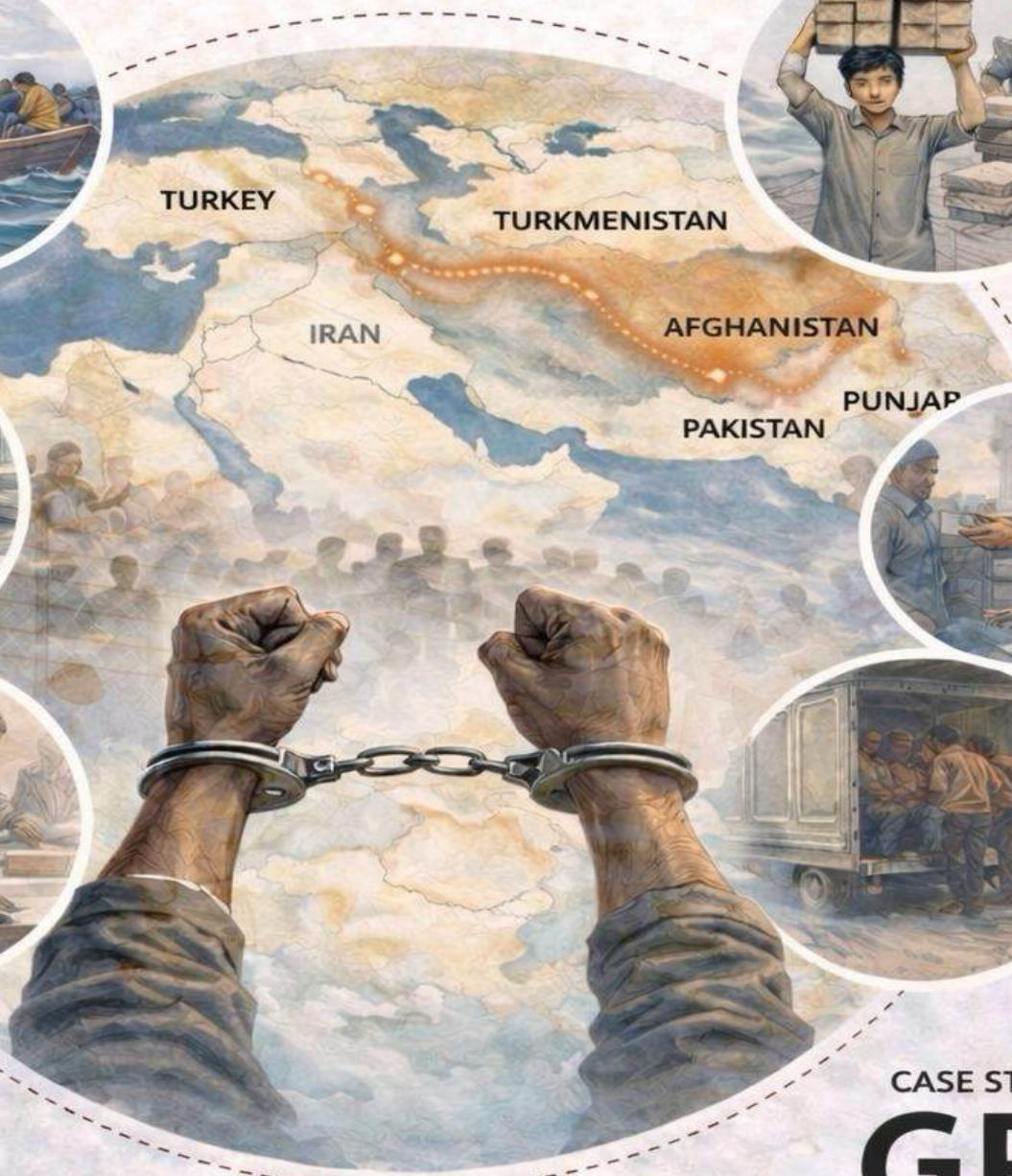


Human Trafficking in Punjab

A case study of M.B. DIN district



CASE STUDY BY

GRI

GOVERNANCE RESEARCH
INSTITUTE PAKISTAN

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This study is authored by Wasim Riaz Khan, with research and analysis conducted under the auspices of the Governance Research Institute Pakistan.

Acronyms

Acronym	Full Form
AHTC	Anti-Human Trafficking Cell
DPO	District Police Officer
MB DIN / M.B. Din	Mandi Bahauddin District
FIA	Federal Investigation Agency
IB	Intelligence Bureau
EOBI	Employees Old-Age Benefits Institution
USEFP	United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan
US	United States
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
ILO	International Labour Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
PKR	Pakistani Rupee
MPA	Member of Provincial Assembly
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
HR	Human Rights
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
AIG	Additional Inspector General
R&D	Research and Development
PSP	Police Service of Pakistan

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1. Abstract

Human trafficking remains a critical governance and human security challenge in Pakistan, particularly in Punjab, where irregular migration and informal labour exploitation intersect. This case study examines the dynamics of trafficking in district Mandi Bahauddin over the period from 1 November 2024 to 1 November 2025 and evaluates the impact of a localized intervention led by a district-level Anti-Human Trafficking Cell (AHTC).

At the outset, the district faced significant challenges related to irregular migration, forced labour, child labour, and the exploitation of vulnerable groups. A large number of individuals, particularly young men, were trafficked through dangerous land and sea routes toward Europe and the Middle East, often through deception, financial exploitation, and coercion by smuggling networks. Within the district, exploitative practices were also prevalent in brick kilns, informal workshops, and among marginalized communities.

Using field-based diagnostics, surveys, and multi-sectoral analysis, the study identifies trafficking as a structurally embedded phenomenon driven by socio-economic vulnerability, information asymmetry, and institutional fragmentation. In response, the establishment of the AHTC enabled targeted, evidence-based, and coordinated interventions, including regulatory action against traffickers and travel agencies, enforcement of labour protections, victim support measures, and awareness campaigns.

The findings demonstrate that such interventions can disrupt recruitment networks, reduce exploitation in high-risk sectors, and improve reporting and public trust. However, these gains remain fragile in the absence of systemic integration and long-term economic interventions. The study concludes that sustainable anti-trafficking outcomes require a shift from reactive enforcement to integrated governance approaches combining law enforcement, social protection, economic resilience, and institutional coordination.

