



Prevent, protect, and respond to human rights violations

Combating trafficking in persons (C-TIP)

Threats to human rights are escalating worldwide as we contend with some of the most challenging and complex issues of our era, including the COVID-19 pandemic that has intensified a global decline in freedom. In fact, less than 20 per cent of the world's population lives in a “free” country with access to political rights and civil liberties – the smallest proportion since 1995.^{1,2}

This brief highlights research findings and observations from five studies on interventions to **prevent** human rights violations, **protect** victims and human rights defenders, and **respond** to human rights abuses by combating trafficking in persons (C-TIP). Trafficking in persons (TIP) refers to “the use of force, fraud or coercion to exploit an individual for profit through forced labor or sexual exploitation.”^{3,4} The topic was selected based on the availability of evidence and the priorities of USAID Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) Center. The intended audience is DRG practitioners, with a focus on practical information and considerations to inform planning and implementation of DRG programming and research. The brief thus does not synthesize or quantify intervention effect sizes (as in a systematic review), nor does it replace the need for rigorous evaluation of DRG programming.

In 2021, 3ie created the **Human Rights Evidence Gap Map**, mapping 423 studies examining causal evidence on human rights interventions identified through a systematic search and screening process.⁵ The five studies in this brief were screened from EGM results and included based on their examination of one or more C-TIP interventions in conjunction with one or more outcomes falling under human rights prevention, protection, and response categories.

Did you know ?

- The UN human rights chief warns that we are facing “the most wide-reaching and severe cascade of human rights setbacks in our lifetimes.”⁶
- Twenty-five million people are estimated to be victims of human trafficking.⁷
- Forced labor generates an estimated \$150 billion in illicit profits annually.⁸

Key messages



For practitioners



- We need to know more about **protection** and **response** programming.
- Verify theory of change for “pre-departure” prevention approaches.
- Consider trade-offs of broad and narrow strategies for targeting at-risk persons (ARPs).
- Develop culturally responsive programming.
- Integrate protections for whistleblowers into reform efforts.
- Knowledge of rights is important to empower migrant and vulnerable workers to hold employers accountable.
- Broad-based collaboration can be a key facilitator of legal reform.

For learning specialists and researchers



- To fill knowledge gaps, more research is needed to assess the effects of C-TIP interventions.
- The complexities of trafficking require rigorous, mixed-method impact evaluation approaches.

Conceptualizations

How we conceptualize human rights



We draw on the *human rights based-approach* and key USAID democracy, human rights, and governance documents^{9,10,11} to develop a high level Theory of Change for systems that prevent human rights abuse, protect human rights, and respond to violations (Figure 1). We conceptualized a set of interventions intended to influence a set of intermediate outcomes that target three types of interdependent actors (rights holders, duty bearers, and rights defenders).

Rights holders are individuals and groups who are entitled to universal rights.

