



ECOWAS COMMISSION  
COMMISSION DE LA CEDEAO  
COMISSÃO DA CEDEAO

# **FREETOWN Roadmap on Enhancing the Combat of Trafficking in Persons in the ECOWAS Region**

Freetown, April 2023

**WE, the Ministers in charge of the combat of trafficking in persons in the ECOWAS region;**

**GATHERED in Freetown, Sierra Leone on 25 and 26 April 2023 at the REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF ECOWAS STATES ON ENDING HUMAN TRAFFICKING;**

**RECALLING the adoption of the Initial Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons by Head of States of the ECOWAS Commission in 2001;**

**RECALLING the adoption of several iterations of ECOWAS Plans of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, with the latest being for the period 2018 -2022, currently under review,**

**RECALLING the ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration stating that 'Combating human trafficking is a moral and humanitarian imperative'**

**TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the efforts of Member States and the ECOWAS Commission in combatting human trafficking and progress recorded consequent on these efforts;**

**CONCERNED that growing inequalities fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, conflicts, disasters and climate change, economic and physical insecurity as well as other factors are likely to result in an increase in Trafficking in Persons.**

**TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the need to strengthen cooperation amongst Member States in combatting Trafficking in Persons**

**ACKNOWLEDGING that cross-border collaboration and engagement is critical in the combat of cross border trafficking, especially in the context of mixed-migration movements.**

**RECALLING the ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security (Articles 2, 3, 16, 40,42 and 46), focused on the realization of the basic principle of protection**

**of fundamental human rights and freedoms and the observance of the rules of international humanitarian laws.**

**RECALLING** the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, Section VII covering the guarantee of children's rights, prescription for special laws against child trafficking and child prostitution and laws and regulations on child labour, amongst others.

**AFFIRMING** the internally recognised 4 Ps (prevention of human trafficking, protection of victims, prosecution of traffickers and partnerships) approach to the combat of human trafficking in the region.

**RECOGNISING** the relevance of the SDGs to the combat of trafficking in persons, especially Goals 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 16 (Peace Justice and Strong Institutions).

**EXPRESSING** our appreciation to the Government of Sierra Leone for hosting this Ministerial Conference and for having initiated action on the matter under consideration.

**COMMIT OURSELVES** to the following measures towards ending trafficking in persons in the ECOWAS region, and call on the ECOWAS Commission and all Member States to implement the following measures:

#### **Measures to Address Basic Causal Factors**

1. Identify and address the root causes of trafficking in persons (TIP), including negative cultural and gender practices, child exploitation, perversion of the practice of the traditional fostering system etc. in a concerted manner.
2. Focus on effective implementation of the ECOWAS Child Policy and Strategic Plan of Action (2019-2030), the ECOWAS Child Protection Strategic Framework (5 Key Priority Areas and 10 Systems Strengthening Pillars), the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan on Elimination of Child Labour and Forced Labour, the ECOWAS Roadmap on Preventing and Responding to Child

Marriage, the ECOWAS Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons and the Plan of Action on International Humanitarian Law, amongst other relevant Instruments.

3. Ensure that all persons enjoy the right to legal identity by implementing critical measures in relation to Birth Registration and Vital Statistics, maintaining Civil Registers, addressing Statelessness and taking further measures, as might be appropriate, with respect to at risk populations such as Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. Accelerate the roll out of the ECOWAS Biometric ID Card Initiative and other complementary measures to aid in effective border management and protection of vulnerable persons moving within the ECOWAS space.
4. Implement strategies to build the resilience of the most vulnerable groups through the identification of risk factors such as poverty, family instability, physical and sexual abuse and climate change; and the provision of appropriate social risk management interventions and strengthening social protection.
5. Endorse and operationalise the Roadmap agreed upon during the ECOWAS In-Country High Level Advocacy, Coordination and Capacity Building of Multi-Stakeholders and the establishment of the ECOWAS Protection and Human Security Integrated Coordination Mechanisms (ECO-PHSICM) in the Member States, as may be applicable.

### **Systemic Responses to Trafficking in Persons linked to related protection concerns.**

1. Full elaboration and implementation of the Trafficking in Persons Plus<sup>1</sup> concept at both regional and national levels, integrating human rights-

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The TIP Plus concept treats TIP as a part of a wider group of crimes which victimize 'especially vulnerable persons' falling within categories such as sexual and gender based violence, violence against children, abuse of the disabled and other categories. The specific crimes would include penal definitions in domestic law of the worst forms of child labor, sexual assaults, rape etc. forced labor, pimping deprivation of liberty etc. The emphasis is on the commonality of causative factors, linkage in the commission of the offence (for example sexual assaults or bodily harm committed during the commission of the human trafficking offence or resulting from TIP etc.); and on the targeting of specific groups by criminal role actors i.e. women, children, disabled persons, vulnerable migrants etc. All the foregoing are primarily a sub-category of crimes against persons,

based response measures to human trafficking with other criminal justice, social workforce and regulatory initiatives and responses to protection risks and victimization. This shall include addressing the vulnerability to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Violence Against Children and other related victimization.