Keywords: Human Trafficking; Irregular Migration; Governance; Punjab; Pakistan; Labour Exploitation; Evidence-Based Policing; Public Policy; Vulnerability; Institutional Reform

2. Introduction

Human Trafficking is a form of organised crime which involves the exploitation of people through deception, coercion or abuse of vulnerability. It involves forced labour, sexual exploitation, child labour and other forms of practices that affect the basic human rights. Globally, trafficking is associated with poverty, unemployment, poor governance and lack of access to justice.

As per Walk Free Foundation (2023), there are 2.3 million people in Pakistan who are trapped in modern slavery in Pakistan at any given time. In Pakistan, human trafficking has manifested in several forms as a result of economic pressure and labour migration on a large scale. Punjab province contributes a large share of the trafficking cases due to huge population and economic inequalities. In this regard, Mandi Bahauddin has become a high-risk area, especially for illegal international migration. Many people living here consider migration to be the only means to escape poverty and stagnation in social life (UNODC, 2023). Once they leave the district, their exploitation starts. As per IOM's Returnees Longitudinal Survey, 10 percent of all returnees from Punjab belonged to MD Din district.

Traffickers exploit this desire by making false promises of jobs and safe passage to the other side of the world. Victims are charged extremely high prices and brought through insecure routes. Many are subject to violence, detention and extortion during transit. Families are often impoverished because they lose their savings and become even poorer. Boat tragedies and deaths in foreign countries have been a source of long-term trauma in the district.

Inside the district, exploitation is done in the informal sectors of labour. Brick kiln workers are caught in debt cycles which are passed from generation to generation. Children work in unsafe conditions in workshops instead of going to school. Transgender people experience social exclusion and are exposed to sexual exploitation and violence.

3.Scene Setter: Situation in Mandi Bahauddin at the Start of the Period

On 1 November, 2024, there were serious challenges faced by the district Mandi Bahauddin with regard to human trafficking. The district was ranked among the top districts in Pakistan with the largest number of trafficking incidents. An estimated 1100 to 1200 people were leaving the district each year, many became victims of exploitation. Most of them were from poor families with little education and job opportunities. Therefore, illegal migration was the most visible and dangerous type of trafficking. The main route ran through Balochistan into Iran, then Turkey and Europe. Victims were transported in unsafe vehicles and then forced to cross mountainous border areas on foot. During these travels, many were kidnapped by armed groups. Families were forced to pay substantial ransom, often by selling land or obtaining loans.



Figure 1 - route

Secondary routes were partial legal travel by visit visas to other countries like Turkey, Libya, or the United Arab Emirates. From there, victims were smuggled on by sea or land. Several fatal boat

cases earlier in year 2024 had a deep impact on local communities. Many families were still looking for missing family members or mourning over the deaths.

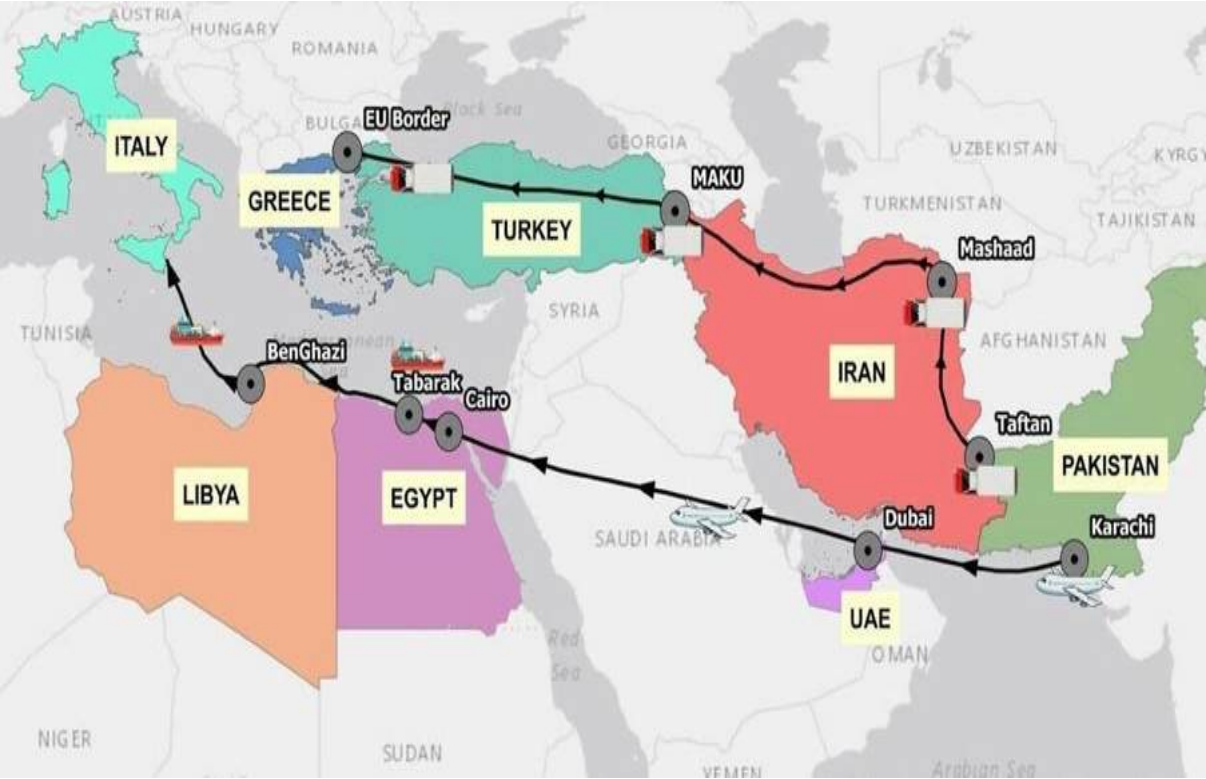


Figure 2 - Route 2

Within the district, exploitation was rife. Brick kiln workers lived in debt bondage, had no written contracts or social security. Child labour was there in workshops, where the children worked long hours in unsafe conditions. Awareness about labour rights was very low.

