Chapter One
Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Crimes have grades. Some are labelled crime against humanity, such as genocide. There is consensus on considering trafficking in persons as an inhumane and degrading. Child and human trafficking are among the most severe human rights abuses, impacting millions of people worldwide. Trafficking entails the exploitation of vulnerable people through means such as force, fraud, coercion, or abduction for purposes including forced labour, sexual exploitation, and organ trafficking. This illicit activity is not only a significant criminal issue but also a complex social problem with profound economic, health, and psychological impacts on victims and their communities.

Human trafficking has evolved into one of the most insidious and pervasive crimes of the twenty-first century, often described as a modern form of slavery. It is an egregious violation of human rights, affecting virtually every country, either as a source, transit, or destination for trafficked persons. While global estimates vary, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that approximately 50 million people were living in modern slavery as of 2021, with a significant proportion involved in human trafficking for forced labour, sexual exploitation, and organ trade. The gravity of this issue lies not only in its magnitude but also in its ability to morph in response to enforcement efforts, global migration trends, digital technologies, and systemic vulnerabilities.

The definition of human trafficking, as established by the United Nations Palermo Protocol of 2000, involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons

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by means of threat, force, coercion, fraud, or deception for the purpose of exploitation[1]. This broad but legally codified definition forms the international benchmark against which national frameworks such as Nigeria's Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPPEA) and the United Kingdom's Modern Slavery Act 2015 are assessed. While both nations have ratified the Palermo Protocol, their national experiences reflect stark differences in how trafficking is institutionalized, enforced, and prosecuted.

Nigeria remains a significant source, transit, and destination country for trafficking victims. The socio-economic fabric of the nation, marked by poverty, political instability, youth unemployment, gender inequality, and systemic corruption, has created fertile ground for traffickers to exploit vulnerable populations[2]. Internally, victims are often trafficked from rural to urban centres for domestic servitude, forced marriage, or labour. Externally, Nigerian women and children are routinely trafficked to Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, where they face sexual exploitation, unpaid labour, and criminal coercion. Traffickers frequently use familial trust, spiritual manipulation, and community endorsement to lure victims, especially young girls, into overseas trafficking routes, often with promises of education, employment, or marriage[3]. To combat this, Nigeria has developed a relatively comprehensive legal framework. The TIPPEA Act of 2015 criminalises all forms of trafficking and mandates the creation of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). This agency has the mandate to investigate, prosecute, rehabilitate, and prevent trafficking through institutional partnerships. However, enforcement remains inconsistent due to fragmented inter-agency coordination, limited investigative capacity, and entrenched judicial corruption[4]. Although thousands of potential trafficking victims have been identified since 2015, prosecutions and convictions remain very low in comparison. Between 2018 and 2024, there were nearly 94,000 referrals into the National

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Referral Mechanism, but only 2,679 prosecutions and fewer than 2,000 convictions. In 2022 alone, police recorded over 10,000 modern slavery offences, yet only 405 prosecutions and 282 convictions followed. These figures highlight the large gap between identified cases and judicial outcomes[5].

In contrast, the United Kingdom, a common destination for trafficked individuals, has developed a more integrated anti-trafficking framework. The Modern Slavery Act of 2015 consolidates existing trafficking laws, expands victim protection, and mandates corporate transparency in global supply chains[6]. It established the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and strengthened the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to ensure timely identification and support of victims. British law also provides for asset seizure, financial investigation, and long-term rehabilitation support for confirmed victims of trafficking. Nonetheless, the UK system is not without criticism. Because of hostile immigration policies, fear of deportation, and delayed legal recognition, many trafficking victims either do not report abuse or reject formal support (especially among irregular migrants). Even when referrals are made, protracted delays and stricter proof requirements frequently prevent timely or any access to post-referral support, leaving those whose claims are rejected or delayed exposed to further harm[7]. An Important dimension of the UK's response lies in its emphasis on the financial aspects of trafficking. Investigations increasingly include the use of proceeds of crime legislation to disrupt trafficking networks, a domain still underdeveloped in Nigeria[8]. Additionally, the UK courts have shown a firm willingness to prosecute offenders irrespective of their social or political status. The high-profile UK prosecution and conviction of Nigerian Senator Ike Ekweremadu, his wife, and a doctor for orchestrating a kidney-harvesting plot under the Modern Slavery Act illustrates strong enforcement when cases are brought in robust legal systems. In Nigeria, while investigations and arraignments

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over organ harvesting allegations have been made (for instance by NAPTIP), they have generally not resulted in similarly visible convictions, especially among powerful or elite actors[9].

Structural and institutional gaps further complicate Nigeria's anti-trafficking efforts. Many victims rescued by NAPTIP receive limited rehabilitation support, with shelters underfunded and under-resourced, particularly in rural regions. Reintegration is further undermined by societal stigma, lack of economic alternatives, and weak state support for survivors' psychological recovery. Because many trafficking victims—especially those forced into sex work—are subject to criminal sanctions (e.g. for soliciting, immigration offences, public order offences) or have their access to support conditional on clean criminal histories, there is a strong deterrent effect. This deters victims from coming forward. Even after identification, victims may be re-victimised when the system treats them as offenders rather than people in need of protection.[10]. In the UK, although services are more institutionalised, they are often temporary and contingent on the outcome of legal claims, particularly for non-UK nationals. After survivors are formally recognised under the UK's National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and receive a Conclusive Grounds decision, support often ends within 45 days, even though many still need help with housing, legal status, mental health, and integration. Because the Recovery Needs Assessment process does not reliably identify long-term needs, many victims leave the formal support system with little or no provision, making them vulnerable to destitution, exploitation, or re-trafficking[11].

Another important divergence lies in data infrastructure. Reliable data is crucial for mapping trafficking trends, formulating interventions, and evaluating policy effectiveness. Nigeria's data collection mechanisms are fragmented, poorly digitised, and often influenced by

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political interests. This impedes efforts to assess real-time changes in trafficking dynamics and frustrates international cooperation efforts[12]. On the other hand, the UK employs more centralised data systems and national statistics, though concerns persist over regional inconsistencies and under-reporting across police jurisdictions[13]. Without a common evidence base, bilateral and multilateral efforts suffer from fragmentation and duplicative strategies. Furthermore, both countries face new and emerging challenges linked to globalisation and technological change. In Nigeria, traffickers increasingly leverage social media to recruit young women with fraudulent job offers, using encrypted platforms to evade detection[14]. In the UK, trafficking has been increasingly reported in the context of "county lines" drug trafficking, where children are groomed and exploited to transport narcotics across regions. These evolving trends demand equally agile responses, yet legal systems often lag behind innovation in criminal networks[15].

More importantly, international cooperation plays a pivotal role in shaping national responses. Nigeria has signed bilateral and multilateral agreements with European Union (EU) states and regional blocs for mutual legal assistance, victim repatriation, and intelligence sharing. However, political distrust and institutional weakness frequently hamper implementation. The UK, while more effective in applying international standards, has encountered diplomatic friction post-Brexit, particularly with the EU's anti-trafficking systems and oversight mechanisms[16]. Both countries therefore face the dual challenge of national enforcement and transnational cooperation in an increasingly interconnected world. Researchers and policy analysts have also highlighted the importance of prevention strategies alongside enforcement[17]. While law reform is vital, addressing the root causes, economic disempowerment, gender discrimination, and community vulnerability, is central to reducing the supply of potential victims. In Nigeria, prevention efforts are heavily supported by civil

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society organisations, international partners, and religious groups, but these are often donor-driven and inconsistent[18]. While in the UK, prevention is anchored in both public awareness campaigns and mandatory corporate reporting, although critics argue that the Modern Slavery Statements required of businesses lack enforcement teeth and are more symbolic than transformative[19].

This backdrop sets the stage for the present study. Human trafficking, as a global scourge, requires not only moral and legal condemnation but also comparative analysis of how legal systems respond to it. Nigeria and the UK present two strikingly different contexts, one a prominent source and transit country in the Global South, and the other a destination country in the Global North with high-profile international enforcement mechanisms. Yet both nations struggle with similar challenges: low prosecution-to-reporting ratios, inconsistent victim support, inadequate data, and political inertia in sensitive cases. By undertaking a comparative analysis of human trafficking laws, enforcement capacity, and prosecution outcomes in Nigeria and the United Kingdom, this study seeks to uncover not only the gaps in implementation but also transferable lessons across jurisdictions. It aims to probe why, despite apparent legal convergence on paper, real-world outcomes differ dramatically. Moreover, it will examine how structural violence, institutional inertia, and political economy shape the actual effectiveness of anti-trafficking strategies. In doing so, this thesis contributes to the broader discourse on justice reform, transnational law, and victim-centred legal practice. Ultimately,dismantling the machinery of trafficking requires more than reactive law, it demands proactive systems, international solidarity, and political courage. By grounding the study in empirical evidence and comparative legal evaluation, this work aims to inform more nuanced, responsive, and effective anti-trafficking policies in both nations.

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1.2 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria and Britain are tied by colonial heritage, both have had many years of diplomatic relations, alliances, and symbiotic immigration. They have engaged in multiple cultural exchange programmes. Despite the existence of robust legal frameworks in both Nigeria and the United Kingdom, human trafficking remains an enduring and complex challenge. In Nigeria, the enactment of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPPEA), 2015, and the establishment of NAPTIP were landmark developments in the fight against trafficking. However, enforcement remains weak due to systemic corruption, limited institutional capacity, inadequate inter-agency coordination, and underfunded victim rehabilitation centres. The problem is further exacerbated by socio-economic pressures, particularly in rural areas, where traffickers exploit poverty, illiteracy, and gender disparities to lure vulnerable individuals into exploitative networks. Victims in Nigeria often face re-traumatisation through stigmatisation, slow judicial processes, or even criminalisation, especially when trafficked into sex work. Prosecution rates remain low, and many cases involving powerful individuals rarely reach conviction, indicating significant implementation gaps. Meanwhile, data collection mechanisms are inconsistent, making it difficult to assess the scale or evolving patterns of trafficking[19].

In the United Kingdom, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides one of the most advanced legal responses to trafficking globally. It consolidates offences, mandates corporate transparency, and strengthens victim support through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). However, critics highlight the continued under-prosecution of cases, long delays in victim processing, and weak enforcement of corporate compliance[23]. Migrant victims, in particular, are deterred from seeking help due to fears of deportation or some

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uncertainimmigration status. The persistence of human trafficking in both countries, despite their legal instruments, suggests that legislative action alone is insufficient. Implementation challenges, lack of victim-centred approaches, and insufficient structural reforms remain critical barriers to progress. This study is therefore driven by the need to explore these gaps through a comparative analysis of Nigeria and the United Kingdom, with the goal of identifying historical modus operandi of legal concerns in both countries, lessons available to learn from handling of issues and persons associated with human trafficking, challenges confronted by states being studied, and desirable reforms that cannot only strengthen anti-trafficking efforts in both jurisdictions.

1.3. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to compare and contrast how two sovereign states deal with human trafficking in terms of legal institutions, enforcement, and prosecution of offenders.Specific objectives of the study are to do the following:

i. analyse the provisions of human trafficking laws in Nigeria and the United Kingdom.

ii.assess the enforcement mechanisms of trafficking laws in both countries.

iii. evaluate the outcomes of human trafficking laws.

iv. identify the gaps in the current legal frameworks.

1.4. Research Questions

1. How do the legal frameworks and provisions of human trafficking laws in Nigeria and the United Kingdom compare?

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2. How are the trafficking laws enforced in both Nigeria and the United Kingdom?

3. What are the outcomes of trafficking laws enforcement in both countries?

4. What gaps exist in the current legal frameworks of Nigeria and the United Kingdom?

1.5Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on human trafficking by offering a comparative legal analysis between a Global South country (Nigeria) and a Global North country (the United Kingdom). Understanding the similarities and differences in their legal responses provides valuable insights for strengthening domestic and international interventions.

Second, the study will guide policymakers in both countries by highlighting areas where current laws are underperforming and where enforcement gaps exist. It may also serve as a practical tool for legal practitioners, human rights organisations, and civil society advocates committed to eradicating trafficking and enhancing victim protection.

Lastly, the research provides a foundation for further academic inquiry into transnational criminal law, victim-centred justice, and global cooperation against trafficking. By bridging practice, policy, and scholarship, this study adds meaningful value to contemporary debates on global justice and legal harmonisation.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the legal frameworks, enforcement strategies, and prosecution outcomes relating to human trafficking in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. It specifically examines relevant statutes, institutional mechanisms, and legal processes used to combat

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trafficking in both countries. Geographically, the study is limited to Nigeria and the United Kingdom as case examples. It does not include other countries or broader regionalcomparisons. Thematically, the research is restricted to trafficking for labour, sexual exploitation, and organ removal. It excludes related issues such as smuggling, migration policy, or general violence against women and children. The justification for the researcher's choice of Nigeria and the United Kingdom is that both are connected or tied with a colonial heritage, English Language is Nigeria's official language, and Nigeria is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, which the United Kingdom leads. So the study aimed at finding out laws work well in one state and do not in the other.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

This study is limited by variations in the availability and accessibility of data on human trafficking, particularly within the Nigerian context. While the United Kingdom maintains more structured and publicly accessible records, Nigerian data is often decentralised and inconsistently reported across agencies. These discrepancies may affect the depth of comparative analysis but do not undermine the validity of the findings derived from verifiable sources.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Human Trafficking: The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons by means such as coercion, abduction, fraud, or deception, for the purpose of exploitation. It includes forced labour, sexual exploitation, involuntary servitude, and organ removal.

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Child Trafficking: A form of human trafficking involving persons under the age of 18, recruited or moved for exploitation, irrespective of consent or the use of force.

Legal Framework: The collective body of national laws, international conventions, institutional mandates, and enforcement mechanisms established to prevent trafficking, prosecute offenders, and protect victims.

Victim Protection: Measures designed to uphold the rights and welfare of trafficking victims, including legal assistance, shelter, medical care, counselling, and social reintegration services.

Enforcement Mechanisms: Institutional and legal processes used by states to implement anti-trafficking laws, including policing, investigation, prosecution, border monitoring, and judicial action.

Prosecution Outcomes: The measurable results of legal actions against suspected traffickers, including arrest rates, successful convictions, sentencing patterns, and judicial delays.

Modern Slavery: A contemporary form of human exploitation characterised by control over individuals through threats, coercion, or deception, which deprives them of their liberty and autonomy.

Trafficking Network: An organised or semi-structured group of individuals or entities involved in the recruitment, transport, exploitation, or concealment of trafficking victims, often operating across borders.

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Comparative Legal Analysis: A research approach that evaluates similarities and differences in legal systems, structures, and enforcement practices across countries or jurisdictions.

National Referral Mechanism (NRM): A system used in the UK to identify, support, and protect victims of trafficking through collaboration between government agencies and support providers.

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Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

This chapter reviews existing literature on human trafficking laws, their enforcement, and the prosecution of offenders. It examines global trends, national variations in the dynamics of trafficking, and efforts to combat it through international and national legal frameworks. The review highlights major gaps in the existing research, setting the foundation for analysing the

comparative effectiveness of British and Nigerian human trafficking laws in subsequent chapters.

2.1.1 Human Trafficking as a Concept

Human trafficking is globally recognised as one of the gravest violations of human rights, often described as modern-day slavery. The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, popularly known as the Palermo Protocol, provides the most universally accepted definition of the crime. It describes human trafficking as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation[1].

This definition encompasses three critical components: the act (e.g., recruitment or transfer), the means (e.g., coercion or fraud), and the purpose (i.e., exploitation). Its comprehensive nature ensures broad applicability across various forms of trafficking, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, and organ harvesting. However, it also raises interpretative challenges, particularly in cases where individuals voluntarily migrate but later find themselves subjected to exploitation[2]. In parallel, the European Union's Directive on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings reinforces and expands the Palermo definition by explicitly referencing the exchange or transfer of control over persons as a hallmark of trafficking[3]. Notably, it emphasises "abuse of vulnerability" as a coercive factor, recognising that not all trafficking involves overt physical force. This nuanced inclusion

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reflects Europe's response to emerging trafficking patterns, particularly those involving psychological manipulation and systemic socioeconomic vulnerabilities[4].

The International Labour Organization (ILO) narrows its definitional lens to focus particularly on labour trafficking. According to the ILO, trafficking involves forced or compulsory labour, where individuals are subjected to coercion or deception in employment contexts[5]. This industry-specific view has prompted targeted responses in sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, and construction. Nevertheless, critics argue that the ILO's labour-centric focus may obscure the broader spectrum of trafficking forms, including sexual exploitation, child soldiering, and organ harvesting[6]. National legal frameworks often adapt these international definitions to reflect local realities. In Nigeria, the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act aligns with the Palermo Protocol but includes culturally specific elements like internal trafficking and debt bondage[7]. Nigerian law recognises trafficking as involving deception, coercion, or debt manipulation for sexual, labour, or domestic servitude purposes, often occurring within the country as much as across borders[8]. Similarly, the UK's Modern Slavery Act of 2015 adopts a broader legal approach that prioritises exploitation over consent. It asserts that any exploitation, be it sexual, labour-related, or otherwise, is unlawful, regardless of whether the victim initially agreed to travel or work. This legal interpretation eliminates consent as a defence for traffickers, reinforcing the victim-centred focus of the British legal system.

Globally, there are at least seven recognised forms of human trafficking: sex trafficking, child sex trafficking, forced labour, forced child labour, debt bondage, involuntary domestic servitude, and child soldiering[9]. Among these, sex trafficking, defined as the exploitation of an adult in commercial sex acts through force, fraud, or coercion, is the most reported. Child

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sex trafficking similarly involves minors under the age of 18, while debt bondage occurs when financial obligations are used to control or enslave victims[10]. Other forms include involuntary domestic servitude, where victims are exploited in private homes without freedom or pay, and the recruitment of children into armed groups, a particularly egregious form of abuse often overlooked in legal discussions[11]. These manifestations reflect the diverse strategies traffickers employ and the need for equally comprehensive legal and policy responses. Importantly, the existence of physical movement or border crossing is not a necessary element for trafficking to occur. Domestic trafficking, especially in contexts like Nigeria, where children are moved from rural to urban areas for domestic servitude, demonstrates that trafficking is as much a local issue as it is a transnational one[12].

2.1.2 Human Trafficking Trend, Evolution and Spread around the World

Human trafficking has evolved from a hidden and marginalised criminal enterprise to a pervasive global issue that transcends borders, cultures, and economic systems. While the term "slavery" often conjures historical images of transatlantic trade, modern trafficking has adapted to contemporary contexts, embedding itself in both legitimate and illicit economies. Despite international legal prohibitions dating back to the 1926 Slavery Convention and reinforced by subsequent treaties, human trafficking persists as a thriving industry in the 21st century[13]. The scale of the crisis Is staggering. Human trafficking is now recognised as one of the most profitable criminal industries in the world, following only the illegal drug and arms trades. It is estimated to generate over $150 billion in illicit profits annually[14]. This figure reflects the brutal commodification of human beings for purposes ranging from sexual exploitation and forced labour to domestic servitude and organ harvesting. Unlike drugs or

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weapons, human beings can be sold repeatedly, making trafficking a uniquely persistent and regenerative crime.

Technological advancement and globalisation have amplified the problem. Increased migration, porous borders, the proliferation of online platforms, and digital anonymity have all contributed to the rise of cross-border and cyber-facilitated trafficking[15]. The expansion of transportation infrastructure and international commerce has inadvertently enabled traffickers to operate more efficiently and conceal their activities more effectively. Moreover, trafficking does not always involve the crossing of international borders. Internal trafficking is rampant, particularly in countries grappling with socioeconomic inequality. In Nigeria, for instance, individuals, particularly women and children, are trafficked from rural to urban areas under the guise of employment or education, only to be exploited in homes, markets, or brothels[16]. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, domestic trafficking includes the use of vulnerable children in the county lines drug trade, where criminal gangs exploit minors to move narcotics across regions.

The trend of trafficking has shifted with global events and regional crises. Armed conflicts, political instability, and natural disasters have exacerbated vulnerabilities, especially in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Displacement caused by Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria, for example, has significantly increased the risk of trafficking among internally displaced persons (IDPs), especially children[17]. These individuals often fall prey to traffickers who masquerade as aid workers or job recruiters. Efforts to address the spread of trafficking have improved global awareness and legal structures. Campaigns by the United Nations, civil society organisations, and state actors have spotlighted trafficking as a human rights crisis[18]. Nevertheless, prosecution rates remain low, particularly in regions

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where corruption, legal loopholes, and under-resourced law enforcement undermine anti-trafficking frameworks[19]. Despite numerous conventions and treaties, including the Palermo Protocol, the enforcement of anti-trafficking laws remains inconsistent across jurisdictions[20]. While some high-income countries have adopted comprehensive legislation and victim-centred support services, others still lack basic legal definitions or protective mechanisms for victims. This legal asymmetry facilitates the global diffusion of trafficking networks, allowing perpetrators to exploit legal and procedural gaps across borders[21].

