Smuggling Investigations and Maritime Crime Investigations Division (HTSIMCID) and police initiated at least 34 investigations of 60 suspected traffickers (33 for sex trafficking and 27 for forced labor) and continued 11 investigations of 20 suspects. The government initiated prosecution against 23 suspects, including 15 for sex trafficking (some of whom had multiples charges with 10 under procurement, 360A; three under the sexual exploitation of children statutes, 360B; and six under the trafficking statute, 360C) and eight for labor trafficking (all under Section 360C),and continued prosecution of at least 239 suspects.[7]

Human trafficking is increasingly facilitated through digital platforms — from online recruitment and social media grooming to encrypted communications used by trafficking networks. As trafficking increasingly shifts online, the NAHTTF is very much aware that it must integrate cybercrime prevention tactics and leverage artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to stay ahead of the evolving threats. There is also increasing evidence of Cyber sexual and gender-based violence (CSGBV) that is that also includes the on-line exploitation of particularly children.[8]

COVID-19 affected all of the population, particularly the migrant workers who lost their sources of income and were stranded overseas. The economic crisis within the country also resulted in a new emerging trend that saw Sri Lankans trafficked abroad as a result of cyber scams for

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[4] *National Policy and Action Plan for Migration Sri Lanka (2023-27) https://labourmin.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/National-Policy-and-National-Action-Plan-on-Migration-for-Employment-Sri-Lanka-2023-2027-English-Ver._compressed.pdf*

[5] *The Presence of human trafficking and forced labour in Sri Lanka (ILO:2019) https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-colombo/documents/publication/wcms_735511.pdf*

[6] *Situational Analysis of Trafficking in Persons in Sri Lanka, A Civil Society Perspective (The Asia Foundation, 2021) https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Sri-Lanka-TIP_Situational-Analysis-of-Trafficking-in-Persons-in-Sri-Lanka-A-Civil-Society-Perspective.pdf*

[7] *The 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Sri Lanka https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/sri-lanka*

[8] *Understanding Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Asia A Qualitative Study (UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office. 2024) https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2024-10/Understanding%20technology-facilitated%20gender-based%20violence%20in%20Asia_1.pdf*

forced criminality. Between January 2023 and September 2024, a total of 97 victims (73 men and 24 women), mostly educated, young males with English language and IT skills, were returned to Sri Lanka (with support from IOM), having been trafficked to the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the Southeast Asian region. The victims had been transported to the scamming compounds in special economic zones (SEZs) in Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, with Thailand as the main transit country.[9]

Traffickers used various methods to lure and groom potential victims including increasing use of on-line platforms and social media. These methods often include intimidation, false work pretences, or a technique in which the trafficker pretends to be interested in helping their potential victim, often to find employment. Traffickers maintain control over their victims through the use of force, sexual or physical assault, threats of violence or blackmail, confinement, abuse of power, or preying on their vulnerabilities. Victims often suffer physical, sexual, financial, emotional and psychological abuse, and often live and work in horrific conditions. The effect of this crime on victims can be traumatic and inherently lifelong.

Traffickers reportedly also exploited foreign nationals in online scam operations in Sri Lanka[10]. In addition, the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic followed by the country's economic crisis have contributed to an increase in CSGBV and increased the risk of low-income individuals and other vulnerable groups to sex trafficking.[11]

There is also evidence of migrants trafficked to Sri Lanka for the purpose of sexual exploitation/forced prostitution. While most of the victims trafficked into Sri Lanka are women, there have been reported cases where migrant men have been deceived of jobs in Sri Lanka and have been subjected to labour exploitation[12].

With regard to internal trafficking trends within the country many incidents are observed where women who have been deceived into accepting jobs in the main cities to work in the garment and hospitality sectors, beauty salons, spas, or for domestic work and are subjected to sexual exploitation by forced prostitution and forced labour. Given the prevalence of trafficking related to labour migration, there is a need for more research and data to inform policy[13].

Despite efforts by the GoSL and other stakeholders to collect data on human trafficking, comprehensive statistics on victims remain limited. Many victims do not come forward to report the crime due to various factors, including fear, social stigma, and a lack of trust in the criminal justice system. The lengthy judicial process further discourages victims, as they often face years of waiting before their cases are heard in court.

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[9] Ibid

[10] The Sunday Times: Sri Lanka fast becoming hub for international scam operations (13th October 2024) https://www.sundaytimes.lk/241013/news/sri-lanka-fast-becoming-hub-for-international-scam-operations-574106.html

[11] Cyber Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Sri Lanka, A Gaps Analysis (Search for Common Ground, December 2023) (https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CitW_Gap_Analysis_2023_SFCG.pdf

[12] Emerging Trends of Human Trafficking In Sri Lanka : Trafficking For Forced Criminality (IOM, Sri Lanka) https://srilanka.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1601/files/documents/2023-12/ct-policy-brief_pxu-digital-1.pdf

[13] The 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Sri Lanka (Office to Monitor and Combat TIP: U.S Dept of State) https://2021-2025.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/sri-lanka/

3.

SPECIFIC GAPS

AND CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN THE CONSULTATION

The following gaps and challenges were identified during the consultation process:

3.1

EVOLVING NATURE OF TRAFFICKING:

Trafficking for forced criminality: New cybercrime-related trends are emerging in trafficking and irregular migration. Social media and AI are increasingly being used for recruitment and exploitation and transnational criminal organisations can use generative AI to engage with communities who were previously unaffected by trafficking.

Exploitation and or Trafficking of Women and girls through the use of Technology: Technologies are used to target and capture women and girls for sexual abuse or trafficking, force them to accept trafficking and sexual abuse situations, exercise power and control over them, and prevent them from freeing themselves from the abuse, including by threatening to disclose private information[14].

Online Child Sexual Exploitation: Online child sexual exploitation includes a wide range of behaviours and situations. Most commonly this includes grooming, live streaming, consuming child sexual abuse material, and coercing and blackmailing children for sexual purposes. This could include: An adult engaging a child in a chat about sexual acts.

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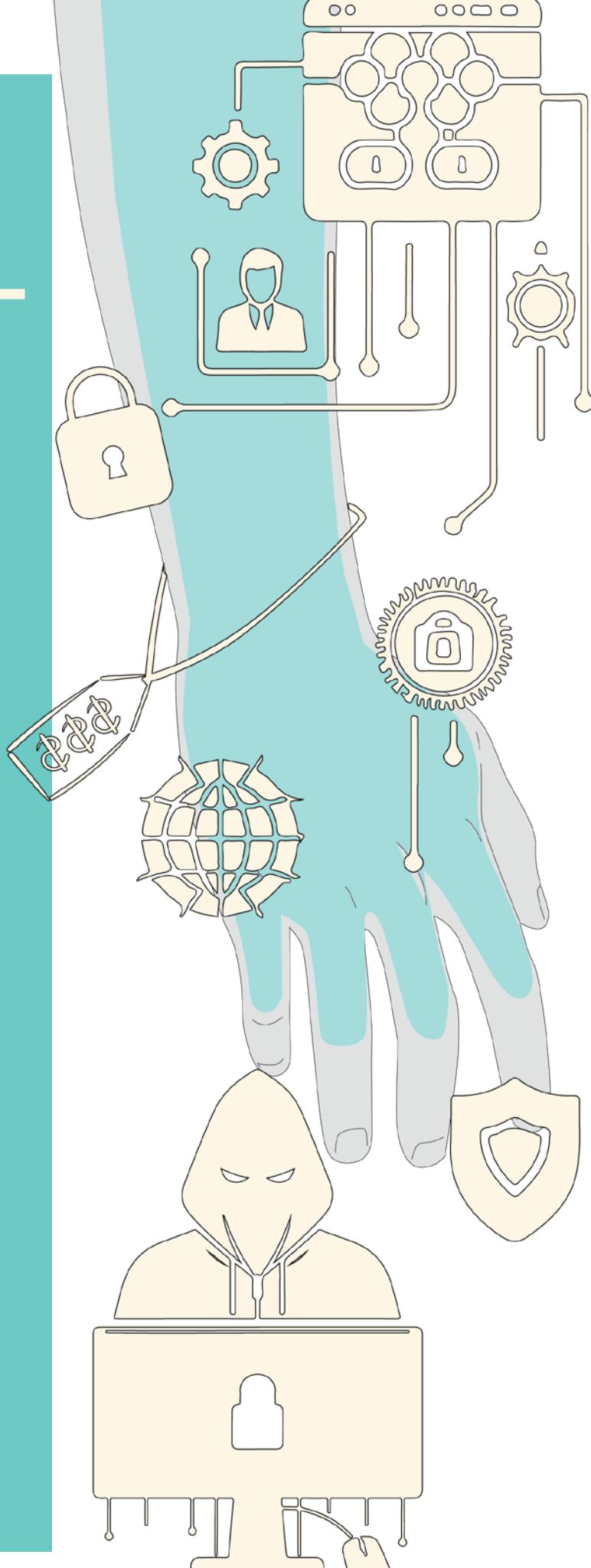
[14] Cyber Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Sri Lanka (A Legal Gaps Analysis: December 2023)) https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CitW_Gap_Analysis_2023_SFCG.pdf