The transgender community was extremely marginalized. Many people were forced into sex work because of the lack of other means of survival. Access to healthcare and legal protection was restricted.

Institutional weaknesses contributed to the problem. Illegal travel agencies were not regulated. There was no system of centralized reporting. Victims had a lack of faith in law enforcement. There was little coordination between government departments.

4. Assessment of the Situation in District MBD and Action Plan

4.1 Approach of the Assessment

At the start of the intervention period, a well-planned approach towards assessment of human trafficking was established. The goal was to know the magnitude, patterns and root causes of human trafficking in the district. In this regard, a dedicated Anti Human Trafficking cell (AHTC) was established which was headed by the DPO himself. Rather than making secondary reports or assumptions, the Cell was focused on direct engagement with affected groups and high-risk sectors.

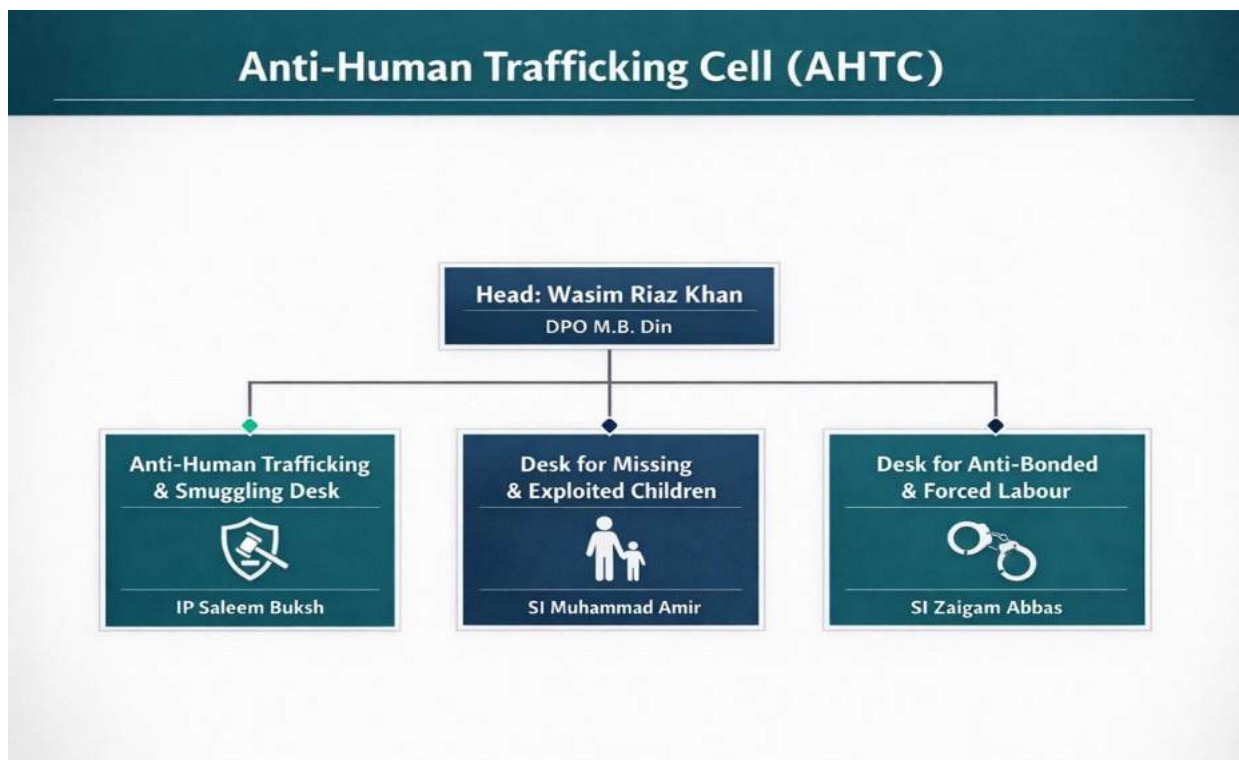


Figure 3 - Composition of AHTC

Field surveys, interviews and inspections were employed as the primary assessment tools. These methods enabled the gathering of first-hand information from victims etc.

The assessment addressed issues of illegal migration, forced Labour, child Labour, sexual exploitation and institutional gaps. The findings were the basis of a realistic and local action plan.

4.2 Assessments

4.2.1 Survey of Illegal Migration and “Dunky” Victims

A detailed survey was conducted with 49 victims of illegal migration; commonly known as dunky victims. Questionnaires were used to obtain information on the journey taken, financial arrangements and experiences during migration etc.

Most of the respondents said they were recruited by local agents who promised them safe travel and work abroad. The price tag was between PKR 3 to 4 million in multiple stages. Victims described extreme physical hardship, detention, kidnapping and ransom demands while in transit. Several had escaped deaths along the route.

4.2.2 Survey of Brick Kilns and Forced Labour

Out of 230 brick-kilns in operation in the district, 44 were surveyed to evaluate conditions of labourers and labour exploitation patterns. The findings showed deep-rooted forced Labour practices.

