



Rabat Process
Euro-African Dialogue on
Migration and Development

Outcome Document

Joint Thematic Meeting Rabat, Khartoum and Niamey Processes

Enhancing prevention, protection and prosecution frameworks in
combating migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings along
African and European Routes

4-5 November 2025
Lagos, Nigeria



GOVERNEMENT

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Under the co-chairmanship of Nigeria and France

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Implemented by ICMPD



In collaboration with the Niamey Declaration



United Nations
Office on Drugs and Crime

Overview

- Co-chaired by Nigeria and France, this Joint Thematic Meeting built on the long-standing collaboration between the Rabat Process, the Khartoum Process and the Niamey Declaration, reflecting a shared commitment to tackling common challenges, enhancing synergies and exchanging good practices between the regional dialogues.
- The meeting aligned with Domain 4 of the JVAP on the prevention of and fight against irregular migration, migrant smuggling, and trafficking in human beings, emphasising the need for coordinated action between European and African countries.
- With **166 representatives** from **41 Dialogue partner countries**, as well as regional and international organisations, the meeting brought together diverse perspectives for in-depth discussions on addressing challenges, responding to common needs, and unlocking shared opportunities across the two continents.

Objectives

- Deepen insights into smuggling–trafficking links, including criminal networks’ modus operandi, exploited vulnerabilities, and exploitation cycles, to strengthen prevention, protection, prosecution, and law enforcement responses across borders.
- Promote enhanced prevention and protection frameworks as essential complements to prosecution and law enforcement efforts.
- Identify and develop strategies to strengthen cross-border cooperation mechanisms to prevent smuggling and trafficking, including early warning systems, awareness campaigns, safe and legal migration pathways, and identification and response to vulnerabilities.
- Promote strengthened victim protection frameworks through harmonised standards and legal frameworks, coordinated referral mechanisms, and improved access to trauma-informed support services across borders.
- Identify capacity development needs for law enforcement and judiciary actors to ensure effective investigation, prosecution, and dismantlement of transnational criminal networks.

Expected Outcomes

- A shared understanding that protecting victims and individuals in situation of vulnerability is central to prevention, law enforcement and prosecution efforts, reducing victimisation risks, securing convictions, and dismantling criminal networks.
- Identification of cross-border opportunities and peer-to-peer capacity-building initiatives to address challenges and close gaps in preventing migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons, ensuring victim protection, and prosecuting perpetrators effectively.
- A joint set of recommendations to scale up prevention, strengthen victim protection, and enhance prosecution responses along African and European migratory routes.

High-level opening ceremony

The opening remarks were presented by senior representatives, including **H.E. Gautier Mignot**, Ambassador of the **European Union** to Nigeria and to the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**; **Fernando Jorge Alves d’Almada**, Head of the Social Affairs Division at **ECOWAS**; Ms. **Monica Zanette**, Head of Region, Pan-Africa at the **International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)**; Mr. **Cheikh Ousmane Touré**, Representative to Nigeria at the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**; **Ambassador Cyrille Baumgartner**, Ambassador of France in charge of Migration ; and, on behalf of the host country, **H.E. Babajide Sanwo-Olu**, Executive Governor of Lagos State; **H.E. Ambassador Yusuf Maitama Tuggar OON**, Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs; and **H.E. Prof. Nentawe Yiwaltida**, Honourable Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction of the **Federal Republic of Nigeria**.

H.E. Gautier Mignot, Ambassador of the European Union to Nigeria and ECOWAS, highlighted the importance of Africa–EU partnerships in countering smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings. He commanded UNODC and ICMPD for facilitating the coordination among the regional processes and underscored that these frameworks serve as crucial dialogue platforms along migration routes. He referred to the upcoming Pact on Asylum and Migration and the EU directive on a common return system, aimed at ensuring dignified returns and reducing avenues for traffickers and smugglers to operate. He also noted EU collaboration with the Nigerian National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and

Nigerian authorities on data and reintegration programmes and announced the Second Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling Conference, taking place in Brussels in December 2025.

Ms. Monica Zanette, Head of Region Pan-Africa at ICMPD, expressed gratitude to the co-chairs, Nigeria and France. She highlighted that the Lagos meeting marks a notable milestone in enhancing collaboration among the Rabat, Khartoum and Niamey Processes. She recalled that this gathering is especially well-timed, taking place during the 10th anniversary of the Khartoum Process and ahead of the Rabat Process's 20th anniversary, providing a unique opportunity to consolidate achievements and agree on shared strategic priorities. She recalled the urgency of addressing the crimes of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, recalling the latest UNODC available data showing over 75,000 trafficking victims identified annually worldwide, one-third of them in the African region. Ms. Zanette highlighted the growing overlap between migrant smuggling and human trafficking, the increasing sophistication of criminal networks, and the sharp rise in trafficking for forced labour, representing now 42% of detected victims globally. She reaffirmed ICMPD's commitment to strengthen prevention, protection, accountability, and survivor participation, including through innovative civil society initiatives implemented by the Migration and Mobility Dialogue (MMD) Grants Facility.

Mr. Cheikh Ousmane Touré, UNODC Representative to Nigeria, highlighted the increasing complexity of migration across the West and Central Mediterranean routes, stressing that trafficking and smuggling require integrated responses grounded in human rights, prevention, and justice. Dr. Touré noted progress achieved through the Niamey Declaration, including strengthened cooperation, national action plans, and improved data collection, while acknowledging remaining gaps in timely information and victim-centered protection. He reaffirmed UNODC's commitment to supporting States with technical expertise, evidence-based tools, and strengthened regional coordination.

Ambassador Cyrille Baumgartner, Ambassador of France in charge of Migration, reaffirmed France's strong commitment to strengthening interregional dialogue, stressing that no single country or framework can address migration challenges alone. He warned that migrant trafficking and smuggling undermine the rule of law, destabilise societies and constitute modern forms of slavery, disproportionately harming women and children. He urged placing prevention at the heart of collective action, by addressing the root causes of vulnerabilities and irregular migration, notably poverty, insecurity, and climate-induced displacement. He underlined that protection and prosecution are inseparable, calling for strengthened access to justice and legal aid for victims, enabling them to testify without fear and ensuring they are not penalised for crimes committed against them. He recalled that combating migrant smuggling and human trafficking is a national priority for France, led by specialised bodies such as the Office for Combatting Migrant Smuggling (OLTIM) and embedded in a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. The French Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Interior, together with agencies such as the French Agency for Development (AFD), Expertise France, and Civipol, provide complementary expertise and capacity-building support to partners. Finally, he emphasised that political momentum must be matched with specialised expertise and sustained international cooperation as well as strong partnerships with regional organisations, international actors and civil society, in order to translate shared commitments into concrete results.

Hon. Tijjani Aliyu Ahmed, speaking on behalf of the President of Nigeria, emphasised Nigeria's determination to combat trafficking and smuggling and support returnees through training and reintegration. He described Lagos as a "symbolic migration hub" and expressed readiness to translate dialogue into concrete action.

H.E. Ambassador Yusuf Maitama Tuggar OON, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria (represented by a senior official), reaffirmed Nigeria's Rabat Process chairmanship priorities for 2025–2026: youth empowerment, education, anti-trafficking, and ownership of migration governance. He called for cross-border collaboration and information sharing, anchored in prevention, protection, and prosecution.

