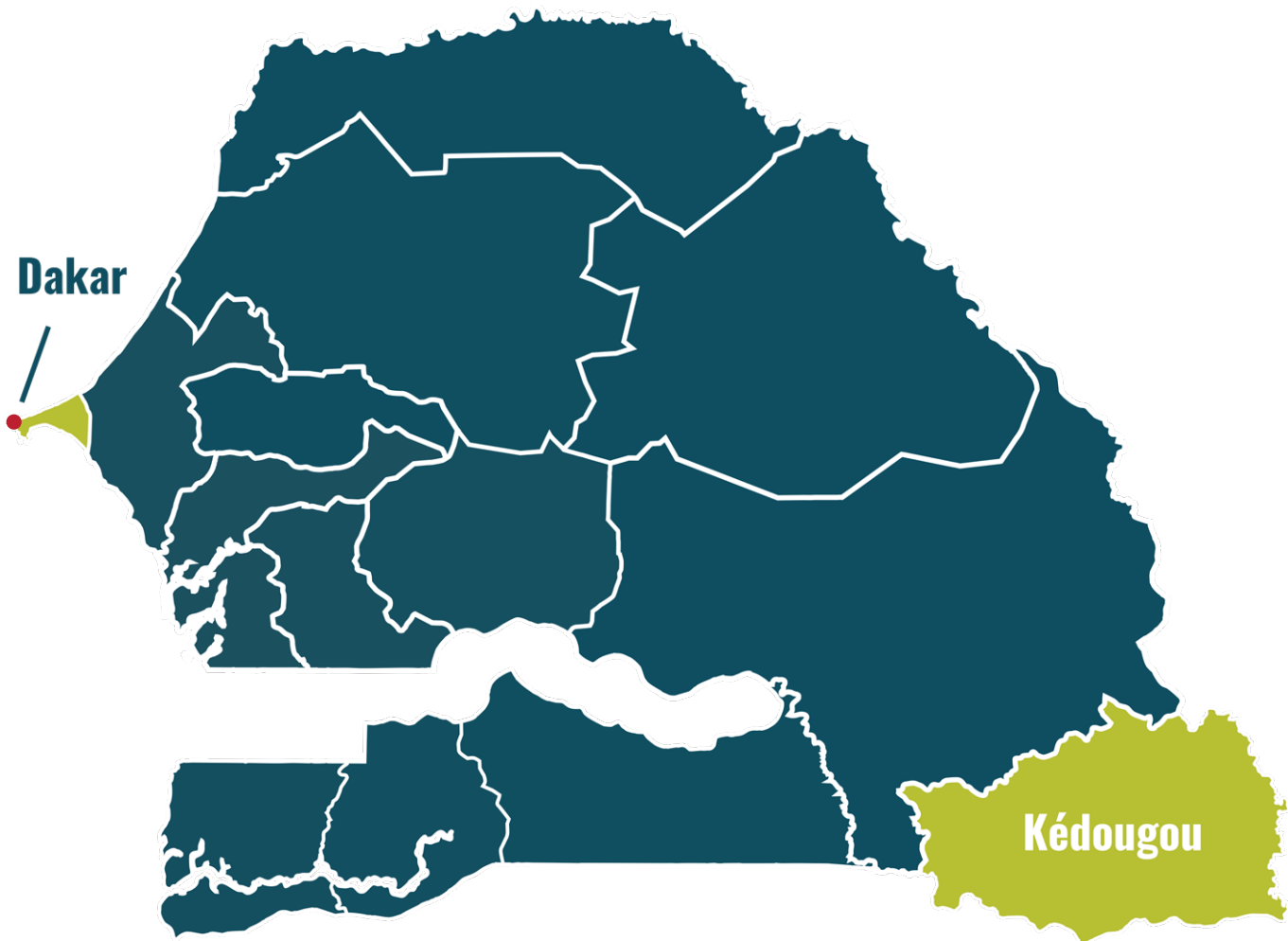


New Evidence on Sex Trafficking in the Gold Mining Areas of Kédougou, Senegal: Implications for Policy





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ABOUT THIS REPORT

The African Programming and Research Initiative to End Slavery (APRIES), in partnership with Mantle, has recently carried out research on sex trafficking in the Saraya and Kédougou departments of Senegal. This research establishes a baseline that pinpoints key issues in order to enhance the impact of anti-Trafficking in Persons (TIP) programming and policies. This research assessed views on service and policy gaps that will serve to prioritize future activities to address the issue. This policy brief outlines key findings from this research and the implications for efforts to address the harms and injustices relating to sex trafficking. The research gives voice to victims, survivors, as well as girls and women engaged in commercial sex, who had an unprecedented opportunity to speak out on several issues that affect them.