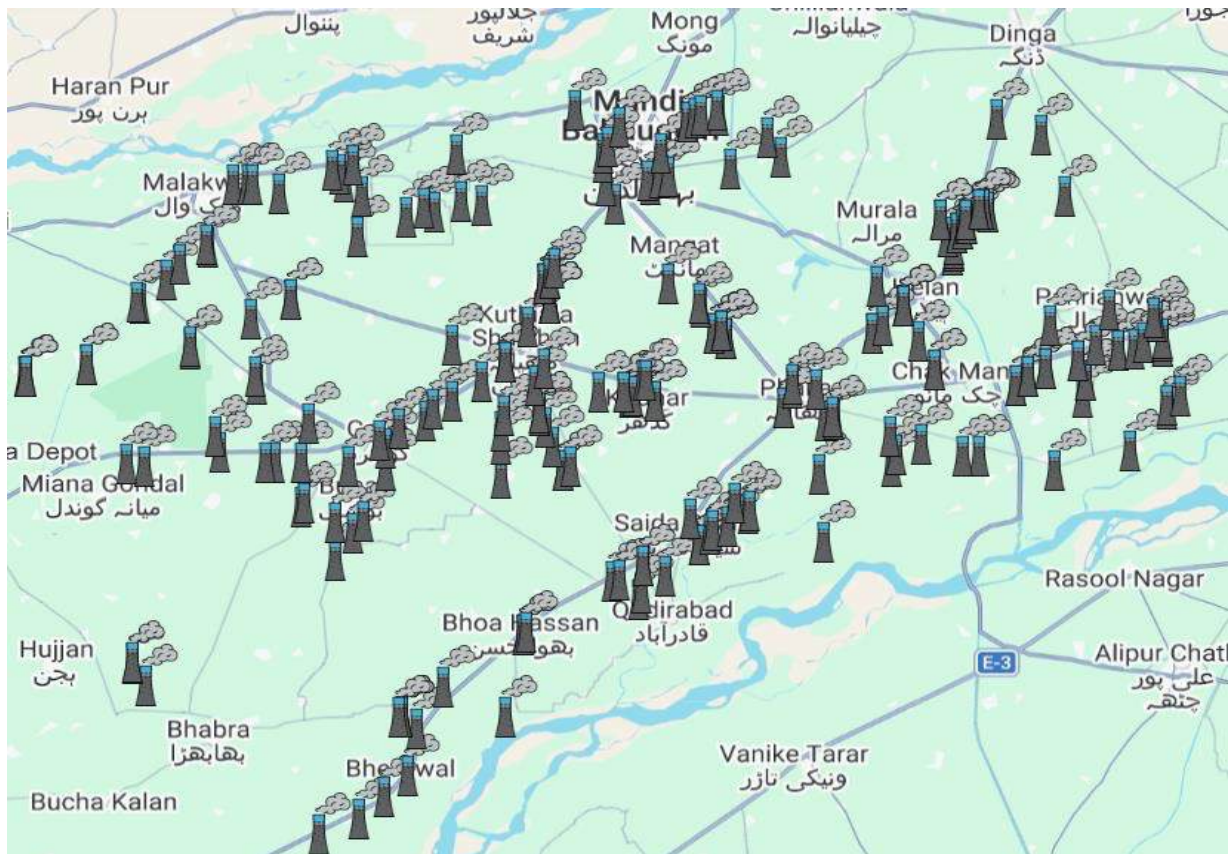


Figure 4 - Survey of Brick Kilns

89 Percent of workers were found to be in debt bondage. Advance payments had trapped entire families. 98 percent of the workers did not even know about minimum wage laws or Labour rights. Literacy levels were extremely low with 95 percent of the workers unable to read or write.

Workers did not have written agreements or social security. Children were often involved in the production of bricks in order to help their families.



Figure 5 - Field visits to brick kilns and interaction with Labour families

4.2.3 Survey of Workshops and Child Labour

A total of 116 workshops were surveyed to determine child Labour and Labour exploitation. Many workshops employed kids in mechanical, electrical and manufacturing work. Children worked under unsafe conditions and often over long hours in physically dangerous environments.

Parents often considered child Labour necessary for survival. The school attendance of working children was very poor. Employers had low level of awareness in child protection laws.



Figure 6 - Field Visit to Workshops

4.2.4 Survey of Travel Agencies

The assessment identified 119 registered and 29 unregistered travel agencies that were operating in the district. Illegal agencies were found as a major source of fraudulent migration schemes. These agencies had no transparency, did not show their staff details and made false promises in regards to visas and work. Public awareness about legal procedures for traveling was limited. In addition, there were multiple agents operating in this regard.



Figure 7 - Awareness in Travel Agencies

4.2.5 Survey of Transgender Community and Sexual Exploitation

MB Din had total population of 99 transgender individuals who identified themselves so. They were interviewed to determine their vulnerabilities to trafficking and sexual exploitation. Eleven of them spoke of coercion, violence and health risks. Medical examination of 45 transgenders conducted to determine any health risk.

Lack of alternative livelihood options compelled many to high-risk sexual work. Fear of social stigma prevented abuse reporting.



Figure 8 - Engagement sessions with transgender individuals

4.3 Action Plan and Interventions

Based on the results of the assessment, the feedback and effective input from AHTC an action plan was executed. The plan considered prevention, protection and enforcement in an integrated way.

4.3.1 Law Enforcement and Regulatory Measures

Criminal cases were registered against identified traffickers and facilitators. Known smugglers were interviewed, warned and documented. Illegal travel agencies were given notices and instructed within a time to do registration or to stop operations.

Standard Operating Procedures were introduced for travel agencies. These included mandatory display of employee lists, licensing information and public advisories against fraud.

4.3.2 Victim Support, Rescue, and Rehabilitation

Victim support was essential to all the efforts to rebuild the trust with the affected communities. Meetings were held with the families of victims of boat tragedies in Morocco and Greece, in order to provide emotional support and advice.

Referrals were made to relevant departments for medical care, legal assistance and social welfare support.

4.3.3 Labour Rights Enforcement at Brick Kilns

Brick kiln owners were called for meeting in DPO office. It was found that they were paying much less than the minimum wages as notified by the govt of Punjab. They committed to immediately enhance the minimum wages by 20 percent. Workers for the first time were registered with the Employees Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI) in the district.



Figure 9 - Meetings with brick kiln owners and Labour department officials

4.3.4 Ending Child Labour and Admission into Schools

Identifying children during surveys at the workshops, those children were withdrawn from labour. Coordination with the child protection authorities allowed for enrollment into education. Parents were counseled on the long-term benefits of education.



Figure 10 - Children rescued from Labour and admitted into schools

4.3.5 Awareness and Capacity Building

Awareness campaigns were carried out in schools, colleges, universities for educating youth on the risks of trafficking and safe migration. Public advisories were posted at hospitals, parks, educational institutions and other public places. Training sessions were conducted for frontline officers for better victim identification and response.



