

REGIONAL TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS COMMITTEE (TIPCOM)

FORUM REPORT



United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime



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CONTENT

BACKGROUND	4
LIST OF PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES	5
ABOUT THE FORUM	6
OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM	7
OPENING REMARKS	8
COUNTRY PRESENTATIONS	9
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA	10
COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS	11
BARBADOS	13
BELIZE	14
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	16
GRENADA	17
JAMAICA	18
MONTSERRAT	19
ST. LUCIA	20
ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES	22
SURINAME	23
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	24
CARICOM IMPLEMENTING AGENCY FOR CRIME AND SECURITY (IMPACS) RESOURCES TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS	26
RESOURCES – UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME	28
“WHY TIP SCREENING MATTERS”	30
COMMON IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES	31
BEST PRACTICES	32

BACKGROUND

As the custodian of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (TIP Protocol), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), plays a crucial role in supporting member states in their efforts to combat human trafficking by strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing law enforcement capacities, and fostering international cooperation.

Following the unprecedented challenges and consequences posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the landscape of trafficking in persons changed. Four years after the major impacts of the pandemic, global detection of trafficking victims has increased. However, according to the UNODC 2024 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, this trend has not been observed in the Caribbean region, where victim detection has decreased compared to 2020.¹ This trend underscores the pressing need for adaptive screening techniques to uncover hidden cases and protect vulnerable individuals who may be at heightened risk.

In the Caribbean region, human trafficking remains a complex and transnational issue, necessitating coordinated responses and adaptive strategies. The 2024 Regional Trafficking in Persons Committee (TIPCOM) Forum, held on July 19, 2024, was hosted by the Commonwealth of The Bahamas' Ministry of National Security in collaboration with UNODC and the Caribbean Community Implementation Agency for Crime and Se-

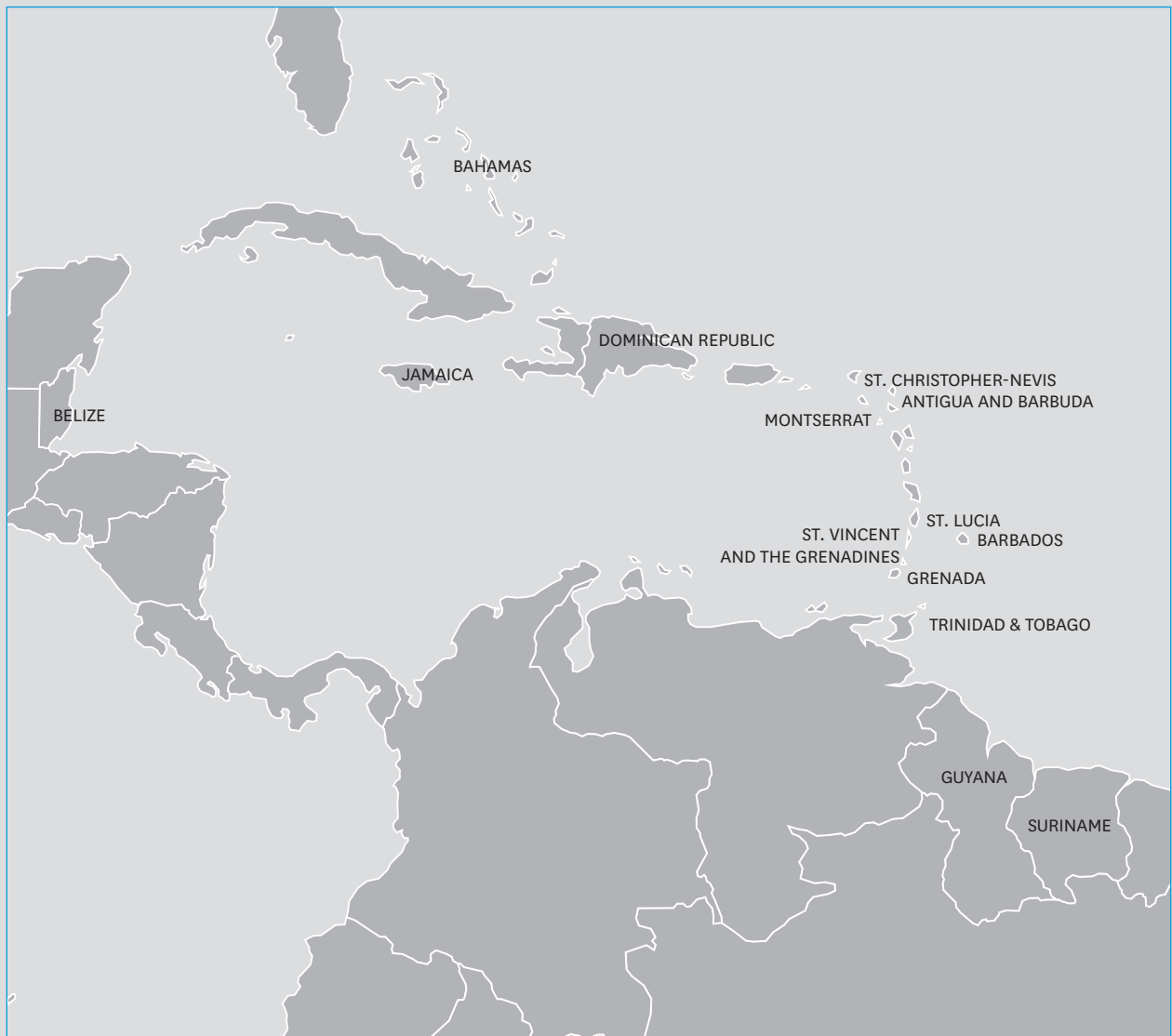
curity (CARICOM IMPACS). In its second edition, the TIPCOM Forum was convened to focus specifically on 'Trafficking in Persons Screening', understanding that screening should be trauma-informed, victim-centered, and culturally appropriate. The Forum provided an essential platform for Caribbean nations to identify gaps and explore innovative solutions to improve victim identification in the region using a survivor engagement approach, understanding that their voices should be incorporated into decision-making and policy planning related to trafficking in persons.

