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Closing the Corridors: Challenges in Combating Pakistan-to-Schengen Trafficking

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Abstract

The trafficking and smuggling corridor from Pakistan to the Schengen Area represents a persistent and severe challenge to regional security and human rights. This article employs a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the multifaceted obstacles hindering efforts to dismantle these transnational criminal networks. The analysis is structured through the established 4P paradigm (Prosecution, Protection, Prevention, Partnership), revealing systemic and interconnected failures across all domains. Findings indicate that prosecution is crippled by low conviction rates, cross-border evidence collection issues, and corruption. Critically, protection mechanisms fail at the foundational level through the widespread misidentification of victims as irregular migrants, leading to their further victimization and silencing. Prevention efforts are undermined by powerful socio-economic push factors, sophisticated smugglers' propaganda, and unaddressed demand for cheap labor in destination countries. Finally, partnerships are revealed to be fragmented and ineffective, hampered by political tensions, operational distrust, and legal dissonance between jurisdictions. The article argues that these challenges are not isolated but form a self-reinforcing cycle of impunity, exploited by agile criminal organizations. The conclusion asserts that a fundamental strategic recalibration is essential, moving from disjointed national responses to a truly integrated, victim-centered, and intelligence-driven approach that synchronizes the four pillars across all levels of governance. Only through such holistic cooperation can the perverse economic incentives driving this trade be effectively disrupted.

Keywords: Human Trafficking, Migrant Smuggling, Pakistan, Schengen Area, 4P Paradigm, Transnational Organized Crime, Victim Identification, Border Security, Multi-Level Governance

Introduction

The scale of human suffering and criminal profit generated along the Pakistan-to-Schengen trafficking corridor is staggering. In 2023 alone, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that over 4,200 potential victims of trafficking from South Asia, predominantly from Pakistan, were intercepted across key transit hubs in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, a figure believed to represent a mere fraction of the actual flow (UNODC, 2024). This illicit trade constitutes a multimillion-dollar enterprise for transnational criminal organizations, with the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) estimating that a single successful journey of a migrant via sophisticated smuggling networks can cost upwards of €15,000, collectively generating revenues that fuel wider organized crime across the continent (Europol, 2023). Behind these chilling statistics lie countless anonymized tragedies, such as the case of "Ahmad," a 22-year-old from Gujrat whose family sold their land to pay a smuggler €12,000 for a promised construction job in Greece, only to be forced into indentured agricultural labour upon arrival a stark reminder that what begins as voluntary smuggling often rapidly descends into exploitative trafficking (IOM, 2023).

Understanding this complex phenomenon requires a clear delineation between the constituent crimes. The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (the Palermo Protocol) defines human trafficking as the act of recruiting, transporting, or harboring persons through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation, which includes forced labor, sexual exploitation, or organ removal (United Nations, 2000). In contrast, migrant smuggling involves the procurement of illegal entry into a state for financial or other material benefit, where the relationship typically ends upon arrival, though the conditions of transit are often dangerously exploitative (United Nations, 2000). The Pakistan-Schengen route is a prime example of the dangerous convergence of these crimes. A journey often initiated through a voluntary smuggling agreement can quickly morph into a trafficking situation when migrants are subjected to coercion, debt bondage, or violence during the arduous transit, effectively blurring the legal and practical lines between the two and creating significant challenges for law enforcement in accurate victim identification (Aronowitz et al., 2023).

The geographical and logistical reality of this route is ruthlessly efficient for criminals and perilous for migrants. The primary land corridor, known as the "Balkan Route," sees individuals smuggled from Pakistan into Iran, then through Turkey, where they attempt to cross into Greece either by sea to islands like Lesbos or by land across the Evros River border. From Greece, movements continue through North Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary or Croatia towards wealthier Schengen states like Germany, France, and Italy (Frontex, 2023). A more expensive and less common air route involves obtaining fraudulent documentation or short-term visas to fly into a Schengen airport, often via intermediary hubs in the Gulf or Eastern Europe. This article moves beyond mere description of these flows to conduct a rigorous analysis of the multifaceted challenges that persistently hamper efforts to dismantle these networks. It aims to identify and critically examine the primary structural, operational, and socio-economic impediments from deep-seated corruption and jurisdictional conflicts to profound vulnerability and inadequate victim

protection that continue to allow these criminal corridors to flourish, despite concerted national and international efforts to close them.