Figure 11 - Awareness sessions in educational institutions

4.3.6 Institutional Partnerships

Strong coordination was made with the Federal Investigation Agency, Intelligence Bureau, Labour Department, Child Protection Bureau and Social Welfare Department. This led to an improved information sharing, joint inspections and referral mechanisms. In addition district level monitoring committee was also activated so that all agencies have synchronized efforts and outcome.



Figure 12 - Activating District Monitoring Committees

4.3.7 Digital Innovation: Bahifazat Platform

Digital intervention was also made. The Bahifazat.com platform came with a unified reporting and awareness system. The mobile application enabled citizens to report anonymously about trafficking, smuggling and exploitation. This also offered access to helplines, awareness material and updates. This digital tool lowered barriers to reporting as well as boosted early detection.

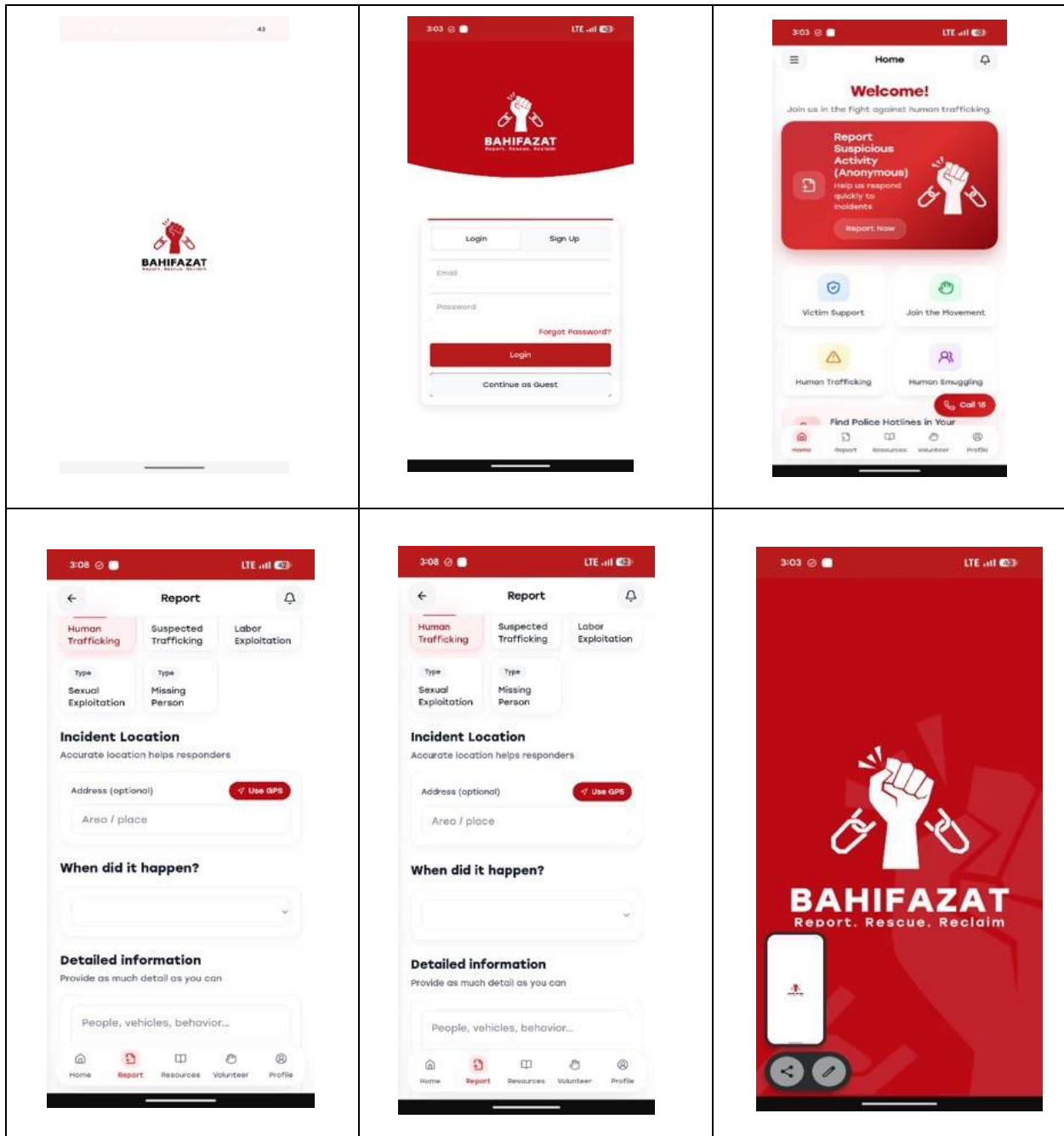


Figure 13 - Bahifazat mobile application interface

4.4 Limitations

This study offers a valuable account of district-level anti-human trafficking interventions; however, several limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting its findings and assessing its broader applicability.

First, the study is primarily descriptive in nature and does not employ a fully specified research design. While it draws on primary data through surveys, interviews, and field inspections, it does not provide sufficient detail on sampling strategies, respondent selection, instrument development, or procedures for ensuring reliability and validity. This limits the reproducibility of the study and constrains the generalizability of its findings beyond the specific context examined.

Second, the analysis does not incorporate a rigorous impact evaluation framework. Although the study reports improvements in awareness, reporting behavior, institutional coordination, and deterrence, these outcomes are not substantiated through systematically collected baseline and endline data, longitudinal analysis, or statistically verifiable indicators. The absence of quantified outcome measures—such as prosecution and conviction rates, victim rehabilitation outcomes, or usage metrics for digital reporting tools—restricts the ability to establish causal attribution between the interventions and observed changes.

Third, the study adopts a broad conceptual scope that encompasses multiple forms of exploitation, including irregular migration, migrant smuggling, bonded labour, child labour, and sexual exploitation. While these phenomena are often interconnected in practice, they are analytically and legally distinct. The lack of clear definitional boundaries and operational categorization may introduce conceptual ambiguity and complicate alignment with established international frameworks on trafficking in persons.

Fourth, the absence of a comparative or counterfactual design limits the study's internal and external validity. Without benchmarking against comparable districts, pre-intervention trends, or control settings, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of the intervention from broader socio-economic, regulatory, or enforcement dynamics. This constrains the strength of claims regarding effectiveness and scalability.

