

Strengthening Anti-Trafficking Advocacy: From Rights on Paper to Protection in Practice

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Abbreviations	Full terms
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ACTIP	ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
AU	African Union
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EU	European Union
GHRD	Global Human Rights Defence
GRETA	Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings
ICCPR	International Convention on Civil and Political Rights
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IGO	International Governmental Organisations
IOM	International Organisation of Migration
SAARC	The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
U.S.	United States

1. INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is one of the most persistent **human rights challenges** in the world (UNODC, 2024). Although several **international legal frameworks** have been developed to prevent trafficking, prosecute traffickers, and protect victims, many of them remain **unidentified** or unable to access these **protection systems**, formally existing to protect them (OHCHR, 2014). This indicates a **gap between legal frameworks and the protection victims can access in practice**. While limitations are present within the legal frameworks themselves, their effectiveness also depends on how governments **implement** them and how authorities **enforce** and translate them into **accessible protection and support for victims**. When this does not happen effectively, **legal rights might exist on paper without resulting in meaningful protection in practice**.

Advocacy plays an important role in identifying where these systems fall short, **raising awareness**, bringing forward **evidence** and **survivor perspectives**, and **encouraging policymakers to improve both legislation and its implementation**. Global Human Rights Defence (GHRD) believes that advocacy can play a much stronger role in **bridging the gap between rights on paper and protection in practice**.

GHRD is an international human rights organisation based in The Hague, working to **promote and protect human rights through research, advocacy, education, and international engagement** (GHRD, 2025). As part of its advocacy work, GHRD has published reports and articles addressing human trafficking and related forms of **exploitation** across different regions. This growing body of work provides the organisational foundation for the present report, which examines GHRD's existing **anti-trafficking advocacy** alongside insights from practitioners and a survivor of labour exploitation to identify opportunities for strengthening future advocacy.

This report focuses on **advocacy in the context of human trafficking**: rather than only asking whether legal frameworks exist, the report examines advocacy in terms of how it can help to **strengthen victim identification, representation, and protection**.

The following methodology is used: the report combines two main sources of data, namely **reports, articles and press releases published by GHRD** related to human trafficking and **primary data collected through interviews** conducted by the researcher with organisations and individuals working directly on human trafficking. The GHRD publications are used to understand how our organisation currently **conducts advocacy and communicates across different contexts**. Analysing reports, articles and press releases provides an opportunity to reflect on **GHRD's existing knowledge, best practices, and advocacy approaches**. More importantly, it offers the opportunity to identify areas where these approaches are less effective and therefore need improvement by examining which elements are consistently present or absent across the publications, such as **survivor participation, attention to implementation, the specificity of recommendations, and follow-up on advocacy impact**.

The interviews were conducted with La Strada International, FairWork, SHOP Den Haag, Anti-Slavery International, and Harold D'Souza, a survivor of labour trafficking. These interviews provide **insights into how human trafficking is experienced in practice, what victims need, what barriers to protection and identification exist, and where advocacy**

can become more effective in providing victims and survivors with **access to justice**. Interviews gave concrete insights into the realities behind the issue of human trafficking. The findings are analysed thematically and draw mainly on **practitioner perspectives** from organisations working in the Netherlands, supported by survivor and UK-based insights.

By **bridging GHRD’s existing advocacy work with practical insights from the field**, this report aims to **identify the gap between legal recognition and the practical protection** of victims and survivors of human trafficking and where advocacy is already strong and where it can be further improved. The final chapter consists of **practical recommendations for strengthening victim-centred advocacy**, both within GHRD’s future work and for other organisations working on human trafficking and victim protection.

2. DEFINING HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND ADVOCACY

2.1 Human Trafficking

2.1.1 Historical Context

Exploitation is the most fundamental element in human trafficking: people who are trafficked are exploited for the benefit or profit of others (UNODC, 2024). The exploitation of human beings for economic gain has existed for centuries, one of the most well-known examples being the transatlantic slave trade (Ighobor, 2024). Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, an estimated 12 to 15 million people were trafficked from Africa to the Caribbean, North, Central and South America for enslaved labour (Eltis, 2025). In March 2026, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted, by majority vote, a resolution acknowledging the trafficking of enslaved Africans and racialised chattel enslavement of Africans as the “gravest crime against humanity”. The resolution received 123 votes in favour, three against, and 52 abstentions, demonstrating the continued importance of acknowledging the historical scale and impact of this exploitation (UN Affairs, 2026). Although the legal ownership of people has been abolished in every country, exploitation has not disappeared.

Today, this exploitation manifests itself as “modern slavery”, an umbrella term used to describe situations of severe exploitation that a person cannot refuse or from which they cannot leave because of threats, violence, coercion, or deception. Modern slavery includes forced labour, forced marriage, debt bondage, forced commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, slavery-like practices, and the sale and exploitation of children (ILO, 2022). Most importantly, all forms include the removal of a person’s freedom in order to exploit them for someone else’s personal or commercial financial gain (Anti-Slavery International, n.d.). Although slavery has been formally abolished and prohibited under international law, including Article 8 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), modern slavery continues to exist in more concealed forms, often hidden within legal labour markets, migration systems, and criminal networks (Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, 2021).

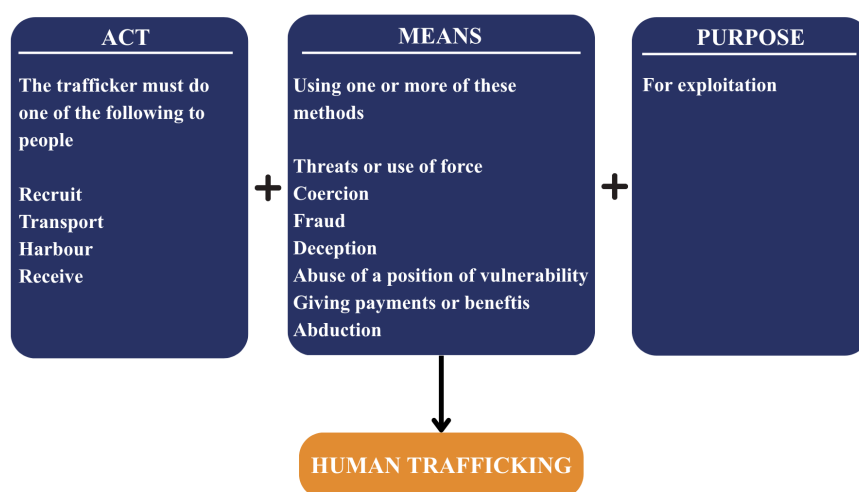
2.1.2 Defining “Human Trafficking”

To understand how these modern forms of exploitation are addressed today, it is important to define human trafficking as a specific legal and human rights concept. The terms “trafficking in persons” and “human trafficking” refer to the same phenomenon and are often used interchangeably. While “trafficking in persons” is the official term used in international legal instruments and by organisations such as the UN, “human trafficking” is more commonly used in public discourse, media, and advocacy (Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, 2023). The UN has played an important role in addressing this issue, especially through the Palermo Protocol, formally known as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. This Protocol was adopted in 2000 as part of the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNODC, 2004). As of July 2026, 185 UN member states are parties to the Palermo Protocol (United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.). States that have ratified the Protocol are required to adopt the legislative and other measures necessary to criminalise human trafficking in accordance with its requirements.. Furthermore, under Article 2(b) of the Palermo Protocol, member states are obliged to protect and assist victims of human trafficking with full respect for their human rights (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d.).

