Event Report

Addressing Trafficking in Persons in the Caribbean – Progress Towards 2030

July 20 to 24, 2026

CCATIP

FREE THE SLAVES

Caribbean Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons

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THEME

ADDRESSING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN THE CARIBBEAN – PROGRESS TOWARDS 2030

Executive Summary

The Caribbean Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons (CCATIP) convened the 2026 Webinar Series, "Addressing Trafficking in Persons in the Caribbean – Progress Towards 2030," as part of its observance of World Day Against Trafficking in Persons and as a follow-up to the 2025 Caribbean Anti-Trafficking Conference. The series brought together government officials, international organizations, civil society leaders, survivor advocates, youth representatives, academics, law enforcement practitioners, and private-sector stakeholders to examine emerging trafficking trends and identify practical actions to strengthen the Caribbean response.

Over five days, participants explored key themes including cyber-enabled trafficking and sport trafficking; meaningful youth engagement in anti-trafficking efforts; demand reduction strategies targeting commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour; coalition-building and survivor-led networks; and the importance of self-care and mental wellbeing among anti-trafficking practitioners. Across all sessions, speakers emphasized that trafficking in persons is evolving rapidly and requires innovative, coordinated, and survivor-informed responses.

Several cross-cutting priorities emerged. Participants highlighted the need for stronger regional collaboration, harmonized legislation, improved identification of emerging trafficking typologies, and greater investment in survivor leadership. Youth engagement was recognized as both a prevention strategy and a governance imperative, with calls for meaningful youth participation in policy development and implementation. Discussions on demand focused on addressing underlying social, economic, and cultural drivers that contribute to exploitation, while coalition-building sessions demonstrated the value of networks in fostering collective impact and sustainable change.

The webinar series also underscored the importance of practitioner wellbeing. Participants acknowledged that burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma can undermine the effectiveness of anti-trafficking responses and emphasized that organizational support systems, peer networks, and mental health resources are essential to sustaining the movement.

Overall, the 2026 Webinar Series reaffirmed that achieving meaningful progress toward the elimination of trafficking in persons by 2030 requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

Success depends on strengthening partnerships, empowering survivors and youth, addressing demand, investing in practitioner resilience, and ensuring that anti-trafficking efforts remain collaborative, inclusive, and grounded in human rights.

Background

Human trafficking remains a persistent and complex challenge across the Caribbean region, affecting women, men, and children in diverse and often hidden ways. The Caribbean serves as a source, transit, and destination region for trafficking in persons, with individuals exploited in forced labour, domestic servitude, agriculture, fishing, construction and the commercial sex industry. In recent years, there has been a rise in detected trafficking for exploitation in scamming and other types of forced criminality. Concern is also being expressed about trafficking related to the sport sector.

Structural vulnerabilities in the Caribbean continue to heighten the risks of trafficking for many sectors of the regional population. These include economic inequality, limited access to decent work, migration pressures, climate-related displacement, and gaps in protection systems. Regional anti-trafficking laws recognise the following individuals as being "in a position of vulnerability": migrants (especially undocumented migrants), children, pregnant women, persons in challenging socio-economic circumstances, and people living with mental or physical disabilities (including addiction to a substance). Trafficking in the Caribbean is further complicated by geographic fragmentation, porous borders, and varying national capacities to detect, prevent, and respond to trafficking cases.

While governments across the region have made advances in enacting and updating anti-trafficking legislation, establishing national task forces, strengthening the capabilities of law enforcement and judicial officers, and engaging in cross-border collaboration, there remain significant challenges in implementing policies and laws, identifying victims, accessing justice, and providing trauma-informed and survivor-centred support.

In July 2025, the Caribbean Anti-Trafficking Conference convened by the Caribbean Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons (CCATIP) brought together governments, civil society organisations, regional bodies, international partners, and survivors to examine progress, identify gaps, and articulate forward-looking recommendations to strengthen anti-trafficking responses. The conference emphasised the urgent need to accelerate the implementation of commitments, enhance cross-border cooperation, and leverage regional solidarity in addressing trafficking and its root causes.

A key insight from the conference was that no single entity can effectively combat trafficking alone. Instead, a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach is essential to harness the expertise and experience of survivors, policymakers, law enforcement officers, educators, labour actors, health

professionals, private sector stakeholders, youth, migrants, persons with disabilities, other marginalised groups, media, and community leaders – preferably in organised groups such as coalitions and networks.

Especially important is the meaningful engagement of survivors and communities affected by trafficking, ensuring their voices shape policy, programming, and advocacy. Survivors must be recognised not only as beneficiaries but as leaders and partners in the movement.

Additionally, increased attention must be paid to addressing systemic drivers such as the demand for commercial sex and exploitative labour, as well as ensuring the sustainability and well-being of anti-trafficking practitioners across the 4 Ps. Burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma are growing concerns among frontline responders and advocates in the region.

Against this backdrop, this five-day webinar series will commemorate the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons 2026 by amplifying regional dialogue, advancing actionable solutions, and strengthening collaboration across the Caribbean.

Purpose

The purpose of this webinar series is to:

- Promote the implementation of recommendations from the 2025 Caribbean Anti-Trafficking Conference by developing actionable steps for collaboration
- Facilitate critical discussions on emerging and persistent challenges in combating trafficking
- Strengthen regional collaboration and coalition-building
- Elevate survivor-informed and inclusive approaches
- Address practitioner wellbeing and sustainability in anti-trafficking work

Objectives

1. To identify specific areas for collaboration by CARICOM, civil society, survivors, national governments, the private sector and other stakeholders to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons
2. To explore strategies to reduce demand for exploitation in both commercial sex and forced labour contexts
3. To highlight the role of partnerships, coalitions, and networks in strengthening anti-trafficking responses

4. To promote mental health, self-care, and resilience among stakeholders working in anti-trafficking
5. To ensure inclusive engagement of marginalized populations, including survivors, youth, migrants, and persons with disabilities

Expected Outcomes

- Increased awareness and commitment to implementing conference recommendations
- Strengthened regional collaboration and partnerships
- Enhanced understanding of demand-side interventions
- Greater inclusion of marginalized voices in anti-trafficking efforts
- Improved awareness of mental health and wellbeing strategies among stakeholders

Acknowledgements

The Webinar Series was convened by the Caribbean Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons and hosted by Free the Saves, whose Caribbean Regional Coordinator, Adrian Alexander, leads the Anti-Trafficking Conferences Project on behalf the Coalition.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who helped make the 2026 Webinar Series, “Addressing Trafficking in Persons in the Caribbean – Progress Towards 2030,” such a resounding success. As a follow-up to the 2025 Caribbean Anti-Trafficking Conference, the webinar series was also the main activity for the Coalition’s observance of World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. The Coalition acknowledges that the success of this Webinar Series from 20th to 24th July was possible only because of the shared dedication and generosity of so many partners.