The Forum also presented the opportunity for Caribbean countries to exchange best practices in identifying and responding to trafficking cases effectively and showcased the pivotal role of technology in enhancing screening processes to adapt to evolving trafficking patterns.

The Forum further emphasized that regional collaboration and cooperation are essential in the Caribbean context to effectively tackle trafficking in persons, considering the unique context, resources, and best practices within the region. By fostering partnerships among Caribbean nations, stakeholders can pool resources, share intelligence, and leverage collective expertise to combat this transnational crime more effectively.

¹ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2024/GLOTIP2024_Chapter_1.pdf

LIST OF PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES



ABOUT THE FORUM

The Forum was organized by UNODC and hosted by the Commonwealth of the Bahamas under the auspices of the Honourable Mr. Wayne Munroe, Minister of National Security. Bringing together a diverse contingent including UNODC representatives, CARICOM IMPACS specialists, law enforcement officials, social services representatives, government officials, academics, university representatives, health care practitioners, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders.

Although the event was primarily virtual, it followed a hybrid format in the Bahamas attended by key members of government and law enforcement, while online participants from 14 Caribbean countries joined the discussions. This setup fostered a collaborative dialogue on each country's trafficking in person screening processes, best practices, challenges, and opportunities for national and regional partnerships.

Key topics included cultural sensitivity in screening protocols and adaptive techniques aligned with emerging trafficking trends. Open discussions were facilitated by Ms. Lissette Reyes, Caribbean Project Officer, Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section, UNODC.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM

- **Enhance Trauma-Informed and victim-centered approaches and tools:** The forum aimed to highlight the importance of improved, trauma-informed screening approaches and tools for identifying trafficking victims in the region. By understanding the unique challenges faced by victims and the shifts in trafficking patterns, the objective is to enhance screening techniques that prioritize victim-centered approaches.
- **Promote Inter-Institutional collaboration and gender-sensitive responses:** Due to the multiple contexts in which a victim can be identified and the challenges that identification poses, coordination remains a significant obstacle to effective identification and referral. Strengthening communication channels amongst key stakeholders will allow us to reinforce harmonized approaches and avoid re-victimization. Learning from best practices will be key to promoting inter-institutional collaboration.
- **Foster Regional Cooperation and Innovation** among Caribbean nations to effectively combat trafficking in persons. By convening stakeholders, the forum sought to identify gaps in current screening methods and explore innovative solutions. Through shared best practices and experiences, the objective is to strengthen regional cooperation and collective expertise in addressing trafficking in persons.

OPENING REMARKS

- The Hon. Wayne R. Munroe, Minister of National Security, The Bahamas, stressed the importance of collaboration with international organizations like UNODC and CARICOM IMPACS to combat human trafficking. “Working together, we can defend the rights of every person who is a victim of human trafficking,” he affirmed.
- Ms. Sylvie Bertrand, UNODC’s Regional Representative for Central America and the Caribbean, echoed this sentiment, highlighting the role of TIPCOM as a platform to deepen regional cooperation and enhance collective responses to trafficking.
- Mr. Rufus Ferdinand, Chief Legal and Compliance Officer, CARICOM IMPACS underscored the need for a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to combat human trafficking, supported by regional and international partnerships. He emphasized the importance of joint operations and security strategies and said: “We have much to learn from each other and numerous opportunities to collaborate more closely in the future.”²

² **IMPACS Insights Issue 2 May-August 2024, CARICOM IMPACS Newsletter.** Available at: <https://www.caricomimpacs.org/newsletters>.

COUNTRY PRESENTATIONS



ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Antigua and Barbuda presented their victim screening form, developed in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It was noted that the screening process begins with obtaining informed consent, allowing individuals to choose whether they wish to proceed and be informed of possible assistance. The data collection includes personal information such as age, gender, nationality, and interview details which include a list of questions aimed at identifying indicators of trafficking. Victims may be referred by law enforcement, or immigration, or may self-refer.

Antigua highlighted that their screening form is available in both English and Spanish with the availability of interpreters within their unit. According to Antigua, most of the individuals they are in contact with have English as a second language. Considering the individual's needs, all interviews must be done in the native language of the individual.



COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

Bahamas presentation focused on a pilot study being conducted to improve human trafficking screening processes. This project is part of a partnership between The Bahamas and Indiana University-East Campus. The pilot study seeks to develop a standardized screening tool for more effective identification of victims of trafficking in persons (TIP).

Key Points from the Presentation:

1. Purpose of the Pilot Study:

The main objective of the project is to create a standardized, efficient, and relevant screening tool for detecting trafficking victims. The tool aims to provide a baseline measure to identify trafficking exposure, characteristics, and demographics, with the ultimate goal of helping to detect unseen victims and streamline the use of resources.

2. Development of the Screening Tool:

The team designed an assessment instrument consisting of 21 questions, with 10 specific to TIP. These questions were developed using research from existing screening tools, including those used in the U.S. and worldwide. Dr. Parker highlighted the importance of separating preliminary screening questions from secondary investigation questions to ensure the tool is fit for purpose.

3. Use of the U.S. National Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Toolkit (2018):

This toolkit was used to help refine the screening tool. One issue with existing tools was that many questions mixed preliminary screening with secondary investigative elements, making them less effective for initial victim identification.

4. Development of Trafficking Exposure Scale:

The pilot study introduced a 1-10 scale to measure the level of exposure to trafficking, where:

- Low exposure: 0-2
- Moderate exposure: 3-5
- High exposure: 6-10

It was emphasized during the presentation that trafficking should not be viewed as a binary process (trafficked vs. not trafficked), but rather as a progressive process similar to gang recruitment. Victims become susceptible to trafficking as they are exposed to various components of exploitation over time.

5. Broad and Inclusive Metrics:

The tool includes specific questions for different types of trafficking (e.g., labor trafficking, sex trafficking) and incorporates demographic information and contact details for follow-up referrals. The tool is designed to be used by a wide range of

individuals, including school officials, healthcare workers, and social services, making it broadly accessible and easy to implement.

