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Rehabilitation Programs to Combat Human Trafficking and Foster Reintegration

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DRAFT

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Acknowledgment

This study seeks to identify best practices aimed at preventing individuals from being human trafficked, and rehabilitative measures for former traffickers with a view to reducing their chances of re-engaging in human trafficking. This research was conducted by participating in the International Capstone course at the Cornell Brooks School of Public Policy in collaboration with The Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP Office).

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(The views, findings, and recommendations of the report are those of the author and respondents and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Department of State.)

List of Abbreviations

Words	Abbreviation
Adverse Childhood Experiences	ACE
Central Intelligence Agency	CIA
Department of Justice	DOJ
EURO	EUR
Human Rights-Based Approach	HRBA
International Labour Organization	ILO
Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons	J/TIP
National Referral Mechanism	NRM
Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences Science	PACEs
Risk Need Responsivity Model	RNR
Trafficking in Persons Report	TIP
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime	UNODC
United States Agency for International Development	USAID

Executive Summary

Human trafficking remains one of the main challenges that Europe faces, and thus any form of response has to be holistic in nature, with strategies aimed at prevention and rehabilitation. While prevention looks to economic, social, and cultural conditions that enable trafficking networks to survive and function, rehabilitation seeks the traffickers' reintegration into society by tackling the very systemic barriers that make rehabilitation so difficult: stigma, economic instability, and mental health challenges. A two-pronged strategy is thus required in destroying this chain of exploitation through the diminution of vulnerability and through alternative, durable solutions for a complete exit from the situation.

Preventive strategies are designed to disrupt the financial incentives and organizational structures of traffickers while also addressing underlying risk factors such as poverty, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and limited economic opportunities. Community-based initiatives- education, vocational training, and economic empowerment-are critical in lowering vulnerabilities and building resilience among at-risk populations. Simultaneously, tailored interventions for at-risk youth are necessary to counter recruitment tactics and provide healthy pathways for personal and social development.

Rehabilitation programs emphasize trauma-informed care, vocational training, and restorative justice with accountability, emphasizing long-term reintegration into society. Empathy-driven approaches using survivor-run workshops and community forums serve to heighten awareness of the deep human toll and, in turn, foster personal reformation. The strategies should continue upon a foundation of economic stability, breaking systemic biases, and encouraging interagency cooperation among governments, Non-Governmental-Organizations (NGOs), and community organizations for actual progress in sustainable ways. The following holistic framework positions prevention and rehabilitation as essential components of an overall international effort to end human trafficking and promote human dignity.

This report relies primarily upon data extraction, and data collection through 7 interviews with experts from a wide range of relevant fields. Our secondary research source included an expansive literature review focused on existing studies, reports, and legal frameworks related to the rehabilitation of human traffickers and prevention efforts against human trafficker recruitment. The review included a regional summary, as well as an exploration into generalized rehabilitation mechanisms, theories, and practices with examples in the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany.

The interviews conducted in this research revealed critical insights into the systemic, social, and policy barriers in perpetuating human trafficking. The Economic Pressures factor arose as one of the strong drivers because financial desperation generally forces people into trafficking roles as a matter of survival, while the organized crime heads exploit the vulnerabilities for a profit return. The structural marginalization in which historically excluded groups, such as the Roma, experience limited access to education, employment, and resources serves only to deepen susceptibility to exploitation. The Organized Crime Nexus emphasized that trafficking is part of a larger criminal system, one in which victims are often coerced into perpetrator roles and high-level leaders avoid accountability. The interviewees criticized the Overemphasis on Punitive Justice for failing to deter recidivism

and not solving problems at their root causes, such as trauma and poverty; they called for more investment in rehabilitation and reintegration programs. Gaps in Rehabilitation: a lack of mental health support, skill development, and pathways to societal reintegration continue the vicious cycle of exploitation. Lastly, one finds Awareness Deficits and Misconceptions about trafficking dynamics, hindering effective policy decisions and interventions that could be overcome with comprehensive education and prevention. Ultimately, human trafficking can be stopped only through systemic reforms and targeted rehabilitation strategies that take head-on these many interlocking barriers; such approaches must focus on the survivors

Following our interviews and research, our team developed comprehensive policy recommendations. Our first recommendation is strengthening community-based prevention and support initiatives to address the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty, abuse, and other forms of trauma. Bolstering early intervention mechanisms for at-risk youth in order to further challenge the root causes of trafficking through mentoring programs and other extracurricular activities. Third, European states must develop alternative economic opportunities for individuals to prevent them from seeking opportunities in trafficking enterprises. These programs can include life skills training in financial literacy, job readiness, and conflict resolution to address broader employment barriers. Fourth, states must develop empathy-based rehabilitation strategies to amplify the impact and reach that current rehabilitation programs lack. Fifth, the advice is leveraging existing law European enforcement partnerships built between J/TIP and The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) in order to institute training programs with the law enforcement and correctional agencies to create/bolster rehabilitation programs that seek to rehabilitate offenders of human trafficking and prevent recidivism.

Finally, this report recommends that states and agencies utilize the UNODC Evaluation framework to audit the Rehabilitation Programs of European Nations for Efficacy and Robustness.

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Literature Review

Human trafficking in Europe remains a deeply entrenched issue, requiring a multifaceted response that addresses both the prevention of trafficking and the rehabilitation of traffickers. Prevention strategies focus on disrupting the economic, social, and cultural factors that drive trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2008), while rehabilitation efforts seek to reintegrate traffickers into society after serving time, addressing the root causes of their involvement (Dank et al., 2018). This literature review examines key insights from studies that explore the systemic challenges of preventing individuals from becoming human traffickers, alongside the limited but emerging research on strategies for rehabilitating traffickers. By integrating approaches that address both the supply and demand side of trafficking, this review offers a comprehensive look at how governments and organizations can combat this pervasive issue.

1. Regional Analysis and Research from Government Bodies

While the general understanding of rehabilitation of perpetrators is not fully developed in the wider discussion of Human Trafficking, there is a wealth of research and analysis on particular regions and countries of note involving transnational trafficking operations by international organizations, especially the US Department of State, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) This section summarizes findings involving trafficking in persons in Europe, and the global networks that are connected to the European continent.

The Department of State TIP Report from 2023 highlights various transnational trafficking organizations in Nigeria and Mali that disguise trafficking networks through the coercion of young women through the advertising of jobs in Europe. Countries of interest within Europe that are placed on tier 3 (the highest prevalence of trafficking) are Belarus and Russia, with tier 2 watchlist nations such as Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria. Tier two nations are much more widespread, encompassing Italy, Switzerland, Malta, Portugal, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Albania, North Macedonia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ireland, Norway, Moldova, Ukraine, Latvia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, among others. A wider scope on Europe demonstrates a varied prevalence of trafficking in persons.

A key theme in the TIP Report and the other governmental reports is the intersection of asylum seekers and refugees being exploited and forced to participate in sex trafficking under fear of deportation and violence. A case study is that of a 14-year-old girl named Daria, who fled Ukraine to the United Kingdom after her parents were killed by a Russian bombing. While in a shelter for minors that are unaccompanied, she was offered a job in food service by a stranger who promised to help her gain legal status in the UK. He forced her into sex trafficking, abusing her and forcing her to take drugs. She was threatened with being deported if she sought assistance from the police.

Another troubling trend is the growth of State-sponsored trafficking through the creation of “forced labor in local or national public work projects, military operations, economically important sectors, or as part of government funded projects or missions

abroad to sexual slavery on government compounds.” (68) In a regional focus on Europe, Russia is a key player in state-sponsored trafficking operations.

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022 reported in Central and Southeast Europe that there has been a higher increase in the detection of traffickers, as well as a higher rate of convictions. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, there was a 24% decrease in female victims, but a 41% increase in male victims. In Western Europe, a similar trend continued with a 22% increase in male victims, as well as a decrease in convictions. UNODC lists similar countries of note for the prevalence of trafficking operations, citing Slovenia, Slovakia, Serbia, Romania, Poland, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Estonia, Croatia, Czechia, Bulgaria, Bosnia Herzegovina, Albania, Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, and Belarus as key players in Europe. (32) By demographic, UNODC cites in Western and Central European countries, 68% of individuals convicted of trafficking were men, 29% were women, and 3% were minors. In Eastern Europe, there is a stark difference in perpetrator background, with 19% men, 81% women, and 1% minors.

The CIA World Factbook 2022 goes into deeper detail on the networks and locations to which individuals are transported. In Belarus, one of the Tier 3 level countries, Belarussian victims are trafficked all over the world, primarily to Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. In Russia, another tier 3 country, individuals from Europe, Central and South Asia, are exploited in forced labor conditions. Russian victims of sex trafficking are often transported to Northern Asia, Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, and in inverse, women from Europe, Africa, and Central Asia have been found to be forced into sex work in 2022 in Russia.

2. General Rehabilitation Practices

While there is a fairly large gap in literature regarding specific practices for rehabilitating human traffickers, the idea of rehabilitation of crimes that are individually collected to human trafficking, specifically violent and sexual crimes is not a new one. The challenge, however, is how to surmise the full treatment modern for human traffickers compared existing systems for kidnappers, murderers, and other violent offenders.

In the United Nations Roadmap for the Development of Prison Based Rehabilitation Programmes, rehabilitation of prisoners must contain both “medical and psychological treatment, counselling and cognitive-behavioral programmes....” as well as “education, vocational training, and work in prisons” (UNODC, 2017). These measures both engage with the specialized needs of the offender to rewrite the cognitive and behavioral background that underlie criminal behavior, as well as creation of educational and vocational opportunities to dissuade recidivism back into criminal activity (UNODC, 2017). UNODC maintains a framework of evaluation questions for rehabilitation programs:

1. “What is known about prisoners’ existing skills and aspirations, their typical education level, whether they have any professional skills and can contribute to learning and training.
2. What is the current level of enrollment of prisoners in rehabilitation programs?

