



# The role of the transport sector in facilitating and preventing trafficking in persons along high volume transport corridors in sub-Saharan Africa

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The relationship between Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and transport is under-researched. The transportation of victims is not discussed in a substantive way in the TIP literature, while TIP is seldom conceptualized as a potential negative externality of transport infrastructure development. The negative health impacts of TIP often start to manifest at the transportation stage of TIP.

**Objectives:** The research aimed to improve understanding of the relationship between TIP and high volume transport corridors in Tanzania and Uganda. It examined the role of vehicle operators and communities in facilitating and preventing TIP, identifying those at risk of being trafficked and outlining their experiences.

**Methods:** The study comprised a literature review and field-based research. Vehicle operators and community members were targeted for a quantitative survey (sample n = 1548). Semi-structured interviews (sample n = 55) were carried out with key informants including regulatory officials, driver trainers, transport associations, civil society organisations (CSOs) and TIP survivors.

**Results:** A small but significant proportion of vehicle operators and communities were involved in TIP. The research highlighted the inadequacy of training on TIP for vehicle operators; the low priority given to TIP in the activities of transport associations and driver training schools; poor knowledge of TIP within border communities; and low confidence in the capacity of regulatory officials to address TIP. The voices of survivors provided potent insight into the human costs, including health impacts, of TIP.

**Conclusion:** The transport sectors in Tanzania and Uganda play an important role in TIP. They also provide an entry point for TIP prevention activities and for identifying and supporting victims. Potential areas of intervention include training for vehicle operators delivered by transport associations or driver training schools; targeted public education campaigns focused on the transport routes and vehicles favoured by traffickers; and training for border control officials and traffic police.

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## 1. Introduction

Human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons for the purpose of exploitation using threats, force, deception, fraud or abuse of power over a vulnerable person (UN, 2000). Human trafficking (hereinafter referred to as Trafficking in Persons, or TIP) can occur on a transnational or domestic basis for a range of purposes including sexual exploitation, forced labour, organ removal or other types of slavery such as recruitment for begging.<sup>1</sup> Global estimates of the number of TIP victims paint an alarming picture. An estimated 23.6 million people were involved in some form of forced labour in 2021.<sup>2</sup> Of these, 6.3 million – 78% female and 27% children – were in a situation of forced sexual exploitation. Approximately 14% of victims of forced labour are from Africa (ILO, Walk Free and IOM, 2022). In low-income countries, children comprise half of all TIP victims (UNODC, 2020).

Stories about TIP are frequently covered by African news sources yet reliable country-specific statistics are often lacking. The gap in the evidence base extends to understanding the nature and scale of trafficking along transport corridors. Very little is known about the role that transport sector actors play in TIP, whether their involvement is intentional or unintentional, formalised or informal, and where these actors fit within the complex networks that facilitate TIP. In addition, survivors' stories tend not to dwell on the details of their transportation experiences. In contrast, the human rights abuses suffered by trafficked persons have been well-documented (Oram et al., 2016; OHCHR, 2014; Aransiola and Zaraowsky, 2014; Le et al., 2017), with health impacts reported as wide-ranging and sometimes long-term and life-changing.

The current high-level policy emphasis on transport as a key driver of economic growth (World Bank, 2022; EBRD, 2019; Rodrigue and Notteboom, 2020) means that it is an opportune time to examine the wider impact of transport corridors on vulnerable groups. The relationship between TIP and long-distance transport corridors and cross-border posts in sub-Saharan Africa has been little studied to date. Our study therefore set out to shed light on the nature and demographics of TIP in high volume transport areas in two countries in the East African region (Tanzania and Uganda), the role that transport actors play in these activities, and opportunities to develop effective interventions and policy change to improve TIP awareness, identification and victim support. The safety of vehicle operators who may lack information on the legal ramifications of being involved in TIP was a further consideration. Because the study was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, the relationship between COVID-19 and TIP along transport corridors was an additional topic of enquiry.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Literature review

A document search was undertaken and the core principles of a systematic literature review process were applied (Green et al., 2020). Evidence relating to the study's research questions was located through a database search of academic literature using keywords and via other search engines (e.g. Google Scholar and Google). The search also included policy documents, legislation and grey literature, sourced from the transport sector and stakeholders working to combat TIP. Due to a lack of material, the initial search parameters were expanded from the two research countries to include host, destination and transit countries for TIP. Of 127 documents identified as relevant to the research countries, 31 directly addressed the relationship between TIP and transport. A level of evidence classification system was formulated and applied to assess the extent to which the identified documents offered reliable evidence. The highest level represented data derived from multiple randomised trials or meta-analyses and the lowest included opinion and documentation from informal sources such as news reports and blogs.