We first thank the wonderful members of the Coalition who volunteered to serve as moderators for each day’s sessions. We are equally grateful to the Survivor Leaders who joined our panels and interactive dialogues. Your courage and willingness to share your journeys as survivors and leaders in the movement gave the Webinar Series conference its most powerful moments and offered essential guidance for shaping survivor leadership and survivor-informed policy.

Thank you to the youth advocates and CARICOM Youth Ambassadors who brought their voices and perspectives to the conversation. Your contagious energy, fresh ideas, and clear calls to action underscored the essential role young people play in preventing trafficking and building a safer future for the region.

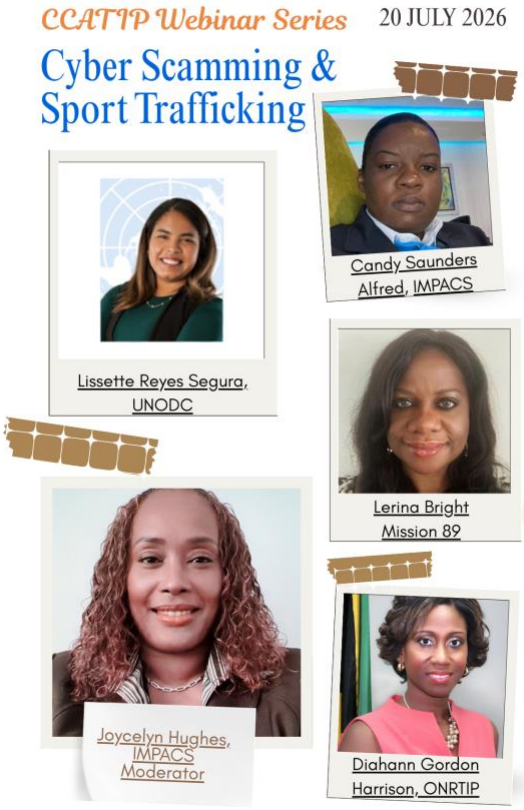
We extend our sincere appreciation to the Distinguished Speakers, representing international and regional institutions and organisations, national governments and task forces, non-profits, community-based groups and survivors. Your expertise and thoughtful analysis brought depth to every session and helped illuminate the complex challenges — and opportunities — in the fight against human trafficking.

We recognize the invaluable partnership of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), CARICOM IMPACS, the Department of Public Security of the Organisation of America States (OAS), the Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons (ONRTIP) in Jamaica, and Free the Slaves. Your sustained commitment to regional anti-trafficking work continues to make a real difference.

We also thank the Coordinator of the CARICOM Youth Ambassadors Programme, and the many NGOs and community-based organizations from across the Caribbean and beyond — including Mission 89, Beyond Borders, Youth with Disabilities Connections, Men Can, Finding Your Light Foundation Inc., and the Caribbean Survivor Network.

Finally, to all the Participants: thank you for your active engagement, sharp questions, and steady commitment across all five days of the Webinar Series. Your collective dedication continues to drive us toward a more just, equitable, and resilient Caribbean Community.

CYBER SCAMMING AND SPORT TRAFFICKING



Executive Summary

Our Webinar Series to observe World Day Against Trafficking in Persons 2026 began with an all-female panel of powerful women in the anti-trafficking space. The day's conversation on "Cyber Scamming and Sport Trafficking – What are they and how can we combat them?" was expertly moderated by Joycelyn Hughes, Border Security Specialist at CARICOM IMPACS and a member of the Coalition. Participants included Lissette Reyes from UNODC, Candy Saunders-Alfred from CARICOM IMPACS, Lerina Bright from Mission 89 and Diahann Gordon Harrison from ONRTIP Jamaica, who is also Chair of the Coalition.

Discussion centered on two emerging and under-recognized forms of exploitation in the Caribbean: trafficking connected to online scam operations, and trafficking that uses sport, particularly football, as a recruitment pathway. Panelists agreed that both forms are accelerating due to digital connectivity, are frequently under-identified because existing legislation was written with sexual and labor exploitation in

mind, and require coordinated legislative, institutional, and public awareness responses across the region.

Cyber-Enabled Trafficking and Forced Criminality

Diahann Gordon Harrison, speaking as Jamaica's National Rapporteur and chair of the Caribbean Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons, noted that nearly all trafficking matters handled by her office in a recent reporting period involved some digital element, often beginning with contact through messaging platforms. She emphasized that information shared unwittingly online is increasingly used to facilitate exploitation.