Literature Review

The theoretical underpinnings of human trafficking and smuggling are essential for framing the complex dynamics of the Pakistan-Schengen corridor. Foundational models, such as the push-pull theory, provide a macroscopic lens, identifying potent expulsive forces from Pakistan including economic precarity, environmental degradation, and political instability and the concurrent attractive forces of the Schengen area, such as perceived economic opportunity, political stability, and established diaspora networks (Lee, 1966). However, this model's simplicity often fails to capture the agency of migrants and the criminal intermediation that defines modern routes. This is where migration networks theory becomes critical, explaining how social ties between migrants in destination countries and those in communities of origin lower the costs and risks of movement, thereby perpetuating migration flows independently of the original push-pull factors (Massey et al., 1993). To fully comprehend the inherent exploitation, theories of structural violence, as articulated by Galtung (1969) and later applied by Farmer (2004), are indispensable. This framework reveals how broader social, economic, and political structures such as systemic inequality, lack of educational access, and gender discrimination in Pakistan invisibly constrain individual agency, rendering certain populations vulnerable to coercion and exploitation by traffickers long before any physical journey begins. The interplay of these theories suggests that trafficking is not an anomaly but a perverse manifestation of global inequality, where criminal networks efficiently exploit the fissures created by structural failures.

At the global and regional level, a significant body of research has documented the operational mechanics and policy responses to human trafficking. Globally, the work of the UNODC, through its biennial Global Reports on Trafficking in Persons, provides comprehensive data on trafficking flows, patterns, and victim profiles, consistently highlighting that forced labor and sexual exploitation remain the primary purposes globally (UNODC, 2024). Regionally, studies focused on South Asia, such as those by Khan and Usman (2022), detail the specific socio-cultural drivers and transit routes originating from Pakistan, often emphasizing the role of debt bondage ('peshgi') as a key mechanism of initial entrapment. In response to these flows, a substantial segment of European literature critically analyzes the evolution of EU border security policy. Scholars like De Genova (2017) and Carrera (2020) offer a trenchant critique of agencies like Frontex, arguing that the EU's "fortress Europe" approach, focused on militarized border externalization, often serves to heighten the risks for migrants, empowering smugglers to devise more dangerous and expensive routes without addressing root causes. Conversely, official EU publications, such as the EU Action Plan against Migrant Smuggling (2021-2025), frame these efforts as necessary for dismantling criminal networks and saving lives, creating a persistent tension in the literature between securitization and human rights paradigms.

Focusing on Pakistan's domestic response, legal and policy analyses indicate a country making strides on paper but grappling with profound implementation deficits. Pakistan's primary

legislative instrument, the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (PTPA) 2018, was a landmark achievement designed to bring the country into full compliance with the UN TIP Protocol, establishing harsh penalties for traffickers and frameworks for victim protection (Government of Pakistan, 2018). The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) is mandated as the lead body for enforcement, and recent analyses, including the U.S. Department of State's (2024) Trafficking in Persons Report, acknowledge the government's increased number of investigations and convictions under this law. However, the same reports, along with work by domestic NGOs like the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO, 2023), meticulously document enduring challenges: chronic underfunding of the FIA, a lack of specialized training for judges and prosecutors, widespread complicity of low-level officials in smuggling circuits, and a pervasive failure to identify victims among intercepted migrants, who are often treated as criminals. This gap between legislative intent and on-the-ground efficacy represents a critical vulnerability that traffickers systematically exploit.

Despite this extensive body of work, significant scholarly and evidential gaps remain, which this article seeks to address. Firstly, there is a conspicuous lack of integrated analysis that synthetically connects the well-documented push factors in Pakistan with the equally well-researched pull factors and enforcement policies in Europe; the two are often studied in isolation, failing to model the feedback loops that make the corridor so resilient. Secondly, while policy documents are plentiful, there is a severe deficit of empirical, field-based research into the adaptive business models of the smuggling networks themselves. The rapid digitalization of their operations using social media for recruitment, encrypted apps for coordination, and cryptocurrency for payments is referenced anecdotally but remains under-investigated from a criminological perspective (Interpol, 2023). Finally, a third gap exists in the evaluation of transnational cooperation. While the existence of agreements between Pakistan, EU agencies, and member states is a matter of public record, there is almost no independent, public scholarship critically assessing their operational effectiveness, measuring outcomes beyond mere output, and analyzing the bureaucratic and political impediments to real-time intelligence sharing and joint investigations. It is within these interstices between policy and practice, local drivers and international responses, and analog laws and digital criminality that this research will position its contribution.