H.E. Babajide Sanwo-Olu, Executive Governor of Lagos State (represented by a senior official), underscored the human cost of trafficking and smuggling, calling them "threats that destabilise families and societies." He advocated for an action-oriented triple approach, Prevention, Prosecution, and Promotion of Hope, linking legal migration and inclusion. He called for concrete plans and stronger engagement of local actors.

The opening concluded with a shared reaffirmation of the 4Ps framework (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership) and the commitment to collective responsibility across African and European partners.

Keynotes addresses - Insights on Prevention and Protection as Strategic Pillars to effective law enforcement and prosecution responses

Moderated by **Ms. Sarah Doyel**, Senior Data and Research Project Manager at the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), the keynote session provided a global and evidence-based perspective on the evolving nexus between migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. Drawing on recent MMC research, Ms. Doyel highlighted alarming trends:

- Over **50 percent of smugglers** reported changing routes in the last six months, reflecting the adaptability and responsiveness of criminal networks to law enforcement efforts.
- **84 percent of refugees and migrants** surveyed experienced at least one human-rights abuse on the journey toward Europe.
- The number of **child victims of trafficking** rose globally by 31% between 2019 and 2022, with children representing the majority of confirmed victims in West Africa.

Ms. Siobhán Mullally, UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, stressed the urgent need for international cooperation to prevent trafficking and exploitation at every stage of the migration journey. She stressed that protecting the rights of asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, and migrants is essential for preventing trafficking in persons and safeguarding the human rights of trafficked persons and those at risk. She warned that restricted migration channels, externalisation practices, and accelerated return procedures can exacerbate trafficking risks and undermine oversight. She further noted that limiting access to asylum and other forms of international protection combined with vulnerabilities to exploitation — linked to discrimination, weak child protection systems, limited access to social protection, poverty, inequality, gender-based violence, and failures in the rule of law — can heighten the risk of trafficking by forcing people into precarious and unsafe journeys. She called for safe and regular migration pathways, stronger consular and embassy protections, effective implementation of the non-punishment principle for victims, and long-term residence solutions. She recalled that the protection of the human rights of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and all displaced persons must remain at the heart of the Rabat, Khartoum, and Niamey dialogues. She further called for gender- and child-responsive, rights-based, and trauma-informed frameworks that place victims' protection and empowerment at the heart of policy and operational responses. She highlighted the importance of the upcoming Global Refugee Forum Progress Review (15-17 December 2025), which will be critical to assessing progress on the implementation of the multistakeholder pledge to prevent trafficking in persons among refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons.

Prof. Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, Professor of Public Law at the University of Nigeria, emphasised the importance of addressing structural vulnerabilities, including poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and displacement, that create the conditions for exploitation. She recalled that human rights violations are both a cause and consequence of human trafficking. She stressed the importance of the universal respect of human rights for all to address the root causes of irregular migration and vulnerability to smuggling and trafficking. She recommended an eleven-pillar comprehensive approach based on 5Ps (protection, prosecution, punishment, prevention, promoting international cooperation and partnership), 3Rs (redress, recovery, and reintegration), and 3Cs (capacity, cooperation, and coordination), guided by international human rights law and standards. She urged governments and regional dialogues to invest in education, awareness, and survivor leadership to build resilience within at-risk communities. She further recalled that although trafficking affects women, men, boys, and girls, there is broad consensus that trafficking disproportionately impacts women and girls and constitutes a form of gender-based violence (GBV). She also highlighted the growing influence of technology in both enabling and countering trafficking and smuggling, calling for innovative responses that leverage digital tools for early warning, awareness raising, and victim identification, while combating online exploitation.

The keynote speakers and moderator converged on three shared priorities:

1. Whole-of-route cooperation to ensure protection, information, and assistance along migration corridors.
2. Integrated prevention and prosecution strategies linking community awareness, victim support, and law-enforcement cooperation.
3. Expansion of safe and regular migration pathways, including labour mobility opportunities, consistent with the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) objectives.

The keynote addresses concluded with a call to translate evidence into action by bridging policy frameworks with operational realities, and enhanced international cooperation, including stronger global and regional mechanisms and bilateral migration agreements, to ensure coherent, rights-based responses across borders.

Following the keynote interventions, participants heard two complementary perspectives from the Nigerian Immigration Service and the European Union, offering practical insights into how national and regional institutions are translating the 4Ps framework—Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership—into concrete action.

Perspective from the Nigerian Immigration Service, Nigeria

Comptroller General Kemi Nanna Nandap from the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), outlined Nigeria’s comprehensive approach to combating migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons, structured around the “4 Ps” framework – Protection, Prosecution, Prevention, and Partnership. She described Partnership as the linchpin connecting institutional action with community engagement, enabling local actors to become “active defenders of their borders rather than passive observers.” Her remarks detailed how the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) applies a risk-based, technology-driven, and people-centred strategy, balancing human rights safeguards with firm law enforcement. She emphasised that prevention begins with risk reduction, identifying vulnerabilities and criminal opportunities before they manifest and that regular, well-managed migration flows remains the most sustainable preventive measure.

The following operational advancements and system were highlighted as central to the NIS strategy: 1) Predictive passenger profiling at border points to identify criminal patterns such as individuals repeatedly travelling with vulnerable women and girls. She recalled that this system enhances early victim detection and ensures that potential victims are treated as persons in need of protection. 2) Screening and reception centres rehabilitated to facilitate immediate access to shelter and psychosocial services, with inter-agency coordination through NAPTIP and other partners, and safe return when applicable. 3) The Automated Border Security System (e-Gate) and mobile passport scanners which have reduced document fraud and human error. 4) The Border Management Information System (BMIS), operational in over 35 land crossings and developed with IOM, captures travellers’ data and cross-checks it against criminal databases, enabling real-time alerts and rapid response. 5) The new e-Border Surveillance System, equipped with CCTV and motion-detection cameras linked to a central command centre, has improved interception and rescue rates. She recalled that with these mechanisms, in 2025, over 600 suspected traffickers and smugglers were intercepted along the Nigeria–Niger corridor.

On regular migration facilitation, Ms. Nandap noted the introduction of a fully automated passport processing system and the upcoming ECOWAS Regional Identity Card, expected to enhance safe intra-regional mobility. She underscored that community engagement is a pillar of NIS strategy: border communities are now integrated as partners, contributing intelligence and monitoring cross-border movement. Restoration of identity and dignity is embedded in reintegration efforts through the issuance of Emergency Travel Certificates and the forthcoming Single Travel Emergency Passport (STEP) system.

She also announced two strategic initiatives: the creation of a Cybersecurity Unit within NIS and the drafting of a National Action Plan on Migrant Smuggling. Ms. Nandap concluded by reaffirming that “tangible progress toward secure and victim-centred migration management is feasible when political will meets partnership.” She stressed that the 4Ps approach must remain balanced and integrated, where prevention and protection are acts of dignity and responsibility, and prosecution signals that impunity will not be tolerated.

Perspectives of the European Union on addressing trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling

Mr. Matthijs Korzilius from the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) European Commission provided an overview of EU trends and policy frameworks on addressing trafficking and smuggling. Drawing on FRONTEX, Eurostat and IOM data, Mr. Korzilius noted that while irregular migration to Europe slightly declined in 2023, 1,299 people have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean so far this year. He added that an estimated 90% of those arriving irregularly have relied on smugglers at some point in their journey. He highlighted that 63% of trafficked victims identified in 2023 were non-EU nationals, mainly from Nigeria, Morocco and Côte d’Ivoire, reflecting a shift in origin trends. He emphasized that beyond the well-established link between migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, these crimes are also closely connected to broader criminal activities such as corruption, firearms trafficking, and drug trafficking.