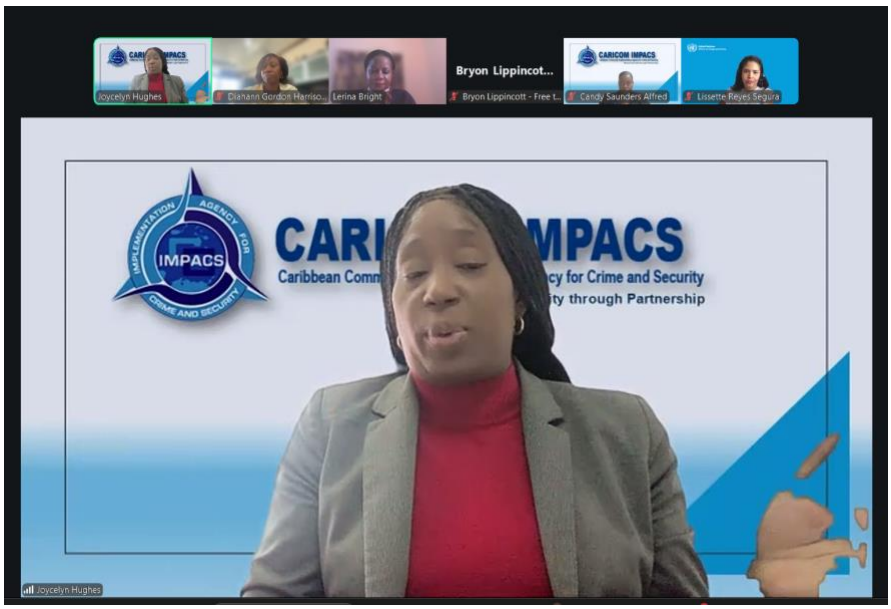
A UNODC representative, Lissette Reyes Segura, presented global context, citing UNODC research estimating losses of eighteen to thirty-seven billion dollars from scam operations targeting victims in East and Southeast Asia, with related cases also emerging in Jamaica. She described human trafficking as a core structural element of many online scam operations, with recruitment increasingly occurring through fraudulent job advertisements that exploit financial need. While large-scale scam compounds have not yet been identified in the Caribbean, she noted that smaller-scale equivalents, including call centers and businesses disguised as legitimate enterprises, are emerging regionally.

Panelists identified significant institutional and legislative gaps. Cases are commonly investigated under fraud or cybercrime statutes rather than trafficking frameworks, and anti-trafficking units frequently lack the technical capacity to investigate cyber-enabled components, leading to fragmented, siloed responses. Recommendations included formally recognizing forced criminality as a modality of trafficking under national legislation, aligned with the Palermo Protocol; strengthening coordination between police, cybercrime, and anti-trafficking units; and consistently applying the principle of non-punishment so that persons compelled to commit unlawful acts as a direct consequence of exploitation are not prosecuted for those acts.

Candy Saunders Alfred of CARICOM IMPACS outlined regional trends, including the use of fraudulent websites to exploit digital immigration processes, unregulated cryptocurrency ATMs used to move funds linked to organized crime, and artificial-intelligence-generated media used in investment scams that impersonate public officials. She described regional coordination mechanisms, including national points of contact, monthly information-sharing sessions, and a new digital forensic management platform intended to support incident reporting and access to a shared pool of regional experts. She also identified the proposed CARICOM Cybersecurity and Cyber Crime Action Plan as a vehicle for legal harmonization and capacity building across member states.

Sport Trafficking

Lerina Bright presented on sport trafficking, now defined internationally and aligned with the Palermo Protocol, as the recruitment or movement of persons for exploitation in which sport serves as the setting or pretext. She described three recognized forms: trafficking in sport, where exploitation occurs within a genuine sporting environment, often through abusive contracts at the grassroots level; trafficking through sport, where a sporting opportunity is fabricated to obtain a visa or family consent with no genuine placement ever intended; and trafficking around sport, referring to exploitation, including sexual exploitation, occurring at the margins of major sporting events.



Panelists during the Day One session

Recruitment typically begins online, with fraudulent agents presenting fabricated credentials, club affiliations, or academy branding that has grown increasingly sophisticated. Warning signs identified include any request for payment for trials or placement, an intermediary who controls contracts, travel, and documentation, and withholding of a young athlete's travel documents after arrival. Ms. Bright described a case involving a young footballer who, after paying substantial fees, was left unmet on arrival, subsequently relocated between clubs in different countries, and ultimately worked undocumented for minimal pay. She noted that verification tools, such as FIFA's agent registry, exist but are difficult to locate, and that clubs have shown hesitancy toward greater transparency regarding the intermediaries and satellite academies with which they work.

Ms. Gordon Harrison confirmed that while sport trafficking is not yet named in Jamaican legislation, at least one prosecution has proceeded under forced-begging provisions involving a coach who recruited youth footballers under the pretense of an overseas placement. She stressed that culturally tailored public education, reaching parents as well as athletes, is essential given the appeal of a sporting career as a path to opportunity.

Regional Cooperation and Recommendations

Panelists agreed that addressing both forms of exploitation requires stronger data, harmonized legislation, and sustained cross-sector partnership. Ms. Gordon Harrison noted that consistent data collection, such as that produced through Jamaica's National Rapporteur mechanism, enables trend identification and evidence-based recommendations, and suggested that additional rapporteurs across the CARICOM region would strengthen regional accountability and information sharing.

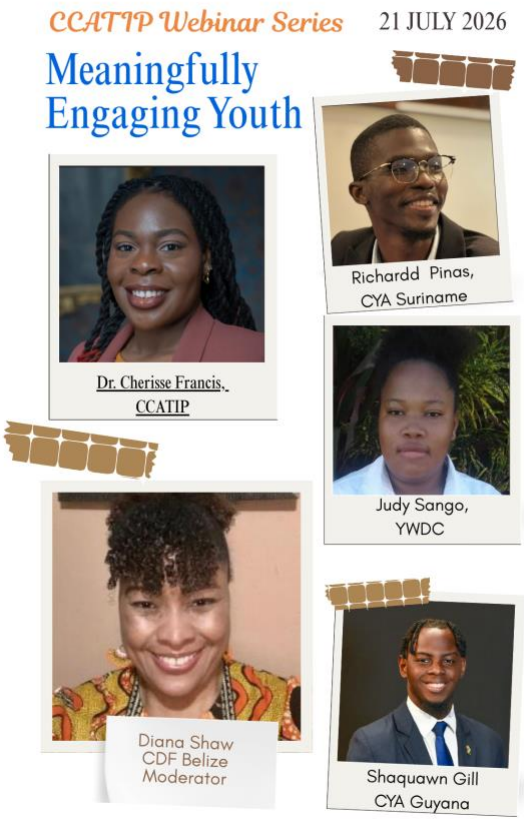
On public-private partnership, panelists highlighted the value of corporate social responsibility programs, media partnerships for awareness campaigns, and specialized non-governmental organizations supporting survivor rehabilitation and repatriation. Ms. Bright described a youth-facing prevention model, the Youth Ambassador Program, developed with international academic and migration partners, which trains young people, including student athletes, to advocate for child protection and safeguarding policies within their schools and athletic institutions.