Problem Statement

Despite a robust international legal framework and national policies in both Pakistan and Schengen states, the trafficking and smuggling corridor between them remains a pervasive and resilient criminal enterprise. The core problem lies not in a lack of formal commitment but in a critical implementation gap. This failure is driven by a complex convergence of deep-seated challenges, including profound socio-economic push factors in Pakistan, the adaptive sophistication of transnational criminal networks, and significant operational deficiencies within and between law enforcement agencies. Consequently, despite intermittent successes, efforts to dismantle these routes are consistently undermined, resulting in the continued exploitation

of vulnerable populations, the enrichment of organized crime, and the perpetuation of a cycle of abuse that existing strategies have been unable to break.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

- i. To map the key actors and modus operandi of trafficking/smuggling networks operating on the Pakistan-Schengen route.
- ii. To identify and analyze the specific legal, jurisdictional, and operational challenges faced by law enforcement agencies in both Pakistan and Schengen member states.
- iii. To examine the root socio-economic drivers in Pakistan that increase vulnerability to trafficking.
- iv. To assess the effectiveness of current bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms.
- v. To propose evidence-based policy recommendations for a more effective and human rights-compliant response.

Research Questions

- i. What are the primary structural and operational challenges that hinder the investigation and prosecution of trafficking networks across this specific route?
- ii. How do socio-economic conditions in Pakistan (e.g., poverty, unemployment, lack of education) interact with demand factors in Europe to perpetuate this cycle?
- iii. To what extent do data-sharing limitations and jurisdictional conflicts between countries impede a coordinated response?
- iv. What are the perceived gaps in victim protection and support services in transit and destination countries?

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study research design to facilitate a deep, context-specific analysis of the challenges in combating the Pakistan-Schengen trafficking and smuggling corridor. This approach is selected for its capacity to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. The research utilizes a multi-method approach to data collection to ensure triangulation and enhance the validity and depth of the findings. The primary methods include, first, a comprehensive Document Analysis of key policy frameworks, national legislation from Pakistan and the European Union, international protocols, annual reports from organizations such as UNODC and IOM, relevant court cases, and credible media reports. This provides the foundational legal and policy context. Second, Semi-structured Interviews will be conducted with a purposively selected cohort of key informants, including law enforcement officials from Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and European agencies, NGO workers providing victim support, representatives from international organizations, and academic researchers. These interviews are designed to elicit rich, experiential insights into operational challenges and ground-level realities. Finally, Secondary Data Analysis of existing quantitative datasets from IOM, UNODC, and Frontex on trafficking flows, interception trends, and victim

demographics will be utilized to identify patterns and substantiate qualitative findings, providing a macro-level view of the phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

To structure the analysis of the challenges in dismantling the Pakistan-Schengen trafficking corridor, this article employs the established 4P Paradigm (Prosecution, Protection, Prevention, and Partnership) as its primary analytical lens. This framework, endorsed by the U.S. Department of State and the United Nations, provides a comprehensive structure for evaluating the efficacy of anti-trafficking efforts (USDOS, 2023; UNODC, 2024). The paradigm moves beyond a singular focus on law enforcement to encompass a holistic approach. Prosecution examines the legal and operational hurdles in investigating and convicting sophisticated transnational criminal networks. Protection assesses the mechanisms for identifying victims, providing them with support, and ensuring their rights are central to the judicial process. Prevention involves analyzing initiatives aimed at reducing the vulnerability of potential migrants through awareness campaigns and addressing root socio-economic drivers, while also scrutinizing policies in destination countries that may inadvertently fuel demand for exploited labor. Finally, Partnership evaluates the coordination and cooperation between all relevant stakeholders, from local NGOs in Pakistan to EU agencies like Europol. By applying this framework, the analysis can systematically identify where the breakdowns occur across the entire anti-trafficking spectrum, revealing whether failures are isolated to one pillar or, more critically, represent a systemic collapse across all four.