Mr. Korzilius outlined the work of the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling, calling for coordinated global action to prevent smuggling, enhance data collection, strengthen judicial cooperation, pursue financial investigations, and uphold human rights. He outlined the three pillars of the Global Alliance: preventing smuggling, responding to smuggling, and providing alternatives to irregular migration. On prevention, he emphasised the need to reaffirm commitments to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants. He underscored the importance of reinforcing national legal frameworks and capacities, strengthening border management, and conducting effective information and awareness campaigns. In this context, he recalled that the European Commission has proposed upgrading EU legislation to counter the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit, and stay, and to reinforce EUROPOL’s role in combating smuggling and trafficking. On the response component, he emphasised ongoing efforts to improve data and situational awareness, promote joint law enforcement operations, enhance judicial cooperation, advance financial investigations and asset recovery, as well as to ensure protection and assistance for migrants, particularly those in vulnerable situations. Finally, he stressed that providing alternatives to irregular migration by promoting legal pathways and

labour mobility, addressing root causes of irregular migration, and supporting alternative livelihoods in communities dependent on smuggling and trafficking are essential. He added that effective return, readmission, and sustainable reintegration of migrants without the right to stay must equally be ensured. He announced the Second International Conference of the Global Alliance, scheduled on 10 December 2025 in Brussels, during which the Commission will present for endorsement a Joint Declaration to strengthen international cooperation in tackling migrant smuggling globally through a whole-of-route approach and in the spirit of shared responsibility.

Mr. Korzilius finally made referenced the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy, which focuses on prevention, digital awareness campaigns, and partnership with third countries and international organisations. He highlighted operational coordination through EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats), the Focus Group of Prosecutors specialised on combatting trafficking in human beings co-chaired by EUROJUST and the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, political and high-level policy dialogues with non-EU countries and international organisations, as well as joint initiatives between the EU and third countries including through EU Home affairs funded projects.

Mr. Samuel Simon Pulido from the Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) of the European Commission elaborated on the EU's operational support and investments in countering trafficking and smuggling, with a budget of EUR 150 million invested under the EU Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) in West Africa, including EUR 43 million for 2025–2026 to strengthen migration management, reinforce border security, and enhance the fight against smuggling and trafficking. Mr. Pulido reaffirmed that all EU's engagement is grounded in a human rights-based approach (HRBA), ensuring that gender equality and the protection of vulnerable groups are integral to all programmes. He identified Common Operational Partnerships (COPs) as the cornerstone of EU–Africa cooperation, notably enabling joint law enforcement initiatives between European and African partners.

COP II – Senegal, with an EU contribution of EUR 34.75 million, was cited as a key project structured around five main axes of intervention: 1) Countering Trafficking, 2) Securing Land Borders, 3) Sea Rescue and Maritime Security, 4) Victim Protection and public awareness on the risks of illegal migration and 5) the promotion legal migration and employment opportunities. He further detailed regional programmes such as 'NETCOP (Network of Common Operational Partnerships)'—which links specialised investigative units across West and Central Africa as well the 'Support to Free Movement of Persons and Migration in West Africa – Phase II', implemented in partnership with ECOWAS. In the Horn of Africa, initiatives such as the Better Migration Management (BMM) programme and the Regional Operational Centre in support of the Khartoum Process (ROCK) continue to strengthen regional cooperation and institutional capacities. He noted that the EU is also investing in maritime security and rescue capacities, including projects such as the "Surveillance, Recherche et Sauvetage" initiative in Mauritania to strengthen coastal surveillance and sea border operations while ensuring comprehensive human rights protection mechanisms. He noted that in Nigeria, the EU works with national institutions such as NAPTIP, NIS, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU), and the Police to reinforce investigations, prosecutions, and responses to trafficking and smuggling. In Côte d'Ivoire, the EU also supports anti-trafficking systems, victim protection, and the implementation of ECOWAS free movement initiatives to strengthen mobility, border management, and regional cooperation.

At the global level, Mr. Pulido emphasised that the EU is launching the "Global Action Against the Financial and Digital Dimensions of Smuggling", implemented by UNODC across Senegal, Mauritania, Nigeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Ethiopia, and the "Promoting Action and Cooperation Against Trafficking and Smuggling Initiative" - implemented by UNODC to break down silos between countries of origin, transit, and destination by implementing a "whole-of-route" approach.

Mr. Pulido concluded by reaffirming that EU cooperation is and will continue to be guided by solidarity, responsibility, and strong respect for human rights and dignity, with an emphasis on joint ownership and alignment with regional mechanisms such as the JVAP, Niamey Declaration, and ECOWAS Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons.

Joint Valletta Action Plan (JVAP)

Mr. Resat Ozkan, from the [JVAP Follow-up](#) Team at ICMPD, part of the MMD Programme implemented by ICMPD and funded by the European Union, provided with an overview of implementation data under Domain 4 of the Joint Valletta Action Plan covering the “Prevention of and fight against irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.” Resat Ozkan explained that data collection was initiated following the 2015 Valletta Summit on Migration and has been carried out regularly since then. These efforts have resulted in a database featuring 3,442 initiatives, representing EUR 25B in investments. Of these figures, 667 initiatives and EUR 3,7B in funding pertain to Domain 4, which were primarily invested in three pillars: Humanitarian Aid, Legal Protection, and Institutional Reform. Activities thereunder include:

- Legal assistance, psychosocial support, and access to basic services;
- Reintegration programs emphasizing economic inclusion and community-based support and;
- Border management and partnerships, especially concerning policies.

The database shows a wide geographic coverage of implementation, particularly across the Sahel, West Africa, and North Africa and a high volume of policies recorded in Europe. Examples of implementation include inter alia: a National Action Plan of Action in Ghana, supported by UNICEF, to address human trafficking; a child protection mechanism in schools and communities in Egypt; a participatory mapping exercise in Mali to identify types and prevalence of trafficking and the rehabilitation of border posts in Niger.

Virtually all funding derives from the European Union and EU Member States as well as Norway and the United Kingdom, with EU Funding Mechanisms representing EUR 1,4B of total funding – the highest share of the total of investments.

Significant efforts towards policy developments were also highlighted during the presentation, such as the Common Benelux Work Programme 2017-2020, the Arab Strategy for the Protection of Children in Asylum Context in the Arab Region, or the 5th National Action Plan on Combating Human Trafficking 2018-2020 of Austria.

Resat Ozkan closed his presentation by emphasising the importance of the ongoing data collection cycle, encouraging stakeholders to actively contribute. Broad participation, he stressed, will ensure a richer and more representative dataset—strengthening the foundation for truly evidence-informed policymaking.

MMD Grant Facility

Dr. Marcello Giordani, Coordinator of the Grant Facility of the Migration and Mobility Dialogue (MMD) at ICMPD, presented the facility’s key contribution to the MMD Support Programme, namely to contribute to the operationalisation of engagements and commitments made in the dialogues, and to foster knowledge-sharing by generating insights and recommendations that inform dialogues’ discussions and priority-setting. He highlighted that the MMD Grant Facility currently supports eight grants implemented by 29 civil society organisations (CSOs) across 25 African countries on migration and development. He also introduced the [newly published factsheet](#) showcasing the Facility’s contribution to the objectives of the Joint Thematic Meeting.