3. How have prisoners assigned to the various programme categories, and do these programmes lend themselves to continuation upon release?
4. How are prisoners assigned to the various programme categories, and do these programs lend themselves to continuation upon release?
5. How, and in cooperation with which other non-governmental stakeholders, are existing activities organized, supervised, and funded?
6. Is there physical space available to accommodate current and additional rehabilitation programmes safely and securely, including necessary equipment and resources?
7. Do prisoners attend education, vocational training courses or work outside of prisons and, if so, under what circumstances?” (UNODC, 2017)

Regarding vocational training, work programs, and education, additional factors must be discussed to evaluate the efficacy of the rehabilitation structures, such as:

1. “The range of professional and vocational skills being taught
2. Choice about training
3. Quality of instruction
4. Cooperation between the prison administration and the Ministry of Education
5. The personnel involved in teaching
6. The curriculum
7. Teaching Resources”
8. Nature of work offered
9. Remuneration and working conditions
10. Role and involvement of the private sector” (UNODC, 2017)

These questions transition towards measuring the limitations and shortcomings of existing frameworks of rehabilitation programs. There are numerous barriers that lead to insufficient infrastructure in which rehabilitation programs are unsuccessful, such as poor access to educational classes, lack of education resources, staff shortages and lack of training.” (UNODC, 2017) Further obstacles that may lead to barriers in the learning process are: maintaining buy-in from both financial bodies to support vocational and educational programs, cost of programs, and mental health barriers to learning (UNODC, 2017). UNODC reports models of practice that may improve existing rehabilitation programs, such as peer learning programs and university partnerships to both ensure buy-in from incarcerated individuals, as well as improve the quality of education by the involvement of University instructors (UNODC, 2017).

Attached below is a framework checklist in which inspectors can evaluate the stability and robustness of rehabilitation programs: (UNODC, 2017)

Checklist 1: Master checklist – The main stages for initiating/ enhancing prison-based rehabilitation programmes

Tasks	Not achieved	Partly achieved	Achieved
1.1 Government supportive of promoting prison management in line with the Nelson Mandela Rules	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2 Importance of education, vocational training and employment understood by Prison Service and its line Ministry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>A comprehensive assessment is made of:</i>			
2.1 Education and skill levels of prisoners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2 Enrolment levels (by prisoner category)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3 Assignment processes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.4 Organization, supervision and funding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.5 Range of rehabilitation programmes, including adequacy of curricula used	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.6 Labour market opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.7 Human rights compliance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>A strategy is developed that involves:</i>			
3.1 The engagement of all relevant stakeholders (governmental, civil society, private sector) donors, prisoners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2 An environmental scan as well as stakeholder, organizational and SWOT analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3 A log frame with a theory of change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.4 Specific SMART goals and indicators of achievement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

According to the Society of Clinical Psychology’s Violent Offender Treatment Effectiveness: What We Know and Where to From Here? by Papalia, Spivak, Daffern, and Ogloff in 2019, over 27 controlled studies, the researchers discovered a glaring absence of evidence of the efficacy of rehabilitation programs, but the programs operate under the assumption that they are effective regardless of deeper insight in prevention of recidivism (Papalia et al, 2019). This assumption is not unfounded, as these expectations of efficacy are drawn in conjunction with a wider understanding of efficacy for nonviolent offenses. Highlighting this gap in understanding for violent offenders, the authors cite a single analysis written by Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007, which synthesized the idea of “intervention” as a variety of strategies to seek rehabilitation: Cognitive Behavioral

Therapy, supervision systems, anger management therapy, etc. (Papalia et al, 2019). A factor that adds deeper complexity to the general practice of rehabilitation is that it is not a one-size-fits-all process, as each offender is coming from a unique background and may have comorbidities regarding mental illness that may require specialized intervention that may be beyond the abilities of individual smaller rehabilitation programs at institutions.

The United States Department of Justice developed a practice profile, titled Psychological Treatments for Adults with Histories of Violent Offending, which highlights a standard framework in which practitioners can develop their own methodologies of treatment of violent offenders towards rehabilitation. The practices discussed in the article are considered “promising” in their efficacy, however, there are comorbidities that may not take effect for individuals with antisocial personality disorders. Thus, the framework is focused on individuals with a history of violent offenses, with a focus on domestic violence and sexual violence (DOJ, 2021). The DOJ’s framework is built upon the principles of the RNR Model, or risk, need, or responsibility model, developed by Andrews, Bonta, and Hoge in 1990. The RNR Model is summarized below:

1. “Risk principle: The level of services should be matched to the level of risk posed by the individual who committed the offense. High-risk individuals should receive more intensive services; low-risk individuals should receive minimal services.
2. Need principle: Practitioners should target criminogenic needs with services—that is, target those factors that are associated with criminal behavior. Such factors might include substance use, pro-criminal attitudes, and criminal associates. Practitioners do not target other, non-criminogenic factors (such as emotional distress, self-esteem issues) unless they act as a barrier to changing criminogenic factors.
3. Responsivity principle: The ability and learning style of the individual should determine the style and mode of intervention. Research has shown the general effectiveness of using social-learning and cognitive-behavioral style interventions.” (DOJ, 2021)

Using this systematic approach, the DOJ discovered that across a variety of studies, the RNR model was fairly effective in reducing anger, impulsivity, improving social problem solving, and general social skills (DOJ, 2021). As discussed previously, there was no change for individuals with antisocial cognitions, i.e. personality disorders (DOJ, 2021). While the RNR method may not directly address human trafficking, it has clear success in assisting individuals guilty of other violent crimes, and may be a possible avenue for rehabilitation, if not adaptation to specifically build a model to prevent recidivism for transgressors within the United States.



Photo Credit: Russell Webster

In the United Kingdom, a similar approach is taken to seek rehabilitation for violent offenders. In Russell Taylor’s *Crime and Rehabilitation: An Overview*, an article published by the UK House of Lords in 2022, the British prison service utilizes a “pro- social” program, which is specifically catered to the individual prisoner, while creating alternative routes away from recidivism, such as educational programs, employment plans, substance treatment, etc. Further specialized treatment is focused on offenders convicted of crimes involving sexual violence and crimes related to addiction (Taylor, 2022). According to the Royal Inspectorate of Probation:

“Each prisoner [is provided] with a key worker, who is a prison officer, who is there to guide, support, and coach an individual through their custodial sentence. Key workers and prison offender managers, who are employed by the probation service, work together. Prison offender managers produce structured assessments, sentence plans, and facilitate interventions for—and with—the prisoner. These practitioners are the bridge to community probation services, and facilitate resettlement and reintegration activity.

The premise of resettlement is to address offending-related factors, and associated factors, that might act as barriers to reintegration within the community by those leaving custody and by doing so reduce reoffending and promote desistance. This includes securing accommodation, continuance of interventions, family links, access to benefits, and/or employment and training” (Taylor, 2022).

Through treating addiction, educational programs, employment strategies, resettlement plans, this system seeks to dissuade offenders from returning to criminal activities. As compared to the United States RNR Model, while human traffickers do not have a specific rehabilitation plan, this comprehensive system may be applicable to a wider method of rehabilitating human traffickers (Taylor, 2022).

Germany is an additional nation that places a high emphasis on the rehabilitation of prisoners. In Helmut Kury’s 2018 Article *Rehabilitation in Prison: German Experiences and What Can Be Done Better*, Germany experienced an influx of more punitive and aggressive measures in sentencing following sensationalist fears of crime as a result of high rates of immigration (Kury, 2018, 20). Regarding prevention prior to offending, Germany places emphasis on “Primary prevention” through school and family intervention, and “Secondary prevention” by preventing opportunities to engage in criminal activity at the forefront (Kury, 2018). The author introduces a unique statistic: in Germany, “nearly 54% of the inmates in these institutions

[prisons with social therapy programs] are sex offenders and 19% are homicide delinquents” (Kury, 2018, 26). The author concludes that while programs for sex offenders have proven successful in Germany, there is a drought of research to conclude if the programs are widely successful for other types of offenders (Kury, 2018, 28).

In all these countries, there is a balancing act between punishment and rehabilitation. Preventing recidivism, reforming criminals, and maintaining a feeling of justice for victims and the wider community are all necessities juxtaposed within addressing human trafficking. One must ask in reflecting on the individual efforts of each country whether approaches localized by nation may be more targeted and effective compared to a wider standardized approach, or vice versa.

3. Preventing Individuals from Becoming Human Traffickers

Human trafficking in Europe presents multifaceted and persistent challenges, where preventing trafficking and rehabilitating traffickers requires a dual approach that addresses both supply and demand. It is essential to disrupt the economic incentives that fuel trafficking while also increasing the risks for traffickers. Traffickers often function within complex financial ecosystems, minimizing their risk and maximizing profits through informal channels like personal transfers or couriers (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe et al., 2010). For example, Eurojust estimated that a trafficking ring operating in Italy and France generated about EUR 10 million between 2002 and 2006 (EuroJust Annual Report 2007, n.d.). These high profits demonstrate the economic appeal of trafficking, which in turn makes it crucial to increase both the cost and risk of engaging in trafficking activities. Increasing financial risk for traffickers, through enhanced legal frameworks and stricter enforcement mechanisms, is key to making trafficking less economically viable. These economic incentives are exploited by traffickers who operate within varying organizational structures, each adapting to different environments and opportunities.