Ultimately, the evolution of human trafficking is marked by a disturbing adaptability. As states develop responses, traffickers shift their tactics, recruiting younger victims, using cryptocurrency, or exploiting crises[22]. Addressing this menace therefore demands not only robust legal and institutional frameworks but also sustained international collaboration, victim protection, and a deeper understanding of trafficking's root causes, including poverty, gender inequality, and armed conflict[23].

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2.1.3 Magnitude of Human Trafficking Worldwide

Estimating with any accuracy the number of victims of human trafficking is a discouraging task, so much so that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated, a statistical goal may prove to be unachievable[24]. However, methodological problems have not prevented organisations and scholars from offering widely ranging estimates. The International Labour Organization (ILO) previously estimated that there are approximately

12.3 million people globally in forced labour, bonded labour, forced child labour, and sexual servitude at any given time[25].

In an assessment covering the period from 1995 to 2013, an estimated 2.4 million people were victims of human trafficking[26]. The number of individuals trafficked across international borders each year has been placed at approximately 800,000, of which 50 percent are children and 80 percent women and girls[27]. In the United States alone, the annual number of trafficked foreign nationals has been placed between 14,500 and 17,500, highlighting the country's role as a significant destination for traffickers[28]. Based on global estimates, the prevalence rate of trafficking victims in the world is around 1.8 per 1,000 inhabitants[23]. More recent ILO figures suggest an even graver picture: around 27.6 million people are believed to be victims of forced labour globally, a substantial proportion of whom are trafficked[29]. This includes about 4.8 million individuals trafficked for sexual exploitation and many more subjected to forced labour in industries such as construction, agriculture, manufacturing, and domestic work[30]. Traffickers often prey on vulnerable populations, especially children, women, and people affected by socioeconomic hardship, conflict, or political instability[31].

The spread and magnitude of human trafficking are not uniform across the globe. Trafficking flows are shaped by a range of factors including geographic proximity, economic disparity, political conflict, and social instability[32]. The UNODC has identified distinct transnational trafficking patterns, typically flowing from less economically developed regions, such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, toward richer destinations in Europe, North America, and the Middle East[33]. These locations often serve both as source regions and transit zones, depending on the structure of trafficking networks. Moreover, it is critical to note that not all trafficking involves international movement. A large proportion of human trafficking takes

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place within countries. Known as internal trafficking, this occurs when individuals, especially children and women, are relocated from rural or impoverished areas to cities or towns for purposes such as forced domestic labour or sexual exploitation[34]. In Nigeria, for example, trafficking often involves girls from rural communities being taken to urban centres under false promises of employment or education, only to be coerced into exploitative conditions[35]. The magnitude of human trafficking is thus best understood not merely through statistics, but through the complex networks, social dynamics, and geopolitical realities that make individuals vulnerable and traffickers profitable. While significant global attention and legal instruments have been mobilised to confront the issue, the true scale remains elusive, calling for improved data systems, cross-border cooperation, and holistic victim-centred interventions.

2.1.4 Evolution of Trafficking Practices in Nigeria

The phenomenon of human trafficking in Nigeria has undergone significant transformation over the past four decades, evolving from predominantly informal local exploitation to a sophisticated, transnational criminal enterprise. Understanding this evolution is crucial to appreciating the complex structural and historical conditions that shape both the perpetrators' strategies and the state's response. In the immediate post-independence period, exploitation in Nigeria took forms that were often culturally embedded and not always criminalised. Practices such as child fostering, domestic servitude, and early marriage were common in rural communities and were rarely seen as exploitative, even when they involved long working hours, denial of education, or physical abuse[36]. At this stage, the boundaries between cultural norms and rights violations were often blurred, and the legal infrastructure lacked the clarity and reach to address such issues comprehensively.

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By the 1980s and 1990s, the nature of trafficking began to shift. Nigeria's worsening economic conditions, including rising inflation, the collapse of the educational sector, and surging unemployment, particularly among youth, contributed to the emergence of illicit migration networks[37]. Young Nigerians, especially from Edo and Delta States, were recruited with promises of lucrative jobs in Europe. These recruits often embarked on perilous journeys through the Sahara Desert and North Africa en route to Italy, Spain, or France. Along the way, they were subjected to physical violence, extortion, and sexual abuse. A growing number of these migrants were coerced into sex work, forced labour, or organ trafficking upon arrival[38]. The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by the Nigerian government in the mid-1980s further deepened socio-economic inequalities. Public services were slashed, welfare systems weakened, and informal employment surged. Many households began to rely on remittances from abroad, creating a dangerous incentive system for young women to travel under false pretences[39]. Consequently, trafficking transformed into a community-supported industry, where entire villages celebrated successful migration without knowing, or choosing to ignore, the exploitative conditions attached.

A distinctive feature of Nigerian trafficking networks Is the role of juju rituals and spiritual manipulation. Victims are often subjected to oaths that bind them psychologically to their traffickers. These rituals, often conducted by local priests, include symbolic acts such as drinking blood, handling fetish objects, or swearing upon ancestral spirits. The psychological impact of these rituals is profound, instilling fear and obedience that law enforcement struggles to break[40]. The use of spiritual control reflects not only the traffickers' cultural understanding of their victims but also the failure of the legal system to address such forms of coercion, which may not leave visible scars. Another major phase in the evolution of trafficking practices was the institutionalisation of the crime within organised crime

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syndicates. By the early 2000s, trafficking networks were no longer composed of individual recruiters and victims; instead, they had become structured with financiers, transporters, document forgers, and enforcers. These groups operate across several countries and involve actors from different nationalities. Nigerian traffickers collaborate with agents in Libya, Morocco, and Spain, making it difficult for Nigerian law enforcement to investigate or prosecute effectively[41].

Internally, trafficking also grew more structured. Thousands of children are trafficked each year from northern Nigeria to southern cities like Lagos, Ibadan, and Port Harcourt to work as domestic help, hawkers, or beggars. In some cases, they are forced into Almajiri systems, where they are compelled to beg under the guise of religious education. These forms of child trafficking often go unnoticed because they are disguised as culturally or religiously sanctioned practices[42].

Technological advancement also changed trafficking operations. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram have become new tools for recruitment. Traffickers use these platforms to offer fake job opportunities, scholarships, or marriage proposals. Victims are often drawn into digital relationships, convinced of their recruiter's legitimacy, and persuaded to relocate without proper documentation or safety planning[43]. Technology not only enhances recruitment reach but also enables traffickers to track, threaten, and control victims remotely. Law enforcement, by contrast, lacks the digital literacy and tools to investigate trafficking in cyberspace effectively. A further evolution Is visible in the increasing participation of women as traffickers. Unlike stereotypical male-dominated crime syndicates, Nigerian trafficking rings often include "madams", older women who were once trafficked themselves and now serve as intermediaries or enforcers. These women are

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sometimes more feared than their male counterparts because of their knowledge of the network, understanding of the victims' psychology, and command over spiritual manipulation. This gendered dimension complicates the state's prosecutorial efforts, especially in communities where such women command respect or fear.

The Nigerian government has made several legislative and policy attempts to curb trafficking. The most significant is the enactment of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPPEA) 2015, which criminalises all forms of trafficking and establishes procedures for victim protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration[44]. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) has prosecuted hundreds of cases and rescued thousands of victims. However, enforcement gaps remain wide. Conviction rates are low compared to reported cases, and many victims are reluctant to testify due to fear, trauma, or cultural stigma. Moreover, traditional institutions, such as village chiefs and religious leaders, are rarely involved in anti-trafficking campaigns, despite their influence at the grassroots level. There remains a disconnect between federal legislation and local enforcement mechanisms. This lack of synergy often leads to selective justice and the recycling of victims back into exploitative cycles. Without addressing the cultural and socio-economic roots of trafficking, legal interventions remain reactive rather than preventative[45].

The evolution of trafficking practices in Nigeria reflects a complex interplay of economic desperation, cultural manipulation, weak governance, and international criminal collusion. From localised child exploitation to globally coordinated sex trafficking, the crime has matured in sophistication and scale. Efforts to disrupt this trajectory require equally dynamic, culturally informed, and transnational approaches. Only by acknowledging the deep

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historical and structural roots of the problem can Nigeria move beyond symbolic legal reforms and begin to dismantle the systems that allow trafficking to thrive. Nigeria has long been recognised as a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking, particularly involving women and children. The evolution of trafficking in the Nigerian context reflects broader historical, socio-economic, and geopolitical shifts, from colonial enslavement to contemporary transnational organised crime. Each era has contributed uniquely to the development and entrenchment of trafficking practices across the nation.

Colonial and Post-Colonial Period

The origins of trafficking in Nigeria trace back to the transatlantic slave trade, where millions of Africans, including Nigerians, were forcibly transported to Europe and the Americas as part of a vast colonial exploitation enterprise[45]. Although the abolition movement in the 19th century formally ended this system, the legacy of exploitation persisted. It laid the foundation for future forms of coercion and displacement disguised as labour migration or traditional servitude. Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, a new form of internal human movement emerged, driven by urbanisation, poverty, and economic migration. These changes spurred labour exploitation, particularly of women and children from rural communities, who were trafficked into domestic servitude or informal street labour under exploitative arrangements[46]. The post-colonial era thus marked the emergence of internal trafficking, a trend that continues to persist alongside cross-border activities.

1980s–1990s: The Rise of Sex Trafficking

By the 1980s and 1990s, Nigeria became internationally known for sex trafficking, particularly of young women trafficked to Italy and Spain under false promises of employment or education. Nigerian trafficking syndicates expanded their operations across

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Europe, often relying on deceptive travel agencies and fake sponsors[47]. A particularly insidious tactic was the use of traditional belief systems, such as juju or spiritual oaths, to control victims psychologically, creating fear-based bondage that ensured silence and compliance[48]. This era marked the emergence of organised, community-linked trafficking networks, where families, relatives, or local agents were complicit in the deception and exportation of vulnerable girls. The illusion of opportunity abroad masked deep cycles of exploitation, and many victims ended up in forced prostitution or domestic enslavement[49].

2000s: Transnational Expansion and Child Trafficking

With the growth of globalisation and regional migration flows, human trafficking in Nigeria expanded its reach and complexity. Nigerian victims, men, women, and children, were trafficked for forced labour, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude to destinations such as Europe, the Middle East, and North America[41]. This period saw the rise of child trafficking as a dominant pattern, especially from rural regions into cities or across borders for street begging, agricultural labour, and household service. Children were trafficked not only within Nigeria but to neighbouring countries like Cameroon and Benin, and even as far as Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Italy[50]. These developments highlighted a grim reality: trafficking was no longer limited to women in prostitution but extended to minors trapped in survival-based exploitation under the guise of "helping" their families. Organised criminal syndicates also began to link trafficking with other illicit enterprises, such as drug smuggling, illegal migration, and fraudulent documentation, thereby reinforcing transnational trafficking as a form of multi-layered organised crime[51].

2010s–Present: Legislation, Technology, and Armed Conflict

In response to increasing international scrutiny and advocacy, Nigeria enacted stronger anti-trafficking legislation, most notably the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement

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and Administration Act of 2015. This Act established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), tasked with enforcement, victim rehabilitation, and prosecution[52]. While these measures led to increased arrests and awareness campaigns, significant challenges remain. Corruption, inadequate funding, and gaps in law enforcement have hindered consistent application of the law. Moreover, traffickers have adapted their methods, leveraging social media platforms, WhatsApp, and fake recruitment websites to deceive young people, particularly girls seeking overseas education or jobs[53].

The emergence of conflict-induced displacement, particularly as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria, has added a new layer of complexity. The insurgency has created a surge in internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom fall victim to traffickers posing as aid workers or job facilitators[54]. Children from these conflict zones are at risk of becoming child soldiers, sex slaves, or forced labourers. This evolution reflects the adaptability and resilience of trafficking networks. Despite policy advancements, traffickers continue to exploit technological advancements, regional instability, and socioeconomic inequality, thereby sustaining a deeply rooted crisis that Nigeria must address through more integrated, victim-centred, and transnational cooperation efforts.

2.1.5 Factors Responsible for Human Trafficking

A range of complex and intersecting factors contributes to the persistence of human trafficking globally, and particularly within Nigeria and the United Kingdom. These include poverty, armed conflict, gender inequality, economic disparity, inadequate education, weak governance, and restrictive migration policies. Each of these elements' functions both independently and in combination to increase individuals' vulnerability to trafficking.

Poverty, Inequality, and Vulnerability

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Poverty remains a central factor fuelling human trafficking. It renders individuals, especially those in rural or marginalised communities, more susceptible to deceitful recruitment tactics. In Nigeria, rural inhabitants frequently accept dubious travel or job offers in hopes of escaping poverty, only to fall into exploitative conditions[55]. Similarly, economic hardship in parts of Eastern Europe and Africa drives migration to the UK, which traffickers exploit under false pretences[56]. Economic inequality exacerbates this issue. Within many developing countries, extreme disparities in income distribution mean that opportunities are concentrated in the hands of a few. Marginalised populations, including ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities, often find themselves excluded from mainstream economic systems and thus become easy prey for traffickers[57]. Social vulnerability is another major driver. Children from broken homes, orphans, and internally displaced persons are particularly at risk. Women and girls facing gender-based violence or exclusion are also disproportionately trafficked for sexual and domestic exploitation[58].

Armed Conflict and Political Instability

Situations of armed conflict and social unrest significantly increase the risk of trafficking. In Northern Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has displaced thousands, leaving children, particularly girls, vulnerable to abduction and exploitation[59]. The recruitment of minors into armed groups or their use in forced marriages and domestic labour illustrates how conflict intersects with trafficking trends. Instability in other regions such as Libya, Sudan, and the Middle East contributes to large-scale migration flows. Many refugees who flee conflict zones end up trafficked en route to Europe, with the UK being one of the final destinations[60]. Traffickers often pose as smugglers or aid facilitators, exploiting the desperation of displaced individuals.

Gender and Cultural Discrimination

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Cultural norms and gender roles play a significant part in sustaining human trafficking. In societies where patriarchy is dominant, women and girls are denied access to education, property ownership, and formal employment, thereby increasing their vulnerability[61]. In both Nigeria and the UK, gender-based discrimination makes women prime targets for sexual exploitation and coerced labour. Traditional beliefs, particularly in Nigeria, can also be used to control victims. The use of juju oaths to bind women psychologically into silence and compliance has been a well-documented tactic among Nigerian trafficking rings[62].

Weak Legal Frameworks and Corruption

Where anti-trafficking laws are weak or poorly enforced, trafficking thrives. In Nigeria, although legal frameworks such as the NAPTIP Act exist, implementation gaps persist due to corruption, underfunding, and a lack of specialised training for law enforcement[63]. Traffickers often bribe officials to facilitate cross-border movements or to avoid prosecution. In the UK, while legislation like the Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides a robust legal basis for addressing trafficking, challenges remain in terms of victim identification, prosecution rates, and support for survivors, especially among undocumented migrants[64].

Restrictive Migration Policies and Labour Demand

Tight migration controls in destination countries, such as the UK, may inadvertently increase trafficking. Individuals denied legal migration pathways are often forced into irregular channels where traffickers operate[65]. The global demand for cheap labour, sexual services, and domestic help also fuels the exploitation of trafficked persons. In agriculture, construction, and care sectors, traffickers exploit legal loopholes and labour shortages to

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supply underpaid and unprotected workers. Victims often lack the freedom to leave or complain due to threats, debt bondage, or the confiscation of documents[66].

2.1.6 Regional Variations and Challenges of Trafficking Practices in the UK and Nigeria

Human trafficking is a highly contextualised phenomenon that manifests differently across regions, depending on the prevailing socio-political, economic, and cultural conditions. Both Nigeria and the United Kingdom experience internal variations in trafficking patterns and face distinct challenges in response and enforcement. These regional disparities influence not only the form of trafficking but also the effectiveness of interventions aimed at prevention, prosecution, and victim protection.

In Nigeria, the regional dynamics of trafficking are shaped by socio-cultural norms, religious traditions, levels of economic development, and security challenges. The South-South and South-East regions, especially Edo, Delta, and Anambra States, are widely recognised as trafficking epicentres, particularly for the export of young women and girls to Europe for sexual exploitation[66]. In these regions, trafficking has become deeply embedded in community practices, with whole families or clans investing in the migration of daughters under the guise of "supporting the family". In many cases, the journey is initiated with the consent, or even encouragement, of parents, unaware of the real nature of the journey or resigned to it due to poverty[43].

On the other hand, the North-East and North-West regions exhibit trafficking patterns that are largely linked to conflict and insurgency. The activities of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram have not only displaced thousands but also resulted in the abduction of women and children who are trafficked for sexual slavery, forced marriage, and labour[35]. Camps for

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internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States have reported high levels of trafficking, often facilitated by humanitarian aid intermediaries or disguised as charitable assistance[67]. The combination of insecurity, weak institutional presence, and lack of access to justice mechanisms renders victims in these regions particularly vulnerable. Meanwhile, in urban centres like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, trafficking often involves domestic servitude and child labour. Children, particularly girls from rural areas, are sent to live with wealthier relatives or acquaintances for education or employment but end up as unpaid domestic workers. These arrangements, rooted in the traditional practice of child fostering, are now increasingly used as fronts for exploitation[68]. The lack of regulation of informal labour and weak child protection mechanisms mean that abuse often goes unreported.

Challenges facing anti-trafficking efforts in Nigeria include inadequate data disaggregation, especially at the subnational level. Many states lack trafficking task forces, functional family courts, or rehabilitation centres. Where such institutions exist, they are often under-resourced or inaccessible to victims due to cost, distance, or fear of stigma[6]. Furthermore, customary and religious laws in many regions often conflict with national legislation, particularly regarding the age of consent, marriage, and women's rights. These legal inconsistencies hinder the implementation of national anti-trafficking laws such as the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPPEA) of 2015.

In the United Kingdom, regional variations also exist in trafficking patterns and policy responses. Urban centres such as London, Manchester, and Birmingham serve as hotspots for both international and domestic trafficking. These cities, with their large and diverse populations, provide anonymity for traffickers and a constant demand for cheap labour,

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particularly in construction, hospitality, and care services[68]. Many victims in these areas are foreign nationals, primarily from Eastern Europe, Africa, and South-East Asia, recruited with false promises of employment, only to find themselves trapped in debt bondage or exploited in informal economies. In contrast, more rural areas of the UK, such as parts of East Anglia and the Midlands, experience labour trafficking in the agricultural and food processing sectors. Migrant workers, including seasonal labourers, are recruited through deceptive agencies or trafficked directly into exploitative working conditions. A lack of inspections, language barriers, and fears over immigration enforcement prevent many victims from reporting abuse[52].

Scotland and Northern Ireland have developed somewhat distinct legal and policy frameworks for combating trafficking. While all UK regions are subject to the overarching provisions of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, Scotland and Northern Ireland have passed their own complementary legislation. For instance, Scotland's Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 includes a greater emphasis on victim protection and public awareness. However, the decentralised approach has led to inconsistencies in enforcement and data collection. Law enforcement agencies and courts in different regions interpret trafficking definitions and thresholds variably, affecting victim identification and case outcomes[70].

Another major challenge in the UK is the operational complexity of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). While the NRM offers a structured pathway for identifying and supporting victims, access and outcomes vary across regions. In some parts of England, victims face long waiting times for case determination, while in others, referral rates are low due to inadequate training among first responders or distrust of law enforcement[71]. Migrant

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victims, particularly those without legal status, often avoid the system altogether for fear of deportation, exacerbating their vulnerability. A further concern Is the limited collaboration between regional law enforcement and third-sector organisations. Many charities and NGOs play critical roles in victim rehabilitation and community education, yet their involvement in policymaking or regional anti-trafficking task forces remains limited. Moreover, funding disparities between London-based organisations and those in less affluent regions affect the availability and quality of services provided to survivors.

Both countries also face difficulties in harmonising anti-trafficking data. In Nigeria, reporting mechanisms are fragmented across the police, immigration service, and NAPTIP, each using different metrics and definitions. In the UK, inconsistencies in police reporting and judicial outcomes across the four nations complicate national-level data aggregation. Without accurate and consistent data, targeted intervention and monitoring remain challenging for policymakers in both settings[72]. In sum, regional variations in both Nigeria and the UK are shaped by a constellation of historical, economic, legal, and institutional factors. While urbanisation, poverty, and cultural norms drive trafficking in Nigeria, immigration controls, labour demand, and governance decentralisation influence patterns in the UK. In both contexts, tailored, region-specific strategies are essential to address the complexities of trafficking. Centralised policies alone are insufficient without locally informed interventions that account for the nuanced realities in each region.