ABOUT APRIES

The African Programming and Research Initiative to End Slavery (APRIES) at the Center on Human Trafficking Research & Outreach is an international consortium of antislavery researchers, practice, and policy specialists and staff from the University of Georgia, the University of Liverpool, and various partners in Guinea, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. Through funding by the U.S. Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP Office), our goal is to reduce the prevalence of modern slavery in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) by transforming the capacity of community-engaged agencies to implement prevention, prosecution, and protection strategies. We use data that identifies service and policy gaps of human trafficking prevention and response to inform collaboration with local implementation partners with the goal to measurably reduce its prevalence. This report draws from data produced through a baseline mixed-methods; a community-based research study conducted in Senegal by APRIES in partnership with continent-based research partners Mantle in 2021. [A full version of the Senegal Baseline Report is available on the CenHTRO website.](#)

KEY FINDINGS

National, local, and community stakeholders within the development sector, local administration, civil society, health sector, and close contacts of survivors identified key areas for prioritizing reform of the Senegal anti-TIP strategy. We conducted in-depth interviews with them to discuss their roles and understandings of the issues regarding sex trafficking prevention, protection, and prosecution activities in the Kédougou region. Through our analysis of the interviews, in combination with evidence from a household survey, our research provides new evidence on the nature and scale of sex trafficking in the Saraya and Kédougou departments and points to steps that can strengthen programs and policies. These are:

- Improvement of collaboration and partnership among stakeholders working in the prevention of sex trafficking, in order to enhance enforcement efforts.
- Involvement of additional areas of government for whole-system prevention. Evidence points to relevance and importance of institutions and ministries not directly linked to prostitution or the protection of children in developing a more effective response.
- Inclusion of essential elements of social protection for survivors for more equitable outcomes through modification of current National Anti-TIP law.

Beyond these implications for strategic policy action, our research identified additional practical and operational gaps related to the specific context that need to be addressed:

- **Language barriers for local NGO facilitators** who speak mostly in the local language or French, which excludes much of the English-speaking community residing in the gold mining areas from interacting with them effectively.
- **The porous nature of the borders** means that there are always new residents in the gold mining sites. Participants in the research cited poor to little border control as a barrier to identifying potential victims of trafficking and therefore additional support at the border to monitor and identify human trafficking would be welcome.
- **Awareness raising is not focused on sex trafficking** but rather covers all legal prostitution or voluntary engagement in commercial sex. For example, awareness campaigns focus on sexually transmitted infections, the reintegration of individuals engaged in commercial sex into other professions, and categories of violence experienced by young girls and women. This naturally reduces the focus on preventing or combating sex trafficking, which, in contrast to legal commercial sex activities, is a criminal offense.
- **Lack of a reporting mechanism.** Stakeholders told us they believe that prevention is hampered by the lack of a reporting system that would allow suspected sex trafficking cases to be referred to the appropriate agencies. Although some trafficking cases are reported, there is no mechanism known to the community at large to monitor and report suspected sex trafficking. This limits agencies' ability to provide effective and appropriate support.



RESEARCH SUMMARY

APRIES and Mantle used a mixed-methods approach to estimate prevalence of sex trafficking among women (18–30 years old) engaged in commercial sex in the Kédougou region. Between October – December 2021, 561 women who were engaged in commercial sex in the study region participated in a quantitative survey and 140 respondents (including key stakeholders and victims of sex trafficking) were interviewed. It is worth noting that the participants in the interviews were victims and survivors of sex trafficking, as well as other stakeholders within the development sector, local administration, civil society, whereas the respondents to the survey were women engaged in commercial sex more broadly (but including sex trafficking victims). For this reason, we have focused attention on the interview data to assess implications for policy.

In total, 32 victims and 36 survivors of sex trafficking were interviewed. Most of the sex trafficking victims who participated in the qualitative component of the study were aged between 19 and 24. Among the victims and survivors interviewed, 58 were from Nigeria, 6 were from Senegal, and 4 were from other countries (including Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Mali). These findings were consistent with results from the quantitative survey as well as interviews with local leaders and government stakeholders, suggesting that women from Nigeria are heavily represented in sex trafficking in the region.