6. Pilot Testing and App Development:

The screening tool was initially pre-tested on 53 students from criminal justice, nursing, and business fields to evaluate its validity and reliability. A beta test followed, involving 37 participants at a labor fair in Nassau, Bahamas. The tool was integrated into an app running on a secure cloud-based server (Qualtrics), providing robust protection against malware and ensuring data security.

7. Screening for Juveniles:

The team also developed alternative screening tools for juveniles, recognizing the need for tailored approaches to different age groups and circumstances.

8. Use of Community Vulnerability Index:

The screening tool incorporates a community vulnerability index, similar to the one used by the Richmond Police Department and social services. This index, based on collective efficacy research, helps assess broader community risks associated with trafficking.

Conclusion:

The Bahamas' new screening tool will enhance the detection of trafficking victims by providing a flexible and widely usable system that also highlights the relevance of data for prevention efforts. The tool is designed to be deployed by various stakeholders, from law enforcement to healthcare professionals, and it represents a significant step forward in the fight against human trafficking in The Bahamas.



BARBADOS

Barbados' presentation focused on its current screening practices, challenges, and opportunities:

- **Screening Practices:** Barbados utilizes border surveillance and screening forms developed by the Unit to identify potential victims of trafficking. Given its role as a transit point, screening focuses on detecting indicators that may reveal cases of trafficking, including primary and secondary screening processes. Primary screening is the initial assessment, followed by in-depth questioning based on the Means-Purpose-Act elements of trafficking. Law enforcement officials often screen non-nationals who may have reported a sexual or violent offence or theft as victims often do not self-identify (using this as a proactive measure of potentially identifying victims as well). Additionally, non-nationals who may be detained at the air or seaports for drug trafficking are also screened for TIP indicators as they may have been forced or coerced to transport drugs which is a form of TIP according to national legislation.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognizing cultural differences plays a critical role in identifying trafficking victims. For example, living arrangements that may seem normal to some cultures, such as sharing a bed or sleeping on a mattress on the floor, could be misinterpreted as indicators of trafficking. It is essential to differentiate cultural practices from potential signs of exploitation.

Barbados highlighted the need for contextual understanding when assessing such situations and ensuring that cultural sensitivity is incorporated into all screening protocols.

Challenges:

- **Distrust of law enforcement:** Many victims, particularly those coerced by traffickers, are briefed on what to say to border officials, making it challenging to get truthful answers.
- **Abuse of CARICOM's free movement regulations:** Traffickers exploit the six-month visa-free stay for CARICOM nationals, complicating the identification of victims.

Opportunities:

Screening provides insights into new trafficking patterns and trends, which can inform legislative amendments related to labor laws, immigration, money laundering, and sexual offenses. Regional collaboration is key to addressing these challenges effectively, as information gathered can be shared with counterparts across the Caribbean to improve response strategies.



BELIZE

Belize highlighted that the country's prime position in the Central American migration corridor results in fluctuating numbers of regular and irregular migrants, many of whom pass through en route to Mexico, the United States, or Canada. The screening process in Belize has had to adapt over time, especially when dealing with migrants traveling with minors. A notable issue arose in 2021/2022, when it was discovered that some minors were not related to the adults accompanying them. Belize now includes the presence of guardians, parents, or social workers during the screening of minors to ensure their safety and well-being.

- **Screening Adaptation:** The Unit has moved away from relying solely on forms, as this approach can make migrants feel as though they are under investigation or in trouble. Instead, the team engages migrants in conversation, asking about their well-being and personal needs before formal questioning. This more personalized approach has led to better information collection, helping authorities understand the individual's trajectory, their sponsor's involvement, and whether they have family connections in their destination country.
- **Challenges:** Belize faces a lack of adequate facilities to house both regular and irregular migrants, which becomes particularly problematic during migration surges. Additionally, there are logistical challenges when screening large groups of people, especially children.

- **Opportunities:** Belize is working on modifying its screening form and expanding its capacity by training social workers and community members to assist in identifying potential victims. This approach helps improve community awareness and increases the Unit's reach in detecting trafficking cases, especially among families bound for labor exploitation in factories and farms across the borders.

UNIQUE INSIGHTS

During the open discussion, the representative from Belize highlighted the complex relationship between migration and human trafficking, particularly regarding domestic servitude and the smuggling of minors from neighboring countries such as Honduras and Guatemala. It was explained how persons from the migrant community who have lived and worked in Belize have recruited minors from their home countries under the guise of legitimate job opportunities. Later transporting the minors to Belize under the pretense of family relations and eventually aid in their exploitation for domestic labor. These children are smuggled into Belize and then hired under informal arrangements, which makes them difficult to detect.

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- **Case example:** *A notable case was shared involving a minor smuggled into Belize to work for a prominent family. She was underpaid, forced to sleep on deplorable conditions, and given minimal food, with no communication with her family. Her plight only came to light through an anonymous tip, and Belizean officials were able to rescue her. Belize noted that such cases are becoming more common, but detection remains challenging.*

The country recently completed an amnesty program in which irregular migrants were provided with an alternative pathway to permanent residency. This

registration process also led to the identification of several trafficking victims, however, there were still many undocumented migrants who did not take part in the process, posing a significant challenge to identifying trafficking cases.

Belize iterated that there is a concern about many more victims of trafficking remaining hidden for different reasons like fear, and lack of awareness (among others) underscoring the need for ongoing efforts to build trust with migrant communities and improve trafficking detection in Belize.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Dominican Republic's presentation highlighted the structure and efforts of the Interinstitutional Commission against Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling (CITIM). As a national coordination mechanism, CITIM unites 14 government institutions under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to combat trafficking and smuggling through a comprehensive, cross-sector approach. CITIM's primary objectives in addressing trafficking are twofold:

- Identification and Protection of Dominican trafficking victims abroad.
- Interinstitutional Coordination and Response to human trafficking and migrant smuggling, including the development of national action plans and coordinated efforts with governmental agencies.

The Dominican Republic shared its cross-cutting strategy implemented across three key pillars to address these issues:

- Prevention: Raising awareness through campaigns, capacity-building initiatives, and sensitization programs on trafficking and smuggling.
- Prosecution: Fostering interinstitutional cooperation for investigations and legal proceedings.