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2.1.7 Modus Operandi and Dynamics in Different Countries

The strategies employed by human traffickers, often termed as modus operandi, vary significantly depending on regional factors, legal environments, cultural systems, and levels of enforcement. In both Nigeria and the United Kingdom, human trafficking is facilitated

through highly adaptable and often invisible mechanisms that exploit institutional loopholes and social vulnerabilities. Understanding the unique and shared operational patterns in these two countries provides a clearer view of the transnational character and evolving sophistication of trafficking networks.

In Nigeria, the modus operandi of traffickers has deep cultural and socio-economic roots. A common initial method involves family or community-based recruitment, where traffickers, often known to the victim, present migration as an opportunity for education, work, or marriage abroad[73]. Recruiters may be family friends, neighbours, or relatives who have already established links with traffickers in destination countries. The offer is framed as a form of benevolent support, with travel costs typically fronted by the trafficker, thereby creating a debt bondage arrangement that binds the victim even before departure.

Spiritual manipulation is also a defining feature of trafficking in Nigeria. Particularly in the southern regions, traffickers subject victims to juju rituals or traditional oaths. These ceremonies often involve personal sacrifices, including hair, blood, or nail clippings, and are used to instil psychological fear and compliance[74]. The threat of supernatural retribution ensures silence, discourages escape attempts, and enforces loyalty long after physical control is removed. This spiritual dimension is uniquely Nigerian and significantly complicates rescue and rehabilitation efforts.

Transportation logistics in Nigeria are equally complex. Victims are often moved across inter-state and international borders, sometimes through informal checkpoints and bush paths. Routes through Benin, Niger, Libya, and Morocco are common for victims trafficked to Europe. Travel is often facilitated by forged documents, complicit immigration officials, or through porous borders that lack sufficient surveillance[48]. These cross-border movements are

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staged in phases, with victims kept in transit "safe houses" before proceeding to the next leg of the journey. On the other hand, traffickers operating in the United Kingdom use more institutionalised and digitally mediated methods. The UK is both a destination and transit point for international trafficking networks, as well as a site of internal exploitation. A prominent method is online recruitment, where traffickers post fraudulent job offers or social opportunities on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp[68]. Victims, particularly from vulnerable countries, are persuaded to enter the UK legally using student, visitor, or work visas. Once they arrive, their documents are seized, and they are subjected to various forms of exploitation.

Labour exploitation is facilitated through seemingly legitimate businesses such as car washes, cleaning services, nail salons, construction sites, and agricultural farms. Victims are forced to work long hours for minimal or no wages, often under surveillance and threat of deportation. Recruitment agencies, particularly informal or unregistered ones, serve as intermediaries in this process, blurring the line between employment and enslavement[6]. In many cases, workers are unaware they are being trafficked until they attempt to leave or report abuse. Internal trafficking within the UK has evolved notably through the county lines drug distribution model, where children and vulnerable adults are recruited to transport illegal substances from urban centres to smaller towns and rural communities. These individuals are lured through grooming, financial incentives, or coercion. Once recruited, they are isolated from their families, subjected to violence, and manipulated through threats of harm to themselves or loved ones[75]. County lines operations reveal a domestic version of trafficking that challenges traditional narratives of international movement. Accommodation control is another shared tactic between the two countries. In both Nigeria and the UK, traffickers use housing as a tool of subjugation. Victims are typically kept in overcrowded, unsanitary

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apartments, often under constant surveillance. The withholding of personal documents, lack of freedom of movement, and psychological threats are all used to enforce dependence and fear. The lack of affordable housing or access to legal shelters further traps victims in these exploitative environments.

Debt bondage remains a cross-cutting dynamic. In Nigeria, debts relate to travel costs, spiritual oaths, or family honour. In the UK, the debt may include travel fees, rent, or false "training" costs. Traffickers use this financial burden to justify continued exploitation, warning victims that failure to comply will result in harm or exposure to immigration authorities[76]. Many victims are unaware of their legal rights or fearful of institutional involvement, further enabling traffickers' control.

Furthermore, traffickers in both countries employ coercion layered with deception. In Nigeria, deception occurs at the point of recruitment and is reinforced by familial trust and cultural obedience. In the UK, deception continues post-entry, with traffickers often promising better working conditions or legal documentation upon "completion" of a certain period of work. These broken promises are part of a broader manipulation strategy that maintains power without physical force. Gender dynamics also play a critical role in shaping trafficking operations. In both countries, women are not only victims but also major facilitators, often referred to as "madams" in Nigeria or recruiters in the UK. Many of these women are former trafficking victims who now act as enforcers within the criminal networks. Their understanding of the psychological vulnerabilities of victims enables them to be particularly effective in maintaining control[77]. This dual victim-perpetrator identity presents unique ethical and legal dilemmas for prosecutorial agencies.

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However, while the modus operandi of trafficking in Nigeria and the UK differ in sophistication, share common elements of coercion, exploitation of vulnerability, and psychological control. Nigeria's dynamics are deeply embedded in traditional systems and economic desperation, while the UK's mechanisms are more institutionalised and technologically enabled. Both contexts reflect the adaptability of traffickers and the limitations of existing legal and social frameworks. To disrupt these patterns, a multi-sectoral approach involving community engagement, transnational cooperation, technology regulation, and survivor-informed policy is essential.

2.1.8 Recruitment, Transit, and Exploitation Techniques in Nigeria

Human trafficking in Nigeria operates through a complex web of recruitment, transit, and exploitation mechanisms. These methods are strategically designed to capitalise on socio-economic vulnerabilities, cultural belief systems, and institutional weaknesses. The sophistication of these techniques has evolved over time, making detection and disruption increasingly difficult. While the patterns vary across regions and demographic groups, the overarching strategies reflect a high degree of organisation, adaptability, and local embeddedness.

Recruitment Techniques

Recruitment is often the first step in the trafficking process, and in Nigeria, it typically begins within communities. Recruiters are frequently individuals known to the victim, such as extended family members, neighbours, or trusted acquaintances[78]. This relationship-based recruitment ensures initial trust and minimises suspicion. In many rural communities, poverty, lack of education, and limited access to accurate information about migration contribute to a high level of receptiveness to offers of work or education abroad.

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A common method of deception Involves promises of legitimate employment in Europe, the Middle East, or urban centres within Nigeria. Recruiters exploit aspirations for upward mobility, offering to sponsor travel and lodging, with the expectation that the victim will repay these costs later. These arrangements, however, conceal exploitative debt bondage systems that are nearly impossible to escape[78]. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to such tactics, often recruited for domestic work, hairdressing, or hospitality jobs that turn out to be fronts for sex trafficking.

Additionally, traffickers in Nigeria frequently use spiritual manipulation as part of the recruitment process. Victims, particularly from the South-South region, are subjected to juju rituals or traditional oaths that psychologically bind them to the trafficker. These rituals are designed to instil fear and compliance, often involving symbolic acts such as the taking of hair, nails, or clothing items, which are believed to tie the victim's soul to the trafficker[5]. The psychological grip of such rituals is profound, leading victims to endure exploitation in silence, fearing spiritual retribution if they break their oath or expose the trafficker.

Recruitment has also moved into the digital realm. Increasingly, traffickers leverage social media platforms, WhatsApp, and online job boards to contact and lure prospective victims. This method broadens the recruiters' reach and reduces the risk of detection. Girls and young women looking for modelling jobs, scholarships, or travel opportunities are often tricked by false offers from seemingly legitimate organisations.

Transit Mechanisms

Once recruited, victims are moved through a series of transit points, within Nigeria and across international borders. Internal transit usually involves moving victims from rural villages to urban hubs such as Lagos, Benin City, or Abuja. These cities serve as staging

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grounds for onward travel abroad or for placing victims in exploitative jobs within Nigeria[79]. Transit routes are selected based on accessibility, presence of trafficker networks, and minimal law enforcement oversight.

Cross-border transit is facilitated by a mix of formal and informal methods. Many victims are transported across Nigeria's poorly policed borders into neighbouring countries such as Niger, Benin, and Cameroon. From there, they are moved toward North Africa and subsequently into Europe through Libya or Morocco. This multi-layered route is intentionally circuitous, designed to obscure origins and reduce traceability[8]. Transportation methods vary depending on the age and gender of the victim. Children are often disguised as relatives or apprentices and moved by bus or motorbike. Adult women are sometimes provided with falsified travel documents or smuggled with groups of migrants under the control of "travel agents", who are often complicit in trafficking networks[9]. These agents frequently collaborate with corrupt border officials, enabling smooth passage without scrutiny.

Safe houses or transit camps are another integral part of the trafficking infrastructure. Victims may be held for days or weeks at these locations while arrangements for travel are finalised. During this period, they are often subjected to beatings, threats, or additional rituals to reinforce control. In some cases, they are raped or coerced into performing acts that compromise them further, making them psychologically and legally dependent on the traffickers[80].

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Exploitation Practices

The end point of transit is exploitation, and in Nigeria, this occurs in various forms, both within and outside the country. Internally, many victims, especially children, are placed in domestic servitude. They are expected to cook, clean, and care for children in private homes,

often under abusive conditions. Wages are either withheld or paid directly to the recruiter, who claims ownership of the victim's labour[81]. Sexual exploitation is another prevalent form. Women and girls trafficked to Europe, particularly Italy, are forced into prostitution under surveillance and threat. They are compelled to pay back large debts, sometimes exceeding €50,000, accumulated through falsified travel, accommodation, and "training" costs[82]. The combination of debt, spiritual oaths, and physical threats ensures that most remain compliant.

Labour trafficking in agriculture, street hawking, and informal markets is also widespread. In Northern Nigeria, young boys are trafficked to serve as Almajiri (itinerant Islamic students) but end up begging on the streets or working in menial jobs with no access to education or care[54]. In the South-West, children are trafficked to Lagos and Ibadan to work as street vendors, porters, or shop assistants. These children live in hazardous conditions, lack access to healthcare, and are often physically abused. A relatively new but growing form of exploitation Is organ trafficking. Victims, often recruited under the pretext of travel or job offers, are taken to foreign countries, especially in North Africa or Asia, where their organs are harvested, typically kidneys or corneas, without informed consent or adequate post-operative care. The 2023 conviction of a prominent Nigerian politician in the UK for organ trafficking further spotlighted this practice, raising alarm about its growing prevalence[84].

Another overlooked form of exploitation is forced criminality, where victims, including children, are coerced into theft, drug peddling, or fraudulent schemes. Failure to participate is met with threats or physical harm, and any criminal act committed under duress exposes the victim to arrest and prosecution, further entrenching their dependency on traffickers[85].

Traffickers maintain control through multiple overlapping mechanisms: economic bondage, psychological coercion, physical abuse, and legal entrapment. Victims who attempt escape

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often face retaliation against themselves or their families. Fear of stigma, deportation, or imprisonment also discourages victims from seeking help, particularly in a system where traffickers sometimes hold greater social and political power than the victims themselves.

2.1.9 Impact of Legal Instruments on Victim Protection and Rehabilitation

Legal frameworks addressing human trafficking are not solely intended to prosecute offenders; they also serve to protect and rehabilitate victims. The extent to which national laws prioritise survivor welfare often reflects the effectiveness and humaneness of a country's anti-trafficking regime. In both Nigeria and the United Kingdom, legislation outlines victim rights, but the implementation and accessibility of these protections differ significantly.

In Nigeria, the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015 contains provisions for the rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration of victims. It mandates the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) to operate shelters, offer counselling, provide legal aid, and implement reintegration programmes[86]. However, empirical evidence indicates that many of these services are underfunded and inconsistently applied. Shelters are unevenly distributed across the country, often lacking specialised staff or long-term care facilities[87]. Furthermore, social stigma against trafficking survivors, particularly those trafficked for sexual exploitation, hampers community reintegration.

Victims in Nigeria also face psychological trauma, economic hardship, and in some cases, re-victimisation upon return. The lack of structured mental health services and vocational reintegration support contributes to a high risk of re-trafficking. Though NAPTIP

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collaborates with non-governmental organisations and international partners, coordination challenges and limited resources often reduce the scope and sustainability of these programmes63. In contrast, the United Kingdom's Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides a more structured approach to victim protection. Victims referred through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) are entitled to accommodation, healthcare, legal assistance, and a reflection and recovery period of at least 45 days. Additionally, the Act grants victims the right to compensation, and in some cases, residence permits. These protections are delivered through a framework involving civil society organisations contracted by the Home Office[88].

Despite these legal provisions, implementation gaps remain. Research shows that victims often experience delays in accessing NRM services, face uncertainty during immigration assessments, and struggle with inadequate mental health care[89]. Some are detained as irregular migrants before their trafficking experiences are recognised, undermining trust in state institutions. Moreover, survivors report inconsistent access to legal representation and housing, particularly after leaving government-funded shelters[59]. Comparatively, while both countries have codified victim protection in law, the UK's institutional framework is more comprehensive but not without operational flaws. Nigeria's legal intent is clear, but practical limitations, funding, capacity, and public attitudes, undermine delivery. For victim protection laws to be meaningful, both countries must ensure not only legal recognition of rights but also tangible, trauma-informed services that support survivor recovery and reintegration.

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2.1.10 Use of Technology in Human Trafficking

The proliferation of technology, particularly digital platforms, has significantly reshaped the modus operandi of human trafficking in Nigeria. While digital tools offer opportunities for

awareness, intervention, and victim support, they also provide traffickers with novel avenues for recruitment, coordination, concealment, and exploitation. The rapid digitisation of communication, financial transactions, and borderless interaction has inadvertently facilitated what has now been described as tech-enabled trafficking[89].

Digital Recruitment Platforms

Social media and messaging applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram have become primary tools for traffickers to recruit victims in Nigeria. These platforms allow traffickers to pose as job agents, modelling scouts, or benefactors offering scholarships or international opportunities[90]. The informal and often anonymous nature of communication on these platforms makes it difficult for law enforcement to trace or intercept trafficking-related exchanges.

Young girls and unemployed youths are particularly susceptible to false promises of employment or education abroad. In many instances, these platforms are used to showcase the apparent success of previous victims, often under duress, as a lure for others. Pictures of luxury, freedom, or Western lifestyles are posted to create a narrative of escape from poverty, even though the reality is one of entrapment and exploitation. This form of digital deception is especially dangerous as it targets emotional and economic vulnerabilities without requiring physical contact between recruiter and victim[90]. According to Arowolo, the anonymity and interactivity of platforms such as WhatsApp have made it easier for traffickers to groom victims in private chats, share instructions on border crossing, and manipulate them psychologically[91]. In some cases, trafficking rings maintain multiple digital identities to evade detection, using virtual private networks (VPNs) and encrypted messaging apps.

Cryptocurrency and Financial Technology

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Traffickers in Nigeria are increasingly using cryptocurrencies to collect payments and transfer illicit profits. Digital currencies such as Bitcoin and Ethereum offer anonymity and decentralisation, reducing the traceability of transactions by regulatory authorities. These tools enable traffickers to operate across borders without leaving a financial trail in traditional banking systems[92]. This development presents a significant challenge to anti-trafficking enforcement agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), whose regulatory tools are often insufficient for crypto-traced crime. The complexity of blockchain technology and the lack of harmonised international cyber-finance laws enable traffickers to avoid asset seizure or legal prosecution for illicit earnings. Moreover, fraudulent online "job portals" often demand application or processing fees paid via digital wallets or cryptocurrency platforms. Victims are made to believe that such payments guarantee travel, visas, or job placement abroad. Once paid, the recruiters disappear or proceed to exploit the victim under conditions of debt bondage.

The Dark Web and Encrypted Platforms

The dark web provides an additional layer of invisibility for traffickers. These hidden parts of the internet, only accessible through specialised browsers like Tor, host forums, marketplaces, and encrypted chatrooms used to advertise or negotiate trafficking services. While much of this activity has been linked to trafficking in Europe and North America, Nigerian networks are increasingly reported to be accessing dark web platforms to expand international connections[93]. Within these spaces, victims, particularly women and children, are commodified, their identities anonymised and presented as digital profiles for “clients” abroad. Some platforms even auction trafficked individuals for sexual exploitation or organ harvesting, with buyers paying in cryptocurrency to maintain discretion. Efforts to monitor

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and shut down these sites face limitations due to cross-jurisdictional complexities and the lack of local cyber-surveillance capacity.

Technology-Enabled Surveillance and Control

Beyond recruitment, traffickers in Nigeria now use technology to monitor and control victims. GPS-enabled devices, mobile phone tracking, and covert surveillance through social media accounts allow traffickers to keep constant watch on victims. Victims are sometimes required to share passwords or install tracking apps under the guise of "security." These technologies become tools of coercion, especially for victims trafficked abroad who fear escape due to constant surveillance[78]. There are also reported cases where traffickers monitor victims' families in Nigeria, using pictures and location updates to issue threats or extort further compliance. These digitally enforced threats magnify the psychological grip traffickers hold over victims, particularly those who have been subjected to juju rituals or oaths of loyalty.

Online Recruitment of Trafficking Collaborators

Technology is also used to recruit collaborators within trafficking networks. Websites offering courier, domestic work, or nanny jobs often attract unsuspecting individuals who are later manipulated into transporting or supervising trafficked persons. Some are promised lucrative commissions for "delivering" individuals to recruiters or hosting them at transit points. Fake immigration agencies and travel consultants maintain elaborate websites with fabricated credentials to project legitimacy. Victims and collaborators are often unaware they are part of a trafficking chain until law enforcement intervenes or the situation becomes abusive[58]. The sophistication of such sites makes it difficult for even educated individuals to differentiate between legitimate and fraudulent recruitment agents.

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State Surveillance Gaps and Response

Despite the escalating use of technology in trafficking, Nigeria's cyber-policing infrastructure remains inadequate. Law enforcement officers lack training in digital forensics, and data-sharing protocols between internet service providers and agencies such as NAPTIP are underdeveloped. The absence of a centralised data registry of trafficking-related digital activity leaves a significant blind spot in prevention and enforcement[37]. Although NAPTIP has recently launched campaigns targeting online trafficking, such efforts are often reactive rather than proactive. Furthermore, internet fraud and cybercrime in Nigeria are often addressed separately from human trafficking, despite their increasing convergence. Despite growing international cooperation, legal and institutional gaps continue to hinder the effective use of digital evidence in trafficking prosecutions. Technology is both a facilitator and potential solution in human trafficking. While traffickers leverage digital tools to obscure their activities, governments and civil society must invest in capacity-building, cross-border intelligence sharing, and the development of ethical surveillance technologies to counter this evolving threat.

2.1.11 Factors Responsible for Human Trafficking

Human trafficking in both Nigeria and the United Kingdom is driven by a combination of economic, social, political, and structural factors. These factors create environments of vulnerability and impunity in which traffickers operate with relative ease. In Nigeria, one of the primary drivers of trafficking is poverty, which affects over 40 percent of the population. For many families, sending a child to work in the city or overseas is seen as a survival strategy rather than a form of exploitation[47]. Lack of economic opportunities, especially in rural areas, pushes individuals to seek better prospects elsewhere, even if it involves high risk.

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This is worsened by rising youth unemployment, inadequate social welfare, and regional economic imbalances. Another major factor is cultural and social norms. Practices such as child fostering, early marriage, and domestic servitude are often justified as traditions, even when they expose individuals to exploitation[56]. In some communities, it is considered normal for a girl to be sent to a city to work and remit money to her family. The normalisation of this system masks the reality of abuse and forced labour.

The role of education is also critical. Low literacy rates and lack of awareness about the dangers of trafficking leave individuals susceptible to deception. Many victims are unaware of their rights or the legal protections available to them. Recruiters take advantage of this ignorance by offering false promises of jobs, marriage, or scholarships abroad[77]. Corruption and weak law enforcement are systemic factors that enable trafficking to thrive in Nigeria. Immigration officers, police, and even community leaders are sometimes complicit, accepting bribes to facilitate border crossing or silence investigations[92]. The judicial system is often slow, under-resourced, and inaccessible to most victims, leading to a culture of impunity for traffickers. In contrast, the UK faces different but equally complex challenges. One factor is the demand for cheap and exploitable labour, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, care work, construction, and hospitality[84]. Migrant workers, often with limited legal status, are especially vulnerable to abuse by unscrupulous employers.

