



UNCOVERING THE CONNECTIONS: SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SURINAME

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Executive Summary

The report explores the connections between sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, and human trafficking, including the continuum of violence against sexually exploited women, which encompasses marginalization, social isolation, and all forms of gender-based violence. It describes the situation of Suriname more generally, including on sexual trafficking and exploitation in the context of *garimpos*, illegal artisanal and small-scale gold mining camps in Suriname, based on an extensive desk review and insights from women interviewed by D'Antilles et D'Ailleurs (DA&DA) at brothels near a garimpo (Nasson), in Albina, Nickerie, and Paramaribo.

Suriname has long served as both a transit and destination country for human trafficking, including sexual trafficking of women and girls from the Caribbean (mainly Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti), Brazil, and Venezuela.¹ Human traffickers predominantly target women and children for sexual exploitation and low-skilled labor, particularly in the mining regions deep within the country's interior. Women and girls are subjected to sexual exploitation in mining camps and are often forced to work in brothels, bars, and strip clubs.²

To address data scarcity on trafficking and gender-based violence in the Caribbean region, D'Antilles et D'Ailleurs (DA&DA) conducts its own research. Due to the lack of primary data or official statistics, an in-person survey was conducted to collect quantitative data from women in brothels near a *garimpo* ([Nasson](#)) in the department of Tapanahony, in Albina, in Nickerie, and in Paramaribo, Suriname. This was complemented by insights from interviews with a subset of the same group of surveyed women. In 2020, DA&DA embarked on a similar initiative in Martinique with the *Mouvement du Nid* organization, resulting in the publication of the first-ever report on prostitution in Martinique.³

The findings of this report provide critical evidence to inform, guide, and support the strategies of key governmental authorities, multilateral cooperation agencies, and civil society actors aimed at preventing and responding to sexual trafficking, particularly of women, in Suriname. These actors include the Trafficking in Persons Unit of Suriname, the Bureau of Gender Affairs (BGA) of Suriname, the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) of the European Union, the Agence française de développement (AFD), Civil society organizations engaged in Women and Human Rights issues in Suriname.

¹UNHCR (2021). UNHCR Submission for the Universal Periodic Review – Suriname – UPR 39th Session (2021). <https://www.refworld.org/policy/upr/unhcr/2021/en/123959>

²European Centre for Law and Justice (2021). Status of human rights in Suriname for the 39th session of the Universal Periodic Review. UPR Submission—Suriname—39th Session.

³Bastitta, María (2020). Profil des femmes en situation de prostitution en Martinique. L'expression d'un système de domination patriarcale. Mouvement du Nid. <https://www.dantillesetdaillieurs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Annexe-3mouvement-du-nid-rapport-diagnostic-2020-2.pdf>

Acknowledgements

This study was written by the independent consultant Mara Tissera Luna with generous contributions from the D'Antilles et D'Ailleurs (DA&DA) professionals.

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[D'Antilles et D'Ailleurs](#) is a feminist NGO established in Martinique since 2016, working to eradicate gender-based violence and promote women's rights. More specifically, our organization is committed to strengthening skills, facilitating training, and promoting the socio-economic integration of women and young people in vulnerable situations. This study has been realized with the contribution in the direct interviews to the women by:

[Lavinia Ruscigni](#): Co-Founder and Director of D'Antilles & D'Ailleurs. She holds a master's degree in African and Asian studies (Università degli studi di Pavia - Italy, Osmania University-India) and a specialization in gender studies (San Francisco State University). Since 2012, before in Strasbourg and then in Martinique, serves as project manager on projects focused on women through different local and international funds. Volunteer 10+years for the Mouvement Du Nid, the French national organization "with the women in prostitution and against the prostitution system", she is now Departmental Delegate of the Mouvement Du Nid Martinique.

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Questions or comments should be directed to the DA&DA team.

We are thankful to the women who were interviewed and surveyed, as well as the institutional stakeholders interviewed: representatives from Justice, the Defense Commander (Armed Forces of Suriname), the Domestic Violence Department of Nickerie, the Trafficking in Persons Unit in Paramaribo, an Immigration and Customs officer in Albina, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) who shared their expertise, experiences, and recommendations. We also appreciate their consent to allow us to share this information. Moreover, the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) of the European Union co-financing the Change Nickerie!project and BFN organization, lead partner, facilitating part of the interviews with the authorities under the project.

Glossary

Garimpos. Garimpos refer to illegal artisanal and small-scale gold mining camps in the Amazon Basin, encompassing Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela, and French Guiana. These camps are considered environmental crimes and are sustained by national and transnational organized crime networks also involved in narcotics, arms, and human trafficking.