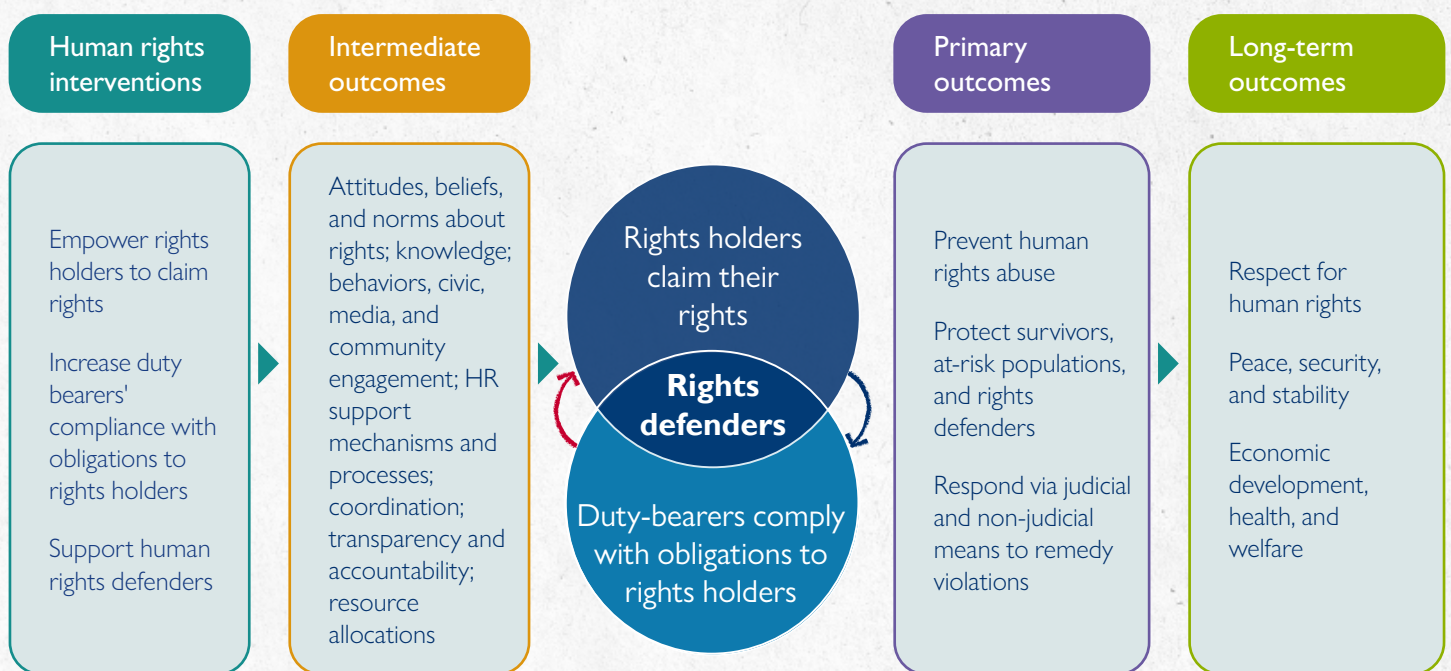
Duty bearers can be state actors (e.g., public institutions) or non-state actors (e.g., corporations, armed groups) that are obligated by international and/or domestic laws and norms to uphold the rights of rights holders.¹² They must create and

implement laws, policies, institutions, and procedures in order to **prevent** human rights abuses, to **protect** survivors, human rights defenders, and other at-risk populations, and to **respond** to human rights violations. This includes ensuring respect for the right to access justice and due process and the right of no-repetition. Duty bearers also have an obligation to provide the security required to ensure that rights holders' rights are respected.

Human rights defenders can be any persons or groups working to promote or protect human rights.

The behaviors or actions of these actors are in turn theorized to influence primary outcomes, which in turn contribute to a set of long-term outcomes.

Figure 1: Conceptualizing systems that protect human rights



Source: 3ie, adapted from: USAID 2013; 2016; 2019 and UNFPA 2014.

Since 2009, the “4P” paradigm – prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership – has served as the foundational framework used by the United States and the world to combat TIP.¹³ To compliment the 4Ps, this brief uses the “prevent, protect, response” lens to highlight the intersecting dimensions of rights holders, duty bearers, and human rights defenders in C-TIP. The prevent, protect, response framework promotes the development of: (1) **prevention** of TIP, by raising public awareness of alternative livelihoods and the dangers of human trafficking; (2) **protection** for trafficking victims and for first responders; and (3) prosecutorial and non-prosecutorial **response** to TIP to remedy violations.¹⁴

Availability of evidence

Mapping the availability of evidence



To achieve the full and equal realization of human rights, there is a pressing need to compile evidence on effective strategies for promoting them legally and practically. This requires evidence that can quantify changes attributable to a program, after accounting for other factors.

