



# Public-Private-Partnerships and their potential to combat Trafficking in Persons in a post Covid-19 MENA Region- Victim Centered Approach

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## **Abstract**

Trafficking in Persons (TiP) has over the years been a worrying phenomenon for governments all over the world. Human traffickers tend to exploit the economic and social vulnerability of their victims and most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing disadvantages, poverty and vulnerabilities of TiP victims and survivors. The UNODC Compendium of Promising Practices on Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) to Prevent and Counter Trafficking in Persons provides relevant background information on three sectors: supply chain, finance and technology, in four different regions; Southeast Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia-Pacific. (UNODC, 2021c)

The paper analyses the potential of PPP to combat trafficking in persons in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region particularly in the post Covid-19 era by sharing promising practices and lessons learned. The paper uses a qualitative methodology based on seven in-depth interviews with experts working on trafficking in persons and on Public-Private-Partnerships from UNODC, civil society organizations, private sector and survivors of trafficking. The evidence collected demonstrates that there is a need for victim-centered PPPs and technological solutions in the MENA region. This is in consideration that the main issues, expressed by most participants, lie in lack of resources and funding for survivors and projects that are intended to directly help victims and survivors. We presumed that partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society are progressively urgent in creating awareness on issues of TiP and on implementing anti-trafficking measures.

*key words:* PPP, COVID-19 pandemic, victims, survivors, trafficking in persons

## **Abbreviations**

CSEM	Child Sexual Exploitation Materials
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSU	Civil Society Unit
FEI	Federation of Egyptian Industries
HTMSS	Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section
ILO	International Labour Organization
IO	International Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISTAC	International Survivor of Trafficking Advisory Council
MENA	Middle East and Northern Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODIHR	The Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PPP	Public-Private-Partnerships
RAUN	Regional Academy of the United Nations
TiP	Trafficking in Persons
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNTOC	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime

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# **Public-Private-Partnerships and their potential to combat Trafficking in Persons in a post Covid-19 MENA Region-Victim Centered Approach**

Konrad Gertz, Ivy Omondi

## **1 Introduction**

Trafficking in Persons (TiP) is the fastest-growing form of crime that involves recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of an individual through the means of force, fraud or coercion. It is estimated that 24,9 (2016) million people fall victim to trafficking (ILO, 2017). Types of TiP include forced labour, sexual exploitation or organ removal. Smuggling of migrants, even though it is a different crime, is often interconnected with TiP (Interpol, n.d.). Often the illicit proceeds from exploiting victims of trafficking are laundered using legal tech-based tools such as social media platforms and financial services. (Henry N, Powell A, 2018; CNN, 2021; US State Department, 2021a)

Human traffickers tend to exploit the economic and social vulnerability of their victims and most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has increased unemployment and poverty which are typical drivers of vulnerability. The role of certain technologies such as adult services websites and social media have also facilitated the increase of human trafficking operations (UNODC, 2021a). Based on national-international data sharing and research, TiP is a very difficult crime to track with low risks and high rewards for criminal gangs. This is because human trafficking networks are neither constrained by geography, but the sophisticated transnational criminal networks are operated in a manner that is very difficult to detect especially when there is insufficient data. (UNODC, 2021b)

The MENA region (Middle East and Northern Africa) has, due to its economic and social diversity, sending countries, receiving countries and transit countries for victims of TiP. The victims are also diverse, being trafficked in the country, region or originating from southeastern Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa into the region. For instance, numerous East African countries such as Kenya and Uganda export their labour mainly to the Middle East, and to a lesser degree to Europe, the Americas and Africa. The social and economic vulnerability make migrants a vulnerable population for exploitation. As main transit migration routes from Sub-Saharan Africa lead through Northern Africa to Europe, highly vulnerable migrant populations are present in Northern Africa, e.g., in Libya (US State Department, 2021b). Further political unrest and economic crises in the region make already vulnerable populations more at risk to TiP.

In this context, the private sector has several entry points and motivations to combat trafficking in persons. Companies are responsible if victims of trafficking are knowingly or unknowingly exploited in their supply chains. National and international legislation starts to make companies also legally responsible if e.g., forced labour is employed in their supply chain. An example of such legislation is the very recent German *Lieferkettengesetz* (BMZ, 2021). Additionally,

services of mainly tech and finance companies are employed to commit and facilitate crimes such as the social media platforms of Meta, or financial service providers (CNN, 2021; US State Department, 2021a). At the same time, these companies have good tools to help the victims of TiP such as Uber a global company who trains its drivers to recognize victims of TiP, and Microsoft which cooperated with Dartmouth College to create the project PhotoDNA which deletes known images of sexual exploitation from the internet (Uber, n.d.; UNODC, 2021c) and provide evidence for legal proceedings. A stable social and economic environment, free of corruption and crime is also good for business and for politics and their involvement in combating TiP highlights the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Therefore, in consideration of the foregoing, this research proposal seeks to answer the following question: **‘In what ways can the public and private sectors collaborate to address implementation gaps in anti-trafficking policies in a post Covid-19 Middle East?’**

The research paper answers the research question through a qualitative methodology based on seven in-depth interviews with experts working on Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP) to address TiP. These experts are from UNODC, civil society organizations (CSO), private sector and survivors of trafficking. Through the diverse expert backgrounds the research paper sheds light on the possibility of victim-centered PPPs to combat TiP and help survivors of trafficking to re-integrate in society.