Closing recommendations from the panel converged on three priorities: harmonizing legislation across CARICOM member states so that offenders moving across borders can be prosecuted; updating screening and referral procedures so front-line practitioners can recognize evolving typologies, including forced criminality and sport trafficking; and ensuring minimum anti-trafficking training for professionals across relevant sectors so that early indicators are reported and acted upon.

Conclusion

The panel underscored that modern slavery continues to take on new forms, whether concealed behind an online employment offer or the promise of a sporting career, while remaining rooted in deception and the exploitation of aspiration. Panelists called for coordinated action across legislative, institutional, and community levels, and emphasized that responses must preserve the dignity of those affected, recognizing survivors not by the acts they were compelled to commit, but by what was done to them.

MEANINGFULLY ENGAGING YOUTH



Executive Summary

The second day of our Webinar Series was charged with youthful energy! Moderating the discussion on "Meaningfully Engaging Youth: Learning from those most targeted by traffickers" was Ms. Diana Shaw, Founder of The Child Development Foundation in Belize, and a member of the Coalition. Participants included Dr. Cherisse Francis from the Coalition's Leadership Committee, Judy Sango from Youth with Disabilities Connections and Richard Pinas, the male CARICOM Youth Ambassador for Suriname. (Due to pressing work-related commitments, Shaquawn Gill, the male CARICOM Youth Ambassador for Guyana and Vice-Dean of the CYA Corps, was unable to attend the webinar).

Framed around the Convention on the Rights of the Child's best-interest principle, the discussion moved beyond treating young people as subjects of awareness campaigns and instead examined how to position them as leaders, researchers, and co-designers of policy. Panelists addressed the digital and

cultural drivers of youth vulnerability, shared concrete models for youth leadership, and set out the safeguarding and mental-health supports needed to sustain young people's involvement in this work.

Understanding Youth Vulnerability

Judy Sango spoke from the perspective of young people with disabilities, noting that barriers to education, employment, and social inclusion leave this group especially susceptible to traffickers who promise employment, scholarships, modeling opportunities, or migration assistance. She emphasized that young people with disabilities must not simply be mentioned in anti-trafficking discussions but should shape them directly.

Cherisse Francis highlighted how online spaces, including gaming and social media platforms, have become the primary sites where young people build community, and consequently where traffickers increasingly make contact, including through AI-enabled impersonation and image misuse. She also pointed to a distinctly Caribbean risk factor: familial trafficking, in which children sent to stay with relatives, often during the July/August school vacation, are exploited for domestic labour. Cultural norms that discourage children from questioning adults, she noted, can make it harder for young people to disclose what is happening to them. She further described a documented case in which a football team was made to solicit funds under the guise of sponsorship, an activity that meets the legal definition of trafficking even though it is rarely recognized as such.

Richard Pinas framed trafficking as a threat that has moved from an abstract concern into young people's everyday digital lives, describing smartphones and social media as spaces that have been weaponized as recruitment grounds. He argued that young people should be understood not merely as vulnerable but as active partners with the local knowledge needed to design effective responses.

Models for Youth Leadership

Ms. Sango described Youth with Disabilities Connections, a youth-led organization built on the principle "nothing about us without us," which creates peer discussion spaces on relationships, online safety, and exploitation, and trains young people with disabilities to facilitate these sessions themselves rather than relying on adults to speak on their behalf.

Panelists during the Day Two session

Mr. Pinas outlined CARICOM's Youth Leadership Network, which places young leaders directly into official CARICOM organs covering education, climate, gender equality, and public health, and the newly established Youth Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Youth Involvement in Crime and Violence, on which he serves. The committee is rolling out regional interactive sessions and youth-built digital toolkits, with data and recommendations feeding directly into the Regional Committee on Crime and Security. He described this as a deliberate pipeline connecting young people's lived realities to formal policymaking.

Dr. Francis shared a further example from her work in Belize, where university interns were trained in trafficking law and cultural context and then staged a full moot trial, taking on every courtroom role. Several participants went on to careers in criminal justice or social work, illustrating, she said, that equipping even a small number of young people with real tools and responsibility produces lasting impact. She contrasted this with awareness competitions offering cash prizes, which raise visibility but do not necessarily build lasting understanding.

Safety and Ethical Considerations

Panelists agreed that involving young people in anti-trafficking work carries its own risks and responsibilities. Ms. Sango stressed practical digital-safety habits, including not clicking unfamiliar links, withholding location information, and setting boundaries with media when questions feel too personal, particularly for young people with intellectual disabilities who may need extra time or clarification.

Dr. Francis raised the risk of burnout among youth leaders, noting that the same small group of young people is often called on repeatedly, which narrows the diversity of perspectives involved and increases the emotional toll on those who participate. She recommended a formal, non-tokenistic youth seat on

national task forces and coordinating bodies; structured mentorship and succession planning so institutional knowledge is not lost each time a youth leader transitions out; and a trauma-informed approach that provides young people with mental-health support rather than treating them, in her words, as being “fed to the wolves” in high-pressure settings. She also encouraged practitioners to engage young people already in conflict with the law, arguing that they often hold the clearest picture of how risks are actually evolving on the ground.

Ms. Sango added that self-care, including rest, boundary-setting, and having a trusted person to debrief with, is essential for young leaders managing multiple responsibilities, and that it is acceptable, and important, for young people to say “No”.

Digital Engagement and Education

Because most youth socialization now happens online, panelists agreed that adults must engage directly in digital spaces rather than treating them as separate from adult responsibility. Mr. Pinas called for stricter platform regulation, AI tools to detect digital grooming patterns, and clearer verification channels so young people can confirm whether someone contacting them legitimately represents an organization. Dr. Francis proposed embedding trafficking-risk awareness directly into existing school subjects and assessments, such as having students produce a short video or artwork on trafficking risk, arguing that integrated, creative learning builds communication skills while encouraging young people to share what they learn with peers and family.