3.2
INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING:

Weak cooperation among national and international institutions and the private sector hinders opportunities to promptly react to approaches adopted by online traffickers and does not allow for full utilization of resources and expertise available in different sectors.

There is a need to maintain cyber security into the mandate of the NAHTTF and strengthen institutional capacity building at all levels to address the emerging cyber related issues and widen the beneficiaries of training both horizontally and vertically.

3.3
ONGOING ISSUES AND THE EVOLVING MIGRANT VULNERABILITIES:

Poverty, lack of opportunities, absence of required skills, and indebtedness continue to drive irregular migration and increase trafficking risks. Social media is widely used for recruitment, affecting both low-income individuals and more educated Sri Lankans.

Issues with sub-agents, irregular migration routes, and lack of clarity on employment contracts remain, making would-be migrants vulnerable to trafficking.

3.4
CHALLENGES WITH STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOPS):

Different agencies have competing SOPs, creating confusion for NAHTTF members as to their roles and responsibilities. The national 'Standard Operating Procedures' (SOP) on the identification, referral and protection of victims of human trafficking is not being adequately implemented.

3.6
LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PROSECUTION REQUIRES STRENGTHENING:

The investigation of trafficking cases continue to face significant challenges. A reliance on victim testimony, lack of cooperation, and lengthy legal proceedings undermine law enforcement and negatively impact implementation of the legislation and therefore prosecutions.

There is a lack of capacity, awareness and expertise of law enforcement, prosecutors, and the judiciary on the complex and evolving nature of ICT-facilitated trafficking and CSGBV.

3.5
GAPS REMAIN IN VICTIM SERVICES:

A shortage of shelters for victims of trafficking persists. Constraints also remain in direct assistance including the availability of interpreters for foreign victims. There is a strong need for victim centric approaches and trauma informed care when delivering services to victims.

3.7
NEED FOR A NATIONALDATABASE:

Decision-making relies on fragmented data from individual institutions. The absence of a centralized national database limits a comprehensive understanding of trafficking in Sri Lanka and undermines effective policy making. There is a need to Significantly expand data collection and research on the scope, scale, and nature of online and tech based trafficking and CSGBV.

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[15] Ibid

3.8
NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK TO MEET THE EMERGING TRENDS.

The legal framework is inadequate to meet the new cyber trends related to trafficking. The current legislation should be equipped to capture the latest trends of trafficking and take preventive measures as well as provide effective mechanism and tools to prosecute perpetrators.

The legal framework does contain adequate provisions to address Online Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. With the use of mobile phones by children and young adults , there is a need to establish effective legislation to counteract and respond to any progressive abuse, harm, or potential exploitation of children. This is essential in line with the international obligations[15].

3.9
CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES:

Civil society partnerships need stronger institutional support to enhance cooperation and collaboration with NAHTTF. There is a need to improve CSO participation both at national and grassroots level including through the District Anti-Trafficking Fora (DATF).

3.10
NEED FOR STRENGTHENED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION.

New trafficking trends, including cyber-enabled trafficking and recruitment through social media, require international technological collaboration to track and combat online exploitation effectively.

As many Sri Lankan trafficking victims are exploited overseas, particularly in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Stronger collaboration with foreign governments, international organizations, NGOs and active engagement

with the regional and global processes and dialogues is needed to improve victim identification, repatriation, investigation and reintegration services.

Coordinated efforts with international law enforcement agencies such as INTERPOL and regional task forces need to be strengthened in order to facilitate intelligence- and electronic haring, the arrest of traffickers and the disruption of organized crime networks.

3.11
IMPROVED MONITORING & EVALUATION (M & E):

There is a need to improve the M&E of the next phase of the NSAP. A well-structured M&E system is essential for ensuring that the NSAP 2026–2030 is reliablee and results based. Strengthening M&E will enhance accountability, improve decision-making, and ultimately contribute to a more effective response to trafficking in Sri Lanka. Strengthened M&E will facilitate alignment with global best practices and meet international reporting requirements.

3.12
RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS.

Resources from the national budget were not adequate and additional financial resources are required.

4.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

## IN ADDRESSING TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The proposed recommendations aim to further strengthen the whole of-government, whole of society approach to combating human trafficking. Strategies and good practice in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have been incorporated into the recommendations from the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA)[16] and the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process(RSO)[17].

The recommendations provide a starting point for action. They emphasise the need for a multi-faceted approach involving governments, the technology industry, the private sector CSOs and NGOs, and victims/ survivors. Key areas of focus include the development of clear and concrete anti-trafficking measures for technology companies, the enhancement of AI safety features, up-to-date education and awareness programs, improved identification and protection of victims, enhanced cross border cooperation and increased support for research initiatives.

4.1

BEST PRACTICES TO MEET THE EMERGING TRENDS OF CYBER TRAFFICKING

A number of examples of best practices with respect to addressing the issue of the cyber scams and trafficking for forced criminality include the establishment of national anti-scam centres. The Australian National Anti-Scam Centre, operated by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), provides a good model and brings together experts from government, law enforcement and the private sector to disrupt scams before they reach consumers, analyse and act on trends from shared data and raise consumer awareness about how to spot and avoid scams[18].