The Protocol provided the first internationally agreed definition of human trafficking, enabling states to align their domestic laws with this international standard:

“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.”(United Nations, 2000, art. 3(a)):

The definition of human trafficking consists of three main elements: the act, the means, and the purpose.



Source: [UNODC](#), n.d.

The act revolves around how trafficking takes place, it is about the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons. The means refers to what is used to control a person, which may be exerted through the use of threat or force, coercion, fraud, deception, abuse of a position of vulnerability or abduction. Lastly, the purpose of trafficking is always the exploitation of an individual for the personal or commercial benefit of others (UNODC, n.d.). In the case of children under the age of 18, the “means” element is not required to establish that they were trafficked: when a child is recruited, transported, transferred, harboured, or received for the purpose of exploitation, this can constitute trafficking even when force or coercion cannot be proven. This distinction recognises the particular vulnerability of children and ensures that apparent consent cannot be used to excuse their exploitation (United Nations et al., 2014).

Because the Palermo Protocol emerged within the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, it primarily frames human trafficking as a form of organised crime rather than solely as a human rights issue. This criminal justice orientation is reflected in the requirement for states to criminalise human trafficking, as well as in measures aimed at investigating and prosecuting traffickers, strengthening border controls, and facilitating cooperation between states in addressing transnational trafficking (OHCHR, 2002). While these measures remain essential for combating trafficking, this approach has often resulted in greater emphasis on prosecuting offenders than on ensuring consistent protection and assistance for victims: it influenced how trafficking is understood and dealt with globally. The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) argues that this focus on prosecution, border measures, information exchange, and cooperation between law-enforcement authorities, can place excessive responsibility on individual traffickers while giving insufficient attention to the labour conditions, migration policies, economic inequalities, and institutional practices that facilitate exploitation. When the primary focus remains on criminal proceedings, victim needs are often not met, as access to assistance is frequently contingent upon cooperation with authorities and law enforcement, legal proceedings can be lengthy and difficult to understand, and victims might have limited control over whether or how a case proceeds. GAATW (2026) documents several cases in which people who have been trafficked are treated as offenders rather than recognised as victims. These limitations demonstrate why prosecution, although necessary for accountability, cannot by itself provide safety, recovery, compensation, autonomy, or protection from further exploitation.

2.1.3 Legal Frameworks

International human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, provide the human rights frameworks that underpin states' obligations towards trafficked persons. Together with the Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, developed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), these instruments have contributed to the development of a human rights-based approach that extends beyond criminalisation by emphasising victim protection, assistance, access to remedies, and the prevention of further exploitation (OHCHR, 2010).

Outside the UN framework, Europe has one of the most extensive regional anti-trafficking systems, which further expands states' legal obligations to combat human trafficking and safeguard victims (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2011). The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings adopted a more victim-centred and human rights-based approach, placing greater emphasis on state obligations regarding victim assistance and protection. The Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings establishes common standards within the European Union (EU) concerning prevention, prosecution, and victim support (European Commission, 2021).

Beyond Europe, several regional organisations have also developed anti-trafficking frameworks that build upon the principles established in the Palermo Protocol. In Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP) as a legally binding mechanism to strengthen regional cooperation and enhance Member States' responses to human trafficking (ASEAN, 2018). The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) established the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution, focusing on cross-border trafficking in South Asia (SAARC, 2002). In Africa, the African Union (AU) adopted the Ouagadougou Action Plan to strengthen regional cooperation against trafficking (AU, 2006). The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) provides a comprehensive policy framework for participating states across Europe, North America, and Central Asia, focusing on prevention, prosecution, and victim protection (OSCE, 2021).

2.1.4 Forms of Exploitation

Even though international frameworks have established a unified legal definition of trafficking in persons, there is a difference in the recognition and prioritisation of the different forms of exploitation (UNODC, n.d.). Sexual exploitation remains the most commonly identified form of human trafficking worldwide, accounting for the largest proportion of detected cases (UNODC, 2024). This strong association between trafficking and sexual exploitation stems from political and feminist debates surrounding prostitution and the exploitation of women. This has led to public attention and policy responses becoming increasingly focused on sex trafficking above other forms of exploitation (Wijers, 2026). Sexual exploitation involves the coercion or manipulation of individuals into prostitution, pornography, or other sexual services for profit.

Forced labour is another prominent form of human trafficking and accounts for a substantial share of identified cases worldwide. However, it has historically received less public and policy attention, illustrating how different forms of trafficking are not always recognised or prioritised equally (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019). Forced labour refers to situations in which individuals are compelled to work under exploitative conditions, often in sectors such as agriculture, construction, manufacturing, or domestic work (ILO et al., 2022). Domestic servitude is a form of forced labour that takes place within private households, such as cleaning, cooking, and caretaking. It creates isolation and restricted freedom of movement, while victims regularly experience psychological or physical abuse. This form of exploitation

is often hidden, making it difficult for authorities and other professionals to identify potential victims (UNODC, 2024).

Human trafficking can also occur for the purpose of forced marriage. Forced marriage involves situations in which individuals are compelled to marry against their will, often resulting in sexual exploitation and domestic servitude.

Furthermore, trafficking occurs for the purpose of forced criminality, which is currently on the rise in the new age of AI and online scam operations. Victims are exploited in illegal activities such as drug transportation, theft, online scams, or forced begging for the benefit of the traffickers (De Bolle & Europol, 2018).

Another form of trafficking is organ removal, in which victims are coerced or deceived into having their organs illegally removed for the financial benefit of traffickers or other individuals involved in the illegal organ trade (Duguay et al., 2025). Although the forms of trafficking outlined above differ in their methods and contexts, they are all characterised by the exploitation of individuals through coercion, deception, or the abuse of power or vulnerability for the benefit of others.

Many factors can increase an individual's vulnerabilities to human trafficking, making them more susceptible to exploitation (Bales, 2007). Governmental corruption is a big predictor of trafficking: when authorities are corrupt, traffickers can bribe their way across borders or out of prosecution, making it a lower-risk crime (Skrivankova et al., 2011). A fundamental root cause that makes individuals vulnerable to exploitation is poverty. Many victims fall prey to traffickers when seeking a better life or enhanced economic opportunities, making it easy to persuade them with false promises of high-paying jobs. Sometimes, parents in extreme poverty might entrust their children to wealthier individuals or accept payments in the hope that their children will escape poverty. Another possible cause is conflict and political instability, such as war and social unrest, which create displacement and destabilisation, leaving populations vulnerable to exploitation (UNODC, 2024). Other factors include labour demand. When destination countries experience shortages of low-skilled workers, the resulting demand for labour can create opportunities for traffickers to recruit vulnerable individuals and exploit them through abusive or coercive working conditions for profit (United Nations, 2014). Social and cultural factors, including gender inequality, discrimination, and harmful social norms, further increase the vulnerability of women and children to exploitation and trafficking (Gauci & Hanley, 2022). It is important to recognise that victims are not always passive but may make the decision purely for survival when involved in highly constrained social and economic conditions (Chuang, 2015). An individual's initial agreement to work, migrate, or enter a particular situation does not prevent it from constituting human trafficking when the act, means, and purpose of exploitation required under the Palermo Protocol's definition of trafficking in persons are present.