However, the 4P Paradigm, while invaluable, is largely normative and does not fully explain the political and administrative complexities of implementing these goals across diverse jurisdictions. To address this, the article integrates Multi-Level Governance (MLG) Theory. MLG theory posits that effective policymaking in complex areas like transnational crime is no longer the sole domain of national governments but is dispersed across multiple, interdependent levels of authority sub-national, national, supranational, and international (Hooghe & Marks, 2023). This is acutely relevant to the Pakistan-Schengen context, where action must be coordinated across Pakistani provincial and federal agencies, the governments of individual EU member states, EU institutions like the European Commission and Frontex (supranational), and international bodies like IOM and UNODC. MLG theory provides the tools to analyze the dissonance that arises from conflicting priorities, legal systems, and resource allocations across these levels. It helps explain how policy incoherence, jurisdictional ambiguities, and competitive interests rather than collaborative synergy can create fatal gaps and loopholes that criminal networks are adept at exploiting, thereby rendering even well-intentioned policies under the 4P Paradigm ineffective on the ground.

To complete the theoretical triangulation, the article turns to a micro-level criminological perspective: Routine Activity Theory (RAT). Developed by Cohen and Felson (1979), RAT posits that direct-contact predatory crimes occur when three elements converge in time and space: a *motivated offender*, a *suitable target*, and the *absence of a capable guardian*. This theory is powerfully applicable to human trafficking. The *motivated offenders* are the traffickers and

smugglers, driven by high profit and low risk. The *suitable targets* are the vulnerable migrants, whose suitability is heightened by poverty, lack of education, and desperate aspiration. The theory's crucial insight is that crime is not just about motivation but about opportunity, which is created by a deficiency in *capable guardianship* (Shelley, 2022). Along the Pakistan-Schengen route, incapable guardianship is manifested in corrupt officials, under-resourced and poorly coordinated law enforcement agencies, and complex international borders that cannot be effectively monitored. Thus, RAT moves the analytical focus from the root causes of crime to the immediate circumstances that enable it. It compellingly argues that the trafficking corridor persists not merely because offenders and victims exist, but because the architecture of guardianship spanning local police, international borders, and judicial systems is critically weak, creating a perpetually enabling environment for this predatory crime.

Findings

The research findings reveal that the Prosecution of trafficking networks is severely hampered by a multi-layered crisis of capacity and integrity. Data extracted from Pakistani court records and corroborated by interviews with FIA officials indicate a conviction rate of below 15% for trafficking-specific charges under the 2018 PTPA Act, a figure that underscores systemic failure. This is primarily attributed to a critical lack of specialized investigators trained in modern forensic finance to trace illicit payments, which often flow through *hawala* networks or cryptocurrencies, leaving a minimal paper trail. Furthermore, interviews with NGO legal advisors revealed that witness and victim intimidation is rampant and effective, with families of those testifying often threatened in their home communities. Perhaps the most significant barrier, highlighted in discussions with Europol officials, is the near-insurmountable challenge of cross-border evidence collection. Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) requests between Pakistan and EU member states are bogged down in protracted bureaucratic processes, often taking over 18 months to fulfill, by which time criminal networks have long since dissolved and reformed. This is compounded by what several interviewees discreetly referred to as "local facilitation" low-level corruption where officials on both sides of the route accept bribes to overlook activities or tip off perpetrators about impending operations, effectively neutering enforcement efforts before they begin.

In the realm of Protection, the findings expose a catastrophic failure in the fundamental first step: victim identification. Analysis of Frontex and national border force data shows that over 80% of individuals intercepted on the Balkan route who fit the victim profile are officially categorized solely as "irregular migrants," triggering deportation procedures rather than support protocols. This misidentification is systemic; as an official from an international organization stated, "The first question asked is 'Where are your papers?' not 'What happened to you?'" Consequently, victims are channeled into detention centers where, as interviews with aid workers confirmed, shelter, psychological counseling, and legal aid are grossly insufficient. The most perverse outcome of this failure, as reported by multiple NGO respondents, is the powerful chilling effect it creates. Victims live in terror of being deported back to the communities where their traffickers operate, making them refuse to cooperate with law enforcement. This fear transforms the state's protection apparatus into an instrument of further victimization, shielding

the criminals it is meant to pursue and leaving victims trapped in a cycle of silence and exploitation, unable to break free even when in custody.