- Protection: Coordinating assistance, protection, and reintegration services, with a focus on the repatriation and support of Dominican victims identified abroad.

Additionally, the Dominican Republic shared four best practices currently in place:

- Interinstitutional Agreement for Victim Reintegration: Supporting the reintegration process for Dominican trafficking victims identified abroad.
- Coordinated Response for Dominican Victims Abroad: An interinstitutional collaboration involving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Attorney General's Office, Immigration, and National Police to ensure comprehensive support.
- Online Reporting Tool: A digital platform enabling coordinated response efforts between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Police to facilitate the rescue and support of potential victims.
- Consular Capacity-Building Programs: Regular training for consular officials on crime identification, referral procedures, and victim assistance.



GRENADA

Grenada's presentation outlined the current processes for combating TIP, which involves collaboration between the immigration authorities and police force, in addition to current standard operating procedures and documents developed with technical assistance from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and European Union (EU) funding. Several training workshops have been conducted for immigration officials and other stakeholders, including civil society, to better identify and respond to TIP. Border officials are continuously trained to detect indicators of trafficking.

Challenges:

- **Resource Constraints:** Grenada faces significant financial and human resource limitations, which hinder its capacity to identify and respond to trafficking cases effectively.
- **Reluctance of Victims:** Identifying trafficking victims is particularly difficult, as they are often reluctant to approach authorities.
- **Limited Data Collection:** There is a lack of robust data collection mechanisms, which impedes the ability to track and analyze trafficking trends.

Opportunities:

- **Regional Cooperation:** Grenada emphasized the importance of enhanced regional cooperation, working closely with neighboring countries to improve the detection and intervention of trafficking cases.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Increasing public awareness about the signs of trafficking can help in victim identification and prompt intervention.
- **Capacity Building:** There is potential for further capacity building, both at the national and regional levels, to address the gaps in Grenada's response to human trafficking.

Case Study:

A suspected human trafficking case from 2012 was shared. In this case, 14 Nepalese nationals were found in a guest house in Grenada. The victims reported that they were recruited to attend a non-existent university in St. Lucia then smuggled from St. Lucia to Grenada, with the intention of eventually reaching Trinidad. A Ghanaian-Trinidadian national was found to be responsible for organizing the smuggling and was charged and fined. Grenadian officials were able to assist the victims with a successful repatriation.



JAMAICA

Jamaica's presentation emphasized the development of a National Referral Mechanism, which has been pivotal in maintaining the country's Tier 2 ranking in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. This mechanism was further strengthened through the Child Protection Compact (CPC), a four-year plan developed in collaboration with the U.S. government. The CPC aims to enhance Jamaica's ability to prosecute child traffickers, identify child trafficking victims, and provide comprehensive protective services.

Key Components of Jamaica's Anti-Trafficking Response:

- **National Referral Mechanism and Practical Screening Tool:** The CPC Compact led to the creation of a practical screening tool, which has become a cornerstone of Jamaica's efforts to identify victims of trafficking. This tool, born from the National Referral Mechanism, provides a structured approach to ensure that victims are identified and referred to appropriate services.
- **Specialized Anti-Trafficking Task Force:** Jamaica has established a specialized anti-trafficking task force within the Jamaica Constabulary Force. This unit is specifically trained in TIP identification and response. For instance, during raids, these officers are responsible for identifying victims and ensuring they are referred to support services.

- **Training:** The specialized training of the taskforce is considered a best practice, ensuring that victims are properly identified and supported during enforcement actions.

Challenges in Broader Law Enforcement:

- A significant challenge arises from the lack of TIP expertise among other law enforcement officers and stakeholders in the justice system. Victims who exhibit characteristics of trafficking may go unrecognized if they are encountered by personnel outside of the specialized anti-trafficking unit. As a result, opportunities to provide early support to victims are sometimes missed.

Support Resources for Victims:

- **Online Resource Library:** Developed in collaboration with the CPC and the Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking, this online library serves as a central hub of information to aid law enforcement and other stakeholders in understanding trafficking trends and victim identification.
- **Handbook of Services:** Jamaica has created a handbook to guide victims and service providers, making it easier for victims to navigate the system and access the services they need.



MONTSERRAT

Montserrat's presentation outlined the island's approach to tackling trafficking in persons (TIP) and migrant smuggling, highlighting a collaborative, multi-agency response. While Montserrat lacks a specialized unit dedicated solely to TIP and smuggling, these cases are primarily managed by the Central Investigative Department (CID), with support from immigration and customs as needed. This model leverages interdepartmental coordination to address serious offenses effectively.

To date, there have been no reported cases of TIP on the island. In contrast, there have been instances of migrant smuggling. This issue is linked to Montserrat's geographic location, which positions it as a transit point between other Caribbean islands, leading to its borders being used for transshipment activities.

Process at Ports of Entry:

- Upon entering Montserrat, immigration officials conduct initial interviews with individuals who may raise suspicions or concerns. If warranted, the police become involved in secondary interviewing to gather more information and assess potential risks.

Collaboration and Communication:

- Being a small territory, Montserrat benefits from close collaboration among officials. The ease of communication among law enforcement and immigration personnel allows for efficient information sharing regarding specific cases. Inspector Antoine emphasized the island's eagerness to work closely with Caribbean counterparts and other relevant agencies to strengthen their collective efforts against trafficking and smuggling.



ST. LUCIA

St. Lucia outlined its practices regarding Trafficking in Persons (TIP) screening, particularly the development and implementation of a comprehensive victim screening process designed to enhance the identification and support of trafficking victims.

Key Components of St. Lucia's TIP Screening Process:

■ Development of the Screening Form:

In 2019, St. Lucia developed a TIP Victim Screening Form. This form is part of a broader framework outlined in the Standing Operating Procedures (SOP) for the referral and protection of victims of trafficking (VOT) in St. Lucia. The form captures essential data regarding potential VOTs, assesses their needs and risk levels, and facilitates referrals to relevant authorities for post-trafficking support, including psychological and financial assistance.

