

# MENA REGIONAL FORUM

**Strengthening  
Protections for  
Vulnerable  
Populations  
Against Human  
Trafficking and  
Forced Labor in  
the MENA Region**

**DATES: DECEMBER 10-12, 2024**  
**LOCATION: ONLINE**



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# FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY FORUM SERIES



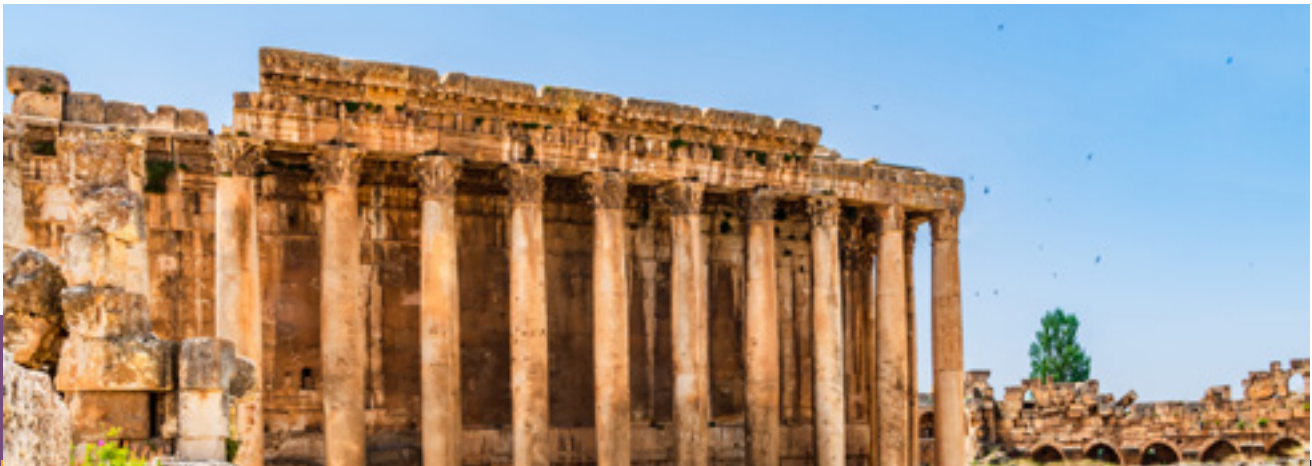
The Freedom from Slavery Forum was established in 2013 to gather anti-modern slavery leaders worldwide to create a space to merge, create partnerships, discuss promising practices, and develop a shared agenda for action. Participants have built relationships and prioritized actions in advocacy and collaboration with other sectors. In 2021, the annual Global Forum was supplemented by a series of Regional Forums. The 2022-2023 series took place online and in person, providing opportunities to increase access and ensuring grassroots ideas and voices were amplified within the movement. In 2024, the Europe Regional Forum also became a separate entity, resulting in 7 Regional Forums held throughout the year: three in-person forums (North America, Caribbean, Europe) and four online Forums (Latin America, Asia, Africa and MENA). The 2024 - 2025 series will conclude with the 2025 Global Forum in November 2025 in Paris France.

# SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUMS



The objectives of the Regional Forums are **to explore and define critical strategies for local engagements, identify the best approaches to revitalize the movement, increase resilience and resistance to modern slavery, and determine how these engagements may inform the global synergies**. The Forum is a collegial space to unite stakeholders and strengthen the anti-modern slavery movement. The panels and workshops discuss opportunities, challenges, practices, strategies, and actions to eradicate modern slavery in the regions.

# MENA REGIONAL FORUM



Held from December 10 to 12, 2024, the MENA Regional Forum was an online event centered on the theme: "Strengthening Protections for Vulnerable Populations Against Human Trafficking and Forced Labor in the MENA Region." The forum was convened by Free the Slaves in collaboration with en.v, Migrant-Rights.org, and the Social Work Society. It gathered 330 registrants with an average of 80 active participants per day, including representatives of grassroots organizations, governments, international NGOs, academia, and survivor leaders from across the MENA region.

**Online**

**Dec 10-12, 2024**

**Strengthening Protections for  
Vulnerable Populations Against  
Human Trafficking and Forced  
Labor in the MENA Region**

The forum's agenda was structured around three daily themes:

## **Day One**

Protecting Vulnerable  
Populations in  
Conflict and Post-  
Conflict Zones

## **Day Two**

Addressing Forced  
Labor under  
Temporary Migration  
Schemes

## **Day Three**

Enhancing Multi-  
Stakeholder  
Collaboration and  
Advocacy



## THE PLANNING OF THE FORUM

While Free the Slaves serves as the Forum's secretariat, we were not the sole actors involved in planning the event. We would like to express our gratitude to all external committee members, without whom this event would not have been successful.

## EXTERNAL COMMITTEE

Elisa Franceschinis – en.v  
Hind Francis - Social Work Society  
Rima Kalush – Migrant-Rights.org