When it comes to operational structures, traffickers vary significantly in terms of organization and scope. Research from the Netherlands (2000-2003) revealed that solo operators represented 12 percent of cases, many of whom were engaged in domestic trafficking. Domestic trafficking, in particular, often exceeds international trafficking in certain countries like the Netherlands and the U.K. (Aronowitz, 2009; Shelley, 2010). For instance, Operation Pentameter in the U.K. identified different levels of traffickers, ranging from independent "loners" to organized gangs managing entire trafficking supply chains (Operation Pentameter, 2007). The diversity in trafficker profiles—ranging from small-scale individual actors to highly organized networks—underscores the need for equally multifaceted prevention strategies. Given this diversity in trafficker profiles, prevention efforts must be equally diverse, adopting universal, selective, or indicated approaches depending on the regional and socioeconomic context.

This variation in trafficker operations calls for targeted approaches that reflect the specific nature of trafficking activities within different regions and socioeconomic contexts. Prevention efforts can follow a universal approach, targeting entire populations without focusing on individual risks, a selected approach aimed at high-risk groups, or an indicated approach that focuses on individuals already exposed to violence (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Task Force to Prevent Human Trafficking, n.d.).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) significantly affect the likelihood of future victimization, violent behavior, and long-term health. The ACE survey tracks 10 types of childhood trauma, five related to abuse and neglect (physical, verbal, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect) and five related to household challenges (alcoholic parent, domestic violence, incarcerated family member, mental illness in the family, and parental separation). Higher ACE scores are associated with greater risks for chronic illness, mental health issues, and becoming victims of violence (PACES Science 101, 2023). One could hypothesize that addressing such trauma early in life is crucial not only for preventing future victimization but also for reducing the risk that individuals may become traffickers, thus tackling both sides of the trafficking equation. This is a question that will be explored in our research and interviews.

The prevention of human trafficking hinges on addressing the systemic social, economic, and cultural factors that lead individuals to become involved, either as traffickers or victims. The Urban Institute's report on *What the Evidence Says About Ending Trafficking of Women and Girls* (2018) highlights the normalization of abuse and exploitation as a key factor that perpetuates trafficking. Traffickers, particularly those involved in sex trafficking, often internalize patterns of physical, emotional, and psychological abuse from their family and community environments, leading them to view exploitation as acceptable and even expected behavior. This insight underscores the importance of community-based educational interventions that challenge harmful norms about the treatment of women and girls and promote gender equity.

Furthermore, the report emphasizes the role of poverty and lack of economic opportunities in driving trafficking. Educational and vocational programs that empower at-risk individuals, particularly women and girls, can divert them from exploitation. By providing pathways to economic independence, such initiatives reduce the vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit.

In the Urban Institute's *Justice in Their Own Words* (2018), survivors echoed the need for educational awareness as a critical prevention tool. Survivors suggested that traffickers, many of whom do not fully grasp the harm they inflict, could benefit from education about the long-term impacts of trafficking on victims. Educational interventions for traffickers, as survivors have suggested, could complement broader community-based efforts, reinforcing the message that exploitation is unacceptable and offering alternative paths to economic stability. This could disrupt the cycle of harm by encouraging traffickers to reflect on their actions and seek alternative ways to provide for themselves and their families.

4. Rehabilitation of Human Traffickers

Research related to effectively preventing trafficking and rehabilitating traffickers after they have served time in prison provides critical insight into the complexities of reintegration and the socioeconomic causes driving trafficking. It is important to highlight the challenges faced by traffickers in the process of reintegration: whether and how economic and institutional barriers have impacted the challenge, and how human rights-based approaches have been applied in combating trafficking.

Human trafficking often involves people who have been forced into the trade due to either poverty or victimization in the past, which in itself can make integration particularly difficult. The piece, Love et al's *Challenges to Reintegration: A Qualitative Intrinsic Case-*

Study of Convicted Female Sex Traffickers, qualitatively analyzed ten convicted female traffickers and found three key barriers to their reintegration: circumscribed options, negative labeling, and unmet needs. It is indeed hard to get hit by the stigma of being a trafficker in self-esteem as much as in work opportunities (Love, etc. 2020). Besides, psychological and vocational grounds of support are acutely lacking, which potentiates their vulnerability to recidivism. This vulnerability warrants an assertive comprehensive rehabilitation agenda on both trauma recovery and social reintegration through longitudinal support mechanisms (Love, etc. 2020).

In addition, economic factors are necessary in the process of integration. Klea Ramaj (2021) considered problems of reintegration facing Albanian trafficking victims in his piece *The Aftermath of Human Trafficking: Exploring the Albanian Victims' Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Challenges*. He states that many return to impoverished areas with few job opportunities, thus leaving them susceptible to re-trafficking (Ramaj, 2021). Besides, institutional inefficiencies, such as corruption and delays in justice and social services, add to this problem. Many victims face problems in healthcare, a place to stay, and legal protection; all these factors contribute to less successful rehabilitation processes. Because of this argument, economic empowerment takes center stage in reducing recidivism (Ramaj, 2021). At the same time, a multi-sectoral approach to job creation, legal reforms, and anti-corruption policy is needed for successful reintegration.

A human rights-based approach (HRBA) has been suggested for being better positioned to respond to trafficking complexities. According to the article, "A human rights-based approach for effective criminal justice response to human trafficking" (Demeke, 2024). Conventional approaches to criminal justice in the context of prosecution have not taken into consideration the root causes of trafficking or rehabilitation issues of the traffickers. An HRBA focuses on the root causes of problems like poverty, labor exploitation, and migration, with traffickers being protected during a trial (Demeke, 2024). Consequently, this approach requires states, NGOs, and international organizations to work in collaboration through the provision of social and legal support systems necessary for both traffickers and their victims to ensure successful reintegration.

Combined, these studies have highlighted that rehabilitation strategies for traffickers must be multidimensional by addressing the socio-economic, psychological, and legal challenges they are likely to face during reintegration, pointing out stigma reduction and economic opportunities that will nurture the risk of recidivism. Demeke (2024) expands further and incorporates human rights principles into criminal justice responses to trafficking for a balanced approach where traffickers would be held accountable and comprehensive support systems in place. Rehabilitation programs of any significance need to be trauma-informed, with a broad perspective on long-term psychological support and systemic changes that ensure traffickers have essential services with legal protection of their human rights to create conditions for sustainable reintegration.

The rehabilitation of former traffickers is essential for reducing recidivism and preventing re-engagement in trafficking activities. This rehabilitation approach aligns with survivors' calls for a justice system that goes beyond punishment and focuses on both preventing future harm and ensuring long-term rehabilitation of traffickers. The Urban Institute's report *Justice in Their Own Words* (2018) highlights survivors' skepticism about the effectiveness of the current criminal justice system in achieving this goal. While some survivors advocated for the incarceration of traffickers, most doubted that prison could rehabilitate traffickers or prevent future harm. Many believed that traffickers would

continue to operate within prison, normalizing criminal behavior and potentially exacerbating the problem. Instead, survivors advocated for alternative forms of justice that focus on education and rehabilitation, rather than punitive measures alone.

In line with this perspective, Dank et al's *Alternative Forms of Justice for Human Trafficking Survivors* (2018) emphasizes the potential of restorative justice practices. Restorative justice approaches, which prioritize repairing the harm caused to victims and fostering accountability among offenders, offer a more holistic approach to rehabilitation. While restorative justice allows traffickers to confront the harm they've caused, educational programs provide the necessary knowledge to reshape their understanding of exploitation, creating a more holistic approach to reducing recidivism. Traffickers who participate in such programs may confront the emotional and psychological damage they have inflicted, which could reduce the likelihood of them reoffending. Labor trafficking survivors, in particular, expressed a desire to confront their traffickers and demand reparations for unpaid work, which could serve as a pathway for traffickers to make amends.

In addition to restorative justice, survivors in *Justice in Their Own Words* (2018) proposed educational programs as a rehabilitative measure for traffickers. These programs could focus on the harms caused by trafficking, aiming to reshape traffickers' understanding of exploitation and dissuade them from re-engaging in trafficking activities. By educating traffickers about the legal and moral implications of their actions, these programs could offer a more sustainable solution to recidivism than traditional incarceration.

However, addressing individual behavior alone is not enough. Broader community-based interventions are crucial to dismantle the cultural and structural norms that enable trafficking. Survivors also expressed concerns that entire communities often contribute to trafficking, either through complicity or by enabling traffickers' activities. This suggests that rehabilitative efforts must extend beyond individual traffickers to address broader cultural and structural issues. Community-based interventions that educate both traffickers and their communities about the harms of trafficking, and that challenge cultural norms supporting exploitation, are essential to breaking the cycle of trafficking.

Survivors' perspectives on justice reveal a complex understanding of the limitations of the legal system. Both labor and sex trafficking survivors expressed a desire for justice that focuses on preventing future harm, rather than solely on punitive measures. This highlights a critical shift in understanding justice—not just through punishment but by ensuring survivors' healing and traffickers' rehabilitation, preventing future harm. In *Urban Institute's Justice in Their Own Words* (2018), survivors emphasized the need for justice systems to offer resources that facilitate their own healing, rather than focusing solely on punishment for traffickers. While punitive measures are often taken to deliver justice to survivors, this report reveals that many survivors see justice through resources being invested in their healing and the assurance that traffickers will not be re-involved in trafficking. For them, true justice means preventing traffickers from inflicting harm again, which moves away from the conventional idea that punitive justice for traffickers is the only way to right the wrongs against survivors.

This insight aligns with Dank et al's *Alternative Forms of Justice for Human Trafficking Survivors*, (2018) which highlights how many survivors, particularly those of labor trafficking, sought reparations for unpaid work but did not necessarily prioritize apologies

from traffickers. Such approaches in both justice and rehabilitation frameworks ensure that the focus is on survivors' long-term well-being and preventing future harm, rather than solely on punitive measures for traffickers.

