



Advisory Note: Strengthening a Human Rights-Based Response to Human Trafficking along the Southern Migration Corridor

1. Introduction

This Advisory Note has been developed by the National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) of Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia following deliberations on human trafficking and migrant protection along the Southern Migration Corridor. The deliberations were undertaken during the Regional Meeting of the NHRI Technical Working Group on Migration and Human Rights, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 8 – 10 July 2026.

Human trafficking remains one of the most pressing human rights and protection challenges affecting the Southern Migration Corridor. The corridor, connecting countries of origin, transit and destination, continues to expose thousands of migrants and other vulnerable persons to trafficking, death, forced labour, sexual exploitation, debt bondage, arbitrary detention, violence and other serious human rights violations.

Although States along the corridor have adopted legislative and policy frameworks to address trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling, implementation remains uneven and fragmented. Weak victim identification systems, insufficient protection and assistance services, limited cross-border coordination, inadequate data systems, and low public awareness continue to undermine effective prevention, accountability, access to justice and the protection of victims and survivors.

This Advisory Note outlines key protection concerns, policy and institutional gaps, and human rights implications identified across the corridor. It further provides targeted recommendations to NHRIs, governments, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the African Union (AU) and development partners to strengthen a coordinated, victim-centered and human rights-based response.



2. Key Findings

2.1. Common Protection Concerns

Available evidence consistently demonstrates increasing protection risks across the Southern Migration Corridor. Drawing on findings from National Human Rights Institutions, national government statistics, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), United Nations agencies, NANHRI and GANHRI reports, academic and policy literature, civil society documentation and victim testimonies, this Advisory Note identifies the following common protection concerns and policy and institutional gaps.

- Limited legal awareness on human rights and available protection mechanisms to human trafficking victims.
- Victims frequently experience secondary victimization during criminal investigations and prosecutions. In many instances, continued protection is conditioned upon their willingness to serving as witnesses, thereby exposing them to intimidation, re-traumatization and withdrawal from justice processes.
- Inadequate victim identification mechanisms often result in trafficked persons being treated as irregular migrants. Consequently, victims are detained, prosecuted or deported under immigration laws rather than recognized as individuals entitled to protection.
- Language barriers significantly impede access to justice, legal representation and essential social services.
- Fear of retaliation, stigma, discrimination and mistrust of authorities discourages victims from reporting abuses or cooperating with investigations.
- Limited availability of safe houses/shelters, psychosocial support, legal aid and long-term reintegration services further exacerbate victims' vulnerabilities.



2.2. Policy and Institutional Gaps

Despite the existence of national legislation and regional commitments, significant implementation gaps persist.

- Weak enforcement of anti-human trafficking legislation and inadequate institutional capacity continue to undermine effective protection and successful prosecution of trafficking offenses.
- Cross-border cooperation remains limited, resulting in fragmented investigations, inconsistent victim referrals and inadequate information sharing among States along the corridor.
- Insufficient coordination among law enforcement agencies, immigration authorities, labour inspectors, social services, prosecutors, diplomatic missions and NHRIs continue to weakens comprehensive and integrated responses.
- Prevention efforts remain underdeveloped, with limited community awareness campaigns addressing the root causes of human trafficking.
- Capacity constraints among frontline officials contribute to inadequate victim identification and inconsistent application of human rights standards.
- Reliable, harmonized and disaggregated data remain scarce across the corridor, constraining evidence-based policymaking, comprehensive monitoring and development of targeted protection accountability interventions monitoring.
- Victim-centred and trauma-informed approaches are not consistently applied, resulting in the detention, prosecution or deportation of trafficking victims and inadequate access to protection services.
- The absence of reliable, harmonized and disaggregated migration data limits evidence-based policymaking, effective monitoring and the development of targeted protection interventions.

3. Human Rights Implications

The identified protection gaps have significant consequences for the enjoyment of fundamental human rights.



They contribute to:

- persistent violations of the rights to liberty, security, dignity and freedom from exploitation continue to be reported across the corridor;
- increased vulnerability of women, children and other at-risk populations to trafficking and abuse;
- continuation and expansion of organized criminal networks operating across borders persist, reinforcing transnational trafficking routes, enabling complex smuggling and exploitation schemes;
- persistent barriers to justice, effective remedies and victim rehabilitation;
- prolonged cycles of poverty, exploitation and irregular migration continue to reinforce structural vulnerability and heighten exposure to trafficking and related abuses;
- increased risks of statelessness where victims lack civil documentation or children born during migration remain without legal nationality, exposing them to long-term protection, barriers to services, and intergenerational vulnerability;
- erosion of human dignity and social cohesion across affected communities continue to undermine collective resilience.

Therefore, without stronger regional cooperation, human trafficking will continue to erode progress towards sustainable development, weaken regional integration efforts, and undermine the protection of human rights across the corridor.