■ Implementation and Use:

The Major Crimes Unit of the Royal St. Lucia Police Force was the first agency to utilize this screening form, acting as the first responders to TIP incidents. The screening form has been widely circulated among various stakeholders, including immigration officials, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Labour, and the Department of Health Services, to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Key Protocols:

The screening process is guided by specific protocols that prioritize:

- **Informed Consent:** Victims must agree to participate in the assessment.
Minors' Considerations: There is a specific section in the form designed for minors.
- **Sensitivity and Comfort:** Ensuring the physical and emotional comfort of victims during interviews.
- **Language Accessibility:** Providing translators for non-English speaking victims.
- **Approval of Presence:** Victims can approve who may be present during their interview.
- **Training for Professionals:** Professionals who use the screening form receive training to build rapport and trust with victims prior to the interview. This training emphasizes a victim-centered approach, focusing on making potential victims feel at ease.

Challenges Encountered:

- The screening process may not always capture necessary information, as victims might not self-identify or may refuse to cooperate.
- Language barriers and skepticism regarding the existence of human trafficking in St. Lucia can hinder the process.
- Inadequate resources may lead to a lack of access to professionals like counselors and translators, which are essential for effective screening.

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- The interview environment might not always provide the privacy required for sensitive discussions, risking re-traumatization for victims recounting their experiences.
 - Information sharing among agencies can be inconsistent, and the forms are not always utilized effectively by stakeholders.
 - Continuous training is a challenge, as trained personnel are frequently replaced, leading to gaps in knowledge and practice.

Benefits of the Screening Process:

- The screening process plays a crucial role in identifying the needs of victims, providing essential data to the police taskforce, and assisting the

Minister of Home Affairs in decision-making regarding applications for permanent or semi-permanent residency for victims.

- The screening form captures vital information about both victims and perpetrators, aiding in the prosecution of trafficking cases and ensuring adherence to international requirements.
- The process promotes collaboration among service providers to address observed gaps, facilitates learning from experiences, and examines best practices from other member states.
- Ultimately, the impact of the screening interviews extends to the victims and the police, contributing to a more effective response to the challenges posed by trafficking in persons.



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG), the screening of victims of trafficking (VOT) faces significant challenges, primarily due to the underreporting of cases. Victims often do not self-identify, making screening crucial for identifying the type of exploitation and the circumstances surrounding the trafficking incidents.

Key Points:

- **Historical Cases:** The first documented case of trafficking in SVG occurred in 2015, involving three foreign nationals who were victims of labor exploitation. The perpetrator, a local businessman, was taken to court, but the case was dismissed. Since then, there have been no arrests for human trafficking.
- **Geographical Context:** SVG comprises 32 islands, many of which are uninhabited, and have porous borders similar to other Caribbean nations. This geographical reality complicates the monitoring of trafficking activities.
- **Screening Form Development:** The police have developed a screening form designed to capture essential biographical information about potential victims, including key elements of crime like the acts, means, and modality of exploitation.
- **Support Services:** The screening process is essential for connecting victims with necessary services, such as medical care, psychological support, and legal assistance, preventing further exploitation and trauma.
- **Data Collection and Awareness:** Screening helps gather vital information to understand the scope and trends of trafficking in SVG. Raising awareness among healthcare providers, law enforcement, and the general public is critical for identifying potential trafficking signs.
- **Collaboration:** SVG has signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with various ministries, including Labour, Customs and Excise, Health, Education, and Prisons, promoting a multi-agency approach to combat trafficking.



SURINAME

Suriname is recognized as a Tier One country in the U.S. TIP report and has made strides in addressing human trafficking through collaborative efforts and the establishment of effective screening processes.

Key Points:

- **Trauma-Informed Care:** The TIP Unit has enhanced its trauma-informed care approach and developed a questionnaire with 12 targeted questions to assess the prevalence of trafficking, followed by in-depth interviews for specific cases.
- **NGO Collaboration:** The TIP Unit collaborates with various NGOs to provide services to victims, including the appointment of female police officers to assist female survivors throughout the investigation process.
- **Awareness and Outreach:** The unit engages local women's organizations and LGBTIQ groups to help identify vulnerable individuals and raise awareness about trafficking in more remote areas of Suriname.

Support Services:

Suriname now has a permanent shelter for victims, assisting those who choose to remain in the country

with employment opportunities. During open discussions, the representative from Suriname indicated that they faced challenges in providing long-term housing for victims of trafficking, as they previously only had a transitional shelter, which was insufficient for ongoing victim care after the initial police investigation. Recognizing the need for a more permanent solution, Suriname initiated efforts to establish a permanent shelter for victims. Through proactive leadership and advocacy, the initiative received support from the Ministry of Justice and Police and the President of Suriname. The Attorney General's Office (AG) suggested looking for a house that had been confiscated by law. Such a property was identified and was repurposed by the government to serve as the new permanent shelter for trafficking victims.

Future Collaborations:

Suriname is focused on further enhancing its collaboration with CARICOM IMPACS for training, the IOM for victim support, and Interpol for information exchange. Suriname is looking forward to expanding partnerships with UNODC and other agencies to enhance victim identification and develop effective anti-trafficking projects.



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The Counter-Trafficking Unit (CTU) was established by the Trafficking in Persons Act and is designed to combat trafficking through a multi-dimensional approach. The unit is specialized and civilian-led, including personnel from various law enforcement agencies including immigration, police, and defense forces with plans to integrate personnel from the labour inspectorate. CTU's multidisciplinary approach operates independently from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS).

Key Highlights:

■ Specialized Function:

The CTU is the only agency authorized to legally deem a person a VOT. It receives referrals via its 24-hour hotline, proactive intelligence-led exercises, external law enforcement, NGOs, and IOM. In the last reporting period, the CTU screened 144 individuals for potential trafficking cases, providing crucial data for law enforcement and victim support.

■ Context of TIP:

Trinidad and Tobago faces unique challenges related to TIP, particularly due to porous borders and the socioeconomic crisis affecting Venezuela which has led to a surge in irregular migration by sea. This migrant population is particularly vulnerable to TIP.