Gender-based violence (GBV)⁴ refers to harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power, and harmful norms.⁵ The term is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials place women and girls at risk for multiple forms of violence. Women and girls suffer disproportionately from GBV, even if men and boys can also be targeted. The term is also sometimes used to describe targeted violence against LGBTQI+ populations and violence related to gender norms.⁶

Intersectionality. Initially developed by Black Feminist scholars and activists in the 70's,⁷ intersectional feminism is a framework that examines the systems (racism, colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism) that have, over time, produced oppression, inequality, and unjust social, economic, and political hierarchies.⁸ Thanks to the pioneering research of lawyer, professor, and researcher Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept of

⁴UNFPA (N/D). What is gender-based violence (GBV)? [Web page]. <https://www.friendsofunfpa.org/what-is-gender-based-violence-gbv/>

⁵UN Women (N/D). Frequently asked questions: Types of violence against women and girls [Web page]. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence>

⁶UN Women (N/D). Frequently asked questions: Types of violence against women and girls [Web page]. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence>

⁷Combahee River Collective (1977). The Combahee River Collective Statement. [https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition Readings.pdf](https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition%20Readings.pdf)

⁸Viveros Vigoya, Mara (2016). La interseccionalidad: una aproximación situada a la dominación. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género. <https://repositorio.unal.edu.co/handle/unal/80372>

intersectionality can also be used to describe and address the unique challenges faced by individual women affected by intersecting social injustices. This includes providing support services, policies, and programs specifically for Black and migrant women survivors when such responses are otherwise lacking.⁹

Rape culture refers to the social environment that allows male sexual aggression¹⁰ and sexual violence to be normalized and justified. Rape culture is pervasive since it's embedded in the way we think, speak, and move in the world. While the contexts may differ, rape culture is always rooted in persistent gender inequalities, patriarchal beliefs, power, and control.¹¹

Sexual exploitation. Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Examples include transactional sex (the exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favors), solicitation of transactional sex, exploitative relationships, and human trafficking.¹²

Sexual violence. Acts of a sexual nature against one or more persons or that cause such person or persons to engage in an act of a sexual nature by force, or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression, or abuse of power, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment or such person's or persons' incapacity to give genuine consent. Forms of sexual violence include rape, attempted rape, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation and abuse, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, child pornography, child prostitution, sexual slavery, etc.¹³

Survivor. In this report, the term "survivor" refers to any woman and girl who has experienced gender-based violence and/or trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Trafficking for sexual exploitation. The definition of trafficking consists of three core elements: The act of trafficking, which means the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons; the means of trafficking which includes threat of or use of force, deception, coercion, abuse of power or position of vulnerability; the purpose of trafficking which is always exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery,

⁹Crenshaw, Kimberly (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>

¹⁰ESCWA (N/D). Rape culture. <https://www.unescwa.org/sd-glossary/rape-culture>.

¹¹United Nations Sustainable Development Group (25 November 2019). 16 ways you can stand against rape culture.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/11/compilation-ways-you-can-stand-against-rape-culture>

¹²United Nations (2017). Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. P. 6. https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/SEA%20Glossary%20%20%5BSecond%20Edition%20-%202017%5D%20-%20English_0.pdf

¹³United Nations (2017). Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. P. 8. https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/SEA%20Glossary%20%20%5BSecond%20Edition%20-%202017%5D%20-%20English_0.pdf

servitude or the removal of organs.¹⁴¹⁵ While men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime, women and girls are disproportionately trafficked for sexual exploitation.¹⁶

Violence against women and girls (VAWG): In this report, the term is used as an umbrella term for all forms of gender-based physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family or within the general community or perpetrated or condoned by the State, and which results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.¹⁷

Methodology

The findings in this report emerge from participant-observation, an extensive review of secondary sources, surveys with 36 women who are being sexually exploited in Suriname, in-depth interviews with a subset of 14 women, and seven interviews with institutional stakeholders who could provide contextual knowledge about human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Suriname.

In the framework of the 'Change Nickerie' project, DA&DA's team members visited the sites where women are prostituted in Suriname five times between 2021 and 2023. In addition to speaking with these women, the team conducted participant-observations with associations that serve and support prostituted persons in Suriname, maintaining direct contact with many of them. Lacking primary data (official statistics) on trafficking or sexual exploitation in Suriname, an in-person survey was conducted to collect information about the women's living conditions, health issues, access to healthcare, and migration stories.

The interview participants were selected through snowball sampling, facilitated by DA&DA's prior participant observation in the field. Interviews were conducted at either the participants' places of prostitution or their lodgings. The average age of the women interviewed is 36 years, while the average age of the sample of women surveyed is 34 years. Among the fifty women surveyed, the distribution of origins is as follows: Dominican Republic 72.5%, Cuba 15.7%, Venezuela 7.8%, and Guyana 2%. Due to this

¹⁴UNDOC (N/D). Human Trafficking Facts (Website). <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/faqs.html#h1>

¹⁵ A/RES/55/25, United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; Annex II: The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 8 January 2001. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>

¹⁶The Inter-Agency Coordination Group (2017). The gender dimensions of human trafficking. The Inter-Agency Coordination Group (ICAT). <https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl461/files/publications/icat-ib-04-v.1.pdf>

¹⁷UN Women (N/D). Frequently asked questions: Types of violence against women and girls [Web page]. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence>

preponderance of Dominicans as survey respondents, DA&DA decided to focus on Dominican women for in-depth interviews.