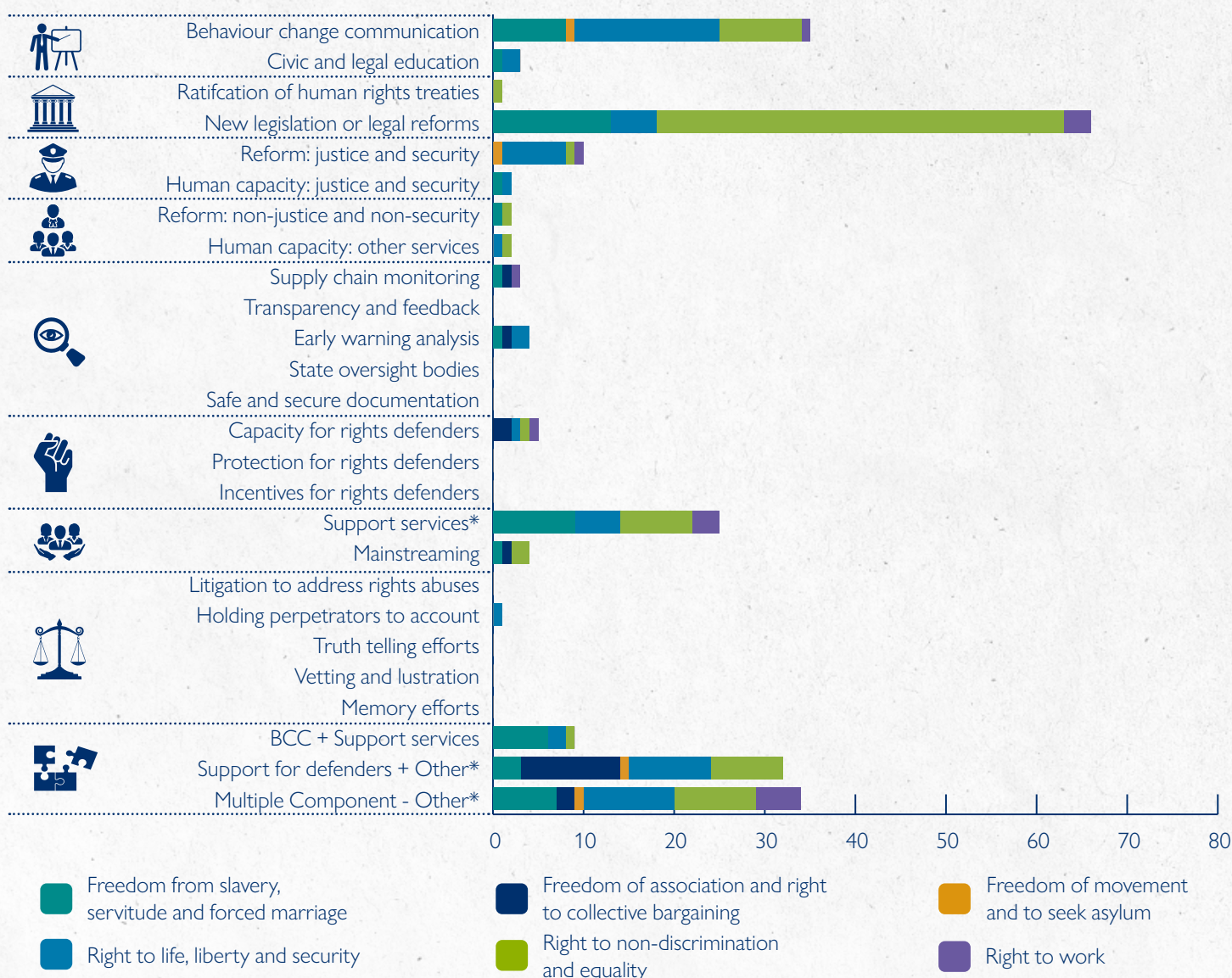
USAID commissioned 3ie to develop an **Evidence Gap Map (EGM)** about human rights interventions and outcomes. An EGM is a visual representation of completed and ongoing studies that provide this type of evidence on effects, structured around a framework of interventions and outcomes.

Because human rights broadly include political, civil, social, cultural, economic and environmental rights, nearly any development program can be considered to be directly or indirectly targeting human rights. We elected to include all civil political rights and economic, social, environmental and

cultural rights, the latter four through their intersection with discrimination, to delineate explicitly human-rights-focused programming from broader development programming that could have an implicit human rights focus (e.g., many interventions in education, health, etc.). To present a large evidence base in a useful way, we developed categories of rights and mapped relevant interventions to these rights. In many cases, interventions were designed to address multiple human rights violations.

Figure 2 maps the studies included in the EGM by their intervention category and human right focus. The human rights shown in color represent those included in C-TIP interventions. Studies that target multiple rights would appear under more than one color. Studies of interventions that target other rights have been omitted.

Figure 2: C-TIP relevant studies mapped by their intervention category



Notes: The intervention subcategories addressed by C-TIP studies are marked with *




What do we know? Where are the gaps?

Studies were selected for inclusion in the EGM based on whether the study investigated the effects of an intervention. The criteria for inclusion are elaborated in the “*what types of evidence are included in this brief?*” section below. Within this large evidence base of human rights studies, we found five studies on the effects of C-TIP programming (Figure 3). Details of included studies are presented in [Online appendix A](#).