Finally, while the study advances a compelling case for replication, it does not fully articulate the operational, institutional, and financial parameters required for scaling the model. The absence of

detailed information on resource requirements, implementation costs, staffing structures, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and sustainability mechanisms limits its utility as a transferable policy model.

Taken together, these limitations suggest that, while the study contributes important field-based insights, its conclusions should be interpreted with caution. Future research would benefit from a more rigorous methodological framework, clearer conceptual delineation, systematic outcome measurement, and incorporation of comparative and longitudinal analysis to strengthen the evidence base for anti-trafficking interventions.

5. Analysis of the Initiatives and Their Impacts

The initiatives that were implemented in district Mandi Bahauddin, over the period from November 2024 to November 2025 are analysed using a problem - response - outcome framework that is supported by a SWOT analytical tool. This combined approach meant that a focused assessment of effectiveness can be made.

5.1 SWOT Based Overall Analysis

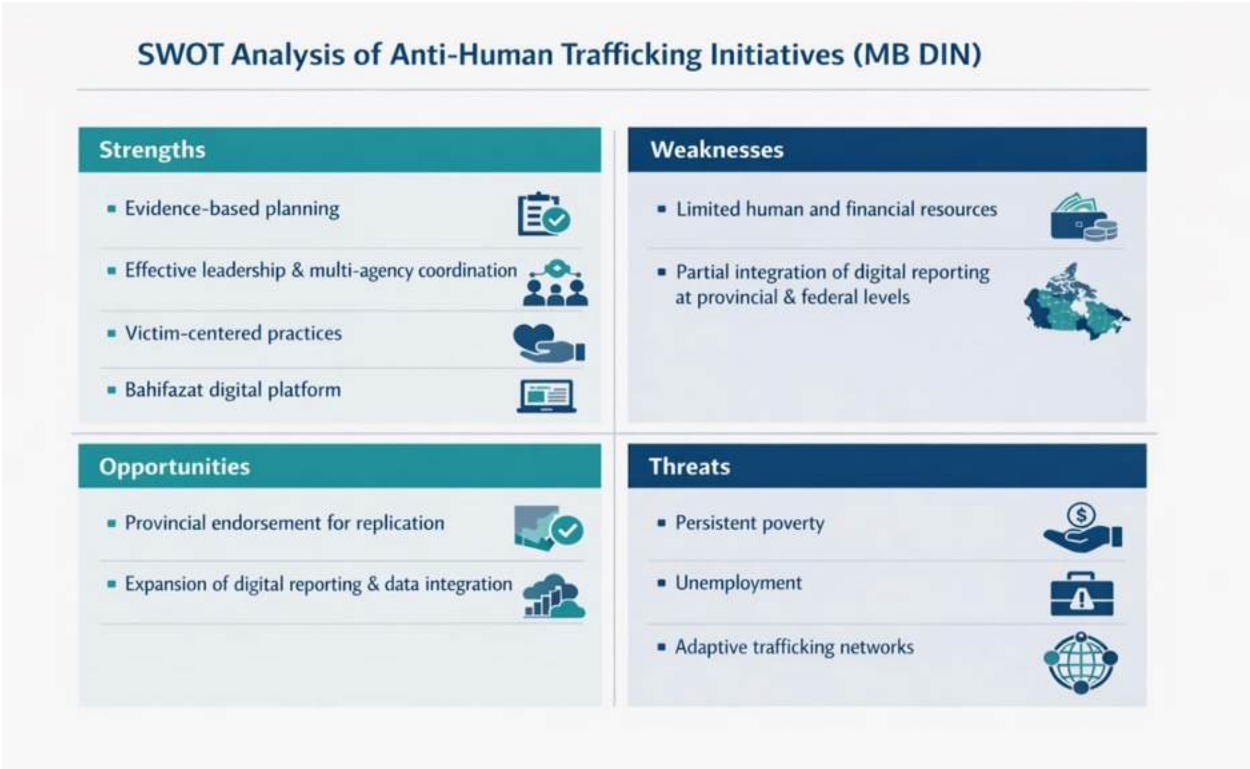


Figure 14 - SWOT Based Overall Analysis

Overall, the results of the analysis indicate that the MB DIN initiative was able to produce measurable institutional and social impact and provides a credible and scalable model for anti-human trafficking interventions when sustained over time.

5.2 Impacts on the Networks of Illegal Migration and Trafficking

Regulation of travel agencies and direct interaction with known smugglers broke up recruitment networks in the area. Inspections, notices and enforcement measures developed deterrence. Public advisories helped enhance caution among families that were contemplating migration.

Post-intervention victim interviews demonstrated enhanced knowledge of the legal process of travel and the risks. While the economic pressure to migrate was still there, the decision-making process became more informed. The increase in early reporting of suspected fraud shows that people were beginning to have faith in the mechanisms of law enforcement.

5.3 Forced Labour, Child Exploitation and Vulnerable Groups Impact

Labour interventions at brick kilns resulted in structural change Enforcement of minimum wages and registration of workers with EOBI was challenging the long-standing debt cycles. Although slow, there was progress and workers got formal recognition and access to social protection for the first time.

Withdrawal of children from workshops and their linkage with education reduced exposure to hazardous work. Counseling of parents helped to bring about gradual changes in the attitude towards child work and schooling.

Targeted engagement with transgender people and sex workers brought into open view sexual exploitation previously hidden. Medical support, counselling and respectful interaction led to a reduction in fear of authorities and more reports.

5.4 Acknowledgment by US Consulate Lahore and USEFP

The effect of these initiatives was acknowledged formally in many different levels. A United States Consulate delegation visited the Anti-Human Trafficking Cell and recognised their victim centered and preventive approach.



Figure 15 - U.S. Consulate Visit of US Consulate officials to AHTC, MB DIN

The model was also acknowledged and efforts were recognized by USEFP as well in their publications.





Combating Human Trafficking in Pakistan



United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan 53m · 🌐

Humphrey fellow and District Police Officer, Wasim Riaz, is actively combating human trafficking in Pakistan. Since establishing the Anti-Human Trafficking Cell (AHTC) in December 2024, he has made significant progress in protecting victims' rights and preventing trafficking in Mandi Bahauddin and the surrounding districts of Punjab.