Immigration policy and enforcement also play a role. Strict immigration controls and the criminalisation of irregular migration push undocumented individuals into the shadows, where they are more likely to be exploited. Fear of deportation discourages victims from reporting abuse[73]. Technology has further facilitated trafficking, allowing recruiters to reach victims across borders with ease. Social media and encrypted messaging apps enable traffickers to operate anonymously and scale their operations with minimal risk[94]. In both

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countries, gender inequality remains a cross-cutting factor. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by trafficking due to limited access to education, economic marginalisation, and societal expectations. Gender-based violence, both domestic and institutional, increases their vulnerability to trafficking[95]. These factors are often interrelated, reinforcing one another in complex ways. Addressing them requires a multidimensional approach that goes beyond law enforcement to include education, economic empowerment, community engagement, and international cooperation. Fragmented response limits the country's capacity to intercept trafficking at its digital roots.

However, civil society and NGOs are beginning to bridge this gap. Organisations like Devatop Centre for Africa Development have introduced digital literacy campaigns and victim-reporting platforms that use mobile apps and toll-free SMS services. These tools empower individuals to verify recruitment offers and seek help discreetly. Tech-based interventions are also emerging through artificial intelligence tools that detect trafficking patterns on social media and alert moderators for content removal. Technology, while offering opportunities for combating trafficking, has become a double-edged sword. It facilitates anonymity, cross-border operations, and financial secrecy for traffickers, but also offers tools for detection, prevention, and awareness. Nigeria must urgently invest in cybersecurity, cross-sector digital collaboration, and law enforcement training. Public education campaigns on the risks of online offers and the signs of trafficking should be mainstreamed into school curricula and digital platforms. With strategic use, technology can move from being a tool of exploitation to an instrument of protection.

2.1.12 Implications of Human Trafficking

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The consequences of human trafficking are profound and far-reaching, affecting not only individual victims but also communities, national institutions, and international development. In both Nigeria and the United Kingdom, the implications manifest in legal, economic, social, and psychological dimensions. From a human rights perspective, trafficking represents a grave violation of dignity and freedom. Victims are subjected to forced labour, sexual exploitation, servitude, or organ removal, often under inhumane conditions. These abuses result in long-term physical harm, trauma, and psychological distress[60]. Survivors frequently suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, especially when subjected to repeated violence and isolation. The legal and judicial Implications are also significant. Trafficking undermines the rule of law by fostering corruption, weakening trust in law enforcement, and promoting a culture of impunity. In Nigeria, poor investigation practices and delays in prosecution erode public confidence in the justice system[59]. In the UK, although laws are more robust, there remain gaps in victim protection and prosecution consistency. For example, some victims are treated as offenders, particularly in cases involving forced criminality[96].

Economically, trafficking distorts labour markets and suppresses wages by providing a pool of cheap, unregulated labour. This is particularly evident in industries such as agriculture, construction, and domestic work, where trafficked individuals are often underpaid or unpaid entirely. For the state, the economic burden includes the cost of law enforcement, victim rehabilitation, and social services. It also results in lost tax revenue and diminished economic productivity. Public health systems are also strained by the impact of trafficking. Victims are often denied access to healthcare and suffer from untreated infections, malnutrition, injuries, and reproductive health complications. In the case of sex trafficking, the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, is significantly higher. Mental health services

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are frequently inadequate, particularly in Nigeria, where trauma counselling is underdeveloped and often inaccessible. Socially, trafficking exacerbates inequality, especially gender and class disparities. It perpetuates cycles of poverty, disempowerment, and marginalisation within already vulnerable communities[97]. In Nigeria, the social stigma faced by returnee victims, particularly those trafficked for sex, further alienates them from their communities and impedes reintegration. Internationally, human trafficking damages diplomatic relations, especially when citizens of one country are trafficked into another. It also impacts the credibility of national anti-trafficking commitments in international forums such as the UN and ECOWAS. Nigeria's recurring Tier 2 or 2 Watch List status in the US Trafficking in Persons Report reflects its ongoing struggle to fully meet minimum standards for elimination[98]. The implications of human trafficking go beyond the individual level. It is a multidimensional challenge that compromises governance, economic stability, public health, and international credibility. Sustainable solutions require systemic reforms, cross-border collaboration, and survivor-informed policymaking.

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2.1.13 Preventive Measures and International Protocols/Conventions

The fight against human trafficking is underpinned by a range of international instruments, protocols, and preventive frameworks designed to address the crime's transnational nature. These tools are complemented by national laws and regional agreements aimed at harmonising responses and fostering cooperation among states.

The most foundational international instrument is the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (also known as the Palermo Protocol), adopted in 2000. This protocol, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, is the first legally binding instrument with an internationally accepted definition of trafficking[99]. It outlines a comprehensive framework built around the "3Ps": Prevention, Protection, and Prosecution. Preventive measures under the Palermo Protocol require states to address root causes, including poverty, inequality, and lack of education. It also mandates awareness campaigns, training of personnel, and research to inform evidence-based responses. Nigeria ratified the protocol in 2001 and has since domesticated its provisions through the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015[100]. At the regional level, Nigeria is a signatory to the ECOWAS Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons (2002–2023), which emphasises cross-border cooperation and harmonised legal frameworks across West Africa. ECOWAS member states are encouraged to establish National Task Forces and coordinate victim repatriation, rehabilitation, and criminal prosecution. This regional approach recognises the role of porous borders and shared trafficking routes across countries like Niger, Mali, and Benin[101]. The United Kingdom, meanwhile, aligns its anti-trafficking efforts with both international and regional conventions. It ratified the Palermo Protocol in 2006 and has implemented a range of domestic laws, including the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which reflects many of the protocol's principles. The UK also complies with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005), which strengthens victim protection, provides a monitoring mechanism (GRETA), and fosters coordination across European states[87]. Preventive measures in the UK include education and outreach campaigns (e.g., "Modern Slavery is Closer Than You Think"), transparency in supply chains legislation, and

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risk-based visa monitoring. Law enforcement officers, border control agents, and healthcare workers are trained to identify signs of trafficking. However, critics argue that these measures are inconsistently applied, and immigration enforcement sometimes undermines prevention by discouraging victims from seeking help[67].

Globally, institutions like the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) support preventive strategies by offering technical assistance, funding anti-trafficking projects, and building capacity for border surveillance and victim services. Civil society groups also play a vital role, particularly in areas underserved by government resources. International conventions and preventive protocols form the backbone of global anti-trafficking efforts. Their effectiveness depends on domestic implementation, inter-state cooperation, and the alignment of legal systems with human rights standards.

2.1.14 The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking (Especially Womenand Children)

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, also known as the Palermo Protocol, was adopted in 2000 and represents a milestone in international law. It is the first global legally binding instrument to define trafficking in persons and to require countries to criminalise the act and collaborate internationally to address it[102]. The Protocol defines trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons through means such as threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, or abuse of power, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation includes, but is not limited to, forced labour, sexual exploitation, slavery, servitude, and

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organ removal[96]. The Protocol further recognises the special vulnerability of women and children and includes provisions tailored to their protection.

Nigeria ratified the Protocol in 2001 and integrated its provisions into national law via the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPLEAA), now updated as the TIPPEA Act 2015. This Act established the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), which is tasked with enforcing anti-trafficking laws, protecting victims, and prosecuting offenders[63]. Nigeria's compliance with the Protocol has led to the creation of specialised anti-trafficking units and victim rehabilitation centres, though enforcement challenges remain. The United Kingdom, having ratified the Protocol In 2006, has incorporated its provisions through a combination of statutory instruments. The Modern Slavery Act 2015, which criminalises slavery, servitude, forced labour, and trafficking, reflects the language and structure of the Protocol. The Act also created the role of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to oversee implementation.

However, there remain notable challenges in operationalising the Protocol. In Nigeria, limited resources, inadequate victim support infrastructure, and weak border surveillance continue to undermine compliance. Although legal instruments exist, enforcement is inconsistent, especially at the state level[63]. Victims often face stigmatisation and lack access to long-term rehabilitation. In the UK, critics argue that immigration enforcement sometimes supersedes victim protection under the Protocol. Migrants suspected of being trafficked may be detained or deported before identification procedures are completed. This tension between border control and human rights protection presents a significant dilemma[78]. Despite these challenges, the Palermo Protocol has significantly influenced anti-trafficking legislation

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worldwide. It provides a common legal language and encourages mutual legal assistance and cross-border investigations. For both Nigeria and the UK, continued commitment to the Protocol is essential to strengthening national frameworks and enhancing global cooperation in the fight against trafficking.

2.1.15 European Conventions and Their Impact on UK Law

The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) is the major European regional treaty addressing human trafficking. It builds upon the UN Palermo Protocol by placing stronger emphasis on victim protection, prosecution of offenders, and international cooperation[103]. The Convention defines trafficking in comprehensive terms and outlines detailed procedures for identification, assistance, protection, and compensation of victims. The United Kingdom ratified the Convention In 2008 and incorporated many of its provisions into domestic legislation. Notably, the Convention's principles influenced the drafting of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, especially concerning victim rights and protection from prosecution for unlawful acts committed under coercion. The Act aligns with the Convention's "non-punishment clause", which asserts that victims should not be penalised for crimes committed as a result of being trafficked. Under the Convention, states must establish a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to identify and assist victims. The UK introduced its NRM in 2009 and revised it in 2014 to address inefficiencies and improve victim-centred outcomes. Through the NRM, designated authorities such as police, social workers, and NGOs can refer suspected victims for assessment and support.

The Convention also established GRETA (Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings), which monitors state compliance. The UK has been regularly evaluated by

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GRETA, which has praised efforts such as increased prosecutions and the establishment of the Anti-Slavery Commissioner. However, GRETA reports have also identified shortcomings, particularly in support for adult male victims and the adequacy of long-term housing[104]. One notable influence of the Convention is the UK's requirement for businesses with a turnover above £36 million to publish Modern Slavery Transparency Statements, disclosing steps taken to ensure their supply chains are free from exploitation. This reflects the Convention's call for corporate responsibility and due diligence. Brexit raised concerns about the UK's continued alignment with European human rights instruments, but the government has reaffirmed its commitment to the Convention. However, observers note that political pressures around immigration and asylum have sometimes undermined the spirit of the Convention, especially when enforcement priorities overshadow victim welfare. Overall, European conventions have shaped the UK's legal and policy responses to trafficking in significant ways. They provide a framework not only for domestic action but also for cooperation with other European countries in the fight against transnational trafficking.

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2.1.16 Nigerian Compliance with International Standards

Nigeria's engagement with international anti-trafficking frameworks demonstrates its commitment to addressing the issue. The country has ratified several major instruments, including the Palermo Protocol, the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Domestically, Nigeria has responded with a comprehensive legal regime. The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act (TIPPEA) 2015 consolidates earlier laws and provides definitions, penalties, and institutional structures to combat trafficking. It establishes the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) as the central body for enforcement, victim rehabilitation, and public awareness[89]. NAPTIP has made notable progress. It has investigated thousands of cases, rescued numerous victims, and carried out training for law enforcement agencies. The agency also operates shelters and rehabilitation programmes, and collaborates with civil society and international partners. However, challenges persist. Budget constraints, limited personnel, and inadequate inter-agency cooperation hinder the agency's effectiveness[39]. International partners such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have supported capacity-building, return and reintegration assistance, and data collection. These partnerships have helped Nigeria align more closely with international norms. Despite these efforts, Nigeria has struggled to maintain consistent performance in international evaluations. The US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report has frequently placed Nigeria on the Tier 2 Watch List, citing issues such as low conviction rates, underreporting, and insufficient victim services[11].

Legally, Nigeria's compliance with international standards is strong on paper but weak in practice. For instance, although the TIPPEA Act criminalises all forms of trafficking and includes provisions for victim protection, implementation at the state level remains inconsistent. Many states have yet to domesticate the law or establish functioning family courts, and law enforcement officers often lack specialised training[23]. Furthermore, community-level awareness remains low. In rural areas, traditional beliefs and patriarchal norms hinder the recognition of trafficking as a crime. Victims are often blamed or

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stigmatised, discouraging reporting and cooperation with authorities. Nevertheless, Nigeria's progress is notable. The legal framework is robust, institutional structures are in place, and partnerships with international organisations continue to grow. To achieve full compliance with international standards, Nigeria must strengthen enforcement, invest in victim support, and prioritise public education and community-based prevention.

2.1.17 Combative Measures: Legality, Advocacy, and Enforcement Structures

Effectively combating human trafficking requires a multi-pronged approach that integrates legal instruments, advocacy efforts, institutional enforcement, and international collaboration. In both Nigeria and the United Kingdom, these components work together,although imperfectly, to identify, prosecute, and prevent trafficking.

Legally, both countries have established robust anti-trafficking frameworks. Nigeria's TIPPEA Act 2015 criminalises all aspects of human trafficking, including recruitment, harbouring, transportation, and exploitation. It prescribes penalties ranging from 5 years to life imprisonment, depending on the severity of the offence[71]. The UK's Modern Slavery Act 2015 consolidates offences related to slavery, servitude, and forced labour. It empowers courts to impose life sentences and confiscate assets gained from trafficking crimes. However, legal measures alone are insufficient. Advocacy and public awareness campaigns play a critical role in both preventing trafficking and supporting survivors. In Nigeria, organisations such as Devatop Centre for Africa Development, WOTCLEF, and NAPTIP conduct outreach in vulnerable communities, schools, and transit hubs[105]. These campaigns aim to inform the public of the risks of trafficking and the legal avenues for redress. Community dialogues, media engagement, and survivor storytelling have been used to shift cultural attitudes that tolerate or normalise exploitation. In the UK, campaigns such as

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"Modern Slavery is Closer Than You Think" and "Hidden in Plain Sight" have been launched to encourage public reporting and corporate responsibility. Additionally, NGOs like Anti-Slavery International, The Salvation Army, and Hope for Justice provide direct services to survivors and advocate for policy reforms. Institutionally, Nigeria has centralised enforcement through NAPTIP, which operates investigation units, legal departments, and victim shelters across the country. NAPTIP collaborates with police, immigration, and customs services, though inter-agency coordination remains a challenge. In many states, the absence of anti-trafficking task forces or trained personnel hampers implementation at the subnational level. The UK, in contrast, employs a decentralised model supported by national oversight. Law enforcement units across the country are trained in identifying trafficking cases.

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) enables coordinated victim identification, assessment, and access to support services. However, the NRM has been criticised for bureaucratic delays and limited survivor input in decision-making. Internationally, both countries collaborate through bodies such as Interpol, Europol, UNODC, and the Global Action to Prevent Trafficking (GLO.ACT). These partnerships facilitate intelligence sharing, joint investigations, and capacity-building. Nigeria has signed bilateral agreements with countries such as Italy and the Netherlands to enable victim repatriation and trafficker prosecution[105]. The UK, as a leading donor to global anti-slavery initiatives, supports international projects and offers asylum to victims under certain legal conditions.

Despite these efforts, enforcement remains uneven. In Nigeria, prosecution rates remain low due to underreporting, fear of retaliation, and limited resources. Survivors may be unwilling to testify, and cases are often dropped for lack of evidence[8]. In the UK, while prosecution is

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more frequent, complex evidentiary requirements and immigration enforcement priorities sometimes inhibit justice to strengthen anti-trafficking efforts, there must be greater alignment between legal instruments, community advocacy, and institutional response. Survivor-centred approaches, culturally competent outreach, and international accountability mechanisms are vital to closing enforcement gaps and sustaining progress.

2.1.18 Comparative Case Study – UK Ike Ekweremadu vs. Nigeria Prosecutions

The 2023 conviction of Senator Ike Ekweremadu, a Nigerian lawmaker, in the United Kingdom on charges of organ trafficking offers a stark example of how prosecution standards and legal frameworks differ between Nigeria and the UK. The case involved an attempt to procure a kidney for Ekweremadu's daughter from a vulnerable Nigerian man under false pretences[94]. In the UK, the case was prosecuted under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, specifically under provisions criminalising the trafficking of individuals for the purpose of organ removal. The trial took place at the Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey) and was widely publicised due to the political status of the accused[10]. The UK judiciary, demonstrating independence, handed down a prison sentence of 9 years and 8 months for the senator, 10 years for his wife, and 6 years for their medical accomplice.

The swift and transparent prosecution process highlighted several critical aspects of the UK legal system: the strength of the judiciary, the effectiveness of victim-witness protection, and the uncompromising stance against political influence. The case also showed how trafficking laws are applied beyond sexual or labour exploitation, encompassing other forms such as organ trafficking, which is often underreported in Nigeria. In contrast, had the case been tried in Nigeria, the outcome might have been less predictable. The Nigerian legal system has often struggled with high-profile cases due to issues such as political interference, delayed

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trials, and evidentiary weaknesses[106]. Although organ trafficking is a criminal offence under the TIPPEA Act 2015 and the National Health Act 2014, prosecutions are rare. Public health authorities, police, and courts are poorly coordinated in handling such sensitive and medically complex cases. Moreover, public perception in Nigeria was divided. While some condemned the senator, others sympathised with him, viewing the act as a desperate attempt to save a family member. This ambiguity reflects societal norms that may prioritise personal survival over legality, especially when the consequences appear humanitarian in nature.

The Ekweremadu case sets a precedent for how trafficking-related crimes involving elite individuals are handled in the UK compared to Nigeria. It underscores the importance of institutional independence, international cooperation, and clear legal definitions. It also points to the need for Nigeria to strengthen its prosecutorial infrastructure, ensure equal justice regardless of status, and raise public awareness about the legality and ethics of organ donation.

2.1.19 Major Differences in the Prosecution of Trafficking Offenders in the UK andNigeria

The prosecution of human trafficking offences in Nigeria and the UK differs significantly in terms of procedure, effectiveness, and outcomes. These differences are shaped by legal traditions, institutional capacity, socio-political contexts, and public engagement. In the United Kingdom, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides a comprehensive legal basis for prosecuting trafficking offences, supported by strong judicial institutions. Courts operate independently, and cases are often fast-tracked through specialised units within the Crown Prosecution Service[107]. Prosecutors are trained in handling victim-sensitive issues, and sentencing guidelines ensure consistency and severity where appropriate. Evidence collection

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in the UK relies heavily on forensic data, victim testimony, surveillance, and financial audits. Multi-agency collaboration between police, immigration services, and NGOs ensures that cases are built comprehensively. Victims are offered legal representation, interpreters, and witness protection, improving the likelihood of conviction. In contrast, Nigeria's prosecution landscape is less developed. Although the TIPPEA Act 2015 provides adequate legal backing, implementation is hampered by poor investigation techniques, a shortage of trained prosecutors, and delays in court proceedings[59]. Many trafficking cases are dropped or dragged on for years, discouraging victims from participating in trials.

Corruption and political influence also undermine the integrity of prosecutions. In rural areas, customary courts often lack jurisdiction or understanding of trafficking laws, while magistrate courts are overburdened and under-resourced. Moreover, traffickers who operate within or with the support of transnational networks often evade justice due to jurisdictional and logistical barriers. Another critical difference lies in victim treatment. In the UK, victims are treated as survivors entitled to support and restitution. They are generally not criminalised, especially if forced into illegal acts. In Nigeria, however, victims, particularly those trafficked for sex or criminal activity, may be arrested and imprisoned, often without being identified as victims[78].

Public perception and political will also differ. In the UK, anti-trafficking enjoys strong political support, media attention, and civil society engagement. In Nigeria, trafficking is still viewed by some as a private or moral issue, limiting the urgency of response. To close the gap, Nigeria must invest in judicial training, ensure victim protection, strengthen evidence-based investigations, and depoliticise the prosecution process. Without these reforms,

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traffickers will continue to exploit legal weaknesses, and justice for victims will remain elusive.

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory posits that individuals make decisions by weighing costs against benefits to maximise personal gain. Originally rooted in economic theory, its application in criminology provides a framework for understanding the calculated nature of criminal behaviour, including human trafficking[108]. This theory is particularly relevant for interpreting the decision-making processes of both traffickers and, to an extent, their victims. In the Nigerian context, traffickers often perceive the risks of being apprehended as minimal, given the widespread issues of weak law enforcement, political protection, and corruption. These conditions create an enabling environment in which the perceived rewards of trafficking, chiefly financial gain, significantly outweigh the likelihood of punitive consequences. The decision to traffic persons is thus framed as a rational act, made in response to a favourable risk reward calculation.

Victims themselves may also be influenced by forms of constrained rationality. Faced with dire economic conditions, high unemployment, and limited educational or social opportunities, many Nigerian youths view the promises of traffickers, whether for overseas employment, education, or improved livelihood, as rationally preferable to their existing realities. The seeming legitimacy of these offers, combined with the desperation of their circumstances, leads victims to accept arrangements that ultimately result in exploitation. In the United Kingdom, Rational Choice Theory helps explain the behaviour of traffickers who exploit systemic gaps in regulation. They target sectors such as agriculture, domestic work,

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and care services where oversight is often weak. By exploiting undocumented migrants or those with precarious immigration status, traffickers minimise the risk of legal consequences. The calculated use of debt bondage, identity document confiscation, and legal intimidation reveals a rational strategy to maximise profit while managing legal risk.