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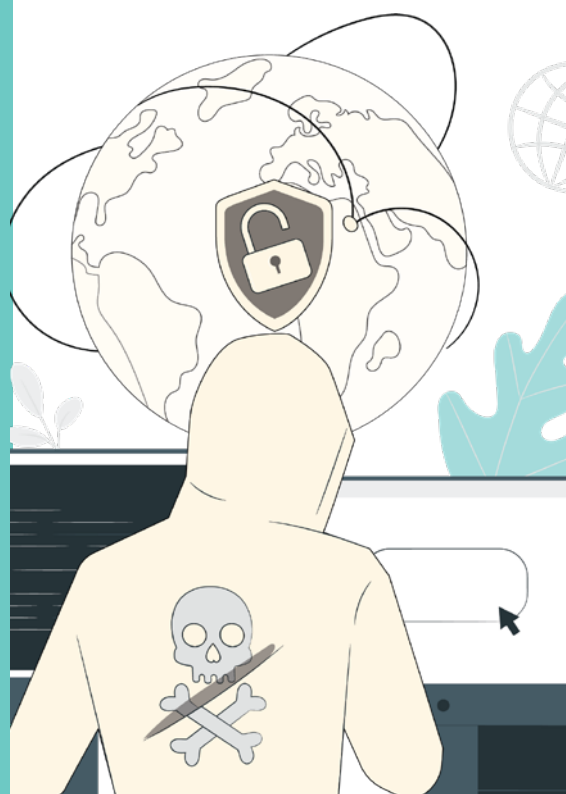
[16] Online and technology -facilitated trafficking in human beings Summary and recommendations (GRETA): March 2022, Council of Europe) https://rm.coe.int/online-and-technology-facilitated-trafficking-in-human-beings-summary-/1680a5e10c
[17] New Frontiers: The Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence to Facilitate Trafficking In Persons (OSCE: Regional Support Office (RSO) of the Bali Process Flyer Template
[18] Australia: National Anti-Scam Centre https://www.nasc.gov.au/

In 2023, Thailand launched the Anti-Online Scam Operation Centre(AOC) to combat the growing problem of cybercrime in Thailand. This initiative aims to streamline the reporting and remediation process for victims of online crimes and enhance the government's ability to pursue cybercriminals. The AOC brings together the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (DES), Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO), Bank of Thailand, Thai Bankers Association ,Department of Special Investigation (DSI), National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC) and the Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau[19].

In Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Chiefs of National Police (ASEANAPOL) has been promoting the setting up of national anti-scam centres[20]. Thailand has formed the Joint Cyber-Slavery Task Force for collaboration and coordination bringing together IOM, NGOs, and the Royal Thai Government[21] . Malaysia has proposed the establishment of an ASEAN Cybercrime Task Force, designed to mirror the structure of Interpol[22]. A key aspect of Malaysia's strategy is fostering stronger public-private partnerships, where governments, law enforcement agencies, tech firms, and corporations work together to improve cybersecurity and facilitate intelligence sharing.

PREVENTION:

In July 2024, in Vietnam the Authority of Information Security (AIS) under the Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) and Meta - the parent company of Facebook have launched the "Identifying Scams" campaign in Vietnam for 2024. The campaign aims to help social media users to avoid six of the 24 online scam types that the AIS identified as "hot spots" in Vietnam. These are investment scams, job scams, financial scams, loan scams, lottery scams, and impersonation scams. Also in Vietnam, The Ministry of Public Security (MPS) proactively monitors closed Facebook groups and other social media for suspicious behaviour.

In 2019, in cooperation with UNICEF, the Philippine Government, launched the SaferKidsPH campaign to raise national awareness on the extent and impact of online sexual exploitation and abuse of children in the Philippines. The campaign is part of the six-year SaferKidsPH initiative that addresses online sexual exploitation and abuse of children by raising national awareness of the problem and supporting stronger implementation of laws and policies that protect children.[23]

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[19] *What is Thailand's Anti-Online Scam Operation Center? (Thailand Law Library)*
https://library.siam-legal.com/what-is-thailands-anti-online-scam-operation-center/
[20] *ASEANAPOL http://ww.aseanapol.org/home*
[21] *Situational Report on Trafficking In Persons into Forced Criminality in Online Scamming Centres in Southeast Asia (IOM: February 2024). https://roasiapacific. iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl671/files/documents/2024-07/iom-southeast-asia-trafficking-for-forced-criminality-update_december-2023_-final.pdf*
[22] *Regional Resilience: Malaysia Proposes ASEAN Cybercrime Task Force: https://opengovasia.com/2025/01/21/regional-resilience-malaysia-proposes-asean-cy-bercrime-task-force/*
[23] *New campaign SaferKidsPH to raise awareness on online sexual exploitation of children: https://www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/new-campaign-saf-erkidsph-raise-awareness-online-sexual-exploitation-children*

PROTECTION:

In Thailand victim identification is conducted by Multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs), which included representatives from government agencies and NGOs. Thailand has put together a consular guide, frequently asked questions (FAQs) on its National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to Assist and Protect Survivors of Trafficking in Thailand, and developed Information, Education, and Communication materials for embassies[24]. The NRM was developed in cooperation with CSOs and is supported with guidelines and a new subcommittee that oversees victim services and assistance and access to compensation. Thailand has also established a Task Force to review trafficking victim cases for committee members[25] to assess areas of improvement; survivors of trafficking participated as subcommittee members. With support from the Regional Support Office (RSO) of the Bali Process, Indonesia Conducted technical trainings for Indonesian diplomats on identification of TiP in online scam activities.[26]

PROSECUTION:

Following a high-level meeting with representatives from 17 countries in Bangkok, the Royal Thai Police have announced the establishment of an international coordination centre to tackle cross-border scams and transnational crime, Seven new measures to strengthen border security, including tighter airport screening and stricter immigration checks at land crossings. The coordination centre was opened on the 1st of February 2025 and operates 24/7.

PARTNERSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY:

Civil Society and NGOs are represented in national task forces in the following countries in the wider region. Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal Philippines, and Thailand. NGOS contribute to the development of national plans and in addition to prevention activities provide services to victims, may engage in victim identification, capacity building and provide legal support.

For example, In India, The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and NGOs jointly operate Anti Human Trafficking Unites (AHTUs) in multiple states, implementing thousands of rescues and legal actions.[27] NGOs provide victim support services, while police focus on investigations and legal enforcement. The organisation, Justice and Care – Works with State Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) and law enforcement to rescue victims and prosecute traffickers[28].

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[24] *Ibid*

[25] *Guidelines on the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to Assist and Protect Survivors of Trafficking in Thailand: https://thailand.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzb-dl1371/files/documents/2024-03/guidelines-on-nrm-to-protect-and-assist-survivors-en.pdf*

[26] *Indonesia and RSO collaborate to provide training for consular staff on identifying and protecting victims of trafficking in persons https://rso.baliprocess.net/indonesia-and-rso-collaborate-to-provide-training-for-consular-staff-on-identifying-and-protecting-victims-of-trafficking-in-persons/*

[27] *Comprehensive Scheme for Establishment of integrated Anti Human Trafficking Units (AHTUS): Ministry of Home Affairs/ Grih Mantralaya Government of India/ Bharat Sarkar Centre-State Division North Block, New Delhi: https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/Scheme-AHTU-SS-271011.pdf*

[28] *Justice and Crae: Joining forces to end modern slavery - Justice and Care*

4.2

MEETING THE POLICY CHALLENGES OF TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The adoption of the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime in December 2024, will put into place a vital framework to strengthen international cooperation and legal harmonization to tackle crimes committed through digital platforms. Through streamlined international cooperation and the swift exchange of electronic evidence, digital intelligence, law enforcement agencies can better identify, track, and dismantle trafficking networks, ultimately protecting vulnerable populations and holding perpetrators accountable.

To leverage on the full potential offered by the Cybercrime Convention, countries should *(a) complete the harmonisation of national legislations with the Convention; (b) widen and enhance the training on the possibilities offered by the Convention as not all State Parties are currently using*

the tools available to their full potential; (c) raise awareness on the broad scope of the procedural powers and tools for international cooperation of the Convention, particularly in relation to trafficking cases; and *(d) swiftly implement the measures included in the Second Additional Protocol.*

The Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) has recommended the following actions in respect of the detection, the investigation and the prosecution of cases of technology-facilitated human trafficking. In addition, GRETA has proposed actions for cooperation and capacity building.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

ACTIONS FOR THE DETECTION OF CASES INVOLVING TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED HUMAN TRAFFICKING

1.1	Law enforcement should invest in capacity building in the areas of Internet monitoring, cyber-patrols, undercover online investigations (cyber-infiltration), the use of Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) by specialised officers, social network analysis, and the use of automatic searching tools to analyse evidence.
1.2	Law enforcement and labour inspectorates should implement more stringent regulations and frequent controls on job advertisement websites. Technological tools could be developed in cooperation with private companies (e.g., online job advertisement validator tools, tools to scrape job advertisements sites using indicators of trafficking). Labour inspectorates should develop digital expertise and increase their online presence.
1.3	Countries/private providers/NGOs should put into place and strengthen confidential reporting mechanisms, allowing anonymous reporting of trafficking as well as victims' self-identification. One example would be the use of chat bots.