The next sections use study findings to identify illustrative drivers and barriers to the effects of C-TIP interventions, as well as gaps in the evidence and implications for further research. The studies are categorized according to their main objectives, namely:

1. **Prevention** of TIP by raising public awareness of the dangers of human trafficking and promoting alternative livelihoods
2. **Protection** of trafficking victims and first responders
3. **Response to TIP** using judicial and/or non-judicial remedies

Figure 3: Aims of C-TIP interventions included in the EGM

Aim		Example of intervention
To raise awareness of human rights, foster positive social norms, and provide education and information to help individuals claim their rights		Training on the dangers of migration Education on women’s and worker’s rights
To improve the capacity of, protect, or incentivize human rights defenders such as medical personnel and NGO staff		Training and mentoring for women union activists Legal protection for whistleblowers
To protect at-risk groups by providing support services and developing their skills		Counseling to help students overcome risk factors that make children vulnerable to trafficking
To provide redress for human rights violations		Provision of legal aid to union members

Overall, we find very little evidence on the effects of C-TIP interventions in general, and where it does exist, study limitations prevent us from drawing conclusions. Four of the five studies included in this brief focus on prevention of TIP. That we were only able to identify five C-TIP evaluations—despite broad inclusion criteria—indicates a serious lack of evidence on the effects of C-TIP programming within the human rights evidence base. Furthermore, we assessed two studies as high risk of bias in research methods. For these reasons, this brief primarily focuses on barriers and facilitators to C-TIP intervention implementation rather than reporting program effects. We emphasize that the absence of evidence on intervention effects does not mean an intervention should be avoided, but rather highlights the potential benefit of conducting rigorous impact evaluation.

Therefore, **the first key message of this brief for practitioners, researchers, and learning specialists is the need to invest in high-quality impact evaluations of C-TIP interventions, particularly those addressing protection and response.** Only one study that mentioned protection and response was found in the EGM, representing a gap in the evidence base. There are several explanations for this evidence gap. The primary reasons are likely related to challenges in conducting TIP evaluations, as detailed in the “For learning specialists and researchers” section. For example, a C-TIP SR that reviewed 144 potentially eligible studies identified just 23 suppressive interventions that focused on the prosecution of traffickers; however, none of them met the authors’ criteria for inclusion in the review. This may mean that evaluation efforts have focused on prevention relative to protection and response.

Considerations for programming and implementation



Interventions for preventing trafficking in persons



Key messages



- Verify theory of change for “pre-departure” prevention approaches.
- Consider trade-offs of broad and narrow strategies for targeting ARPs.
- Develop culturally responsive programming.