Finally, DA&DA conducted seven interviews with relevant institutional stakeholders who could provide contextual knowledge about human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Suriname. These included representatives from Justice, the Defense Commander (Armed Forces of Suriname), the Domestic Violence Department of Nickerie, the Trafficking in Persons Unit in Paramaribo, an Immigration and Customs officer in Albina, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

In its work and research, DA&DA's staff engage in participatory processes that involve women as protagonists in a conversation that looks more like a two-way dialogue than an exercise in collecting or extracting knowledge from them. During the interviews and in-person surveys, DA&DA ensured a trusting and open environment, allowing the women consulted to freely express their views. This participatory approach helps ensure that a variety of viewpoints are discussed and documented, and that the women's diverse needs, perspectives, and resourcefulness are considered in programming and advocacy. Importantly, participatory research can be an opportunity for typically marginalized groups, such as trafficked or sexually exploited women, who are otherwise excluded from participating in or being represented in mainstream society and politics to share their perspectives on issues that disproportionately affect them.¹⁸ The findings of participatory approaches can also challenge prevailing narratives and inform more effective strategies for addressing the human rights issues these women face.¹⁹

Setting the Context: Sexual trafficking into Suriname

Suriname serves as both a transit and destination country for human trafficking, including sexual trafficking of women and girls from the Caribbean (mainly Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti), Brazil, and Venezuela.²⁰ Human traffickers predominantly target women and children for sexual exploitation and low-skilled labor, particularly in the mining regions deep within the country's interior. Women and girls are subjected to sexual exploitation in mining camps and are often forced to work in brothels, bars/pubs, and strip clubs.²¹ Several reports concluded that most of these girls and women reportedly were lured by the

¹⁸Frisina, A. (2018). FGDs in Migration Research: A Forum for "Public Thinking"?. In: Zapata-Barrero, R., Yalaz, E. (eds) *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies*. IMISCOE Research Series. Springer, Cham. P. 190. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76861-8_11

¹⁹See: Tissera Luna, M. (2024). Mini-guide Research for Advocacy & Systemic Change: A Ridiculously Simplified Guide to Intersectional & Decolonial Research + examples. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FK-wuDhJ3bHsvb85U_crh-M5Y51l66-O/view

²⁰UNHCR (2021). UNHCR Submission for the Universal Periodic Review – Suriname – UPR 39th Session (2021). <https://www.refworld.org/policy/upr/unhcr/2021/en/123959>

²¹European Centre for Law and Justice (2021). Status of human rights in Suriname for the 39th session of the Universal Periodic Review. UPR Submission—Suriname—39th Session.

promise of employment in the hospitality sector, and were unaware that they would be forced into prostitution.²² In recent years, the economic downturn triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected women,²³ has heightened the risk of trafficking for low-skilled individuals and marginalized groups struggling to find work. The economic crisis has also led more adults to turn to prostitution as a means of earning extra income and has likely contributed to a rise in child trafficking.²⁴

Suriname's geographical isolation from the rest of the continent is marked by dense jungle covering about 80% to 90% of its territory. In Suriname's sparsely populated and remote dense jungle regions, where State presence is low, human trafficking is typically intertwined with other criminal activities. Organized crime groups in the region are predominantly engaged in the cocaine trade towards Europe, illegal gold mining, and money laundering activities.²⁵ Human trafficking networks are believed to be international, working through local, small, mafias.²⁶ There are reports of corruption and local official complicity in trafficking crimes that may impede anti-trafficking efforts.²⁷ At the apex of Suriname's criminal hierarchy, a network of former military personnel, businessmen, and government officials controls a significant portion of both the cocaine trade and gold business, as well as laundering illicit profits.²⁸

The pervasiveness of irregular migration within mixed flows of migrants and forcibly displaced women, as well as the crime of human smuggling, are also connected to heightened risk to trafficking.²⁹ Factors such as inaccessible regular migration pathways, limited family or community support, lack of identity documents, restricted access to quality jobs and education, and curtailed freedom of movement are all connected to an increase in the risk of migrants to being trafficked.³⁰ Migrants who have been irregularly smuggled have also been found to be at risk of being trafficked.³¹ Suriname's 1500-kilometer border

²²See, for example, U.S. State Department (February 25, 2009). 2008 Human Rights Report: Suriname. <https://cybercemetery.unt.edu/archive/oilspill/20121017103635/http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119174.htm>;

²³Women are statistically more likely than men to be employed in low-paid, precarious jobs like domestic work, food services, etc. The New Humanitarian (29 December 2021). Ten humanitarian crises and trends to watch in 2022. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2021/12/29/ten-humanitarian-crises-trends-to-watch>

²⁴U.S. Department of State (2023). 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Suriname. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/suriname>

²⁵Insight Crime (2020). Suriname Profile. <https://insightcrime.org/suriname-organized-crime-news/suriname/>

²⁶Global Organized Crime Index (2023). Suriname. <https://ocindex.net/country/suriname>

²⁷U.S. Department of State (2023). 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Suriname. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/suriname>

²⁸Insight Crime (2020). Suriname Profile. <https://insightcrime.org/suriname-organized-crime-news/suriname/>

²⁹UNHCR (N/D). Trafficking in persons [Webpage]. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/asylum-and-migration/trafficking-persons>

³⁰This sentence does not refer exclusively to Suriname, and it is an adaptation from: IOM & UNHCR (2020). IOM-UNHCR Framework document on developing standard operating procedures to facilitate the identification and protection of victims of trafficking. P. 6. <https://www.refworld.org/policy/opguidance/unhcr/2020/en/123233>

³¹Human trafficking and smuggling can be intertwined but are distinct in three critical ways: first, victims of human trafficking are forced, defrauded, or coerced into their situations, unlike individuals who typically consent to being smuggled. Second, human trafficking constitutes a crime against an individual, whereas smuggling is considered a crime against a country. Third, human trafficking does not necessarily involve the physical movement of a person, which is a requisite in smuggling, where individuals are

remains largely uncontrolled.³² This, coupled with a lack of protection-sensitive entry systems and reception arrangements or mechanisms for profiling and referral of migrants with specific needs that mean it's harder to identify and protect women subjected to sexual trafficking.³³