Dr. Francis also noted that legislative frameworks across the region generally predate the digital era and should be updated to reflect online risks to children, potentially through cyber-protection statutes as well as trafficking law, alongside accountability measures such as the loss of public office for officials convicted of trafficking offenses, a provision already in place in Guyana.

Conclusion

The panel closed by directing participants to two resources: Crossroads, a trafficking-focused graphic novel produced by young people for young people, and a UNICEF-CARICOM study on youth mental health in the Caribbean. Panelists reinforced that combating trafficking is a multi-sectoral responsibility that cannot be shifted onto young people themselves. Policymakers, educators, and parents must build safe, informed spaces in which young people can lead. As Mr. Pinas closed, “There is nothing wrong in the region that what is right in the region cannot fix; and what is right in the region, is its youth!” This statement emphasises that the region’s youth are not tomorrow’s potential liability but today’s strategic partners in building a safer, more resilient Caribbean.

ADDRESSING DEMAND: COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND FORCED LABOUR

Executive Summary

The third day of the Webinar Series was a deep dive into gender, culture and how those norms impact the demand for commercial sex and forced labour in the Caribbean. Moderating an all-male panel for today's discussion on "Addressing Demand: Tackling Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Forced Labour in the Caribbean" was Dr. Cherisse Francis, a member of the Coalition's Leadership Committee and Co-Chair of the Research Committee. Participants included Dr. Warren A. Thompson from the Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA) in Jamaica, Kwasi Cudjoe from Men Can in Trinidad and Tobago, Neil Derrick from The Employers Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago, and Andre Charles from the Saint Lucia Bureau of Standards, who is working on developing an international standard in the ISO 37200.

The presentations moved from cultural drivers of demand for commercial sexual exploitation, to community-based strategies engaging men and boys as allies, to how legitimate organizations and

supply chains can unintentionally sustain forced labor, and finally to an emerging international standard for managing modern slavery risk. The session underscored that reducing demand requires shifting cultural norms and organizational practice, not only prosecuting traffickers.

Gender, Culture, and the Demand for Exploitation

Warren Thompson opened by defining gender as a socially constructed system that allocates status and resources between women and men, and culture as the shared beliefs and practices that shape those roles. Drawing on Jamaica Constabulary Force data for 2024 and 2025, he noted that confirmed trafficking victims in that period were exclusively female, most between fourteen and sixteen years old, and that the large majority were victims of sexual exploitation rather than forced labor. He argued this pattern reflects broader cultural dynamics, including a persistent patriarchal structure across the region, expectations of male sexual dominance, and a normalization of transactional sex, all of which he said are also reinforced in popular culture and music.

Dr. Thompson identified a specific legislative gap in Jamaica: while selling sexual services is illegal, purchasing them is not, except where the person is a child or a confirmed trafficking victim. He argued this asymmetry allows demand to persist largely unaddressed while enforcement focuses on those being exploited. He also described a common pattern of gradual exploitation, in which economic need draws a person into an ostensibly legitimate job that progressively shifts toward commercial sexual exploitation, with dependence on an exploiter sometimes misread as consent.

Panelists during the Day Three session

On the state response, Dr. Thompson described Jamaica's public awareness efforts, including community events, a television drama series addressing child protection and grooming, law enforcement operations at known locations, and toll-free, confidential reporting hotlines. He noted that a child protection early-warning system is in early development. He closed by stressing that anti-trafficking messaging alone

cannot shift demand; it must be paired with sustained work to change the underlying gender and cultural norms.

Engaging Men and Boys as Allies

Kwasi Cudjoe framed his contribution around going "upriver": addressing the attitudes and norms that generate demand before exploitation occurs, rather than only responding once harm has taken place. He argued that men and boys should be treated as a core pillar of prevention rather than a peripheral concern, noting that trusted local figures, including coaches, faith leaders, and other community anchors, can shift norms faster than institutional messaging because relationships and word of mouth travel quickly within small island communities.

He described MenCan, a Trinidad and Tobago-based network founded in 2021, which creates confidential, non-judgmental spaces, which he termed "brave spaces," where men can examine harmful ideas about masculinity and the beliefs underlying them. Central to this approach is the Mango Tree Model, which moves participants from awareness of an issue, through honest reflection on their own beliefs, to concrete protective action, such as intervening safely or contacting a reporting hotline. Mr. Cudjoe emphasized that information alone rarely changes behavior, and that programming should use strengths-based rather than deficit-based language, since messaging that tells men something is wrong with them tends to produce disengagement rather than change.

Organizational Drivers of Forced Labor

Neil Derrick shifted the discussion to how forced labor can arise within organizations and supply chains that are not run with criminal intent. He described economic pressures such as competition, migration, and informality as key drivers of business decisions around recruitment and cost, noting that a substantial share of Caribbean workers are in informal employment concentrated in construction, agriculture, fishing, hospitality, and domestic work, sectors where migrant labor is common and oversight is limited.

He argued that decent work should be understood as a designed operating system rather than an incidental outcome, shaped by governance, leadership, recruitment practice, procurement decisions, and frontline supervision. Drawing on his experience in industrial relations, he gave an example of a collective agreement requiring justification whenever contracted work was priced well below an independent cost estimate, arguing that when contractors are forced to accept unsustainably low rates, the resulting pressure can itself create conditions for exploitation.

An Emerging International Standard

Andre Charles introduced a forthcoming ISO guidance standard on managing the risk of modern slavery, developed under a joint secretariat between the British Standards Institution and the Saint Lucia Bureau of Standards, with input from national standards bodies across more than a dozen countries. Expected to be finalized in early 2026, the standard is intended for organizations of any size and focuses on prevention, identification, and remediation of forced labor and modern slavery across an organization's direct operations, its supply chain, its wider value chain, and its broader sphere of influence.