2.2 Advocacy

Advocacy is a broad concept that generally refers to actions or expressions by individuals or groups aimed at influencing policies, public opinion, social issues, or decision-making

processes. What advocacy exactly means differs across legal, academic, and public contexts. Consequently, advocacy does not have one consistently applied definition across all contexts (Gen & Wright, 2013). The term “advocacy” is derived from the Latin “advocare”, meaning “to call to one's aid”, reflecting its historical association with supporting or speaking on behalf of another person. Over time, the concept has expanded beyond its legal origins and is now widely used to describe efforts by individuals and organisations, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to promote or defend the rights and interests of others (O’Gorman et al., 2014). Advocacy can take place within formal political and legal institutions, such as governments and courts, or within society through public campaigns, grassroots movements, and awareness-raising activities. The main goal is to influence political, legal, or social outcomes. Legal advocacy can involve the use of court action to represent or advance the interests of individuals and groups whose interests are underrepresented in government (Reid, 2000).

Anti-trafficking advocacy is a multi-layered global effort that involves states, international governmental organisations (IGOs), and NGOs, working at local, national, and transnational levels (Reid, 2000). In recent years, the problem of human trafficking has been addressed extensively: thirty years ago, there was limited use of the term human trafficking, whereas today numerous organisations work on the issue in the majority of countries around the world (Limoncelli, 2016). These organisations have merged into a movement with transnational advocacy networks linking civil society, states, and international organisations (Coalition Against Trafficking Women, 2024). Advocacy has shaped the international legislation on human trafficking by turning trafficking from a hidden or fragmented issue into a more internationally unified legal framework. NGOs, feminist groups, migrant groups, children’s rights advocates, faith-based organisations, survivor advocates, and international organisations have pushed governments to recognise trafficking as a serious cross-border problem. This has helped to move trafficking onto the agenda of the UN, regional bodies, and national governments (Keck & Sikkink, 1999), and has contributed to the development and strengthening of international and regional anti-trafficking frameworks, such as the Palermo Protocol.

At the state and IGO level, advocacy focuses on creating legal frameworks to criminalise trafficking and protecting victims. As discussed in the previous chapter, the 2000 UN Palermo Protocol marked a key turning point by providing the first legally binding international definition of trafficking in persons (United Nations, 2000). This was significant because earlier international responses were limited and frequently addressed trafficking-related exploitation through separate perspectives, including prostitution, migration, labour rights and organised crime, rather than through a single comprehensive trafficking framework (Gauci & Hanley, 2022, pp. 17, 52). Advocacy has also played an important role in pushing the law beyond just punishment responses. Early anti-trafficking responses focused strongly on criminal law and punishing the perpetrator, while human rights advocates argued that legislation also had to protect the victims. This perspective is reflected in the OHCHR’s Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, which were created to help integrate a human rights perspective into anti-trafficking law and policy (OHCHR, 2010).

The international response to human trafficking is commonly organised around the so-called 3P framework: prevention, prosecution, and protection. Reflected in the Palermo Protocol,

this framework recognises that combating human trafficking requires not only the prosecution of traffickers, but also measures to prevent trafficking and protect victims (Dearnley, 2010). As discussed in the previous chapter, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings provides a victim-centred framework for combating trafficking. Its monitoring body, the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), also provides an important accountability mechanism that advocacy organisations can use to promote stronger implementation by States (Council of Europe, 2005). This shows how advocacy has helped to move legislation towards accountability by pressuring them to actually monitor their actions.

Advocacy surrounding human trafficking has become increasingly uniform, with organisations adopting similar approaches, narratives, and policy goals. IGOs and International NGOs provide standardised guidelines and rules that domestic NGOs follow. Typically, these strategies involve awareness campaigns, creating written products, and using media to educate the public. NGOs also provide specialised and direct focus on and for specific groups, such as women or children, providing humanitarian aid, health services, and labour support (Reid, 2000). Wealthy donor states and regional institutions, particularly the United States (U.S.) and the EU, can also influence global anti-trafficking priorities through the funding they provide. Organisations that depend on these external funding programmes may have to align proposed activities with donor priorities and eligibility requirements, which can influence the types of anti-trafficking programmes that receive support (Rossoni, 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used to examine the effectiveness of European anti-trafficking advocacy, specifically by GHRD, but as well as in broader context. A qualitative approach was adopted, combining an analysis of GHRD publications with primary data collection through interviews with practitioners and a survivor of labour exploitation. Together, these methods provided both organisational and practical insights into advocacy, victim identification, and access to protection. The following sections describe in more detail the methods used to collect and analyse the data, as well as the scope and limitations of the research.

3.1 Analysis of GHRD Publications

To examine GHRD's advocacy approaches to human trafficking and related forms of exploitation, thirteen GHRD publications on this subject were analysed. These cases give an overview of different geographical contexts, forms of trafficking and advocacy strategies. Together, they provide insights into how GHRD addresses issues such as labour trafficking, sexual exploitation, child trafficking, forced labour, modern slavery, and gender-based violence. Table 1 presents an overview of the selected cases.

Table 1: GHRD publications overview

Report title	Country/Region	Type of trafficking/Exploitation	Publishing date
Human Trafficking in Cambodia: Tier 3 Blacklist	Cambodia	Forced labour, sexual exploitation, forced criminality	24 December 2022
Exploring Article 4 of the ECHR: Analysis of the ECtHR's Jurisprudence on Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation and Forced Prostitution	Europe (Cyprus, Russia, Croatia, Greece)	Sexual exploitation and forced prostitution	30 October 2023
Legislation and Law Enforcement Regulating The Chain of Gender-based Violence: Child Marriage and Human Trafficking	Bangladesh	Child marriage and trafficking related exploitation	3 March 2025
Modern Slavery in the Fast Fashion Industry	Bangladesh, China, India	Forced labour and modern slavery in supply chains	21 April 2025
In-Transit: The Cross-Border Human Trafficking in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand	Cambodia, Laos, Thailand	Cross-border trafficking, labour trafficking, sexual exploitation, child trafficking	26 May 2025
Modern Slavery	Global	Human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, forced prostitution	2 July 2025
Violence Against Children: Unveiling the Devastating Impacts of Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events	Global	Contains substantive discussion of child trafficking and exploitation linked to climate vulnerability	6 August 2025
Human Trafficking in Thailand – Complex Background and Legal Factors	Thailand	Labour trafficking and sexual exploitation	15 August 2025
Forced Labour of Foreign Workers in Fiji	Fiji	Forced labour of migrant workers	20 August 2025
The Kafala System: Law-Protected Servitude	Global, case study on Sierra Leone	Migrant worker exploitation, forced labour, servitude, trafficking vulnerabilities	27 February 2026
Labour Rights and Compliance Gaps in China	China	Forced labour, labour exploitation, state-imposed forced labour, migrant worker exploitation, and supply-chain exploitation	17 May 2026
Human Trafficking Remains One of the Gravest Human Rights Violations of our Time and Represents a Modern Form of Slavery	Global	Human trafficking and modern slavery	26 May 2026
Children in Europe's Asylum System: Protection Gaps, Disappearances, and Human Rights Challenges	Europe	Chapter 5 examines what happens after children disappear from asylum centres, highlighting how these disappearances can expose children to serious risks of exploitation and human trafficking.	20 June 2026

These cases show the diversity of trafficking contexts addressed by GHRD. Some of the cases focus on specific countries and victim groups, while others adopt a regional or

international perspective. The cases also illustrate a variety of advocacy approaches, ranging from legal advocacy and awareness-raising to policy advocacy, corporate accountability advocacy, and survivor-centred advocacy. This diversity makes the selected publications suitable for identifying the broader patterns in GHRD's anti-trafficking advocacy work.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

To complement the analysis of GHRD publications, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with organisations working in the field of anti-trafficking and an individual directly affected by human trafficking. The interviews included perspectives from La Strada International, FairWork, SHOP Den Haag, Anti-Slavery International, and Harold D'Souza, a survivor of labour exploitation.