2. Implement the ECOWAS Guidelines on Protection, Support and Assistance to Witnesses in Trafficking in Persons Cases and other related protection situations, including in situations of Violence Against Children, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.
3. Strengthen the capacity of criminal justice practitioners, including law enforcement and judicial officials to detect, investigate, prosecute and adjudicate TIP and related offences, and protect victims.

The foregoing shall include a focus on training standardization, improvements in curricula and management of specialist law enforcement and investigative teams and task forces.

4. Enhance regional cooperation frameworks between criminal justice practitioners, including law enforcement and judicial officials of ECOWAS Member States to ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases. The regional cooperation areas may include reinforced cross-border police operations, judicial cooperation and mutual legal assistance; and the promotion of inter-agency cooperation at both regional and national levels.
5. Address child begging and street children, through the establishment of channels and protocols for safe return and reintegration, in accordance with the principle of the best interest of the child, in situations where international return is required.

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specifically taking inspiration from the Palermo Protocol emphasis on 'Preventing, suppressing and punishing human trafficking especially women and children'.

6. Respond effectively to the linkages between the crimes of illegal child adoption, baby selling, corrupt practices in the process of fostering (both formal and informal) and child exploitation and trafficking.
7. Promote local community frameworks and structures for child protection especially outside main cities and urban areas with a focus on sensitization on child protection risks and vulnerabilities and strengthening surveillance initiatives.
8. Develop effective Social Service Workforce through harmonized minimum standards for curricula and ensuring appropriate numbers and distribution between urban and rural areas.
9. Implement the ECOWAS Child Protection Strategic Framework and Guidelines, especially with regards to 'Auxiliary' Social Workforce personnel, including 'Community Child Protection' actors, to augment formally certified social workers.
10. Passage of legislation on Child Online Sexual Exploitation, conduct research to understand how human traffickers abuse Information and Communication technology and build appropriate response capacities at the regional and national levels.
11. Compile relevant Protection and Human Security Instruments for ease of reference by Member States functionaries and other stakeholders. Also, consider the development of a Protection and Human Security Handbook as a central body of knowledge and for the standardization of concepts and response measures to critical protection concerns.
12. ECOWAS should compile and analyse relevant international and domestic counter trafficking in person's legislations to ensure compliance with international standards and norms.

13. Enhance Safeguarding measures for accompanied and unaccompanied children moving either within national borders or across international borders.
14. Strengthen responses to the phenomenon of children recruited and exploited by armed groups (including Disarmament, Demobilization and Rehabilitation – DDR, trauma informed counselling and intervention planning etc.) at both regional and national levels. This can be achieved through appropriate engagement between Child Protection actors and Peace and Security actors, including security forces and criminal justice practitioners.

### **Trafficking in Persons Specialist Response Measures.**

1. Increase the rate of implementation of the ECOWAS Policy on Care and Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Persons as a means of Strengthening the Regional Referral System (RRM).
2. Ensure an adequate focus on responding to trafficking in persons in emergency contexts, including conflict related trafficking in women, children and persons with vulnerability exacerbated by displacement.
3. Foster effective cooperation through bilateral agreements by Member States where necessary (where existing multi-lateral agreements may be insufficient) and operational level agreements.
4. Strengthen cross-border coordination to provide comprehensive assistance to victims in countries of origin, transit and destination and effectively implement the Regional Referral Mechanism instituted by the ECOWAS Commission.
5. Strengthening National Referral and Care Mechanisms as well as Standard Operating Procedures for identification, referral and protection of victims, including establishment and improvement of shelters within

the wider National Referral Mechanisms. Also, ensure adequate funding, training of personnel and representation in remote areas and improve the monitoring of the implementation of victim support interventions, including in remote or rural areas.

6. Ensure the effective communication of protection standards and engage in social mobilization and advocacy to address negative social practices such as child begging, the use of children as domestic servants, and child labour. Integrate counter human trafficking and other protection messaging into primary and secondary school curricula etc.
7. Ensure adequate provision of mental and psychosocial health assistance and reintegration support for victims of trafficking in persons.
8. Conduct research at the regional level on the existing systems of data collection, organization and sharing on trafficking in persons with a view to further streamline and improve the data management processes at national, regional and international levels.
9. Establishment of Compensation and Reintegration Funds for victims of trafficking in persons in ECOWAS Member countries
10. Build the capacities of Consular Services of Member States in transit and destination countries towards effective intervention in the identification, care and protection of victims of trafficking in persons and vulnerable persons; including in trauma informed and victim centered, return and reintegration.
11. Commit to adequately fund the Trafficking in Persons National Action Plans.



**Chair of the Ministerial Meeting, of the Regional Conference of ECOWAS States  
on Ending Human Trafficking, 2023.**

**Madam Baindu Dassama.**

**Minister of Social Welfare of the Republic of Sierra Leone**

**Done at Freetown, this 26<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2023**



**FOR THE MEETING**

