

## UAE contribution to the Secretary-General's report on trafficking of women and girls

21 May 2023

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) was the first country in the region to enact a comprehensive anti-human-trafficking law with Federal Law 51 in 2006. Under this law, human trafficking included all forms of sexual exploitation and engaging others in prostitution, servitude, forced labor, organ trafficking, coerced service, enslavement, begging, and quasi-slavery practices. In addition, the law stipulates that if a person is aware of an incident of human trafficking and does not report it, he or she is liable for punishment.

In 2007, the UAE established the "National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking" – comprising 18 entities from various government institutions, public prosecutions, and civil society institutions – under Cabinet Resolution No. 15 of 2007, in order to facilitate and unify the process of coordination with the relevant authorities, and to overcome obstacles in their work, thus ensuring the efficiency of national action to combat this crime.

Most recently, in September 2023, the UAE government promulgated Federal Decree by Law No. 24 of 2023 on Combating Human Trafficking<sup>1</sup>, which repealed abovementioned Federal Law No. 51 of 2006 concerning Combating Human Trafficking Offences. This new Decree, which went into effect on 16 September 2023, expands the definition of human trafficking, enhances penalties against perpetrators, and introduces new crimes that were not mentioned in the previous law. Furthermore, it strengthens victim support and assistance, including witness protection, and it contains a reference to aggravating circumstances, including if the victim is a pregnant woman.

### Measures to address trafficking in women and girls, including to prevent and address root causes

In implementing the legal framework to combat human trafficking, the UAE's Ministry of Interior and police leadership have adopted following measures:

- engage in community awareness programs with women and children, as they are most vulnerable to human trafficking;
- conduct research and awareness studies;
- organize and conduct adequate training and qualification programs for personnel working in the field of combating human trafficking crimes, which includes anti-human trafficking specialist programs, traineeship programs, and training of national experts in combating human trafficking..

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<sup>1</sup> <https://uaelegislation.gov.ae/en/legislations/2127>, last visited 14 May 2024.

Additional protection measures aimed at mitigating vulnerabilities and strengthening resilience against trafficking that the UAE government has undertaken include:

- the protection and promotion of the rights of all expatriate workers,;
- transparency of contracting;
- informing workers of their rights through specialized centers called guidance centers, e.g. Tadbeer center;
- organizing the recruitment of domestic workers;
- securing labor entitlements,
- strengthening labor inspection and supporting it with “smart systems” to monitor and resolve labor-related disputes.

### **Impacts of technology and digital means on trafficking in women and girls and specific measures taken to address them**

In the UAE, there are several online platforms provided by the government to report cybercrimes, such as the ‘eCrimes platform’ launched by the Ministry of Interior, the ‘eCrime’ website by Dubai Police, ‘Aman Service’ by Abu Dhabi police, and a safety application provided for by the UAE’s federal public prosecution.

When it comes to the protection of children, the UAE has adopted a series of preventive measures and solutions designed to protect them from online risks in accordance with legal frameworks agreed to both on the international and national level. The UAE was the first Arab country to accede to the Convention on Child Protection against Cybercrime of 2001.

Since 2015, the UAE, represented by the Ministry of Interior, has been chairing the Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT). The VGT is an international alliance of dedicated law enforcement agencies and industry partners working together to keep children safe online. It has contributed to the rescue of hundreds of children around the world from online child exploitation and to the prosecution of hundreds of offenders since 2003.

### **Measures to increase access to justice and strengthen capacity to detect and protect survivors and prosecute perpetrators**

Article 4 of the UAE’s recently adopted Federal Decree by Law No. 24 of 2023 on Combating Human Trafficking stipulates measures and procedures to be taken at all stages of collecting evidence, investigation, and trial of human trafficking offences:

- Informing the victim and witness of the legal rights thereof in a language they understand, while providing them with the opportunity to express legal and social needs thereof;
- Presenting the victim to medical authorities to receive psychological or physical treatment if it becomes apparent that the victim is in need of that or based on request thereof.

Moreover, the victim shall be admitted to a medical or psychological rehabilitation centre if necessary;

- The victim shall be lodged in an accommodation centre if the victim is found to need that;
- Providing the necessary security protection for the victim and witness whenever they are in a need thereof;
- Keeping the foreign victim or witness in the country if the investigation or trial requires this based on an order from the Public Prosecution or the Court, as the case may be;
- Appointing an attorney by the court for the victim based on the victim request to file a civil claim for compensation for the damage, and the state shall bear the fees thereof as contained in the Penal Code;
- Considering the provision of educational assistance to the victim, especially children and persons with disabilities, if necessary;
- In all cases, the court shall take measures to ensure that victims and witnesses are protected and not influenced in accordance with the provisions of the Law on the Protection of Witnesses and the like.

Furthermore, the UAE acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in 2016.

For the UAE, the protection of victims and the preservation of their dignity is the ultimate goal of concerted efforts to combat human trafficking crimes and perhaps one of the first strategic and basic pillars when dealing with human trafficking cases. Accordingly, the State has established a number of centers and institutions for the care and shelter of victims to provide them with the necessary services. Following centers and non-profit organisations working on this have been established:

- the Abu Dhabi Center for Shelter and Humanitarian Care;
- the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children;
- the Aman Center for Women and Children care for shelter ;
- the Ewa'a Shelter for Women and Children;
- the Women's Protection Centre of the Social Services Department of Government of Sharjah (SSSD).

These victim care and shelter centres and institutions receive all victims of human trafficking at the state level and implement a number of programs designed to provide all the necessary support requirements for victims in an urgent and fair manner without discrimination of race or gender. They allocate toll free hotlines to provide social, psychological and legal counselling and solutions to domestic issues by legal, social and psychological specialists as well as family consultations through its website. These institutions also provide rehabilitation programmes to victims of

trafficking and supports them in legal procedures and offers them financial assistance to help them start over.

Additionally, the Aman Service for community safety and stability is an Abu Dhabi Police initiative working with the public to raise community safety and stability by promoting the public's engagement in combating crimes through confidential and anonymous reporting.

Dubai Police has established services for Child and Women Protection, Human Trafficking Victims, and Victim support. These services allow children and women who are victims of crime and violence, to obtain legal protection and social support, to receive care and rehabilitation, by providing them with financial, legal and moral support.

### **Multisectoral services for victim-survivors of trafficking**

Article 23 of the Federal Decree by Law No. 24 of 2023 on Combating Human Trafficking provides for "...mechanisms to protect victims, and work to create appropriate conditions to assist them, provide them with health, psychological, educational and social care, rehabilitate them and integrate them into society within a framework of freedom and human dignity. In addition, it shall ensure their return to their countries quickly and safely if the person is a foreigner who is not resident in the state, in accordance with the rules and the procedures issued by a resolution of the Cabinet."

Centers and institutions for the care and shelter of victims of human trafficking play an important and essential role in the voluntary return of victims and securing their reintegration into society. This can either be within the country by helping them to obtain suitable work and thus amending their legal status to remain in the country, or through cooperation and coordination with the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking and other entities such as foreign embassies and relevant international organizations so that the victim can safely return to the home country or to a chosen third country. Institutions for the care and shelter of victims in the country communicate with the victim for a period of six months up to a full year to ensure the safety of the victim in her home country.