A semi-structured interview format was selected to provide a consistent basis for comparison while allowing follow-up questions tailored to each participant's expertise and professional experience.

The interviews explored recurring themes including victim identification, access to protection, advocacy strategies, survivor participation, and barriers to implementing anti-trafficking legislation in practice. All interviews were transcribed and analysed qualitatively to identify recurring themes and differences across participants. Direct quotations from the interview transcripts are used throughout this report to illustrate key findings and support the analysis.

Participants were interviewed in their professional capacity, and their contributions are therefore attributed to the organisation they represented. This reflects that the findings presented in the report primarily concern the organisations' experiences and approaches to anti-trafficking advocacy rather than solely the personal views of individual interviewees. Harold D'Souza's contributions are identified separately, as they draw on his lived experience as a survivor of human trafficking.

3.3 Scope

The scope of the analyses of GHRD publications is limited to publicly available reports and articles on the subject published between 2022 and 2026. The interviews provide in-depth qualitative insights but do not represent all organisations, countries, forms of trafficking, or professional perspectives within the anti-trafficking field. The findings should therefore be understood as recurring themes identified across a limited group of participants rather than as conclusions that apply equally to every national context.

Despite these limitations to the research scope, combining the interviews with the analysis of GHRD's publications, made it possible to compare documented advocacy approaches with practical experiences from the anti-trafficking field. While the publication analysis provided organisational context and identified strengths and points of improvement in GHRD's

advocacy, the interview findings form the primary basis for identifying the key challenges of advocacy against human trafficking and developing the recommendations presented in this report. These recommendations will be implemented by GHRD, but are also intended to inspire the strategy of other organisations that aim to effectively address human trafficking through advocacy.

4. ANALYSIS OF GHRD ADVOCACY APPROACHES

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of GHRD publications on human trafficking. The aim of this analysis is to examine how GHRD addresses human trafficking through its advocacy by identifying the strengths and points of improvement of recurring advocacy approaches used across the publications. These findings provide an overview of GHRD's current advocacy work and serve as a foundation for comparison with the perspectives obtained through the semi-structured interviews presented in the following chapter.

4.1 Effective Advocacy Approaches

A thorough examination of GHRD's publications reveals several recurring advocacy approaches that are commonly used to strengthen anti-trafficking efforts. These include structural analysis, the application of international and legal frameworks, evidence-based advocacy, awareness raising, and practical policy recommendations. Rather than functioning independently, these approaches reinforce one another and are frequently combined within GHRD's publications to explain trafficking, assess existing responses, and formulate recommendations for governments and other stakeholders.

4.1.1 Structural Drivers of Trafficking

Emphasising the structural drivers of trafficking strengthens advocacy by shifting attention from individual trafficking cases to the broader conditions that enable exploitation. Rather than presenting trafficking as an isolated act, the analysed GHRD publications identify factors such as poverty, migration pressure, gender inequality, corruption, discrimination, statelessness, and weak governance as conditions that increase vulnerability to exploitation. Recognising these underlying vulnerabilities encourages preventative responses alongside criminal justice measures and highlights the need for long-term structural reforms to reduce the risk of trafficking.

4.1.2 International and Legal Frameworks

Using international human rights and legal frameworks strengthens advocacy by providing recognised standards against which government action can be assessed. The analysed publications frequently refer to international conventions, regional instruments, and state obligations to demonstrate where existing responses fail to meet legal commitments. This legal framing supports accountability, strengthens the legitimacy of advocacy claims, and provides a foundation for evidence-based policy recommendations.

However, legal arguments alone are often insufficient to persuade decision-makers. They become considerably stronger when supported by robust evidence demonstrating both the scale of trafficking and its real-world impacts.

4.1.3 Evidence-Based Advocacy

Grounding advocacy in documented evidence increases its credibility and persuasiveness. Throughout the analysed publications, academic literature, reports from governments and international organisations, legal instruments, and documented case examples are used to support both the analysis and the recommendations. Evidence-based advocacy enables complex trafficking issues to be communicated in a balanced and well-supported manner, making recommendations more convincing for policymakers and practitioners. Evidence alone, however, has limited impact if it remains within academic or policy circles. Translating research findings into broader public understanding is therefore another important component of effective advocacy.

4.1.4 Awareness-Raising

Raising awareness of less visible forms of trafficking broadens public and institutional understanding of exploitation. The reviewed publications draw attention to forms of trafficking that often receive limited recognition, including exploitation within global supply chains, child trafficking, and migration-related exploitation. Expanding the public understanding of trafficking beyond the most commonly recognised purpose, namely sexual exploitation, helps challenge common misconceptions and encourages more comprehensive anti-trafficking responses. Alongside increasing public awareness, effective advocacy should ensure that the experiences and rights of those affected remain central to anti-trafficking efforts.

4.1.5 Practical Policy Recommendations

Providing practical recommendations increases the policy relevance of advocacy by translating research findings into concrete actions. Rather than merely identifying shortcomings, the analysed publications recommend measures to strengthen victim identification, improve regional cooperation, enhance corporate due diligence, strengthen legal implementation, and increase institutional accountability. Action-oriented

recommendations support policymakers and practitioners in applying research findings to improve anti-trafficking responses.

4.2 Gaps in GHRD Advocacy Approach

Some advocacy gaps in GHRD's work can be identified based on the analysed cases. Across cases, structural vulnerabilities are explored, yet little attention has been given to evaluating whether advocacy efforts translate into tangible results, improvements for victims or policy change. The major advocacy practices that GHRD has so far left unexplored include greater survivor participation, more attention to implementation in practice, stronger use of primary sources, a more systematic evaluation of advocacy impact, and the development of more specific and action-oriented recommendations.

A recurring gap in GHRD's publications is the limited inclusion of victim and survivor voices. This is important because their perspectives and lived experiences provide valuable insights into what trafficking means in practice, the challenges they experienced and continue to experience, and what they need to recover and rebuild their lives. These insights can also improve understanding of how people are coerced into trafficking and help ensure that protection systems are shaped by the experiences and needs of those they are intended to protect. Including these voices also gives advocacy a more human dimension. While laws, policies, and statistics are important, they cannot fully capture the personal stories behind and individual impacts of trafficking.