**Forum Team:** Aline Gaju, Bryon Lippincott, Jaime Moro Saavedra and Mohammad Bader



## Day One: Protecting Vulnerable Populations in Conflict and Post-Conflict Zones





## OVERVIEW OF SPEAKERS - DAY 1



**Dr. Davina P. Durgana**

Free the Slaves



**Bryon Lippincott**

Free the Slaves



**Sherrynorth**

Sherrynorth  
Real Life  
Foundation



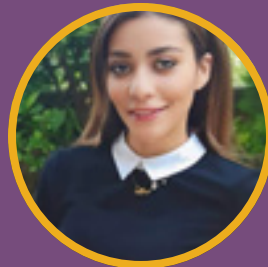
**Elisa Franceschinis**

en.v



**Lucy Turay**

Domestic  
Workers  
Advocacy  
Network



**Mira Bene**

Mesewat



**Awah Francisca  
Mbuli**

Survivor  
Network  
Cameroon



**Salahedine Juma**

Human Rights  
Defender and  
Community  
Activist



**Rima Kalush**

Migrant  
Rights.org



**Halifet  
Ayemohammed**

Wollo  
University

## OVERVIEW OF SPEAKERS - DAY 1



**Rana Hussein**

The Jordan Times



**Maria Khayat**

Beyond



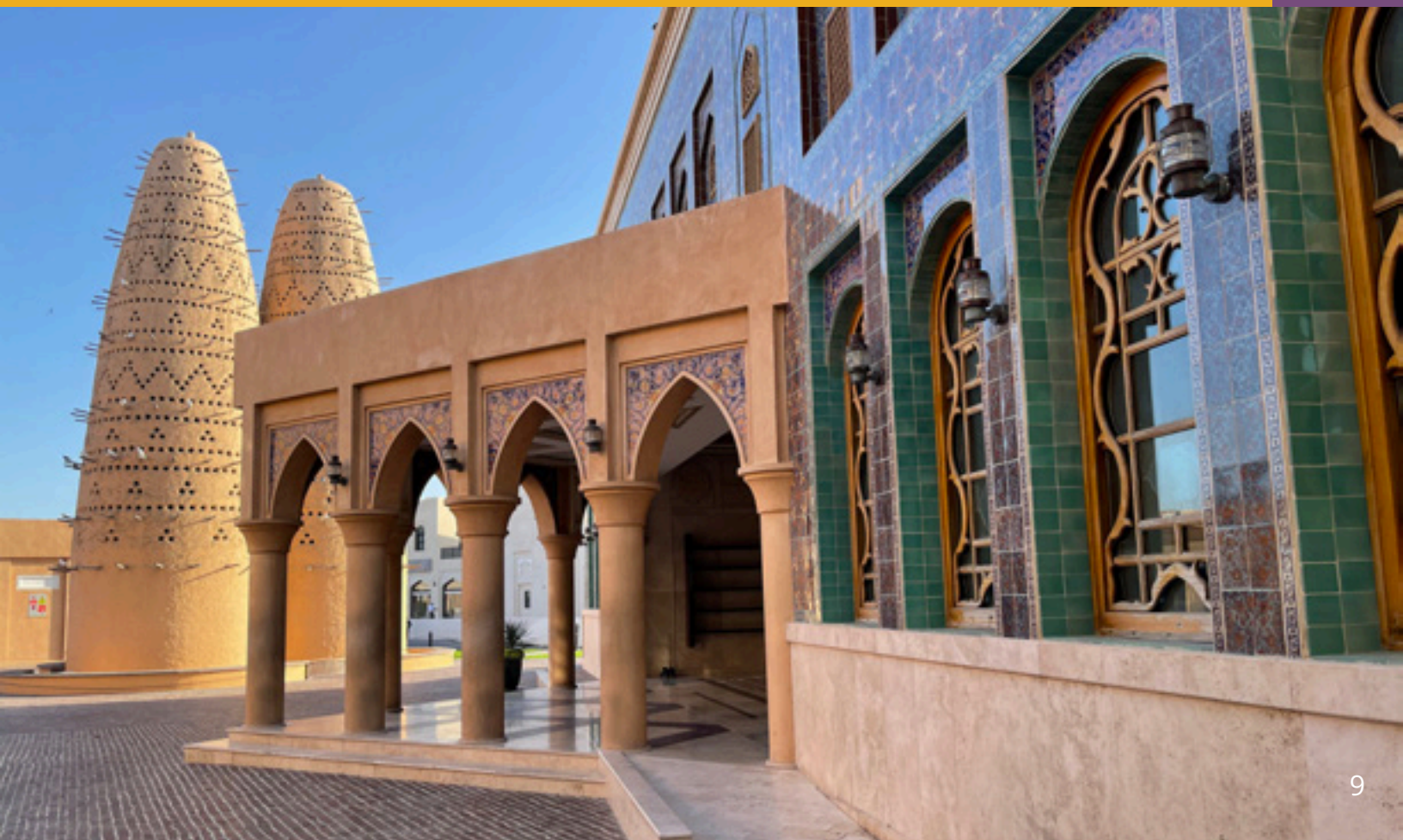
**Dara Foi'Elle**

Migrant Work Action



**Hind Francis**

Social Work Society



## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The forum commenced with a welcome address from Bryon Lippincott, the Head of Communications at Free the Slaves, who underscored the region's urgent need for action in light of escalating conflict and systemic inequality. His remarks emphasized that trafficking in the MENA region disproportionately affects women, children, stateless persons, and migrant workers. Additionally, his remarks highlighted the need for unity, collective hope, and actionable strategies, reminding attendees of the forum's role as a platform to amplify survivor voices and strengthen protections for the vulnerable.

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*"We cannot ignore the harsh reality that conflict exacerbates vulnerabilities, making it even more difficult to address exploitative practices. Yet, we hold on to hope that peace will return, bringing with it the possibility to rebuild stronger protections for those most at risk." - Bryon Lippincott, Free the Slaves*

## KEYNOTE SPEECH

Sherrynorth, a lived-experience expert on human trafficking and the founder of the Sherrynorth Real Life Foundation, delivered a compelling and deeply personal address, sharing her journey from being trafficked in conflict zones to becoming a global advocate for vulnerable populations. Drawing on her own survival, she called for stronger protections against human trafficking, particularly for those living in or fleeing from regions affected by armed conflict.

Sherrynorth emphasized that conflict zones serve as fertile ground for exploitation. When law and order collapse, traffickers seize the opportunity to target those already devastated by violence and displacement. Women, children, and stateless individuals become easy prey, often coerced or deceived into trafficking situations. These vulnerable groups lose more than physical shelter; they are stripped of education and future aspirations, resulting in long-term cycles of poverty, trauma, and marginalization.

A core focus of Sherrynorth's message was the re-victimization survivors often face when they return to their home communities. Rather than receiving empathy or support, many survivors are met with suspicion, shame, or outright rejection. This societal stigma not only deepens psychological wounds but also hinders reintegration and recovery. Sherrynorth urged the need for comprehensive aftercare, including psychosocial support, education, and economic empowerment, to ensure survivors are not abandoned for a second time.

Additionally, she called for survivor-led advocacy to be placed at the heart of anti-trafficking efforts. Those with lived experience, she argued, are best equipped to inform policy, design effective reintegration programs, and educate communities. By centering survivor voices, responses to trafficking can become more humane, inclusive, and impactful. Her message was a heartfelt call to action to build systems rooted in dignity, justice, and lasting support.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Conflict Zones Intensify Trafficking Risks by Dismantling Legal Systems and Social Protections**

This creates the perfect environment where traffickers can operate with impunity.

### **Survivors Require Support After**

Survivors need sustained reintegration support, including mental health services, job training, and access to education.

### **Survivor-led Initiatives are Crucial for Effective Anti-trafficking Strategies**

It is important that responses are informed by lived experience to ensure effectiveness.

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*“Traffickers prey on desperation, stripping individuals of their dignity and dreams. We must rebuild systems of support that restore hope and provide survivors with the tools to reclaim their lives.” - Sherrynorth, Sherrynorth Real Life Foundation*

## **PANEL DISCUSSION: GRASSROOTS APPROACHES TO COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT ZONES**

The panel discussion, Exploring Grassroots Approaches to Addressing Human Trafficking in the MENA Region, moderated by Elisa Franceschinis - en.v, brought together four distinguished grassroots leaders: Lucy Turay - Domestic Workers Advocacy Network; Awah Francisca Mbuli - Survivor Network Cameroon; Mira Bene - Mesewat; and Salahedine Juma - Human Rights Defender and Community Activist. Together, they examined grassroots strategies for combating human trafficking, particularly in conflict and post-conflict contexts across the MENA region.

A major focus of the panel was the vulnerability created by conflict and instability. Awah Francisca Mbuli highlighted the importance of amplifying survivor voices, ensuring that anti-trafficking programs reflect lived experiences and address real needs. Additionally, she mentioned that she had led to increased displacement and heightened vulnerability to trafficking. She emphasized the critical importance of creating economic opportunities, strengthening local community networks, engaging community leaders, and collaborating closely with law enforcement and health providers to mitigate trafficking risks.

Lucy Turay shared her personal experience as a survivor of forced labor in Lebanon, describing the severe challenges faced by African migrants who return home. She pointed out that repatriated women often face stigmatization, economic hardship, and re-trafficking risks due to limited local support. To combat these challenges, her organization emphasizes community-level economic empowerment through skills training, agricultural projects, and continuous awareness campaigns in schools, markets, and community groups to prevent trafficking.