Two projects supported under the Facility were presented: SAFE-MIT and OUESTAF, both targeting Domain 4 of the JVAP addressing the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

Ms. Manon Cagnard (Seefar Foundation) and **Mr. Ikape James Ikape** (McCAHT) presented the SAFE-MIT project, implemented in Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Morocco, Tunisia, The Gambia, Ethiopia and Uganda by a consortium of five CSOs. The initiative combines education and digital outreach, focusing on teacher training and evidence-based social media campaigns to build durable knowledge rather than short-term awareness. To date, the project has reached 65,000 students and trained 1,200 teachers, achieving more than 50 million online impressions through targeted campaigns.

Mr. Lucas Richer (We World Onlus) presented the OUESTAF project, implemented in partnership with WILDAF-AO in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and Togo. The regional initiative strengthens governance and coordination mechanisms for migration management in West Africa and the Sahel through policy research, legislative advocacy with national parliaments and the African Union, and capacity-building. Early findings emphasised the need for enhanced training of local actors, stronger cross-border cooperation, and the establishment of an African mechanism for data sharing on migrants’ rights.

The session concluded by underscoring a key takeaway: the MMD Grant Facility helps strengthen CSO engagement in migration and mobility dialogues and African-led implementation, promoting South-North and South-South cooperation through shared implementation and learning. Through its supported projects, the Facility not only contributes to the implementation of initiatives stemming from dialogue commitments, thereby turning commitments into concrete actions, but also enables CSOs to actively shape dialogue conversations and agendas as key participants in these spaces.

Session 1: Tailored Prevention Efforts Addressing the Intersection of Trafficking and Smuggling

In the first panel, participants examined the root causes, risk factors, and structural vulnerabilities that enable migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings along the Rabat, Khartoum and Niamey migration routes. It analysed perpetrators, their modus operandi, the vulnerabilities they exploit, as well as the interconnected criminal environment they operate in – as a basis for strengthening evidence-based inter-regional cooperation.

*This session, moderated by **Dr. Feyi Ogunade**, Regional Organised Crime Observatory Coordinator at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), examined how trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants intersect operationally along the Rabat, Khartoum and Niamey routes, and how prevention strategies can respond to these overlapping crimes exploiting similar vulnerabilities.*

INTERPOL's **Dr. Rosemary Nalubega** opened the discussions by mapping how trafficking and smuggling networks diversify their activities and operate in broader criminal environments. She presented data from the INTERPOL Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Unit showing that the smuggling and trafficking networks frequently engage in document fraud, narcotics and labour exploitation operations. Through Operation Liberterra II (116 countries, over 3,000 victims identified), INTERPOL demonstrated the value of real-time information exchange and joint investigations. Dr. Rosemary Nalubega stressed that data sharing, use of I-24/7 law enforcement networks and cross-border trust-building remain cornerstones of effective prevention.

ICMPD's **Rhoda Dia-Johnson** presented the School Anti-Trafficking Education and Advocacy Project (STEAP) implemented by ICMPD and NAPTIP with Dutch funding. The project targets the school ecosystem to build awareness among teachers, parents and students across Nigeria (2024–2027). She showcased curriculum-based modules on safe migration choices and peer mentorship programmes that create protective environments for children. Preliminary results indicate increased awareness among adolescents and teachers and their wider communities on the risks of irregular migration and deceptive recruitment tactics.

Ms. Oumou Niaré, Chair of Mali's CNCLTPPA (National Committee for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and Related Practices — *Comité National de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes et les Pratiques Assimilées*), underscored that context-specific responses are essential where conflict and poverty increase situations of vulnerability. Her committee's mapping initiative identified regional hotspots of child trafficking linked to gold-mining and agricultural sectors. She called for integrating community leaders and traditional authorities into prevention efforts and creating alternative livelihood options for rural youth.

UNODC's **Abimbola Adewumi** presented the PROMIS initiative, implemented with OHCHR and funded by the Netherlands, highlighting its dual mandate of strengthening criminal justice responses to trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling while promoting and protecting human rights. The presentation emphasised PROMIS's evidence-based approach, using data and research to guide priorities across ten West and Central African countries. Key achievements included legal reforms, capacity-building for over 3,000 practitioners, support to civil society organisations, and enhanced regional cooperation through the Niamey Declaration and the Liaison Magistrate Initiative. The presentation underscored the importance of addressing vulnerabilities, strengthening prevention, and ensuring that protection and justice remain central to regional efforts.

Key Takeaways

- **Trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling remain intertwined and evolving challenges along African and European migratory routes.** Although distinct in legal terms, these crimes frequently converge in practice, feeding on vulnerabilities, exploiting similar global dynamics, and operating within overlapping criminal ecosystems. Perpetrators adapt continuously, using diverse victimization dynamics, shifting modus operandi and routes. **Systematic mapping of these patterns—through robust data collection and strengthened operational information-sharing among Rabat, Khartoum, and Niamey Process partner countries—is essential to inform evidence-based prevention measures and disrupt criminal networks.**
- **Timely cross-border information exchange and coordinated investigations are fundamental** to increasing the capacity to identify victims, detect perpetrators, trace financial flows, and disrupt trafficking and smuggling supply chains.
- **Local realities shape risks but also provide solutions.** Understanding how exploitation occurs in specific communities, labour sectors, or migration corridors enables prevention strategies to be context-sensitive, moving away from ‘one-size fits all’ approaches towards targeted interventions.
- **Prevention shall begin early and be rooted in communities.** Evidence from ICMPD’s STEAP project illustrates that engaging community leaders, schools, educators, parents, and youth can enhance awareness on deceptive recruitment tactics and reduces incentives to engage in irregular migration pathways.
- **Respect for human rights and proactive efforts to address situations of vulnerability should be a cornerstone of prevention strategies,** reducing exposure to coercion and exploitation.
- **Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches** are indispensable to ensuring broad reach, institutional coherence, and sustainable impact.
- **Regional cooperation under INTERPOL networks and UNODC frameworks** can further leverages for early warning mechanisms, operational intelligence sharing, and joint actions against transnational networks.

Session 2: Protection in practice: mechanisms and good practices for identifying and supporting victims of trafficking and smuggling on the move

*Moderated by **Kehinde Akomolafe**, Director of Training and Research, NAPTIP, the second panel explored mechanisms, tools, strategies, to identify, refer, and support victims of trafficking and smuggling along migration routes and in cross-border contexts. The discussions featured global, regional, national, and local perspectives to ensure a comprehensive and multi-layered approach to protection.*

Mr. Olatunde Olayemi presented the ECOWAS regional frameworks supporting counter-trafficking efforts, including the Demand-Driven Facility (DDF) for technical assistance of national institutions as well as mechanisms for the annual peer review of National Action Plans. He underscored the importance of the Regional Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking, which ensures continuity of care and assistance across member states’ borders. A key policy highlighted was the presumption of minority, whereby authorities treat any person of indeterminate age as a child until proven otherwise, an essential safeguard against wrongful detention or deportation. He reported ongoing technical and financial support to member states and announced the approval of Phase II of ECOWAS Regional Trafficking in Human Beings programme, following a successful first phase that supported over 1,000 victims.

