

UNODC joins top-ranking representatives of key criminal justice institutions in Mozambique to discuss the use and abuse of technology in Mozambique on World Day Against Trafficking in Persons

MAPUTO, Mozambique. Worldwide, human traffickers are increasingly making use of technology to facilitate their criminal activities on wider scales and for bigger profits, particularly preying on people in vulnerable situations, especially children. Mozambique has been no exception to this trend, with technologies being widely used by criminals to target, recruit, control and exploit their victims, including through social media, in and through the country.

Technology, however, does not need to be an enemy in the joint fight against trafficking in persons in the country.



This was the message conveyed by top-ranking representatives of key criminal justice institutions in Mozambique, including the Mozambican Attorney-General's Office, the Supreme Court, and the National Service for Criminal Investigations (SERNIC - Serviço Nacional de Investigação Criminal), in a

series of events held on the occasion of World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, commemorated every year on 30 July.

This year's campaign focused on the "*Use and Abuse of Technology*" by human traffickers and aimed to raise the awareness of the public, policy-makers, legislators and practitioners not only about the impacts posed by modern technologies, including Information and Communication Technologies (ITCs), on the crime of trafficking in persons, but also about the opportunities that these present in terms of facilitating investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases, as well as the detection and rescuing of victims.

Mozambique is country of origin, transit and destination for trafficking in persons, with most victims detected in the country being trafficked into forced labour, particularly in the agriculture and mining sectors, as well as into sexual exploitation.

Children, especially orphan children and those living below the poverty line, are particularly vulnerable to falling victims of predators and traffickers in the country.

Indeed, technology plays a crucial role in criminals' illicit endeavours, particularly at the recruitment stage, but also during the exploitation phase. Technology in fact is incredibly useful to traffickers as it increases their and their victims' anonymity, helps to defuse evidence in the cyberspace, enables encrypted communications and transactions, and provides additional means to control victims.

In the context of the deteriorating security situation in the Cabo Delgado region in the North of the country, that has so far generated over 800,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), traffickers are likely seizing the opportunity to target vulnerable women, men and children escaping the conflict to traffic them into different forms of exploitation. It is expected that technology is and will be a key enabler of their illicit operations in that context.

During the roundtables and thematic discussions held and co-organized by UNODC with the Mozambican Office of the Attorney-General and the Supreme Court, respectively on 25 and 29 July 2022, the highest-level representatives of key criminal justice institutions came together to share knowledge about how technology is being used by human traffickers in the specific Mozambican context and what are the current challenges and opportunities in terms of countering this phenomenon, with the help of technological tools.

Among the key concerns raised by practitioners is the lack of capacities of investigators, prosecutors and judges to keep up with technological advances, particularly as these get abused by traffickers. This is in part due to lack of resources for purchasing technological equipment that could be used to facilitate investigations, but also limited skills on its usage, as well as other juridical challenges, such as the collection and handling of digital evidence for the purpose of criminal proceedings.

"Technology transfer and capacity-building for criminal justice officials are needed in many parts of the world, and Mozambique alike, not only to improve access to such modern technologies where these are not available, but also to enhance the skills of investigators, prosecutors and judges on their use", said Antonio De Vivo, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer at UNODC Mozambique.

“In doing so, partnership with the private sector, and particularly with ICT companies and social media platforms, is crucial, including to develop data-sharing procedures and cooperation protocols”, he added.

Several participants also underscored the importance of addressing the root causes leading vulnerable people to fall prey of organized criminal groups in Mozambique, including poverty and unemployment, which are currently ripe, including as a result of the global financial crisis and the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions.

At the same time, the representatives agreed on the need to focus efforts on reinforcing inter-institutional cooperation among key actors, including to ensure that while investigations of cases are underway, adequate protection and assistance are afforded to victims.

UN Resident Coordinator in Mozambique, Ms. Myrta Kaulard, also present in these discussions, confirmed the UN’s system-wide commitment to support the Mozambican Government in taking measures to strengthen the prevention of trafficking in persons, support its victims and bring perpetrators to justice.

UNODC, acting as the guardian of the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its supplementing Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, is ready to support the Government by providing technical assistance, as needed, in investigations and prosecutors related to technology-enabled trafficking in persons, including to facilitate the sharing of existing good practices, to provide training to law enforcement and judiciary on technical and operational aspects, as well as to reinforce cooperation with other States.