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[29] *Online and technology -facilitated trafficking in human beings Summary and recommendations (Council of Europe: GRETA (March 2022)*

https://rm.coe.int/online-and-technology-facilitated-trafficking-in-human-beings-summary-/1680a5e10c

2 ACTIONS FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF CASES INVOLVING TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED HUMAN TRAFFICK-ING

2.1 Law enforcement should consider training officers specialised in both ICT and human trafficking. Countries should also consider creating technical support groups staffed by officers with specialised ICT capabilities embedded within anti-trafficking units.

2.2 Law enforcement should ensure that all officers possess an adequate level of expertise in collecting and handling electronic evidence. Training on electronic evidence should be made integral to training curricula and be constantly updated.

2.3 Countries/international organisations should regularly carry out a strategic analysis to generate knowledge on emerging trends on offenders' modus operandi as well as to keep up to date with the fast-changing technology and its use.

2.4 Countries should increase cross-border cooperation through streamlined procedures, the sharing of best practices and technologies (e.g., specialised software) and share practical information about cases and use of technology.

3 ACTIONS FOR THE PROSECUTION OF CASES INVOLVING TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED HUMAN TRAFFICKING

3.1 Prosecutors should be provided with specific training on technology-facilitated human trafficking and the handling of electronic evidence as well as its presentation before a judge/jury. Countries should take measures to ensure that prosecutors are familiar with procedures to request electronic evidence from private companies as well as obtaining evidence.

4 ACTIONS TO FACILITATE COOPERATION WITH PRIVATE COMPANIES FOR TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED HUMAN TRAFFICKING

4.1 Countries should develop data-sharing procedures with companies holding relevant data and consider developing cooperation protocols with private companies, including social networks and gig-economy companies as well as rental platforms to foster the timely provision of information.

5 CAPACITY BUILDING

5.1 Joint Training Activities (JTAs) should be envisaged for countries that are systematically engaged in investigating cases. Law enforcement officers should participate in international and regional trainings focused on specific aspects of investigating ICT-facilitated human trafficking.

5.2 NGOs / CSOs should receive training on the latest developments in both technological based trafficking, including changes in recruitment strategies.

6 ACTIONS TO ENHANCE LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

6.1 Authorities should devise common procedures for the rapid exchange of digital evidence with internet service providers (ISPs) and should re-assess the length of data retention obligations imposed on ISPs (current periods are too short considering the length of police investigations). Efforts should be made to adopt a common framework regarding data retention obligations and sharing of electronic evidence.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Regional Support Office of the Bali Process (RSO) have jointly develop a policy document on the emerging nexus of AI and trafficking in persons (TIP) The policy document recommends the following for governments

  i. Technology companies operating digital platforms should be required to take steps to mitigate and remediate human trafficking on their platforms and across related supply chains. This would include identifying, managing, and preventing risks such as trafficking activities that could arise from end-users or businesses utilising their services.

  ii. Amending existing anti-trafficking and/or anti-forced labour legislation to require technology businesses—who host services with large numbers of users that enable user connections, conversations or advertisements—to report on efforts undertaken to tackle human trafficking taking place on their platforms.

  iii. Updating relevant processes and guidance to encourage technology companies to report and share with relevant state authorities all cases of misuse of AI related to suspected human trafficking cases.

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[30] *New Frontiers: The Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence to Facilitate Trafficking in Persons (OSCE/ RSO: November 2024) https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/d/579715.pdf*

5.

PREVENTION

Building on the objectives of the NSAP 2021–2025, the proposed prevention recommendations emphasize an expanded role for civil society. These recommendations aim to raise awareness and sensitize both state and non-state stakeholders at national and local levels on current trends in human trafficking, including the growing role of technology in recruitment and exploitation of victims and CSGBV. The recommendations seek to enhance institutional capacity and cooperation mechanisms, reduce vulnerabilities that contribute to trafficking by engaging the private sector, and improve cyber literacy, data collection, and legislative measures.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Establishing a national training resource and training for all those who may come into contact with victims .

- Strengthening partnerships between stakeholders to promote a whole of government, whole of society approach

- Leveraging technology to address emerging trends, increase awareness and promote protection from cybercrime.

- Enhancing border management strategies.

- Addressing root causes and vulnerability factors through strengthened private sector collaboration.

- Conducting research to inform policy and interventions.

5.1

CAPACITY BUILDING

5.1.1   Establish and train an inter-agency National Training Team (NTT) from the national resource pool of human trafficking trainers on up-to-date trafficking issues and trends including cyber-related trafficking, CSGBV, victim identification, referral to protection and irregular migration and smuggling. Consider CSO representation in the NTT.

5.1.3   Drawing on the expertise and to encourage consistency of information and services across all districts, the NTT should provide standardized awareness raising and training on trafficking including use of technology for NGOs/ CSOs.

5.1.2   In support of the NTT, conduct a brief assessment for the development of a national modular curriculum and embed it in a new NAHTTF portal / online platform. The platform that will act as a national counter trafficking resource for NAHTFF agencies, embassy officials, CSOs, NGOs and the general public including would-be migrants. To address current trends and emerging priorities in trafficking the platform would act as a resource and integrate protection advice and measures from cybercrime, cyber scams and CSGBV.

5.1.4   Drawing on best practices conduct an assessment to strengthen prevention measures in the tourism sector including a campaign to address the issue of child sex tourism and CSGBV.

5.2

PARTNERSHIP

5.2.1   Update the prevention objectives and activities of NSAP (2021-25) to incorporate the emerging trends and technological challenges with respect to online scams and related forced criminal activities, CSGBV, and the challenges being brought about by AI.

5.2.3   With CERT and technology experts, monitor the use of AI by human traffickers. Identify communities most at risk and liaise and collaborate with technology companies to evaluate suitable responses[33].

5.2.2   In cooperation with the Ministry of Digital Economy (MoDE)[31] and the Computer Emergency Readiness Team (CERT)[32] integrate cybercrime issues into the prevention pillar of NSAP (2026-2030). Based on international best practices, consult with MODE to consider establishing a national cyber trafficking early warning system at CERT to detect digital trafficking hotspots and alert law enforcement and tech partners.

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[31] Ministry of the Digital Economy (MODE) https://mode.gov.lk/

[32] National Centre for Cyber Security in Sri Lanka as our objective is to create a resilient and trusted cyber security ecosystem that will enable Sri Lankan citizens, businesses, and government to realize the benefit of digitalization: Computer Emergency Readiness Team (CERT) https://cert.gov.lk/

[33] Any response to the threat of AI will require data on how AI is being used by traffickers. And in turn will assist with the development of new technological responses to tackle the issue and inform prevention efforts,

5.2.4 To address emerging trends, in cooperation with the MoDE and the Ministry of Mass Media[34], develop a communication strategy to address emerging trends in human trafficking and related scams facilitated through the internet/ social media.

5.2.5 Sensitize technology companies (and the media) on trafficking issues and trends and host events for the private sector to learn how their businesses could contribute and should comply with legislation and regulations related to cybercrime (and CSGBV) and counter trafficking in Sri Lanka.