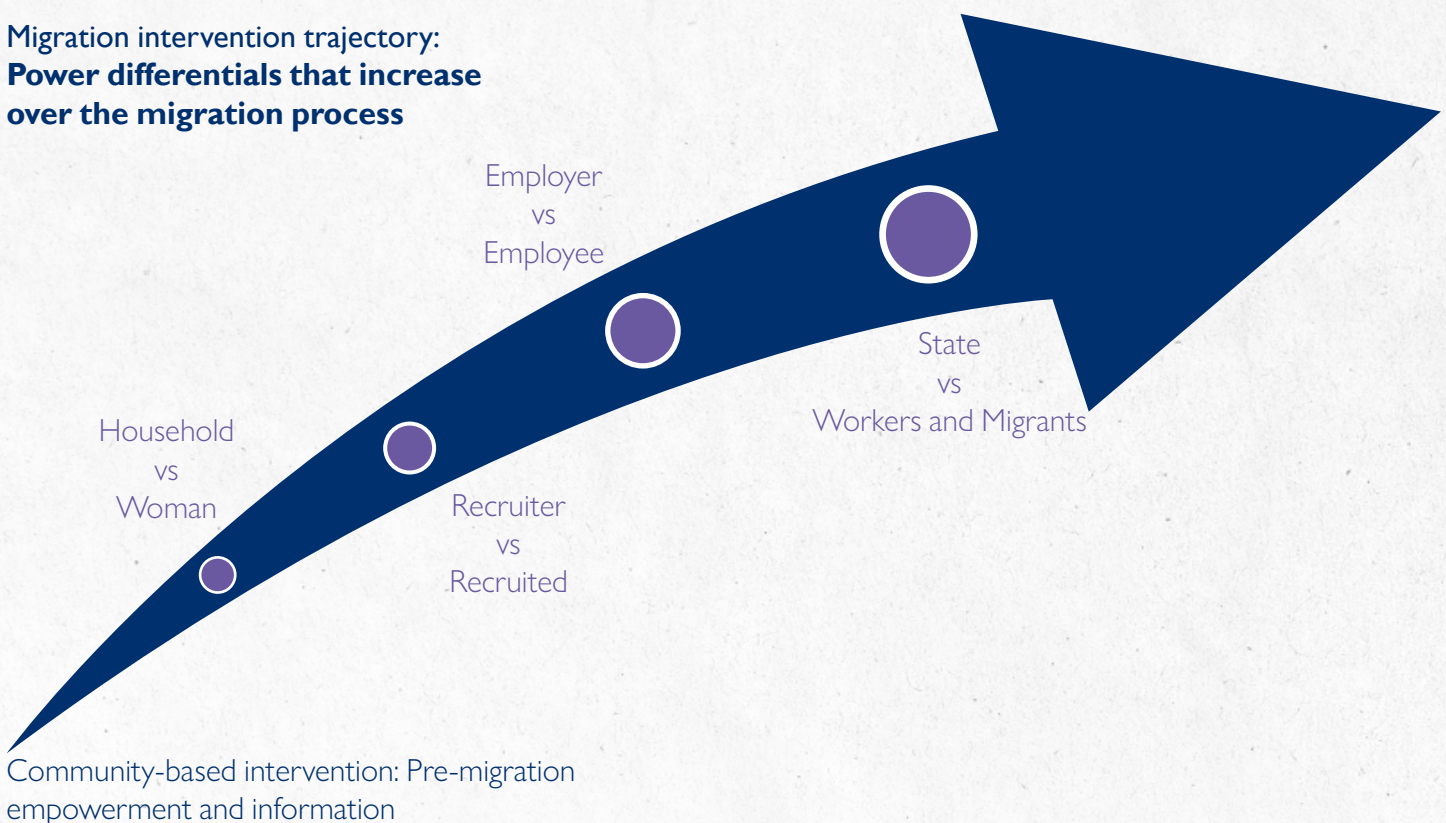
The prevention-related evidence focuses on public information and education campaigns to promote behavior change that positively inform social norms surrounding TIP. We summarize findings from studies (two quantitative and one qualitative) implemented in South Asia, East Asia, and West Africa.

Verify theory of change for “pre-departure” prevention approaches. Several C-TIP interventions target participants before they choose to migrate or are forced into migrating, by developing alternatives to migration before it happens.^{15,16,17} However, two studies report that faulty assumptions in the theory underpinning the design of these pre-departure interventions affected their implementation and effects.

One evaluation found that incorrect assumptions about ARPs’ level of internet-use knowledge inhibited participation in the “Bong Pheak” internet job-matching platform: only 40 per cent of the treatment group knew how to use the internet, resulting in low uptake.¹⁸ An evaluation of the Work in Freedom interventions in Nepal theorized that pre-migration “rights-based” awareness and women’s empowerment training would equip women with the knowledge and skills to refuse migration. Authors report that this theory of change did not properly account for asymmetric power dynamics between women workers and traffickers, and therefore the training did not adequately prepare women to assert their rights in this setting (Figure 4).¹⁹

Figure 4: Power dynamics in migration

Migration intervention trajectory: Power differentials that increase over the migration process



Authors recommend that intervention Theory of Change anticipates power imbalances throughout the migration process.²⁰
Source: Zimmerman et al. 2021

For practitioners

Consider the trade-offs of broad and narrow strategies for targeting ARPs.

Targeting refers to mechanisms that attempt to link an intervention with its intended group of beneficiaries.²¹ In C-TIP, both victims and perpetrators of trafficking are often considered “hidden populations” that are difficult to define and identify, making targeting a challenge.^{22,23,24,25,26} While broad-based targeting strategies are more inclusive, some interventions may benefit from a more focused approach. One study reported that job training was primarily attended by older participants; younger ARPs, the interventions’ intended beneficiaries, had already moved or migrated away from their villages by the time the training launched, and did not participate.²⁷ Another study reported that implementers used a broad targeting approach, treating all women of working age as potential migrants in order to achieve a maximum number of participants to meet donor obligations. Additionally, researchers report that many prospective migrants did not actually have any clear plans to migrate – a finding indicative of poor participant identification.²⁸ Thus, while broad targeting may increase participant numbers, it may limit intervention effects if a high proportion of participants are not ARPs. Embedding trafficking prevention programs in people’s daily activities in trusted community settings may facilitate the identification and participation of ARPs. For example, an in-school counseling intervention that targeted children at risk of trafficking relied on teachers and

counselors to identify vulnerable children and children were required to participate as part of their class schedules.²⁹

Intervention design and implementation should be culturally responsive. All five C-TIP studies emphasize the importance of incorporating local context into intervention design. To accommodate the complexity of migration, study authors recommend a multi-pronged approach to labor trafficking that incorporates local determinants of trafficking and the cultural context.^{30,31,32} This requires careful consideration of location-specific drivers of trafficking, stakeholder dynamics, and cultural sensitivity in the intervention design phase.