■ Screening Process:

The CTU standardized its screening form in 2024 in collaboration with stakeholders and first responders. The screening form is a critical tool for identifying potential victims and ensuring they receive the necessary support.

While the CTU is the specialized unit, first responders—including police, Coast Guard, and defense force personnel—are often on the front lines, intercepting individuals at sea and assessing potential trafficking situations before referring to CTU.

Best Practices in Screening:

- Active Listening: The CTU emphasizes the importance of active listening during interviews. This includes asking open-ended questions to gather comprehensive information and establishing a rapport with victims to encourage them to share their experiences without fear of judgment. Trinidad and Tobago's sole conviction for trafficking involved a minor Trinidadian national trafficked within Trinidad underscoring the successful implementation of a victim centered approach. The minor victim felt comfortable to share critical information and allowed for the successful prosecution of the case.

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- **Observation of Non-Verbal Cues:** During rescue operations, one officer is assigned to observe non-verbal communication, which can help identify possible enforcers hidden among victims. This method led to the arrest and charging of a perpetrator who was amongst VOTs.

- **Case Management:**

The CTU operates under the National Joint Action Task Force, focusing on a whole-of-government approach to victim support. They are moving towards a digital referral mechanism and have developed a rapid screening form that first responders can use to facilitate quick identification and referral of victims to the CTU.

- **Victim Identification and Support:**

The CTU has established protocols for victim identification that include verifying a potential VOT's identity and nationality. This involves collaboration with various embassies to ensure proper care and services for minor victims through the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. Upon identification, victims are afforded rights and privileges under the local TIP Act, which includes access to food, shelter, psychological assistance, and medical resources.

CARICOM Implementing Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) Resources to Combat Trafficking in Persons

CARICOM IMPACS Overview:

CARICOM IMPACS is the implementation arm for managing CARICOM's action plan on crime and security. Participants were briefed on the CARICOM Framework for the Management of Crime and Security, including its structure and core functions, which focus on capacity building, intelligence sharing, and addressing cross-border threats.

Key Areas of Focus:

1. Common Threat Areas:

Major regional security threats identified included drug trafficking, gun trafficking, serious organized crime, financial crimes, and TIP. Understanding these crimes is essential for developing effective strategies to combat them.

2. Challenges in Addressing TIP and Smuggling of Migrants (SOM):

- i. Geographic and Socio-Vulnerabilities: The Caribbean's landscape and maritime borders make the region susceptible to criminal networks and human trafficking. The region's migration transit routes contribute to it being both a source and a transit point for trafficking victims.
- ii. Technology: Traffickers use technology, such as social media and messaging apps, to recruit and control victims.

- iii. Legal Framework Disparities: Legislation varies significantly across the region. Countries like the Bahamas, Guyana, and Suriname have been ranked as Tier 1 countries by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons from the US Department of State due to their robust anti-trafficking legislations and specialized agencies/ task forces.

3. Law Enforcement Challenges:

- i. Identification and Protection: Law enforcement faces difficulties in identifying and protecting trafficking victims.
- ii. Resource and Training Limitations: There are constraints in funding, training, and operational capacity.
- iii. Jurisdictional Barriers: Legal and jurisdictional barriers make it difficult to combat trafficking across the region.
- iv. Corruption and Complicity: Internal threats such as corruption within law enforcement agencies hinder efforts to combat trafficking.

4. Tools and Strategies:

Advanced Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR): CARICOM emphasized the importance of using these systems to conduct risk and threat assessments of incoming passengers, aiding in the detection of trafficking.

Regional Intelligence Fusion Centre (RIFC): This system can assist member states in investigating

cybercrime, a tool critical to tackling the growing role of technology in trafficking.

5. Guidance Documents and Training:

CARICOM IMPACS highlighted the recently developed Guidance Documents on Trafficking in Persons for Member States. The Guidance Documents are a result of collaboration with UNODC and were designed to foster capacity development across the region. Training is provided through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) Connect, including Train the Trainer programs, and partnerships with international bodies like the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST).

Areas of Intervention:

Key areas where CARICOM IMPACS is collaborating with international partners:

1. **Capacity Building Programs:** Providing capacity building programs like Train the Trainer to identify, detect and prosecute trafficking cases.

2. **Specialized Operations:** Interpol's Operation Turquesa was highlighted as an example of a successful multinational collaborative operation aimed at dismantling criminal networks involved in the trafficking and smuggling of vulnerable people.
3. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Initiatives that involve the private sector, such as partnerships facilitated by the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) in Trinidad and Tobago, could be replicated in other member states.
4. **Strengthening Legal Frameworks:** Building and reinforcing legal and regulatory frameworks to combat TIP, as recommended in the 2019 CARIFORUM report.

The Way Forward:

CARICOM IMPACS reaffirmed its commitment to assisting member states in combating TIP. It was emphasized that TIP is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach, including collaboration from all stakeholders within member states to successfully address the problem.

RESOURCES – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNODC's Knowledge Hub on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling (KNOWTS)

UNODC led a presentation to brief participants on UNODC's Knowledge Hub on Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling (KNOWTS). Participants were informed on the functionality of the online platform which was developed to provide resources, tools, and information for stakeholders involved in combating human trafficking and migrant smuggling. The platform allows registered users to access a wide range of materials, including research reports, training modules, legal frameworks, and best practices, aimed at improving responses to these crimes.

KNOWTS is designed to facilitate knowledge exchange, capacity building, and cooperation among law enforcement agencies, policymakers, civil society, and international organizations. Through the platform, users can stay updated on global and regional trends, access country-specific data, and utilize resources to enhance their work in identifying and supporting victims of trafficking and smuggling.

In the context of events like the TIPCOM Forum, KNOWTS serves as a central hub for sharing materials and tools discussed during the forum, fostering collaboration among participants from different countries and sectors. All participants received accounts before the forum and were encouraged to continue to use the platform in the future.

UNODC Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section: Programs, resources and tools to combat Trafficking in Persons in the Caribbean.