### 2.2. Research protocol

Informed by the findings of the literature review, a protocol was developed for the primary research. Four research sites were identified: three (Busia and Malaba in Uganda and Tunduma in Tanzania) were at border posts along high volume transport corridors; the fourth (Arusha in Tanzania) was at a key transit location (Table 1). These were selected as likely hubs for the recruitment and movement of TIP victims and the recruitment of would-be traffickers from the transport sector.

The cross-sectional research study utilised both quantitative and qualitative designs. Sampling for the quantitative design was done using Cochran's formula to determine a sample size of 384 respondents for each research site (total sample  $n = 1536$ ). The sample was exceeded by 12 to give a final sample size of 1548. The two respondent categories were vehicle operators (i.e. drivers, conductors and "turn-boys" or drivers' assistants) (sample  $n = 780$ ) who operated buses, coaches, heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), minibuses and taxis, and community members living and working along the transport corridors (sample  $n = 769$ ). Systematic sampling was used for vehicle operators, with every tenth driver, conductor or turnboy selected. Snowball sampling was used to select community members. Interviews were conducted face-to-face. The survey questions covered the following: knowledge of and attitudes towards TIP; respondents' views on the scale of TIP and trends, including the impact of COVID-19; personal involvement in trafficking; understanding of risk and sanctions; knowledge of victim identification and support; the role played by traffic police and border officials in tackling TIP; and recommendations for policy and practice. The survey tools were translated into Swahili in Tanzania and an English-language

<sup>1</sup> Although often conflated, people smuggling differs from TIP in two key ways: people smuggling begins as a voluntary transaction and always involves a transfer over one or more international borders, whereas TIP involves coercion and/or deception and can be domestic or international.

<sup>2</sup> This figure focuses on the private economy and excludes victims involved in state-sponsored forced labour.

**Table 1**  
Characteristics of research sites.

Tanzania				
Research Site	Location	Status	Transport Corridor	Relevance
Arusha	Arusha Region, northern Tanzania	Regional capital and border with Kenya	Arusha – Namanga – Athi River Trunk Road: connects Tanzania and Kenya through Namanga border post. Links countries further north (e.g. Ethiopia, Somalia) to destinations in southern Africa.	Busy through road that transverses the regional capital. Major potential centre for TIP.
Tunduma	Momba District, Songwe Region, western Tanzania	Border town with Zambia	Dar es Salaam Corridor: connects Dar es Salaam to Zambia and branches off to Malawi	Multiple connections point to opportunities for cross-border trade and internal TIP
Uganda				
Busia	Busia District, Eastern Region	Main administrative, municipal and commercial centre of Busia District. Border town with Kenya.	Northern Corridor: connects Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda to the Kenyan sea port of Mombasa	One Stop Border Post. Handles a high volume of goods traded with Kenya/ elsewhere. One of the busiest border crossings along the Northern Corridor. Known hub for cross-border TIP.
Malaba	Tororo District, Eastern Region	Busy border town with Kenya	Northern Corridor: Malaba connects various parts of Uganda to the Eastern Region, including Jinja, Mbale and Kampala	One Stop Border Post. Busier than Busia with more infrastructure. Known hub for cross-border TIP.

version was used in Uganda.

For the qualitative component, there were five respondent categories: traffic police officers, border officials (Uganda only), representatives of driver training schools and transport associations, civil society organisations (CSOs) and survivors of TIP. Key informants ( $n = 55$ ) were identified using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The interviews were conducted in English in Uganda and Swahili in Tanzania and covered similar topics to the survey. The interviews with survivors were designed so that they could share their personal experiences of TIP and make recommendations for policy makers.