HOW AND WHY DOES SEX TRAFFICKING HAPPEN IN KÉDOUGOU?

Gold mining as a “magnet”: Our data indicates that the prevalence of sex trafficking can be explained by various characteristics of the region that make it favorable to such practices. The presence of gold mining activities attracts many immigrants from different nationalities to a region that borders several countries. Key informants reported that sex trafficking activities were most prevalent in Sambaranbouyou, Tenkoto, Bantaco, Khossanto, Karakhéna, Mouran, Kolia, Diyabougou, Samécouta, Moussala, and Bambaraya, all of which have traditional gold mining sites, locally called “diouras.” Gold mining was described as a largely male-dominated sector with perceptions related to impurity—such as ‘to find gold you have to be soiled’—which was reported to fuel sex trafficking. Mining towns in this region are characterized as hyper-masculine, with large populations of young male workers. Women come to, or are brought to, mining towns to engage in diverse support activities, including food catering, hairdressing, bars, but most notably commercial sex. Findings from our quantitative survey indicated that overall, in the Kédougou region, nearly 19% of individuals engaged in commercial sex are estimated to be victims of sex trafficking.

Complex network: Sex trafficking in Senegal appears to rely on a complex network expanding across international borders. Key informants indicated that “rabatteurs” (couriers) often use land routes to traffick victims across borders. This involves complex multi-country journeys, meeting and staying with multiple different people before reaching Senegal. If we look at the itinerary of the Nigerian victims whom we spoke with, the trip to Kédougou is organized by people positioned at the crossing points. From Nigeria to Kédougou, we can identify two main routes:

Itinerary 1: Lagos (Nigeria) – Cotonou (Benin) – Lomé (Togo) – Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) – Bamako (Mali) – Kédougou (Senegal)

Itinerary 2: Lagos (Nigeria) – Niamey (Niger) – Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) – Bamako (Mali) – Kédougou (Senegal)

We identified these routes through conversations with survivors who have the lived experience of traveling within these networks. Their testimony gave insight into locations and geographical landscape of the route, as well as the many people involved with managing their movement across borders. Insights from survivors allow us to understand more deeply the complex nature of the networks involved in this exploitation.

“When our father passed away, my mother was all alone with us, with no job, and we had no food to eat, and over there in Nigeria, it’s not easy to find a job. So, I stopped studying because I am the older child, then I told one of my friends that I wanted to work to see if he could help me find a job to help my family. He told me that here in Senegal, there are companies that work in gold mining, and if I come, I will prepare food for them, and they will pay me. So, I accepted and left the country, very happy. Then I went with him to Cotonou. There he told me that he had to go back to Nigeria but that I could go on with another guy he had introduced me to in Cotonou and that he would help me when I got to Senegal. I said okay, then I continued with the guy. He took me to Burkina, and then we arrived in Dakar. Then he left me with a woman, and it was this woman who brought me here to Kolia and told me that I owed her money, and I had to do sex work to pay her, and then I would be free to do what I wanted.”

–Survivor, 23 years old, Kolia, Saraya

False assumptions: According to the interviews, local community members assume women from other countries engaged in commercial sex in Kédougou are there voluntarily. However, this assumption may not be true in many cases and hinders identification and response to sex trafficking. Victims and survivors assert that many women are forced to engage in commercial sex. Recruiters, smugglers, pimps, “aunties”⁴, victims, and clients are all part of the structure that operates sex trafficking in Senegal. They note that sex trafficking is widespread in the area and is a concern for a large category of vulnerable women who are subjected to abuse of trust. Our data indicated that for most of the girls/women involved in sex trafficking in the Kédougou region, recruitment is carried out on the promise of professional jobs in fields such as hairdressing, catering, hotel businesses, trading, etc., and to destinations both within Africa and outside Africa. Traffickers use the costs associated with the journey to trap women/girls into debt bondage whom they then exploit through commercial sexual exploitation to pay off the debt.

Understanding how sex trafficking happens in the context of Senegal is important to developing interventions which can reduce prevalence and provide better resources for the protection of survivors. Our study indicates many areas where commercial sex is an element of the larger mining economy within the region; and though it is legal within the parameters set out by the government, there are areas that operate criminally. This research highlights these criminal elements and aims to identify areas of potential key policy work that could disrupt this chain to help decrease prevalence and increase prosecution and protection against sex trafficking.