Mira Bene addressed the exploitation embedded in Lebanon's kafala system, specifically highlighting the severe risks faced by Ethiopian domestic workers. She emphasized that Mesewat works directly to empower migrant workers through capacity-building, emergency responses, and livelihood programs, enabling workers to sustain themselves in Lebanon or successfully reintegrate upon returning home.

Salahedine Juma brought attention to the crisis in Libya, detailing the exploitation faced by migrants and refugees fleeing conflict zones, such as Sudan. He described how vulnerable groups are frequently manipulated by militias and traffickers who exploit their desperation, using detention and ransom tactics. Salahedine stressed that grassroots groups, such as Refugees in Libya, play a crucial role in documenting abuses, raising international awareness, and advocating for stronger protections and responses from international organizations for people and activists.

Each panelist emphasized the essential role of grassroots approaches, highlighting community-driven solutions, survivor-led initiatives, and locally tailored economic empowerment programs as critical to breaking cycles of vulnerability and trafficking. The discussion underscored the necessity of integrating comprehensive support systems, such as psychosocial services, skill-building, and sustainable livelihoods, to ensure long-term stability and resilience for vulnerable communities affected by conflict-driven displacement and trafficking in the MENA region.



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*“We believe in skills training because that was what was missing... So we started with skills training... We are working with school club, mother's club, market club... to raise awareness and have a community to engage them continuously.” - Lucy Turay, Domestic Workers Advocacy Network*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Community Awareness is a Powerful Tool**

Grassroots campaigns in schools, markets, and neighborhoods help at-risk populations recognize and avoid trafficking.

### **Economic Empowerment Reduces Vulnerability**

Programs offering skills training and microfinance give survivors pathways to independence and reduce re-trafficking risk.

### **Survivors Must Lead the Movement**

Lived experience is essential. Policies and interventions must be shaped by those directly affected.

### **Stronger Local-International Collaboration is Needed**

Partnerships between grassroots groups and global actors are essential to close protection gaps.

### **Funding and Policy Reform are Key to Sustainable Change**

Addressing root causes like poverty, conflict, and weak legal systems is critical for long-term impact.



## **PANEL DISCUSSION: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE STRENGTHENING PROTECTIONS FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS**

The panel discussion From Policy to Practice, strengthening protections for vulnerable populations, moderated by Rima Kalush, Program Manager at Migrant-Rights.org, brought together four distinguished voices from across the region: Halifet Ayemohammed, a law lecturer at Wollo University in Ethiopia; Rana Hussein, senior reporter at The Jordan Times; Maria Khayat, director of Beyond Association in Lebanon; and Dara Foï'Elle, Policy and Communications Manager at Migrant Work Action. Together, they examined the systemic challenges facing migrants, refugees, and marginalized communities across the MENA region, with a sharp focus on the disconnect between policy frameworks and real-world implementation.

A key topic was the persistent migration of African workers to the Middle East. Halifet Ayemohammed highlighted how economic hardship, conflict, and limited local opportunities continue to push people to migrate, but the reality is that once people migrate it is very likely for them to face exploitation, legal limbo, and abuse due to poorly enforced bilateral agreements and a lack of awareness of host country laws. He emphasized that reintegration after deportation remains fraught, especially in rural areas where social and institutional support is minimal, often leading to repeated cycles of migration.

The panel discussed the plight of migrant workers facing entrenched discrimination under the kafala system. Rana Hussein illustrated how migrant communities are routinely excluded from aid and policymaking—even though they play vital roles in crisis response. Migrant leaders, she noted, are often denied access to financial aid and advocacy platforms, leaving them dependent on inadequate in-kind donations.

Maria Khayat addressed the rising crisis of child labor and trafficking in Lebanon, exacerbated by the country's economic collapse and the influx of Syrian refugees. She noted that many families both refugee and Lebanese have resorted to child labor for survival, making children vulnerable to traffickers. Beyond Association, which she directs, has launched emergency response teams and protection centers offering psychosocial support and educational services. However, Lebanon's refusal to sign the 1951 Refugee Convention complicates coordinated international protection efforts.

Dara Foi'Elle shared their experiences, focusing on the gendered dimensions of displacement. With many men absent or unable to work, women have been forced into breadwinning roles, often encountering early marriage, gender-based violence, and economic exploitation. While some have built resilience through small businesses and community support, opportunities inside refugee camps remain extremely limited. She emphasized the importance of awareness campaigns, psychosocial services, and targeted livelihood programs to help women and children regain stability.



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*“Migrant leaders are the agents of change, but it is the responsibility of NGOs to ensure that this agency is enabled, empowered, and supported.” - Dara Foi'Elle, My Choices Foundation*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Legal and Reintegration Gaps Leave Migrants Vulnerable**

Migrants from Ethiopia face exploitation due to weak enforcement of legal protections and a lack of reintegration support, driving cycles of re-migration.

### **Migrant Workers in Lebanon Face Structural Exclusion**

Under the kafala system, migrant workers are denied aid, rights, and political voice despite their key role in crisis response.

### **Child Labor and Trafficking Worsen in Times of Crisis**

Economic collapse and political instability in Lebanon have increased child exploitation, especially among refugees.

### **Women Escaping from War Face Gender-Based Vulnerabilities**

Women refugees face early marriage, economic hardship, and limited opportunities, especially inside camps.

### **Systemic Reforms Must Be Matched with Local Solutions**

Panelists called for stronger laws, inclusive policymaking, and investment in education, psychosocial support, and economic resilience.

## WORKSHOP: VOICES FROM THE GROUND

Facilitated by Hind Francis, Social Work and Communications Manager at the Social Work Society, this dynamic workshop convened grassroots organizations, community advocates, and regional stakeholders to co-create practical solutions to the pressing challenges faced by vulnerable populations in conflict and post-conflict contexts across the MENA region. The workshop was structured around three breakout sessions, each focused on a critical area of vulnerability, with participants emphasizing survivor-led advocacy, structural reform, and inclusive funding models that better reach frontline communities.

The first breakout session, *The Impact of the War in Lebanon on Migrants*, examined the systematic exclusion of migrant workers from Lebanon's National Emergency Plan. Participants highlighted dire gaps in shelter services, frequent forced evictions, and the lack of institutional support—particularly for multi-national migrant families. Migrants are often left to rely on informal community networks or international NGOs, as domestic systems fail to address their needs. The group recommended strengthening collaboration between registered NGOs and migrant-led groups while preserving community autonomy, adapting donor policies to fund informal grassroots initiatives, and improving cultural sensitivity training for NGOs to foster trust and enhance service delivery.

In the second breakout session, *Addressing Social Stigma in Reporting Human Trafficking*, participants explored how social stigma remains a major barrier preventing survivors from reporting their experiences or seeking help. The conversation focused on the urgent need for mental health services, pre-departure education, and awareness campaigns to shift societal attitudes toward trafficking survivors. The group underscored the critical role of survivor-led advocacy and called for funding mechanisms that are flexible and inclusive, especially for grassroots organizations in West Africa. Recommendations included the creation of safe, survivor-centered reporting spaces, legal and psychological support services, and the integration of survivor-led organizations into policymaking.