Suriname's weak enforcement of immigration policies means migrants who enter Suriname legally in search of livelihoods and remain in the country after their legal stay expires may be at risk of sex and labor trafficking. Migrant women and girls are especially at risk for sex trafficking in Suriname, including in brothels, massage parlors, hair salons, and illegal gold mining camps in Suriname's interior. Some migrant groups avoid seeking assistance from the authorities for fear of criminalization or deportation, making them vulnerable to traffickers.³⁴

Despite the known presence of human trafficking, the government faces significant challenges in addressing these crimes due to a lack of presence in mining regions, insufficient resources, and inadequate training.³⁵ As a result, most trafficking cases go unreported and uninvestigated.³⁶ Additionally, comprehensive, and official data on the extent of sex trafficking into Suriname and Nickerie, as well as on human rights violations against survivors, is lacking.

Human Rights Violations Against Prostituted Women

Due to the absence of large-scale, comprehensive research or statistical data, our knowledge about the current state of trafficking and sexual exploitation in Suriname presented here is derived from research carried out by DA&DA, reports from the 2000's and early 2010's, and grey sources like media reports. Most studies concur that prostitution takes place mainly at bars, pubs, or nightclubs serving as brothels. In 2001, the Stichting Maxi Linder Association (Paramaribo) reported that, although brothels are banned by law, the government tolerates their registration and functioning as "hotels", where women listed as "hostesses"

transported across national borders. Source: William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies (2020). Human Trafficking Trends in the Western Hemisphere. <https://wipcenter.org/document/human-trafficking-trends-in-the-western-hemisphere/>

³²CIA World Factbook (May 07, 2024). Suriname. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/suriname/#transnational-issues>

³³For more details on protection-sensitive regional migration management in the Americas, including entry and reception mechanisms, see: Center for Democracy in the Americas (March 31, 2020). Blueprint for Regional Migration (Public-Facing Version).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e3d7cf054f8264efecdf2ef/t/6070728b9b9b6f30538b9648/1617982092810/Final+Public+Blueprint+with+Cover+Page.pdf>

³⁴U.S. Department of State (2023). 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Suriname. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/suriname>

³⁵William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies (2020). Human Trafficking Trends in the Western Hemisphere. <https://wipcenter.org/document/human-trafficking-trends-in-the-western-hemisphere/>

³⁶Centre for Law and Justice (2021). Status of human rights in Suriname for the 39th session of the Universal Periodic Review. UPR Submission—Suriname—39th Session.

paid the club owner for her travel, medical expenses, and maintenance.³⁷ In the 2000's, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) reported that:

"In all cases, the set-up story is similar: Promised a decent job as a waitress or other position, women unwittingly sign up with a trafficker for assistance in coming to Paramaribo or Suriname's mining towns, only to find themselves caught in a trafficking ring upon arrival (...). Once sold to a club owner, however, the women themselves stand little chance of earning money to pay off so-called "debts" (for food, lodging, etc.) used to justify the deal."³⁸

Another study from 1999, specifically about sexual exploitation in mining towns, described that women exploited at the clubs near the mines were not allowed to leave the mining town, could not refuse clients, and were required to engage in as many daily sexual encounters as possible. The women interviewed for that research reported that the living conditions were significantly worse than in the city, due to robberies, lack of basic hygiene, malaria, isolation, conflicts, clients who did not pay, and experiences of physical and sexual violence.³⁹ Furthermore, a 2008 study reported that trafficked women had their passports confiscated and were constantly monitored. They were often subjected to physical violence and coercion, particularly until their debts towards their exploiters were paid off.⁴⁰ The women were frequently moved from one club to another or further inland. Additionally, since their passports were taken away, the women were reluctant to risk being expelled from the clubs. If a trafficked woman managed to escape, she would become an "illegal" (irregular) migrant. With nowhere to go, no passport, and no money, they often ended up on the streets, making it virtually impossible for them to return to their home countries.⁴¹

³⁷Stichting Maxi Linder Association (2001). In: Sodireitos and others (2008). A trinational study about Trafficking in Women from Brazil and the Dominican Republic to Suriname: A joint intervention. P. 44-47. <https://documentation.lastradainternational.org/doc-center/2142/a-trinational-study-about-trafficking-in-women-from-brazil-and-the-dominican-republic-to-suriname-a-joint-intervention>

³⁸PBS (September 25, 2003). Dying to Leave. Human Trafficking Worldwide: Suriname. <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/uncategorized/human-trafficking-worldwide-suriname/1462/>

³⁹ANTONIUS-SMITS, CHRISTEL C.F. et al. (1999). Gold and Commercial Sex: exploring the link between small-scale Gold Mining and commercial sex in the rainforest of Suriname. In: KEMPADOO, Kamala. Sun, sex and gold: Tourism and sex work in the Caribbean. Oxford: Rowman and Litterfield. In: Sodireitos and others (2008). A trinational study about Trafficking in Women from Brazil and the Dominican Republic to Suriname: A joint intervention. P. 44-47. <https://documentation.lastradainternational.org/doc-center/2142/a-trinational-study-about-trafficking-in-women-from-brazil-and-the-dominican-republic-to-suriname-a-joint-intervention>

⁴⁰These findings are based on interviews with trafficking women, employees of the Maxi Linder Association Foundation (SMLA), the Ministry of Labour, Technological Development and the Environment and the Ministry of Justice and Police. Van de Wal, Laura (2008). De ruimte voor vrouwenhandel in de Surinaamse samenleving (The space for trafficking in women in Surinamese society). OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis. Jaargang 27. https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/oso001200801_01/oso001200801_01_0007.php

⁴¹Ibidem.