## 2 Literature Review:

The UNODC Compendium on PPP to Prevent and Counter TiP provides useful information on the role of PPP in preventing and countering trafficking in persons. The compendium looks into three relevant sectors: supply chain, finance and tech, in four different regions: Southeast Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia-Pacific. Key conclusions and recommendations informing this research paper are (I) The need for capacity-building initiatives from organizations, such as the UNODC, to better understand the crime of TiP and to implement effective PPPs; (II) The need for more information exchange between and within regions and sectors to help collaborative efforts to address human trafficking; (III) Victims on human trafficking are essential actors for PPPs and should be brought in as equal partners from the outset; (IV) More financial assistance and legitimate employment models via PPPs are required to help survivors and to break the cycle of human trafficking, and the for increased focus on victim protection; (V) Technical solutions can be instrumental in the fight against human trafficking; and (VI) data privacy and strong security controls must remain a priority when designing and implementing a PPP to address TiP, especially where technology plays a role and in the financial sector. (UNODC, 2021c)

As the research paper is aimed at complementing the PPP Compendium published by the UNODC Civil Society Unit (CSU) and the Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section (HTMSS) on 11 October 2021, the research will follow the same definitions for Trafficking in Persons and Public Private Partnership (PPP) contained in the Compendium. Here, PPP is defined as follows: “PPPs are a way to counter trafficking in persons through a coherent and collaborative endeavor between governments, the private sector and relevant civil society organizations. In doing so, these actors leverage resources, expertise and/or market efforts to

create significant positive impact and sustainable effects in reducing human trafficking. PPPs can consist of a mix of two or more public and private entities working together and/or striving for specific goals as part of the overarching aims of preventing and addressing trafficking in persons in line with the UNTOC and its Trafficking in Persons Protocol.” (UNODC, 2021)

Trafficking in Persons is defined in the PPP Compendium as follows: “Article 3, paragraph (a) of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol defines trafficking in persons as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.” (UNODC, 2021)

Literature on the impact of Covid-19 on TiP is still scarce. However, in a 2021 study UNODC states that existing socio-economic vulnerabilities have been exacerbated through the pandemic. Additionally, national health measures during the pandemic have not always considered the needs of vulnerable populations affected by exploitation and violence or survivors of trafficking. The report has found that also traffickers’ *modi operandi* have changed. Such changes include increased local recruitment and exploitation, increase in online recruitment and exploitation and an increased demand for child sexual exploitation materials (CSEM).

Given the increase in exploitation and recruitment online and the decrease of in-person services for survivors of trafficking, technological tools are increasingly important to combat trafficking and to provide service to survivors. Traffickers often prey on vulnerable individuals through websites and online sources. The role of certain technologies such as adult services websites and social media have also facilitated the increase of human trafficking operations. However, the internet is also an important source of information, visibility, and awareness-raising about what counts as trafficking, how it can be prevented, steps to take, and for collection of evidence for the prosecution of perpetrators. Some examples of positive tech-based PPP practices include Uganda’s Trafficking in Persons Mobile App Platform (TIPMAP) database (Human Trafficking Institute, 2021) and large-scale collaborations across tech companies such as ‘Tech Against Trafficking. (Tech Against Trafficking, n.d.)’

Tech Against Trafficking is a collaboration of tech companies addressing the issue of human trafficking as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and through Public-Private Partnerships. The "Tech against Trafficking" collaboration of large tech companies such as Amazon, British Telecommunications (BT), and Microsoft was founded in 2018. This coalition collects data and maps the use of technological tools being used to combat human trafficking globally. Identified tools range from those that automatically identify child abuse material on the internet to educational gaming apps to raise awareness or software that identifies missing persons' pictures on the internet. (Microsoft, 2021; Stop the Traffik, n.d.)

### 3 Justification

This research focuses on the Middle East and Northern Africa, a region not yet covered by the PPP Compendium, and contributes to the creation of knowledge relating to the role of PPP to combat TiP in the region. Additionally, this study takes a victim-centered approach and concentrates on tech-based solutions. While the compendium also focuses on the tech-sector, the victim-centered approach is specific to this research paper. However, tech-focused victim-centered approaches are highlighted also as *promising practices* in the PPP Compendium. A main focus of this research paper is additionally the post Covid-19 pandemic situation in the MENA region, which, due to its actuality is only sparsely investigated in academic literature (UNODC, 2021a; Todres, Diaz, 2020; IOM, 2021). By providing a new regional focus to the four foci of the PPP Compendium the research paper aims to build a knowledge base and further inform the work of the UNODC in the region on this relevant issue.

### 4 Methodology:

This research paper is conducted as a study based on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are seven in-depth interviews with experts from the relevant sectors. The secondary sources are academic literature published on the topic of PPPs, TiP and tech-based solutions (see literature review). Furthermore, this research design builds up on the UNODC PPP Compendium and aims at broadening the regional focus of the compendium.

In order to answer the question **‘In what ways can the public and private sectors collaborate to address implementation gaps in anti-trafficking policies in a post Covid-19 Middle East?’**, the research paper takes a qualitative research approach, each step building upon the previous one to ensure knowledge creation and interconnection between the outcomes gained through the different stakeholders involved in the research.

To begin with we conducted a secondary source desk research concerning the situation of human trafficking in the MENA region, with a specific focus on the impact of Covid-19 on the practices of trafficking in humans. This first step also identified possible implementation gaps in anti-trafficking policies due to Covid-19 related issues such as budget cuts, national economic situations and more. This desk research provided a basis on which further research and qualitative data collection was conducted.

The first interviews conducted for the research paper were with the **UNODC regional office of the Middle East and Northern Africa** in Cairo and the **UNODC field office in Algeria**. These interviews were conducted to provide an overview of the situation concerning trafficking in persons and the impact of Covid-19 in the region. Furthermore, the meeting provided an overview of the work that is already undertaken by relevant international organizations (IO) such as the UNODC and other relevant stakeholders, the role of PPPs and the relationship with the UNODC with CSOs in the region. The UNODC country office in Cairo and Algiers also served as an entry point to different stakeholders operating in the MENA region, such as relevant civil society actors or other IOs. A broad interview guideline was developed, and contact was established with the UNODC regional office. (Bengtsson, 2016)



The main in-depth interviews were conducted with relevant regional and international stakeholders, answering the main questions: What is being done on an international and regional (MENA) level to combat trafficking in persons?, what is needed to improve the prevention of trafficking in persons, the protection and reintegration of survivors and the prevention of trafficking in persons in the MENA region?, how can victim-centered PPPs help survivors of trafficking?, and what are existing PPPs in the MENA region? To answer these main questions interviews were conducted with survivors of trafficking, relevant NGOs and private sector entities working to prevent and combat this crime.

As a spokesperson for survivors of trafficking in persons, an in-depth interview with **Kendall Alaimo**, member of the ‘International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council’ (ISTAC) of the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) which is a branch of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and founder of the Public Private Partnership Initiative ‘The University Alliance on Human Trafficking’ was conducted.