Although victims are frequently discussed and their vulnerabilities are acknowledged in the GHRD publications, they are often presented as passive recipients of protection rather than active participants in advocacy processes. Most reports lack direct testimonies, lived experiences, and survivor-led recommendations, with the exception of a few examples such as the *In-Transit: The Cross-Border Human Trafficking in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand* report, which does highlight survivor initiatives. Understandably, there is a reliance on secondary sources, given the ethical and practical challenges that come with researching trafficked persons. Secondary sources can still include lived experiences, but when survivor perspectives are not consistently incorporated or clearly identifiable, advocacy may have fewer direct insight into how protection systems are experienced in practice.

Many reports rely on international legal frameworks and state obligations and demonstrate where governments fail to comply with existing human rights and trafficking standards. However, the cases do not address how these legal commitments can realistically be translated into practice and whether this translation suffices in accordance with states' treaty obligations. Even when legal obligations are clearly established, they still need to be applied in practice by authorities, support services, and other actors responsible for victim identification and protection. Implementation of the already existing legislation can remain weak in certain states because of corruption, lack of resources, limited political will, or weak institutional capacity. When advocacy focuses primarily on what the law requires, it risks overlooking the practical barriers that prevent victims from actually accessing protection and justice.

Lastly, many publications conclude with policy recommendations. Generally, these recommendations are formulated in broad terms such as improving cooperation, strengthening victim protection, or increasing awareness. These are highly valuable recommendations, but they sometimes overlook concrete implementation strategies, measurable objectives, or clear responsibility for different stakeholders, reducing their practical value and making accountability more difficult.

5. PRACTITIONER AND SURVIVOR PERSPECTIVES

According to Article 3(a) of the Palermo Protocol, human trafficking does not require visible violence or kidnapping; deception and the abuse of a position of vulnerability can also constitute the means through which trafficking occurs (United Nations, 2000, art. 3(a)). In practice, people may be recruited through false promises of better employment or living conditions and gradually become dependent on the trafficker. Harold D'Souza's experience illustrates this process. He travelled legally from India to the U.S. after being promised better economic opportunities, but after his arrival, his documents were taken by his trafficker, who gradually gained control over his work, income, housing, and freedom of movement. This growing dependency made it increasingly difficult for him to leave the exploitative situation

"I lost my voice, I lost my courage, I lost my hope, and I lost my freedom." (Harold D'Souza)

This dependency is important in understanding victim identification and protection. Victims may be unable to report human trafficking because dependency on the trafficker and fears of detention, deportation, criminalisation, or punishment can make seeking help feel too risky. These same conditions can also shape how victims understand their situation, meaning they may not always recognise themselves as victims or may be too afraid to come forward. In D'Souza's case the traffickers repeatedly referred to him as a "criminal", which reinforced his fear of authorities and made seeking help even more difficult. Advocacy therefore needs to be based on the reality that trafficking is often hidden behind dependency, fear, and survival, rather than relying solely on clear legal definitions.

When conducting the interviews, there were several themes that stood out. The most prominent themes were: victim identification, trafficker control, fear of authorities, dependency of evidence, political agenda, legal frameworks, and access to protection and support.

Accordingly, Section 5.1 examines the challenges surrounding victim identification and recognition, focusing on why victims may remain unidentified and the role of professionals in recognising signs of trafficking. Section 5.2 explores the barriers victims face when seeking help and accessing protection, including dependency on traffickers, fear of authorities, and practical obstacles within existing support systems. Finally, Section 5.3 discusses victim rights, recognition, and access to justice by examining how legal frameworks operate in practice, the importance of legal recognition, evidence-based advocacy, and the role of long-term support in ensuring that victims can effectively exercise their rights.

5.1 Victim Identification and Recognition

One of the most recurring themes throughout the interviews was the challenge of victim identification. Legal frameworks do place a significant emphasis on identifying victims of trafficking; however, recognising exploitation in practice remains complex. Victims do not always recognise themselves as victims, and authorities often fail to recognise and identify persons who are being exploited and trafficked.

This misconception that victims are always aware of their own exploitation was mentioned by most interviewees. Harold D'Souza reflected on his own experience by stating: *"I came legally, I didn't know I'm being trafficked"*. His experience shows how trafficking can develop gradually through manipulation and false promises. Victims might therefore remain in exploitative situations for long periods without identifying their experiences as trafficking.

SHOP also explained that victims often do not recognise the exploitative situation they are in as they might compare it to their previous situations in their home country:

"One barrier is that victims regularly do not see themselves as victims. This can occur, for example, in a situation of labour exploitation, where a victim is paid far too little, but still earns more in one month than they would earn in a year in their home country. It can then be difficult for the person to realise that they were being exploited." (SHOP)

This perspective was reinforced by La Strada International, which argued that victim identification should not depend solely on a person's ability to recognise themselves as a victim.

"For sure, it helps the early identification, if victims would recognise themselves as victims and report immediately. However we also see that reporting by victims or those that report on their behalf, is questioned or disputed. However, whether or not the victimhood is recognised by the victim, it remains the responsibility of states to ensure they are recognised and receive adequate protection and support." (La Strada International)

This was similarly emphasised by Anti-Slavery International; identification should not depend on directly asking people whether they consider themselves as victims of human trafficking. The terminology itself might be unfamiliar or might not reflect how a person understands their own experiences:

"A question could simply be: 'Are you a victim of modern slavery?' Someone might not know what that means. Even the term 'modern slavery' can bring back ideas of the historical slave trade, so people might not understand the concept itself." (Anti-Slavery International)

Instead, the responsibility for identification should primarily lie with professionals, authorities, and support organisations that are able to recognise indicators of exploitation and intervene when necessary. However this comes with its own complications as Anti-Slavery International explained:

"Sometimes people disclose their exploitation but are still not referred to the identification mechanism because the first responder may not be properly trained or may not understand the definitions and indicators of trafficking." (Anti-Slavery International)

FairWork stated that victim identification is often more effective when information and support are provided through organisations and networks that migrant or other vulnerable

groups already know and trust. Thus, rather than expecting vulnerable individuals to approach formal institutions themselves, FairWork works with migrant self-organisations, informal networks, cultural mediators, and familiar community spaces:

“We work a lot with migrant self-organisations, where people can always go and where there is more trust. Information is also shared through WhatsApp groups and informal networks. We try to organise information sessions in places where people already come, such as world houses or homeless shelters, and we work with cultural mediators.” (FairWork)

Interview findings suggest that victim identification should be viewed as a process rather than a single moment. Exploitation often develops gradually, and victims may not immediately understand what is happening to them. However, even when victims do recognise that they are being exploited, they may still decide not to report if seeking help brings significant risks, such as detention, deportation, loss of income, or retaliation, while the protection or support they might receive remains uncertain. Effective identification therefore requires awareness, trust, specialised knowledge, and a broader understanding of vulnerability. Rather than focusing exclusively on whether someone meets a legal definition of trafficking, the interviewed organisations repeatedly emphasised the importance of recognising when a person is vulnerable, exploited, and in need of protection.

5.2 Barriers to Seeking Help and Accessing Protection

Another frequent theme in interviews was that victims often face significant barriers when seeking help or reporting exploitation. These obstructions do not only come from failing protection systems but are often deliberately created by traffickers themselves. Traffickers manipulate, create dependency, create fear, and give misinformation, which makes victims feel unable to leave or seek assistance.

According to Harold D’Souza, traffickers are highly skilled at identifying vulnerabilities and adapting their methods accordingly.