Recent Progress in anti-trafficking and gender policy

In the past decade or so, Suriname has achieved significant progress in relation to anti-trafficking and gender equality policy and legal frameworks.

Suriname ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (the Palermo Protocol) in 2007, and adopted a National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking in April 2014. In 2015, the penal code was revised to address human trafficking, aligning it with the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, including protocols to prevent and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and against the smuggling of migrants by land, air, and sea. Additionally, police members from all four regions have received specialized training on this subject.⁴² The government has also conducted awareness-raising campaigns among women and girls in the interior, established a shelter for women and children's survivors of trafficking, and started to provide psychological counselling for them. In 2019 the government of Suriname has launched a national plan of action for the prevention and response to trafficking in persons under the pillars of "Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Partnership and Policy".⁴³

In terms of gender equality policy, due to the high rates of domestic violence in the District of Nickerie, the Bureau of Gender Affairs revitalized its branch office there in March 2016 to improve collaboration with stakeholders. Serving as a coordinating hub, this office supports the Gender Platform established in 2019. This platform, comprising government bodies, non-governmental organizations, and individuals, is responsible for identifying gender inequalities in Nickerie, proposing, and implementing actions, and monitoring and evaluating these initiatives.⁴⁴

Despite progress in the legal and policy framework, the government still has significant work to do in implementing these measures. This includes more vigorous efforts to investigate and prosecute traffickers, even government officials complicit in trafficking crimes, improving data collection on human trafficking

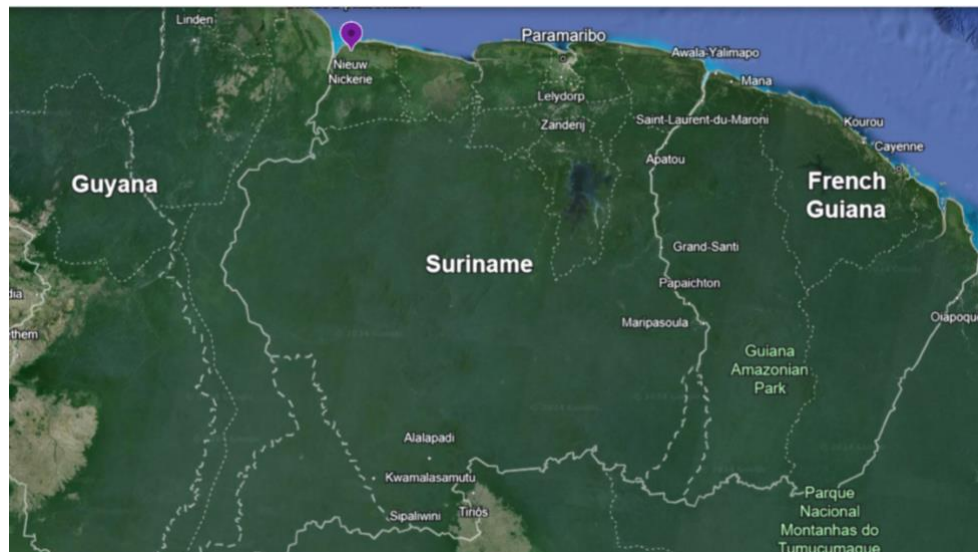
⁴²See the U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Reports for Suriname cited in this report; and UNHCR (2021). Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report Universal Periodic Review: 3rd Cycle, 39th Session. <https://www.refworld.org/policy/upr/unhcr/2021/en/123959>.

⁴³Ministry of Home Affairs, Bureau Gender Affairs. (2019, August). Suriname report: National review on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action + 25. Ministry of Home Affairs, Bureau Gender Affairs. P. 37. https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/informe_beijing25_suriname_final_0.pdf

⁴⁴ Ministry of Home Affairs of Suriname (May 2019). Suriname Report on the Implementation of the Montevideo Strategy October 2016 - May 2019. <https://gov.sr/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/suriname-report-on-montevideo-strategy.pdf>

and sexual exploitation, and enhancing identification, protection, and support for trafficking survivors. Additionally, there is a need to increase funding for anti-trafficking initiatives, particularly in remote areas.⁴⁵

The Continuum of Violence Against Women in Suriname: Exploitation, Marginalization, and Isolation



Suriname is located between French Guiana, Brazil, and Guyana. Nearly 80% of its territory is covered by rainforests, and its south is part of the Amazon Basin.

To understand why sex trafficking takes place in Suriname, it's important to note that illegal gold mining is a booming industry. Suriname's economy is driven by its abundant natural resources, with mining accounting for nearly half of public sector revenue and gold representing more than three quarters of total exports.⁴⁶ When including illegal small-scale gold mining (the so-called *garimpos*), the actual gold production rate in Suriname is significantly higher, as illegal mining accounts for the majority of gold mining

⁴⁵This paragraph is an adaptation of U.S. Department of State (2023). 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report: Suriname. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/suriname>; and UNHCR (2021). Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report Universal Periodic Review: 3rd Cycle, 39th Session. <https://www.refworld.org/policy/upr/unhcr/2021/en/123959>.