Interviews with civil society Representatives were conducted with the NGOs **Love Justice** and **Médecins du monde Tunisia**. The NGO Love Justice operates globally to prevent trafficking in persons, including through the use of tech-based approaches such as data mapping of migration routes. The NGO Médecins du monde is a global NGO working in Tunisia mainly providing medical services to migrants but also to victims of TiP and Smuggling of Migrants.

The first interviews with private sector stakeholders were conducted with representatives of **Western Union** and **Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI)**. The private sector representatives were interviewed to provide insight to existing PPPs in the MENA region and the work of private sector companies that are directly affected by the issue of TiP.

The in-depth interviews were then transcribed and coded (Dresing & Pehl, 2020; Campbell et al, 2013). The analysis of the interviews focused on the impact of Covid-19 on TiP in the MENA Region and on survivors of trafficking, as well as identification of promising practices by CSOs and private sector entities and challenges and recommendations in establishing victim-centered PPPs in the MENA region.

## 5 Results

The chapter first explores the impact of Covid-19 on victims and survivors of trafficking in persons (5.1.1) and on organizations combating trafficking in persons (5.1.2.). Secondly, the chapter looks into the needs of survivors of trafficking to reintegrate into society and possible tech-based solutions to help survivors of trafficking (5.2.). In the next sections of chapter five the research paper explores, informed by the respective interviews, the role of Government (5.3.), the role of the private sector (5.4.), the role of CSs (5.5.), and the role of IOs (5.6.) in combating Trafficking in Persons and help the reintegration of survivors of trafficking in society, and stop the exploitation of victims of Trafficking. Section 5.7. is the presentation of promising practices by CSOs and private sector entities combating TiP and aiding survivors of trafficking. Promising practices highlighted are from the Federation of Egyptian Industries (5.7.1), Médecins du monde Tunisia (5.7.2.) and Love Justice (5.7.3.).

Due to only a limited number of interviews it is worth noting that the results presented here might not be fully representative of the situation globally or in the MENA region. The research acknowledges the complexity of the field data collection in this research paper. Given the broad geographic region of the MENA region with its multiethnic and multi religious nature, the authors recognize that the outputs might not be generalizable, especially if applied outside of the MENA region.

## 5.1 Impact of Covid-19

### 5.1.1 *Impact of Covid-19 on Victims and Survivors of Trafficking in Persons*

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a considerably negative impact on human trafficking victims and survivors. The global job losses meant that there was an increased supply of workers vulnerable to false promises and exploitation. People who were already vulnerable found themselves in even more precarious circumstances and more likely to accept risky employment in illegal informal or unregulated sectors. Online predators have also refined and adapted their tools to engage and recruit victims. Moreover, the absence of safe spaces accessible for survivors were significantly more problematic as existing shelters that serve TiP victims had to close because of lack of funding. This finding is upheld by the response of one of our participants:

*“COVID-19 has really taken a toll on the organizations working to combat human trafficking and serve survivors daily. It has driven a global financial crisis and we're seeing a lot of NGOs here in America and around the world not having the funding that they used to have. They're not able and equipped to provide housing, medical care, educational resources, skills, and job training to get them back into society.”*

*(Kendall Alaimo)*

The Covid-19 pandemic also heightened the health risks for victims and survivors of trafficking. Victims and survivors were more exposed to contracting the virus and less equipped to prevent it since they had less access to adequate health care to ensure their recovery. Moreover, isolation caused an outrageous pressure on mental health. There was a risk of higher levels of post traumatic stress disorder and mental health issues among survivors recently determined to have suffered from PTSD and other mental health issues, just as the ones without a past analysis. This conclusion is supported by our participant's remark:

*“When we talk about the survivor population, we have to understand a lot of them are continuing to survive as they are exiting with complex cases of post traumatic stress disorder and often under diagnosed dissociative disorders. Covid-19 fueled devastating economic affects globally and has depleted needed funding to critical international organizations that previously allowed them to provide needed housing, ethical trauma informed healthcare and re-integration programs. As a result, this vulnerable population is at higher risk for re-exploitation which causes additional abusive trauma increasing clinical symptomatology, causing complication of in their over all pathology and driving negative health outcomes over the course of their lives.”*

(Kendall Alaimo)

### 5.1.2 Impact of Covid-19 on Organizations combating Trafficking in Persons

All experts involved in this study agreed that the pandemic had led to a decrease in funding to NGOs, private organizations and governments. In the following quote Ryan also points to uncertainty in the future when he speaks of a “funny sort of economic phase”.

*“...there was a slight decrease[of funding] in the last six months. We didn't hit our budgets for six months. I hope that does not continue.*

*It looks like it probably will, that the world is going into a bit of a funny sort of economic phase.”*

*(Love Justice representative)*

NGOs and international organizations in the MENA regions also highlighted that there was reduced funding to conduct their normal activities such as providing safe houses, supporting victim's livelihood, training and conducting community outreach, rescue activities and operations. Donors, governments and private contributors preferred to redirect guaranteed financing to emergency Covid-19 projects. This implied that NGOs had decreased financing to offer direct help to victims and survivors. Besides that, there was a significant decrease in reporting of suspected human trafficking cases during the pandemic. Therefore, law enforcement agencies were unable to identify trafficking trends significantly hindering their ability to conduct proactive investigations. This had consequently enabled the perpetrators to continue conducting their normal activities by exploiting the circumstances caused by the pandemic. Many of these claims are logical conclusions of experts in their fields and given the ongoing pandemic conditions solid data is yet to be collected and analysed.

*“But unfortunately, we do not have any data and we have to wait for a couple of months or eventually years to have a proper assessment.”*

*(Samia Chouchane, UNODC Algeria)*

## 5.2 Needs for Survivors of Trafficking in Persons

*“Survivors are experts in what they need because they're still often surviving. [...] [It is important that] survivors really have a seat at the table on a high level and raise their hand and say, I need housing, I need education, I need a way to school, I need a way to economic equity and ultimately I need a way home and a path to freedom is something that could be implemented and really listening to the needs of survivors.”*

*(Kendall Alaimo)*

Our interviews with survivors of trafficking and stakeholders working with them resulted in five main themes. These observations are (I) listening to the survivors of trafficking, (II)

economic equity and freedom, (III) technological tools, (IV) culturally sensitive approaches and (V) the role of PPPs.