Research participants were informed of their rights prior to being asked to sign a research consent form. Interviews with TIP survivors were arranged with the assistance of CSOs and pro bono psycho-social support was offered if required. The survey questionnaires used unique identifiers to ensure the privacy and anonymity of respondents. In Uganda, ethical approval was obtained from the Mildmay Uganda Research Ethics Committee and research clearance from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. In Tanzania, ethical approval was granted by the National Bureau of Statistics and the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology.

The primary research was carried out from February to September 2021. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, the research team was provided with training on TIP, research ethics, safeguarding and working safely in the context of COVID-19, in addition to a focus on data collection tools and data management. The survey tools were tested in a two-day pilot and adapted in response to feedback. Quantitative data were collected by Research Assistants over a two-week period under the leadership of a Research Supervisor who quality assured the completed survey questionnaires prior to data entry.

The quantitative data were analysed using scientific data analysis tools, specifically the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and STATA (statistical analysis software). Cross-tabulation was used to analyse the data. Several statistical tests were carried out, including descriptive analysis and univariate, bivariate and multivariate tests of associations. The qualitative data were transcribed, translated and coded. The data were interpreted manually using thematic analysis.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Literature review findings

In the global literature, TIP is conceptualized as problematic from a range of perspectives, suggesting that it is a complex issue that requires a multidisciplinary response. From a criminal justice perspective, TIP is considered to undermine the rule of law, trigger civic instability and lead to loss of tax revenue (Williams, 2019; Walton, 2019). This translates into an emphasis on arresting and prosecuting traffickers and preventing TIP, a focus that is dominant within the literature. Other authors focus on the socio-economic factors that lead vulnerable individuals to fall victim to traffickers (Sillfors, 2018; Taremwa, 2017; ANPPCAN and Terre des Hommes Netherlands, 2017; ASF, 2010). The human rights abuses suffered by TIP victims are also widely discussed (Olusegun, 2018; Aransiola and Zaraowsky, 2014; OHCHR, 2014).

The literature review identified useful contextual information on the scale of TIP, the routes used by traffickers and anti-TIP legislation both internationally and in the two research countries. According to the Global Slavery Index, in 2018 there were an estimated 336,000 and 304,000 trafficking victims in Tanzania and Uganda respectively (Walk Free Foundation, 2018). Tanzania's links to European, Middle Eastern, South Asian, southern African and Kenyan markets, plus weaknesses in its security infrastructure,

such as the many unstaffed border posts between Tanzania and Kenya, have made it a significant hub for TIP (IHS Markit, 2020). In Uganda, many TIP victims are trafficked domestically, primarily from rural to urban areas (AMMi, 2017), although transnational trafficking is also important, especially to Kenya and the Middle East.

Both countries have domestic anti-TIP legislation in the form of Tanzania's Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act 2008) and Uganda's Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act 2009). Both are signatories to the [United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2000](#) (Palermo Protocol). In Tanzania, an individual convicted of TIP is liable to a fine of up to 100 million Tanzania Shillings (equivalent to US\$ 43,000) or imprisonment of between two and ten years, or both. In Uganda, individuals successfully prosecuted for TIP can be fined or imprisoned, or both. For first offences, fines are relatively small. Second-time offenders face a prison sentence of up to seven years. Fines for companies are higher (up to 20 million Ugandan Shillings, equivalent to US\$ 5300). In practice, success with operationalising these laws has been poor. This is reflected in official government statistics, with Tanzania reporting just 161 victims in 2019 (U.S. Department of State, 2019), and Uganda recording 455 victims in the same year (Uganda Police, 2019).