Efforts to combat human trafficking must consider both prevention and rehabilitation as interconnected processes. Prevention strategies, as discussed, are critical for reducing vulnerabilities in at-risk populations, challenging harmful community norms, and disrupting the financial incentives that perpetuate trafficking. Meanwhile, rehabilitation efforts focus on breaking the cycle of exploitation by addressing the underlying economic and psychological factors that lead traffickers to re-offend. However, a clear gap exists in the literature on effective rehabilitation methods for traffickers, particularly in understanding how to dismantle the socioeconomic and institutional barriers they face during reintegration. This gap highlights the need for further research into targeted, long-term rehabilitation programs that can complement prevention strategies. By developing multidimensional approaches that reflect the varied forms and contexts of trafficking, we can create sustainable solutions to reduce trafficking and reintegrate traffickers into society, ultimately making meaningful progress in addressing this global issue.

Research and Methodology

1. Secondary Research: Literature Review

- a) Scope: The literature review focused on existing studies, reports, and legal frameworks related to the rehabilitation of human traffickers and prevention efforts against human trafficker recruitment. The review included a regional summary, as well as an exploration into generalized rehabilitation mechanisms, theories, and practices with examples in the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany.
- b) Sources: Academic journals, government reports, policy briefs, and documents published by international organizations (e.g., UNODC, IOM, and ILO) along with relevant publications on rehabilitation, restorative justice, and anti-trafficking strategies.

2. Primary Research: Interviews

- a) Data Extraction: Key themes, best practices, and gaps in existing research were identified and synthesized. Special attention will be paid to contextualizing these findings within the U.S. context and exploring their applicability to J/TIP's goals.
- b) Data Collection: 7 interviews were conducted via video conferencing. When consent was provided interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Interviews with survivors were not recorded, notes were taken and used for analysis.
- c) Sampling Strategy: A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who have relevant expertise and experience and aim for diversity in the target population.
- d) Consent Form: Given the high risks associated with human trafficking a consent form was developed and signed before each interview.
- e) Pilot Interviews: 1 pilot interview was conducted to assess if our interview guide is able to elicit useful and relevant information. This ensured the clarity and relevance of the guide before the main data collection phase.

3. Interviews

- a) **Interview Format:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow exploration while maintaining a clear focus on trafficker-centric rehabilitation and prevention.

Target Participants	Description
Correctional Psychologists	Psychologists specializing in the mental health of incarcerated individuals, studying the effects of incarceration and trauma and developing treatment programs
Researchers	Experts in fields like Criminology, Sociology, Psychology, Public Policy, Social Work, and Human Rights, focusing on criminal justice, rehabilitation, and recidivism.
International Organizations Employees/Experts	Organizations that combat human trafficking and look at incarceration, justice, and rehabilitation of ex-traffickers like GRETA (Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings)
Legal Experts and Practitioners	Legal professionals focused on rehabilitative justice and anti-trafficking laws, working to reform legal practices for better outcomes in justice systems.
NGOs and Anti-Trafficking Organizations	Nonprofits involved in trafficking prevention, supporting survivors, and working in communities with high trafficking risks.
Academic Experts	Scholars on issues of human trafficking who have conducted research on .
Survivors of Human Trafficking	Individuals with lived experience of trafficking who provide valuable insight into rehabilitation, prevention, and their perception of justice
Government	Anti-trafficking team leads in the European Commission working on the issue of trafficking

b) **Interview Questions**

i) **Survivors**

- What do you think leads individuals to become traffickers?
- From your experience, what might push someone to engage in trafficking activities, even if they are not the main trafficker?
- What do you believe are the most effective ways to stop people from becoming traffickers?
- Do you believe there are gaps in law enforcement or social services that allow trafficking networks to grow? How can these be fixed?
- What would you suggest for individuals who might be involved in trafficking under coercion or desperation to avoid becoming traffickers?
- What advice would you give to policymakers or organizations working to stop trafficking, based on your experience?
- If given a platform, what would you want the world to know about the complexity of stopping traffickers and those involved in trafficking?

- What do you think is the role of community awareness and education in preventing human trafficking and helping with rehabilitation activities for those who have been involved?
- What should be most central in a rehabilitation or reintegration program?
- Which support services/programs played the most crucial role in your recovery process and social reintegration, and how do you think such services could also contribute to the prevention of others from becoming victims of trafficking?

ii) **Psychologists**

- What sorts of psychological factors do you think predispose individuals to fall prey to human trafficking, and how might prevention programs attempt to address such vulnerabilities?
- What is the role of trauma-informed care and mental health support in the successful rehabilitation of former traffickers, and how might these approaches be integrated into programs?
- What are the most crucial factors, from a psychological perspective, that help individuals not to become reinvolved in trafficking once rehabilitated?
- Do you believe former human traffickers can be rehabilitated and successfully reintegrated into society, and what factors influence this outcome?
- How can family relationships and social support systems be leveraged in the rehabilitation process?
- How does the public perception that former traffickers do not deserve to be integrated affect their rehabilitation? What strategies can be implemented to help them cope with this societal pressure?

iii) **Legal Experts/Prosecutors / Law Professors**

- Do you believe former human traffickers can be rehabilitated and successfully reintegrated into society, and what factors influence this outcome?
- Does the current legal system have frameworks that can support the rehabilitation and protection of former human traffickers? How can current laws be reformed to facilitate rehabilitation rather than solely punitive measures?
- What underlying factors do you believe contribute to an individual's decision to engage in trafficking, and how can these be addressed in rehabilitation programs?
- How can rehabilitation programs ensure that the needs and perspectives of trafficking victims are incorporated into the process?
- What criteria do you believe should be established to effectively assess the success of rehabilitation programs for former traffickers?
- How effective is international human trafficking regulation compared to domestic laws and mechanisms?
- Have any countries instituted unique policies that have had a positive/negative impact on preventing human trafficking and recidivism?

- iv) **Organizations/Researchers**
- How does your organization engage with the issue of human trafficking prevention or rehabilitation?
 - How does your organization identify individuals who may be at risk of becoming traffickers?
 - Can you describe the rehabilitation programs your organization provides/has researched on for ex-traffickers?
 - What are the biggest challenges in rehabilitating ex-traffickers?
 - What strategies have been most effective in preventing recidivism among former traffickers?
 - How has your organization influenced policy development in the areas of human trafficking prevention or rehabilitation?
 - What role do partnerships between governments, NGOs, and the private sector play in preventing trafficking and rehabilitating traffickers?
 - What innovative approaches or tools are emerging in your work to prevent trafficking involvement or rehabilitate ex-traffickers?
- v) **International Organizations/NGOs/Governmental Organizations**
- How can international organizations produce comprehensive rehabilitative mechanisms and outreach when so many countries have specific values and perspectives on the nature of the crimes?
 - In your work regarding the idea of rehabilitation, do you receive backlash or pushback from critics of the idea?
 - How can international organizations encourage rehabilitation and restorative justice initiatives in countries with much more aggressive and punitive legal mechanisms?
 - How can international organizations produce prevention rhetoric that can show the true pain caused by human trafficking for potential perpetrators?

4. Data Analysis: Qualitative Analysis

- a) Interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, challenges, and best practices using MAXQDA.
- b) Qualitative data was analyzed simultaneously to data collection in case new questions rose that need to be added to the interview guide.
- c) Findings from the literature review were synthesized with interview data to draw comprehensive conclusions on best practices.

5. Limitations

- a) Geographical Focus: A specific region focus was not easily possible as we had to focus on any countries that were actively addressing the human trafficking issue from the prevention and rehabilitation of traffickers. Therefore findings may not be universally applicable to other regions. However, the intent is to draw lessons that can be adapted to multiple contexts.
- b) Access to Participants: Difficulty in accessing key stakeholders posed a challenge. We did an early and more expansive outreach but given the time constraints, and lack of incentive for participants we were not able to conduct more than 7 interviews.

- c) Lack of existing literature: Since most of the research on human trafficking has been focused on survivors of trafficking instead of traffickers there were gaps in the literature. Our research therefore will allow for a qualitative understanding of current rehabilitative efforts for human traffickers and preventive measures globally, providing J/TIP with actionable insights for its programming.
- d) Actionability of Recommendations: Due to the uncharted nature of our research topic, our recommendations and findings are introductory and may struggle to be immediately actionable. However, they will develop further as future cohorts of students contribute to building a wider understanding and framework for implementing policy recommendations.

6. Ethical Considerations

a) Ethical Compliance and Consent

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, with clear communication on how their data would be managed, stored, and protected.
- Participants were given the right to withdraw from the research at any time, with the option of deletion of any related data upon withdrawal.

b) Confidentiality Considerations

- Participants' identities and any sensitive data were protected through anonymization, and informed consent was obtained before participation.

c) Data Management Plan

- Data Collection and Storage: All interview recordings, transcripts, and field notes were collected digitally and stored on a secure, encrypted, password-protected drive accessible only to the primary researchers.
- Anonymization and De-identification: All participant names and identifying details were anonymized in transcripts and reports to protect participants' identities. A key linking participants' identities to their codes was stored separately from other data files and was encrypted with restricted access.
- Data Access and Sharing: Only authorized female members of the research team were provided access to raw data files. Data sharing beyond the primary research team will be limited to anonymized and aggregated findings in final reports and publications.
- Data Disposal: After 6 months of the completion of the project, the data will be permanently deleted from storage drives.

Findings and Analysis

The interviews conducted for this study revealed profound insights into the systemic, societal, and policy barriers that hinder efforts to combat human trafficking. By emphasizing the rehabilitation of former traffickers and their reintegration into society, these findings illuminate critical gaps in existing frameworks while offering pathways for more effective interventions.

