

## Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare

### **Implementation of UN Resolution on “Trafficking in women and girls”**

#### **I. Current trends and concerns to address trafficking in women and girls**

Presently there is no record and established cases of trafficking in women and girls. However, this Ministry has commissioned a study on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation in the Republic of Mauritius to *inter alia* determine the current situation identify emerging challenges, and inform future strategies to address the issue.

#### **II. Measures to address trafficking in women and girls, as per resolution A/RES/77/194, including on efforts to prevent and address the root causes that lead to all forms of exploitation of women and girls including through addressing demand.**

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare implements measures guided by the National Action Plan (NAP) to combat Trafficking in Persons in Mauritius 2022-2026. The Ministry has consolidated its measures to incorporate protection, prevention, prosecution, partnership and coordination, data research, and evidence-based measures to align with the NAP.

#### **The Key Measures implemented are provided below:**

- Training is an ongoing feature and is essential in order to equip Officers with the necessary skills to assist victims and respond to emerging issues. For instance, in April 2024, some 150 Officers dealing with family issues were trained on court procedures, on gender-based violence amongst others;
- The government also implements regular activities on gender-based violence and family well-being in collaboration with Social Welfare Centres and Community Centres across the island;
- From February 2018 to March 2024, 3048 persons were reached through 65 awareness campaigns on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), inclusive of child trafficking and child prostitution;

- The ‘Ansam Avec CSU’ programme provides a proximity service to the public whereby all the various departments of the governments showcase their services. From July 2023 to February 2024, 56 Ansam Avec CSU Programs were attended by Officers of the Ministry to disseminate information on services provided to the members of the public;
- Moreover, legal provisions have deterrent influence upon potential perpetrators involved in trafficking of women and girls;
- Upon the Proclamation of the Children’s Act 2020, on the 24 January 2022, provisions have been made to safeguard the best interest of the child. Section 4 of the Children`s Act (2020) provides that the best interests of a child shall, in respect of any matter concerning the child, be paramount and be the primary consideration by any person. Moreover, Section 33 of the Children`s Act (2020) also provides for actions to be taken for the best interests of the child. The Child Sex Offender Register Act (2020) was also proclaimed on 24 January 2022 to better improve services provided to children with a register which the Police has the responsibility to follow up;
- The child has inherent human rights and Mauritius ratified the CRC in July 1990 and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare through the Child Development Unit (CDU) is the National Machinery which is mandated to safeguard the survival, protection, development and participation rights of the child;
- The Parental Empowerment Resource Centre (PERC) was set up as part of a New Scheme Measure in December 2022, to develop parenting skills for parents and to focus on various aspects of early childhood development, in an effort to keep children and families safe. The PERC also acts as a ‘referral centre’ for parents needing services in the community. For the period January 2023 to December 2023, 116 parents were reached through recurrent activities held by PERC.
- A Coordinating Panel is operating as needed to meet all stakeholders for the welfare of a child. In this regard, all responsible department plays a role for the welfare of

the girl child. Mandatory reporting is done if a child is at risk and also to help the Child Development Unit (CDU) to attend the child. Varied awareness campaigns held in schools, social welfare and even through media to strengthen early detection on trafficking.

- The mobile application (app) “*Lespwar*” launched in 2020 enables a victim of Gender Based Violence (GBV) to rapidly connect with the Main Police Command and Control Centre. This application can be downloaded on a smart phone and clear instructions are provided for registration and use of the panic button;
- Moreover, Hotline 139 is operational on a 24/7 basis and is free of charge for reporting cases of domestic violence;
- The hotline 113 operates on 24/7 (to report cases of abuse against children) is toll-free and caller may remain anonymous.

### **III. Impacts of conflict, crisis, COVID, climate change or other emergency contexts on the trafficking of women and girls and specific measures undertaken to address these risk factors.**

In situations of conflict crisis, COVID-19, climate change, or other emergencies, the Ministry ensures prompt and effective actions to protect victims and potential victims of violence through its hotlines and intervention services.

### **Impacts of technology and digitalization on the trafficking of women and girls and specific measures undertaken to address these risk factors.**

The rise in technology has increased the risk of cyber violence against girls. Cases of child pornography are reported to the Mauritian Cybercrime Online Reporting System (MAUCORS) for necessary action. Additionally, the mobile application “Lespwar” and Hotline 139 offer rapid response and support to victims of Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

The specific measures undertaken to address risk factors are as follows:

- In 2023, video materials were developed under the collaboration of the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council on the Protection from Domestic Violence Act and services provided by this Ministry. The video clips were launched in the context of the Commemoration of the International Day on the Elimination of Violence Against Women on the 25 November 2023 under the “We Remember” media campaign;
- The video clips were broadcasted through the Mauritius Broadcasting Co-operation and on the extensive network of screens of the Victoria Urban Terminal and are also used as IEC materials in awareness and sensitisation campaigns;
- On 25 November 2020, the mobile application (app) “*Lespwar*” was launched as a rapid response system to victims of gender-based violence;
- The app is easily downloadable and accessible to all age groups of women and men victims/survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) to access help, information on GBV and receive requisite support there-on; and
- The application provides:
  - Rapid Response by Police through a geolocalisation feature, and
  - an information platform for all victims of GBV to feel secure, protected and taken care of by all the authorities concerned in order to maintain a stable and healthy life.

#### **IV. Measures to increase access to justice and to strengthen detection, protection of victim-survivors and prosecution of perpetrators.**

Detection and prosecution of trafficking cases are handled by the Mauritius Police Force and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution.

**V. Information on multi-sectoral services for victim-survivors of trafficking including any available data on access to such service.**

Psycho-social services are provided to women victims of trafficking as referred by the relevant authorities. The services offered to the victims are as follow:

- Legal and psychological advice to support women victims of domestic violence and their children;
- Assistance to victims of domestic violence with regard to their application for a Protection Order, Occupation Order and Tenancy Order under Protection from Domestic Violence Act (PDVA);
- Provision of psycho-social support as a follow-up following provision of Court Orders under the PDVA;
- Counselling services to adult perpetrators; and
- Referral to other institutions as appropriate, amongst others.

**Moreover, the issue of child trafficking is addressed through the following measures -**

- a) There is a close collaboration with the Brigade Pour la Protection de La Famille and other stakeholders to assist in the identification of victims and providing them support; and
- b) All reported cases of alleged child trafficking are automatically referred to the Police for criminal enquiry; and
- c) Protective and Support Services are provided at the level of the different 10 child protective services located around the island.

The Protective and Support Services comprise the following -

- **A Hotline/Helpline 113** for reporting cases of child abuse including Child Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) either anonymously or otherwise.
- Assistance to victims of child trafficking/csec for medical and Police Medical Examinations as well as HIV testing and pregnancy tests; and
- Psycho-social counselling to victims and their families.
- As regards victims who live together with their families, on-going home visits are effected by the CDU Officers on a regular basis.
- The Drop-In-Centre which is managed by the Mauritius Family Planning and Welfare Association offers services such as therapeutic and rehabilitative activities including: group counselling and focus group discussions, monthly medical sessions/examinations, contraceptive counselling and parental counselling.
- Place of safety for victims, L'Oasis Residential Drop-In-Centre at Grand River North West.
  - The above Residential Drop-In-Centre is operational since 26 May 2016 as per the recommendations made by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in January 2016 with a view to strengthening policies and programmes for the prevention, recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of children victims of CSEC. Victims of Sexual Abuse and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children including Child Trafficking are placed thereat.