“Traffickers are very smart. They know the victim’s culture, their mind, how they operate.” (Harold D’Souza)

Rather than relying solely on physical violence, traffickers frequently establish control through trust and false promises. D’Souza explained that he arrived in the U.S. believing that he was pursuing a legitimate employment opportunity.

“I came on trust, I came on a promise, I came on a faith, and I came to live my American dream.” (Harold D’Souza)

Once the victims become dependent on their employer for housing, income, legal status, or documentation, it is hard to leave the situation. Several interviewees highlighted that traffickers use immigration status as a control mechanism. D’Souza described that threats of arrest, detention, and deportation are commonly made to discourage victims from seeking help.

“The trafficker would say, ‘I’ll get you arrested, I’ll get you handcuffed, I’ll get you jailed, I’ll get you deported.’” (Harold D’Souza)

These threats can have a psychological impact, D'Souza reflected on his own experience and mentioned that his trafficker would make him feel like a criminal.

"My nickname was 'illegal'. So what happens to the mind, body and soul? This is very well planned out by traffickers [...] They called me 'illegal', so I was thinking I'm a criminal, it's like plain brainwash [...] You are mentally in a prison." (Harold D'Souza)

The statements suggest that this fear is not incidental to exploitation, but a part of the trafficker's strategy of control. SHOP similarly explained that exploiters might intentionally undermine the trust that victims have in authorities and support services, while taking advantage of fears connected to insecure residence status. Because of this, formal systems become viewed as threatening rather than safe.

"Traffickers can deliberately reinforce this distrust by undermining victims' confidence in the police, authorities, and support services, making them even less likely to seek help." (SHOP)

FairWork explained that many victims might be hesitant to report exploitation because they fear the consequences.

"They are afraid of losing their work [...] or in the worst case being deported if they are undocumented [...] For example, an undocumented person in the Netherlands will often be too afraid to speak to authorities because they fear being exposed." (FairWork)

In other words, victims might perceive reporting exploitation as higher risk than remaining in the exploitative situation.

Stigma and shame create an additional barrier to seeking help. SHOP noted that this can be particularly significant when trafficking intersects with other stigmatised experiences:

"Victims do not always want their family or environment to find out that they have been active in the sex industry, even though this was not their own choice." (SHOP)

La Strada International similarly noted that undocumented persons in the Netherlands are afraid to speak to authorities, for fear of deportation.

"For example, an undocumented person in the Netherlands will often be too afraid to speak to authorities because they fear being exposed. That is why we strongly advocate for safe reporting mechanisms. Someone should be able to walk into a police station, say: 'This happened to me, but I am undocumented,' and still safely walk back out again after reporting the crimes." (La Strada International)

Beyond fear and dependency, interviewees also highlighted practical barriers within existing reporting systems. La Strada International pointed out that reporting procedures are often inaccessible for the people who need them most, due to language barriers, unfamiliarity with legal systems, and a lack of culturally sensitive communication. This can make it difficult for victims to understand their rights or access available support.

"Victims do not always have the information of how to seek help and report a crime. If they do not have an NGO contact or someone else telling them these things, they often do not even know what rights they have, what human trafficking is, or where they should go [...] There also needs to be clear information, an accessible legal system, and support structures where

people can temporarily stay somewhere safe and receive help. They should also receive support throughout the legal process if it reaches that stage.” (La Strada International)

FairWork further emphasised the importance of having accessible information, which is why they work with translators to make the information more culturally appropriate.

“We have 60 volunteers at FairWork. We have 13 different language teams that also offer help in people’s own language, and we work with mediators who come from the migrant groups themselves, sometimes people who have also been helped by us. [...] You do not reach this group by opening an information desk. This really requires a fine-meshed network and trust, so that people also dare to come forward.” (FairWork)

Together, these findings demonstrate that barriers to seeking help are not solely individual challenges but are created systematically through a combination of trafficker control, fear of consequences, and structural shortcomings within protection systems. Moreover, reporting exploitation does not necessarily guarantee access to protection and support, as these may depend on cooperation with authorities and on whether an investigation or prosecution can proceed, meaning that even cooperating victims can lose access to support when a case is dismissed. Effective victim protection therefore requires not only legal safeguards, but also accessible information and reporting mechanisms, trust in institutions, and support structures that allow victims to come forward without fear of punishment or deportation.

5.3 Access to Rights and Justice

In addition to these barriers, the interviews also showed that legal protection does not automatically mean accessible protection. Even when victims manage to come forward, their access to rights often depends on whether their situation is formally recognised as human trafficking and whether authorities are able or willing to pursue the case.

According to La Strada International, the legal framework itself is not necessarily the main problem:

“You see that there is actually a very good framework which gives rights to victims. It is mainly the application that is weak.” (La Strada International)

The interviewee further noted that the legal and institutional framework addressing human trafficking has become comparatively well developed, owing to sustained efforts at the international, European and national levels to strengthen victims’ rights, protection and access to support.

However, access to these rights depends on whether trafficking can be legally established. As La Strada International further explained:

“Much depends on whether human trafficking can actually be proven because of the link with criminal law and legal procedures.” (La Strada International)

This means that, if the required legal elements cannot be proven with evidence, serious exploitation might still not result in formal recognition of a situation of human trafficking.

“You can have a very serious labour exploitation case where organisations like FairWork or other experts would say: ‘This is clearly human trafficking.’ But if you cannot legally prove

the coercion, the vulnerability, or another required element under the human trafficking law, then it may only be classified as a labour law violation, and these victims have no access to rights guaranteed for victims of human trafficking.” (La Strada International)

Victims are therefore highly dependent on decisions made by the Public Prosecution Service regarding whether and how a criminal investigation proceeds, as well as on the evidence available to support the case. As La Strada International explained:

“You are very dependent on the Public Prosecution Service and on whether the case is actually pursued.” (La Strada International)

This can create situations in which support organisations or other professionals recognise that a person has experienced serious exploitation, while access to certain forms of formal protection may still depend on whether the person can be legally recognised as a victim of trafficking. This becomes particularly complicated in cross-border cases, where Dutch authorities may have limited jurisdiction or insufficient evidence and investigative leads to pursue exploitation that occurred abroad. La Strada International illustrated this through the example of a victim who was exploited in their home country, but later arrived in the Netherlands where authorities were unable to investigate the case domestically.

“The police can say, for example, ‘Yes, I understand very well. You were exploited in Libya and then went to Italy, and then came to the Netherlands. We believe you and the seriousness of the exploitation, but we cannot conduct an investigation because we have no data or leads to evidence here in the Netherlands. [...] So then we close the case.’ So then that person, who is the victim, cannot acquire any rights in the Netherlands.” (La Strada International)

Anti-Slavery International also mentioned that evidence is one of the most decisive factors in victims being able to receive protection and rights. However, even where this evidence is available, it is not always used by governments.

“It comes back to the priorities from the government. It's just the political agenda [...] We're still obviously creating evidence and informing consultative processes. [...] We have case studies, quantitative and qualitative data from partner organisations that really show the impact of criminalising survivors. But it seems we are in a time where evidence is not really listened to, unfortunately.” (Anti-Slavery International)

Despite this reduced influence on government decision-making, the organisation emphasised that evidence remains essential in other forms of advocacy, particularly strategic litigation and engagement with international monitoring bodies.