1. Understanding the Drivers and Dynamics of Human Trafficking

- a) Marginalization and Exploitation: The interviews identified the intersection of marginalization and exploitation as pivotal drivers of trafficking across various contexts.
- b) Economic Pressures as a Drivers of Human Trafficking: Christina, a survivor, highlighted the economic motivations behind trafficking, stating, “Trafficking—whether for labor, sexual, or organ exploitation—generates immense profits.” She emphasized that “extreme financial desperation often overrides ethical considerations,” illustrating how economic hardships can push individuals into trafficking roles out of necessity rather than malice. The commodification of individuals transforms people into objects of economic value, particularly for traffickers who understand the system and recognize that the profits often outweigh the risks. This dynamic leads to the dehumanization of victims. All interviewees agreed that trafficking is often chosen as a career by individuals facing severe poverty, as it is seen as one of the few viable ways to earn a living. As Christina explained, this financial desperation drives traffickers to disregard ethical considerations because they view trafficking as the only means of survival. However, anti-trafficking experts clarified that this rationale primarily applies to the foot soldiers of trafficking networks—those in poverty who have limited options. In contrast, the leaders of these operations, who reap substantial profits, are not motivated by the same survival needs but by greed and exploitation.
- c) Structural Vulnerabilities and Community Dynamics Driving Traffickers: Our interviews revealed that the pressures driving individuals into trafficking often stem from historical and systemic marginalization experienced by the communities they belong to. Phillip Brewer, reflecting on trafficking within European contexts, highlighted the distinct exploitation dynamics affecting marginalized groups, particularly the European Roma. He explained that systemic exclusion and shared experiences of marginalization deepen vulnerabilities by limiting access to resources, education, and social mobility. For example, discriminatory practices in education systems often prevent Roma children from completing school, leaving them with limited skills to access formal employment. Housing segregation and legal barriers to land ownership also isolate Roma families, pushing them into precarious living conditions.

The Roma community, historically excluded from mainstream European society, face profound challenges due to their lack of political representation and cultural recognition. This marginalization creates fertile ground for trafficking networks, as individuals see few legitimate pathways to earn a living. Brewer observed, “Breaking free is nearly impossible.” The deep social exclusion and lack of resources make it exceedingly difficult for individuals to escape trafficking networks. Even those who attempt to leave often find themselves forced to return to exploitative environments due to the absence of viable alternatives and the pull of strong community ties.

This cyclical nature of exploitation is reinforced by systemic barriers, as individuals who temporarily exit trafficking often encounter significant challenges that pull them back. Employers in many countries are reluctant to hire individuals from marginalized groups, reducing opportunities for stable income. Combined

with the stigma attached to having been involved in trafficking, this leads to limited economic mobility, trapping individuals in a cycle of exploitation.

The intersection of socioeconomic disenfranchisement and community dynamics creates a self-reinforcing cycle of poverty and exploitation. This cycle not only drives individuals toward trafficking as a desperate survival strategy but also perpetuates the structural inequalities that make marginalized groups disproportionately vulnerable to exploitation.

Economic desperation, compounded by societal exclusion, fosters an environment where individuals prioritize survival over morality, emphasizing the need to address these systemic inequalities to prevent trafficking at its root.

- d) Organized Crime and Human Trafficking: Interviews revealed that addressing human trafficking in isolation is reductive and inefficient; it must be understood as one component of the broader system of organized crime. Human trafficking functions as a critical element within this system, interlinked with smuggling, kidnapping, fraud, and other illicit activities. Organized crime networks exploit societal and legal vulnerabilities with alarming efficiency, perpetuating cycles of exploitation and oppression.

Phil Brewer emphasized that the distinctions between victims and perpetrators in these networks is often unclear, with few "pure" victims or perpetrators. These networks target structurally marginalized individuals, exploiting their vulnerabilities and using them as pawns in a profit-driven system. Leaders of organized crime are adept at manipulating the system, recruiting those who are easiest to exploit due to poverty, trauma, or other disadvantages.

An official from the EU Anti-Trafficking team at the European Commission noted that traffickers often recruit minors because of their reduced criminal accountability in many countries. Similarly, a correctional psychologist observed that those at the ground level of trafficking networks often come from environments of extreme poverty and trauma, making them more susceptible to cycles of criminality. Adding to the complexity, victims frequently transition into traffickers themselves as a means of survival within the organized crime network that they are trapped in, further illustrating the coercive nature of these networks. Often to survive, those trapped become perpetrators of their daughters and girlfriends.

The pervasive nature of organized crime ensures that even when individuals are prosecuted, they are often only the "foot soldiers" of these operations. Leaders remain insulated from accountability, recruiting new pawns to replace those who are arrested. While rehabilitation programs can offer vulnerable individuals alternative pathways, their effectiveness is severely undermined by the overarching strength of organized crime. Interviewees stressed argued that the leaders of these networks—driven purely by profit—must be the primary targets of law enforcement efforts. These leaders view the risks as minimal and manageable, allowing them to operate with impunity.

They also added that prisons, rather than serving as a deterrent or rehabilitation center, often act as hubs for organized crime activity. Challenges in prosecuting the leaders of these networks stem from various factors, including corruption, the absence of reliable evidence, and legal loopholes that protect high-level operators. These barriers allow leaders to avoid accountability and continue their operations even when lower-level members are arrested. Without dismantling the leadership and infrastructure of these networks, rehabilitation efforts for lower-level offenders will remain largely ineffective. Systemic interventions are required to break this cycle, including targeted prosecutions of high-level leaders and strategies to disrupt the operational structures of organized crime.

2. Critiquing Current Anti-Trafficking Efforts: The Need for Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Awareness

- a) Overemphasis on Punitive Justice: Interviews revealed that current anti-human trafficking efforts disproportionately focus on punitive justice, neglecting the broader complexities of the crime. Due to the transnational nature of trafficking and the way these operations are structured, very few traffickers are successfully prosecuted. Philip Brewer remarked, “Prosecutions are so low...if that was how I was inclined, I’d take the risk just because of the returns.” Traffickers often evade justice because victims are moved rapidly from one location to another, and the criminal network is fragmented into small, independent links, making it difficult to establish connections. When prosecutions do occur, traffickers are often charged for related crimes like kidnapping rather than human trafficking itself.

Even when traffickers are convicted, the lack of a rehabilitative approach limits the effectiveness of punitive measures. Incarcerated traffickers frequently continue their operations from prison or rejoin trafficking networks upon release. The current system neither deters further involvement nor provides pathways for traffickers to transition out of criminal behavior.

Additionally, the high evidentiary burden required to prove coercion and exploitation in court often results in traffickers escaping accountability altogether, perpetuating cycles of exploitation. This singular focus on punishment neglects the root causes of trafficking and overlooks opportunities for prevention and rehabilitation.

Interviews also highlighted the pervasive resistance to rehabilitative approaches within the anti-trafficking ecosystem. While many professionals expressed belief in the value of rehabilitation, they noted the significant backlash such efforts face, often making them impractical. Dr. Mehdi recounted how this punitive focus has influenced even prison staff, who frequently view convicted traffickers as irredeemable. This is partly due to the lack of mainstream development of rehabilitative programs and the biases ingrained in the system.

Moreover, a lack of political will to implement rehabilitative measures has stifled progress. Many governments prioritize punitive strategies to demonstrate a tough stance against trafficking, which resonates more with public sentiment. However, this approach often neglects the deeper systemic changes required to address trafficking

sustainably. Without the support of policymakers and stakeholders, rehabilitative justice efforts remain underfunded and underdeveloped.

This resistance underscores the need for education and training for those working on trafficking issues. By better understanding the systemic drivers of trafficking—such as poverty, trauma, and social marginalization—practitioners can focus on addressing root causes rather than merely responding to symptoms. Broadening the approach to include prevention, rehabilitation, and education would provide a more holistic and effective strategy to combat human trafficking.

- b) Lack of Rehabilitation and Reintegration Strategies: The overemphasis on punitive justice is compounded by a significant lack of focus on rehabilitation and reintegration strategies, perpetuating the cycles of exploitation and reoffending. Experts emphasized that addressing these gaps is critical to achieving meaningful change.

Dr. Mehdi highlighted that untreated mental health challenges among offenders severely hinder reform efforts. Many individuals involved in trafficking—whether as perpetrators or coerced participants—have experienced poverty, trauma, or systemic marginalization, all of which contribute to cycles of criminality. Evidence suggests that comprehensive mental health care is essential to reducing recidivism, yet such resources remain scarce within the justice system. The absence of mental health support not only undermines rehabilitation efforts but also leaves offenders vulnerable to being reabsorbed into trafficking networks.

Public perception further exacerbates the issue. Societal stigma often labels traffickers as irredeemable, denying them opportunities to reintegrate. Dr. Dadunashvili noted that this stigma reinforces punitive approaches and diminishes support for reintegration programs, even when such programs have the potential to reduce harm and prevent reoffending. Public awareness campaigns, she argued, could play a crucial role in shifting these perceptions, fostering a greater understanding of the structural factors driving trafficking and encouraging acceptance of reintegration initiatives.

Without significant investment in mental health resources, societal education, and tailored reintegration programs, cycles of exploitation are likely to persist. These systemic gaps not only fail offenders but also undermine efforts to disrupt trafficking networks at their roots. A more balanced approach—one that combines accountability with rehabilitation and reintegration—is essential to addressing the broader dynamics of human trafficking effectively.

- c) Insufficient Awareness and Misconceptions about Trafficking: Interviews revealed that the current anti-trafficking approach is riddled with misconceptions, leading to a lack of results in effectively reducing trafficking. A lack of understanding of trafficking dynamics among communities, lawmakers, and the public continues to hinder anti-trafficking efforts. Misconceptions about victims, traffickers, and buyers not only complicate the creation of effective policies but also perpetuate harmful stereotypes that obstruct meaningful interventions.

One of the most pervasive misconceptions is the belief that trafficking is an isolated crime involving foreign networks. This narrative often overshadows the reality that traffickers and victims frequently come from the same communities. This local nature

of trafficking, often driven by systemic vulnerabilities such as poverty and marginalization, is rarely acknowledged in mainstream discourse. Public awareness campaigns, while well-intentioned, are typically sporadic and lack the depth necessary to convey the complexity of trafficking dynamics. As a result, many people remain unaware of trafficking's prevalence and the nuanced ways it manifests.