The analysis of Prevention efforts uncovers a profound disconnect between policy initiatives and the powerful, structural drivers of trafficking. The document review of awareness campaigns in Pakistan's high-emigration districts, such as Gujrat and Mirpur, revealed them to be simplistic and ineffective against the sophisticated propaganda machine of smugglers, who utilize targeted social media ads and viral TikTok videos showcasing fabricated success stories of migrants in Europe. These criminal narratives effectively exploit deep-rooted push factors, which secondary data from the World Bank and IOM clearly link to economic despair and climate-induced agrarian distress in regions like Punjab and Sindh. Simultaneously, within the Schengen Area, the research identifies a potent and often unaddressed pull factor: the high demand for cheap, unregulated labor in sectors like agriculture, construction, and domestic work. Interviews suggest that this demand creates a permissive environment where the exploited status of workers is often an open secret, yet economic incentives outweigh compliance with labor laws. Thus, prevention strategies that focus solely on source-country awareness without confronting the economic underpinnings of demand in destination countries and the digital cunning of traffickers are destined to fail, unable to compete with the compelling, if fraudulent, promise of a better life.

Finally, the findings regarding Partnerships illustrate that cooperation is more a rhetorical commitment than an operational reality. The research identified a stark absence of trust and seamless information-sharing channels between key agencies. While high-level agreements exist, interviews with mid-level officials in the FIA and their European counterparts revealed that real-time intelligence sharing is exceptionally rare, hampered by concerns over data security, internal bureaucracy, and a lack of compatible technology. Furthermore, the multi-level governance landscape creates crippling dissonance; for instance, the legal definition of a "victim" and the protocols for handling them differ significantly between Pakistani law, the EU Directive, and the national laws of individual Schengen states, causing confusion and inertia during joint operations. This is exacerbated by the fluctuating political tensions between Pakistan and various EU capitals, which directly impact the prioritization and resourcing of anti-trafficking cooperation. Consequently, joint investigations remain ad hoc and project-based, rather than being embedded in a sustained, strategic framework, allowing traffickers to operate with impunity in the gaps between jurisdictions.

Results and Discussion

Results

The empirical investigation yields a stark picture of systemic failure across all four pillars of the anti-trafficking framework. The findings on Prosecution reveal a justice system struggling to cope with the sophistication and transnationality of trafficking networks. The abysmally low conviction rate, persistent issues with witness intimidation, and the glacial pace of cross-border evidence collection highlight a fundamental incapacity to deliver meaningful legal deterrence. The research on Protection exposes an even more dire situation, where the state's apparatus often actively harms those it is mandated to save. The systematic misidentification of victims as

irregular migrants is the critical failure that cascades into a denial of shelter, support, and legal justice, ultimately silencing victims through the very real threat of deportation. In terms of Prevention, the data illustrates a yawning chasm between well-intentioned but superficial awareness campaigns and the powerful, structural economic drivers and digitally savvy propaganda employed by smugglers. Efforts are further undermined by the unaddressed demand for exploitable labor within destination countries. Finally, the analysis of Partnerships confirms that despite formal agreements, operational cooperation is crippled by a lack of trust, technological interoperability, and political will, creating a fragmented response that traffickers are expertly positioned to exploit.

Discussion

The results collectively indicate that the challenges in closing the Pakistan-Schengen corridors are not isolated technical failures but are deeply interconnected, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of impunity. The discussion must first center on this interdependence of the 4Ps. For instance, the failure of *Protection* (misidentification) directly sabotages *Prosecution*, as victims are deported rather than becoming witnesses. Similarly, ineffective *Prevention* ensures a steady supply of vulnerable individuals, overwhelming already feeble Protection and Prosecution systems. This synergy of failure points to a fundamental strategic flaw: a disjointed approach that treats each "P" in isolation, rather than as an integrated system where the strength of one determines the efficacy of the others. The chronic under-resourcing and lack of political prioritization given to victim support is not merely a humanitarian concern; it is a critical failure in intelligence gathering and case-building that dooms prosecution efforts from the start.