UNHCR’s **Ms. Bernadette Muteshi** emphasised the protection challenges in mixed-migration contexts, calling for the systematic integration of human rights-based and protection-sensitive border management into national frameworks. She shared concrete success stories from Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan, where coordinated release and handover arrangements between border and protection authorities enabled timely victim identification, assistance and safe referral. She described community-based reintegration packages and strengthened witness-protection measures as key measures to empower survivors and help them participating in prosecution proceedings. However, she noted continuing constraints caused by limited resources, high staff turnover, and restricted access to border zones due to insecurity, all of which reduce the consistency of protection service delivery.

Ms. Matiada Ngalikpima outlined Expertise France’s portfolio of anti-trafficking and migration-management programmes, including projects “Addressing Mixed Migration Flows in Eastern Africa (AMMi)”, “Better Migration Movement in the Horn of Africa (BMM)”, “Project to Support the Fight against Human Trafficking in the Gulf of Guinea (ALTP)” and “PROTECT in

the Gulf of Guinea, Sustainable Reintegration of Migrants in Ivory Coast (MIGRET)”, and other technical cooperation projects in Tunisia and Ghana. Ms. Matiada Ngalikpima recalled the cross-sectorial approach used by Expertise France focused on four areas of intervention, namely: 1) institutional strengthening and preventive actions; 2) law enforcement; 3) protection and assistance to victims; and 4) cross-border and regional cooperation. She emphasised that this approach aims at fostering multi-stakeholder engagement, strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring sustainable knowledge and skills ownership by national authorities, while integrating coherent cross-border strategies that reflect trafficking routes. Ms. Ngalikpima emphasised the integration of a gender-responsive lens in all phases of Expertise France’s projects, targeting 60% female beneficiaries, and highlighted innovative use of digital and AI-based tools, such as chatbots for victim information and support. She stressed that sustainability depends on building on existing national systems and avoiding the creation of parallel mechanisms.

Ms. Malaika Oringo, CEO of Footprints to Freedom, and a survivor herself with extensive experience working alongside victims, stressed the critical importance of a survivor-centred approach to policies and programmes grounded in three mutually reinforcing pillars: 1) empowerment, 2) reintegration, and 3) resilience. This approach, she noted, can only be achieved through a series of interconnected commitments: 1) engaging and recognising survivors as experts, ensuring that their insights inform policy, programme design, and accountability mechanisms; 2) embedding trauma-informed and healing-centred care that acknowledges the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of recovery; 3) providing holistic support for independence, including access to housing, education, healthcare, and work opportunities; 4) enabling survivors to access justice and pursue redress without intimidation or re-traumatisation; 5) fostering cross-sectoral protection partnerships that connect state institutions, civil society, community leaders, and service providers to ensure continuity and quality of care; and 6) moving beyond short-term assistance toward long-term systems that uphold autonomy and survivor agency. She cautioned that bilateral or regional agreements which prioritise border control over protection risk re-traumatising victims and discouraging cooperation with authorities. She finally recommended to shift from emergency responses to long-term structural transformation, through: 1) the modernisation of referral mechanisms so survivors are not left navigating fragmented structures; 2) redefining victim identification indicators to reflect the evolving nature of trafficking and ensure that protection frameworks recognise exploitation beyond narrow or outdated stereotypes; 3) strengthening cross-regional collaboration so institutions can follow survivor trajectories across borders; 4) investing in grassroots and survivor-led organisations; and 5) adopting culturally aware, afro-centric recovery approaches.

Key Takeaways

- **Modernising referral mechanisms and redefining victim identification indicators** are essential to ensure that survivors are **not left navigating fragmented systems and that protection frameworks capture the evolving realities of exploitation**, including increased trafficking for forced labour and forced criminality.
- **Protection shall follow people, rather than at borders: Regional Referral Mechanisms** illustrate that **continuity of care** - through victim identification, referral, and assistance mechanisms **that operate along real migration routes rather than stopping at national borders** - are essential to ensure the **effective protection of victims and those at risk** - ultimately participating to regional and cross-regional law enforcement and prosecution efforts.
- **Border management shall be protection-sensitive, human-rights-based and gender responsive:** Coordinated handover procedures and interfaces between security and protection actors enable timely identification, assistance, and safe referral of victims, including in volatile environments.
- **Timely access to safe shelter, healthcare, psychosocial support, legal assistance, and residence rights**, complemented by the **consistent application of the non-punishment principle**, are the **first steps towards effective protection efforts**.
- **A survivor-centred paradigm—grounded in empowerment, reintegration, and resilience**—is essential to shape effective prevention and protection policies, accountability frameworks, care delivery, and pathways toward long-term reintegration.
- **Regional, cross-regional, and bilateral protection initiatives** are particularly impactful when they **reinforce existing systems, centralize fragmented systems, strengthen institutional capacity**, and ensure that **knowledge and skills** remain **embedded within national authorities**.

Session 3: Coordinated prosecution strategies for migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons

Led by UNODC and moderated by Mr. Panagiotis Papadimitriou (UNODC, Vienna), the panel discussion focused on coordinated prosecution strategies grounded in strong victim-protection measures, harmonised legal and evidentiary frameworks, and proactive cross-border cooperation to ensure effective convictions across the Rabat, Khartoum, and Niamey Processes.

Building on recurring themes from earlier discussions, and framing judicial cooperation as central to countering trafficking in human beings and migrants' smuggling, the session discussed how to ensure accountability and end impunity for key organisers and facilitators of these crimes; enhance the quality and coordination of investigations and prosecutions across borders; bridge evidentiary and procedural gaps among legal systems; and uphold the rights and protection of victims throughout judicial proceedings. The session also highlighted UNODC's support to align national laws in light of the United Nations against Organized Transnational Crimes (UNOTC) and its Protocols (The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children and The Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air) as well as to operationalise international cooperation tools.

Mr. Cheikh Ousmane Touré, UNODC Representative in Nigeria, presented 'Operation Open Roads' as a police-to-police, intelligence-led initiative led by UNODC with the operational support of INTERPOL to disrupt networks along illicit trafficking corridors. The three-phase methodology - pre-operational mapping and training, simultaneous deployments at priority border posts, and post-operational debriefs - has yielded concrete results, including victim rescues and network disruptions, and could be replicated in similar initiatives targeting specifically human trafficking and migrant smuggling networks. Lessons learned point to: the need for standard operating procedures (SOPs) across agencies; joint patrols; integration of Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs); and fostering inter-agency collaboration through trust-building and clearly defined roles, ensuring that operational actions lead to successful prosecutions and sustainable disruption of criminal networks.

Ms. Hajara Haruna Yusuf, from Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Justice, described the Liaison Magistrate Initiative embedded within Italian prosecution offices (Palermo, Catania and Rome within the Italian Anti-Mafia Directorate) as a catalyst for speedy mutual legal assistance, extradition, and real-time case follow-up. She stressed that the deployment of a liaison magistrate opened direct communication channels that reduced bureaucracy and enabled swift operational steps, including suspect identification, arrest, and extradition proceedings. She noted persistent challenges, underscoring divergences in evidentiary standards (such as the need for original audio statements rather than police summaries) and pointing out trust deficits that can delay or downgrade charges. Finally, she underlined that sustained commitment at the central level in Nigeria facilitated alignment among key agencies (NAPTIP, Economic and Financial Crime Commission, Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit, Police) and helped foster constructive cooperation.