These gaps in understanding extend to lawmakers and enforcement agencies, where insufficient training often leads to uninformed policies and interventions. Policies built on stereotypes—such as the assumption that all traffickers are part of international cartels or that all victims are physically restrained—fail to address the broader structural factors that enable trafficking. Law enforcement efforts, similarly, may target visible symptoms while overlooking systemic causes, such as economic desperation or community-level exploitation.

To close these gaps, sustained educational initiatives are critical. Community-focused programs can demystify trafficking by presenting accurate information, dispelling stereotypes, and emphasizing its human toll. For example, survivor-led awareness campaigns can provide personal insights into the realities of trafficking that focus on deeper systemic issues. Targeted training for lawmakers and enforcement agencies is equally essential, equipping them with the knowledge to understand trafficking's nuances and design policies that address root causes.

Greater public and institutional awareness can foster a more informed and empathetic approach to combating trafficking, shifting the focus from reactive to preventative strategies. Without this foundational understanding, anti-trafficking efforts risk remaining superficial, overlooking the deep-seated issues that sustain exploitation.

3. Community-Based and Structural Anti-Trafficking Strategies

- a) Community Prevention Strategies: Interviews revealed that prevention efforts must go beyond shielding potential victims; they must also address the root causes that drive marginalized individuals into trafficking networks. Many traffickers are recruited from economically disadvantaged and marginalized groups who struggle to survive within the formal economy. Effective prevention strategies must begin at the community level, targeting populations vulnerable to trafficker recruitment and empowering them with opportunities for a sustainable livelihood.

Christna, a survivor, emphasized the critical role of creating financial opportunities and reducing poverty in at-risk communities to disincentivize participation in trafficking. Economic desperation often pushes individuals into these networks, not out of malice but out of necessity. Addressing this desperation through early intervention programs can be a transformative approach. Programs that build skills, improve access to education, and provide economic opportunities can serve as a lifeline for those at risk of becoming traffickers or foot soldiers within trafficking chains.

A correctional psychologist emphasized the importance of bolstering community mental health services in communities at high risk of recruitment into trafficking networks. They noted that providing accessible mental health support to individuals vulnerable to recruitment could improve their well-being and prevent further deterioration that might drive them toward criminal activity.

The psychologist suggested that mental health outreach efforts could be integrated into existing programs such as homeless outreach initiatives, substance abuse treatment programs, and alcohol abuse support systems. These programs often serve populations most susceptible to trafficking recruitment, making them ideal avenues for early intervention and prevention. By addressing mental health challenges proactively, these efforts could reduce the likelihood of individuals becoming entangled in trafficking networks.

A crucial aspect of these interventions is survivor-led initiatives that share real-life stories and experiences. Many individuals recruited into trafficking networks perform specific, seemingly minor tasks within a broader system, such as transporting people or managing logistics. This compartmentalized structure often obscures the larger reality of the harm their actions contribute to. Christina highlighted how survivor-led campaigns can effectively dismantle these misconceptions, showing individuals the devastating consequences of trafficking and helping them see their role within the larger exploitative framework.

Community-based prevention efforts must also address structural barriers that perpetuate vulnerability. These include a lack of infrastructure for skill-building, limited access to markets or jobs, and systemic neglect of marginalized groups. By identifying and addressing these structural gaps, communities can be empowered to resist recruitment and build resilience against trafficking networks.

- b) **Comprehensive Structural Reforms:** Structural reforms at legislative, judicial, and correctional levels are critical. Lauren highlighted the importance of training judicial and law enforcement personnel to recognize trafficking typologies and understand victims' psychological toll. Such training must include accountability measures to address systemic failures.

Prison reforms should equip incarcerated individuals with life skills, mental health support, and sustainable employment opportunities. Christina (survivor) worked on legislative reforms, including the Debt Bondage Repair Act (DBRA) and the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act, to ensure that individuals trafficked for the purpose of being used as decoys in financial fraud could have their criminal records cleaned under these laws.

Incorporating survivor insights into policy design ensures that strategies are impactful and sustainable. Phillip Brewer emphasized creating exit strategies that encourage potential traffickers to cease exploitation, advocating for approaches beyond punitive justice.

By addressing the root causes of trafficking and incorporating survivors' voices, prevention strategies can disrupt exploitation cycles and foster meaningful change.

4. Analyzing the Barriers to Effective Anti-Trafficking and Rehabilitation

- a) Systemic Biases and Institutional Gaps: Interviewees consistently highlighted that current anti-trafficking efforts, which rely heavily on punitive justice, fail to change trafficker behavior effectively. One glaring issue is the continued occurrence of trafficking within prison systems. This reflects a critical shortcoming in existing frameworks, which neither contain exploitation within correctional facilities nor prevent convicted individuals from re-engaging in trafficking upon release.

Phillip Brewer observed a “notable absence of specific programs that target perpetrators to help them rethink or act differently,” emphasizing a significant gap in rehabilitation efforts. Survivors like Christina advocate for trauma-informed care, comprehensive mental health services, and behavioral training as essential tools for fostering empathy and ethical decision-making among traffickers.

Currently, anti-trafficking initiatives fail on three fronts: they neither deter traffickers from reoffending, incentivize them to disengage from trafficking networks, nor compel them to confront the harm they inflict on others. Without addressing these gaps, the cycle of exploitation continues unabated, undermining the efficacy of anti-trafficking strategies.

b) Systemic Challenges in Addressing Trafficking and Rehabilitation

- Generational Cycles of Exploitation: Interviews underscored the cyclical nature of trafficking, where many traffickers come from environments characterized by trauma, abuse, and poverty. These conditions often perpetuate exploitation across generations. Lauren Smith, a survivor, observed that "some traffickers were initially victims themselves, forced into the role due to their own vulnerabilities". Such findings highlight the critical need to address the root causes of trafficking at familial and community levels. Another anti-trafficking expert emphasized how violence against women within families normalizes, extending similar exploitation beyond the home.
- Barriers to Rehabilitation: Efforts to rehabilitate traffickers are hindered by several factors. Mental health challenges, particularly trauma-related conditions, remain significant obstacles when left unaddressed in rehabilitation programs. Christina, a survivor, highlighted how societal stigmas against traffickers prevent a shift toward reform-focused approaches that recognize their vulnerabilities. She explained that “societal resistance and the preference for incarceration over rehabilitation severely limit the impact of such programs”. Furthermore, rigid legal frameworks often prioritize punitive measures, leaving little room to pilot and implement rehabilitative solutions.
- Corruption in Legal and Enforcement Systems: Widespread corruption within law enforcement and judicial systems undermines anti-trafficking efforts globally. In regions like Latin America, trafficking laws are often neutralized by corruption, while systemic bribery undermines enforcement in Southeast Asia despite robust legal

frameworks in countries such as Cambodia and Vietnam. Survivors noted the misapplication of anti-trafficking laws, where victims coerced into trafficking are “frequently prosecuted as traffickers,” exacerbating their vulnerability. This deters coerced individuals from seeking help and perpetuates cycles of exploitation.

Phillip Brewer added that the current legal enforcement system evaluates success quantitatively—counting arrests, prosecutions, and convictions—without prioritizing outcomes that victims themselves value. Brewer explained that, for many victims, success means ensuring traffickers do not re-engage and harm others. The current punitive justice system often retraumatizes victims through cross-examinations, leaving little room for approaches that prevent reoffending.

- Youth Recruitment and Entrapment: Youth recruitment emerged as a critical issue, with traffickers targeting vulnerable young individuals for peripheral roles such as logistics or intermediary tasks. These individuals, often from unstable homes with limited economic opportunities, are lured into trafficking networks and gradually drawn deeper into their operations. Traffickers specifically exploit the reduced likelihood of prosecution for minors, embedding them into systems of exploitation. Christina emphasized the importance of early intervention to prevent these youths from becoming entrenched in trafficking, stating, “We need targeted programs to provide young people with better options before they’re recruited” .
- Socioeconomic and Regional Barriers to Anti-Trafficking Efforts: The broader societal context often poses challenges. In countries such as Ecuador, Colombia, and Mexico, trafficking has only recently been acknowledged as a widespread issue, limiting the development of effective interventions. These systemic barriers prevent the implementation of proactive measures in at-risk regions.

- c) Policy and Procedural Shortcomings: Fragmented and siloed approaches to trafficking hinder cohesive interventions and create critical gaps in addressing both victim protection and perpetrator rehabilitation. Phillip Brewer emphasized that trafficking is often treated in isolation from related crimes such as domestic abuse or child exploitation, preventing cross-sector learning and collaboration. He criticized the lack of integration in law enforcement and social service efforts, noting that specialists in different areas rarely share insights or strategies. This siloed approach perpetuates inefficiencies in tackling trafficking and reinforces the broader systemic issues underlying it.

A key shortcoming Brewer highlighted is the absence of targeted programs aimed at rehabilitating traffickers. Unlike other crimes, where interventions for offenders—such as domestic violence treatment programs—are common, trafficking lacks specific initiatives to address the behavior of perpetrators. Brewer pointed out that this oversight ignores the complexities of trafficking, where the

line between victims and perpetrators is often blurred. Many traffickers were once victims themselves, coerced into these roles by exploitative networks or circumstances beyond their control. For example, individuals who grow up in environments shaped by exploitation, much like those exposed to domestic abuse, often replicate the patterns they've experienced, either becoming traffickers or remaining entrapped in the cycle of exploitation.