4. Recommendations

4.1. National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)

NHRIs should strengthen their regional collaboration to advance a coordinated human rights response by:

- advocating for the ratification, domestication and effective implementation of relevant international and regional instruments, including the UN Convention relating to the Reduction of Statelessness, the UN Convention



against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols, and other applicable human rights treaties, thereby reinforcing legal harmonization, accountability and protection standards across the corridor;

- establishing formal Memoranda of Understanding among NHRIs within the Southern Corridor to institutionalize coordinated action, strengthen cross-border referrals, enhance systematic information exchange and enable joint advocacy on protection, accountability, and human rights-based migration governance;
- institutionalizing joint cross-border monitoring missions to identify protection concerns, document emerging trends and generate credible right based evidence to inform coordinated regional action and accountability mechanism;
- developing harmonized information-sharing mechanisms while ensuring confidentiality and data protection and compliance with international human rights and data governance standards, thereby strengthening coordinated response and institutional accountability across the corridor;
- strengthening systematic human rights monitoring of detention facilities, border posts, shelters and migration pathways to identify protection gaps, document violations, and support coordinated regional accountability and remedial action;
- conducting public awareness campaigns on human trafficking and victims' rights to strengthen community understanding, promote early identification, and foster culture of prevention and protection across the Southern corridor.
- Strengthen engagement with governments, regional economic communities, diplomatic missions, civil society and international partners to promote coordinated, rights-based responses to human trafficking and migrant protection.
- Promoting regular capacity-building, peer learning and technical exchanges among NHRIs to reinforce institutional competences in monitoring, investigations, documentation and advocacy on migration and human trafficking, thereby enhancing coordinated regional response and accountability mechanisms.



- Generating and utilizing harmonized data and monitoring evidence to inform national, regional and continental advocacy, policy reform and legislative development, thereby strengthening evidence-based decision making, enhance accountability, and supporting coherent human rights-based migration governance across southern corridor.
- Developing regional early warning and rapid response mechanisms to identify emerging protection risks affecting migrants and victims of trafficking, enable timely interventions, and strengthen coordinated cross border action grounded in human rights-based approach.
- Continuing supporting Governments in advocating for mainstreaming of human rights in migration governance, ensuring that policies, institutional frameworks and operational practices across migration cycle are aligned with international standards and grounded in protection centered approach.
- Strengthening partnership with state and non-state actors towards enhancing public awareness on national, regional and international laws key towards combating human trafficking, thereby fostering informed communities, improving early identification, and reinforce protection centered approach across southern corridor.
- Continuing to leverage on NHRI's mandates pursuant to Paris Principles to ensure compliance with human rights obligations by state parties through periodical reporting to treaty monitoring mechanisms, contributing to strengthened accountability, transparency, and alignment with international standards.
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4.2. National Governments

Governments should prioritize implementation by:

- strengthening institutional capacity, resources and specialized training for law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, immigration officials, labour inspectors and frontline service providers to enhance their ability to identify, investigate, document, and respond to human trafficking and



related protection concerns in timely, coordinated, and right based manner;

- adopting victim-centred identification and referral mechanisms that prevent the criminalization or detention of trafficked persons for immigration-related offences thereby recognizing as right holder entitled to protection, assistance, and access to justice in accordance with international human rights and anti-trafficking standards;
- enhancing bilateral and multilateral cooperation on investigations, mutual legal assistance, intelligence sharing and victim protection to strengthen coordinated cross border action, improve the effectiveness of criminal justice response, and ensure victim of trafficking receive timely, right based protection across the Southern Corridor;
- domesticating and fully implementing international and regional legal instruments relating to trafficking, statelessness and victims' protection ensuring their effective integration into national legal frameworks, operational practices, and accountability mechanisms in line with international human rights standards;
- integrating human rights due diligence into business operations and labour recruitment systems to eliminate trafficking within supply and value chains ensuring responsible sourcing, ethical recruitment, and compliance with international standards on labour rights, migration protection, and corporate accountability;
- expanding access to legal aid, psychosocial support, shelters and long-term reintegration programmes for victims and survivors, ensuring comprehensive, right based assistance that supports recovery, resilience, and full social and economic reintegration.
- Strengthening measures to prevent, detect and address corruption within border management, immigration, documentation and law enforcement systems that facilitate trafficking and migrant smuggling are identified, disrupted, and sanctioned through a transparent oversight, accountability mechanisms.
- Strengthening national migration data systems and promote the collection, analysis and sharing of reliable, harmonized and disaggregated



data to support evidence-based policymaking, monitoring and regional cooperation, thereby improving accountability, early warning, and coordinated protection response across the Southern Corridor.

- Investing in community-based prevention programmes that address the root causes of trafficking, including poverty, unemployment, lack of awareness and unsafe migration pathways, thereby strengthening community resilience, reducing vulnerability, and promoting safer, right based mobility options
- Strengthening cooperation with diplomatic missions and consular authorities to facilitate documentation, voluntary return, family tracing and the protection of nationals abroad, thereby ensuring timely consular assistance, safeguarding rights of migrants and trafficked persons, and enhancing coordinated cross border protection mechanisms.