WHAT IS SENEGAL DOING TO FIGHT HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

In addition to the ratification of the Palermo Protocol, Senegal’s response to sex trafficking is guided by a number of national laws and international agreements, such as The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (1981)⁵, The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990)⁶, The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women⁷, and the Regional Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)⁸, which recommends the establishment of a legal framework and the development of a national policy to fight against trafficking in persons.

In 2005, Senegal enacted Law No. 2005-06 Relating to The Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Similar Practices and the Protection of Victims. This law, essentially based on the outlines of the Palermo Protocol, concerns the transportation, transfer, accommodation, and movement of victims, and strongly implies trafficking happens with the passage from one country to another. Therefore, it is likely to marginalize women who are victims of various forms of trafficking within their home country, such as Senegalese women forced into commercial sex. In these cases, even if trafficking is proven, Senegalese lawmakers may consider sexual exploitation as a crime of pimping, pedophilia, sexual violence, kidnapping, or abduction of vulnerable persons and try them under the Senegalese penal code, which depending on the crime can have a lower sentence.



⁴“Aunties” in this context are a subcategory of (female) pimp who host individuals engaged in commercial sex in their homes and take profits from their work. If we consider that pimping is the fact of generating profits on the commercial sex activities of others, thanks to the power that one exercises on the people who engage in it, we cannot say necessarily that these women are part of the trafficking networks, as everything depends on the nature of the relationship with the individual engaged in commercial sex. The qualitative data shows some women choose to live communally with others in these slightly hierarchical arrangements.

⁵<https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights>

⁶<https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-rights-and-welfare-child>

⁷<https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa>

⁸https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/documents/publication/wcms_227737.pdf

The legal status of commercial sex and the rights of persons engaged in commercial sex is central to the discussion of sex trafficking. Prostitution has been legal in Senegal since February 1, 1966. Engagement in legal commercial sex is subject to registration on the government-maintained health files, the possession of a health booklet, medical visits every two weeks, and a minimum age requirement of 21, but registration is voluntary. Despite prostitution being legal, some aspects associated with commercial sex are illegal and can be punished under the law, such as pimping. Survivors and victims reported being arrested while engaging in commercial sex. Some respondents shared that when arrested, those who wanted to break the link with their pimps told their story to authorities. From then on, protection actions were initiated, ranging from the cancellation of the debt to be paid to the perpetrators or the return to the country or locality of origin. However, key informants indicated the absence of a legal protection framework for victims of trafficking, which limits the success of cases reported. Additionally, survivors reported not knowing of any organisation or group of people acting at the community level to fight against sex trafficking despite interviews with local stakeholders confirming there are NGOs and government agencies working in this field.

The 2005 Law to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Related Practices and to Protect Victims deals with prosecution of traffickers and the protection for victims, but there is a clear hierarchy as to which is more important under the law. More statutes address the prosecution of traffickers than the protection of victims.

For example, an adult victim who seeks protection must provide proof that she has been a victim, or she risks penal sanctions in the same way as the traffickers⁹. However, even if she provides this proof, she can only do so when the trafficking situation has ended; this is also when the police start investigating and arresting the traffickers. Some key informants suggested that many underage victims of trafficking are arrested and tried as adults because they have ID cards that indicate an adult age. This causes a challenge in protecting these women's rights as set out in the Palermo Protocol around the non-punishment of victims¹⁰.

The law focuses mainly on the legal prosecution of traffickers, but neglects social protection, psychological care, and the rehabilitation of victims. No decree has been issued to detail the social protection measures granted to victims. This lack of social protection measures may hinder the investigation and prosecution of TIP because victims and survivors often do not want to get involved with the criminal justice system. Failing to protect victims and survivors, in addition to sometimes prosecuting them, means they may only perceive anti-trafficking justice as risk driven and hostile.