Adding to the challenge, Brewer observed that anti-trafficking strategies often focus solely on victim protection, neglecting the need for offender-focused solutions. He drew attention to the "crossover" nature of trafficking, where perpetrators may carry traces of victimization due to prior experiences of coercion or exploitation. Without addressing these dynamics, rehabilitation programs risk overlooking critical pathways to prevent recidivism.

The intersection of anti-trafficking efforts with immigration policies also presents a significant barrier. Brewer highlighted how stricter immigration laws and border control measures deter non-national victims from seeking help due to fear of deportation. This not only leaves victims trapped in coercive situations but also contributes to trafficker recruitment. Victims who cannot escape these cycles often transition into trafficking roles themselves, further perpetuating the problem. Anti-trafficking and rehabilitation efforts must therefore consider the unintended consequences of rigid immigration policies and their role in sustaining exploitative systems.

Brewer's insights underscore the need for comprehensive, systemic reforms. Trafficking cannot be effectively addressed without dismantling the silos in which related crimes are treated, creating specific programs for offender rehabilitation, and reevaluating policies that inadvertently perpetuate exploitation. Rehabilitation efforts should recognize the unique dynamics of trafficking and provide pathways for traffickers to exit exploitative networks while mitigating the structural and policy-level barriers that drive re-engagement with these systems.

5. Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Traffickers: Research-Based Strategies

- a) Victim-Centric Rehabilitation: A significant finding was the need for programs designed specifically for traffickers who were once victims. These initiatives focus on understanding the root causes that led to their involvement in trafficking, such as vulnerability, coercion, and manipulation. Dr. Dadunashvili remarked that, "Rehabilitation and reintegration are possible, particularly for those who were initially victims themselves and were forced to become traffickers while in their own position of vulnerability". Such programs experts discussed must especially have mental health support aspects to it, and must help victims turned traffickers to work on the vulnerabilities that made coercion possible.
- b) Proximity to Family during the Rehabilitative Phase: A correctional psychiatrist highlighted the significant positive impact of proximity to family during the rehabilitation process. They observed that rehabilitation programs prioritizing the placement of perpetrators close to their families, along with fostering regular family interactions, have shown greater success and transformative outcomes.

These interactions often serve as a powerful motivator, encouraging individuals to envision a life free of crime and reinforcing their commitment to rehabilitation.

Interviewees also emphasized that effective rehabilitation should not merely focus on the individual in isolation but consider the broader context of family dynamics and generational trauma. By identifying and addressing issues rooted in family relationships, and counseling families when needed the rehabilitation process can achieve deeper, more lasting change. They warned against oversimplifying these challenges, stressing the importance of situating them within the specific contexts in which they arose to ensure meaningful progress.

- c) Addressing Trauma and Mental Health in Rehabilitation Programs: Interviews highlighted the critical need for mental health support in effective rehabilitation programs to address the trauma and mental illnesses often experienced by traffickers. A correctional psychiatrist emphasized that this support must encompass both psychiatric care and psychological interventions. They explained that many inmates they had encountered exhibited trauma responses, which activated hyper-vigilant survival instincts. These responses not only contributed to their initial involvement in trafficking but also made them more likely to relapse into crime.

The psychiatrist also highlighted the role of spiritual grounding as a powerful tool for holistic recovery. They observed that helping inmates reconnect with their spiritual beliefs and communities could foster a sense of purpose and motivation for transformation. For those already affiliated with spiritual groups, strengthening those connections provided a constructive way to spend time and find meaning in their lives.

Community mental health services were also identified as essential in this process, despite often being informal. One participant noted, “Case managers and community mental health services link individuals to support networks like churches, which provide informal but impactful assistance.” These services not only bridge gaps in formal rehabilitation programs but also provide consistent, long-term support crucial for sustaining recovery.

This integrated approach—combining trauma-informed care, spiritual grounding, and community mental health resources—offers a robust framework for addressing the complex needs of individuals undergoing rehabilitation.

- d) Skill Development and Economic Empowerment: Building economic stability through skill development and increased access to employment is essential for reducing recidivism among ex-traffickers. Effective rehabilitation programs must integrate education, life skills training, and mentorship to provide viable alternatives to criminal activity.

Ex-traffickers with criminal histories often face significant barriers to employment, including stigma and limited opportunities. Beyond building skills, reintegration programs must actively create pathways to employment, ensuring that participants can access sustainable livelihoods. Preparing ex-traffickers for

reintegration involves equipping them with tools and resources to construct a life away from trafficking networks and criminal activities.

Dr. Dadunashvili emphasized the interconnectedness of these efforts, stating, “Factors such as mental health support, economic empowerment, community involvement, and education can significantly impact the success of reintegration.” Addressing these areas holistically ensures that rehabilitation programs not only reduce recidivism but also foster lasting transformation.

- e) Trafficker-Centered Rehabilitation: Empathy and Voluntary Engagement: Interviews revealed that for rehabilitation programs to succeed, they must be designed and marketed in ways that resonate with traffickers' motivations, rather than imposed as obligations. Interviews highlighted the importance of making these programs appealing to traffickers, drawing them in voluntarily. Interviewees emphasized that many traffickers are often detached from the broader impacts of their actions. They may be unaware—or desensitized to—the profound harm they inflict on trafficked individuals.

To address this detachment, rehabilitation programs should prioritize re-sensitizing traffickers by fostering empathy and helping them grasp the human toll of their actions. One promising approach involves the use of storytelling and survivor testimonials. According to Dr. Dadunashvili, sharing vivid, personal narratives from survivors can serve as a powerful tool to break through the emotional disconnection traffickers may feel. By humanizing the experiences of trafficked individuals, these stories can provoke self-reflection and create the emotional impetus necessary for meaningful behavioral change.

Empathy-building strategies should be part of a broader framework addressing the systemic factors that drive individuals into trafficking. Programs must recognize how structural inequities, such as poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and limited access to education, shape traffickers' decisions. Without tackling these root causes alongside fostering empathy, the long-term impact of rehabilitation may be limited.

Additionally, the success of these strategies depends on cultural contexts. Approaches that work in one region may need adaptation for others, considering local attitudes, norms, and socio-economic conditions. For example, in cultures where traffickers may rationalize their actions as part of survival, the framing of storytelling and empathy-building interventions must be carefully tailored to resonate with their lived experiences. Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity are critical to ensuring the effectiveness of these efforts.

- f) Adapting Models from Other Crimes for Trafficker Rehabilitation: Interviewees highlighted the lack of targeted rehabilitation programs for traffickers, especially when compared to strategies developed for other crimes, such as extremism. Phil Brewer discussed that in the UK, the Prevent program focuses on individuals vulnerable to radicalization, providing tailored interventions to steer them away from extremist paths. This program's success lies in its early intervention methods, personalized support, and focus on addressing underlying vulnerabilities. However, no equivalent initiative exists for human traffickers.

Phillip Brewer noted, “We can learn a lot from other crime types, but as it is at the moment, there is no specific program targeting perpetrators in terms of helping them think or act differently.”

This gap underscores the need to adopt and adapt successful models from other criminal justice interventions to create programs that address traffickers' unique motivations and circumstances. Borrowing elements such as community engagement, psychological counseling, and long-term monitoring could provide a framework for rehabilitation that not only deters traffickers but also helps reintegrate them into society as productive individuals.

- g) Addressing Legislative Barriers and Stigmas: Interviews highlighted how legal barriers disproportionately impact individuals who might otherwise be candidates for rehabilitation, particularly those trafficked into a country and subsequently holding an illegal status. Strict immigration laws that fail to recognize the realities faced by these individuals push them deeper into exploitative networks. Phil Brewer for example highlighted that legislative frameworks, such as the UK’s Nationality and Borders Act, and their strict regulations create obstacles for individuals, particularly non-UK nationals, to access support systems effectively. He said “Hostile pieces of legislation have changed the process, making it harder for adults to access support through mechanisms like the National Referral Mechanism.” Non-UK nationals frequently face stigmas tied to immigration status, compounded by fears of deportation. These fears discourage them from seeking assistance or participating in rehabilitation programs. Furthermore, by prioritizing punitive measures over restorative solutions, such frameworks reduce the chances of addressing the root causes of trafficking and exploitation.

Addressing these barriers requires a shift in legislative priorities to ensure that policies facilitate access to rehabilitation and support mechanisms. This includes revising restrictive immigration laws and promoting awareness campaigns to combat stigmas associated with seeking help. Without these changes, rehabilitation efforts risk being inaccessible to the very individuals they aim to support.

- h) Limitations of Rehabilitation: Interviews underscored the importance of distinguishing between traffickers who can benefit from rehabilitation programs and those for whom such efforts would likely be ineffective. Several experts emphasized that rehabilitation investments should focus on individuals coerced or driven into trafficking due to systemic vulnerabilities, such as poverty or marginalization, rather than those deeply entrenched in organized crime or motivated solely by profit. Dr. Dadunashvili asserted, “I do not believe in rehabilitation of the heads and leading figures of organized crime groups,” highlighting a critical limitation in applying blanket rehabilitation strategies.

Leaders of organized crime networks often exploit systemic loopholes, manipulate vulnerable individuals, and operate with calculated efficiency to maximize profits. Their deep-seated control over these networks and the lack of remorse or moral engagement make them unlikely candidates for reform. Rehabilitation efforts targeting such individuals risk diverting resources away from traffickers who may genuinely benefit from intervention.

This distinction calls for a tiered approach to rehabilitation, where resources are allocated based on the likelihood of success. For lower-level traffickers, tailored programs addressing root causes and offering viable alternatives may prove effective. However, dismantling organized crime networks requires stricter enforcement measures aimed at prosecuting and disrupting the leadership structure.

- i) Holistic and Targeted Approaches to Rehabilitation and reintegration: Interviews consistently emphasized the need for a dual approach to rehabilitation: addressing personal recovery while fostering societal reentry through economic and educational opportunities. Effective programs must provide individuals with tools to build new lives while ensuring they do not fall back into trafficking roles. Lauren, a survivor, stressed that economic stability and access to viable career options are critical in breaking cycles of exploitation.