5.2.6 Host technology innovation events to encourage businesses in the technology sector to gauge the availability and use of potential applications and tools for counter trafficking (prevention, protection, and prosecution) in the Sri Lanka context.

5.2.7 Advocate with relevant CSOs and private sector partners to integrate TIP prevention services within their wider mandates. Special attention should be given to vulnerable groups including women and children, and youth and potential migrants.

5.2.8 Establish District Anti-Trafficking Fora (DATFS) nationwide. CSOs to integrate with DATFS and contribute to public sensitization campaigns on human trafficking, use of technology by traffickers and on the existing victim protection mechanism and services offered to victims.

5.3

AWARENESS

5.3.1 Develop an information campaign with the aim of providing reliable information to counter the false narrative promoted by sub agents/ recruitment intermediaries to address the attitudes and behaviour of migrants considering irregular migration. The campaign would also target key influencers in their decisions, such as family members, religious or community leaders, teachers, returning migrants, and migration facilitators. Engage victims in the design of awareness campaigns and information dissemination against trafficking in the communities and villages. The campaign should also address the use of student and tourism visas for travel to non-traditional countries of destination (including Romania, Lithuania, Dubai, and Myanmar) by prospective migrants and balance the narrative of greener pastures by drawing on the experience of victims and returned migrants[35].

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[34] Ministry of Mass Media https://media.gov.lk/

[35] The overarching aim would be to enable migrants and potential migrants to make better-informed decisions based on objective information rather than misinformation spread by smugglers, as well as informing potential migrants about available legal pathways to Europe, and highlighting alternative economic and vocational training opportunities in Sri Lanka

5.3.2 In cooperation with the MoDE and the CERT, incorporate and review the content of public awareness campaigns on transnational organized crime and trafficking for forced criminality associated with scams. Periodically review campaigns to ensure that information disseminated remains relevant to the target audience and incorporates current trends and uses of technology in human trafficking.

5.3.4 Drawing on best practices, conduct an assessment with a view to setting-up secure, AI-enhanced online platforms where migrant workers can verify job offers, recruitment agencies, and travel documents. Consider creating chatbots and mobile apps that offer real-time trafficking prevention guidance, case referral and self-referral advice, and safe migration tips to would be migrants.

5.3.6 Drawing on best practices, develop an awareness campaign on the harmful impact of the commercial sex industry, including child sex tourism and CSGGV. The campaign would aim to I. highlight the links between commercial sex, child sex tourism, and online sexual exploitation. II. empower communities to recognize signs of exploitation and encourage reporting of suspicious activities III. Advocate for stronger regulations and greater accountability among online platforms and related industries.

5.3.3 In cooperation with the MoDE and the CERT and the Ministry of Mass Media, utilize social media platforms and engage with technology companies, the private sector and the media to develop and implement prevention campaigns for at-risk groups including would be migrants.

5.3.5 In line with the draft cyber-security strategy (2024-2027) of Sri Lanka, expedite the development and integration of cybersecurity issues, including awareness, into primary and secondary education curricula and address the challenges presented by technology unfamiliarity among educators[36] by strengthening training for educators. Consider promoting a *safer internet day*[37] embedding a safe internet message and protection from CSGBV into World Day Against Trafficking (30th July).

5.4

ADDRESSING VULNERABILITY

5.4.1 Conduct an assessment to increase understanding of current vulnerability factors that contribute to human trafficking, irregular migration and smuggling in Sri Lanka. The assessment should seek to identify evolving methods of regular and irregular migration including use of the internet, social media and different types of visa, including student and tourist visas for the purposes of migration to non-traditional countries.

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[36] *National Cyber Security Strategy of Sri Lanka (2024 – 2027) Draft 14: https://cert.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/NCSS-Draft-V14.pdf*

[37] *Safer Internet Day (SID) is an EU wide initiative to promote a safer internet for all users, especially young people. https://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en/ saferinternetday#:~:text=Safer%20Internet%20Day-,Get%20involved,the%20whole%20month%20of%20February.*

5.4.2   In cooperation with relevant Government ministries and departments, draw on data from the labour market and training needs and gaps to identify private sector partnerships (transport, agriculture, hospitality and tourism, businesses, etc.) to address the vulnerability of those most at risk of trafficking. Develop a national campaign and sensitize aspiring migrants on alternatives to migration including the availability of current technical and vocational training programmes and potential employment opportunities in Sri Lanka.[38]

5.4.3   With a view to tackling current trends, integrate digital and financial literacy especially for women and children at risk of trafficking and irregular migration into national curricular and educational and vocational training programmes.

5.5

BORDER MANAGEMENT

5.5.1   With the aim of identifying profiles of traffickers and those at risk of trafficking; entering, leaving or transiting though the airport, continue to strengthen the roles of the Border Support Unit (BSU) and Border Risk Assessment Centre (BRAC) with ongoing training in trafficking including current trends, uses of various types of visa by migrants for irregular migration, digital infrastructure and cross-border intelligence sharing.

5.5.2   Through regional initiatives such as the Bali Process, ensure that the BSU and the BRAC, law enforcement and criminal justice practitioners are regularly up-dated on current intelligence, electronic evidence gathering and sharing, cybersecurity issues and the use of technologies related to smuggling and human trafficking.

5.5.3   Strengthen sharing and oversight of intelligence and evidence sharing with CID from NAHTTF members through the (proposed) NAHTTF prosecution working group.

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[38] *The initiative would be piloted with the Ministry of Education, the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), the Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka (VTA), the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA).*

[39] *Bali Process: Border and Migration Management https://rso.baliprocess.net/our-programmes/border-management/*

5.6

RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

5.6.1 Through regional processes and mechanisms such as the Bali Process and initiatives such as Technology against Trafficking (TAT)[40], undertake a needs assessment to identify best fit technology tools and use of AI for adoption in counter trafficking in the Sri Lanka context across the 'Ps.' Explore technology and AI tools for use in safe regular migration and to protect irregular migrants who fall victim to trafficking .

5.6.3 Reliance on successful prosecutions means that, there is a dearth of quantitative data and qualitative research on the prevalence of TIP, resulting in a disproportionate reliance on anecdotal evidence. This highlights the necessity for more quantitative and qualitative research and investigation into the prevalence of TIP, especially under-explored areas such as child trafficking, internal TIP, use of technology, and trafficking of foreigners to Sri Lanka.

The lack of systematic data collection mechanisms and systems, especially in the government sector, has obscured the exact extent of TIP. Government data are collected and reported by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA), the Sri Lankan Police, and the Attorney General's Department (AGD).

Each of these institutions maintain separate sets of data. The SLBFE and the police both keep records of TIP, while the AGD tracks the number of prosecution. There appears to be a strong need to conduct cross-departmental analyses.

5.6.2 To engender an evidence based approach for policy purposes, conduct a rapid research into trafficking of men, women and children internally in Sri Lanka (for different purposes).

5.6.4 Conduct an assessment for the establishment of a national case management database for identified victims of trafficking.

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[40] Technology Against Trafficking (TAT) https://www.ctdatacollaborative.org/page/tech-against-trafficking-tat-organizational-profile#no-back

6.

PROTECTION

The Protection Recommendations aim to further strengthen victim-centered assistance and protection through enhanced institutional capacity. Victim protection is integral to supporting criminal investigations, ensuring the successful prosecution of traffickers, and deterring future trafficking crimes. These recommendations focus on building the capacity of relevant stakeholders, improving services for victims, and expanding protection mechanisms for Sri Lankans trafficked abroad.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Conducting capacity-building activities for state and non-state actors involved in victim identification and support.

- Improving shelter services and other essential services for victims of trafficking through implementation of the SOPS .