Mr. Abrham Ayalew, from Ethiopia's Ministry of Justice, highlighted Ethiopia's comprehensive framework to combat trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants. He outlined efforts to strengthen cross-border cooperation, including through memoranda of understanding, mutual legal assistance agreements, and joint investigation teams with Djibouti and Kenya, while noting persistent challenges in operationalising these frameworks. He emphasised the need for specialised prosecutorial training, proactive and financial investigations, and stronger inter-agency coordination. He also underscored measures linking protection and prosecution, including a reinforced National Referral Mechanism, a new free legal aid strategy, and Migrant Resource Centres jointly operated with International Organization on Migration (IOM). Finally, he highlighted new legislation on asset recovery and a victims' fund financed by confiscated assets, reaffirming Ethiopia's commitment to financial investigations and victim-centered justice.

Mr. Ettien Tiémélé, Judge, at Abidjan Court of Appeal - Ivory Coast, underscored that organised crime in trafficking in human beings and migrants smuggling is inherently transnational, requiring systematic judicial cooperation across borders. He called for a shift from reactive to proactive approach to investigations, including early use of joint investigations and joint investigation teams (JITs), to prevent offences rather than merely responding to them. He also stressed the need to initiate financial and asset investigations from the outset to trace, freeze, and confiscate criminal proceeds. Pointing to operational tools, he emphasised the need for systematic use of police information-sharing platforms (e.g., INTERPOL databases), leverage the regional West Africa Police Information System (WAPIS) implemented by INTERPOL with funding from the European Union to strengthen information exchange and coordination among west Africans law enforcement agencies, as well as ensuring effective communication channels and interfaces between courts, police and gendarmerie for faster and better-documented cooperation. He highlighted ongoing digitalisation of mutual legal assistance to accelerate casework and practitioner training on cooperation mechanisms. He also flagged legal loopholes or evidentiary gaps (e.g., in the definition of "material or financial benefit" in counter-migrant smuggling legislations) and proposed exploring transnational jurisdiction to prosecute trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling cases involving nationals regardless of the place

of commission of the crimes (*locus delicti*), coupled with continued legal harmonisation and more proactive, intelligence-led investigations.

Mr. Hervé Jamet, Technical Director at the Regional Operational Centre in support of the Khartoum Process (ROCK)/AU-Horn of Africa Initiative/EAPCCO, outlined the Centre’s pragmatic, transnational and victim-centered model, built on partner-country ownership despite shocks (conflict, COVID-19, administrative hurdles). He highlighted the ownership and engagement of 12 partner countries (Burundi, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Yemen), and the integration of new members such as Malawi to strengthen regional cooperation. He described ROCK’s structure, composed of police and justice experts working alongside INTERPOL and CIVIPOL, and its collaboration with EU-funded programmes such as the Better Migration Management (BMM) to deliver joint trainings, operations, and standard operating procedures (SOPs). He emphasised the Centre’s efforts to build trust and operational coordination through the deployment of liaison officers, the creation of joint investigation teams, and partnerships with NGOs and IOM to ensure immediate assistance for victims during operations. Mr. Jamet emphasised the work of ROCK through concrete results, notably the arrest of 53 traffickers, the dismantling of 49 travel networks, and the identification of 15,000 victims through a multi-country operation spanning across Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. He stressed parallel efforts to harmonise legal frameworks, promote real-time alerts on routes and *modus operandi*, and institutionalise police-prosecutor cooperation to convert arrests into convictions while safeguarding victims.

Key Takeaways

- **Judicial cooperation is essential to effectively address trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling.** Shifting from reactive casework to **proactive and mastermind-focused investigations, leveraging UNTOC tools** - Mutual Legal Assistance, extradition, and enhancing **coordinated cross-border action** can be particularly relevant to **secure accountability and deter reoffending**.
- **Operational cooperation models** like UNODC’s *Open Roads* and the *Nigeria–Italy Liaison Magistrate Initiative* show how real-time intelligence and structured communication channels can fast-track formal cooperation, deliver concrete case outcomes, and build trust between jurisdictions. **These successes could be considered for adaptation and replication in other contexts.**
- Key challenges - including remaining trust-building efforts across agencies, fragmented legal frameworks, and constrained victim-protection resources - continue to hinder effective operational outcomes and required tailored sustained responses. **Priority areas for policy development and operational cooperation** shall include **institutionalising standards operational procedures, harmonising legal frameworks and evidentiary standards, expanding joint investigation teams, and ensuring robust knowledge-management repositories** among agencies and organisations. The **development of sustained capacity-building on cyber and financial crime**, and the systematic participation of **Financial Investigative Units (FIUs) to drive effective “follow-the-money” strategies** in investigation are also key to **effectively trace illicit proceeds and prosecute perpetrators**.

Session 4: Strengthening International Cooperation through National Good Practices

*Led by **Ms. Anne Fumey**, Representative of CIVIPOL to the European Union, the discussions focused on identifying replicable effective policies, practices, models and partnerships. Through the presentation of concrete national experiences, participants highlighted transferable approaches and examined how successful practices could be adapted, scaled, and replicated in other contexts to reinforce national systems and inform future cooperation among partner countries and organisations of the Rabat, Khartoum, and Niamey Processes.*

Ms. Francesca Nicodemi, from the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, presented Italy’s national anti-trafficking system. She recalled that the Department acts as the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, overseeing 21 projects across the country and leading the development of the National Anti-Trafficking Strategy. Italy’s approach is anchored in the “4 Ps”: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership. Key legal instruments include criminal provisions addressing trafficking in persons and a legislative decree establishing the framework for victim assistance and protection. She showcased the Italian’s National Referral Mechanism as a successful national practice, offering standard operating procedures for early victim identification and referral. She further referred to guidelines issued by the National Commission for the Right of Asylum and UNHCR to facilitate the identification of trafficking

victims among asylum seekers and build connections between asylum and anti-trafficking systems, ensuring that all protection grounds are adequately and distinctly identified and addressed.

Mr. Cheikh Tourad Abdel Malick, Director of the National Authority for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (INLCTPTM), stressed Mauritania’s geographic position—at the crossroads of Europe, West Africa, and North Africa—making it both a destination and transit country for migrants vulnerable to smuggling and trafficking. In response, the Government has established a comprehensive legal framework, including a law on combating migrant smuggling, a law on the prevention and repression of trafficking in persons and the protection of victims, and standard operating procedures for the disembarkation and care of trafficked migrants developed with the support ICMPD. This framework is supported by specialised institutional capacities: the INLCTPTM; the Central Office for the Repression of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings; temporary reception centres for foreign nationals and disembarked migrants; and a recently created specialised court dedicated to combating slavery, trafficking, and migrant smuggling. Mr. Abdel Malick underlined the central role of the INLCTPTM in the identification, protection, referral, and assistance of vulnerable individuals and persons in need of international protection, including the pre-screening of disembarked migrants in coordination with IOM and UNHCR. He also highlighted the importance of the national assistance fund for trafficking victims, which provides healthcare, shelter, food, legal and judicial assistance, interpretation services, and other support, and offers subsidies to NGOs assisting victims.