⁹Bop, C. (2013). *Pratiques d'esclavage et d'asservissement des femmes en Afrique, 4eme symposium africain sur le genre*, CODESRIA & Centre de Recherche Afro-arabe au Caire en Egypte. <https://publication.codesria.org/index.php/pub/catalog/view/77/506/1190>

¹⁰Palermo Protocol article 6(2) sets out details of how the State should ensure their domestic or legal administrative systems contains measures that provide victims of trafficking with certain protections and support. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/ProtocolonTrafficking.pdf>



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. IMPROVEMENT OF COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP AMONG STAKEHOLDERS WORKING IN THE PREVENTION OF SEX TRAFFICKING TO ENHANCE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

These stakeholders are government administrations and NGOs that work together through the coordination of the Departmental Child Protection Committee (CDPE). Each of these key institutions has their area of interest, but seem to intersect across multiple areas of concern for the prevention and protection of trafficked women and girls. However, it is unclear what type of cooperation or relevant data exists or is being shared across departments.

- **The Action Éducation en Milieu Ouvert (AEMO)**
- **The Departmental Community Development Service (DCDS)**
- **The Regional Youth Council**
- **The association Kédougou Encadrement Orientation et Développement Humain (K.E.O.H)**
- **The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Peacebuilding**
- **National Council for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons (NCFTIP)—see box**

Findings from our study suggest that these departments would benefit from having more coordination between them and performance tools that could facilitate their work. Developing a process that would enable government services to identify other key local services would support better intervention capacity in the fight against sex trafficking.

This could be done through the expansion of the integrated child protection services already in place in Kédougou and Saraya, which is a scheme where the responsibilities and expected role of each actor of the CDPE is presented. This could be adapted to sex trafficking and a specific scheme for child victims of sex trafficking should be designed even at internal (i.e., domestic) level. Additionally, to reinforce the fight against pimping (including “aunties”) in Kédougou, further collaboration should be encouraged between law enforcement and security forces.

“Aunties” (including men who host foreign girls) should be questioned or investigated in order to detect sex trafficking cases. Local capacities should be reinforced to identify the sex trafficking that hides behind legal commercial sex activity.

Despite the 2005 human trafficking law, there is no public policy designed solely for sex trafficking. As a result, key informants reported that there were no officers dedicated to implementing services associated with anti-TIP. One informant even went as far as to admit that they had no previous knowledge of any national anti-TIP policies within Senegal. Other key informants echoed this: stakeholders within multiple ministries were unaware of the current anti-TIP laws.

In addition to a lack of awareness of these policies, the actors involved were reported to work independently of one another. This may put undue confusion and pressure on the available services, and is seen by respondents as a major gap in the fight against trafficking. Key informants suggested putting in place a coordinated framework that brings together all the

National Council for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons (NCFTIP)

The Action Éducation en Milieu Ouvert (AEMO) is a service of the Ministry of Justice, specifically the Direction de l'Éducation Surveillée de la Protection Sociale (DESPPS), which is the technical entity of the Ministry of Justice responsible for child protection.

The Departmental Community Development Service (DCDS) is the regional entity of the Ministry of Community Development whose role is to promote social equity and reduce socio-economic vulnerability factors, particularly in remote localities.

The Regional Youth Council is the regional division of the national youth council of the Ministry of Youth, whose objective is to defend and promote youth rights organizations.

The association Kédougou Encadrement Orientation et Développement Humain (K.E.O.H.) is an education association that intervenes in the field of health by promoting education and training in the techniques of prevention against HIV and also in the integrated management of child and maternal illnesses.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Peacebuilding whose mandate is to address human trafficking, has been established.

National Council for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons (NCFTIP) whose intervention priorities include: Exploitation of children for sexual purposes, sexual violence against girls, prostitution, abduction of minors, corruption of minors, kidnapping, sex tourism, rape.

key actors—the Regional Court; the Police, Gendarmerie and Border Police; administrative authorities’ healthcare agents; and local authorities (neighborhood/village security chiefs known as “Tomboulmans”)—so that they can share data and information and better coordinate their anti-trafficking efforts.

Key informants suggested that health services should be given the encouragement and resources required to enable detection of sex trafficking cases among individuals engaged in commercial sex and to refer them to complementary services and NGOs. This could be done in partnership with the Ministry of Health (which oversees medical follow-up for women registered for engagement in commercial sex), who could integrate psycho-social follow-up through targeted questions by midwives and the Ministry of Women. Health personnel in charge of monitoring the health of individuals engaged in commercial sex could be more effectively involved in the fight against sex trafficking by receiving training on this issue. Giving health care workers the right to question individuals engaged in commercial sex on points related to the fight against trafficking, and to report this information to the relevant services, would provide an additional resource outside the more traditional routes for identifying and protecting women and girls from being exploited by traffickers.