⁴⁶The World Bank (Apr 17, 2024). The World Bank In Suriname. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/suriname/overview>

activities in the country.⁴⁷ The term *garimpos* refers to illegal artisanal and small-scale gold mining camps in the Amazon Basin (comprising Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela and French Guiana), which represent an environmental crime sustained by national and transnational organized crime networks involved in narcotics, arms and human trafficking.⁴⁸ It is estimated that up to 60% of miners in Suriname are Brazilian *garimpeiros*.⁴⁹

While there is no official, comprehensive quantitative or qualitative data on the extent of sex trafficking or sexual exploitation in Nickerie specifically, it is recognized that illegal small-scale gold mining contributes to further human rights violations in Suriname, including child labor, sexual slavery, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking.⁵⁰ The concentration of illegal mines, *garimpeiros*, and other auxiliary workers (e.g., security staff) in certain areas of the country attacks small businesses that cater for them such as shop- and bar/pub-owners, operators of gold buying houses, and brothels.⁵¹ Besides women, children are also subjected to commercial sexual exploitation in the areas adjacent to *garimpos*, sometimes as a result of human trafficking.⁵²

For example, Nieuw-Nickerie, the capital city of Nickerie, located on the north-west coast of Suriname, borders the Atlantic Ocean to the north and Guyana to the west. It serves as a major hub for smuggling goods, drugs, weapons, and humans by criminal organizations. The district's sparse population was 34,233 with a density of 6 people per square kilometer in 2012. Nickerie is connected to Guyana by an official ferry, but people from both countries frequently use unofficial crossings via small speedboats (known as the Back Track route).⁵³ Local authorities have reported extensive smuggling of goods, drugs, weapons, and involvement in human trafficking along this route.⁵⁴ DA&DA interviews with the police revealed that while they are aware of the routes used by criminal organizations, they lack the officers and equipment needed for effective intervention. In September 2023, a police raid at a club in Nickerie uncovered 13 Venezuelan and Cuban women being forced into prostitution. The Trafficking In Persons (TIP) unit and the Combating

⁴⁷The Amazon Conservation Team (2015). Amazon Gold Rush: Gold Mining in Suriname. <https://www.amazonteam.org/maps/suriname-gold/>

⁴⁸Igarapé Institute & Interpol (December 2021). Guidance note On combating Environmental Crime. <https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2021-12-08-Illegal-mining-guide-EN.pdf>

⁴⁹The Amazon Conservation Team (2015). Amazon Gold Rush: Gold Mining in Suriname. <https://www.amazonteam.org/maps/suriname-gold/>

⁵⁰Organization of American States (OAS) (2023). On the trail of illicit gold proceeds: strengthening the fight against illegal mining finances: Suriname. P. 49. <https://www.oas.org/en/sms/dtoc/docs/suriname-eng-digital.pdf>

⁵¹ de Theije, M., & Heemskerk, M. (2009). Moving Frontiers in the Amazon: Brazilian Small-Scale Gold Miners in Suriname. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 0(87), 5-25. <https://doi.org/10.18352/erlacs.9600>

⁵²Department of Labor (2022). 2022 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Suriname. https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2022/Suriname.pdf

⁵³Kaieteur News (Oct 23, 2022). Suriname legalizes illegal border crossing with Guyana. <https://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2022/10/23/suriname-legalizes-illegal-border-crossing-with-guyana/>

⁵⁴Caribbean National Weekly (October 23, 2022). Suriname legalizes illegal border crossing with Guyana. <https://www.caribbeannationalweekly.com/news/caribbean-news/suriname-legalizes-illegal-border-crossing-with-guyana/>

Serious Crime (BZC) arrested five suspects linked to a human trafficking ring.⁵⁵ The police reported that these women were deceived into coming to Suriname and coerced into paying for the rooms where they served clients, with all earnings going directly to the club owner.⁵⁶

Several government representatives interviewed by DA&DA acknowledged that some pubs, known to the government for years, are used for prostitution and trafficking. Although the government attempts to collect evidence for police raids, finding solid proof remains a challenge to prosecution efforts. Criminal organizations often bribe police officers, who in turn provide information about planned raids, ensuring that any evidence is cleared away before the police arrive. Additionally, clubs often obtain licenses as restaurants but also maintain rooms where women are hidden and subjected to sexual exploitation. The traffickers are from various locations, but the club owners are typically Surinamese. This situation is exacerbated by widespread corruption at lower levels of enforcement and governance.

The continuum of violence against sexually exploited migrant women in Suriname.