Mr. Charles outlined practical, self-assessment style questions drawn from the draft, covering stakeholder engagement, supply chain mapping, leadership commitment, and whether training translates into actual risk identification and remediation rather than a compliance formality. He noted that several export markets, including the United Kingdom and Australia, already have modern slavery legislation, and suggested that market access for Caribbean exporters may increasingly depend on demonstrated due diligence against forced labor within their supply chains.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In closing, Dr. Thompson noted that shifting cultural norms and media messaging that normalize the objectification of girls requires sustained engagement with media houses, artists, and other cultural producers, alongside conversations that begin within individual households. The panel converged on several priorities: closing legislative gaps that leave the purchase of sexual services largely unaddressed; scaling community-based, men-and-boys-focused prevention models that build trust before intervening; strengthening organizational governance, procurement, and recruitment practices so that legitimate supply chains do not inadvertently sustain forced labor; and adopting emerging international standards to guide due diligence. Panelists agreed that addressing demand, not only supply, is essential to reducing the conditions that allow commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor to persist across the region.

STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION: COALITIONS AND NETWORKS

Executive Summary

Day Four of the Webinar Series was reminiscent of the warm greeting shared by Helen Sworn (founder of Chab Dai and the Global Learning Community) with the Coalition when it launched two years ago - “It takes a networked solution to address a networked problem. The most strategic and effective way to connect and organise a multi-sector response is through coalitions and networks, the backbone of collective impact. I am delighted the Caribbean Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons is being launched for such a time as this...” The discussion on “Strengthening Collaboration: The Role of Coalitions and Networks in Combating Human Trafficking” was beautifully moderated by Diahann Gordon Harrison, Chair of the Coalition. Participants included Jane Piazer from the Department of Public Security, Organisation of American States, Smith Maxime from Beyond Borders Haiti and Survivor Leaders Stephania Sudney from the Survivor Network of the Restavek Practice in Haiti, and Shamere McKenzie, Founder of the Maryland Survivor Network and the Caribbean Survivor Network.

The panel addressed hemispheric mapping of survivor participation, the rise and eventual decline of a national coalition in Haiti, the structure and partnerships of a Haitian survivor-led network, and what genuinely sustainable survivor leadership requires. A consistent theme ran throughout: coordinated, trust-based collaboration among governments, civil society, and survivors themselves is essential, because trafficking networks already operate this way, and because coalitions succeed or fail based on relationships and institutional commitment, not funding alone.

A Hemispheric View: The OAS Mapping Exercise

Jane Piazer presented findings from a two-year OAS mapping exercise assessing how survivors participate in anti-trafficking decision-making across member states, expanding this year from an initial eight countries to the full OAS membership. The exercise found participation occurring at several levels: some survivors are invited to share their stories at public events, others contribute to policy consultations or training, and, in only a small number of cases, survivors hold leadership roles that directly shape decision-making. Most existing mechanisms were developed by civil society and NGOs rather than governments, with peer-support models, survivor advisory groups, and trauma-informed leadership initiatives cited as promising practices, particularly where housed within national anti-trafficking coalitions or commissions.

Ms. Piazer identified three recurring barriers to meaningful participation: (a) inadequate resources, including compensation for survivors' time and expertise, and practical costs such as transportation, lodging, interpretation, and psychosocial support; (b) weak institutionalization, where progress depends on a single committed official and stalls once that person moves on; and (c) insufficient trust, since meaningful participation requires survivors to feel safe, heard, and confident that confidentiality will be respected. She noted that effective networks are built on relationships and shared purpose before formal structures, and described the OAS mandate, in place since 2024, to explore an Inter-American Network of Trafficking Survivors that builds on, rather than replaces, existing coalitions.

Lessons from a National Coalition: ASR in Haiti

Smith Maxime presented the twenty-year history of the Restavek Abolition Coalition, known by its Creole acronym ASR, formed in Haiti in 2000 through joint efforts by the International Labour Organization, Fondasyon Limyè Lavi, and Beyond Borders to address child domestic servitude. Composed exclusively of Haitian organizations and governed by a general assembly and leadership committee, the coalition grew to thirty-three members and achieved significant milestones: Haiti's 2014 anti-trafficking law, which reclassified child domestic servitude as a trafficking crime rather than a private labor matter; a civil society seat on the resulting National Committee Against Human Trafficking; contribution to a child protection code, though it was never ratified by Parliament; advocacy for

ratification of ILO Convention 189 on domestic workers; development of an accredited host-family system for children removed from exploitative situations while family tracing continues; and the establishment of November 17 as Haiti's National Day Against Restavek.

Panelists during the Day Four session

Despite these achievements, the coalition dissolved amid Haiti's deteriorating security and political situation after 2020. Mr. Maxime identified a structural vulnerability: international NGOs provided funding and technical support but were deliberately excluded from membership so that Haitian organizations retained full control over decision-making. This preserved local ownership but left the coalition entirely dependent on foreign funding, with no mechanism for members to contribute financially; when that funding contracted, activity declined sharply. He offered this as a central lesson for future coalition design: balancing local ownership with more diversified and resilient funding.

Survivor-Led Networks in Practice

Mr. Maxime also described Beyond Borders' support, since 2012, for a survivor network that has grown from two founding members to more than 1,500 across Haiti. The model begins with community-based survivor identification, including door-to-door outreach and street theater in which survivors share their stories and invite others to do the same. Small groups then undergo awareness-building and leadership training covering group management, action planning, budgeting, and child protection, forming local "branches" that connect into a wider network.

Stephania Sudney, a survivor and network leader speaking in Haitian Creole through interpretation, described the network's structure in Port-au-Prince, which includes a rotating leadership committee and seven affiliated branches on La Gonâve. Activities include press conferences, community debates, and

door-to-door engagement to raise awareness of trafficking and encourage protective practices toward children who are not a household's biological children. She described partnerships supporting the work of the Network, including Beyond Borders as its principal funder, an international lawyers' network supporting legal advocacy and reparations for affected children, Doctors Without Borders providing medical and financial support, and a partner organization working with women who have escaped exploitative situations, alongside recognition from Haiti's Ministry of Social Affairs. She noted that the network's greatest ongoing challenge is insufficient resources to meet survivors' health, housing, and livelihood needs, including requests from young women in the network for vocational training, and that expanding partnerships remains a priority.