Victims in the UK, particularly migrants, often find themselves trapped in exploitative conditions out of fear of deportation or because they lack awareness of their rights. In many cases, their continued silence and compliance are also rational acts, chosen under constraint to avoid further harm or institutional persecution. Thus, Rational Choice Theory offers valuable insight into the motivations and constraints shaping behaviour within trafficking networks in both countries.

2.2 Structural Violence Theory

Structural Violence Theory, introduced by Johan Galtung, moves beyond individual decision-making to explore how social structures, economic, legal, political, and cultural, systematically marginalise certain groups[109]. This theory is instrumental in understanding how trafficking is embedded in wider patterns of inequality and systemic neglect. In Nigeria, structural violence is evident in the chronic poverty, gender inequality, and institutional failures that make individuals, particularly women and children, vulnerable to exploitation. Social systems often reinforce the subjugation of women through cultural norms, early marriage practices, and unequal access to education and employment. Furthermore, a fragile judicial system, poor child protection infrastructure, and corruption within law enforcement hinder the ability of the state to effectively prevent trafficking or support victims. Victims of trafficking in Nigeria are frequently stigmatised or blamed, particularly when sexual exploitation is involved. This societal response, coupled with inadequate victim rehabilitation services, ensures that survivors remain trapped within cycles of vulnerability, even after

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rescue. The failure of state structures to intervene meaningfully in these conditions is a form of indirect violence that sustains and normalises human trafficking.

In the United Kingdom, structural violence manifests more subtly, but still profoundly. Policies that criminalise irregular migration or limit asylum access can force victims into the shadows, where they become easy targets for traffickers. Migrants who fear deportation or are unfamiliar with the legal system may avoid seeking help, even when subjected to abuse. Additionally, limited funding for victim support services, housing shortages, and the complexity of the National Referral Mechanism can leave survivors inadequately protected and retraumatised by the very systems meant to assist them.These systemic failures, though less visible than direct violence, play a critical role in sustaining trafficking dynamics. Structural violence theory thus highlights the responsibility of governments and institutions in addressing not just individual perpetrators, but also the broader conditions that enable exploitation to persist.

The relevance of these theories to this study lies in their combined ability to illuminate both the immediate and underlying factors that sustain human trafficking in Nigeria and the UK. Rational Choice Theory explains the logic of individual actions, while Structural Violence Theory exposes the systemic conditions that shape those actions and responses. Together, they provide a nuanced framework for critically analysing the implementation and effectiveness of trafficking laws, the motivations of traffickers, and the lived experiences of victims. In comparative legal analysis, this dual-theoretical approach facilitates a deeper understanding of why legal instruments may function differently in varied socio-political environments. While the UK may possess strong legal mechanisms, structural violence still hinders full enforcement. While, in Nigeria, even when legal frameworks exist, weak institutions and economic desperation lead to widespread non-compliance. This underscores

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the importance of addressing both individual rationality and structural inequality in any effort to combat human trafficking effectively.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Prevalence and Nature of Human Trafficking in Nigeria and the United Kingdom

The empirical literature reveals a complex and evolving picture of human trafficking in both Nigeria and the United Kingdom. In Nigeria, trafficking does not present itself in a single uniform form but rather in multifaceted ways that reflect the country's social, cultural, and economic realities. Common manifestations include sexual exploitation, forced labour, child trafficking, and ritual servitude. These forms of trafficking often overlap, with victims frequently being subjected to multiple forms of exploitation during the course of their ordeals. Women and children remain the most affected groups, and this is particularly true in rural communities where structural poverty, entrenched gender inequality, and limited access to education combine to heighten vulnerability[1]. In such contexts, promises of jobs or educational opportunities by traffickers can appear both credible and attractive, leading families to allow children or young women to leave home in search of better opportunities. Unfortunately, many of these supposed opportunities quickly turn into exploitative arrangements that deprive victims of their autonomy and expose them to repeated cycles of abuse.

Official statistics help to illustrate the scale of this problem. In 2022, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) documented 1,440 reported trafficking cases. Of these, a majority (71.4%) involved internal trafficking, while the remaining 28.6% related to cross-border or external trafficking. In the same year, NAPTIP reported rescuing

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2,743 victims. A breakdown of these figures shows that women, particularly adult women, constituted the largest group of victims, representing 53.2% of those rescued. Female children accounted for 25.1%, male children for 8.5%, and male adults for 13.2%[61]. These figures confirm two important patterns. Firstly, they highlight the disproportionate impact of trafficking on women and girls, reflecting both gendered vulnerabilities and the high demand for female victims in exploitative industries such as commercial sex work and domestic labour. Secondly, they show that internal trafficking—movement and exploitation within Nigeria's borders—is far more common than external trafficking. This is a particularly important finding because trafficking is often portrayed, both in the media and in international discourse, as primarily a cross-border crime. The Nigerian case demonstrates that a significant proportion of exploitation happens domestically, sustained by local networks and internal socio-economic dynamics.

Despite the establishment of NAPTIP and the introduction of comprehensive legal frameworks such as the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, trafficking persists at alarming levels. This persistence reflects not only weak enforcement but also deeper systemic challenges. Law enforcement agencies remain underfunded and overburdened, limiting their capacity to investigate and prosecute cases. Prosecution rates are low, and conviction rates even lower, undermining the deterrent effect of the legislation. Compounding this is a widespread culture of complicity, where trafficking is facilitated by community members who either profit directly or simply turn a blind eye. Informal networks—family, neighbours, or local recruiters—often play central roles in trafficking processes, making it difficult for authorities to intervene without disrupting the social fabric of communities. Corruption within state institutions further shields traffickers

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from accountability, reinforcing the sense that trafficking can be carried out with minimal consequences[72].

Cross-border trafficking nevertheless remains an important dimension of Nigeria's trafficking profile. Nigerian victims are frequently transported to countries such as Libya, Italy, and the United Kingdom, usually under the guise of legitimate opportunities such as overseas employment, education, or assistance in asylum applications[104]. The 2022 NAPTIP data reinforce this point: although internal trafficking dominates the statistics, almost one-third of reported cases were external, underscoring the significance of international trafficking routes. Once abroad, victims are subjected to diverse forms of exploitation. Many women are forced into prostitution, while others are engaged in labour-intensive and poorly regulated sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, or informal street-level economic activities. These sectors are particularly difficult to monitor, making detection and intervention extremely challenging.

A unique feature of trafficking dynamics in Nigeria is the use of "juju" rituals, especially in the southern parts of the country. Traffickers rely on these rituals as powerful psychological tools to secure obedience from their victims. Victims are compelled to swear oaths before traditional priests, with threats of supernatural consequences—including death, madness, or misfortune—if they disobey or attempt to escape. Because these belief systems are deeply ingrained in cultural and spiritual worldviews, victims often remain bound by fear even after leaving Nigeria. The rituals reinforce psychological bondage, ensuring compliance without the constant need for physical violence. This mechanism has proven highly effective in silencing victims and discouraging cooperation with law enforcement agencies. For law enforcement, this presents an immense challenge: even when victims are identified and

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physically rescued, their psychological captivity continues, making it difficult to secure testimony or cooperation in prosecuting traffickers[105].

In the United Kingdom, the trafficking landscape reflects a different but equally concerning reality. Unlike Nigeria, the UK context is characterised by more institutionalised systems of control, supported by sophisticated documentation practices, regulatory mechanisms, and surveillance infrastructure. Nonetheless, trafficking remains a persistent problem, highlighting the limitations of institutional responses. The literature shows that migrants from Africa, Eastern Europe, and South Asia make up the largest proportion of identified victims, with Nigeria consistently ranking among the top five source countries in official statistics[37]. For example, in 2024, a total of 19,125 potential victims were referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). This figure represents a significant increase from the 16,990 referrals recorded in 2023. Among those referred, 68% were adults (approximately 13,100 individuals), while 31% were children (around 5,999 individuals)[24]. These figures not only reflect the persistence of trafficking but also suggest that UK institutions have improved their capacity to identify and refer victims, although large numbers still go undetected.

The forms of exploitation documented in the UK largely mirror global trends, with forced labour, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude being the most prevalent. Victims are often trafficked into hidden or difficult-to-regulate industries. Nail salons, private households, agricultural farms, and food-processing plants are some of the most frequently cited sites of exploitation. The very nature of these industries makes regulation difficult, and the invisibility of victims ensures their continued dependence on exploiters for shelter, subsistence, and immigration-related needs. In many instances, trafficked persons enter the

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UK with valid documents, but their vulnerability is exploited once they arrive, making identification by authorities even more difficult.

Despite the enactment of the Modern Slavery Act in 2015 and the establishment of the NRM, the UK continues to face serious challenges in addressing trafficking. One major challenge lies in the reluctance of victims to come forward. Research shows that many fear immigration enforcement, deportation, or reprisals from traffickers83. Others avoid reporting due to stigma or mistrust of authorities, particularly where previous encounters with police or immigration officials have been negative. Compounding these challenges are inconsistencies in frontline responses. Police officers, social workers, and border officials often lack the specialised training needed to recognise subtle indicators of trafficking, leading to underreporting and misclassification. Bureaucratic delays within the NRM further aggravate the situation. Victims often endure long waiting periods before receiving decisions on their cases, during which they have limited access to legal representation, housing, or counselling. This phenomenon, described as "secondary victimisation," results in re-traumatisation even after individuals have technically been "rescued."

The Modern Slavery Act itself has been subject to mixed reviews. While it introduced innovative measures such as mandatory supply chain transparency for businesses and harsher sentences for traffickers, its implementation has been uneven. Many businesses have responded to the supply chain requirement with superficial statements that do little to address the root causes of labour exploitation. At the same time, prosecution rates for traffickers remain low relative to the scale of the problem, raising questions about the Act's practical effectiveness. Scholars argue that traffickers have adapted quickly to the new environment, exploiting loopholes in subcontracting systems, labour regulation, and immigration

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enforcement. This suggests that while the Act is symbolically powerful, its substantive impact in dismantling trafficking networks has so far been limited.

Taken together, the Nigerian and UK cases reveal both similarities and contrasts. Both countries have well-developed legal frameworks in theory, yet trafficking persists due to deeper structural and institutional challenges. In Nigeria, poverty, gender inequality, and cultural practices such as juju rituals continue to drive victim vulnerability. In the UK, structural demand for cheap labour, coupled with restrictive immigration policies, fuels the exploitation of trafficked persons. The mechanisms of control differ - spiritual coercion in Nigeria and bureaucratic or immigration-related coercion in the UK - but the outcome is strikingly similar: silence, compliance, and continued exploitation.

This comparative picture underscores that trafficking cannot be effectively addressed by national measures alone. Nigeria's position as a source country and the UK's role as a destination country are two sides of the same global system. Addressing trafficking therefore requires coordinated, trauma-informed, and transnational strategies. Such approaches must combine stronger victim protection services, better international cooperation, culturally sensitive responses to psychological coercion, and stricter enforcement of labour rights across both formal and informal economies. Only through such integrated measures can meaningful progress be made in dismantling the structures that enable trafficking in all its forms.

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2.3.2 Prosecution and Legal Implementation in Nigeria and the UK

Prosecution remains one of the most critical indicators of the effectiveness of anti-trafficking frameworks. In Nigeria, despite the legal machinery provided by the Trafficking in Persons

(Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015, the prosecution rate remains considerably low[64]. Data from NAPTIP indicates that although thousands of victims have been rescued, a disproportionately small number of traffickers are successfully prosecuted, often due to poor investigations, insufficient evidence, or the unwillingness of victims to testify[45]. Several structural factors hinder effective prosecution in Nigeria. For instance, in 2022 alone, NAPTIP secured 80 convictions out of 1,440 reported cases, despite rescuing 2,743 victims. Cumulatively, since 2003, NAPTIP has recorded 8,005 arrests but only 511 convictions, with over 260 cases still pending in court[4].First, there is a lack of specialised training for law enforcement personnel and prosecutors. Many officers, especially at the state level, lack a comprehensive understanding of the trafficking law and its procedural application. Secondly, victims frequently report being intimidated by traffickers or their associates, further discouraging cooperation with legal authorities.

Additionally, judicial delays are common, and cases can drag on for years without resolution, eroding public confidence in the justice system. The cultural and spiritual elements of trafficking In Nigeria also complicate prosecution. Victims subjected to juju rituals often believe that testifying in court may lead to spiritual harm, thus making evidence collection difficult[15]. Moreover, corruption within the law enforcement and judicial system often enables traffickers to evade justice through bribery or political connections. In contrast, the United Kingdom has made significant strides in prosecuting trafficking cases, especially under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The Act allows for life imprisonment of convicted traffickers and the confiscation of assets obtained through exploitation[17]. Between 2018 and 2023, the Crown Prosecution Service recorded 1,303 offences under Sections 1 and 2 of the Modern Slavery Act; meanwhile, government data shows that between 2018 and 2024 there were 93,863 referrals to the National Referral Mechanism and 32,587 positive Conclusive

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Grounds decisions, but only 2,679 prosecutions. More recently (Q3 2023/24 to Q2 2024/25), 450 modern slavery prosecutions were completed, with approximately 74% (335) resulting in convictions[81]. So this show an increase in prosecutions since the enactment of the Act, particularly through multi-agency collaborations involving the police, Crown Prosecution Service, immigration officials, and non-governmental organisations[66].

Nevertheless, challenges persist in the UK system. One major concern is the evidentiary burden in criminal trials, especially when victims are unwilling or unable to testify. While provisions exist to protect and support victim-witnesses, the psychological trauma and fear of retaliation often result in their withdrawal from legal proceedings[91]. Additionally, delays in accessing the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and inconsistencies in support services may affect a victim's willingness to engage with the justice system. There are also cases where trafficked persons are criminalised for offences committed under coercion, despite the non-punishment principle embedded in UK legislation. This legal grey area reflects the tension between immigration control and human rights protection. In particular, irregular migrants trafficked into forced labour or criminal activity may face prosecution or deportation without adequate screening for victim status. The two countries show that while legal frameworks exist on paper, their implementation is uneven and fraught with systemic gaps. In Nigeria, the primary limitations are institutional fragility and corruption; in the UK, the challenges lie more in administrative bottlenecks and policy contradictions. Strengthening prosecution in both contexts requires victim-centred reforms, improved investigative capacity, and stronger inter-agency coordination.

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2.3.3 Victim Identification, Protection, and Support Services

The effectiveness of any anti-trafficking regime is largely determined by how victims are identified and protected. In Nigeria, the process of victim identification remains fragmented and, in many respects, reactive rather than proactive. Most victims are discovered only after significant harm has occurred, often through police raids, border interceptions, or when they are deported from European and North African countries. This reflects a systemic weakness: there are no widespread community-based mechanisms or early-warning systems that could detect potential trafficking cases before they escalate. Empirical studies reveal that frontline officers, including immigration officials and police, frequently struggle to distinguish trafficking victims from irregular migrants, largely due to the absence of consistent training and the lack of standardised screening tools[110]. This misidentification often results in victims being treated as offenders, which further entrenches their trauma and prevents them from accessing the protection they need.

NAPTIP, as the central government agency for victim protection in Nigeria, has attempted to bridge this gap by establishing shelters and rehabilitation centres in different parts of the country. These facilities offer a range of services such as temporary housing, medical treatment, counselling, and vocational training designed to help victims reintegrate into society. In principle, this framework represents a major advancement compared to the pre-NAPTIP era when rescued victims had almost no institutional support. In practice, however, the system struggles to meet the scale of the problem. Resources are overstretched, shelters are frequently overcrowded, and some facilities lack trained psychological personnel. Where psychosocial support is available, it is often short-term and focused on crisis management rather than long-term rehabilitation[79]. This shortfall limits the prospects of sustainable reintegration and contributes to high rates of re-trafficking, as victims return to the same vulnerabilities that traffickers initially exploited.

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Another critical issue is the reliance on family reunification as a reintegration strategy. In some regions, victims are returned to their families without thorough risk assessment or follow-up support. This practice is especially problematic for victims whose families were complicit in their initial trafficking or who still face unsafe community conditions. The result is a cycle of re-trafficking, as individuals once again fall prey to exploitative networks. Furthermore, social stigma in Nigeria presents a major barrier to effective reintegration. Victims - especially women trafficked for sexual exploitation - are often ostracised by their families and communities. Instead of being treated as survivors of exploitation, they may be perceived as having brought shame upon their families. Religious and cultural narratives can sometimes reinforce this stigma, framing victims as morally compromised rather than as individuals who were deceived and abused. This kind of societal rejection not only deepens psychological trauma but also pushes victims back into cycles of poverty and marginalisation, making them more vulnerable to further exploitation.

In contrast, the United Kingdom has developed a more institutionalised system for victim identification and protection through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), established in 2009. Under the NRM framework, designated “first responders”, including law enforcement officers, healthcare providers, and local authoritiesare empowered to refer suspected victims of trafficking for formal assessment. Once referred, victims may be granted access to temporary accommodation, medical care, counselling, and legal assistance for a minimum of 45 days[88]. This system provides a structured pathway for victim support, with the intention of separating protection from immigration enforcement and ensuring that victims receive specialised care.

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However, despite its structural strengths, the NRM has faced sustained criticism. Empirical reviews and testimonies from survivors reveal persistent limitations in practice. One of the most frequently cited issues is the significant delay in decision-making. Victims often wait several months for their status to be formally determined[29]. During this uncertain period, many live in limbo - restricted in their mobility, unable to work legally, and dependent on limited support. Such prolonged uncertainty can exacerbate psychological distress, particularly for individuals already recovering from severe trauma. Moreover, the risk of rejection under the NRM process raises further concerns. Victims whose applications are denied may face detention or deportation, even when there are credible indicators of trafficking[65]. This not only undermines victim confidence in the system but also discourages others from coming forward in the first place.

Another challenge lies in the heavy reliance on charities and NGOs to deliver support services on behalf of the state. While many of these organisations are highly effective and possess grassroots expertise, they are often constrained by inconsistent funding cycles and limited capacity. As a result, the quality and availability of victim services can vary significantly depending on geographic location and organisational resources. Particular vulnerabilities are observed among asylum-seeking victims of trafficking, who often face prolonged housing insecurity, worsening mental health conditions, and retraumatisation during the asylum determination process[85]. These gaps suggest that the UK's system, while well designed in theory, can fall short in practice, especially when immigration control imperatives overshadow protection goals.

An additional blind spot in both Nigeria and the UK relates to the treatment of male victims. The dominant narrative around trafficking continues to portray it primarily as an issue

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affecting women and girls, particularly in the context of sexual exploitation. Consequently, most anti-trafficking services, outreach programmes, and rehabilitation centres are designed with female victims in mind. Male victims—who are often exploited through forced labour, criminal activity, or servitude—tend to receive less attention. Social stigma surrounding male vulnerability further discourages men from disclosing their experiences or seeking help[52]. This creates a hidden population of survivors whose needs remain unaddressed.

Taken together, the evidence from Nigeria and the UK highlights that successful victim protection hinges not only on the existence of legal frameworks but also on the attitudes of society and the coordination of institutions. Laws alone cannot guarantee safety if victims are misidentified, stigmatised, or inadequately supported after rescue. Without early identification, long-term psychosocial care, and inclusive reintegration policies that recognise the experiences of women, men, and children alike, even the most progressive legislation falls short. What is required is a trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, and culturally contextualised approach that integrates legal protections with robust social support systems. Only then can victim protection measures truly break the cycle of exploitation and empower survivors to rebuild their lives.

2.3.4 Role of Technology and Organised Networks in Modern Trafficking

The advancement of digital technologies has significantly altered the landscape of human trafficking, enabling traffickers to operate more efficiently, anonymously, and globally. Empirical studies show that trafficking networks increasingly exploit digital platforms for recruitment, coordination, and exploitation across both Nigeria and the United Kingdom[111]. In Nigeria, traffickers now use social media applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram to lure victims with promises of overseas employment, educational opportunities,

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or modelling careers. These platforms allow for rapid and wide-scale targeting of vulnerable individuals, especially young women and girls in rural and urban-poor communities. Recruiters frequently impersonate reputable agents or employers, and their digital identities make verification difficult. Victims are often deceived into initiating travel, only to discover the exploitative nature of their destination upon arrival.

Trafficking operations in Nigeria also rely on organised networks with transnational reach. These networks consist of recruiters, transporters, corrupt officials, destination handlers, and enforcers, who operate through a decentralised but interlinked structure[36]. Communication across the network is facilitated by encrypted messaging platforms such as Telegram or Signal, which provide traffickers with protection against surveillance and interception. Financial transactions are increasingly conducted using mobile money or cryptocurrency, limiting the traceability of funds[112].