The third session, Protecting Refugees in Libya and Advocates Documenting Crimes, highlighted the acute dangers faced by human rights defenders working in Libya, particularly those documenting abuses against refugees. Participants criticized the role of European migration policies in perpetuating these abuses and stressed the need for stronger international advocacy. The group called for engaging local European governments to push for asylum reform and accountability, utilizing media and storytelling to raise awareness, and mobilizing global pressure to end European support for abusive practices in Libya and Tunisia.

The workshop concluded with a call to action: sustainable change requires inclusive funding, survivor leadership, and coordinated responses that prioritize the voices and safety of those on the front lines.

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*“Real change comes when we work together to bridge divides and empower those at the margins.” - Rima Kalush, Migrant-Rights.org*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Migrant Workers in Lebanon Are Systemically Excluded from Aid**

Emergency plans overlook migrant workers, particularly in shelter and crisis services. A more inclusive and coordinated approach is urgently needed.

### **Stigma Silences Survivors of Trafficking**

Survivors often remain hidden due to fear and shame. Safe spaces for reporting, mental health support, and public education campaigns are essential to dismantle stigma.

### **Grassroots and Migrant-Led Groups Must Be Funded and Heard**

Flexible, direct funding and policy inclusion are vital to ensuring grassroots and survivor-led initiatives can drive meaningful change.

### **Human Rights Defenders in the Region Face Life-Threatening Risks**

Those documenting abuses against refugees require urgent protection. International advocacy must challenge the harmful role of European migration policies.

## REGIONAL CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED ON DAY ONE

### **Conflict Zones Fuel Human Trafficking by Dismantling Systems of Law**

This leaves women, children, and stateless individuals vulnerable to exploitation.

### **Migrant Workers are Often Excluded from Emergency Plans**

Having a lack of access to essential services during crises, leaving them reliant on informal networks.

### **Women Refugees Face Gender-Based Violence, and Economic Exploitation**

This happens especially when forced into breadwinner roles without adequate support.

### **Survivors of Trafficking Face Stigma and Rejection**

When returning home people usually experience rejection from their communities, which hinders reintegration and deepens psychological trauma.

### **Survivors Are Not Included in Policy Development**

This leads to disconnected and ineffective anti-trafficking strategies.

### **Economic Hardship Leads to Repeated Cycles of Re-Trafficking and Migration**

This occurs particularly among returnees who lack viable opportunities.

# PROPOSED SOLUTIONS TO THE IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

## **01. Strengthen Legal Systems and Anti-Trafficking Mechanisms in Conflict Zones**

Invest in robust legal frameworks, mobile protection units, and community-based early warning systems to safeguard women, children, and stateless persons during and after conflict.

## **02. Include Migrant Workers in Crisis Preparedness and Response Plans**

Ensure that national emergency strategies account for the needs of migrant populations by formalizing access to shelters, healthcare, and aid distribution, in coordination with migrant-led groups.

## **03. Create Gender-Sensitive Support Systems for Women Refugees**

Develop targeted livelihood programs, protection services, and safe spaces that address the unique challenges women face when thrust into caregiving and economic roles during displacement.

## **04. Develop Community-Based Reintegration and Awareness Programs for Survivors**

Launch stigma-reduction campaigns and survivor-informed reintegration services that combine mental health support, vocational training, and public education to foster acceptance and healing.

## **05. Institutionalize Survivor Participation in Policy and Program Design**

Mandate the inclusion of survivor voices in anti-trafficking frameworks, ensuring policies and services are informed by lived realities and that empower affected individuals.

## **06. Expand Economic Empowerment Opportunities for Returnees**

Scale up access to skills training, microloans, and social safety nets to help returnees rebuild stable livelihoods and avoid re-entering exploitative situations.



## Day Two: Protecting Vulnerable Populations and Addressing Forced Labor under Temporary Migration Schemes



## OVERVIEW OF SPEAKERS - DAY 2



**Dr. Davina P. Durgana**

Free the Slaves



**Jeff Ochieng**

Independent



**Mustafa Qadri**

Equidem



**Ann Abunda**

Sandigan Kuwait



**Bhim Shrestha**

Shramik  
Sanjal



**Aidah Muli**

Survivors  
Network Kenya



**George Muturi**

Bahrain  
Kenyan  
Society



**Mohammad Bader**

Free The Slaves



**Dr. Hayat Osseiran**

Independent



**Tanja Dedovic**

IOM



## OVERVIEW OF SPEAKERS - DAY 2



**Catriona Fraser**

Migrants  
Workers  
Researcher



**Hind Francis**

Social Work Society



## KEYNOTE SPEECH: THE IMPACT OF TEMPORARY MIGRATION SCHEMES ON VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND FORCED LABOR

Day 2 of the forum began with a compelling keynote address delivered by Jeff Ochieng, a Kenyan journalist and human trafficking lived experience person, who is a passionate advocate for migrant rights. Jeff shared his personal story of being trafficked, to explain how this common practice often occurs. Then, he recounted the severe challenges he faced: the confiscation of his passport, threats from employers, abusive working conditions, and the inability to leave or seek legal protection due to bureaucratic and legal hurdles. In these circumstances, he acknowledged the importance of human-rights organizations, as only through the intervention of those Jeff eventually was able to come back to Kenya.

Jeff used his own story to illustrate how the system operates, serving as a reminder of the systemic risks embedded within temporary labor migration systems. He exposed how schemes marketed as opportunities often conceal recruitment fraud, coercive practices, and a near-total lack of oversight. In his address, Jeff urged policymakers, advocates, and stakeholders to push for deep reforms—both at the grassroots and policy levels. He called for the dismantling of exploitative structures like the Kafala system and the establishment of transparent, regulated migration pathways that prioritize worker safety, dignity, and agency.

His testimony set a powerful tone for the day's discussions, emphasizing the human cost of inaction and the urgent need for collective advocacy and systemic change.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Temporary Migration Schemes Can Mask Exploitation**

Systems like Kafala often appear to offer opportunity but instead entrap workers in exploitative conditions with little to no recourse.

### **Recruitment Fraud Is a Major Entry Point into Trafficking**

People migrating are frequently deceived with false job offers, only to arrive in host countries and find no employment or support.

### **There is an Urgent Need for Policy Reform and Regulation**

Without enforcement, temporary migration schemes risk becoming tools of exploitation rather than safe channels for employment.

”

*“Without regulation and accountability, temporary migration schemes become tools of exploitation rather than pathways to opportunity ” - Jeff Ochieng, Human Rights Advocate*

## **PANEL DISCUSSION: REALITIES OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS UNDER TEMPORARY MIGRATION SCHEMES**

The panel discussion Realities of Vulnerable Populations Under Temporary Migration Schemes, moderated by Mustafa Qadri, Founder and CEO of Equidem, brought together four frontline experts and advocates working closely with migrant communities: Ann Abunda, Head Volunteer and Founding Chairperson of Sandigan Kuwait Domestic Worker Association; Bhim Shrestha of Shramik Sanjal; Aidah Muli, Chairperson of Survivors Network Kenya; and George Muturi, Liaison Officer at the Bahrain Kenyan Society. Together, they examined the lived experiences of migrant workers across the Gulf under temporary migration schemes and highlighted the systemic factors that perpetuate labor exploitation.

Mustafa Qadri opened the session by contextualizing the issue: many workers enter migration programs with the hope of financial stability, only to find themselves trapped in cycles of abuse, debt, and legal vulnerability, especially under the Kafala system. He emphasized how current frameworks continue to favor employers and offer little protection for migrant laborers, creating fertile ground for forced labor.