- Strengthening support mechanisms and protection for Sri Lankans trafficked overseas.
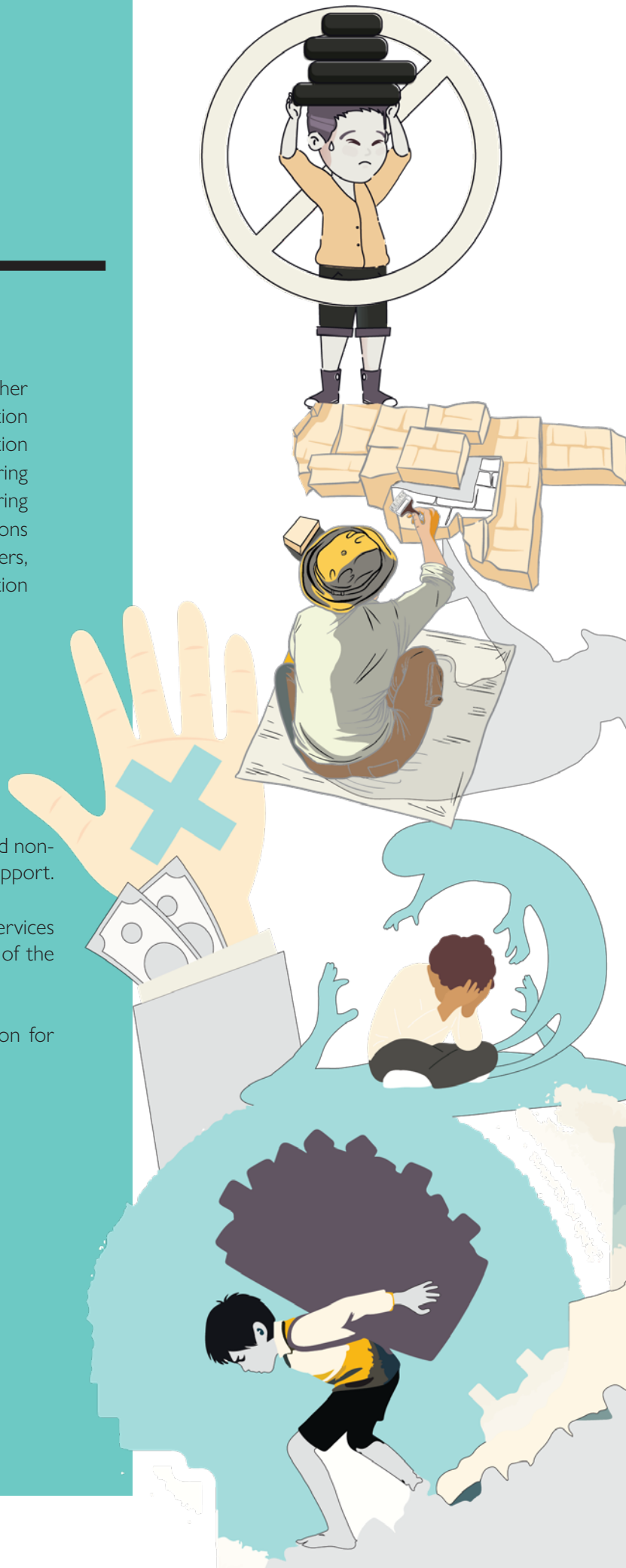
6.1

CAPACITY BUILDING

6.1.1 Conduct a needs assessment and through the NTT, provide training on victim identification and assistance and protection for state and non-state shelter staff, healthcare professionals, Judicial medical officers local CSOs and service providers.

6.1.2 Identify and train officers attached to embassies and consulates on i. screening and victim identification and ii. the rights of all Sri Lankans to assistance and protection irrespective of their (regular or irregular) status in the receiving country. This could be implemented through the proposed national NAHTTF portal / platform.

6.1.3 In tandem with the proposed NAHTTF platform / portal establish a 24/7I-supported virtual helpline that allows victims to report trafficking or exploitation discreetly through multiple platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, web portals, chat boxes). Enable the helpline to automatically forward high-risk cases to relevant authorities, ensuring faster intervention and rescue operations (refer to 1.3.4)

6.2

IMPROVING SERVICES TO VICTIMS

6.2.1 Conduct an assessment of existing services and capacity needs for victim including shelter services and the implementation of existing shelter guidelines.

6.2.2 Conduct an assessment to identify a sustainable solution to the issue of interpreters including using internet based online solutions[41].

6.2.3 Conduct an assessment with a view to up-grading existing shelter services linked to Sri Lanka embassies in destination countries with significant numbers of victims and migrants requiring assistance.

6.2.4 Conduct an assessment of the existing SOPS for victim identification and referral within the current NAHTTF (and their members) focusing on strengthening implementation and monitoring.

6.2.5 Conduct on-going national level capacity building to frontline service providers including CSOs to ensure they use trauma-informed and victim-centric approaches and have access to appropriate referral mechanisms.

6.2.6 Through embassies, pre-identify and establish linkages and cooperation with NGOs/shelters/ service providers to assist VOTs as soon as they are rescued and identified in destination countries.

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[41] To be conducted with IOM and potentially through the Bali Process. The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National), run by the Australian government, provides 24/7 access to phone and video interpreters, including for law enforcement, border protection, and victim support services.

7.

PROSECUTION

The prosecution recommendations focus on strengthening the capacity of key stakeholders involved in the identification, detection, investigation, and prosecution of human trafficking offences. Despite significant progress, the prosecution of trafficking cases continues to face numerous challenges, including victims' reluctance to report crimes, reliance on evidence from foreign jurisdictions, and the complex nature of gathering evidence, especially in transnational cases. These challenges are compounded by the trauma and potential intimidation faced by victims and witnesses, which can undermine the prosecution process. The recommendations seek to address these challenges by enhancing the skills and capabilities of relevant authorities and improving the tools available to them for effective prosecution.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- the development of new investigative techniques and tools

- strengthening partnerships across sectors and agencies

- improving intelligence on cyber-related crimes and sharing of electronic evidence.

- enhancing the capacity of law enforcement, prosecutors, and other relevant officials

- improving and drawing on best practices in investigation methods,

- increasing expertise and cross-border collaboration, and address emerging trends in trafficking, particularly those linked to cybercrime and forced criminality.

7.1

INVESTIGATION TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS

7.1.1 Train law enforcement and prosecutors on collecting and preserving digital evidence and ensure that all officers possess an adequate level of expertise in collecting and handling electronic evidence complemented with sensitization on with blockchain-based tracking of illicit financial flows linked to trafficking. Training on electronic evidence should be made integral to training curricula and be constantly updated.

7.1.2 In adherence to the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act, No. 10 of 2023, implement policies in court that reduce the reliance on testimony and protect victims and witnesses from further harm. In compliance with the Act, pilot the recording of statements from victims and witnesses within or outside Sri Lanka and the sharing of electronic evidence.

7.1.3 Conduct an assessment to establish robust public-private partnerships, including through stronger relationships between law enforcement and the private sector (cyber and tech companies), for the purpose of investigating illicit financial flows.

7.1.4 In cooperation with MODE and the CERT and the support of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) strengthen monitoring of online scams and fraud provide training to law enforcement on illicit flows to document financial crimes and money laundering activities.

7.1.5 Drawing on best practices, invest in AI-based digital forensics tools to analyse large datasets from traffickers' online communications, social media interactions, and financial transactions.

7.2

PARTNERSHIP

7.2.1 Mainstream trafficking related cybercrime and CSGBV as apriority issues into the NAHTTF and collaborate and draw on the expertise from MODE, CERT, law enforcement and tech companies to address the identified issues.

7.2.2 Through the Bali Process explore the potential to work with regional and international partners (e.g. regional task forces, AESEANAPOL, INTERPOL, UNODC) to conduct joint cybercrime operations targeting transnational trafficking networks operating online.