His efforts have led to the rescue of over 70 children from child labor, ensuring they have access to education while dismantling the networks involved in human trafficking. Wasim has also launched Bahifazat, an initiative that utilizes technology and community support to raise awareness and provides a safe platform for reporting exploitation.

“During my time as a Humphrey Fellow at American University, I was able to explore advanced frameworks for combating human trafficking, studying collaborative models between law enforcement, civil society, and community engagement platforms. My exposure to U.S. federal and local agencies further shaped my understanding and institutional capacity building.”

Figure 16 - Efforts recognised by USEFP

5.5 Punjab Assembly Acknowledgment

At the provincial level, the Punjab Assembly acknowledged the performance of the MB DIN model and recommended its replication in the entire province of Punjab.

From: The Inspector General of Police, Punjab, Lahore.

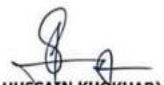
To: i. The Addl: IGP/Operations, Punjab, Lahore.
ii. The City Police Officer, Gujranwala.
iii. The District Police Officer, Gujrat, Sialkot, M.B.Din & Jhelum .

No. 240-4/LB Dated. 20/2 /2025

SUBJECT: MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE NO.08.

Memo: Please refer to the subject cited above.

2. Enclosed please find herewith a copy of letter No. PAP/Spl.Cte No.8/2024/1451 dated 17.02.2025 alongwith its enclosures received from Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, for information and necessary action as per law rules/policy, please.


(SAJID HUSSAIN KHOKHAR) PSP
AIG/R&D,
for Inspector General of Police,
Punjab, Lahore.

(7)

31. Mr Muhammad Nawaz Gondal, Additional Secretary, Information & Culture Department apprised that Directorate General Public Relation Punjab had designed special campaign to highlight the dangers of internal human trafficking as well as cross border human trafficking and smuggling of migrants.

32. Mr Muhammad Suleman, Additional Secretary, Social Welfare & Biatul Maal Department also presented the data of the centers of the department and facilities provided therein. He submitted that the department had been working for welfare of the needy people across the board in the Province.

33. Dr Farhan Navid Yousaf, Director Sociology Department, University of the Punjab submitted that the root cause of the human trafficking needed to be identified and the proactive approach was required to control it. The Punjab University had already developed up a course on illegal migration for one semester at under graduate level. The purpose of the course is to educate the youth and launch a special campaign to highlight and control this social evil.

34. Ms Zarnab Sher, MPA (PP-40) proposed that a joint dedicated strategy was adopted by the provincial departments for awareness and education of youth about dangers of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. For launching of complaints about human trafficking, a well equipped online portal must also be established by the Home Department and the penalties for the crime may also be increased.

35. Mr Tariq Subhani, MPA (PP-45) suggested that joint efforts by the FIA and Punjab Police would be made to control the human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. Furthermore, the offices of the FIA must be expanded at all district headquarters in the Province.

36. Mr Adnan Afzal Chattha, MPA (PP-36)/Chairperson, Skills Development Taskforce Punjab apprised that for the first time in history, Chief Minister Punjab had established a new department (Skills Development and Entrepreneurship Department) for education and training of the youth. The Department had started technical-skilled based courses with national certification to meet the international requirements for skilled labour.

37. After thorough discussion and listening to the views of the members as well as the participants, the Committee praised the working of the provincial departments, administrative authorities and law enforcing agencies to control internal human trafficking and smuggling of migrants; and recommended that:

- (i) as per analogy of DPO office Mandi Bahuddin anti-human trafficking cells may be replicated at all the DPO offices of Punjab by February 28, 2025 and report be sent to the Committee;
- (ii) bimonthly reports of all the districts vigilance committees of the Province regarding control of human trafficking and smuggling of migrants may be forwarded to the Assembly Secretariat for presentation before the Committee;
- (iii) comprehensive data of the victims and illegal agents would be collected by the FIA in collaboration with Punjab Police for submission before the Committee;
- (iv) integrated awareness campaign must be launched by the information & Culture Department with the help of Home Department to educate the youth about dangers of human trafficking and illegal migration;
- (v) productive steps may also be initiated by the concerned departments and authorities for rehabilitation of the victims; and

PTO

Figure 17 - Punjab Assembly minutes & official notification

5.6 Key Findings and Policy Implications

Key Findings

This case study demonstrates that human trafficking in district Mandi Bahuddin is not an isolated criminal activity but a structurally embedded phenomenon rooted in socio-economic vulnerability

and governance gaps. Persistent poverty, unemployment, and limited access to safe and legal migration pathways have normalized irregular migration as a rational, though high-risk, household strategy. The steady outflow of individuals and the willingness to incur substantial financial costs reflect systemic pressures rather than episodic decision-making.

The findings further reveal that trafficking operates through hybrid and adaptive networks, combining local recruitment mechanisms with transnational transit systems, as well as internal structures of exploitation. Victims are exposed to multiple layers of coercion, including extortion, violence, and forced labour. Importantly, the study highlights that internal exploitation, manifested in debt bondage at brick kilns, child labour in workshops, and the marginalization of vulnerable groups, is as pervasive as cross-border trafficking, indicating a continuum of exploitation within the local economy.

A central enabling factor is information asymmetry, where limited awareness of legal migration processes and risks allows traffickers and fraudulent intermediaries to manipulate vulnerable populations. This is compounded by institutional fragmentation, weak coordination across enforcement and welfare agencies, and low public trust, which collectively constrain effective prevention and response.

Within this context, the Mandi Bahauddin intervention demonstrates the effectiveness of a localized, evidence-based, and victim-centered approach. The establishment of the Anti-Human Trafficking Cell (AHTC), supported by field-based diagnostics, enabled targeted interventions across high-risk sectors. Regulatory actions against travel agencies and engagement with known traffickers disrupted recruitment networks and improved reporting behavior, indicating a shift in community trust and awareness.