Ann Abunda shared direct insights into the plight of domestic workers in Kuwait. She described how women workers endure wage theft, isolation, and physical abuse, often without any legal recourse due to the restrictive conditions of their sponsorship. “We are not numbers,” she said. “We are people with stories and voices that deserve to be heard.” She called for domestic workers to be included in decision-making processes and labor protections.

Bhim Shrestha shed light on the burdensome recruitment process many South Asian workers face. He explained how migrants are often misled about wages and conditions and are forced to pay high recruitment fees, leaving them in debt before even beginning their jobs. This economic vulnerability makes it nearly impossible to leave abusive employers or assert their rights.



Aidah Muli addressed the psychological toll of trafficking and forced labor. She emphasized that many survivors return home not just with trauma but also facing stigma and rejection from their communities for failing to meet financial expectations. She stressed the need for comprehensive mental health care and reintegration services.

Finally, George Muturi focused on male migrant workers, particularly those in construction and security. He discussed the poor living conditions, overcrowded camps, and lack of access to healthcare that many face. Language barriers further isolate these workers, limiting their ability to seek help or understand their rights.



”

*"We, the workers, are not numbers. We are people with stories, with struggles, and with voices that deserve to be heard at the decision-making table." - Ann Abunda, Sandigan Kuwait*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **The Kafala System Facilitates the Exploitation of Workers**

Restrictive sponsorship rules prevent workers from leaving abusive employers.

### **High Recruitment Fees Trap Migrants in Debt**

Workers often arrive already financially vulnerable and misinformed about job conditions.

### **Lack of Legal Recourse Perpetuates Abuse**

Migrants face barriers to justice due to fear, bureaucracy, and language isolation.

### **Mental Health and Reintegration Support Are Lacking**

Survivors often return home traumatized and stigmatized, without adequate care.

### **Migrant Voices Must Be Included in Policy Discussions**

Workers must be seen and treated as rights-holders, not just labor units.

## **PANEL DISCUSSION: POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT VULNERABLE POPULATIONS**

Moderated by Mohammad Bader, MENA Regional Manager at Free the Slaves, this panel brought together leading voices from international and research organizations to assess the strengths and shortcomings of current policy frameworks designed to protect vulnerable populations under temporary migration schemes. Panelists included Dr. Hayat Osseiran, an independent expert on child protection and labor; Tanja Dedovic, Regional Thematic Specialist on Labor Mobility and Social Inclusion at the International Organization for Migration (IOM); and Catriona Fraser, Migrant Workers Researcher at the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre.

Dr. Hayat Osseiran opened the discussion by pointing out a key contradiction: while many MENA countries have laws addressing labor exploitation and trafficking, enforcement mechanisms remain weak. Domestic workers, in particular, are often excluded from basic labor protections, exposing them to wage theft, long hours, and abuse. She highlighted that child labor laws are similarly ineffective without proper monitoring and accountability, calling for stricter oversight mechanisms to translate legal protections into meaningful safeguards.

Tanja Dedovic shifted the conversation toward recruitment practices. She explained that workers often pay exorbitant recruitment fees and receive misleading job information, leaving them trapped in debt and abusive conditions. Dedovic advocated for the adoption of employer-pay models and insisted that labor protections must be contextualized to local political and economic realities. She also emphasized that policymaking processes must include the voices of migrant workers.

Catriona Fraser focused on corporate accountability, arguing that many multinational businesses continue to benefit from systemic exploitation in the Gulf due to weak regulation and non-binding corporate social responsibility pledges. She stressed the importance of independent grievance mechanisms that allow workers to report abuse without fear of retaliation. She called for binding legal accountability across supply chains and stronger government oversight.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Weak Policy Enforcement Limits Impact**

Labor laws exist but lack effective monitoring and accountability.

### **Recruitment Systems Remain Exploitative**

High fees and deceptive contracts leave workers in debt and vulnerable.

### **Corporate Accountability Must Be Strengthened**

Voluntary compliance is insufficient; legal enforcement is essential.

”

*"A policy is only as strong as its enforcement. Without monitoring, legal frameworks remain words on paper while exploitation continues unchecked." - Dr. Hayat Osseiran, independent expert*

## **WORKSHOP: PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR PROTECTING MIGRANT WORKERS**

Facilitated by Hind Francis, the Social Work and Communications Manager at the Social Work Society, this interactive workshop brought together grassroots advocates, legal experts, and community organizers to co-develop actionable strategies for enhancing protection mechanisms for migrant workers across the MENA region. The session encouraged collaborative problem-solving focused on the most pressing challenges faced by migrant workers, particularly in areas of mental health, language access, and legal support.

Participants were divided into thematic discussion groups, each addressing a key area of vulnerability. The emphasis throughout the workshop was on grounding solutions in the lived experiences of migrant workers and ensuring that proposed interventions are inclusive, survivor-informed, and scalable.

The first discussion group focused on mental health solutions, recognizing the severe emotional and psychological toll migrant workers face due to abuse, isolation, and labor exploitation. Participants proposed the creation of trauma-informed safe houses, peer counseling networks, and mental health response teams equipped to support survivors of forced labor. This support, they agreed, must be embedded within community structures and made culturally accessible.

The second group addressed language access, emphasizing how the lack of multilingual communication fuels confusion, exploitation, and disempowerment. Recommendations included that employment contracts should be made available in multiple languages and include some technological solutions using digital tools such as translation apps and hotlines to facilitate real-time interpretation between workers and service providers or authorities.

The third discussion focused on legal support, with participants identifying a major gap in migrants' ability to access justice. Solutions included expanding partnerships with embassies to provide diplomatic support, increasing the availability of legal aid through civil society organizations, and strengthening bilateral labor agreements to better protect people's rights across borders.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Mental Health Services Must Be Prioritized**

Safe houses and peer counseling networks are essential for supporting survivors' recovery and resilience.

### **Language Barriers Deepen Vulnerability**

Multilingual contracts and real-time translation tools can empower workers and prevent exploitation.

### **Legal Support and Access to Justice Are Critical**

Partnerships with embassies and expanded legal aid are vital for protecting workers' rights.

### **Migrant Workers' Voices Must Guide Solutions**

Policies and interventions are most effective when shaped by those directly affected.

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*"Practical solutions require collaboration and empathy. It's about addressing the gaps with both urgency and compassion"*  
- Hind Francis, Social Work Society





## REGIONAL CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED ON DAY TWO

### **Temporary Migration Schemes Can Conceal Exploitation**

Many systems, including the Kafala sponsorship model, can be seen as opportunities but often trap migrant workers in abusive and unregulated environments.

### **High Recruitment Fees and Fraudulent Promises Leave Migrants in Debt**

Workers are often deceived by recruitment agencies, and arrive already indebted, making them vulnerable to forced labor.

### **Weak Enforcement of Labor Laws and Lack of Monitoring**

Existing labor laws are poorly enforced, and domestic workers are often excluded from basic protections, allowing exploitation to go unchecked.

### **Limited Access to Justice and Legal Support**

Migrants face legal, linguistic, and systemic barriers when trying to report abuse or seek protection, often risking retaliation or deportation.