Women by DA&DA interviewed at brothels close to a garimpo ([Nasson](#)), and in Albina, in Nickerie, and in Paramaribo, shared some insights into the sexual exploitation experience. Based on their accounts, we learn that gender-based violence (GBV) has been pervasive, affecting every aspect of their lives. Virtually all the women interviewed have experienced gender-based violence from their previous partners in their countries of origin, new partners and/or from exploiters or clients while in Suriname. Besides economic need, many among them fled domestic abuse against them and/or their children. Once in Suriname, the women interviewed live in a state of social marginalization and isolation, and all have experienced coercive control, either by their exploiters, clients, or partners. Coercive and controlling behavior is pervasive and ongoing, permeating the whole life of women who experience it.⁵⁷ Coercive control is a pattern of behavior whereby perpetrators deliberately isolate their victims and inflict harm to control them, and can include financial and economic abuse, sexual abuse, physical violence, threats, intimidation, stalking, monitoring, emotional abuse, and manipulation.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Caribbean National Weekly (October 30, 2023). Human trafficking raid: 13 women rescued in Suriname operation. <https://www.caribbeannationalweekly.com/news/caribbean-news/human-trafficking-raid-13-women-rescued-in-suriname-operation/>

⁵⁶Caribbean Loop News (October 30, 2023). Suriname: Police free sex workers from Cuba and Venezuela. <https://caribbean.loopnews.com/content/suriname-police-free-sex-workers-cuba-and-venezuela>

⁵⁷United Nations (N/D). What Is Domestic Abuse? [Web page]. <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse>

⁵⁸The concept of coercive control is typically used to describe the power dynamics between the perpetrator and their victim(s) in intimate partner violence cases. See: Women's Aid (2016). Nineteen Child Homicides. P. 25-27. <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Child-First-Nineteen-Child-Homicides-Report.pdf>; Monckton Smith, J. (2020). Intimate Partner Femicide: Using Foucauldian Analysis to Track an Eight Stage Progression to Homicide. *Violence Against Women*, 26(11), 1267–1285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801219863876>

Sexual exploitation, sexual violence and discrimination against the women interviewed are not isolated events, but interconnected and part of a continuum of violence that women and girls endure throughout their lives, encompassing sexual, physical, psychological, emotional, and economic abuse (e.g., being exposed to child abuse, domestic abuse, rape across their lives).⁵⁹ This violence is rooted in deep-seated power imbalances, perpetuated by sexual violence and legitimized rape culture. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a historical, social, cultural, and political phenomenon, which is both the cause and consequence of unequal power relations between men and women.⁶⁰ Based on international human rights bodies and legislations, VAWG is a “(...) *manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women and to the prevention of women’s full advancement.*”⁶¹ In other words, sexual violence against women, and the rape culture that legitimizes it, also stem from profound power imbalances.

The oppression of the women in focus in this report experience is intersectional in nature,⁶² given that women who have been trafficked, or who stayed in Suriname after being smuggled, and experienced sexual exploitation typically affected by other forms of oppression. Certain characteristics such as migration status, race or ethnicity, and some contextual factors like poverty and homelessness, coupled with their status as prostituted women, increase their vulnerability to both violence and discrimination, such as racism, including language racism, xenophobia, aporophobia (hatred towards the poor), etc.

Most of the women surveyed and/or interviewed migrated to Suriname and remained in conditions of sexual exploitation primarily for economic need, often to financially support their children or parents who were left behind in their home country and/or any children living with them in Suriname. While some of them were deceived into believing they would work in the service sector, others used smuggling networks to migrate. The latter were aware that they would be entering into prostitution once they arrived but hoped to find different employment opportunities once in the country. Others initially sought different types of work after arriving in Suriname but were unable to fully integrate economically, so ultimately resorted to prostitution as a means of survival, or to make ends meet or maintain their relatives back home.

One of the women interviewed explained that, at her country of origin, the trafficker promised she would work in a water park, but actually, *“at the beginning, I was kidnapped. We were five Dominicans and five Venezuelans in a nightclub in Paramaribo. We worked and I had to leave all the money there to pay my*

⁵⁹This is an adaptation from: UN Women (2020). Bridging the Gap: Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH). <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Discussion-paper-Sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-harassment-SEAH-en.pdf>

⁶⁰ Council of Europe (2008). Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services. P. 36. [https://www.coe.int/t/dg2/equality/domesticviolencecampaign/Source/EG-VAW-CONF\(2007\)Study%20rev.en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg2/equality/domesticviolencecampaign/Source/EG-VAW-CONF(2007)Study%20rev.en.pdf); WAVE (2004). Away from violence. Guidelines for setting up and running a women's refuge. P. 8, 20. [http://files.wave-network.org/trainingmanuals/Away from Violence 2004 English.pdf](http://files.wave-network.org/trainingmanuals/Away%20from%20Violence%202004%20English.pdf)

⁶¹ United Nations (1994). Declaration on the elimination of violence against women. New York: United Nations Dept.

⁶²Crenshaw, Kimberly (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. Stanford Law Review, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>

'debt' (...)." She's a survivor of physical violence by her partners (both in her country of origin and Suriname). Her view was that men working in the *garimpo* become more violent due to the harsh living and working conditions they endure, often over long periods without returning to their home cities.⁶³

Many interviewees agreed that the severe environment, coupled with harsh living conditions and exploitation in the mining areas, make them vulnerable to various forms of gender-based violence and health problems. The absence of safe drinking water and basic healthcare, combined with exposure to violence from miners and the inability to seek protection from government officials, result in significant physical and mental health issues.

All the women interviewed across various locations were affected by sexually transmitted diseases or other health conditions. These issues were primarily due to their unsanitary living environments, social isolation, and limited access to healthcare and basic hygiene necessities, compounded by the absence of regular medical check-ups and healthcare. The **most pressing needs** identified include healthcare, food, medication, psychological support, and financial assistance for childcare. Another primary need is returning safely to their home countries. Many of them are unable to do so because they were still indebted to their smugglers or because they preferred saving money for goals they hoped to achieve once they returned home, such as starting a small business and provide their children with better opportunities.