The considerable emphasis within the TIP literature on crime and punishment may help to explain why the transit aspects have received less attention to date. The literature review identified some studies that mentioned transport modes used for TIP (e.g. [Barasa and Fernandez, 2015](#); [Wundu, 2018](#); [Ondieki, 2017](#); [Kiss et al., 2019](#); [Mbalamwezi, 2016](#); [Walakira et al., 2015](#); [IOM, 2018](#)), but substantive details of the mechanisms of transfer between places or the chains and networks involved in the passing of people along the chain were missing and most of these documents were at the lower end of reliability (e.g. news articles or small-scale qualitative or descriptive studies). An exception was a study that interviewed 1916 victims of TIP and traffickers in Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Burundi. This found that most of the victims travelled by public transport; in Uganda and Burundi the transport was arranged by an individual or organisation; over half (58%) of respondents in Uganda had travelled in large groups; and 11% of the Kenyans and 23% of Tanzanians had made their own way to a destination, indicating that not all TIP-related transport is arranged by a third party. Unfortunately, transport sector actors were not included in the study ([IOM, 2008](#)).

Very few documents identified in the literature review focused directly on vehicle operators as traffickers. One study in South Africa reported on a process called 'Pay Forward'. To reassure TIP victims that their journey was legitimate, drivers pretended to call a family member to inform them of the price of the transfer. In this case, the drivers were fully complicit in TIP, helping to deceive the victim into believing that they were in safe hands ([Aransiola and Zaraowsky, 2014](#)).

A study in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Ghana examined the role that vehicle operators play in irregular migration in West Africa. Although not specific to TIP, the study offers some interesting insights. It explored how vehicle operators relied on reciprocity with security agents to ensure the successful movement of migrants. Complex systems of payments and favours (e.g. supplying goods purchased across the border, giving gifts of food, arranging for items to be repaired, or giving rides to security agents) underpinned the relationship. Vehicle operators acted as important intermediaries between their passengers and security forces, deciding what bribes were needed to be and when, helping passengers, including those lacking documentation, to complete their journey ([Mechlinski,](#)

**Table 2**  
Characteristics of vehicle operators.

	Tanzania	Uganda
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	99%	99%
Female	1%	1%
<b>Age</b>		
18–24 years	4%	8%
25–34 years	39%	35%
35–49 years	39%	44%
50+ years	18%	13%
<b>Vehicle</b>		
HGV	45%	68%
Bus	16%	–
Car taxi	6%	19%
Minibus	15%	2%
Motorcycle/tricycle taxi	12%	7%
Coach	4%	–
Other	–	4%
<b>Role</b>		
Driver	89%	89%
Conductor	9%	4%
Turnboy	2%	7%
<b>Distance travelled</b>		
Short distance	47%	22%
Long distance	41%	63%
Both	12%	15%
<b>Employment status</b>		
Self-employed	25%	15%
Work for company	38%	52%
Work for one other person	37%	33%

2016). The study's emphasis on irregular migration as a process rather than a system is relevant to, and warrants further exploration within the context of, TIP.

Vehicle operators' role in creating demand for TIP was highlighted in some studies. Truckers and other long-distance vehicle operators were identified as playing a role in creating demand for child commercial sex workers in Tanzania (ECPAT, 2013). In Uganda, commercial sexual exploitation of children was reported to be prevalent at truck stops along major transportation routes (Uganda Youth Development Link, 2011). An increase in truck drivers passing through Mutukula, a small town in Kagera Region, Tanzania, was linked to an increase in sex trafficking (Kamazima et al., 2018).

The relationship between COVID-19, transport and TIP was a further focus of the literature review. In 2020 and 2021, the pandemic imposed unprecedented restrictions on transport and the movement of people across sub-Saharan Africa. Several reports predicted that this would result in increased vulnerability to TIP due to job losses, economic pressures, a decline in working conditions, travel bans or situations where individuals were stranded across international borders (Anti-Slavery, 2020; Giammarinaro, 2020; Walk Free Foundation, 2020). The delays at border crossings for HGVs, and discrimination due to positive COVID-19 tests, increased security threats and lack of access to essential services were a further cause for concern (CILT, 2020). These conditions were considered risk factors for vehicle operators looking for ways to generate supplementary income. There were also concerns that crime syndicates could use the cover of COVID-19 to boost their activities, as has been observed during previous outbreaks of disease (Worsnop, 2019).