Interview partners highlighted that it is very important to listen to survivors of trafficking themselves when developing policies or projects aimed at helping them. Often well-intentioned projects or policies do not match the needs of survivors. Here it is important to mention that the needs of survivors are diverse but do have common aspects such as the need for re-integration in society and trauma-informed services. The inclusion of survivors could take place through consultations with them or survivor advocacy groups such as National Survivor Network (National Survivor Network, n.d.). An additional option for integrating their voices in policy making or PPP projects are survivor leader councils. These can give survivors a voice on national or international level. An example of such an international council is the 'International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Board (ISTAC) of the OSCE which consists of 21 survivors of Trafficking in Persons from OSCE countries (OSCE, 2021). A national advisory council example is the US Advisory Council on Human Trafficking (US State Department, n.d.) which is a platform of survivors to advise and make recommendations on federal anti-trafficking policies in the United States. In general, there is an ongoing conversation in communities of survivors stressing the need for a survivor led advisory council in all countries. The MENA region still lacks such integration of the voices of survivors of trafficking in policy making as is evidenced by the lack of comparable victim-led bodies and the expert interviews.

The second main point is the importance and the interdependence of economic equity and freedom. Here, work and education are the main issues of importance. For many survivors, mainly survivors of labour exploitation, work is a difficult subject which can enforce existing trauma. At the same time economic equity is important also for the mental well-being of survivors. Survivors of trafficking often have trafficking related debt from e.g., health care costs. At the same time survivors of trafficking often live under precarious circumstances if they leave safe-houses. Therefore, a stable job is important for the survivor's reintegration into the society. Access to education, the opportunity to get education and as a result being able to choose a career path that is compatible with existing work-related trauma is highly important and aids in the reintegration process. Access to education is however often limited due to financial and social constraints such as trafficking related debt and healthcare costs. Important entry points here could be PPPs such as the University Alliance on Human Trafficking which enables victims to attend university, which lifts the financial, and mental health barrier to seek an education (see below). As survivors of trafficking in the MENA region are often trafficked outside of their country of origin, legal employment and education is often not accessible in the destination countries. Illicit employment then increases the risk of re-exploitation and thus highlights the necessity on national labour laws to include foreigners.

Key tools to help survivors of trafficking are tech-based instruments. These tools however require certain criteria to prevent re-traumatization and re-victimization. Tech-based tools could be used both for recruitment and grooming of victims of trafficking. Through the Covid-19 pandemic the use of online platforms for Trafficking in Persons has increased significantly (see 5.1). On the other hand, the decrease in in-person services for survivors has led to an increase of the creation of online tools to support survivors of trafficking. Tech-based tools can be used

for prevention, stop the exploitation of survivors and for their re-integration into society. Prevention tools could be awareness raising applications for children and adults, presenting vulnerabilities and red flags in e.g., work offers. Tools to stop exploitation could be applications that offer relevant contact points for people being exploited such as local helplines or safehouses and shelters. Additional tools for detecting exploitation are programs from the financial sector that flag and report suspicious financial transactions. Tools to help the re-integration of survivors could be peer-to-peer platforms to exchange information or get into contact with each other and to build a support social network. Such platforms could also serve as a means of communication and information exchange between vulnerable populations such as migrants in the MENA region as a way to prevent exploitation. Survivors of trafficking in the MENA region have reportedly used social media to communicate in search of assistance when they had access to it.

The development of these online tools as well as their maintenance are however expensive. Here, the civil society organizations that developed these tools would most likely need funding from the private sector, government or IOs. Barriers of implementation besides financial aspects also include the danger of re-victimization and re-traumatization of survivors of trafficking in such peer-to-peer platforms. To limit these dangers, a trauma expert moderator is needed to monitor the content and the people who have access to these platforms in order to delete potential triggers for trauma and ensure that no criminal is able to access the network with e.g., a fake profile and find victims for re-exploitation.

Programs, services or victim-centered PPPs need to offer culturally sensitive services to the survivors of trafficking. This is especially important if the survivors are from different countries and cultural contexts. In the MENA region this could be especially important as Trafficking in Persons is often connected with Migration from e.g., Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Culturally sensitive services include language skills, religious consideration and gender roles. For survivors of trafficking from different countries administrative help to get citizenship or residency permits, if possible, within the national legal frameworks of the countries, or if wanted a transfer back to the country of origin is highly important. On these points the government needs to play a facilitating role.

Lastly, PPPs can play an important role in facilitating all the previous points. PPPs can primarily play an important role to create economic equity and freedom for survivors of trafficking by cooperating with universities to offer spots for survivors of trafficking for education, cooperating with the private sector to offer employment --ideally trauma-informed employment-- and collaborating with governments and IOs to develop victim-centered and informed policies. An example is the University Alliance on Human Trafficking which cooperates with universities globally to offer red chairs in universities through the red chair initiative that symbolizes the university's compromise to offer a scholarship to a victim of trafficking. Further, PPPs can support survivor-led NGOs through capacity building, financial support and other services. Furthermore, PPPs can be highly beneficial for tech-based solutions. Such solutions as described above can be costly in development and maintenance. Therefore, private sector involvement can be highly beneficial for such projects for the provision of expertise, financial, material and technical assistance. Finally, PPPs can support governments'

ability to respond to trafficking quicker and more effectively through cooperation with the private sector entities that have the capacity and resources to develop solutions.

### 5.3 The Role of Government in combating Trafficking in Persons

The role of the government in combating trafficking in persons is diverse. Main responsibilities include the establishment of a robust legal framework according to the United Nations Convention of Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), the provision of services for survivors of trafficking such as shelters, the provision of law enforcement to identify victims of TiP and cooperating with other countries to prosecute trafficking criminals and protect survivors of trafficking. An important aspect of the Government's support for survivors of trafficking is to support CSOs. These often provide necessary services such as shelters for victims and hotlines.