Dr. Mody Guirandou Ndiaye, Permanent Secretary of Senegal’s National Committee for the Fight against Human Trafficking, emphasised that the West African context is particularly conducive to sub-regional partnerships. He recalled that several ECOWAS Member States have signed bilateral cooperation agreements, enabling coordinated approaches to combat trafficking. He highlighted initiatives such as the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Gambia’s National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons (NAATIP) and Senegal’s National Cell Against Trafficking in Persons (CNLTP), and the creation of sub-regional coordination networks linking institutions in Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania to strengthen anti-trafficking responses and cross-border victim referrals. He also announced declarations of intent between Mauritania’s anti-trafficking authority and Senegal’s CNLTP, and between Guinea’s National Committee and Senegal’s CNLTP. Despite these strong partnership structures, Dr. Ndiaye identified persistent challenges such as divergent approaches; gaps or inconsistencies in legislation on trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling; weak institutional coordination; limited civil society engagement; insufficient involvement of destination countries in project design; capacity gaps; inadequate integration of trafficking into public policies and research; and weak judicial statistical data. He recommended launching sub-regional communication campaigns, involving destination countries in project design, developing multi-country joint training programmes, and ensuring systematic civil society participation in anti-trafficking efforts.

Mr. Derek Kigenyi, Senior Immigration Officer at Uganda’s Ministry of Internal Affairs, recalled that Uganda’s response to trafficking in persons is grounded in the “4Ps”—Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership—and complemented by a trauma-informed, victim-centred approach that prioritises the safety, dignity, and well-being of victims. Uganda relies on a multi-agency, multi-stakeholder model involving state institutions, law enforcement actors, specialised service providers, and joint border arrangements (e.g. with Kenya for victim management). Civil society plays a central role, notably through the Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons in Uganda (CATIPU) and the East and Horn of Africa Anti-Trafficking Network (EHAAT), which supports advocacy, service provision, and case referrals. To ensure coherence, Uganda has developed standard operating procedures for prosecutors and investigators, as well as victim and witness protection guidelines administered by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP). Mr. Kigenyi also outlined Uganda’s referral mechanism: identification begins with first responders—police, immigration officials, and social services—who assess needs and ensure immediate safety. Cases are then transferred to a central coordination office within the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Developments, which records victim data, facilitates case management, and arranges referrals. From there, victims are directed to specialised service providers, including government institutions, civil society organisations, and international partners, while relevant authorities pursue investigations and prosecutions. He stressed that this mechanism promotes rapid identification and ensures continuity of care.

Key Takeaways

- A **strong legislative framework anchored in the “4 Ps”—Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership - together with clearly mandated and well-coordinated institutions to implement these pillars**, remains the foundation of an effective response to trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling.
- **Effective regional or bilateral partnerships require prior capacity and needs assessments** to identify legal, operational, or institutional gaps and **determine where cooperation would be most impactful**.
- The **harmonisation of trafficking and smuggling legislation among partner countries**, coupled with **joint multi-country training programmes and robust interstate and inter-institutional cooperation**, is instrumental to ensure the successful implementation of bilateral and regional partnerships.
- **National Referral Mechanisms are central to the early identification of victims and effective service coordination. Clear Standard Operating Procedures and structured referral pathways**, grounded in trauma-informed and victim-centred approaches, can safeguard dignity, improve protection outcomes, and ensure the continuity of care throughout referral and judicial processes. **Multi-agency and multi-stakeholder systems**, supported by **central coordination hubs**, are essential to **prevent individuals from being lost in fragmented systems, facilitate lawful data management, and maintain continuity of care**.
- While refugee status determination and trafficking identification are legally distinct protection avenues—since victims of trafficking may not qualify necessarily for international protection—they must nevertheless have access to assistance and remedies. **Ensuring proper coordination between asylum systems and anti-trafficking mechanisms is essential to guarantee appropriate care and prevent protection gaps**.
- **Institutionalised and sustainable funding mechanisms for victim assistance can ensure continuity of services, including healthcare, shelter, legal support, psychosocial care, and interpretation**.

Key takeaways and conclusions

Mr. Madis Vainomaa, Anti-Trafficking Team Lead at ICMPD, opened this closing session by reflecting on more than two decades since the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). He noted that *“twenty-five years after UNTOC’s adoption, the time has come to ensure that its legal principles translate into tangible protection for people on the move.”* He underlined that while the Convention and its Protocols laid the global legal foundation, regional dialogues, like the Khartoum, Rabat and Niamey Processes, now provide the partnership architecture required to operationalise these commitments into tangible actions through sustained cooperation and shared practice. He summarised the **following persisting challenges** raised during the two days discussions:

- Under-reporting and weak victim identification: many cases remain invisible due to under-reporting and institutional invisibility, partly due to inadequate awareness and poor data reporting mechanisms.
- Legal and institutional gaps: Several countries lack comprehensive or updated anti-trafficking legislation. In some contexts, labour and criminal laws apply but fail to adequately address trafficking in persons and child labour, while procedural protocols and enforcement tools for frontline actors are often absent or insufficient.
- Limited availability of victim service, particularly the scarcity of shelter capacity, the lack of long-term reintegration support, and budget constraint.
- Coordination and institutional capacity: Persistent coordination gaps among government entities, law enforcement, social services, and civil society continue to hinder effective responses. Weak operational capacities, especially among labour inspectors, social workers, and law enforcement officers, further impede efforts to combat trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.
- In addition, many countries highlighted persistent challenges in cross-border law enforcement and information exchange. In regions characterised by porous and poorly equipped borders, cooperation is often undermined by mutual distrust, fragmented institutional linkages, and limited operational capacities. As a result, judicial and police collaboration remains minimal or ad hoc, hindering efforts to track perpetrators, dismantle networks, and ensure continuity of protection across jurisdictions.

Mr. Nicola Graviano (ICMPD) underscored that trafficking and smuggling remain deeply interlinked yet distinct phenomena. He noted that smuggling predominates along migratory corridors but frequently exposes individuals to trafficking risks, including exploitation, debt bondage, forced labour, and sexual exploitation. At the same time, data and definitions remain weak and fragmented across countries, complicating identification and response. He stressed that restrictive migration

policies and limited legal pathways often push people into unsafe routes, while weak victim identification systems exacerbate vulnerabilities. Emerging trends—including digital exploitation, climate-induced mobility, and increasingly globalised labour recruitment practices—create new challenges. Highlighting ICMPD’s close partnership with ECOWAS, he referred to ICMPD’s support to the Annual Review Meetings of the Regional Network of National Focal Institutions against Trafficking in Persons, to the ECOWAS Annual Synthesis Reports on human trafficking, as well as to the establishment of the ECOWAS Regional Referral Mechanism presented as a model for harmonised protection and cross-border cooperation.

Ms. Samia Chouchane (UNODC) stressed that the discussions highlighted the need for continued harmonisation of legal frameworks, enhanced data-sharing, and strengthened cooperation among law enforcement, judicial, and protection actors to ensure effective cross-border accountability. She also emphasised the importance of improving coordination and collaboration among all international partners to efficiently strengthen responses to trafficking and smuggling by exploring joint synergies between the Rabat, Khartoum, and Niamey Processes.

Mr. Olatunde Olayemi (ECOWAS Commission) highlighted the critical role of regional organisations in bridging policy and practice, promoting victim-centred approaches, and fostering peer-learning among countries of origin, transit, and destination. He reaffirmed ECOWAS’ commitment to ensuring coherence and ownership across regional and national frameworks to make counter-trafficking responses more sustainable.