Furthermore, empirical accounts document how "juju" ritual practices are now conducted or reinforced digitally. Some traffickers record ritual oaths and use the videos as blackmail tools if victims attempt to escape or report the abuse[55]. These forms of cultural and technological hybridisation deepen psychological control and limit victim cooperation with authorities[103]. In the United Kingdom, the technological sophistication of trafficking operations is evident in several sectors. Victims are often advertised through online classified sites and dark web forums for sexual exploitation or forced labour. Organised criminal groups operating in the UK employ advanced logistics, including falsified travel documents, shell companies, and cyber-enabled recruitment networks that span continents[65]. Some networks use dating apps or fake job recruitment sites to identify and entrap victims, offering "nanny jobs" or hospitality work that ultimately leads to servitude[40].

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Recent cases in the UK have also shown the use of GPS-tracking and spyware on victims' phones, enabling traffickers to monitor movements and communications in real-time[113]. This surveillance extends the control mechanism and makes physical escape from exploitation difficult. In some cases, traffickers have used victims' social media activity to manipulate or threaten them, especially when photos or personal information were shared during recruitment. Law enforcement in both countries faces significant challenges in addressing cyber-facilitated trafficking. In Nigeria, anti-trafficking units often lack the digital forensic capacity and inter-agency coordination necessary for cross-border investigations. Moreover, cybercrime and human trafficking are often handled as separate offences, creating jurisdictional confusion[42]. In the UK, although police have established cybercrime units, coordination between immigration enforcement, local police, and online platforms is often fragmented.

International collaboration is essential for addressing these evolving threats. Platforms such as Interpol's I-24/7 system and Europol's Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) have been instrumental in dismantling transnational trafficking networks. However, these efforts are often reactive rather than preventive. Limited information-sharing protocols, jurisdictional barriers, and diplomatic delays continue to slow down coordinated responses[114]. The use of technology has empowered traffickers to operate across borders with speed and impunity. However, it also presents an opportunity. Digital platforms can be used to raise awareness, detect suspicious activity, and provide safe reporting channels for potential victims. Both Nigeria and the United Kingdom must strengthen their digital surveillance, victim-reporting mechanisms, and cybersecurity laws to address the modern dimensions of trafficking.

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2.3.5 Community, Religious, and Civil Society Responses

Beyond government-led interventions, the role of community, religious, and civil society actors in the fight against human trafficking has proven indispensable in both Nigeria and the United Kingdom. These non-state actors often serve as the first point of contact for victims and survivors and are deeply involved in prevention, rehabilitation, and advocacy. Their closeness to local communities and ability to build trust makes them uniquely positioned to address aspects of trafficking that state institutions cannot always reach.

In Nigeria, community-based responses have been particularly central in addressing trafficking, especially in rural and semi-urban areas where the presence of state institutions is weak or inconsistent. Traditional rulers, community-based organisations (CBOs), and market associations have played key roles in awareness creation and prevention. They do so by leveraging local knowledge, informal structures of authority, and cultural legitimacy to mobilise communities against traffickers. In trafficking-prone states such as Edo, Delta, and Benue, these groups have been at the forefront of grassroots sensitisation campaigns[115]. Empirical research highlights the effectiveness of using indigenous tools of communication, local languages, folk drama, and storytelling, as they resonate more strongly with community members and help break the culture of silence that often surrounds trafficking[93]. Unlike mass media campaigns, which may feel distant or abstract, such community-driven methods have the advantage of familiarity and accessibility, enabling even illiterate or marginalised populations to engage with the anti-trafficking message.

Religious institutions also play a significant role in Nigeria's anti-trafficking landscape. Churches and mosques, as central spaces of social life, often serve as safe entry points for survivors returning from trafficking experiences. Many victims report that their first form of

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assistance, whether in the form of food, counselling, or prayer, comes from faith-based organisations. These groups provide moral and spiritual support, short-term shelter, counselling, and, in some cases, vocational training that helps survivors regain independence. Notably, some Pentecostal churches in southern Nigeria have adopted strong public stances against trafficking, integrating anti-trafficking messages into sermons, youth programmes, and women's fellowships. By doing so, they challenge the cultural acceptance of trafficking and discourage members from engaging in or tolerating it. However, the influence of religious institutions is not without limitations. In certain contexts, religious leaders have inadvertently reinforced stereotypes or downplayed systemic factors, framing trafficking as a matter of individual morality rather than structural exploitation. In these cases, the response may focus excessively on prayer and repentance while neglecting the urgent need for social and economic reintegration.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) provide yet another indispensable layer of response. In Nigeria, groups such as WOTCLEF, Devatop Centre for Africa Development, and various NAPTIP-supported NGOs have been instrumental in victim rescue, awareness-raising, survivor rehabilitation, and policy advocacy. Many of these organisations step in where government agencies are either absent or overstretched, particularly in emergency rescue operations and community-level sensitisation. They also play a crucial role in monitoring government performance, lobbying for legislative reforms, and amplifying the voices of survivors in public debate. Despite these achievements, CSOs face several obstacles. Sustainability is a major issue, as many rely heavily on international donor grants. This financial dependence makes long-term programming difficult and sometimes forces organisations to adapt their priorities to align with donor expectations rather than grassroots needs[47]. Furthermore, inter-agency coordination remains a persistent challenge, with

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overlapping responsibilities and competition for limited resources often undermining collaboration.

In the United Kingdom, civil society and faith-based groups also play substantial roles, particularly in the areas of victim support and reintegration. Well-established organisations such as The Salvation Army, Hope for Justice, and Unseen UK provide comprehensive services, including safe accommodation, legal aid, psychological counselling, and employability support. These interventions go beyond immediate crisis response, helping survivors rebuild sustainable livelihoods. The UK government has recognised the centrality of these groups by establishing formal partnerships with them under the Victim Care Contract, through which services are delivered to individuals referred through the National Referral Mechanism[116]. Such institutionalised collaboration reflects a model where state and non-state actors share responsibility, although it also raises questions about dependency and the state's reliance on charitable organisations to fulfil statutory duties.

Faith groups in the UK, as in Nigeria, play a unique dual role in both prevention and reintegration. Initiatives like The Clewer Initiative, spearheaded by the Church of England, have mobilised congregations to identify and report signs of modern slavery, particularly in rural communities and among seasonal migrant workers. Beyond detection, religious communities have provided emotional and spiritual support to survivors, helping to reduce isolation and restore trust. By integrating anti-trafficking messages into sermons, parish activities, and community outreach, faith institutions ensure that awareness reaches diverse audiences who may not otherwise engage with government or NGO-led campaigns.

Empirical evidence from the UK also underscores the watchdog function of civil society. NGOs and advocacy networks frequently raise concerns about the treatment of victims,

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detention practices, and policy shortcomings. Campaigns by civil society actors have influenced amendments to the Modern Slavery Act, as well as reforms to asylum policies affecting trafficking survivors[47]. These advocacy efforts have exposed instances where government agencies failed to uphold their protection obligations, prioritising immigration control over victim welfare[90]. Such watchdog functions not only hold authorities accountable but also highlight the tension between enforcement and protection that continues to complicate anti-trafficking responses in the UK.

Nevertheless, civil society engagement is not without its limitations in both countries. Resource constraints remain a major obstacle, with NGOs often struggling to secure sustainable funding. In Nigeria, CSOs also face political pushback and, in some cases, threats from traffickers or complicit local elites who see anti-trafficking work as a challenge to their interests. In the UK, civil society groups sometimes face restricted access to migrants held in detention or undocumented populations, limiting their capacity to conduct outreach and provide services. These restrictions can prevent the identification of particularly vulnerable individuals, leaving them outside the safety net of formal support systems.

A particularly promising development in both Nigeria and the UK is the growing involvement of survivors themselves in civil society-led responses. Survivor-led advocacy groups, peer mentoring programmes, and testimonial-based awareness campaigns are increasingly shaping the anti-trafficking landscape. By centering lived experience in programme design and evaluation, these approaches ensure that interventions are more responsive to actual survivor needs, while also challenging entrenched stereotypes and stigma. Survivor voices bring authenticity, foster empathy, and provide role models for individuals still trapped in trafficking situations.

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Community, religious, and civil society actors therefore constitute a critical "third pillar" of the anti-trafficking ecosystem, alongside government institutions and international organisations. Their contributions complement state efforts, bridge service delivery gaps, and extend protection to populations that formal structures often overlook. To maximise their impact, these actors need sustained support through stable funding mechanisms, legal recognition, and strengthened institutional collaboration. Any sustainable strategy against human trafficking must therefore see them not as secondary actors but as equal partners in the struggle to dismantle trafficking networks and restore dignity to survivors.

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2.4 Conceptual Model

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework of the Study



Source: Researcher Fieldwork, 2025

This conceptual framework demonstrates the relationship between anti-trafficking laws, enforcement mechanisms, prosecution outcomes, and the overall reduction of human trafficking in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. At the centre are the trafficking laws of both countries, which provide the legal foundation for defining and penalising trafficking offences. Enforcement institutions, including police, border agencies, and specialised task forces, are responsible for operationalising these laws. Their effectiveness directly influences the prosecution process, affecting conviction rates and public trust in the justice system. Prosecution outcomes, in turn, determine the level of deterrence and accountability within the trafficking landscape. When prosecutions are consistent and effective, they contribute to a measurable decline in trafficking cases. Surrounding this core chain are policy revisions and international cooperation efforts, which help adapt laws to emerging trends and global standards. The framework is cyclical, suggesting that reduced trafficking rates inform future reforms, creating a continuous loop of legal and institutional improvement.

2.5 Summary of Literature Review

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The literature reviewed in this chapter has examined major drivers of trafficking, including poverty, gender inequality, weak law enforcement, and globalization. It also reviewed international conventions, regional responses, and national frameworks, highlighting the legal developments in both countries. Despite improvements, the review noted persistent enforcement challenges, community complicity, and limited victim support in Nigeria. In contrast, the UK shows more robust legal structures but continues to struggle with immigration-policy tensions and inconsistent victim protection[87]. Theoretical grounding was provided through Rational Choice Theory and Structural Violence Theory. While the former explained how traffickers and victims make decisions under constrained or calculated reasoning. The latter contextualised trafficking within broader social injustices and systemic inequalities. Together, these frameworks offered a dual lens for understanding micro-level agency and macro-level structural failings across both jurisdictions[106]. Empirical studies that illuminated real-world trends in prevalence, prosecution, victim identification, use of technology, and civil society responses were explored and the findings confirmed the gap between legislation and practice. In Nigeria, resource constraints and sociocultural norms impede implementation. In the UK, legal robustness coexists with procedural delays and migrant marginalization. However, a notable gap persists in comparative, cross-jurisdictional evaluations of how anti-trafficking laws perform within differing socio-political environments. This confirms the relevance and urgency of the present study, which seeks to evaluate the comparative effectiveness of Nigerian and British anti-trafficking laws, enforcement structures, and institutional outcomes for victims.

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Chapter Three
Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative comparative research design, suitable for examining the effectiveness of anti-human trafficking laws in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. The approach enabled the analysis of two distinct legal systems across national contexts, allowing for meaningful evaluation of their similarities, differences, and outcomes.

The study also employed a case study technique, focusing on statutory instruments such as the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015 (Nigeria) and the Modern Slavery Act, 2015 (UK). These documents, alongside real-life court cases and policy reports, served as the foundation for identifying patterns in enforcement, prosecution, and victim protection efforts[1]. This design was appropriate for legal and socio-political research that required a detailed understanding of how laws were framed, interpreted, and implemented in different jurisdictions.

3.2 Population of the Study

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On account of the qualitative nature of the research, the population was not about a numerical count of individuals but a carefully defined set of entities sufficiently connected to the set objectives of the thesis.Therefore, the population of this study consistedof certain keyinstitutions and stakeholders involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of human trafficking matters in Nigeria and and the United Kingdom. These comprised human trafficking agencies, prosecution and preventive authorities, that is, state and non-state actors, the latter being key civil society organisations.

The study also drew from relevant legal texts and national human trafficking strategies. This inclusive approach ensures a rich and context-sensitive exploration of how various actors shape and are shaped by human trafficking. By focusing on public institutions, legal frameworks, among others, the study captured the multi-level and political nature of human-trafficking decision-making in Nigeria and the United Kingdom.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

This study used purposive sampling, a non-probability technique suited for selecting documents and sources that are most relevant to the research objectives. The sample was drawn based on predefined criteria: (1) legal relevance to human trafficking; (2) jurisdictional focus on Nigeria and the UK; and (3) timeliness of publication (2015–2024). Selected sources include Nigeria's TIPPEA Act, UK's Modern Slavery Act, court rulings like the Ekweremadu case, and data from agencies such as NAPTIP and the National Crime Agency (NCA). Only documents from authoritative sources, such as legislative databases, peer-reviewed journals, and reputable NGOs, were included to ensure academic rigour and accuracy.

3.4 Description of Research Instrument

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The data for this study were derived from a range of secondary sources, carefully selected to ensure relevance, credibility, and currency. Primary legal texts included the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015 (Nigeria) and the Modern Slavery Act, 2015 (UK). Supplementary materials such as court rulings, notably the Ekweremadu organ trafficking case, provided practical insight into enforcement dynamics. Official agency reports were sourced from NAPTIP, National Crime Agency (UK), UK Home Office, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)[3]. Academic articles were accessed through databases including JSTOR, HeinOnline, Google Scholar, and PubMed. Non-governmental sources, such as reports from Anti-Slavery International, Human Rights Watch, and Save the Children, also contributed valuable data on victim experiences, institutional interventions, and policy performance. Only documents published between 2015 and 2024 were used to reflect the current state of law and practice.

3.5 Validity of the Research Instrument

The validity of the study was strengthened by using authentic, peer-reviewed, and official sources. All materials were cross-checked for relevance, credibility, and legal authority. Statutory documents were retrieved from official government repositories, while academic texts were drawn from respected databases and journals[4].

3.6 Reliability of the ResearchInstrument

Reliability of the research instrument was ensured in a couple of ways: by securing applying consistent thematic codes across all documents. Data were reviewed independently at different stages to reduce interpretive bias and confirm recurring patterns. Multiple sources addressing the same issue were triangulated to verify the accuracy and consistency of claims. This helped mitigate the risks of relying on outdated, incomplete, or biased materials. In

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addition, all documents were selected based on authenticity, and relevance. This methodological consistency allows future researchers to trace the research process and confirm that similar results could be obtained under comparable conditions.

3.7 Administration of Research Instrument

Data administration involved drawing meaning from coded themes in the context of each country's legal and institutional environment. Patterns observed in both countries, such as prosecution rates, victim identification, and inter-agency cooperation, were analysed in relation to the legal frameworks[5]. Findings were interpreted through the lens of the study's theoretical framework and research questions. For example, poor prosecution outcomes were linked to enforcement gaps or institutional failures, while strong legislative provisions were contrasted with weak implementation in Nigeria. This interpretive process was iterative and reflexive, ensuring that insights derived were grounded in evidence, yet critically reflective of broader systemic and policy dynamics[6].

3.8 Method of Data Collection

The data used in this study were entirely collected from secondary sources. These include statutory documents, international conventions, court judgments, institutional reports, for example, NAPTIP annual reports, UK Home Office publications) journal articles, and NGO publications on trafficking. Relevant materials were gathered from verified online databases such as HeinOnline, JSTOR, Google Scholar, UNODC's legal library, and official websites of NAPTIP and the UK Parliament. The tool, document review deployedhelped to gather

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both deep insights and contextual interpretations. This includes systematic review of legal instruments, official policy documents, strategy papers, international agreements, institutional reports, and academic publications. The analysis of these documents allowed the researcher to uncover relevantthemes, contradictions, and patterns. Priority was given to documents published between 2015 and 2024, aligning with the legislative period under review in both countries[2]. The collection strategy was guided by the study objectives and designed to ensure depth and relevance in addressing the legal, procedural, and practical dimensions of human trafficking interventions in Nigeria and the UK.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

This study applied qualitative content and thematic analysis to interpret data. Documents were reviewed, coded, and categorised under key themes such as legal provisions, enforcement mechanisms, prosecution trends, and victim protection policies. This enabled comparative evaluation between Nigeria and the UK. A case-based approach was used to analyse how laws have been applied in real-world situations, notably through court judgments and agency reports. Key similarities and differences were summarised in comparative tables and discussed narratively. The analysis focused on identifying gaps, strengths, and enforcement outcomes in each country's anti-trafficking regime. This method provided a structured and interpretive framework to assess the effectiveness of legal responses across both jurisdictions.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

This study did not use human participants as sample, and only relied entirely on publicly available secondary data.Although this study relied entirely on secondary data, ethical considerations were still observed. Only publicly available and properly credited sources

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were used. Additionally, care was taken to ensure that discussions involving victims or high-profile individuals were framed with respect, anonymity (where applicable), and legal sensitivity. As no human subjects were directly involved, institutional ethical clearance was not required. However, research integrity and academic honesty were strictly upheld throughout the study.

Endnotes

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Chapter Four

Results and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Demographic Data Analysis

4.1.1 Nigerian Anti-TraffickingData Presentation

Table 4.1: Nigerian Anti-Trafficking Data (2022–2023)

Indicator	2022	2023
Trafficking cases reported	1,440	—
Victims rescued	2,743	3,900
Internal trafficking (%)	1,028 (71%)	—
External trafficking (%)	412 (29%)	—
Convictions	80	55 and counting
Total convictions since 2004	592	631+

Sources: *ripplesnigeria.com*[1] *and Vanguardngr.com*[2]

Table 4.1 shows the data from Nigeria which demonstrates a significant, albeit uneven, enforcement trajectory post- TIPPEA act, 2015. In 2022, NAPTIP recorded 1,440 reported

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cases and rescued 2,743 victims, with 71% involving internal trafficking and 29% external. This domestic trafficking prevalence reflects socio-economic pressures such as poverty-driven child migration for labour, emphasising the need for community-based enforcement strategies.

Conviction data highlight systemic challenges. With only 80 convictions in 2022 and 55 by mid-2023, the agency's total since 2004 remains low at approximately 631 . Given over 22,000 rescues since inception, the conversion rate of rescues to legal accountability is minimal (~3%), suggesting bottlenecks in prosecution linked to limited legal capacity, institutional funding, and victim-witness turnaround. However, upward trends in both rescue and prosecution numbers; 80 convictions in 2022 (the highest annual amount) and rising rescues in 2023 signal improving bottlenecks. Yet, persistent low conviction rates argue for further institutional reforms, including prosecutorial training, robust case preparation, and integrated victim support.

4.1.2 United Kingdom Data Presentation

Table 4.2: UK anti-trafficking (modern slavery) data (2022–2024)

Indicator	**2022**	**2023–2024**
Victims referred to NRM	16,938	19,125
Victims declining NRM support	—	5,598
Police/NCA investigations initiated	—	2,497
Modern slavery prosecutions	—	467
Convictions secured	—	355
Trafficked children who left UK care system	1,871	—
Sector-specific victims (e.g., social care visas)	800+	—

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Source: *Home Office. Modern Slavery: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics, End of Year Summaries 2022 & 2024[3]. London: UK Government; 2022, 2024. Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre. Barriers to Prosecutions under the Modern Slavery Act[4]. London; 2024. The Guardian/ECPAT UK. Home Office Abandons Trafficked Children in NRM, FOI Data Reveal. London; 2024[5]*

Table 4.2 the United Kingdom's anti-trafficking system is widely regarded as structurally advanced, especially through its modern slavery act, 2015. However, the data reveal a mixed picture of legal progress and enforcement shortfalls. In 2022, 16,938 potential victims were referred to the national referral mechanism (NRM), a number that rose to 19,125 in 2024[4]. This sharp increase indicates high trafficking detection levels, yet also exposes a troubling trend: 5,598 victims refused to engage with the NRM, largely out of fear of detention or deportation[6]. This reflects growing mistrust in institutional protection frameworks. From July 2023 to June 2024, 2,497 investigations resulted in 467 prosecutions and 355 convictions, according to modern slavery PEC. Though these numbers show enforcement activity, the prosecution-to-referral ratio remains concerningly low, with less than 2.5% of referred cases leading to conviction. Furthermore, 1,871 trafficked children went missing from care in 2022 alone[7]. Emerging sectors such as care work are increasingly being exploited via legal visa loopholes. In 2023, at least 800 potential victims of modern slavery were identified in the UK care sector (e.g. workers in care homes or domiciliary care) following the relaxation of visa rules[9]. This data speaks to objective 2 (implementation), objective 3 (prosecution/protection), and objective 4 (legal and institutional gaps), demonstrating that a strong legal framework does not always guarantee just or effective outcomes without trust, accountability, and victim-centred procedures.