UNODC highlighted its efforts to combat TIP in the Caribbean, emphasizing the importance of survivor-informed approaches and the coordination needed to effectively address the complexity of human trafficking.

Key Points:

Global Reach and Mandate of UNODC:

- UNODC operates in over 150 countries, collecting evidence-based data that helps develop context-specific public policies and normative frameworks. The organization is the guardian of several key international conventions related to organized crime, including the Palermo Protocol, which guides global efforts against TIP.
- Understanding TIP and Coordinated responses: a common understanding of TIP, including a shared language and vocabulary to identify the crime in its different forms. UNODC's global biannual report on TIP, mandated by the UN General Assembly, compiles data from member states to identify trends and patterns of trafficking. He highlighted the complexity of the crime and the need for coordinated action to prevent and address it effectively.

- Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on TIP: 36% decrease in victims detected globally and a 41% decrease in domestic trafficking victims detected, largely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Traffickers adapted by exploiting people in more clandestine ways, making detection harder. At the same time, there has been an increase in child trafficking and forced marriage cases.
- UNODC Model Law and TIP Indicators: UNODC has developed a Model Law against TIP, which provides guidance to countries on how to reform or amend their legislation in line with the Palermo Protocol. Having solid, evidence-based normative frameworks helps identify specific cases and vulnerabilities in different contexts.
- UNODC also presented its TIP Indicators tool, which identifies common indicators for various forms of trafficking, such as labor trafficking, domestic servitude, and child trafficking. Screening practices need to be based on the modality of trafficking being investigated.
- Victim Identification: Correctly identifying victims is essential to ensuring their protection and rights. A survivor-centered approach that is culturally sensitive is key, taking into account factors like gender, immigration status, cultural background, and technology. These elements must be understood before beginning the victim identification process.
- Private Sector Partnerships – A Best Practice: UNODC recognizes that partnerships are essential in the fight against trafficking in persons. In

Mexico, UNODC partnered with a major airline to enhance victim detection at airports. Assessments conducted by UNODC identified gaps in security processes, particularly in how passengers were handled and how airline and airport staff interacted with them. In response, UNODC developed educational materials on trafficking in persons (TIP), which were placed in the seat pockets of over 150 aircraft, reaching 1.6 million passengers. This partnership led to the rescue of 14 victims, highlighting the impact of collaborative efforts. UNODC emphasizes the importance of building partnerships, creating user-friendly resources, and leveraging technology to combat trafficking in persons effectively.

- Resources and Tools: UNODC presented a list of its resources available for combating TIP and smuggling of migrants, reinforcing the importance of using innovative tools and cross-sectoral cooperation in addressing human trafficking challenges.

UNODC's intervention underscored the importance of partnerships, evidence-based frameworks, and tailored approaches to addressing TIP in the Caribbean. UNODC emphasized that identification and screening are critical to protecting victims and that collaborative efforts, such as those with the private sector, can greatly enhance the region's ability to combat human trafficking effectively.

“Why TIP Screening Matters”

**Presenter: Ms. Shamere McKenzie
- Survivor, Leader, and Advocate**

Ms. Shamere McKenzie’s presentation highlighted the critical importance of screening in identifying victims of trafficking in persons (TIP) and emphasized the need to combat this dehumanizing scourge with survivor-informed policies.

Ms. McKenzie’s words captured the essence of her message:

“We are more than our story; we are agents of action and change that can help lead policies and initiatives to combat trafficking.”

Key Points:

1. Importance of Screening:

Ms. McKenzie highlighted that screening is vital in identifying trafficking victims and ensuring they receive the proper support. She emphasized that survivors should be included in the development of screening tools and victim care policies, as their firsthand experiences provide invaluable insights.

2. Victim-Centered Approach:

A recurring theme was the need to listen to victims themselves rather than assuming what they need. She gave an example where officials might refer a victim for psychological counseling, but the victim may actually prioritize security and

shelter first. This underscores the importance of taking into consideration the voices of victims in shaping effective support systems.

3. Missed Opportunities for Identification:

Ms. McKenzie shared her own 18-month experience as a trafficking victim, during which she came into contact with law enforcement, healthcare workers, and hotel staff, none of whom recognized her situation. This personal account revealed the numerous missed opportunities to identify her as a victim and intervene. She noted how these experiences made her feel invisible, underscoring the urgent need for better training and awareness among professionals likely to encounter victims.

4. Survivors as Leaders in Anti-Trafficking Efforts:

Ms. McKenzie stressed the importance of including survivors in policymaking, stating that they are more than just victims—they are agents of action and change who can provide crucial input in efforts to combat trafficking.

This presentation offered invaluable perspectives on why screening matters in the fight against human trafficking, advocating for more victim-centered approaches and the involvement of survivors in developing anti-trafficking policies and strategies. Ms. McKenzie calls on stakeholders to listen more closely to the needs of victims to ensure they receive the support that is most relevant to them.

COMMON IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

Participating countries identified the following difficulties in their counter-trafficking efforts:

1. Hesitance of Victims to Approach Authorities

Trafficking victims are often hesitant to engage with law enforcement or government officials due to fear, mistrust, or manipulation by traffickers, making identification difficult.

2. Lack of Robust Data Collection Mechanisms

The absence of comprehensive and up to date data collection systems hampers efforts to monitor trafficking trends, assess the scope of the crime and its changing nature to further develop effective counter-trafficking strategies.

3. Inadequate Screening Processes

Current screening methods may fail to capture essential information about victims, particularly because victims might not self-identify or refuse to provide necessary details due to trauma or fear of repercussions.

4. Failure of Victims to Self-Identify

Many victims do not recognize themselves as trafficked, or they may not disclose their exploitation willingly, making it challenging to identify the specific type of trafficking and the nature of their exploitation during the screening process

5. Limited Resources:

Member States often face significant resource constraints, including funding, personnel, and infrastructure, which hinder their capacity to effectively combat trafficking and provide necessary support to victims. This limitation impacts prevention and protection and rehabilitation efforts.

6. Enhanced and Needed Cooperation:

Increased collaboration across borders, sectors, and agencies is essential to address trafficking more effectively. Strengthening partnerships among member states, international organizations, and civil society can amplify impact, share best practices, and close resource gaps.