Building Sustainable Survivor Leadership

Shamere McKenzie, drawing on her own experience as a survivor and on founding the Maryland Survivor Network and, later, the Caribbean Survivor Network, argued that sustainability begins with relationships rather than funding or organizational structure alone. She noted that trafficking isolates people from family, community, and identity, and that survivor networks counter this by rebuilding connection and shared leadership. Members of the Maryland network moved beyond being recipients of services to becoming advisors, board members, researchers, and legislative witnesses, with several contributing directly to state legislation.

Extending this work internationally, Ms. McKenzie emphasized that there is no single survivor experience, and that a sustainable movement must make room for the full diversity of survivors, across trafficking type, nationality, gender, and identity, rather than elevating any one story. She described a survivor network as an ecosystem built on trust, shared purpose, and belonging, and challenged organizations to move beyond asking how to include survivors and instead ask how to build systems in which survivor leadership is expected, supported, and sustained through mentorship, succession planning, and fair compensation.

Conclusion

Across all four presentations, panelists converged on a shared conclusion: trafficking networks already collaborate effectively across borders, and the anti-trafficking response must match that coordination. Sustainable coalitions require institutionalized commitment rather than dependence on a single champion, diversified funding that does not leave local ownership fragile, and genuine power-sharing with survivors as leaders rather than as symbolic participants. Ms. McKenzie closed with a powerful statement: "Trafficking thrives in isolation, while healing, leadership, and lasting change are all built through connection and collaboration."

SUSTAINING THE MOVEMENT

Executive Summary

We brought our Webinar Series to a close on International Self-Care Day by exploring the topic of "Sustaining the Movement: Self-Care, Mental Health and Burnout Prevention in Anti-Trafficking Work." Moderated by therapist and Founder of Pursued International Foundation of Jamaica, Ms. Stacy-Ann Smith, the panel included Ms. Greisy Gonzalez Laguna (a Psychologist from Venezuela now living and working in Trinidad and Tobago), Ms. Sandra Christie Brown (a Survivor Leader from Jamaica and founder of Finding Your Light Foundation Inc.), ASP Indirah Belle, Chair of the Inter-Ministry Task Force Against Trafficking in Persons of The Bahamas, and Ms. Shakiah Lewis, the female CARICOM Youth Ambassador for Turks and Caicos Islands and Dean of the CARICOM Youth Ambassadors Corps.

The session moved from the clinical signs of burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress, to a survivor's personal path toward advocacy and healing, to Caribbean-wide youth mental health data, and finally to how faith and institutional coordination sustain frontline responders. Across every presentation, one message recurred: self-care is not an indulgence but a professional and

organizational responsibility, since responders who are depleted cannot sustainably support the people they serve.

Recognizing Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, and Secondary Trauma

Greisy Gonzalez outlined three conditions common among anti-trafficking responders. Burnout, the most common, arises from heavy caseloads and limited space for debriefing, and presents as persistent tiredness, irritability, difficulty concentrating, disrupted sleep and appetite, and a loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities. Compassion fatigue occurs when a responder unconsciously creates emotional distance from those they serve as a form of self-protection, gradually reducing empathy and, with it, the quality of care provided; Ms. Gonzalez stressed this is a protective response rather than a sign of poor character, but one that requires attention. Secondary, or vicarious, post-traumatic stress disorder affects a smaller share of responders and mirrors symptoms of direct trauma exposure, including intrusive memories, nightmares, anxiety, and physical symptoms, arising purely from repeated exposure to others' accounts of exploitation and abuse. She illustrated the point with her own experience of an unexpected trauma response while working with displaced populations in Trinidad and Tobago, noting that this level of impact typically warrants support from a mental health professional.

Panelists during the Day Five session

Peer Support, Management Practice, and Cultural Awareness

Ms. Gonzalez recommended structured peer support built on active listening and psychological first aid, along with regular debriefing before and after difficult interventions, particularly in settings without full-time access to therapists; she pointed to peer-support manuals published by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as a practical resource. She called on managers to

recognize the mental-health impact of this work, support tailored team self-care activities, and consider formal mental-health leave, while cautioning against the opposite risk of managers who, out of over-identification with the work, expect staff to sacrifice personal boundaries. She also addressed cross-cultural dynamics in multinational teams, recommending intentional practices, such as recognizing team members' national holidays and sharing traditional food and music, to build trust and cohesion across differing nationalities, beliefs, and backgrounds. In a later Q&A, she added that reliance on substances can be an unhealthy coping mechanism that responders and organizations should watch for.

A Survivor's Path to Advocacy and Self-Care

Sandra Christie Brown shared her personal journey following her own trafficking survivorship, including the fear and uncertainty she felt about how others would perceive her, and how seeking professional therapy and being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder led her to discover self-care practices that supported her healing. She described founding the Finding Your Light Foundation in 2023 after visiting her former primary school in Jamaica and recognizing the need for accessible counseling; the foundation now runs a wellness center serving children, parents, and the wider community, alongside practical supports such as a shoe locker for children in need. Ms. Christie Brown described her own self-care routine, including faith practices, adequate sleep, and boundary-setting with her schedule, and highlighted her involvement in a survivor network alongside fellow survivor leaders, which she described as essential to healing and to developing survivor leadership across the region. She closed by encouraging attendees to be patient and kind with themselves and to seek professional help without hesitation when needed.

Youth Mental Health Across the Caribbean

Shakiah Lewis presented findings from the CARICOM-UNICEF Child and Youth Mental Health Research Study, which surveyed more than 1,500 children and young people across seventeen Caribbean countries and territories. The study found that roughly one in five respondents reported symptoms of a mental health condition, with 58 percent reporting low optimism about the future, 56 percent reporting frequent worry, 54 percent reporting feelings of depression or hopelessness, and 77 percent reporting that anxiety made daily responsibilities difficult to manage. The study also found that 54 percent of respondents lacked a trusted person to whom they could turn for mental health concerns, and 68 percent had never seen a counselor despite recognizing its value. Ms. Lewis argued these figures reposition youth mental health as a development, educational, and human rights concern, not solely a health issue, and she called for expanded mental health and psychosocial support alongside multi-sector collaboration among governments, schools, healthcare systems, and civil society. She closed by extending this message to anti-trafficking practitioners directly, arguing that self-care is a professional

responsibility rather than a luxury, since unaddressed stress and burnout ultimately compromise practitioners' capacity to serve survivors with compassion and clarity.