### **Mental Health and Reintegration Needs Are Overlooked**

Migrants and trafficking survivors return home traumatized and stigmatized, often without access to appropriate mental health services.

### **Corporate Accountability Is Insufficient**

Businesses benefit from systemic exploitation with minimal legal responsibility due to weak oversight and reliance on voluntary corporate social responsibility measures.

### **Language Barriers Exacerbate Isolation and Potential Exploitation**

Migrant workers struggle to understand contracts, rights, or legal procedures.

### **Migrant Workers Are Excluded from Policymaking Processes**

Policies and protections are often designed without consulting the workers they aim to serve, making reforms ineffective or out of touch.



# PROPOSED SOLUTIONS TO THE IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

## **01. Reform and Regulate Temporary Migration Schemes**

Dismantle exploitative systems like Kafala and establish transparent migration pathways that uphold dignity, rights, and safety for all workers.

## **02. Implement Employer-Pay Recruitment Models and Crack Down on Fraud**

Shift recruitment costs to employers and strictly monitor agencies to prevent deception and financial exploitation.

## **03. Strengthen Labor Law Enforcement and Monitoring**

Extend legal protections to all workers, especially domestic workers, and implement oversight mechanisms to hold violators accountable.

## **04. Expand Access to Legal Aid and Justice Mechanisms**

Provide legal assistance through partnerships with embassies, civil society, and independent grievance platforms to ensure migrants can safely report abuse.

## **05. Prioritize Mental Health and Reintegration Support**

Create trauma-informed services such as safe houses and peer counseling networks to support survivor recovery and reduce stigma upon return.

## **06. Enforce Binding Corporate Accountability Measures**

Establish mandatory due diligence and labor rights enforcement across supply chains to prevent businesses from profiting from exploitation.

## **07. Ensure Multilingual Communication and Tools**

Require employment documents in workers' native languages and use real-time translation technology to close communication gaps.

## **08. Include Migrant Workers in Policymaking**

Design inclusive frameworks by ensuring that those with lived migration experience have a seat at the decision-making table.



## DAY 3: ENHANCING MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION AND ADVOCACY FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS



## OVERVIEW OF SPEAKERS - DAY 3



**Grace Banya**

ILO



**Elisa Franceschinis**

en.v



**Elenor Burton**

en.v



**Brook Bello**

More Too Life



**Merna Ashraf**

UNDOC



**Mohammad Bader**

Free the Slaves



**Dr. Marta Furlan**

Free the  
Slaves

## KEYNOTE SPEECH

Day 3 of the forum opened with a keynote address by Grace Banya, Chief Technical Adviser at the International Labour Organization (ILO), who focused on how regional governments and stakeholders in the MENA region can actively engage with and strengthen their collaboration under Alliance 8.7, a global initiative dedicated to eradicating forced labor, human trafficking, and modern slavery.

Drawing from Kenya's recent experience in joining the alliance, Grace Banya emphasized that international commitments must be backed by meaningful, sustained action. Signing agreements or adopting policy frameworks is not sufficient unless accompanied by strong political will, coordinated multi-stakeholder efforts, and practical enforcement mechanisms. She stressed that genuine progress requires collaboration between governments, civil society, businesses, international organizations, and, most critically, survivors themselves.

In her address, the speaker explained that Alliance 8.7 offers a valuable platform for countries to share best practices, align national efforts with international standards, and engage in joint strategies to combat exploitation. She encouraged MENA governments to move from policy rhetoric to practical implementation by taking concrete steps: improving data collection, investing in enforcement capacity, and ensuring vulnerable populations are meaningfully represented in decision-making processes.

A major point in her speech was the importance of survivor participation. Banya stressed that those who have experienced trafficking or forced labor firsthand bring unique insights that can shape more effective, human-centered policies. She urged governments to foster inclusive partnerships with survivor-led organizations and grassroots actors.

She also highlighted the role of organizations like Free the Slaves in advancing the goals of Alliance 8.7 and noted that such partnerships can act as bridges between international frameworks and local realities.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Multi-Sectoral Collaboration is Essential**

Ending forced labor and human trafficking requires joint efforts from governments, businesses, civil society, and survivors, not isolated action.

### **Commitment Must Go Beyond Policy**

Signing international agreements is not enough; enforcement, political will, and survivor inclusion are critical to real progress.

### **Alliance 8.7 Offers a Strategic Framework**

Countries can leverage Alliance 8.7 to align national strategies with global goals and drive systemic, survivor-centered change.

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*“No single actor can eliminate forced labor or human trafficking alone. It requires a multi-sectoral approach, where all stakeholders: governments, businesses, civil society, and survivors work together to drive systemic change.” – Grace Banya, International Labor Organization.*

## **BREAKOUT SESSION: INSIGHTS FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE**

The breakout Session was divided into two parallel discussions, each exploring how lived experience can meaningfully shape anti-trafficking efforts and migrant protection systems. The session brought together survivor-led organizations, grassroots advocates, and community practitioners to reflect on how personal experiences with trafficking and labor exploitation can drive more inclusive, effective, and compassionate responses.

Room 1, *From Stories to Solutions: Embedding Lived Experiences in Policy and Practice*, was moderated by Elisa Franceschinis. The conversation focused on the systemic barriers that prevent survivors from moving beyond symbolic participation to real influence. Participants discussed the frustration of being asked to share their stories in advocacy campaigns or reports; while receiving little institutional support for the critical work they do on the ground. Survivor-led organizations often deliver legal assistance, crisis support, and community outreach; but struggle with chronic underfunding and a lack of recognition in policymaking processes. A key message from this room was the urgent need to embed survivor voices not just in storytelling, but in the structural design of policies and programs.

Room 2, *Enhancing Community Support Through Lived Experience Insights*, was moderated by Eleanor Burton and focused on how survivor-informed approaches can strengthen community-based support systems. The discussion highlighted how grassroots initiatives, particularly those led by survivors themselves play a pivotal role in reintegration efforts, especially for women and children returning from trafficking. Participants noted that returning survivors frequently face stigma, social isolation, and economic hardship. Despite limited resources, survivor-led organizations often provide the only trauma-informed, culturally relevant services available to them. There was a strong call for international and institutional actors to build more genuine, long-term partnerships with these groups.

Both rooms echoed a shared truth: lived experience is essential. Participants called for a shift in mindset and funding structures to support survivor-led leadership as a cornerstone of sustainable anti-trafficking work.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Survivor Expertise Should Guide to Systemic Change**

Lived experience must inform not only advocacy but the actual development of policies, services, and frameworks.

### **Survivor-Led Groups Operate on the Frontlines with Minimal Support**

These organizations deliver essential services but remain underfunded and undervalued by major institutions.

### **Disconnect Between Global Institutions and Local Reality Persists**

Grassroots actors need more equitable access to funding and decision-making platforms.

### **Reintegration Remains Deeply Challenging for Survivors**

Community-led, survivor-informed approaches are crucial to addressing stigma and supporting recovery.



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*“One of the most powerful strategies is making sure survivors and grassroots organizers control the narrative—because when their stories are backed by real data and communicated effectively, that’s when institutions start to listen.” - Elisa Franceschinis, en.v.*

## WORKSHOP: BUILDING A MOVEMENT NARRATIVE

This reflective workshop, led by Dr. Brook Bello, the founder of More Too Life, centered on the importance of crafting a unified, inclusive narrative in the global fight against human trafficking. Dr. Bello guided participants through a deep exploration of how language, representation, and storytelling shape both public understanding and policymaking in the anti-trafficking field.