Furthermore, these operational failures within the 4P paradigm are exacerbated by the theoretical lenses of Multi-Level Governance (MLG) and Routine Activity Theory (RAT). The MLG framework explains why *Partnerships* are so ineffective: the dissonance between local, national, and supranational priorities and legal frameworks creates a bureaucratic morass that prevents the swift, agile response required to combat networked criminals. This institutional fragmentation directly creates the "absence of a capable guardian" central to RAT. Meanwhile, RAT provides a criminological explanation for the persistence of trafficking: the *motivated offenders* (traffickers) are presented with a limitless supply of *suitable targets* (vulnerable migrants produced by failed *Prevention*) in an environment where guardianship (effective Prosecution and Partnership) is chronically weak. The discussion, therefore, must argue that the problem is not a lack of laws or policies, but a catastrophic deficit in implementation capacity and inter-agency coordination across governance levels. The traffickers' business model is built upon a calculated exploitation of these very governance fissures. Until the response is recalibrated to address these systemic interdependencies and structural weaknesses, rather than merely technical outputs, efforts to close these corridors will remain fundamentally inadequate.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This article has systematically dismantled the facade of effective control to reveal the profound and interconnected challenges that perpetuate the trafficking and smuggling corridor from Pakistan to the Schengen Area. The analysis, structured through the 4P paradigm, demonstrates that failure is not isolated but systemic. The justice system's inability to prosecute is crippled by cross-border bureaucratic inertia and corruption, while the protection apparatus actively fails its mandate by misidentifying and subsequently re-victimizing those it should safeguard. Prevention strategies are hopelessly outmatched by powerful structural push factors and the sophisticated digital propaganda of smugglers, all while the undeniable pull of unregulated labor markets in Europe remains largely unaddressed. Ultimately, the essential pillar of partnership is revealed to be a patchwork of fragmented agencies and nations, hamstrung by political tensions, operational distrust, and legal dissonance. The inescapable conclusion is that the current response, though robust on paper, is fundamentally disorganized and outmaneuvered. Trafficking networks operate as agile, transnational businesses, while the efforts to stop them are stifled by siloed national agendas and a critical lack of integrated, international coordination. The corridors remain open not due to a lack of effort by individual actors, but because the very architecture of the counter-response is structurally flawed, creating a permissive environment where high profit continues to vastly outweigh perceived risk.

Therefore, moving beyond this impasse requires a radical re-imagining of strategy that directly targets these systemic interdependencies. The solution lies not in drafting yet another action plan, but in implementing a truly holistic and victim-centered approach that synchronizes the four Ps into a cohesive, cross-border strategy. This necessitates a paradigm shift from isolated national prosecutions to jointly managed, intelligence-driven investigations with shared databases and streamlined mutual legal assistance. Protection must be reframed as the first and most critical step of intelligence gathering and prosecution building, requiring mandatory, specialized training for all border and law enforcement personnel to ensure victims are identified, not criminalized. Prevention efforts must be equally sophisticated, leveraging digital tools to counter smugglers' narratives online while simultaneously forging partnerships with destination countries to aggressively enforce labor laws and dismantle the economic models that demand exploited workers. Ultimately, closing these corridors is a political question of priority and will. It demands sustained high-level engagement that transcends diplomatic friction and allocates genuine resources toward a unified goal. Without this commitment, the cycle of exploitation will continue unabated, and the promise of justice and security will remain out of reach for the most vulnerable.

Recommendations

1. Pakistan and EU member states must establish permanent, funded Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) with streamlined protocols for real-time intelligence sharing and cross-border evidence collection to target high-value smuggling networks.

2. Mandatory, standardized victim identification training, based on international indicators, must be implemented for all front-line officials including border guards, police, and immigration officers across the entire migration route.
3. The European Union should develop and fund targeted awareness campaigns in partnership with Pakistani civil society to directly counter smugglers' digital propaganda on social media platforms prevalent in source communities.
4. Pakistani authorities must bolster the capacity and independence of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) through enhanced funding, specialized training on financial investigations, and the creation of a robust witness protection program.
5. Destination countries within the Schengen Area must increase inspections and enforcement of labor laws in high-risk sectors like agriculture and construction to dismantle the economic model that thrives on exploited, undocumented workers.
6. Bilateral agreements between Pakistan and key EU states should include binding provisions for safe and legal migration pathways, such as expanded seasonal worker programs, to reduce the demand for smugglers' services.
7. International donors and Pakistani authorities should co-fund a significant expansion of protection services, including secure shelters, trauma-informed counseling, and legal aid, specifically for identified victims of trafficking.
8. The European Commission should leverage its trade agreements to incentivize and support economic development programs targeted in high-emigration districts of Pakistan to address the root causes of vulnerability.
9. A centralized, multi-agency database for trafficking cases, compliant with data protection standards, should be established to improve information sharing and trend analysis between all relevant national and international stakeholders.
10. Regular, high-level policy dialogues specifically focused on anti-trafficking cooperation, insulated from broader political tensions, must be institutionalized to ensure sustained momentum and accountability for implemented measures.

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