Ensuring Equal Access to Rights

Based on DA&DA's research, it is crucial to provide survivors of sexual exploitation in Suriname with specialist support services to escape exploitation and secure safe, dignified livelihoods. **Key recommendations** to ensure equal access to human rights include:

- **Legislation and Abolitionism.** It is recommended that the government enact robust legislation to control violence and trafficking effectively, even if such activities are legalized. This includes strict monitoring and enforcement mechanisms and monitor an adequate policy development, which goes together with the implementation of legislation and is subject to having improved data collection to support effectiveness and monitoring.
- **Migration Desk.** Set up a migration desk to assist newcomers upon arrival with orientation and language courses and provide support for those wishing to return to their home countries, as legal alternatives to deportation. Additionally, acknowledge and address the lack of formal representation (such as an embassy) for the Dominican Republic in Suriname to better support Dominican nationals.

⁶³Interview with a woman at a brothel close to a *garimpo*.

- **Health Services and Protection.** Establish protective services that prioritize access to essential health care, including medications, gynecological services, and psychological support. These services should be integral to the overall protection framework;⁶⁴
- **Specialist support services.** Specialist comprehensive support services aim at the healing and empowerment of survivors to enable them to “be fully rehabilitated and reintegrated back into the society”.⁶⁵ They vary from one country to another, but the Council of Europe defines them as specialist service delivery by organizations (NGOs or governmental agencies) with expertise in VAWG aimed to create a safe environment for the survivor, seek justice, and undo the harms of violence.⁶⁶ Some examples of support services provided are specialist medical and psychological support; peer support groups⁶⁷; other therapeutic services by trained professional therapists; legal assistance; support for survivors in their role as mothers; emergency shelters; support with securing post-shelter housing, financial matters, employment and training; specialized services for women with disabilities; and support to break isolation (access to culture, sports, and leisure).^{68,69} Besides psycho-social support, medical care, support groups, and legal counseling to report and prosecute their aggressors in court (whenever relevant), survivors require support to find alternative livelihoods and become economically self-reliant in the long term.
- **Intersectional responses.** Effective responses for survivors need to consider the intersectional nature of the oppression they experience. Under the principle of non-discrimination, specialized services should be accessible to all women and girls regardless of where they live, their gender or ethnic identity, migration status, gender orientation, membership to the LGBTQ+ community, and/or disability status, etc. In practice, non-discrimination means services need to be physically accessible (for example, located both in large cities and rural areas)⁷⁰; economically accessible (offering free services), and linguistically accessible (information is provided in various formats to be accessible for women and girls who are illiterate or visually impaired);⁷¹

⁶⁴UNHCR (2016). The 10-Point Plan in Action, 2016 Update, Chapter 5: Mechanisms for Screening and Referral. P. 121. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/10-point-plan-action-2016-update-chapter-5-mechanisms-screening-and-referral>

⁶⁵UN Women, Irish Aid (2016). Shelters for women and girls who are survivors of violence in Ethiopia. P. 3. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2016/Shelters-for-Survivors-of-Violence-Ethiopia.pdf>

⁶⁶Council of Europe (2008). Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services. P. 10. [https://www.coe.int/t/dg2/equality/domesticviolencecampaign/Source/EG-VAW-CONF\(2007\)Study%20rev.en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg2/equality/domesticviolencecampaign/Source/EG-VAW-CONF(2007)Study%20rev.en.pdf)

⁶⁷United Nations General Assembly (2006). In-depth Study on all forms of Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary General. Geneva, United Nations. P. 76, 90-93. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/SGstudyvaw.htm>

⁶⁸UN Women, Irish Aid (2016). Shelters for women and girls who are survivors of violence in Ethiopia. P. 11. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2016/shelters-for-survivors-of-violence-ethiopia.pdf?la=en&vs=5120>

⁶⁹WAVE (2017). WAVE Handbook. Prevention and Support Standards for Women Survivors of Violence. P. 37. http://files.wave-network.org/trainingmanuals/WAVE_Handbook_2017.pdf

⁷⁰N/A (1 February 2006). Shelters and Safehouses. Stop Violence Against Women. https://www.stopvaw.org/shelters_and_safehouses

⁷¹UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP and UNODC (latest version: 2022). Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence. P. 14. <https://www.unfpa.org/essential-services-package-women-and-girls-subject-violence>

- **Non-discrimination and inclusion.** Considering most of the women in focus are (both regular and irregular) migrants, services should also be culturally appropriate and sensitive. This means services should, to the extent possible, respond to each woman and girl’s individual circumstances and experiences, considering their age, identity, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, and language preferences; and provide appropriate services to women exposed to face multiple forms of discrimination due to their class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and bias against women who are sexually exploited.⁷²
- **Preventive measures.** Such as increasing resources and proficient equipment, i.e., to monitor the borders and work of TIP.
- **Awareness and education.** It is of key importance to create an environment of non-discrimination to promote the effectiveness of support and services including awareness of service providers (public officers). Community awareness is necessary to promote civil society response and support, lobby, and advocacy.

⁷²UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP and UNODC (latest version: 2022). Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence. P. 13. <https://www.unfpa.org/essential-services-package-women-and-girls-subject-violence>



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