Countries of the MENA region have robust national laws to prosecute TiP with some exceptions like Libya where prosecuting traffickers uses different laws. These laws remained robust during the Covid-19 pandemic. Effects of the pandemic include the integration of migrants into the national health care system in some MENA countries such as Tunisia which also supports survivors of trafficking. Only a few MENA region governments have existing cooperation with CSOs to provide services such as Tunisia (Médecins du monde Tunisia).

Governments play a vital role in the creation and operation of effective victim-centered PPPs. Here, governments can be active or passive partners. As passive partners, governments can provide resources for projects of CSOs. These resources can be of material nature, financial support and administrative support of the work of CSOs. As active partners governments are more involved in the projects though e.g., the facilitation of training or being trained by CSOs. Training by CSOs are e.g. the training of law enforcement officers to recognize red flags for trafficking and integrating a victim-centered approach. Other active cooperation area is the involvement of CSOs in the national legislation which is an exception in the MENA region.

Here, it is worth highlighting that a good relationship between CSOs and a Government through a PPP or without is very important to foster the effective work of CSOs with victims of trafficking. A good relationship and cooperation can lead to higher prosecution rates, better victim detection (Love Justice) and protection, survivor integration through education and work (FEI), and the provision of services (Médecins du monde Tunisia).

### 5.4 The Role of Civil Society Organizations in combating Trafficking in Persons

NGOs are often the main implementing partners of PPP projects in cooperation with governments, IOs and the private sector. The role of the NGOs is therefore very diverse, such as the provision of various services to victims of TiP and conducting trainings. In the interviews conducted the role of NGOs that was identified include training of migrants (FEI), training of health care workers (Médecins du monde Tunisia), training of law enforcement (Love Justice).

The main recommendation for the role of NGOs in PPPs in the MENA region is for survivor-led or survivor-focused NGOs to provide services to survivors that correspond to their actual needs. PPPs are beneficial for NGOs as they are incorporating government in the work of NGO

and are thus strengthening the cooperation between the actors which can benefit the work of both NGOs and the government combating TiP.

The importance and challenges for the creation of online tools for NGOs due to the high demand for online and material tools were mentioned in interviews. Also due to the Covid-19 pandemic such online tools have become increasingly important. PPPs could be an efficient way for the private sector and the Government to grant financial and material resources to NGOs. It was stressed that even though online tools are cost intensive to develop, the reward is high for victims and survivors of trafficking.

### 5.5 The Role of the Private Sector in combating Trafficking in Persons

Private sector entities are mostly involved in PPPs when they have unintentional contact points with TiP in their supply chain or provided services. This is the case e.g., for tech-companies in the Tech Against Trafficking alliance whose services get exploited for grooming, recruitment and online exploitation of victims. Financial companies such as Western Union are involved in PPPs when it comes to flagging suspicious financial transactions which could be signs of TiP. The motivation for getting involved in PPPs is mostly CSR, in addition to the moral imperative to pro-actively combat of TiP that maybe be carried out using e.g. their services.

Here, it is worth noting that a victim-centered approach requires higher costs due to e.g., trauma support (Interview with Kendall Alaimo) and subsequently contributions from the private sector. Western Union for example has a system that allows for flagging and reporting suspicious financial transactions that support the detection of victims of trafficking and is engaging with sharing of best practices, which is vital. However, a survivor-centered approach would mean for example the inclusion of survivor's voices in the company, as employees, or even consultants on TiP issues which is accompanied by higher costs and efforts but also brings benefits. Similarly, the FEI' work with migrants is a good example of how survivors of trafficking could be re-integrated in society. Applying the model used for migrants on survivors of trafficking could prove more challenging e.g., due to the need for trauma informed support of the survivors given their previous trauma which might also be work-related. Alleged higher costs however are not sufficient reason to not undertake victim-centered/survivor-centered approaches.

Here, the provision of resources and support of NGOs and their work can be a good entry point for private sector entities to take part in a victim-centered PPP. For tech-based PPPs this could be material resources and technical expertise from the companies. An example given in the interview with Médecins du monde Tunisia were reduced prices for medication in pharmacies for migrants and survivors of trafficking.

### 5.6 The Role of International Organizations in combating Trafficking in Persons

IOs such as UNODC, IOM and ILO are actively involved with civil society organizations and governments and can thus play an important role in fostering relationships and creating PPPs between these actors globally and in the MENA region. Further, IOs are also part of PPPs. They support NGOs such as Love Justice and Médecins du monde Tunisia through grants (UNODC,



n.d.) and act as capacity builders in PPPs such as ILO and IOM in the PPP project of FEI where they are conducting vocational trainings for migrants.

Concerning how the UNODC office in Egypt is involved in combatting human trafficking in the MENA regions, the interviewees from UNODC explained that they are engaging with labor inspectors, consular staff, health and social workers, as well as with the judiciary to conduct trainings. UNODC has been active in four countries within the MENA region to provide training at the border crossing points with first responders. These training sessions involve specialized investigative skills such as forensics and on criminal information analysis.

The UNODC regional office has also initiated a dialogue with "TiP Commission in Egypt" and are hoping to foster the cooperation between the National TiP Commission and the private sector to involve the industry in Egypt in responding to trafficking in Persons and help detecting signs of labor trafficking in their factories.

Even though there is the understanding that Public Private Partnerships are an effective tool to combat trafficking in persons, there is a lack of active PPPs with involvement of international organizations observable in the Middle East. The PPPs presented by the interviewees were mainly focused on the detection of victims and prosecution of traffickers through e.g. the training of health personal and labor inspectors. Here it is clear that the observed main role for PPPs in the MENA region is prosecution of perpetrators and detection of victims.

## 5.7 Promising Practices

### 5.7.1 *Federation of Egyptian Industries*

The Federation of Egyptian Industries includes members from more than 102,000 mostly private sector industries in 19 different areas of industry in Egypt. The Federation currently has a Public Private Partnership together with NGOs, the IOM and ILO for training and employment of refugees and migrants in Egypt. Due to the national legislation migrants and refugees usually do not have a legal permit to work in Egypt. This makes them vulnerable to labour exploitation such as long working hours with low pay and no social insurance.