Vocational training and skill development emerged as indispensable components of successful rehabilitation. Christina emphasized the value of providing traffickers with legitimate income avenues, such as training in construction or other skilled trades, as meaningful alternatives to criminal activities. Similarly, Phillip Brewer advocated for integrating trade skill development into rehabilitation programs to create tangible career paths and reduce recidivism. He noted that such training is most effective when paired with mentorship and real-world employment opportunities, which help bridge the gap between training and reintegration.

Dr. Mehdi highlighted a significant gap in rehabilitation programs: the absence of trauma-focused therapies like debriefing and exposure therapy, which are widely used in veteran systems. These approaches address the underlying psychological wounds that often perpetuate harmful behaviors. While some regions, like New York, have implemented more comprehensive frameworks, inconsistencies across jurisdictions limit the scalability of these models. Expanding the use of trauma-informed methodologies and learning from established systems could greatly enhance rehabilitation outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis, this section articulates specific policy recommendations to address the systemic, societal, and procedural challenges identified in combating human trafficking and rehabilitating traffickers. The proposed strategies, in addressing these critical gaps, go on to further strengthen anti-trafficking frameworks, break intergenerational cycles of exploitation, and establish effective rehabilitation pathways.

1. Holistic and Rehabilitation Recommendations

- a) Community-Based Prevention and Support Initiatives: To address systemic root causes of trafficking such as poverty, abuse, and trauma, which interviewees identified, local governments should create comprehensive programs aimed at lowering the level of these vulnerabilities. As survivor Christina noted, many

traffickers emerge from environments of extreme poverty or abusive households, further underscoring the need for community-focused interventions. The governments should liaise with grass-root organizations and provide grants for family counseling, parenting classes, and economic empowerment programs. For example, family counseling would break intergenerational cycles of abuse, while parenting workshops provide skills to the members for safe and supportive environments. Economic empowerment should focus on sustainable industries, such as health or technology, that would involve the process of skill building and provide stable jobs for the vulnerable population. These programs need to be tailored to the specific socioeconomic needs of local communities in order to effectively address root causes.

In fact, such partnerships between governments, NGOs, and businesses are imperative in creating an all-encompassing support system for at-risk populations. For instance, Lauren observed that some of the traffickers were once victims, which shows the need for programs on prevention and rehabilitation. A collaborative approach can further ensure access to more services, which may include housing assistance, mental health resources, and child care, in addition to access to meaningful employment. Efforts taken in community building with sustainable support can disrupt generational cycles of exploitation and make vulnerabilities less at their source. This reduces the conditions that create trafficked individuals and fosters stronger communities—resilient and resistant—to trafficking networks.

2. Strengthening Early Intervention Mechanisms for At-Risk Youth

Early intervention for at-risk youth should be improved. Unless these young people are being recruited by trafficking networks, early intervention programs must be started, targeting the specific issues identified by respondents. For example, Christina mentioned that youth recruited into trafficking are usually brought in gradually through peripheral roles and indicated that "the earlier and more proactive the intervention, the better education on the tactics of trafficking, including awareness through age-appropriate workshops in schools and community centers regarding recognizing the warning signs and where help is available, needs to be implemented by local governments and community organizations. This might include mentorship programs matching at-risk youth with trustworthy adults who will guide them through these times and provide the much-needed emotional support to enable the youngsters to cope. Extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and STEM clubs can provide healthy alternatives and promote a sense of belonging that reduces vulnerability.

3. Skill Development and Economic Empowerment Pathways

Anti-traffickers need an alternative sustainable economic opportunity to avoid recidivism and other forms of exploitation. Expert opinions, such as that of Phillip Brewer, and survivor perspectives, such as Christina, greatly stressed the transformative potential for vocational training and mentorship programs in rehabilitation initiatives. These rehabilitation initiatives should establish relationships with industrial leaders to provide training in emerging and leading industries. For example, construction unions can provide an apprenticeship that results in certifications in sustainable building or technology firms that offer either coding boot camps or IT certifications. Additionally, programs should provide accessible entry

points at every skill level, such as basic education initiatives like the completion of a GED through to advanced technical training aligned with regional economic needs.

Programs should include life skills training in financial literacy, job readiness, and conflict resolution to address broader employment barriers. Participants will acquire practical skills in budgeting, how to navigate through job applications, and effective workplace communication. Tax credits, grants, or public recognition campaigns that highlight their contributions to reducing trafficking-related recidivism can incentivize employers to hire program graduates. Programs should include microenterprise development initiatives for areas with limited formal job markets, offering small business loans, entrepreneurship workshops, and ongoing mentorship for those interested in starting their own enterprises. In so doing, programs can actually disrupt economic desperation—the usual reason individuals fall back into trafficking networks—and provide something tangible and dignified for traffickers to move.

4. Empathy-Based Rehabilitation Strategies

The core of rehabilitation programs should be empathy-based approaches, with a moral and emotional scope towards reform. According to Dr. Dadunashvili, sharing experiences of survivors and campaigns for empathy may alter the traffickers' perception of how much harm they have caused. The survivor-led workshops, which start with the sharing of first-hand experiences about the physical, emotional, and social aftermath of trafficking, are where one should start. Virtual reality simulations, interactive narratives, and other multimedia tools may further plunge them into such experiences. That makes such stories quite vivid and powerful. For example, a virtual reality experience can take the participant through a day in the life of a survivor of trafficking to show the challenges he or she went through.

Community forums can amplify the reach and impact of empathy-driven strategies. These forums would involve survivors, reformed traffickers, and community leaders in open discussions of the realities of trafficking and their potential for change. They can provide a platform for traffickers to publicly commit to reform, enhancing accountability and a sense of responsibility. The empathy-based awareness campaigns can also be extended to schools, workplaces, and other public places. These may include public service announcement survivor testimonials, educational workshops, and community events in place for reducing stigma associated with rehabilitation. By installing empathy within the rehabilitation programs and across broader social initiatives, these approaches facilitate not only individual behavioral changes but also help create a more supportive environment within which to successfully reintegrate.

5. Legal and Organizational Policy Recommendations

- a) Leveraging Existing Partnerships With European Law Enforcement Entities: As demonstrated by our findings as well as the literature review, the definition and practice of rehabilitation varies between European nations, each with their own nuanced systems of justice and policing. Rather than encouraging nations to improve/institute robust rehabilitation programs, as well as programs specifically catered to rehabilitating perpetrators of human trafficking bilaterally through each individual US Diplomatic Post, this recommendation proposes leveraging the existing training and logistical support programs

maintained by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL). INL has built cooperative agreements with law enforcement and judicial agencies within countless nations in Europe. Using these cooperative relationships, J/TIP and assisting bureaus and offices can utilize INL's networks to institute training programs with the law enforcement and correctional agencies to create/bolster rehabilitation programs that seek to rehabilitate offenders of human trafficking and prevent recidivism.

- b) Utilize the Findings and UNODC Evaluation Framework to Audit the Rehabilitation Programs of European Nations for Efficacy/Robustness: While specialized rehabilitation programs for human traffickers is a desirable future outcome across European nations, it is much more likely that countries maintain at the very least generalized rehabilitation programs for violent offenders. In this interim period of lacking infrastructure in targeted rehabilitation of human traffickers, it is of the best interest in preventing recidivism of incarcerated offenders through the strengthening of existing programs in corrections facilities. An evaluation of the efficacy and strength of rehabilitation programs in individual states will provide insight into whether violent offender educational and therapeutic programs are robust enough to rehabilitate human traffickers in the interim.

Conclusion

The findings collected from existing literature and industry experts are an introduction into visualizing the best practices, challenges, and limitations inherent in instituting rehabilitation programs for offenders of human trafficking. The idea of creating these programs is currently uncharted territory, yet there is evidence that they are a crucial necessity in preventing recidivism of offenders back into engaging in trafficking operations. Emblematic of this uncharted course of practice and theory, our team experienced a drought of existing literature on trafficker rehabilitation, yet as we investigated further into general rehabilitation mechanisms, regional factors, and the few articles and reports on this topic, we discovered that both robust rehabilitation programs in general may provide a temporary reaction to rehabilitation of offenders, a targeted approach towards the economic, social, and mental factors that lead individuals into engaging in this egregious industry to be integral towards maintaining a cutting-edge effort to combat human trafficking as a whole. In our conversations with survivors and experts in academic, psychiatric, legal, and law enforcement backgrounds, our respondents reiterated the necessity to establish such targeted programs. It is deeply telling that the experts we spoke to openly admitted to not being experts on the intersection of rehabilitation in the context of human traffickers, yet reiterated the importance of such a powerful concept.

In today's society, the proposal of rehabilitating those convicted of participating in one of the most horrific illicit industries is one that can be considered radical, and critics may challenge whether someone convicted of such crimes can be reformed. Global reliance on punitive justice forgoes the proactive approach in preventing recidivism, as well as curtails the healing process for victims and their families in seeking restorative justice. Rehabilitation of human traffickers both serves the community in preventing them from returning to crime, as well as benefits society and the individual offenders in transforming

them into citizens able to live their lives free of addiction, mental illness, and external factors that lead an individual into committing such grave offenses.

This resistance underscores the need for education and training for those working on trafficking issues. By better understanding the systemic drivers of trafficking—such as poverty, trauma, and social marginalization—practitioners can focus on addressing root causes rather than merely responding to symptoms. Broadening the approach to include prevention, rehabilitation, and education would provide a more holistic and effective strategy to combat human trafficking

To effectively combat organized crime and its link to human trafficking, foster international collaboration between governments, law enforcement, and social services. This should include shared intelligence systems, harmonized legal frameworks, and coordinated operations to dismantle transnational criminal networks.

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