During the plenary discussion, participants reaffirmed that victim protection must remain central to prevention, protection and prosecution efforts. They called for stronger data systems to underpin evidence-based policymaking, time-bound operational follow-up, and enhanced attention to digitally facilitated trafficking and smuggling, including social-media recruitment, fake job advertisements, and online exploitation.

In closing, participants collectively reasserted their determination to strengthen prevention, protection, and prosecution in parallel, sustaining route-based cooperation through the three Processes. The outcomes of this meeting will inform upcoming milestones, including the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling Conference in Brussels on 10 December 2025, which will serve as a platform to review progress and advance efforts to bridge the gap between law and practice.

Closing

Ms. Alexandra Sa Carvalho, Deputy Head of Unit of the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) at the European Commission, reflected on the experiences shared during the meeting and underlined that the protection of victims and respect for human rights must remain at the core of all actions addressing migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons. She stressed that migration is a transnational phenomenon requiring strong international and regional cooperation, including enhanced joint investigations, police cooperation, and prosecutions. She highlighted the EU’s support for key operational initiatives such as ROCK and NETCOP, which contribute to concrete cooperation results. Responding to the clear call for action voiced during the discussions, she noted that the EU is acting both internally and internationally: internally by strengthening the EU legislative framework and the mandate of EU agencies - particularly Europol - and preparing a new EU Strategy on Trafficking in Human Beings to be adopted by the end of next year; and internationally by the EU’s leadership in convening the Global Alliance Against Migrant Smuggling conference on 10 December 2025 and the development of a joint declaration serving as a collective call to action and a commitment to sustained cooperation. She further outlined the EU’s continued support for programmes addressing all dimensions of irregular migration, from prevention of unsafe departures, protection with rescue and disembarkation operations, the protection of those in need of international protection, the fight against smuggling and trafficking and the sustainable and safe reintegration of those in need. She also referred to the ongoing reform of the EU asylum and migration system, including new asylum and return border procedures aimed at more efficient and timely refugee protection for those in need and returns when applicable, stressing the importance of continued cooperation between Europe and Africa in this context too.

Mr. Fernando Jorge Alves d’Almada, Head of the Social Affairs Division at ECOWAS, reaffirmed ECOWAS’ strong commitment to the Rabat, Khartoum and Niamey Processes, recognising their significant value in addressing the interconnected challenges of migration, security, and development in West Africa. He expressed appreciation to Member States, international partners, international organisations, civil society, and the European Union for their sustained engagement, which has enabled meaningful progress in regional cooperation and coordination. He highlighted that ECOWAS is already implementing its Plan of Action, with a focus on strengthening migration policies, promoting decent work for migrant workers, addressing the issue of missing migrants, and supporting labour migration that safeguards migrant workers’ rights. He noted that the ECOWAS Migration Working Group is currently revising its strategic plan to

better respond to the growing complexity of mixed migration flows. He also emphasised ECOWAS' initiatives on children on the move and the development of a comprehensive regional strategy to combat trafficking in persons and related crimes. Stressing the importance of effective coordination, he proposed the establishment of a regional coordination forum for West Africa. He concluded by reaffirming ECOWAS' commitment to prevention, protection, and prosecution, addressing the root causes of irregular migration, protecting migrants' dignity and rights, and holding perpetrators accountable through strengthened collaboration.

Ambassador Cyrille Baumgartner, Ambassador of France in charge of Migration, concluded that the Lagos meeting powerfully demonstrated the value of working together across regions, institutions, and mandates. He emphasised that migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons are global, interconnected, and constantly adapting forms of organised crime that exploit vulnerability and human misery, undermine the rule of law, and destabilise societies, requiring coordinated action, shared responsibility, and sustained commitment - the core principles of the Rabat, Khartoum, and Niamey Processes. He noted that the discussions held enabled participants to share best practices learn from one another and build new synergies. He underlined that prevention must address root causes such as poverty, inequality, instability, and climate change, while also countering misinformation and false narratives, including those spread online. He reaffirmed that protection is a central responsibility, stressing the need for victim-centred approaches that ensure access to justice, psychosocial and health support, safe reintegration, and the ability to testify without fear and risk of reprisal. He highlighted the importance of coordinated referral mechanisms and harmonised legal standards across borders, to ensure that protection does not stop at borders. On prosecution, he stressed the need for stronger judicial cooperation, evidence-sharing, and efforts to address the financial and digital dimensions of criminal networks. He recalled that protection of victims and prosecution of criminal networks are two sides of the same coin, and must be pursued together. Finally, Amb. Cyrille Baumgartner recalled France's national commitment to combating smuggling and trafficking, supported by the Ministries of the Interior and of Europe and Foreign Affairs, alongside French agencies working on development and cooperation such as Expertise France and CIVIPOL. He cited concrete initiatives including ALTP and the newly launched PROTECT project in the Gulf of Guinea, as well as the regional ROCK project in the Horn of Africa, illustrating how operational cooperation can save lives, support victims and bring perpetrators to justice. He concluded by emphasising the human dimension at the heart of these crimes, recalling that behind every statistic lies a human life, and called for translating the strategic frameworks of the Cairo and Cádiz Declarations into tangible results on the ground.

Hon. Tijjani Aliyu Ahmed, Honourable Federal Commissioner of the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons, reaffirmed Nigeria's commitment to protecting human dignity, promoting regular migration, and strengthening regional cooperation. He noted that the outcomes of the Lagos meeting reflected a strong spirit of solidarity and partnership and provided a valuable opportunity to review progress, exchange good practices, and identify practical measures to address migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons. He highlighted that discussions consistently underscored prevention, protection, and prosecution as key pillars of an effective and coordinated response, alongside the central role of partnerships. He expressed pride in hosting the meeting in Lagos, a city that embodies resilience, diversity, and opportunity, and conveyed his appreciation to all participants and partners. Looking ahead, he announced that Nigeria looks forward to hosting the next Rabat Process Senior Officials' Meeting in January 2026 in Abuja, where progress achieved under Nigeria's chairmanship will be reviewed and Switzerland formally welcomed as the incoming chair.

Participation and outreach

Participation

- The Joint Thematic Meeting convened a diverse audience of 166 participants, including representatives from 41 Dialogue partner countries, as well as experts from regional and international organisations, such as the European Commission (DG HOME, DG INTPA, EEAS), Frontex, the ECOWAS Commission, ICMPD, IGAD, INTERPOL, IOM, UNODC, and UNHCR. Development actors including Expertise France and GIZ, the Mixed Migration Centre and key civil society organisations also participated.
- The online feedback survey yielded 93 responses, reflecting a **very high level of satisfaction** with the Joint Thematic Meeting. Most respondents rated the thematic relevance, presentation quality, and opportunities for informal exchange as highly satisfactory. Many also highlighted that the meeting provided valuable new insights and enabled them to establish meaningful professional connections.

Outreach

- The event was widely covered on the **social media** channels of the Rabat Process and Khartoum Process. Over the course of the activity, the coverage generated a total of 9,853 impressions and 393 engagements on LinkedIn (both accounts combined).
- The meeting was also broadcast on YouTube and covered by various local media outlets, including AIT Live, NTA Network, News Central TV, TVC News Nigeria, and News 24.