The program is designed to train migrants and refugees to obtain the legal work and residency documents and employ them in factories of the Federation after the successful completion of the training. Currently the program has 200 trainees of which 50% are migrants and refugees and 50% are women. The first step is obtaining work permits for the migrants and refugees with the help of the Egyptian Government. Next to the vocational training the migrants and refugees are given sessions on awareness raising to educate them about their rights and legal situation for their own protection. Furthermore, the trainees receive soft skill training. Benefits the trainees get next to the job training include medical insurance against accidents in their workplace, ensured decent working conditions and a minimum wage. Additionally, a WhatsApp group was created to give the workers the opportunity to report any problems immediately.

The Program proved successful, leading to an increase of the goal to employ 80% of the trainees from 60% and the hope to increase the number of trainees for the next training course. For the program the FEI cooperated with NGOs to introduce migrants and refugees to the program and



to give soft skill and awareness raising training. The FEI cooperated with the ILO and IOM for financial resources and capacity building courses for the migrants. Furthermore, the Egyptian Government supported the program by providing the necessary work permits.

The challenges the program faced include bureaucratic and financial issues to obtain the necessary paperwork that allows migrants and refugees to work in Egypt, highlighting the importance of close cooperation with the Government. Furthermore, there was a need to change the mindset of Egyptian workers towards the migrant and refugee trainees which led to an awareness raising training for the Egyptian workers. Additionally, businesses were initially hesitant on training migrants and refugees as they are usually not allowed to work in Egypt. As the Federation of Egyptian Industries worked to solve that issue, they were happy to employ the trainees.

### *5.7.2 Médecins du monde Tunisia*

Médecins du monde has been providing health care access to migrants and vulnerable people in Tunisia for the past six years. The organization provides psychological, medical, social assistance, and healthcare reimbursement costs directly to migrants including victims of human trafficking. They also train healthcare professionals in public structures and help them in supporting migrants and advocate for the rights to have full access to healthcare. Currently, they have launched projects in three centres mainly in Tunis, Médenine and Sfax which are located in the south near the border with Libya. Reasons for setting up centres in the south is to accommodate asylum seekers and refugees migrating from Libya. The centres provide mental health assistance to different types of migrants and victims of human trafficking. They also raise awareness and educate the population on the effects of trafficking and the rights of victims. The NGO works in collaboration with its partners and refers possible victims to the anti-trafficking national institute which awards legitimate acknowledgment to victims which is important as it enables the possibility to claim rights in the form of assistance, residence permits and more.

### *5.7.3 Love Justice*

Love Justice is an international Christian Non-Governmental Organization combating trafficking in Persons which is currently active in around 20 countries. The NGO works to stop human trafficking at a pre-exploitative stage, preventing trafficking before it takes place. This is done through trained monitors in high transit areas such as border posts, train stations, and airports in areas prone to trafficking. The monitors identify people with so-called red flags through an integrated questionnaire protocol. Such red flags are for example no working contract, money owed, pre-paid travel. These potential victims are then talked to and informed of the possible exploitation.

The model has several advantages to post-exploitative measures. Primarily it aims to stop exploitation before it happens, thus saving possible victims from trauma. Furthermore, the model brings tangible results in comparison with awareness and sensitization campaigns. Love Justice prevented possible victimization in around 26.000 cases. Additionally, as the memory of the interviewed people is still fresh, they can provide good information about the

perpetrators, their methods and costs, which then can lead to arrests and conviction of the perpetrators. With the information provided by Love Justice more than 1.000 arrests were made with a conviction rate of 33%. Lastly, stopping exploitation before it happens is less cost intensive than law enforcement investigations.

The interview partner highlighted the importance of a good relationship between the Government and the NGO. A good cooperation makes the work of the NGO significantly easier. Additionally, the NGO conducts training for police officers, e.g., in Malawi, focusing on training the police on the ground to achieve quick tangible results and to train the people who the NGO is working with at the high transit areas. Love Justice has achieved increased interceptions by the trained police through their training, showcasing the importance of NGO-government cooperation.

Love Justice is using mapping technology to determine the high trafficked areas where they need to focus on intercepting potential victims of TiP. Furthermore, the NGO is developing an Artificial Intelligence tool, which would be working with real time migration data, that would enable the NGO to determine high-transit areas in advance, and thus increase their presence in that area before the increase in migration.

## 6 Conclusion

The research has shown that PPPs do not only have great potential to combat TiP through detection of victims and prevention trafficking activities but also through the re-integration of survivors in society or through the provision of services for victims and survivors of TiP. However, these victim-centered PPPs are still rare in the MENA region. Often models working on the integration of vulnerable populations in the MENA region are targeted at migrants and are thus only useful for survivors of TiP if they are also migrants, thereby not considering the special needs of victims and survivors of trafficking from the same country.

International organizations play a vital role in facilitating PPPs between CSOs, the private sector and the governments. They need to highlight more the importance of victim-centered PPPs to both the private stakeholders and the governments. IOs also play an important role in collecting data and best practices to share with organizations and governments working on similar issues. However, as the research has shown, also in international organizations in the MENA region PPPs and the role of governments are often still seen as supporting legislation and the prosecution of criminals and not the protection and re-integration of survivors and giving them a voice on national and international level.

Generally, there is a need for a series of technological interventions and a victim-centered approach in combatting human trafficking, especially in a post Covid-19 MENA region. Specifically, given that the problem, as stated by most participants of this research, lies in lack of resources and funding for survivors and projects that target victims and survivors, insecurity in the online platforms and a porous legal system. Therefore, a continuous need to build more capacity of law enforcement who can understand, exchange information and take the entire process through the implementation of anti-trafficking legal frameworks is crucial. In addition,

UNODC is in a good position to facilitate a dialogue and foster cooperation between the private sector, NGO communities and governments.

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## 7 Appendices

### Appendix 1: UNODC Compendium of promising practices on public private partnerships to prevent and counter trafficking in persons



The UNODC Compendium on PPP to Prevent and Combat TiP served as a foundation for our research into the role of PPP in preventing and combatting human trafficking in the MENA region. The compendium of promising practices focuses on three critical sectors: supply chain, finance, and technology, and it does so in four distinctive regions: Southeast Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia-Pacific.