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4.2 Presentation of Data

4.2.1 Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the similarities and differences in the Legal Frameworks addressing Human Trafficking in Nigeria and the United Kingdom?

Table 4.3: Comparison of Legal Frameworks Addressing Human Trafficking in Nigeria and UK

Legal Feature	Nigeria – TIPPEA Act (2015)	United Kingdom – Modern Slavery Act (2015)
Definition of trafficking	Aligns with Palermo Protocol; includes recruitment, transportation, harbouring for exploitation.	Aligns with Palermo Protocol; broader inclusion of servitude, forced labour, organ harvesting, child exploitation, and forced marriage.
Scope of protection	Extends to men, women, and children; focuses more on cross-border trafficking.	Applies to all persons; covers wider practices under "modern slavery."
Prescribed penalties	Up to 14 years for first offence; life imprisonment for repeat offenders.	Life imprisonment permitted; confiscation of traffickers' assets.
Victim protection	Rehabilitation, shelters, vocational training, repatriation (via NAPTIP).	National Referral Mechanism (NRM), legal aid, safe housing, temporary residence permits.
Enforcement agencies	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), under Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs.	Multi-agency: Home Office, National Crime Agency (NCA), Police taskforces.
Trafficker liability	Covers individual and corporate liability.	Extends liability to individuals, companies, and public officials.

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International obligations	Incorporates UNTOC, Palermo Protocol, and African Union treaties.	Incorporates UNTOC, European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and post-Brexit treaties.

Source: Researchers' Findings, 2025

The data show that while both Nigeria and the United Kingdom domesticated the Palermo Protocol, the scope and operationalisation of their frameworks differ. Nigeria centralises its response through NAPTIP, which coordinates victim protection and prosecutions, whereas the UK adopts a multi-agency model that disperses responsibilities across law enforcement and immigration agencies. Moreover, the UK framework places a stronger emphasis on corporate accountability and asset confiscation, while Nigeria's statute highlights victim rehabilitation and repatriation.

Research Question 2: How have the Anti-Human Trafficking laws in both countries been implemented and enforced since their enactment?

Table 4.4: Enforcement Indicators – Nigeria vs UK (2022–2024)

Indicator	**Nigeria (NAPTIP)**	**United Kingdom**
Annual victim rescues	2,743 (2022), 3,900 (2023)	n/r (NRM not rescue-oriented)
Convictions per year	80 (2022), 55 (mid-2023)	355 Convictions (July 2023–June 2024)
Investigations initiated	Not publicly available	2,497 investigations (July 2023–June 2024)
Institutional Funding (estimate)	₦10 billion/year (£10 million approx.)[1]	£45 million/year for PCC and home office anti-slavery *f*
Cross-agency collaboration	Limited; single agency–led	Multi-agency taskforces involving police, home office, modern slavery PEC

Sources: *NAPTIP annual reports/statements (2022–2023)[8]; Home Office Modern Slavery: NRM and Duty to Notify Statistics (2024)[9]; Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (2024); Vanguard Nigeria (2023)[2]*

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[1] estimated based on NAPTIP budget reports; ₦10 b ≈ £10 million

f based on UK home office and modern slavery PEC 2023–24 data

The Table 4.4 above reveal the comparison distinct enforcement strategies and capabilities between Nigeria and the UK following the enactment of their anti-trafficking legislations. In Nigeria, NAPTIP managed to rescue 2,743 individuals in 2022 and 3,900 in 2023, signaling strengthening field operations and outreach. Meanwhile, 80 convictions in 2022 show improved legal follow-through. However, NAPTIP operates largely as a single agency under tight resource constraints, receiving approximately ₦10 billion annually (about £10 million), which is marginal compared to the UK. Limited inter-agency collaboration and dependence on manual data systems also hinder nationwide effective operations. In contrast, the UK's enforcement approach is characterised by multi-agency coordination. Over 2,497 trafficking investigations were launched between mid-2023 and mid-2024, culminating in 355 convictions, reflecting a coherent investigative regime. The government allocates around £45 million per annum to modern slavery initiatives, enabling specialised units including the national crime agency, police leads, and independent bodies like PCC. Despite these benefits, the UK faces significant bottlenecks investigative delays and low prosecution rates (355 convictions vs. 16,938 referrals) suggest systemic inefficiencies. Migrant fear of the NRM process may also contribute to underreporting and enforcement gaps.

These findings indicate contrasting enforcement efficiencies. Nigeria is progressing with noticeable improvements and high rescue numbers, though prosecution remains hampered by funding limitations, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and single-agency limitations. Meanwhile, the UK demonstrates greater institutional capacity but struggles with aligning referrals to convictions and ensuring timely, victim-centered justice.

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Research Question 3: What are the prosecution outcomes and victim protection mechanisms provided under the current legal frameworks in both Countries?

Table 4.5: Prosecution and Victim Protection – Nigeria vs United Kingdom (2022–2024)

Indicator	Nigeria (NAPTIP)	United Kingdom
Annual convictions	80 (2022), 55+ (mid-2023)	355 convictions (July 2023–June 2024)
Cumulative convictions	631 since 2004	approx. 1,000+ under the modern slavery act as of 2024
Victim support structure	40 shelters, vocational training, repatriation, legal aid	national referral mechanism (NRM), safe houses, legal aid
Victims abandoning system	Not officially recorded	5,598 victims declined NRM support (2024)
Child victims lost to system	Not available	1,871 trafficked children left care system (2022)
Support to foreign victims	limited temporary shelter and return assistance	Temporary visa protection; gaps in long-term care

Sources: *NAPTIP (2022–2023)[1]; Vanguard (2023)[2]; Home Office (2024); Modern Slavery PEC (2024)[4]; The Guardian (2024)[5]*

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The prosecution outcomes and victim protection systems in both countries reflect key strengths and gaps in how their respective anti-trafficking laws are operationalised. In Nigeria, NAPTIP has recorded 631 convictions since its inception in 2004, with 80 convictions in 2022 alone, the highest ever in a single year. While this shows growing prosecutorial capacity, it is modest when compared to the scale of trafficking and the number of rescues (over 22,000 victims supported by NAPTIP in two decades). The low conviction-to-case ratio reflects ongoing issues with trial delays, lack of prosecutorial tools, and victim reluctance to testify, often due to fear, stigma, or lack of legal support.

Victim protection services in Nigeria include shelters, legal aid, vocational rehabilitation, and repatriation programmes, largely managed by NAPTIP's zonal offices. However, funding shortfalls and uneven service distribution reduce the national impact of these interventions. Many rural victims remain underserved, and psycho-social reintegration efforts are not uniformly applied across states. In the united kingdom, the prosecution system is more resourced and multi-agency in scope. Between July 2023 and June 2024, there were 355 convictions, showing a more consistent application of the modern slavery act. However, this figure pales when compared with 19,125 NRM referrals in 2024, exposing a major prosecution gap. Victim protection is centralised under the national referral mechanism (NRM), offering temporary housing, legal aid, and health services. Yet, 5,598 victims declined NRM support in 2024, and 1,871 trafficked children disappeared from care in 2022, revealing institutional trust deficits and administrative loopholes.

In both jurisdictions, victim protection remains a critical area requiring reform. While the UK provides more structured services, victim engagement remains fragile. In Nigeria, service

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availability is expanding but not always accessible or adequately supported. Thus, neither system currently delivers a fully protective framework for victims.

Research Question 4: What legal and institutional gaps exist in the fight against human trafficking in Nigeria and the United Kingdom?

Table 4.6: Identified Legal and Institutional Gaps – Nigeria vs United Kingdom

Category	Nigeria (TIPPEA system)	United Kingdom (modern slavery system)
Legal gaps	Ambiguity in law interpretation across states; limited corporate liability	Inconsistent sentencing; no obligation for long-term victim reintegration
Victim protection loopholes	Limited follow-up for reintegration; few rural shelters	High NRM dropout rate (5,598 in 2024); temporary protection leads to re-exploitation
Institutional overload	NAPTIP overstretched as single agency	NRM, police, and social services operate in silos with weak integration
Judicial delays	Slow prosecutions due to backlog, poor case management	Delays in asylum/legal review linked to deportation fears
Enforcement barriers	Low inter-agency cooperation; weak anti-cybercrime framework	Referral–prosecution gap (19,125 referrals vs. 355 convictions in 2024)

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Resource constraints	Underfunding of shelters, courts, and prosecutors	Institutional fatigue; inconsistent local council funding
Cultural/community blindspots	Victim-blaming, reluctance to report trafficking, especially in domestic servitude cases	Public misunderstanding of modern slavery; policy bias against migrant victims

Sources: *NAPTIP (2022–2023)[1]; Home Office (2024)[3]; Modern Slavery PEC (2024)[4]; The Guardian (2024)[5]; Researcher's comparative analysis*

Both Nigeria and the united kingdom have established legal frameworks to combat human trafficking, but substantial implementation and institutional gaps persist, undermining their effectiveness. In Nigeria, the TIPPEA act is aligned with international conventions but lacks strong enforcement mandates across states. Ambiguity in the interpretation of statutory language, especially at lower court levels, results in inconsistent prosecution. Corporate accountability remains weak, with limited legal mechanisms for penalising businesses complicit in trafficking or exploitation. Furthermore, NAPTIP's centralised role overburdens a single agency, limiting effective coordination with other justice sector institutions. Victim reintegration services also reveal institutional weaknesses. While shelters and support centres exist, they are mostly urban-based. Many victims in rural communities receive no formal protection, and there is no structured follow-up post-repatriation or rehabilitation.

In the UK, the modern slavery act empowers multiple enforcement bodies, yet coordination challenges persist. Victims often experience institutional fatigue, with unclear communication between police, social services, and the home office. The national referral mechanism (NRM) remains overwhelmed and increasingly distrusted highlighted by the

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5,598 victims who declined NRM support in 2024. Similarly, the protection afforded is short-term and procedural, often without legal guarantees for long-term resettlement, particularly for foreign nationals. There are also issues with legal effectiveness. Although the UK reports 355 convictions in a year, this represents less than 2% of all referrals, exposing a serious prosecution-to-referral gap. Judicial delays, risk of deportation, and lack of trauma-informed processes further alienate victims from testifying or completing the referral journey.

In both countries, resource constraints, fragmented systems, and policy blind spots (e.g., migrant status, community stigma) contribute to enforcement gaps. Bridging these divides will require not only legal reform, but also stronger inter-agency frameworks, increased funding, and a cultural shift toward victim-centred justice.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The analysis of anti-human trafficking frameworks in Nigeria and the united kingdom reveals that both countries have enacted comprehensive legislation which aligns substantially with international protocols such as the palermo convention. Nigeria's TIPPEA act, 2015, and the UK's modern slavery act, 2015, both criminalise trafficking, outline penalties, and provide for victim protection. However, findings from this study suggest that the legislative clarity does not necessarily translate into systemic strength. The operationalisation of these laws is fragmented, uneven, and often conditioned by political, socio-economic, and institutional factors that vary considerably across both jurisdictions. Nigeria's TIPPEA act appears more comprehensive in its national coverage on paper, but it suffers from a centralisation of enforcement in the hands of NAPTIP, which, despite its impressive mandate, is often overburdened. In contrast, the UK's legislation promotes a multi-agency enforcement system, including police, the national crime agency, and civil society support networks. However,

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this system suffers from poor integration and inter-agency data flow, leading to overlaps and confusion. This mirrors concerns raised in chapter two regarding the "implementation-performance gap" commonly seen in anti-trafficking governance structures worldwide[10]. While both laws are ambitious in scope, they are fundamentally undermined by a disconnect between legislative articulation and ground-level interpretation by enforcement agents, prosecutors, and social workers. The overreliance on centralised agencies in Nigeria and fragmented collaboration in the UK indicate that legal sophistication must be matched by administrative adaptability, otherwise the law risks becoming performative rather than transformative[11].

Findings on enforcement reveal a critical divergence between formal mandates and practical output. In Nigeria, despite TIPPEA's clear penalties and the authority granted to NAPTIP, actual enforcement remains highly centralised and limited by structural deficiencies such as underfunding, uneven state collaboration, and logistical constraints in rural communities. Notably, NAPTIP recorded a relatively high number of rescues in recent years, yet the ratio of arrests to successful prosecutions remains alarmingly low. In contrast, the UK's enforcement practices benefit from better technological resources and legal infrastructure. Yet, the volume of national referral mechanism (NRM) referrals grossly outweighs successful convictions, revealing a gap between detection and judicial conclusion. In essence, where Nigeria's issue is low enforcement capacity, the UK's is more about procedural complexity and bureaucratic saturation.these issues reinforce rational choice theory, which posits that traffickers operate based on perceived risk. In both countries, traffickers are incentivised to persist in their actions due to low certainty of punishment. The cost-benefit calculation still favours the perpetrator in both contexts, albeit for different reasons: institutional fragility in Nigeria, and legal-technical disconnect in the UK[12].

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Prosecution outcomes in both countries, though improving, still illustrate deep institutional bottlenecks. In Nigeria, low conviction rates despite rising rescues point to weak case preparation, witness withdrawal, and judicial delays. The lack of specialised anti-trafficking courts and under-resourced legal aid services mean that cases are often prolonged or abandoned altogether. This inefficiency serves as a demotivating factor for law enforcement officers and prosecutors who struggle to balance mounting caseloads with limited prosecutorial resources.

Meanwhile, the UK, despite a relatively higher conviction rate and robust legal provisions, grapples with a public trust deficit, particularly among foreign victims. Fear of deportation, lengthy legal procedures, and perceived insensitivity by immigration authorities contribute to low victim participation in trials. Many victims either withdraw from the NRM or never enter it at all. Such disillusionment, when widespread, creates a chilling effect that discourages new victims from coming forward, making prosecutions more difficult. Literature reviewed had earlier argued that without institutional trust and prosecutorial efficiency, the legal system becomes a paradox, one that punishes offenders symbolically but fails to deliver real justice to victims. This paradox is visible in both countries, where the rule of law exists, but justice remains inconsistent and inaccessible to the most vulnerable[13].

One of the most troubling findings in this study is the inconsistency in victim protection. In Nigeria, shelters are largely concentrated in urban centres, with rural and internally displaced populations receiving minimal or no structured care. While vocational training, counselling, and repatriation mechanisms exist, they are not scalable or sustainable due to chronic underfunding. Victims are often treated more as witnesses than as rights-bearing individuals, contradicting international standards that call for survivor-led rehabilitation. In the UK, the

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national referral mechanism has been hailed as a comprehensive support framework, yet findings reveal significant attrition rates and disengagement. More than a third of referred victims refused to cooperate with authorities, often due to fears linked to immigration status, police misconduct, or deportation. The system's temporary nature, lacking long-term housing, integration support, or legal certaintyleaves many victims in limbo. This reinforces the argument that protection without permanence is no protection at all[14]. These realities align with structural violence theory, which posits that legal and institutional structures, when poorly designed or unevenly applied, can perpetuate harm. In both countries, bureaucratic indifference, lack of trauma-informed care, and poor inter-agency collaboration have created environments where victims are not re-victimised by traffickers, but by the very systems created to help them[15].

Another major theme from the data relates to institutional gaps, particularly regarding multi-level governance, funding, and coordination. In Nigeria, NAPTIP remains the central actor but operates without consistent support from sub-national institutions, particularly at the state and local government levels. Political interference, jurisdictional overlap, and inconsistent legislative harmonisation continue to affect the uniformity of implementation. The UK's institutional landscape is more decentralised, but this decentralisation has created coordination gaps between police, border forces, immigration officers, and victim support organisations. While individual agencies perform well within their silos, the lack of real-time data exchange and joint case management leads to procedural duplication and victim fatigue. The political economy of justice must also be considered. In both contexts, budget allocations to anti-trafficking efforts are dwarfed by security and defence spending, revealing a misalignment between policy rhetoric and resource commitment. Political actors in both

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Nigeria and the UK often adopt anti-trafficking stances for diplomatic or reputational purposes, but fail to prioritise the systemic investment required for lasting impact[16].

The findings of this research strongly validate the theoretical assumptions presented in chapter two. Rational choice theory is illustrated by traffickers' rational calculation that detection is low, prosecution is rare, and penalties are avoidable. This is particularly evident in regions of Nigeria where NAPTIP has no operational presence and in UK sectors like domestic work, where informal employment hides trafficking cases. Similarly, structural violence theory explains how systemic failings, policy design flaws, and bureaucratic processes deepen the vulnerability of survivors. Victims in both countries are often trapped within layers of marginalisation, including poverty, immigration status, and gender-based discrimination. These layers are not incidental, they are structurally reproduced by national systems that prioritise control over care. By connecting legal texts to actual experiences, this study affirms that the law alone is not enough. For anti-trafficking frameworks to be effective, they must evolve from instruments of criminal justice to vehicles for transformative justice, recognising both the rights of victims and the social dynamics that sustain trafficking[17].

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Chapter Five

Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study examined and compared the legal, institutional, and prosecutorial frameworks addressing human trafficking in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. The research aimed to

understand the extent to which both countries' anti-human trafficking laws align with global conventions such as the Palermo Protocol, and how these laws are translated into practice. Findings revealed that while both jurisdictions have legally comprehensive frameworks, namely, Nigeria's TIPPEA Act, 2015, and the UK's Modern Slavery Act, 2015, gaps remain in terms of enforcement capacity, prosecution outcomes, and victim protection mechanisms.

In Nigeria, enforcement remains centralised through NAPTIP, which, although growing in scope, is underfunded and faces operational limitations, especially at sub-national levels. Victim services are uneven, with rural areas lacking access to shelters and reintegration support. The UK, in contrast, uses a multi-agency approach, yet systemic mistrust, especially among foreign victims, undermines the effectiveness of the National Referral Mechanism. Additionally, prosecution rates in both countries are low compared to the number of identified cases, reflecting a disconnect between investigation and legal resolution.

The application of Rational Choice Theory helped explain why trafficking persists despite legal frameworks, traffickers often perceive minimal risk. Meanwhile, Structural Violence Theory highlighted how institutional barriers, under-resourced support structures, and bureaucratic bottlenecks sustain conditions that marginalise victims. Ultimately, the study underscores that strong legal frameworks must be matched by responsive institutions, adequate funding, victim-centred policies, and community-based enforcement to achieve meaningful impact.

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5.2 Conclusion

While Nigeria and the United Kingdom have both demonstrated strong legislative commitment to tackling human trafficking, a significant disparity exists between policy and implementation. Both countries have ratified international conventions and passed domestic laws that criminalise trafficking and outline provisions for victim support. However, the

realities of enforcement and victim protection reveal critical institutional, political, and socio-cultural shortcomings.

In Nigeria, the centralised enforcement strategy led by NAPTIP has seen some success, especially in terms of victim rescues and public awareness campaigns, but these efforts are constrained by budgetary limitations and lack of coordination with state actors. In the UK, although the legislative and institutional capacity is stronger, systemic distrust among victims, especially those with irregular migration status, weakens participation in protective services and legal proceedings. This study concludes that a multi-dimensional strategy, combining legal reform, institutional development, cross-sector coordination, and survivor-centred interventions, is essential to bridge the gap between statutory intentions and operational realities. Without such integrative reforms, human trafficking will continue to adapt and thrive across jurisdictions.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the research findings and aligned with the study's objectives, the following recommendations are offered:

1. To improve legal frameworks, both Nigeria and the UK should review and update their anti-trafficking laws to close loopholes, integrate technology-based offences, and enhance judicial clarity. Specialised courts should be established to handle trafficking cases swiftly and consistently.

2. To strengthen enforcement, Nigeria must decentralise NAPTIP's operations and ensure regular training and funding at the state level. The UK should enhance integration among law enforcement agencies, immigration officials, and social workers through shared digital platforms and policy alignment.

3. To improve prosecution outcomes and victim protection, Nigeria should create incentives

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for victim cooperation by offering witness protection and legal aid. The UK must reform the National Referral Mechanism to provide longer-term support and clearer immigration pathways to reduce withdrawal from the process.

4. To address legal and institutional gaps, both countries should invest in comprehensive data management systems to track cases from identification to prosecution. Periodic policy audits should be institutionalised to assess enforcement outcomes and victim experiences.

Finally, it is also recommended that reinforcement in public engagement sustained awareness campaigns should be designed to target communities, schools, and transport hubs. Both governments should support grassroots organisations in conducting preventive education, early warning detection, and community-based surveillance.

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5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge on comparative anti-human trafficking legislation and practice. By evaluating the Nigerian and UK legal systems side by side, it provides empirical insight into how different legal traditions, institutional arrangements, and social contexts influence the outcomes of similar legal commitments. The research underscores that while both countries are signatories to global anti-trafficking conventions, their enforcement realities differ markedly based on political priorities, resource allocation, and social trust.