“Before, our evidence was very helpful in pushing the government to change its course [...] When you look at litigation, the evidence is very helpful in that case. [...] We use the evidence to inform bodies such as GRETA, the UN, and Special Rapporteurs, and to apply pressure through international and domestic bodies.” (Anti-Slavery International)

Anti-Slavery International therefore highlighted the importance of translating evidence into clear and accessible public awareness campaigns, so that research findings can also be used to influence public opinion.

“I think working with media and campaigning, so having a very strong and simple campaign helps, because in that way you can also influence the public. So again, if you have the evidence that can back up what you're saying, and you can translate that in a very simple campaign to also influence the public, that's very positive.” (Anti-Slavery International)

The emphasis on evidence in both legal recognition and advocacy highlights a recurring tension between victimhood and legal recognition. While legislation provides rights to victims, access to those rights is often conditional upon meeting legal thresholds, obtaining sufficient evidence, or linking the case to a criminal investigation.

Beyond the access to legal protection, Anti-Slavery International explained that victims and survivors require long-term support to rebuild their lives. Recovery should not end once exploitation has stopped; it involves ongoing access to housing, employment, healthcare, and psychological support.

“What we are calling for is long-term support and leave to remain for 5 years with a route to settlement, , [...] without people having to repeatedly complete paperwork or face uncertainty about what will happen next. [...] Give leave to remain, the right to work, and make sure people have access to mental health support.” (Anti-Slavery International)

Overall, the interviews suggest that the primary challenge is not necessarily the absence of legal frameworks, but rather ensuring that victims and survivors can effectively access the rights that already exist.

6. MAIN CHALLENGES FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

The analysis of GHRD publications and interviews demonstrates that the principal challenges confronting effective advocacy stem not from a lack of legal frameworks or protection mechanisms, but rather from the gap between these formal commitments and victims’ ability to access these systems in practice. Rather than revealing isolated issues, the interviews showed that barriers to victim protection are closely linked together. Difficulties in victim identification, fear of authorities, dependency on traffickers, legal recognition, and access to protection reinforce one another and together limit the effectiveness of existing anti-trafficking responses. The GHRD analysis further revealed that advocacy can be less effective when victim and survivor voices are not directly included, when implementation in practice receives limited attention, and when recommendations remain too broad to clearly guide change. Consequently, the challenge for advocacy is not only to promote stronger legal frameworks, but also to address the practical barriers that prevent victims and survivors from accessing the rights and protections that already exist.

The following sections examine this overarching protection gap, beginning with Section 6.1, which introduces the protection gap as the main challenge identified in the research. Section 6.2 examines barriers to victim identification and access to protection, while Section 6.3 focuses on the tension between legal recognition and practical protection. Finally, Section 6.4 considers how advocacy can move beyond awareness-raising towards more strategic, victim-centred, and measurable approaches.

6.1 Protection Gap

The protection gap is the main overarching challenge identified within the interviews: rather than constituting a single barrier, it reflects the combined impact of several interconnected

factors that limit victims' access to protection in practice. While these issues are discussed separately in the following sections, they explain why existing legal rights and protection mechanisms often fail to translate into meaningful protection for victims.

The interviewees fundamentally challenge the assumption that stronger legal frameworks automatically result in better victim protection. GHRD publications also demonstrate the extensive legal obligations already in place, while the interviews add an important practical perspective by showing that the main barriers often emerge during implementation and access to protection. Formal rights only become meaningful when victims are able to access them: interviews show that these rights remain conditional upon a series of practical barriers, including victim identification, legal recognition, access to information, trust in authorities, and the availability of appropriate support mechanisms.

In practice, these barriers can create a cumulative effect in which one difficulty increases the impact of another. Victims who are not identified or victims who do not recognise the exploitative situation they are in cannot access protection; victims who fear deportation or authorities are unlikely to report exploitation; and victims whose exploitation cannot be legally proven are often excluded from the very protection system that is designed to support them.

Therefore, advocacy should not measure success by the adoption of new legal standards alone, but by whether existing rights are translated into practical protection. This shifts the focus of advocacy towards ensuring the implementation, accessibility, and accountability of legal frameworks, as well as protection and support systems.

6.2 Access to Protection: The Limitations of Self-Identification

Both the interviews and the analysed GHRD publications demonstrate that access to protection is often built upon assumptions that do not reflect the realities of trafficking. Existing protection systems frequently depend on victims recognising their own exploitation, seeking help, and engaging with authorities. However, the interviews consistently show that traffickers deliberately undermine victims' ability to take these steps through manipulation, dependency, intimidation, and isolation. At the same time, fear of deportation, distrust of authorities, language barriers, and a lack of culturally appropriate and accessible information further reduce victims' willingness and ability to come forward. Consequently, systems intended to protect victims may unintentionally create barriers to accessing protection by relying on actions that trafficking itself makes exceptionally difficult. Anti-trafficking responses should therefore move beyond the expectation that victims will identify themselves and instead prioritise proactive victim identification, accessible multilingual communication, and collaboration with trusted communities and organisations that can help bridge the gap between victims and protection systems.

6.3 Legal Recognition *versus* Practical Protection

A persistent tension between legal recognition and access to victim protection emerged across both the interviews and the analysis of GHRD publications. Although international, regional

and national legal frameworks provide extensive rights for recognised victims of trafficking, access to these rights frequently depends upon criminal investigations, evidentiary standards, and prosecutorial decisions. Consequently, protection remains conditional rather than rights-based. This creates situations in which practitioners recognise severe exploitation while victims remain excluded from specialised protection because legal thresholds cannot be met. Advocacy should therefore increasingly focus on ensuring that victim protection is not made fully dependent upon successful criminal prosecution of those believed to engage in human trafficking.

6.4 From Awareness to Strategic Advocacy

The GHRD analysis demonstrates that the organisation makes a valuable contribution to anti-trafficking advocacy through awareness-raising, structural analysis, legal framing, and policy recommendations. However, the analysis also identified relatively limited inclusion of survivor perspectives, broadly formulated recommendations, and limited evaluation of whether advocacy efforts result in tangible outcomes. The interviews identified additional elements that can strengthen advocacy in practice, including concrete recommendations, long-term monitoring, direct engagement with policymakers, credible evidence, and meaningful inclusion of lived experiences. The challenge lies not in a lack of advocacy, but rather in ensuring that advocacy moves beyond raising awareness towards measurable, victim-centred impact.

The following chapter builds on these findings to present practical recommendations for strengthening human trafficking advocacy, victim protection, and implementation.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented in this chapter are based on the findings from both the analysis of GHRD publications and the semi-structured interviews. Building on the advocacy challenges identified in Chapter 6, these recommendations translate the research findings into practical action points that can strengthen advocacy. Each recommendation focuses on a specific area for improvement and is accompanied by five practical implementation suggestions that identify the actions to be taken, the stakeholders responsible, and the rationale behind each recommendation. Together, these recommendations specifically aim to strengthen victim identification, improve access to protection, increase survivor participation, strengthen prevention efforts, and promote more strategic and evidence-based advocacy.

7.1 Strengthen Advocacy for Accessible Protection Systems

Advocacy should prioritise improving victims' access to protection by addressing the practical barriers that prevent them from seeking help and being identified.