#### Promising practices in the Supply Chain Sector

- I. The Bali Process Government and Business Forum (GABF) consists of a number of governments and business leaders coming together as partners to find ways to address human trafficking. In 2018, GABF endorsed the Acknowledge, Act, Advance (AAA) approach. These recommendations have been seen to enhance and strengthen legal and policy frameworks, supply chain transparency, as well as victim protection.
- II. Inter-sectoral Partnerships Responding to Trafficking in Persons in South Africa
- III. Hope for Justice - PPP Enabling Sustainable Reintegration of Survivors of Human Trafficking in Uganda
- IV. The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT) is the leading anti-trafficking coordination mechanism amongst UN agencies and other international and regional organisations, established by the UN General Assembly. . In March 2019, ICAT engaged with the Procurement Network of the UN High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) on prevention of trafficking in public procurement practices and its Task Force for Development of a Joint Approach in Combating Trafficking of Human Beings in Supply Chains.

- V. Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT) is a non-profit organisation that aims to educate, equip, empower and mobilise members of the trucking, bus and energy industries to combat human trafficking.
- VI. Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) Apparel and General Merchandise Public Private Protocol. This protocol sets up a partnership between Labour Market Enforcement Bodies (LMEB) and Apparel and General Merchandise (AGM) Brands in the United Kingdom (UK) to work together and share information with the overarching objective to protect vulnerable and exploited workers, and help bring criminals to justice.
- VII. The UK's Responsible Car Wash Scheme is a UK-based partnership that seeks to create a compliant industry, which can still compete commercially on equal terms.
- VIII. The Responsible and Ethical Private Sector Coalition Against Trafficking (RESPECT) assembles thought leaders, practitioners and policy makers to work on solutions to public and private sector challenges relating to human trafficking.
- IX. The Sustainable Hospitality Alliance is a partnership of hospitality companies, non-profit organisations and governments who work together on sustainability challenges to address human rights issues such as human trafficking within the hospitality industry

#### Promising practices in the finance sector

- I. The Australian Government's Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC) launched the Fintel Alliance in 2017.
- II. Project Protect is an innovative PPP involving Canada's Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre (FINTRAC) and financial institutions that work together to address human trafficking used for the purposes of sexual exploitation.
- III. Project Shadow is a public-private partnership designed to combat online child sexual exploitation in all its forms by enhancing methods to detect, report and disrupt associated financial transactions suspected of being connected to money laundering in any and all of its stages (placement, layering and integration).
- IV. The South African Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Taskforce (SAMLIT) is a public-private partnership between the South African government and the South African banking sector, and was established in December 2019.
- V. Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT) was established under Section 7 of the UK's Crime and Courts Act 2013 and later updated by the Criminal Finances Act 2017.
- VI. Singapore Anti-money Laundering and Counter Terrorist Financing Industry Partnership (ACIP) was established in 2017 and brings together the financial sector, regulators, law enforcement agencies and other governmental entities to work together to identify, assess and mitigate key and emerging money laundering and terrorism financing risks facing Singapore.



VII. Hong Kong Fraud and Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (FMLIT)

VIII. The Liechtenstein Initiative / Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAST) first convened a Commission as a PPP between the Governments of Liechtenstein, Australia, the Netherlands, the UN University Centre for Policy Research (the Secretariat) and the Liechtenstein private and NGO sectors to consider how to place the financial sector at the heart of global efforts to address human trafficking.

IX. Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CTATF)

X. Anti-financial Crime Alliance (AFCA) is a PPP consists of partners including Germany's Federal Financial Supervisory Authority (BaFin), Financial Intelligence Unit, Federal Criminal Police Office and 14 banks.

XI. The Latin American Financial Action Group (GAFILAT) is a regional-based intergovernmental organisation that groups together 17 countries in South America, Central America and North America.

#### Promising practices in the Tech sector

I. Unseen APP is an application that was developed in the UK through collaborations between the NGO Unseen and BT Group and allows anyone, including victims, to report human trafficking to the Modern Slavery Helpline in a much easier way.

II. The NGO Seattle Against Slavery is the lead partner in Project Intercept and has been supported by Microsoft employees who have created a chatbot to address trafficking for sexual exploitation.

III. Microsoft partnered with Dartmouth College in 2009 to create PhotoDNA.

IV. Issara Institute Golden Dreams APP is a Trip Advisor-like app for Burmese and Cambodian workers, which the Issara Institute created in collaboration with USAID and Walmart Foundation.

V. Tech Against Trafficking is a coalition of technology companies collaborating with global experts to help prevent human trafficking using technology.

VI. IdTraffickers is a PPP in the US involving Bashpole Software and Defense Advanced Research Projects Initiatives (DARPA).

VII. University of Nottingham's Rights Lab and Planet Labs Partnership The University of Nottingham's Rights Lab is utilising technology to identify locations where workers may be subject to slavery and to help create on the ground interventions.

VIII. SPOTLIGHT is a project by the U.S.-based NGO Thorn. Thorn is using innovative technology in the identification of trafficking victims, especially children.

IX. Data and Data Ethics and Privacy within Technology-based PPP Most technology developed to combat human trafficking will require the collection, storage and analysis of data, with some placing this at the forefront of its activities

- X. The Stanford Human Trafficking Data Lab is a project focused on using quantitative data and datadriven approaches to fight human trafficking.
- XI. Traffik Analysis Hub (TAHUB) This is a PPP involving IBM, Stop the Traffik, Clifford Chance, Europol, Western Union, Barclays, Lloyds Banking Group, Liberty Global and UCL, as well as support from international organisations.
- XII. eMIN is a partnership between the Mekong Club, a membership-based business association focused on combatting human trafficking, and a global blockchain company Diginex. It involves creating a blockchain-based system to protect workers from exploitation.
- XIII. Coca-Cola and US Government Blockchain PPP
- XIV. The Blue Number Initiative consists of partnerships between private sector and civil society in countries like India, Malaysia and Japan.
- XV. Bait to Plate Project is another private sector and civil society PPP. The Worldwide Fund for Nature in New Zealand, Australia and Fiji have partnered with blockchain venture studio ConsenSys, the tech start-up TraSeable and tuna fishing and processing company Sea Quest Fiji Ltd.
- XVI. Microsoft's automated due diligence platform, known as OneVet, provides a risk-based analysis of active partners and suppliers, including the compilation, scoring, and routing of due diligence reports when risk signals may indicate the presence of corruption, human trafficking, or other human rights violations.