The session emphasized that a movement's narrative is a strategic tool for systemic change. Dr. Bello challenged participants to rethink the way survivors are positioned within the movement. While storytelling has long been used as an advocacy tool, she pointed out that too often survivors are invited to share their experiences without being offered leadership roles or a voice in policy development.

The discussion also addressed the outdated language and legal definitions that still dominate anti-trafficking discourse. Dr. Bello encouraged organizations and institutions to adopt more intersectional frameworks that recognize how race, gender, migration status, and socio-economic inequality intersect to heighten individuals' vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation.

Participants reflected on the need to decolonize anti-trafficking narratives and ensure that the voices shaping the movement come from the communities most affected. Emphasis was placed on survivor-led communication campaigns centered on dignity, agency, and justice, not trauma alone.

This session served as both a call to action and a creative space for reimagining what an inclusive, survivor-led anti-trafficking movement could look like, one defined not only by shared goals but by shared ownership of the narrative itself.



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*“We need to shift from merely ‘telling survivor stories’ to ensuring that they have seats at the table where policies are being drafted. Survivors should not just be voices, we must be leaders” - Brook Bello, More Too Life*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Survivors Must Be Leaders, Not Just Voices**

Inclusion must go beyond storytelling, survivors must shape strategy, policy, and movement leadership.

### **Narratives Shape Power and Policy**

The way trafficking is framed publicly can influence legislation, funding, and community response.

### **Intersectionality Must Be Central**

Effective anti-trafficking strategies must account for how overlapping factors like race, gender, and economic status create unique vulnerabilities.

### **Outdated Legal Definitions Must Be Reformed**

Legal language and frameworks should evolve to reflect the current realities of modern slavery.

### **The Movement Needs a Unified, Inclusive Narrative**

A globally relevant anti-trafficking message must center dignity, equity, and survivor expertise.

## WORKSHOP: PATHWAYS TO PARTNERSHIP

This dynamic workshop brought together regional stakeholders to explore collaborative strategies for tackling human trafficking and forced labor across the MENA region. Facilitated by Merna Ashraf of UNODC, the session was structured to encourage regional dialogue, problem-solving, and the co-creation of action-oriented solutions.

Participants were divided into three regional groups: the countries of the Gulf, the Levant, and North Africa. Each group was tasked with identifying key regional challenges and proposing strategies to enhance multi-sector partnerships. The workshop aimed to bridge gaps between civil society, government institutions, and international organizations by encouraging practical, region-specific approaches.

In the North Africa group, participants highlighted that migration and anti-trafficking policies are often dictated by geopolitical priorities rather than grounded in human rights. This undermines advocacy efforts and creates resistance to reform. The group proposed that stronger partnerships with UN agencies could help increase pressure on governments to uphold international obligations and improve accountability.

The Levant group focused on the criminalization of migrant workers, especially under the Kafala system. Workers who attempt to leave abusive employers risk legal consequences, making it nearly impossible to seek help. The group recommended expanding legal aid networks to ensure migrant workers can safely access support and justice without fear of detention or deportation.

In the Gulf group, civil society actors emphasized the restrictive environment in which they operate. Many organizations face legal and political barriers that limit their ability to engage in advocacy or provide direct services. Participants suggested leveraging UN review mechanisms and international human rights frameworks as indirect but powerful tools to pressure governments and support local reform efforts.

Across all groups, there was strong consensus on the need to improve documentation and data collection to support advocacy, secure international funding, and strengthen survivor-led initiatives. Participants also stressed the importance of cross-border collaboration, recognizing that trafficking networks do not stop at national borders and require coordinated regional responses.

The session concluded with a renewed commitment to breaking silos and building sustainable partnerships grounded in trust, shared accountability, and survivor leadership.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Grassroots Organizations Need Sustainable Funding**

Local and migrant-led groups providing essential services require long-term, flexible funding to continue their frontline work and expand their impact.

### **Regional Collaboration Is Essential**

Efforts to combat trafficking must be coordinated across borders, with stronger regional networks and more countries actively participating in frameworks like Alliance 8.7.

### **International Accountability Mechanisms Should Be Used Strategically**

UN review processes and global human rights frameworks can help pressure governments that fail to protect migrant workers and trafficking survivors.

### **Cash-Based Assistance Must Be More Accessible**

Donor policies and regulatory barriers often prevent migrant leaders from accessing the financial aid they need, limiting their ability to respond effectively during crises.

### **Shared Knowledge Infrastructure Is Urgently Needed**

A centralized regional hub and digital platform would enable better coordination, data sharing, and access to legal and advocacy tools across the MENA region.



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*“Partnership starts with understanding, mapping stakeholders from the ground up and the top down is the foundation for coordinated, targeted responses that actually work.” - Merna Ashraf, UNDOC.*



## WORKSHOP: COLLABORATIVE ACTION PLANNING

The final session of the forum, Collaborative Action Planning, brought together participants from across sectors to co-develop a roadmap for sustained regional cooperation in the fight against human trafficking and forced labor. Facilitated by Mohammed Bader and Dr. Marta Furlan of Free the Slaves, the session served as both a culmination of the forum's three days of dialogue and a launch point for future collective action.

Participants engaged in an open, participatory process to identify priorities, align goals, and define concrete next steps. The emphasis was placed on building durable partnerships across civil society, survivor-led organizations, international agencies, and policy institutions. Stakeholders were encouraged to move from shared analysis toward shared responsibility.

A central theme of the session was the urgent need to center survivor leadership. Participants emphasized that survivors must be engaged not just as witnesses to injustice but as architects of the solutions. This requires meaningful inclusion in advocacy efforts and decision-making spaces, as well as the structural support, resources, training, and access needed to sustain their leadership.

Another key area of focus was the critical role of grassroots organizations, which continue to lead frontline service provision in contexts of crisis and chronic underfunding. The call for increased, long-term funding for these organizations was echoed across working groups, along with the need for better donor flexibility and accessibility.

The session also highlighted the importance of regional infrastructure to support ongoing collaboration. Participants recommended the creation of a centralized resource hub and a MENA-wide digital platform for sharing data, advocacy tools, and survivor testimonies. Additionally, stronger use of UN accountability mechanisms was discussed as a strategy to pressure governments that fail to uphold the rights of migrant workers and trafficking survivors.

In closing, participants reaffirmed their commitment to advancing anti-trafficking efforts that are inclusive, strategic, and regionally coordinated. The message was clear: while the forum may have ended, the work continues. Sustainable change will require persistent collaboration, survivor-driven advocacy, and bold reforms across systems.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **Survivor Leadership Must Be Prioritized:**

Participants emphasized that survivors must play a central role in advocacy, policy development, and implementation, not just be included to collect testimonies.

### **Grassroots Organizations Need Long-Term Support**

There was a clear call for increased, flexible funding for local and migrant-led organizations that deliver critical services but are often overlooked in donor strategies.

### **Regional Coordination and Infrastructure are Essential**

To effectively combat trafficking across borders, participants proposed creating a centralized resource hub and a MENA-wide digital platform for data sharing, collaboration, and collective advocacy.