Evidence shows that through coordinated collaboration between government and non-government agencies, more effective measures can be taken in prosecution, prevention, and protection against human trafficking. This is particularly true for law enforcement which, through the creation of task forces, can share intelligence, work across jurisdictions, and coordinate across borders. Mandating this type of coordinated collaboration is not simply enough, as this does not guarantee effective anti-trafficking strategies, as we are already seeing in Senegal. Though prosecution is important, an effective approach to stopping trafficking requires the inclusion of non-police support agencies that address prevention and protection of survivors through effective collaboration across agencies¹⁴. Coordinating efforts that meet the additional needs of survivors would inevitably support police and prosecution work. Providing a safe place and legal aid to survivors, for example, can increase cooperation with judicial systems, which individuals generally find untrustworthy or intimidating.

2. INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER AREAS OF GOVERNMENT FOR WHOLE-SYSTEM PREVENTION. EVIDENCE POINTS TO RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF INSTITUTIONS AND MINISTRIES NOT DIRECTLY LINKED TO COMMERCIAL SEX OR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN DEVELOPING MORE EFFECTIVE RESPONSE.

To promote a coordinated approach that ensures increased accountability at an administrative level, interviews with non-governmental stakeholders suggest that more effort is needed to guarantee relevant ministries—such as the Ministry of Geology and Mines, the Ministry of Health, and the Social Action Gender Unit—are made aware of the relevant national and international policies on anti-trafficking to which Senegal is a signatory.

In order to promote a more coordinated approach that ensures increased accountability at an administrative level, it has been suggested in our interviews with non-governmental stakeholders that more effort is needed to guarantee relevant ministries, such as the Ministry of Geology and Mines, the Ministry of Health, and the Social Action Gender Unit, are made aware of the relevant national and international policies on anti-trafficking to which Senegal is a signatory.

These ministries could then look into risk factors and vulnerabilities within their remit that might be contributing to furthering the sex trafficking of women and girls within the commercial sex industry. This broad approach would support anti-trafficking efforts already taking place and potentially bring awareness to communities of this form of trafficking in persons. Activities to respond to this recommendation could include promoting awareness of the law among government officials (at national and regional levels, including ECOWAS) or training and funding services and agents dedicated to the implementation of human trafficking prevention. One stakeholder suggested that mapping of roles and responsibilities of the ministries specifically to the fight against sex trafficking should be prioritised. This would allow them to plan and allocate resources that are already within their budget. Some stakeholders consider the law and its sanctions to be adequate, but the involvement of government services in prevention is limited to the Ministry of Women, Family, Gender, and Child Protection, who include sex trafficking in the broad agenda of their work. It may be more effective if a specific prevention strategy for each type of trafficking-related violence was developed so that sex trafficking could be more specifically addressed.

3. EXPAND CURRENT NATIONAL ANTI-TIP LAW TO INCLUDE ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR SURVIVORS OF TRAFFICKING.

Respondents noted that there is currently a strong focus on the prosecution of traffickers and, as a result, a potential risk to victims if they are unable to 'prove' they have been trafficked. Prosecution is seen as an avenue to address sex trafficking, and therefore the current law fails to address the vulnerabilities of survivors. To improve protection strategies, national policy must shift to include protection and support for victims and survivors, the provision of social protections (including psychological care), and the rehabilitation of victims, with a framework for providing facilities for rehabilitation. Our respondents noted that social protection of victims is not provided for in the law, which puts vulnerable women at risk of being re-trafficked. The government could support survivors and victims more effectively by engaging diplomatic representatives from the survivor's country of origin, relevant embassies, and the survivor themselves to create adequate assistance programs.

There is also no legal protection framework within the law for victims to press charges against their trafficker. Pimping should be prosecuted as part of the anti-TIP policies in relevant cases, or sentencing should be equitable to trafficking. This can be argued under the first article of the 2005 Anti-Trafficking Law. A legal protection framework for victims of sex trafficking who wish to press charges against their pimps should be established and should be survivor informed, as it would be empowering to women, including victims of sex trafficking.

Developing a legal protection framework against pimping might diminish the culture of silence that harms individuals engaged in commercial sex, and might protect victims of sex trafficking who can't yet prove they have been trafficked. This framework should support survivors through the prosecution process and support their social and rehabilitation needs. If survivors wish to engaged in commercial sex after being removed from trafficking, this framework would also prevent re-trafficking.