Faith, Coordination, and Frontline Sustainability

Indirah Belle, chairperson of The Bahamas' Trafficking-in-Persons Inter-Ministry Task Force, described the demands of coordinating prevention, victim protection, and prosecution efforts, including accompanying survivors to court and arranging emergency medical care, often without a dedicated shelter or full complement of resources. She described her personal faith, including a dedicated chaplain supporting task force members, as central to sustaining her through the intensity and unpredictability of the work.

Adrian Alexander, closing the session, connected this to the broader integrity of the anti-trafficking system, noting that unaddressed stress, secondary trauma, or unhealthy coping among law enforcement, judicial officers, or social workers can create vulnerability to corruption or compromised casework, making self-care a systemic safeguard as well as a personal one. He noted the overlapping observance of International Self-Care Month and the United Nations' International Judicial Wellbeing Day as evidence of growing recognition of these connections.

Conclusion

Panelists converged on a shared conclusion: sustaining anti-trafficking work requires sustaining the people who carry it out. Organizations were encouraged to build peer-support structures, invest in manager training, provide access to employee assistance programs, and create space for cultural connection within multinational teams. For survivor advocates in particular, panelists emphasized that community, faith, and professional support are not separate from the work but foundational to it. As multiple speakers put it, "One cannot pour from an empty cup". A resilient anti-trafficking movement depends on caring for its people with the same compassion extended to survivors.

KEY REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Based on the discussions, recommendations, and recurring themes across all five webinar sessions, the following Key Regional Priorities for Action Towards 2030 emerge:

1. Strengthen Regional Cooperation and Information Sharing

- Enhance cross-border collaboration among governments, law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, and regional institutions.
- Harmonize anti-trafficking legislation and policies across CARICOM member states.
- Improve regional data collection, analysis, and sharing to identify trends and emerging threats.
- Expand mechanisms for intelligence-sharing and coordinated investigations.

2. Address Emerging Forms of Trafficking

- Strengthen recognition and response to cyber-enabled trafficking, online scamming operations, forced criminality, and sport trafficking.
- Update laws, screening tools, and referral mechanisms to address evolving trafficking typologies.
- Build technical and digital-investigation capacity among anti-trafficking practitioners and law enforcement agencies.

3. Advance Survivor Leadership and Meaningful Participation

- Move beyond survivor consultation to survivor leadership in policymaking, programming, training, and advocacy.
- Support survivor-led networks and coalitions throughout the Caribbean.
- Ensure fair compensation, mentorship, and sustainable support for survivor leaders.
- Institutionalize survivor participation in national and regional anti-trafficking mechanisms.

4. Meaningfully Engage Youth in Prevention and Decision-Making

- Establish structured youth participation in national task forces, advisory bodies, and policy processes.
- Support youth-led awareness, prevention, and research initiatives.
- Promote digital literacy and online safety education.
- Incorporate trafficking awareness into educational curricula and youth leadership programs.

5. Address Demand for Exploitation

- Develop strategies to reduce demand for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour.
- Engage men and boys as partners in prevention and culture change.

- Challenge harmful gender norms, exploitation-tolerant attitudes, and social practices that contribute to demand.
- Strengthen accountability throughout supply chains and labour recruitment systems.

6. Promote Inclusive and Vulnerable-Population Focused Responses

- Ensure meaningful inclusion of migrants, persons with disabilities, youth, women, survivors, and other marginalized groups.
- Strengthen protections for children and persons in vulnerable circumstances.
- Develop culturally responsive and accessible prevention and protection strategies.

7. Strengthen Coalitions, Networks, and Multi-Sector Partnerships

- Promote sustainable national and regional coalitions as vehicles for collective impact.
- Foster stronger partnerships among government, civil society, survivor networks, international organizations, academia, and the private sector.
- Ensure coalition sustainability through diversified funding and institutional support.
- Build trust-based relationships that facilitate long-term collaboration.

8. Strengthen Corporate and Organizational Due Diligence

- Improve governance, procurement, and recruitment practices to prevent forced labour.
- Encourage adoption of emerging international standards such as ISO 37200 and other modern slavery due diligence frameworks.
- Promote ethical supply chains and responsible business practices throughout the region.

9. Build Professional Capacity Across the Anti-Trafficking Spectrum

- Expand anti-trafficking training for professionals involved in Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Partnerships and Policy.
- Improve victim identification, referral, and trauma-informed response mechanisms.
- Ensure practitioners can recognize emerging trafficking indicators and trends.

10. Prioritize Wellbeing and Sustainability of the Anti-Trafficking Workforce

- Address burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary trauma among frontline responders.
- Establish peer-support structures, employee assistance programmes, and mental-health resources.
- Encourage organizational cultures that support work-life balance and resilience.
- Recognize practitioner wellbeing as essential to effective anti-trafficking outcomes.

11. Improve Public Awareness and Community Engagement

- Develop targeted awareness campaigns for parents, youth, communities, employers, sports organizations, and vulnerable populations.
- Increase public understanding of emerging trafficking risks and prevention strategies.
- Leverage media, schools, faith-based organizations, and community leaders as prevention partners.

12. Accelerate Progress Towards the 2030 Goal

- Translate the 2025 Caribbean Anti-Trafficking Conference and 2026 Webinar Series recommendations into concrete actions at national and regional levels.
- Strengthen accountability for implementation.
- Maintain momentum through regular collaboration, monitoring, and reporting on progress against anti-trafficking commitments.

HELPFUL LINKS

United Nations Cybercrime Convention

Global Thematic Report on Sport Trafficking

Pact for the Future

British Standards Institution (ISO 37200)

Mapping of Initiatives of the Public Sector, Civil Society and International Organizations that Actively Engage Survivors of Trafficking in Persons

OAS Regional Guidelines for the Social Inclusion of Survivors of Trafficking in Persons in the Americas

The Caribbean Child and Youth Mental Health Research Study Report — CARICOM and UNICEF Youth Mental Health Survey Report V6

Child Labour in the Caribbean Fact Sheet

Child Labour in the Caribbean Fact Sheet (Child-friendly version)