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*“We believe in human-centered design. Communities identify their own problems and solutions—we simply facilitate. This ensures strategies are grounded in the lived realities of those we aim to support” - Mohammed Bader, Free the Slaves.*

## REGIONAL CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED ON DAY THREE

### **International Commitments Often Lack Enforcement**

Despite formal participation in global initiatives, many countries in the MENA region fail to follow through with practical implementation and accountability mechanisms.

### **Survivors Are Still Marginalized in Leadership and Policy Spaces**

Survivors continue to be invited to share their experiences but are rarely included in the design or leadership of anti-trafficking policies and programs.

### **Grassroots and Migrant-Led Groups Remain Underfunded**

Local organizations providing frontline services are chronically under-resourced and excluded from major funding streams and strategic partnerships.

### **Outdated Legal Definitions Limit Protection**

Many national legal frameworks still rely on narrow, outdated definitions of trafficking and forced labor, excluding modern and intersectional realities of exploitation.

### **Anti-Trafficking Narratives Are Often Top-Down and Exclusionary**

Public messaging and advocacy efforts often reflect institutional perspectives rather than community-based or survivor-informed narratives.

### **Restrictive Environments Limit Civil Society Engagement**

Legal and political conditions in some countries constrain the ability of NGOs and migrant-led organizations to operate or advocate openly.



### **Migrant Communities Are Isolated from Emergency Aid and Decision-Making**

Humanitarian responses often overlook migrant populations, leaving them without direct access to cash aid, shelter, or platforms for advocacy.

### **Cross-Border Collaboration Remains Weak and Fragmented**

Despite shared regional challenges, MENA countries lack mechanisms for systematic cooperation in tackling trafficking networks that span borders.





# PROPOSED SOLUTIONS TO THE IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

## **01. Translate Commitments into Concrete Action**

Governments should back international pledges with enforcement, monitoring, and inclusive policymaking to ensure commitments lead to real change.

## **02. Center Survivor Leadership in Policy and Strategy**

Survivors must be engaged as co-creators of policies and programs, with access to leadership roles, capacity-building, and long-term support.

## **03. Provide Sustainable, Flexible Funding to Grassroots Groups**

Donors must prioritize direct funding for local and migrant-led organizations delivering vital services and advocacy in high-risk environments.

## **04. Modernize Legal Definitions and Frameworks**

Laws should be updated to reflect the complexities of modern trafficking, including intersectional vulnerabilities tied to gender, race, and migration status.

## **05. Build Inclusive, Survivor-Led Movement Narratives**

Shift from trauma-centered storytelling to dignity-based advocacy that is survivor-authored and challenges dominant, exclusionary discourse.

## **06. Strengthen the Enabling Environment for Civil Society**

Governments and international bodies must protect the space for NGOs and community-based groups to operate safely and effectively.

## **07. Ensure Migrants' Access to Aid and Representation**

Design humanitarian and advocacy responses that are inclusive of migrant communities, offering cash assistance, legal support, and decision-making roles.

## **08. Develop Cross-Regional Infrastructure for Coordination**

Survivors must be engaged as co-creators of policies and programs, with access to leadership roles, capacity-building, and long-term support.



# OUTCOMES OF THE FORUM

## **Strengthened Foundations for Regional Collaboration**

The forum fostered strong interest among stakeholders in building closer connections across the MENA region. Participants engaged in rich dialogue around the value of sustained collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and collective action to address human trafficking and forced labor. These exchanges laid promising groundwork for future regional coordination and multi-sector engagement.

## **Reinforced Commitment to Survivor-Centered Approaches**

Across sessions and workshops, survivor leadership emerged as a guiding principle. The forum amplified lived experience as a source of expertise and affirmed the importance of placing survivor voices at the core of policy, advocacy, and service delivery. This reflects a growing regional shift toward inclusive, dignity-driven anti-trafficking strategies.

## **Shared Vision for Practical, Cross-Sector Solutions**

The forum generated a shared understanding among civil society, international organizations, and practitioners around actionable strategies to enhance protections for vulnerable populations. From strengthening legal frameworks to expanding mental health services and ensuring language access, participants aligned around practical solutions grounded in local realities and regional priorities.

## **Expanded Regional Insight on Systemic Vulnerabilities**

Through expert panels and survivor-led sessions, the forum provided a nuanced understanding of the diverse drivers of human trafficking and forced labor across the MENA region. Participants examined intersecting challenges—including conflict, displacement, and temporary migration schemes—while identifying emerging trends, regional patterns, and priority areas for coordinated response.

# ACTION STEPS

The MENA Freedom from Slavery Forum is a stepping stone toward broader regional engagement. The movement remains committed to expanding its strategic presence, strengthening local collaborations, and ensuring that survivor voices remain at the forefront of policy and programmatic responses.

Moving forward, we will:

- Continue engaging with Alliance 8.7 to position MENA as a key player in global anti- trafficking initiatives.
- Comprehensive Report: A post-forum report will be compiled and shared, documenting challenges, proposed solutions, and recommendations to protect vulnerable populations.
- Policy Recommendations: A set of policy proposals and legal reform recommendations will be developed and shared with governments, policymakers, and regional bodies based on what was discussed during the Forum.

# PARTICIPATION AND EVALUATION

The evaluation of the MENA Freedom from Slavery Forum reflected a deeply positive experience among participants. Across the feedback collected, there was a strong sense of satisfaction with the organization of the event, the relevance of the topics addressed, and the overall impact of the sessions. Most participants especially appreciated the clarity of the forum's objectives and the quality of the discussions, which enabled meaningful exchanges around human trafficking, forced labor, and protection mechanisms for vulnerable populations.

Attendees highlighted the value of sessions focused on multi-stakeholder collaboration and survivor-centered advocacy. The sharing of good practices, case studies, and effective policy approaches was seen as a highly useful learning opportunity. Several responses emphasized how the forum expanded their understanding of the systemic challenges faced by vulnerable groups while also offering practical tools to address them. As one participant noted:

"The forum has left me more aware of different organizations which can help our outreach at my organization..."

Beyond the content, many participants found the forum beneficial for expanding their professional networks. While not everyone was able to form new partnerships during the event, a significant number did make meaningful connections with other activists, practitioners, and advocates—laying the groundwork for future collaboration.

Notably, all respondents expressed interest in attending future editions of the forum, showing unanimous enthusiasm to continue the conversations and partnerships initiated in this space. This overwhelming response highlights the forum's value as a platform for regional collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the development of practical, long-term solutions.

Suggestions for future editions included incorporating more interactive formats—such as workshops and roundtable discussions—as well as providing follow-up materials to maintain engagement beyond the forum. Expanding regional representation and exploring topics related to digital technologies and human rights were also recommended.

In summary, the forum was seen as an enriching and impactful experience that not only strengthened participants' collective knowledge but also deepened their shared commitment to ending modern slavery and safeguarding the rights of vulnerable populations.





*"I formed new connections that could turn into future partnerships and collaborations; also deepened connection with previous connections to discuss potential collaborations" –*  
**Anonymous**

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# **FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY** FORUM



[FreedomfromSlaveryForum.org](https://FreedomfromSlaveryForum.org)

**The Hub of the Anti-Modern Slavery Movement**