## **Appendix 2: Interview Guidelines for UNODC Field Offices**

1. What implementation gaps exist within anti-trafficking measures in the MENA region?  
In your opinion, what has been the influence of the pandemic?
2. What countries with an existing or promising alliance with the private tech sector could you recommend for our case study?
3. How would you describe your role within private-public partnerships?
4. What was the impact of COVID-19 on Human Trafficking in the MENA region in terms of Trafficking in Persons operations and government efforts to tackle trafficking in persons in the MENA region?
5. To what extent are innovations within the tech-sector useful to your work in combating trafficking? Do you know any tech-based best practices applied in the MENA region?
6. In your opinion, can the internet or apps contribute to a more victim-centred approach to trafficking measures through: prevention, victim identification, victim protection and securing evidence for criminal proceedings?
7. What stakeholders (e.g. NGOs, private/public sector) within your network could you possibly connect us to regarding this project?



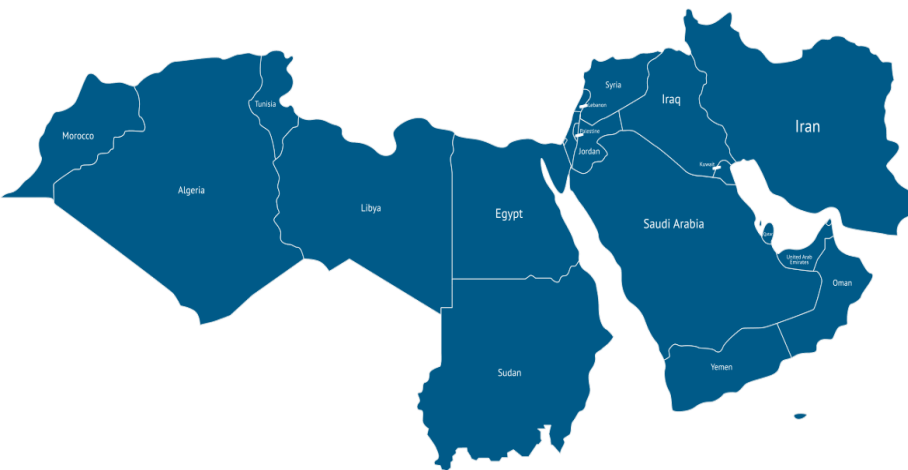
### **Appendix 3: Interview Guideline for the private sector (Western Union)**

1. How does Western Union combat trafficking in persons?
2. Is the work of Western Union only focused on prevention of Trafficking in Persons or does it also have project for victim protection or reintegration?
3. Does your organization have any Public-Private-Partnerships?
4. Do you have any projects in the MENA region?
5. What are the benefits of Public Private Partnerships?
6. Do you know any best practices of Public Private Partnerships?
7. What are the benefits/incentives of the private sector involving themselves in combating human trafficking for the private sector?
8. Why should the Private Sector be involved in combatting Human Trafficking and other related crimes?
9. During our research we also had interviews with survivors of human trafficking and one way that came up in which the private sector can help survivors of trafficking is by offering employment opportunities specific to survivors in order to integrate them back into society - From a public sector perspective, are such schemes possible and what are the difficulties?
10. How important for these Project is the cooperation with Governments?
11. How important for these Projects in the cooperation with Civil Society Organizations?
12. Did the Covid-19 Pandemic have an affect on the funding for such projects?

### **Appendix 4 : Interview guidelines for victims of TiP**

1. What has been the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on victims of human trafficking?
2. Has there been any best practice examples from countries that respected the needs of survivors of trafficking in persons in their Covid-9 policies?
3. In your opinion, can the internet or apps help in countering trafficking? How?
4. Do you know any best practice examples for technology-based solutions for helping survivors of trafficking, or technology-based solutions for the prevention of trafficking in persons?
5. What is in your opinion the merit of public-private-partnership for victims of trafficking in persons?
6. Do you know any best-practice examples for public-private-partnerships to fight trafficking in persons?
7. What has been the impact of Covid-19 on Civil Society Organizations in fighting trafficking in persons or providing services for victims of trafficking?

## Public-Private-Partnerships and their potential to combat Trafficking in Persons in a post Covid-19 MENA Region- Victim Centered Approach



### Executive summary

This research project aimed to offer an overview of the scenario regarding human trafficking and the influence of Covid-19 in the MENA region. The victim-centered PPPs were the focus of this project, which are also identified as promising practices in the PPP Compendium. Because the Middle East and Northern Africa are not yet covered by the PPP Compendium, this study contributes to the creation of information about the role of PPP in combating TiP in the region. Partnerships between governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations, as noted in the Project, are becoming increasingly important in raising awareness on TiP issues, putting a stop to exploitation, gathering evidence, and developing a successful strategy and structure for victims' reintegration into society.



### Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of our research, we propose the following recommendations for UNODC and other stakeholders to consider:

- I **International organizations such as UNODC should foster cooperation between governments, private sector and Civil Society Organizations led by survivors of trafficking.**
- II **UNODC should establish Public-Private Partnerships focused on developing online based tools to provide services for victims and survivors of trafficking in the MENA region.** In a post Covid-19 MENA region online tools can give access to services to a wide range of vulnerable populations.
- III **Private Sector stakeholders should be incentivized to join victim-centered PPPs beyond their business involvement.** These PPPs are important for survivors' re-integration in

society through employment and education opportunities.

- IV **UNODC should increasingly aim to foster Public-Private- Partnerships including CSOs and Governments to build trust and future cooperation.**  
Trust between stakeholders has a positive effect on combating Trafficking in Persons.
- V **International Organizations and governments should improve data collection on the use of tech-based tools for combating TiP and victim detection.**
- VI **UNODC should build on synergies with field offices and organizations contacted throughout this research to assess needs and determine possible PPPs.**
- VII **UNODC should continue to collect promising practices globally and replicate successful PPPs.**  
Here UNODC needs to respect cultural differences between countries and regions in the implementation.