7.2.3 Monitor suspicious money transactions by strengthening collaboration between Law Enforcement Agencies, and the Financial Intelligence Unites (FIU), including international cooperation, to identify subjects and financial flows related to on-line scams fuelling irregular migration, trafficking and CSGBV and child pornography.

7.2.4 Develop Mutual Legal Assistance agreements/ treaties (MLAs) for rapid cross-border cooperation in gathering digital evidence and shutting down trafficking-related domains. If it is evident that turnaround time for the processing of MLAs is unrealistic, consider practical measures to strengthen cross-border cooperation through streamlined procedures, the sharing of best practices and technologies (e.g., specialised software).

7.3

CAPACITY BUILDING

7.3.1 Develop a training module for the NTT on specific on prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of trafficking for forced criminality and cybercrime and CSGBV. Include modules on use of open-source investigation, use and sharing of electronic evidence, social media monitoring and capacity-building.

7.3.2 Promote synergy and added value by providing NTT training to all areas of law enforcement, including anti trafficking and smuggling units of the CID, specialized units the Narcotics and Organized Crime Divisions and the armed forces and CSOs on indicators of trafficking for forced criminality, CSGBV, early identification and best practices in investigation techniques on human trafficking including use of electronic evidence.

7.3.3 Strengthen the criminal justice system to ensure speedy disposition of cases including continued best practice capacitybuilding of law enforcers, prosecutors, judges, and other key stakeholders. Conduct a rapid assessment to address the delay in the criminal justice system to fast-track scheduling of hearings and in-camera testimony.

7.3.4 Increase efforts to identify and assist child trafficking victims, including training to law enforcers, social service providers, and labour inspectors on CSGBV, digital skills, indicators of labour trafficking, online recruitment trends.

7.4

GUIDELINES AND CIRCULARS

7.4.1 Chief justice to consider issuing a new Circular requesting that all trafficking cases be concluded within six months. Magistrates, High Court judges and prosecutors undergo a refresher training on the relevant trafficking legislation and the SOPS and best practices for implementation of the Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act, No. 10 of 2023.

7.4.2 Inspector General of Police to consider issuing a Circular for all local police stations (in those in at risk and vulnerable, high migration areas and tourist hot spots) on charging related to human trafficking cases and detailed instructions on the identification of victims.

7.5

DATABASE

7.5.1 To facilitate an evidence-based approach and ensure that investigations and prosecutions are promptly monitored, conduct an assessment for the establishment of a central data prosecutorial case management database at the Attorney General's Department (AGD).

7.6

STRENGTHENING AND AMENDING LEGISLATION

7.6.1 Current legislation should be equipped to capture the latest trends of trafficking and take preventive measures as well as provide effective mechanisms in prosecuting perpetrators. Conduct a legal gaps analysis to formulate appropriate legal reforms/processes to make counter trafficking law and policy consistent with international standards responding to the emerging realities of cyber related human trafficking and CSGBV.

7.6.2 Conduct a review to ensure that policy and legislation in relation to human trafficking and cybercrime is aligned in terms of definitions and penalties.

7.6.3 Ratify and implement international UN Convention against Cybercrime (2024).

8.

PARTNERSHIP

The partnership recommendations seek to strengthen coordination at all levels, both within Sri Lanka and internationally. Strengthening coordinated efforts and partnerships among government stakeholders, CSOs and NGOs, technology companies and private sector entities, is essential in the fight against human trafficking. Currently, the lack of effective collaboration between the Government and CSOs providing protection services for trafficking victims is limiting the potential positive impact of national counter-trafficking initiatives. The GoSL's limited resources for ongoing victim protection interventions, combined with the project-bound nature of CSO services, continue to present significant challenges in providing systematic and sustained support to victims.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- Institutionalise cooperation between government authorities, CSOs, and NGOs to ensure a comprehensive and unified approach to human trafficking.

- Strengthen regional and global cooperation, addressing cross-cutting issues and promoting coordinated responses to prevention, detection, rescue, prosecution, and victim support.

- Engage with international organizations, foreign governments, and regional frameworks such as the Bali Process, as well as utilizing diplomatic engagement and legal instruments to strengthen partnerships, learn from best practices and inform policy.
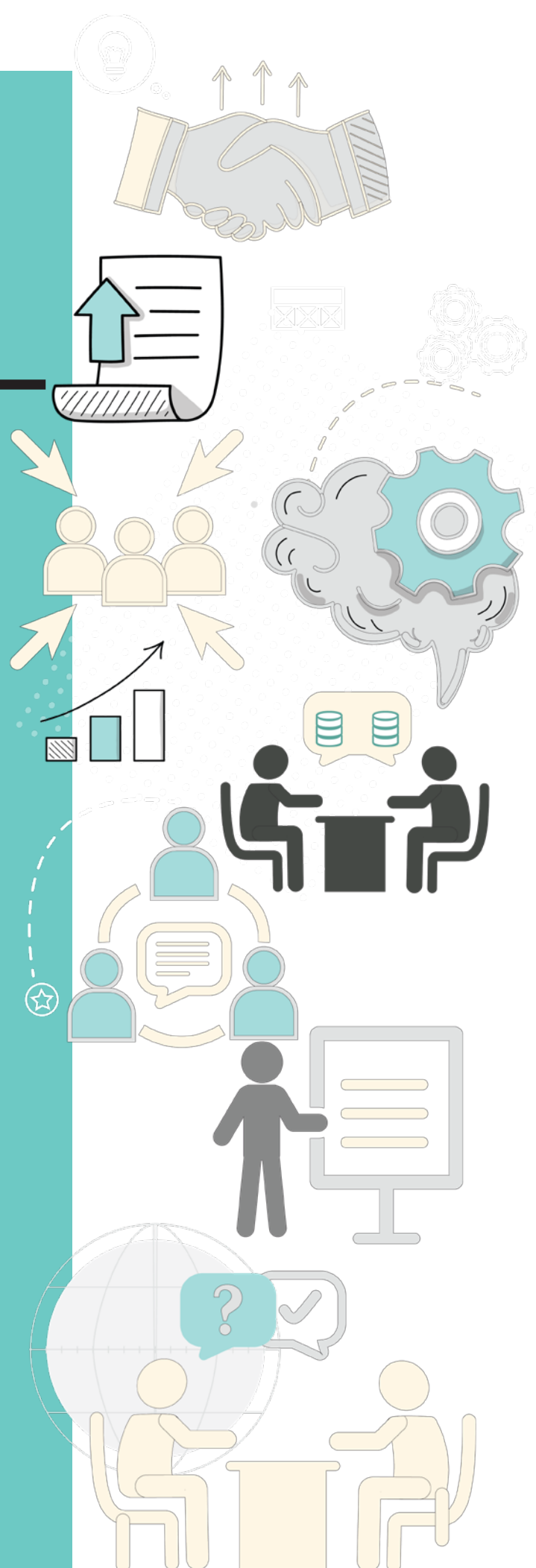
8.1

STRENGTHENING THE WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT, WHOLE OF SOCIETY APPROACH

8.1.1   NAHTTF may consider establishing a Secretariat for the NAHTTF to oversee implementation and monitoring, data management and reporting - horizontally – between task force members and vertically between the NAHTTF and the proposed DATFs.

8.2

STRENGTHENING NATIONAL COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

8.2.1   Expand community-level interventions and awareness on human trafficking to strengthen community systems for identifying, reporting, and responding to human trafficking and improve access to services for victims at the community level.

8.2.2   In order to provide nationwide protection and in cooperation and with the active participation of CSOs and NGOs establish DATFs in all 25 districts. Through NTT provide capacity building to 14,000 village heads on prevention of irregular migration, trafficking and trafficking trends, victim identification and referral reintegration and the role of the NAHTTF and national system of monitoring and evaluation (M &E.)