Theoretically, the study extends the application of Rational Choice Theory and Structural

Violence Theory in the context of transnational crime. Through Rational Choice Theory, it becomes evident that traffickers exploit systemic weaknesses, including poor policing, slow judicial processes, and victim silencing. The theory's application highlights that deterrence is only effective when risk is certain, visible, and immediate. Structural Violence Theory adds another layer by explaining how systemic injustices, such as discrimination, poverty, gender inequality, and institutional neglect, are embedded within anti-trafficking structures. These theoretical insights help policymakers understand that enforcement alone is insufficient without addressing the socio-economic and institutional dynamics that enable trafficking.

Methodologically, the study contributes by employing a rigorous document analysis framework, sourcing credible data from government reports, institutional records, and court decisions. The comparative methodology used highlights the importance of context-sensitive approaches to policy evaluation. This encourages researchers and practitioners to move beyond global indicators and instead examine how laws function in real life across jurisdictions. From a policy standpoint, the study's findings call for reforms that are not only reactive but preventive and participatory. It identifies concrete legislative, institutional, and prosecutorial gaps that if addressed, could improve anti-trafficking systems. Furthermore, it challenges scholars and practitioners to think about justice in terms of outcomes and lived experiences rather than legal compliance alone. Overall, the study offers a nuanced, evidence-based foundation for future policy reform, advocacy, and academic inquiry into human trafficking law and justice delivery.

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5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

This research has provided a comparative analysis of human trafficking law enforcement and prosecution of offenders in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. However, further studies are needed to expand knowledge and provide deeper insights in the following areas:

1. Future studies should gather survivors' perspectives to evaluate protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration systems.

2. More research is needed on how social media, encrypted platforms, and cryptocurrency enable trafficking.

3. Comparative studies on trial processes, sentencing, and evidentiary standards in Nigeria and the UK would add depth.

4. Sub-national research could explore variations in trafficking patterns within Nigerian states and across UK regions.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Sample of Successful Criminal Justice System

Sentencing Remarks

Mr Justice Johnson

19 May 2023

Rex

-and-

(1) Obinna Obeta

(2) Ike Ekweremadu

(3) Beatrice Ekweremadu

Sentencing Remarks of Mr Justice Johnson

Central Criminal Court, 5 May 2023

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1. Introduction

1.1 Obinna Obeta, Ike Ekweremadu and Beatrice Ekweremadu, you have each been convicted of conspiracy to commit an offence of human trafficking. You brought a young man to London to exploit him. The exploitation was the proposed donation of a kidney in return for a reward, the reward being money and a chance to work in the United Kingdom.

1.2 The trafficking of people across international borders to harvest their organs is a form of slavery. It treats human beings, and their body parts, as commodities to be bought and sold. It is a trade that preys on human poverty, misery and desperation. The evidence shows that those who are impoverished, often living in multi-dimensional poverty, desperate for a better life, and ignorant of the true risks, are sometimes willing to sell their organs either for money or the opportunity to work in the UK. Significant risks attach to such donation without proper after-care. Each of you played a part in that despicable trade.

2. The Facts

2.1 You, Obinna Obeta, underwent a kidney transplant at the Royal Free Hospital in London in 2021. You said that you and your donor were cousins. That was a lie. The clinicians at the Royal Free, and the independent assessors at the Human Tissue Authority, were taken in by the lie. They believed that the donor was acting altruistically, as a Good Samaritan. The transplant went ahead. There is no evidence that the donor has been given the necessary aftercare. It is not necessary for me to make a finding as to whether you exploited the donor. What is clear is that you learned from your experience that it was possible to manipulate and

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corrupt the regulatory system by using a fabricated affidavit, by lying about your relationship with the donor, and by coaching the donor to lie.

2.2 You, Ike Ekweremadu, and you, Beatrice Ekweremadu, have a daughter, Sonia. She is very ill. She is suffering from FSGS nephrotic syndrome. She needs a kidney transplant. Everybody has enormous sympathy for her, and for the impact on you of seeing your daughter's suffering. Sonia's uncle, Diwe Ekweremadu, knew Obinna Obeta from medical school. He got in touch. Obinna Obeta offered to help find a donor. A possible donor was identified. By law, his name may not be published. I will call him C.

He had grown up in a village where he had no electricity or running water. He left school at the age of 15. He went to Lagos where he sold phone accessories from a wheelbarrow in a market. He was earning approximately 3,500 Naira a day, equivalent to about £7. Tests in Nigeria showed that his blood group was the same as Sonia's. He agreed to come to the UK. He did not at any point agree to donate a kidney to Sonia altruistically. There was no reason why he should do so. He was not related to your family. He did not know Sonia or any other member of your family. Nothing was put in place to secure his future healthcare needs if he donated a kidney. The wealth and power inequality and disparity between you and C could not be more marked.

You, Ike Ekweremadu, are a senator in Nigeria's National Assembly. You have held high political office. You had many staff, including domestic staff, chefs, maids, and drivers. You own multiple properties across the globe – there is evidence of as many as 40. More than £400,000 went into your bank account over a 6-month period. By contrast, C was unable to afford the £25 fare to travel from Lagos to Abuja.

2.3 You each conspired together to bring C to the UK in order to exploit him. You all knew that was unlawful. You, Ike Ekweremadu, had been part of the legislature that had introduced the law that made that conduct a criminal offence in Nigeria.

2.4 You, Obinna Obeta, secured the visa. You did so by telling a lie that C and Sonia were cousins, the same lie you had told in respect of yourself and your donor. You also secured a fabricated affidavit testifying to their relationship as cousins, just as you had done for your transplant.

2.5 You asked the Ekweremadu family to pay C a fee of N3.5M. The jury rejected your account that the fee was for his loss of earnings. The fee was paid by you, Ike Ekweremadu. The jury rejected your account that you knew the fee was a scam and that no reward would ever be paid to C.

2.6 The evidence suggests that a corrupt relationship was established with a member of Royal Free staff, an interpreter who agreed to help with "coaching the boy" and to provide the "relevant interpretation." You, Ike Ekweremadu, were instrumental in establishing and controlling that corrupt relationship.

2.7 The clinicians at the Royal Free Hospital once again believed the untruthful account that the donor and recipient were cousins. There was, however, a concern about the risk to C given his age and ethnicity. After interviewing him, they were concerned that he was not

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sufficiently mature and motivated to be an organ donor. This time, the transplant was not approved.

There was no report to the safeguarding team and no report to the police, despite the indicators that the donor was a victim of trafficking. Those indicators included the tenuous nature of the relationship between C and Sonia, the limited evidence to support that relationship, and C's clear lack of understanding about the process, and his reaction to being told that he was at the hospital to discuss a kidney donation.

In the course of the trial, Hugh Davies KC suggested that a lesson to be learned from this case is that clinicians must be alive to the risk of trafficking and report cases when concerns like this arise. I entirely agree.

2.8 After the decision had been made that the transplant would not go ahead, there was a sinister development. A consultant nephrologist and another man examined C at the place where he was being kept. It is not necessary to make a finding as to the true purpose of the examination. But it is easy to understand why C believed that he was going to be taken back to Nigeria for the transplant to be conducted there.

2.9 On 3 May 2022, when C was due to return to Nigeria, he ran away. He spent two nights sleeping rough. On 5 May 2022, he attended Staines Police Station. There, he saw Sonya Nicholas, a police enquiry officer, and DC Hannah Paisley. As a result of them carefully listening to him, it was recognised that he might be a victim of trafficking. Arrangements were made to secure his protection and well-being. Subsequently, each of you was arrested, charged, prosecuted, and convicted.

3. Compensation Order

3.1 C suffered a loss of his personal autonomy because you kept his passport and exercised control over his movements and his basic human needs. He was put in fear that he would be subject to the forced removal of his kidney without any appropriate aftercare. Now, he is scared to return home to Nigeria. As he puts it, he is having to start his life again.

3.2 I considered that a substantial compensation order might well be appropriate for the loss and damage he has been caused by your conduct. I asked the Crown to enquire as to C's attitude towards such an order. That is because in some cases victims of crime do not want compensation from the offender, and an award of compensation might even risk causing further distress. Police officer carefully explained the meaning, reason and purpose of a compensation order to C. He immediately responded that he did not wish to entertain compensation. The officer says:

> *"[C] spoke with moral conviction. Despite understanding the material benefit receiving compensation may have for him, he adamantly said he did not need or want anything from the 'bad' people. ...he no longer wants them to have any involvement with him – in any capacity; irrespective of the financial benefit he stood to make. ... [C] said that he wanted to put this entire ordeal behind him and move on with his life. He believes this to be the right and fair thing to do."*

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3.3 Two days later, the officer spoke to [C] again. He remained "resolute with his decision regarding compensation and insisted he had not and did not wish to change his mind on the subject."

3.4 I, of course, respect C's views. In the circumstances, it is not appropriate to make a compensation order.

4. Costs

4.1 The Crown seek an order for costs under section 18 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985. I adjourn that application and will make directions for its determination.

5. Statutory Surcharge

5.1 In the case of each of you, I impose the statutory surcharge order in the sum of £190.

6. Custodial Sentence

6.1 In each case, the offence is so serious that neither a fine alone nor a community sentence can be justified. A life sentence is not appropriate, and I do not consider that you are dangerous so as to merit the imposition of an extended sentence. Accordingly, in each case, I pass a determinate custodial sentence with the shortest term that is commensurate with the seriousness of the offence, taking account of the aggravating and mitigating features.

Practical Effect of Sentence: Early Release

6.2 You will each serve part of the sentence in custody before being released on licence. When you are released, you will be on licence until the end of your sentence. You must comply with the terms of the licence and commit no further offences. Otherwise, you will be liable to serve a further period in custody.

Practical Effect of Sentence: Barring Provisions

6.3 The Disclosure and Barring Service will include each of you in the lists of those who are barred from working with vulnerable adults or children. You may ask the Service to be removed from the lists.

7. Length of Custodial Term

7.1 The Sentencing Council has published guidelines for offences of human trafficking contrary to section 2 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. You have each been convicted of conspiracy to commit that offence. The guidelines do not directly apply, but the offence that you committed is closely related to the guideline offence. I reject the defence submission that the guidelines are not apt to cover this particular form of trafficking. I therefore have close regard to the guidelines.

7.2 Harm The transplant did not go ahead. But you each intended that it should go ahead, and you each intended the harm to the donor that would result and which was eminently

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foreseeable. The donor would have faced invasive surgery with a small but still possible risk of death. He would have faced spending the rest of his life with only one kidney, and without any funding for the required aftercare. He would have faced an increased risk of early onset raised blood pressure, an increased risk of developing chronic kidney disease later in life, and a lifetime risk of dialysis or a need for a kidney transplant himself. He was at increased risk because of his young age, and his ethnicity. The removal of a kidney amounts to serious physical harm which has a substantial and long-term effect. Even if he had known that he was going to donate a kidney, I am sure that the risks had not been properly explained to him before he was brought to the UK. He was deceived and pressurised into donating a kidney. I reject the defence assertions that he consented in any meaningful sense. I am sure that he did not. There has been a substantial and long-term adverse impact on his daily life. He is scared to return to Nigeria because of the risk of retribution from those that are sympathetic to you.

Mr Justice Johnson lives a solitary existence and is separated from his life, friends and family as a direct result of this offence.

7.3 This amounts to category 2 harm within the meaning of the Sentencing Council's Guidelines. I do not accept the Crown's submission that the nature and extent of the harm factors justify a movement to category 1. They warrant an upwards adjustment within the category range. The fact that the transplant was not carried out merits a downwards adjustment. The level of that adjustment is limited because:

(1) The gravamen of the offence is the agreement that you reached to exploit the donor. The offence was complete at that point. The offence focuses on the conduct of the offender rather than the harm caused to the victim.

(2) You did not withdraw from the conspiracy. The only reason that the transplant did not take place was because the hospital refused to carry it out. In each case your reaction was to seek to exploit others.

(3) Quite apart from the harm that would have resulted from a transplant, C has suffered substantial actual harm of the nature that I have identified.

7.4 Culpability: Obinna Obeta

You, Obinna Obeta, fall within the high culpability bracket. You played a leading role in the offending. You identified the donor and controlled him throughout the process. You did so in the expectation of substantial financial advantage. I reject your assertion that there is no evidence of substantial financial advantage. Your bank statements show otherwise, and demonstrate that you were reliant on the funds you secured from the Ekweremadu family to keep your head above water. You applied a high degree of planning and premeditation. For example, you arranged the visa, you secured a fabricated affidavit, and you organised a scheme to seek to deceive the clinicians and, ultimately, the Human Tissue Authority. You were thoroughly dishonest throughout. You kept a substantial sum of money that was paid by Ike Ekweremadu and was intended for the donor.

7.5 Culpability: Ike Ekweremadu

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You, Ike Ekweremadu, also fall within the high culpability bracket. You also played a leading role in the offending and to a greater extent than Obinna Obeta who was acting, through Diwe Ekweremadu, at your direction. You did so in order to secure a material advantage, namely a human kidney for your daughter. You were involved in a high degree of planning and premeditation. For example, you orchestrated the arrangements through your brother, Diwe. You sought to conceal your link to the payment of a donor reward, by instructing a member of your staff to make the payment via a currency trader. You were involved in the corruption of a member of hospital staff. I reject the defence suggestion that you were naïve as to offers or payments of a reward, or that you only joined the conspiracy at a late stage. You were the driving force throughout. Reliance is placed on the fact that you had no contact with C or Obinna Obeta. That is true, but it is an indicator of the leading role you played, directing the overall operation, but keeping your distance by getting others to do your bidding. I accept that you were not directly involved in the fabrication of an affidavit and that you told Sonia not to sign it. Again, in context, that is consistent with the type of leading role you played. You well knew the sorts of steps that were being taken to try and pull the wool over the eyes of the doctors and regulators.

7.6 Culpability: Beatrice Ekweremadu

I am satisfied that you, Beatrice Ekweremadu, performed limited functions under the direction of your husband. I accept the submission of Mr Mohindru KC that your family was patriarchal and you were deferential to your husband. Your role was primarily to adopt the cousin lie. There was, so far as you are concerned, some limited planning and pre-meditation. You committed the offence in the expectation of a material advantage, namely securing a human kidney for your daughter. Your case falls at the cusp of lower and medium culpability.

7.7 Before allowing for aggravating and mitigating factors, the applicable starting points are 10 years in the case of Obinna Obeta, 10 years and 6 months in the case of Ike Ekweremadu and 6 years in the case of Beatrice Ekweremadu.

8.Obinna Obeta

8.1There are aggravating features in your case. You deliberately targeted a victim who was particularly vulnerable due to his young age, his isolation from his immediate family and his poverty. After the conspiracy to exploit C was thwarted you continued to seek to find another person to be exploited in the same way.

8.2 As against that, you have no previous convictions and were a person of good character. I accept that you have done much good work as a medical doctor. You also have your own serious medical condition, as someone who has himself undergone a kidney transplant. I have taken account of the medical evidence. That does not suggest that your condition cannot be adequately managed in custody. I consider that the mitigating and aggravating factors are in balance. I sentence you to 10 years' imprisonment. Subject to allowing for the time for which you have been remanded in custody, you will serve two thirds of the sentence in custody and will then be on licence until the end of your sentence.

9. Ike Ekweremadu

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9.1 There are substantial aggravating features. You knew that the donor was vulnerable because of his young age and poverty. You had a profound understanding of the impact of his vulnerability, because of the work you have done for the Ikehoa Foundation. You gave direct instructions to ensure that tight control was exercised over C. Once the transplant with C did not go ahead, you immediately sought to find another person to be exploited in the same way, rapidly managing to identify several potential candidates.

9.2 As against that, you have your own ongoing health problems. You have no previous convictions and are a person of good character. I accept your counsel's description of you having exceptionally positive good character, and that your conviction represents a substantial fall from grace. You set up the Ikehoa Foundation, and have funded that organisation which undertakes a great deal of valuable charitable work, to help those living in poverty in Nigeria. At trial there was a great deal of character witness testimony, including from Archbishop Emmanuel Chukwuma, the Archbishop for the Diocese of Enugu. I have been provided with a bundle of 51 pages of character statements for the purpose of sentencing. I have read all of them. They include statements from a former President of Nigeria, the current President of the Senate of Nigeria, the Bishop of Enugu, the Attorney General and Chief Law Officer of Nigeria, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. They also include moving pleas advanced by some of those who have benefited by your generosity and good works, and also a moving statement from your daughter, Sonia. I take all of that into account. You were motivated by the despair of your daughter's very serious illness. The weight to be attached to that factor is limited by reason of the fact that, as you recognised in your evidence, you could have sought a genuinely altruistic donation, including from a family member albeit not Sonia's parents or siblings.

9.3 After taking account of the aggravating and mitigating factors, I impose a sentence of 9 years and 8 months imprisonment. Subject to allowing for the time for which you have been remanded in custody, you will serve two thirds of the sentence in custody and will be on licence thereafter for the rest of the sentence.

10. Beatrice Ekweremadu

10.1 In your case I adopt a starting point of 6 years' custody. I do not consider that the aggravating features that are present in the case of your co-defendants apply to you. You were not directly involved in the identification of the donor, and the evidence does not show that you were directly involved in the attempts to identify a further donor after the transplant did not go ahead.

10.2 I take account of all the mitigating features that Mr Mohindru KC has identified, and the content of the thorough and helpful pre-sentence report prepared by the Probation Service. You are a person of good character. You set up the Ikehoa Foundation with your husband and you have been closely involved with its important charitable work. Much of the character evidence I have read applies also to you. You were also motivated by the desperate plight of your daughter, and by maternal love. Further, in your case, I accept that although Sonia is an adult, you have substantial caring responsibilities towards her. Your incarceration will have a significant impact on her, in that she will no longer be able to rely on your presence as a source of care and support. Having regard to those factors I impose a sentence of 4 years' and 6 months' imprisonment. You have spent 234 days on an electronically monitored curfew between 9pm and 7am. I specify that the credit period for the purposes of section 240A of the

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Criminal Justice Act 2003 is 117 days. So that period shall count towards your sentence. Subject to that, and subject to allowing for the time you have spent remanded in custody, you will serve one half of the sentence in custody. You will be on licence thereafter for the rest of the sentence.

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Bio-data

A. Personal Data

Full Name: Kareem Taiwo Tiwalade

Address: House 3, Tella,Tella Extension,Umoru, Akobo, Ojurin, Ibadan, Oyo State

E-Mail Address: tiwaladesodeke@gmail.com

Phone No: 08157589733,08106478588

Date of Birth: 16th of April 1992

Place of Birth: Ijebu-Ode

Nationality: Nigerian

Marital Status: Married

Name of Next of Kin: Mr Kareem Adebayo Abidemi

Address of Next of Kin: House 3, Tella, Tella Extension, Umoru, Akobo, Ojurin, Ibadan, Oyo State

B. Educational Background

Educational Institution attended with Dates		
M.Sc In View	Lead City University, Ibadan	March 2023/2024 – Present
Bsc(Ed)	Tai Solarin University of Education Ijagun , Ijebu Ode	2012-2016
Senior Secondary Certificate	Bammy International School, Agbado Okearo, Ogun State	2006-2011
School Leaving Certificate	Varsity Children School, Epe Garage, Ijebu Ode	1999-2005

C. Work Experience with Dates

Lead City University Ibadan DO NO

Partner's Healthcare At Mohammed International Airport,Lagos. 2020-2021

Customer Service Agent.

Mikel Gas International,Sango Ota,Ogun State. 2021-2022

Cashier

Demaster International School, Sango Ota ,Ogun State 2018-2020

Teacher

D. Awards Nil

E. Membership Nil

F. Publication

1 EMMAJIMO, Emma Jimo & KAREEM, Taiwo Tiwalade & ADO, Nasir, 2025. "Participation and Perceptions of Citizens about Thuggery and Electoral Violence Management during 2023 General Elections in Lagos State," Lead City Journal of the Social Sciences (LCJSS), Lead City University, vol. 10(1), pages 53-67.

G. Major Conference Attended with Dates Nil

H. References

1. Mr Ogunsolu

   Public Servant, Tai Solarin University of Education

   Tel: 08055256784

2. Mr Sodeke

   Public Servant, Tai Solarin University of Education

d City University Ibadan DC

Tel: 07058116828

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The University Compliance Certification

This is to certify that this thesis by Taiwo Tiwalade **KAREEM** with matriculation number LCU/PG/005518 in the Department of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Management and Social Science, Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State is in full compliance with the approved university format and style.

_____ _____

Signature Date

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