The Cambodia job training evaluation found that **participants did not prioritize intervention activities unless village authority figures encouraged participation.**³³ The Work in Freedom intervention evaluation noted that training was not held at a contextually appropriate time in the migration cycle, and did not anticipate that socio-economic differences between trainers and participants would impact participants’ connections to the empowerment messaging.³⁴ The authors also report that participants may have been more likely to migrate for sectors that were not included in the scope of the training, such as construction or agriculture.³⁵ Modifying the intervention to the local context may have mitigated some of these challenges.



For practitioners

Interventions for protection from TIP

Key messages

- Integrate protections for whistleblowers in reform efforts.

Evidence on interventions that **protect trafficking victims and first responders (such as frontline human rights defenders, medical staff, or social workers)** is limited, and represents a gap in the C-TIP evidence base. In this section we review evidence from one descriptive qualitative study.

Integrate protections for whistleblowers in reform efforts. A qualitative study highlighted whistleblower

protection as a key facilitator in improving protections for migrant workers' rights.³⁶ Researchers report that corruption is more often identified by employees of a plant or ministry than by journalists. If a person reports corruption, labor laws are their primary method of defense.³⁷ In collaboration with anti-corruption civil society organizations and partner trade unions, the Labor Initiatives intervention was able to push for Ukraine's first whistleblower protection law that provides free legal aid and lost wages for a year in case of retaliation.

Interventions responding to TIP

Key messages

- Knowledge of rights is important to empower migrant and vulnerable workers to hold employers accountable.
- Broad-based collaboration can be a key facilitator of legal reform.

The evidence on interventions that **respond to TIP through judicial or non-judicial reform, or training of justice and security actors**, is also limited. A qualitative study of the Global Labor Program conducted case studies in six partner countries to better understand strategies to improve legal frameworks and enforcement of freedom of association and other fundamental worker rights (including migrants and other vulnerable workers) in order to end human trafficking.³⁸ The study identified several key implementation approaches for promoting policy change: (1) awareness-raising and advocacy; (2) labor organizing; and (3) collaborative partnerships.

“Knowing one’s rights and having the power to demand them” is important to empower migrant and vulnerable workers to hold employers accountable.³⁹ Researchers highlighted this element of advocacy campaigns in all six partner countries, particularly for vulnerable worker groups. Outreach activities included media campaigns with public lectures on labor rights,

education interventions to build advocacy capacity, migrant leader training, forums on regulations, and informational kiosks in public locations.

Broad-based collaboration among civil society actors can be a key facilitator of legal reform.

Authors note that another common facilitator among interventions that influenced legal reforms was broad-based collaboration among unions and local non-union organizations. For example, in Cambodia and Thailand, consolidated advocacy efforts among independent unions, migrant working groups, and partnerships with local civil society organizations led to legal reform of migrant protections. However, the role of labor organizing in facilitating policy change differs from country to country. Authors observed greater openness to society-wide reform and union reform in countries with stronger unions relative to those with weaker unions.⁴⁰ In some countries, organized labor unions faced challenges regarding their public image and acceptability as credible partners in public debate.

For learning specialists and researchers

Key messages



■ There is a strong need for rigorous research on what works in C-TIP.

■ The complexities of trafficking require rigorous, mixed-method research approaches.

More methodologically robust IEs are needed to assess the effects of C-TIP interventions. There is a great need for funding and execution of rigorous C-TIP evaluations. We only identified four impact evaluations of C-TIP interventions- several with significant methodological limitations- and several authors note the evidence base on trafficking is largely descriptive rather than evaluative.^{41,42} Researchers can help to fill this evidence gap by conducting more rigorous IEs using methods that allow for causal attribution. While randomized controlled trials are not always feasible, there are many quasi-experimental IE methods well-suited to assess the effects of C-TIP programming. Gathering baseline data and participant characteristics in addition to outcome monitoring are often key to establishing a counterfactual comparison group through methods such as difference-in-difference, instrumental variables, and statistical matching.