8.3

STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

8.3.1   Strengthen regional cooperation by organizing policy dialogues that bring together States, NGOs, and international organizations to share information on managing migration, protection and trafficking through processes such as the Bali Process,[42] The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)[43] and the Colombo Process[44].

8.3.2   Issue a Circular for all Sri Lankan embassies and consulates (through Secretary of the Foreign Ministry) with detailed instructions on the importance of actively screening, identifying, and referring Sri Lankans who fall victim to trafficking and other related offenses. The circular should stipulate the requirement that all identified cases be recorded and shared with the Secretariat of the NAHTTF.

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[42] The Bali Process https://www.baliprocess.net/

[43] BIMTSEC: https://bimstec.org/

[44] The Colombo Process https://www.iom.int/regional-consultative-process-overseas-employment-and-contractual-labor-countries-origin-asia-colombo-process

8.4

POLICY
See 4.2 for suggested policy recommendations

8.4.1 Working through existing initiatives, such as the Bali Process, where necessary strengthen international cooperation through agreements and regional frameworks (Bilateral, multi-lateral for information exchange on issues and trends, best practices in investigations, prosecutions, convictions and victim assistance and protection).

9.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The implementation of NSAP 2026-2030 requires strengthened collaboration and institutional coordination among NAHTTF members including the sharing of budgets and resources, and periodic joint monitoring to ensure outcomes are met and victims are being identified and provided with assistance and protection through the SOPS.

The proposed recommendations will facilitate implementation of the policy, provisions, cutting across different government structures at the national, divisional, district and community levels and with a multitude of stakeholders including government agencies, the private sector, NGOs CSOs and development partners.
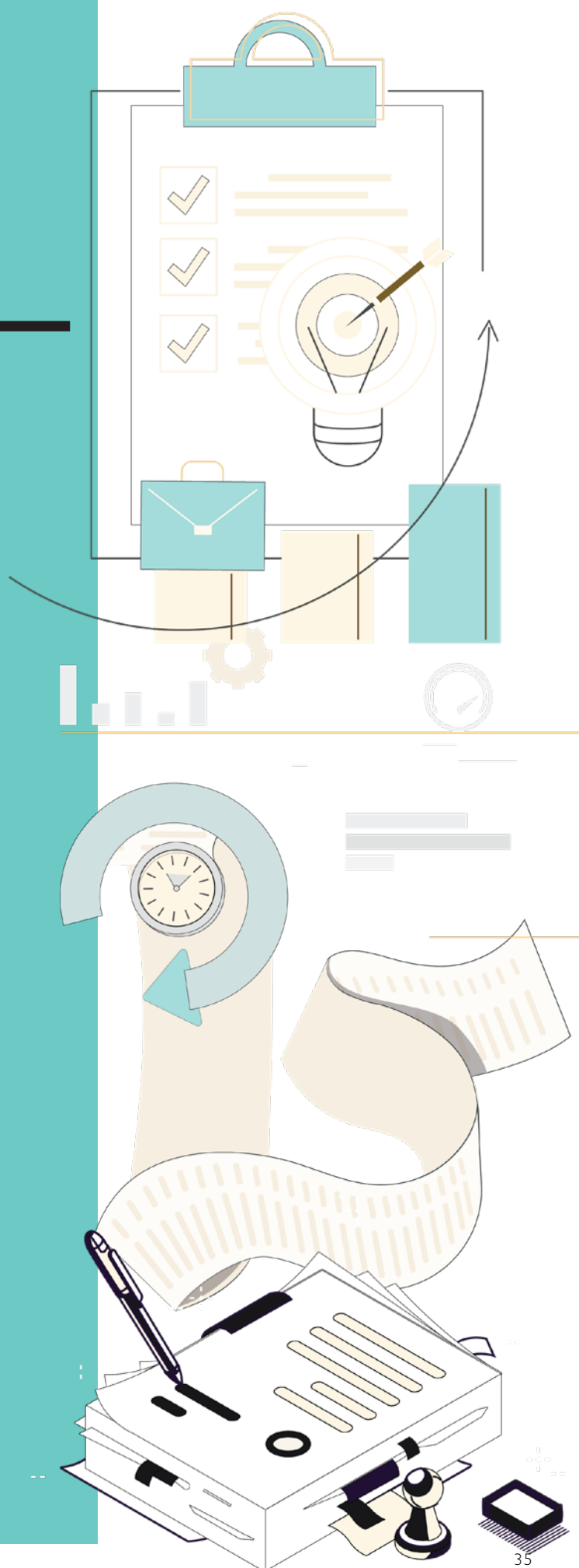
9.1

STRENGTHENING THE IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING MECHANISM:

9.1.1   Draft a terms of reference (TOR) and establish a NSAP monitoring and strategy oversight team, that will report to the Secretary of the NAHTTF. The oversight team is to be representative of all key agencies (and will include CSO representation) be appointed by the Ministry of Defence. The oversight team will function according to Terms of Reference (TOR) for a two-year term. The ToR will describe key functions of the team including policy guidance and strategic direction to the steering committees to be established under each core 'P'. The oversight team will require and review annual progress reports and provide feedback to respective committees and ensure timely implementation of proposed activities as stipulated in the action plan. It will advise on all aspects of the national counter trafficking strategy and inform, endorse and manage the work of the NTT.

9.1.2   Establish steering committees responsible for oversight, implementation and monitoring of the respective 'P'. The main role of a steering committee is to oversee implementation of the action plan by relevant sectoral lead implementing agency and partners and will adhere to the annual planning and budgeting cycle of the NAHTTF. At the beginning of each fiscal year, each committee will coordinate and compile an annual plan based on the outcomes of the action plan in collaboration with all sectoral ministries other institutions and relevant CSOs. The steering committee will track the progress and monitor the implementation of the plan and will submit quarterly progress reports to the Secretariat.

9.1.3   Explore possibilities to develop and link provincial level steering committees to the proposed DATFS and mainstream into the reporting and monitoring framework.

9.1.4   Conduct an assessment for the development of a reporting and data and monitoring and evaluation system across NAHTTF at national, provincial and district levels. Embassies will also report to the Secretariat through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Consider use of an online a digitised reporting mechanism that will first responders to submit a referral through a single online form regardless of their location in Sri Lanka, whether the victim is an adult or child.[45]

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[45] *As working example, the UK National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process has been digitized through a secure online portal used by front-line professionals such as law enforcement, local authorities, and NGOs to submit Referral Forms electronically when they suspect someone is a victim of trafficking.*

9.2

MEETING FUNDING CHALLENGES

9.2.1 To ensure adequate funding for the proposed activities explore alternative funding mechanisms and opportunities. For example, strengthen public-private partnerships (PPPs) and engage corporations, technology firms, and financial institutions to fund prevention programmes and victim support services. Leveraging technology including use of AI and mobile apps and digital hotlines to report trafficking cases, will reduce costs on physical outreach programmes.

9.2.2 Consider strengthening partnerships with local NGOs and community organizations, which often have lower operational costs and direct access to vulnerable populations. At the community level, support and embed volunteer-based programmes for victim assistance, legal aid, and public awareness campaigns on human trafficking and irregular migration.

ANNEXURE :

PHOTOGRAPHS

CONSULTATION WORKSHOP WITH CSOS HELD ON 14 FEBRUARY 2025

CONSULTATION WORKSHOP HELD WITH DONORS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS ON 13 FEBRUARY 2025

CONSULTATION WORKSHOP WITH THE GOVERNMENT/NAHTTF HELD ON 10-11 FEBRUARY 2025