Complementary measures addressing structural vulnerabilities, such as labour formalization, enforcement of minimum wage standards, and child protection interventions, contributed to incremental but meaningful reductions in exploitation. Awareness campaigns and community engagement improved risk perception, while the introduction of the Bahifazat digital platform lowered barriers to reporting and strengthened early detection mechanisms. Multi-agency coordination further enhanced operational coherence and response capacity.

However, these gains remain fragile and potentially reversible. The underlying drivers of trafficking persist, and trafficking networks continue to adapt to enforcement pressures. Limitations in institutional capacity, resource allocation, and integration of digital systems at higher governance levels constrain scalability and long-term sustainability.

Taken together, the findings underscore that human trafficking is fundamentally a governance and vulnerability challenge rather than solely a law enforcement issue. While district-level interventions can significantly disrupt trafficking ecosystems, sustainable impact requires institutionalization of reforms, systemic integration, and alignment with broader socio-economic policy frameworks.

Policy Implications

The study highlights the need for a systemic and integrated response framework. Evidence-based diagnostics should be institutionalized through regular district-level risk mapping and strengthened Anti-Human Trafficking Cells. Regulatory oversight of migration intermediaries must be enhanced through licensing, transparency, and digital verification systems. Labour formalization in high-risk sectors should be scaled through enforcement of minimum wage laws and universal worker registration within social protection frameworks.

Child protection interventions must ensure sustained reintegration into education systems, while victim-centered rehabilitation should include psychological, legal, and economic support to prevent re-trafficking. Community engagement strategies should be expanded to influence social norms and improve awareness of risks and rights.

Digital platforms such as Bahifazat should be integrated with provincial and federal systems to enable real-time data sharing and policy analysis. Multi-agency coordination mechanisms should be formalized with clear accountability frameworks. Finally, long-term reduction in trafficking requires addressing structural drivers through employment generation, skills development, and access to safe migration pathways.

6. Conclusion

This case study examined human trafficking in district Mandi Bahauddin over the period from 1 November 2024 to 1 November 2025. At the outset, the district was confronted with significant

challenges, including irregular migration, forced labour, child labour, and the exploitation of vulnerable groups. These issues reflected deeper structural drivers such as socio-economic vulnerability, limited access to safe migration pathways, and weak institutional coordination.

The establishment and operationalization of the Anti-Human Trafficking Cell (AHTC) marked a critical shift in the district's response. Rather than relying solely on reactive enforcement, the intervention adopted a data-driven and field-oriented approach based on surveys, direct assessments, and engagement with affected communities. This enabled a more accurate understanding of trafficking patterns and supported the design of targeted and context-specific interventions.

The initiatives addressed trafficking across multiple dimensions. Law enforcement actions disrupted local trafficking and smuggling networks, while regulatory measures against travel agencies reduced fraudulent practices. Labour inspections and worker registration contributed to addressing bonded labour in brick kilns, and child protection interventions facilitated the removal of children from hazardous work and their reintegration into education. Engagement with marginalized groups, including the transgender community, shifted the focus from exploitation to protection.

Preventive efforts were strengthened through sustained awareness campaigns targeting youth and families, improving risk perception and informed decision-making. The introduction of the Bahifazat digital platform enhanced accessibility of reporting mechanisms and reduced fear of retaliation. Furthermore, improved coordination among district, provincial, and federal institutions enhanced response efficiency and operational coherence.

While structural drivers such as economic pressures and migration aspirations remain long-term challenges, the experience of Mandi Bahauddin demonstrates that evidence-based, victim-centered, and coordinated district-level interventions can significantly reduce vulnerability to human trafficking when sustained over time.

The experience of Mandi Bahauddin demonstrates that effective anti-trafficking responses require a shift from reactive enforcement to integrated governance, combining data-driven policing, social protection, economic resilience, and institutional coordination. Without such a systemic approach,

gains will remain incremental; with it, district-level interventions can evolve into scalable models for broader provincial and national reform.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and lessons from international experience, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen anti-human trafficking efforts at the district and provincial levels.

First, there is a need to improve data collection and regular monitoring. Authorities should conduct regular surveys to understand migration patterns, labour conditions, and vulnerable groups. This will help identify risks early and take timely action before situations worsen.

Second, efforts should focus not only on activities but also on results. Clear targets should be set, such as how many traffickers are caught, how many victims are supported, and whether child labour is reducing. Independent evaluations should also be conducted to ensure transparency and effectiveness.

Third, laws and procedures should be clearly applied to distinguish human trafficking from illegal migration and labour violations. Police, prosecutors, and judges should be properly trained so that cases are handled correctly and justice is delivered effectively.

Fourth, greater attention should be given to supporting victims in rebuilding their lives. This includes rescue services, counselling, legal assistance, and job opportunities. A proper system should also be in place to track victims' progress and prevent them from being trafficked again.

Fifth, travel agents and migration facilitators should be strictly regulated. A licensing system should be introduced, and people should be able to verify agents through a public digital platform. Strong action must be taken against fraudulent agents to protect vulnerable individuals.

Sixth, labour inspections should be expanded, especially in high-risk sectors such as brick kilns and informal workshops. Workers should be registered with social protection programs, and strict action should be taken against child labour and bonded labour. At the same time, employers should be encouraged to follow the law through incentives as well as enforcement.

Seventh, digital reporting systems such as the Bahifazat platform should be expanded and integrated with provincial and federal institutions. This will improve reporting, case tracking, and

coordination between departments. Proper training should also be provided to ensure effective and widespread use of the platform.

Eighth, awareness efforts should be strengthened at the community level. Religious leaders, teachers, and local influencers should be actively involved in spreading awareness. Local reporting mechanisms should be developed, and schools should play an important role in identifying children at risk.

Ninth, stronger coordination between different government departments is essential. Police, labour departments, social welfare agencies, and other stakeholders should work together through a clear system with defined roles, responsibilities, and accountability.

Finally, the successful model implemented in Mandi Bahauddin should be expanded to other high-risk districts of Punjab. For this, a clear implementation plan should be developed, including required resources, staffing, training, and monitoring systems to ensure long-term success.

Overall, these recommendations highlight the importance of a coordinated, practical, and people-centered approach that focuses on prevention, protection, and accountability, while ensuring long-term sustainability.

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