7. Capacity Building for Prosecution:

Strengthening prosecution efforts through targeted capacity-building initiatives is essential, as low prosecution rates continue to hinder justice for trafficking victims. Investing in specialized training, resources, and support for legal and law enforcement professionals can improve case outcomes and deter future trafficking.

BEST PRACTICES

1. Proactive Screening for Non-Self-Identifying Victims (Barbados)

2. Law enforcement in Barbados screens non-nationals who report sexual or violent offenses or theft, as victims often do not self-identify. This proactive approach helps identify victims who may not recognize or disclose their exploitation.

3. Screening for Trafficking Indicators in Drug Trafficking Cases (Barbados)

Law enforcement screens non-nationals detained for drug trafficking at air or seaports for TIP indicators, recognizing that some may have been coerced or forced into drug transport—a form of trafficking under national law.

4. Adaptable Screening Approach (Belize)

Belize's anti-trafficking unit engages migrants in personalized conversations rather than relying solely on forms. This victim-centered approach builds trust, allowing for more effective information collection about migrants' experiences, sponsors, and family connections.

5. Amnesty Program Leading to Victim Identification (Belize)

Belize's amnesty program for irregular migrants, offering a pathway to permanent residency, also served as a tool to identify trafficking victims,

showcasing the value of inclusive immigration policies and interagency collaboration.

6. Handbook of Services for Victims (Jamaica)

Jamaica has developed a handbook to guide trafficking victims and service providers through available support services, simplifying the process for victims to access the resources they need.

7. Informed Consent in Victim Assessments (St. Lucia)

In St. Lucia, victims must provide informed consent before participating in any trafficking assessments, ensuring that their involvement is voluntary and respectful of their autonomy.

8. Language Accessibility for Non-English-Speaking Victims (St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago)

St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago prioritize language accessibility by providing translators for non-English-speaking victims, ensuring they can fully participate in the assessment process.

9. Approval of Presence During Interviews (St. Lucia)

Victims in St. Lucia are given the right to approve who may be present during their interview, offering them a sense of control and comfort throughout the process.

10. NGO Collaboration for Victim Support (Suriname)

Suriname's TIP Unit collaborates with NGOs to provide services for victims, including appointing female police officers to assist female survivors during investigations, enhancing victim protection and support.

11. Outreach and Awareness Initiatives (Suriname)

Suriname's TIP Unit works with local women's organizations and LGBTIQ groups to identify vulnerable individuals and raise trafficking awareness in remote areas, extending the reach of anti-trafficking efforts.

12. Collaboration with State Entities for Establishment of Shelter (Suriname)

The TIP Unit in Suriname collaborated with the Attorney General's Office to repurpose confiscated property as permanent shelter for trafficking survivors, ensuring long-term, secure housing for victims.

Post Forum Recommendations:

■ Strengthen Multi-Agency Cooperation:

Encourage collaboration between immigration, law enforcement, health services, and other stakeholders through formal partnerships (MOUs and SOPs) to improve victim detection, investigation, and support across borders.

■ Standardize Screening Tools and Procedures:

Develop standardized screening tools and create a digital referral mechanism to ensure consistent victim identification and support throughout the region.

■ Capacity Building and Continuous Training:

Implement continuous training programs, including train-the-trainer initiatives, to enhance the skills of frontline workers in law enforcement, immigration, and healthcare.

■ Increase Public Awareness and Community Engagement:

Launch and sustain awareness campaigns involving the public and private sectors to educate communities on trafficking signs and encourage reporting.

■ Strengthening Inter-Regional Collaboration:

Use the TIPCOM Forum as a platform for fostering inter-regional collaboration by regularly sharing trends, data, and best practices among member states. Establish a framework for ongoing communication between countries to discuss emerging trafficking patterns, successful prevention strategies, and case management techniques. The TIPCOM Forum provides a unique opportunity for regional stakeholders to develop stronger ties and promote consistent collaboration in combating trafficking. Regularly sharing insights and lessons learned will enhance each coun-

try's ability to respond proactively to trafficking threats, creating a more cohesive and informed regional response. This will also help leverage successful strategies from individual countries and apply them across the region, ensuring that best practices are standardized and consistently implemented.

- **Targeted Focus on Prosecution Efforts:** Develop and implement targeted training programs for prosecutors and judicial officials across the region to enhance their understanding of Trafficking in Persons (TIP) cases, focusing on the complexities of trafficking crimes, victim protection, and the application of national and international TIP laws. This training should also emphasize the importance of trauma-informed approaches and victim-centered justice, particularly in the absence of a specialized TIP court.

In the absence of a dedicated TIP court, it is crucial that prosecutors and judges are equipped with the specialized knowledge required to handle trafficking cases effectively. TIP cases are often complex, involving cross-border crime, victim intimidation, and evolving trafficking methods. Without proper training, there is a risk that victims may not receive the protection they need, and traffickers may escape justice due to a lack of understanding of trafficking dynamics.

UNODC advocates for the establishment of specialized prosecutors to effectively combat trafficking in persons. These specialized prosecutors

play a crucial role in addressing the complexities of trafficking cases, ensuring that justice is served for victims and accountability is upheld for perpetrators.

By focusing on the unique legal, procedural, and investigative challenges of trafficking in persons, specialized prosecutors are better equipped to:

- Build strong cases against traffickers, leveraging international and national legal frameworks.
- Collaborate with law enforcement, victim services, and other stakeholders to ensure a coordinated response.
- Provide trauma-informed approaches that prioritize the rights and needs of victims throughout the judicial process.

UNODC provides technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and legal expertise to support countries in creating and strengthening specialized prosecution units and supporting networks. These efforts are vital to dismantling trafficking networks, improving conviction rates, and advancing the global fight against human trafficking.

TIPCOM Forum 2024 concluded with agreements on priorities to strengthen regional cooperation and enhance screening practices. By prioritizing culturally appropriate and collaborative approaches, the forum aims to advance the identification and support of trafficking victims across the Caribbean