Understanding variation in policy or intervention rollout and implementation can also help researchers to identify IE opportunities. For instance, an intervention implemented using a pipeline approach, in which activities expand to more locations over time, provides many options for IE, provided that baseline data is collected. The specific qualitative evaluation methods included in the **Human Rights EGM**⁴³ can also establish causal links between interventions and outcomes.

Provide thorough description of evaluation methods and processes, and addressing assumptions, limitations, and risk of bias. This is an important area for improvement, as both of the quantitative IEs were assessed to have high risk of bias. Where constraints on article length are a concern, it is very helpful if this information can be supplied in an appendix or other

supplementary materials. This detailed level of analysis enhances transparency and replicability and increases confidence in the validity of results.

The complexities of trafficking require rigorous, mixed-method research approaches. A recent review of trafficking evaluations notes that the complexity of human-trafficking crimes – which include a wide range of perpetrators, routes, sectors, victims, and forms of exploitation – can make it difficult to measure change over time.⁴⁴ The illegal nature of trafficking makes it difficult to collect reliable data and make accurate conclusions. This has implications for data collection and, by extension, study design. For example, in a study measuring participation of young men in “pre-departure” programming, researchers could not find young men to interview for their quantitative survey instruments. This impacted the generalizability of the results and biased the evaluation.⁴⁵ Due to implementation challenges, one of the IEs changed its evaluation method at the midline, resulting in data loss.⁴⁶ Furthermore, as trafficking involves forced migration, it can be difficult to follow up with study participants.⁴⁷ Although designing rigorous research methods that establish causality and data collection plans for “hidden populations” is challenging, research teams equipped with adequate funding and expertise can address these difficulties.⁴⁸

Mixed-method approaches are generally more flexible and capable of addressing complexities in intervention design. They combine qualitative insights from participants and other stakeholders with rigorous quantitative methods. As less than one third of studies included in the Human Rights EGM use mixed methods, this represents a promising direction for future research in the often complex arena of C-TIP interventions.



About the evidence

This brief includes findings from one SR and two quantitative IEs of C-TIP interventions along with two studies using qualitative evaluation methods that seek to establish causal inference. They were selected based on a secondary screening of Human Rights EGM results to identify studies of interventions with the objective of

countering trafficking in persons. Quantitative studies were assessed for quality using a rapid risk-of-bias assessment tool ([Online appendix A](#)). Insights from quantitative studies are derived from the researchers' understanding of contextual factors, rather than effectiveness findings.

Figure 5: What types of evidence are included in this brief?

Evidence type	M&E indicators and project reports	Performance and process evaluations	Impact Evaluations (IEs)	Systematic Review (SRs)
Key question	WHAT was done?	HOW was it done?	Did it have an EFFECT?	Were the effects CONTEXT dependent?
Use(s) of findings	Assist in guiding program implementation and course-correction, and demonstrate accountability	Multiple purposes (e.g., program adherence to the plan, implementer performance, achievement of planned outputs and immediate outcomes, stakeholder/partner/client feedback)	Measure intervention effectiveness, after accounting for other factors; published IEs provide examples of interventions that have or have not had an impact on a targeted outcome.	Synthesize findings from multiple IEs (often through quantitative meta-analysis) on a particular issue, increasing confidence and generalizability.
Included in EGM	No	No	Yes	Yes

In effectiveness evidence from IEs and SRs, **negative findings are just as important** as positive findings, because they help to refine our understanding about what works (or not, and why or why not). Negative findings also contribute to feedback loops to improve intervention design and implementation. The **absence of effectiveness**

evidence does not mean an intervention should be avoided, but rather highlights the potential benefit of an IE, particularly if the intervention:

- is innovative,
- may be scaled up, or
- is being considered as a potential model for replication elsewhere.

Why evidence matters

Why is this important? !