4.3. Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

Regional Economic Communities should:

- developing and strengthening regional frameworks that harmonize responses to human trafficking ensuring coherent standards, coordinated cross border actions, and alignment with continental and international obligations to enhance prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership efforts across the region;
- institutionalizing regular dialogue among Member States, NHRIs and relevant stakeholders to mainstream human rights into regional migration governance, fostering coordinated policy development, shared accountability, and harmonised protection standards across the region;
- establishing regional mechanisms for information sharing, victim referral and coordinated monitoring and investigations, ensuring timely cross border cooperation, harmonised protection standards, and strengthened regional capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to human trafficking and migrant smuggling;
- promoting implementation of regional labour mobility and economic integration initiatives that reduce reliance on irregular migration pathways



exploited by criminal networks and strengthening protection centered, development-oriented mobility across the region;

- facilitating peer learning and exchange of good practices among Member States to strengthen institutional capacities, promote harmonized approaches, enhance coordinated regional response to human trafficking, migrant protection, and broader migration governance challenges.
- Monitoring and supporting the implementation of regional migration and anti-trafficking commitments by Member States, including through regular reporting, peer review and accountability mechanisms, thereby strengthening compliance, promoting transparency, and ensure coherent, right based regional actions against trafficking and unsafe migration across the region.
- Supporting the establishment of regional early warning systems to identify emerging migration trends, trafficking patterns and protection risks, enabling timely and coordinated responses across the Southern Corridor and strengthening regional preparedness, accountability, and cross border protection mechanisms.

4.4. African Union

The African Union should strengthen continental leadership by:

- accelerating implementation and monitoring of existing AU migration, human rights and anti-trafficking instruments ensuring coherent continental oversight, strengthened compliance by member states, and systematic integration of these frameworks into national and regional governance systems;
- strengthening follow-up mechanisms to ensure Member States implement recommendations arising from treaty bodies, Special Mechanisms and peer review processes reinforcing continental accountability, promoting systemic compliance, and enhance coherence between AU frameworks and national governance systems;
- considering the establishment of a dedicated Special Rapporteur or Special Mechanism on Human Trafficking within the African human rights system



to provide continent wide leadership, strengthening monitoring and reporting, support member states in implementing obligations, and enhance coordinated response to trafficking and related exploitation;

- promoting diplomatic engagement to strengthen cross-border cooperation and regional accountability fostering sustained political commitments, enhance coordinated actions among member states, and reinforce continental leadership in preventing and combating human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and related protections challenges;
- encouraging jurisprudence from African regional courts and human rights bodies that advances victim-centred protection standards reinforces state obligations to prevent and respond to trafficking, and strengthens accountability through authoritative interpretations of continental human rights instruments;
- developing continental guidelines on comprehensive victim protection, rehabilitation, compensation and durable solutions that prioritize survivors' rights alongside criminal justice responses ensuring harmonized standards across member States, strengthen accountability, and promoting survive centered approach that address immediate needs, long-term recovery, and sustained reintegration.

4.5. Development Partners

Development partners should:

- providing sustained technical and financial support to strengthen institutional capacity and regional cooperation enabling member States and regional bodies to coherent, evidence based, and rights centered response to human trafficking and unsafe migration;
- supporting evidence generation, research and integrated data systems that inform policy and programming strengthening data quality, enhancing monitoring and evaluation, and enabling harmonised, evidence driven decision making across the Southern corridor;
- financing awareness campaigns addressing trafficking risks, safe migration and victims' rights ensuring sustained, evidence-based



community outreach that strengthens prevention, promotes informed mobility choices, and enhance early identification;

- supporting establishment and expansion of safe shelters, psychosocial services and survivor return and reintegration programmes ensuring comprehensive, survivors centered assistance that address immediate protections needs, promotes long-term recoveries, and facilitate sustainable social and economic reintegration across the Southern corridor;
- strengthening civil society organizations and community-based protection mechanisms enhancing their capacity to prevent trafficking, support survivors, mobilize communities, and contribute to coordinated, rights centered protection systems across the Southern corridor;
- supporting legislative reforms and policy dialogue aimed at aligning national and regional frameworks with international human rights standards fostering coherent legal harmonization, strengthening State compliance, and promoting rights centered governance across Southern Corridor.

5. Conclusion

Human trafficking remains a complex transnational human rights challenge that cannot be effectively addressed through isolated national interventions. The findings presented in this Advisory Note underscore the need for strengthened regional cooperation, enhanced accountability, and a coordinated response that prioritizes the rights, dignity, protection and recovery of victims and survivors across the Southern Migration Corridor.

The NHRIs of Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia call upon governments, Regional Economic Communities, the African Union and development partners, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to intensify efforts to prevent trafficking, strengthen protection systems, improve access to justice, and address the structural drivers that increase vulnerability to exploitation.



Sustained political commitment, effective implementation of existing legal and policy frameworks, strengthened cross-border collaboration, and enhanced evidence generation will be critical to building a safer and more rights-respecting migration environment along the Southern Migration Corridor.