This recommendation could be implemented through the following actions:

- i. **Promote proactive victim identification.** Governments should ensure that frontline professionals, including police officers, labour inspectors, healthcare providers, immigration authorities, and social workers, receive regular training to recognise indicators of trafficking rather than relying on victims or survivors to identify themselves.
- ii. **Advocate for safe reporting mechanisms.** Victims and survivors, including undocumented migrants, should be able to report exploitation without the immediate risk of immigration enforcement or deportation.
- iii. **Strengthen access to legal assistance.** Advocacy should promote early and accessible legal assistance for victims and survivors to help them understand their rights, access compensation, obtain residence protection where applicable, and safely navigate criminal and administrative procedures.
- iv. **Promote coordinated referral systems.** Governments and NGOs should strengthen cooperation between healthcare providers, legal aid organisations, labour inspectorates, shelters, and specialised anti-trafficking organisations to ensure victims and survivors receive timely support.
- v. **Promote sustainable long-term support.** Governments and support organisations should ensure that victims and survivors have continued access to housing, healthcare, legal assistance, education, employment opportunities, and psychological support. Recovery from trafficking rarely ends once immediate assistance or criminal proceedings have concluded, and protection systems should reflect this reality.

7.2 Strengthen Prevention through Targeted Awareness

Advocacy should move beyond general awareness-raising, by promoting targeted prevention strategies that improve understanding of trafficking among vulnerable groups, professionals, and the wider public.

This recommendation could be implemented through the following actions:

- i. **Develop evidence-based awareness campaigns.** Campaigns should explain how trafficking occurs in practice and that this is often a hidden crime, including psychological coercion, debt bondage, document confiscation, abuse of vulnerability, and labour exploitation, rather than focusing solely on extreme or stereotypical cases.
- ii. **Target populations at increased risk of exploitation.** Prevention initiatives should prioritise migrant workers, asylum seekers, seasonal workers, children, and other vulnerable groups by providing practical information on labour rights, recruitment risks, and available support services in culturally appropriate language.
- iii. **Promote public education on recognising trafficking.** Educational programmes and public awareness initiatives should equip members of the public to recognise early warning signs of trafficking and understand how to respond safely and appropriately when exploitation is suspected.
- iv. **Challenge misconceptions surrounding trafficking.** Advocacy campaigns should actively address common misconceptions, including the belief that trafficking always

involves physical violence or international movement, while reducing stigma that prevents victims from seeking help.

- v. **Evaluate the effectiveness of awareness initiatives.** Awareness campaigns should be regularly assessed to determine whether they improve public understanding, increase victim identification, and encourage earlier reporting of exploitation.

7.3 Increase Survivor Participation in Advocacy

Advocacy should systematically incorporate survivor perspectives to ensure that policies, recommendations, and awareness initiatives reflect the realities and needs of those with lived experience.

This recommendation could be implemented through the following actions:

- i. **Engage survivors throughout the advocacy process.** Survivors should be consulted, where appropriate and with informed consent, during the development of research, policy recommendations, and advocacy strategies rather than only contributing personal testimonies.
- ii. **Strengthen partnerships with survivor-led organisations.** Collaboration with survivor-led organisations can improve the relevance of advocacy efforts while ensuring that lived experience informs policy discussions.
- iii. **Promote ethical storytelling.** Survivor stories should only be used with informed consent, appropriate safeguarding measures, and full recognition of survivors' ownership over their experiences.
- iv. **Support meaningful participation.** Survivors who participate in advocacy should receive appropriate preparation, trauma-informed support, and, where possible, fair compensation that recognises their expertise and time.
- v. **Recognise survivors as experts.** Advocacy should present survivors not only as victims of exploitation but also as experts whose experiences contribute to stronger policies, improved victim protection, and more effective anti-trafficking responses.

7.4 Make Advocacy More Strategic and Measurable

Advocacy should move beyond raising awareness by producing concrete, evidence-based recommendations and continuously evaluating whether advocacy contributes to meaningful improvements in policy and practice.

This recommendation could be implemented through the following actions:

- i. **Develop action-oriented recommendations.** Advocacy publications should clearly identify what should change, who is responsible for implementation, and how progress can be measured, enabling policymakers to translate recommendations into concrete actions.
- ii. **Strengthen recommendations through multidisciplinary evidence.** Advocacy should combine legal analysis with practitioner expertise, research findings,

- monitoring data, and lived experience to ensure recommendations are both evidence-based and practically relevant
- iii. **Maintain engagement beyond publication.** Advocacy organisations should continue engaging with policymakers, international organisations, and civil society through meetings, consultations, public events, and follow-up discussions to encourage implementation of recommendations.
 - iv. **Monitor implementation and accountability.** Advocacy organisations should encourage regular follow-up on policy commitments and anti-trafficking strategies to assess whether recommendations have been implemented, whether victims and survivors experience improved access to protection, and whether governments remain accountable for their obligations.
 - v. **Prioritise practical and achievable recommendations.** Advocacy organisations should ensure that recommendations are realistic, clearly prioritised, and tailored to the responsibilities of specific stakeholders, making them more feasible to implement and monitor in practice.

8. CONCLUSION

This GHRD report examined the **effectiveness of advocacy in addressing human trafficking** through an analysis of its own publications and interviews conducted specifically for the purpose of this report, with practitioners from La Strada International, FairWork, SHOP Den Haag, Anti-Slavery International, and labour trafficking survivor Harold D'Souza. The findings demonstrate that while **international and national legal frameworks** provide an important foundation for combating trafficking in persons, **advocacy is most effective when it helps translate these legal commitments into meaningful protection for victims and survivors in practice.**

The analysis of GHRD publications demonstrated that the organisation plays an important role in **raising awareness, documenting structural patterns of trafficking, and promoting human rights-based policy recommendations.** Across the publications, recurring advocacy approaches included structural analysis, victim-centred perspectives, evidence-based research, awareness-raising, and practical recommendations aimed at strengthening legal and policy responses. At the same time, the analysis identified opportunities to strengthen advocacy by developing more **concrete and measurable recommendations, incorporating survivor perspectives more consistently,** and placing greater emphasis on **evaluating the implementation and impact of advocacy after publication.**

The interviews reinforced these findings by demonstrating that the greatest challenges are no longer the absence of legal frameworks, but rather the **barriers that prevent victims and survivors from accessing the protections that already exist.** Participants consistently emphasised that victims often remain **unidentified** because of coercion, manipulation, fear of authorities, language barriers, and dependency on traffickers, making **self-identification unrealistic.** They further highlighted that access to protection frequently depends on legal or administrative processes rather than victims' immediate needs, while **survivor perspectives**

remain insufficiently represented despite providing valuable insight into how policies function in practice.

Overall, the findings indicate that **strengthening anti-trafficking advocacy requires a greater focus on implementation, accessibility, and practical impact**. Effective advocacy should prioritise improving access to protection systems, strengthening prevention through targeted awareness, ensuring meaningful survivor participation, and producing evidence-based recommendations that are **practical, measurable, and responsive to the realities faced by victims and survivors**. By focusing on these areas, advocacy can contribute to **more effective implementation** of existing legal frameworks and ultimately strengthen protection for those who have been subjected to human trafficking.

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