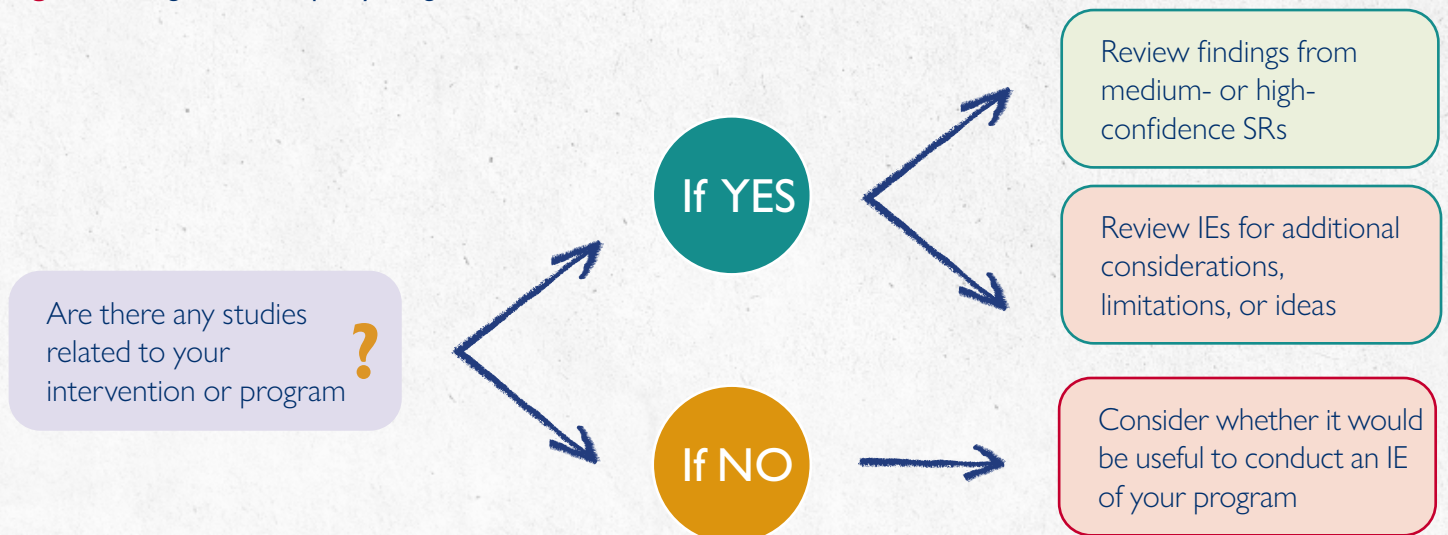
This brief (along with the associated EGM matrix and report) is designed to inform USAID practitioners' investments in human rights C-TIP interventions at multiple phases of the program cycle, including strategic planning; project design and implementation; activity design and implementation; monitoring; and evaluation.

- Results will feed into the **technical evidence** base in the **learning** phase of USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) Framework.
- IE findings provide USAID practitioners with ideas about which interventions they may want to consider when developing a **program design**.

- Like IEs, SRs may include an explanation of relevant theories of change, which can be useful during the **project and activity design** stage.
- In SRs, the more consistent the findings are across contexts, the higher the likelihood that the approach may work in a new context.

We encourage practitioners to take a closer look at the online **Evidence Gap Map** to engage with the available evidence. When considering if and how the programs on which you work fit into the framework, we suggest asking the following questions:

Figure 6: Using evidence in policy design



You can always reach out to the Justice, Rights, and Securities (JRS) C-TIP team (C-TIP@usaid.gov) within the DRG Center in USAID/Washington if you have any questions, ideas, or suggestions related to evidence that may help inform the design of your project(s) and/or activity(ies).



About the brief

This brief highlights research findings from one low-confidence SR, two quantitative IEs, and two qualitative studies on interventions to prevent, protect, and respond to human rights violations related to trafficking in persons. Reported findings and implementation considerations are illustrative and not based on systematic synthesis.

The studies on which this brief is based were identified through the **Human Rights Evidence Gap Map**, by Tomasz Kozakiewicz and colleagues (2021b). The authors systematically searched for published and unpublished IEs and SRs through May 2021, and then identified, mapped, and described the evidence base of interventions that aim to strengthen human rights. The

map contains 46 SRs and 377 IEs. The characteristics of the evidence are described and mapped according to a framework of 23 interventions (supplemented by several of the most common multiple-component combinations) and 28 outcomes. The EGM can be viewed at <https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/egm/human-rights>.

This brief was authored by Jane Hammaker, Heather van Buskirk, Amber Franich, Tomasz Kozakiewicz and Douglas Glandon. They are solely responsible for all content, errors, and omissions. It was designed and produced by Akarsh Gupta and Tanvi Lal.



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February 2023