### 3.2. Primary research findings

#### 3.2.1. Characteristics of sample

Respondent characteristics are outlined in Tables 2 and 3 below. Almost all vehicle operators in the study countries were male and most (78% in Tanzania; 79% in Uganda) were aged between 25 and 49 years old. HGV operators comprised the largest respondent group (45% in Tanzania; 68% in Uganda). In Tanzania, a greater variety of transport modes were included in the study (i.e. HGVs, buses, cars, motorcycle and tricycle taxis, minibuses and coaches), whereas in Uganda, most vehicle operators were associated with HGVs or car taxis. The majority of respondents were drivers (89%) with the remainder of the sample comprising conductors and "turnboys" (drivers' assistants). In Uganda, a higher proportion of vehicle operators were long-distance drivers compared to Tanzania (63% versus 41%). Most vehicle operators worked for a company or one other person (75% in Tanzania; 85% in Uganda).

The community sample comprised slightly more women in Tanzania than Uganda (54% versus 48%). The age profiles in the two countries were similar, with more respondents aged between 25 and 34 years than other age groups (45% in Tanzania; 47% in Uganda). The employment profile of community respondents differed between the two countries, with more respondents in Tanzania describing themselves as a businessperson or entrepreneur compared to Uganda (64% versus 19%). Thirty percent of community respondents in both countries were female sex workers. The community sample represented the individuals and trades common in transit locations and at cross border posts, demographics that are likely to be different to those of other urban or rural communities in the study countries.

#### 3.2.2. Key findings

In both countries, the majority of vehicle operators had heard of TIP and almost two thirds had seen cases. A small but significant proportion reported seeing many victims (14% in Tanzania; 21% in Uganda). In Tanzania, vehicle operators had been more exposed to TIP than community members whereas in Uganda, exposure levels were similar among the two groups of respondents (Table 4). The youngest vehicle operators and community members in Tanzania had less knowledge of TIP than older respondents. This was not the case in Uganda. Knowledge of TIP was similar among male and female community members in Uganda whereas women knew less about TIP than men in Tanzania (Table 5). In Uganda, specific categories of community respondents were more likely than others to have seen many victims of TIP. These included sex workers, mobile money agents, clearing and forwarding agents and business people.

Over half (51%) of vehicle operators and 76% of community members in Uganda identified adolescent girls as the main victims of

**Table 3**  
Characteristics of community members.

	Tanzania	Uganda
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	46%	52%
Female	54%	48%
<b>Age</b>		
18–24 years	21%	12%
25–34 years	45%	47%
35–49 years	22%	33%
50+ years	11%	8%
<b>Employment</b>		
Businessperson/entrepreneur	64%	19%
Female sex worker	30%	30%
Taxi driver	–	14%
Farmer	1%	–
Student	2%	–
Other	3%	37%

**Table 4**

Knowledge of TIP and cases observed.

	Arusha	Tunduma	Tanzania	Busia	Malaba	Uganda
<b>Vehicle operators</b>						
Heard of TIP	75%	81%	78%	86%	81%	84%
Seen cases	55%	71%	64%	62%	66%	65%
Seen many cases	20%	7%	14%	25%	17%	21%
<b>Community members</b>						
Heard of TIP	72%	59%	65%	98%	93%	96%
Seen cases	25%	14%	20%	62%	61%	62%
Seen many cases	23%	4%	16%	48%	34%	39%

TIP. In Tanzania, the category most frequently mentioned by vehicle operators was adolescent boys (36% of respondents) whereas community members were more likely to mention adolescent girls (49%). Community respondents in both countries associated most cases of TIP with sex work and domestic servitude. While half the community respondents in Uganda knew of victims within their own community, only 14% in Tanzania did so.

In Tanzania, more than half of vehicle operators (54%) thought that the number of TIP victims had decreased in recent years; only 15% thought that the numbers were increasing. The latter attributed increasing trends primarily to rising unemployment/better employment options in urban areas (64%) or, secondarily, to an increase in social problems within families (29%). In Uganda, in contrast, 58% of vehicle operators thought that TIP was increasing and, of these, 69% attributed this to rising unemployment. In Uganda, 59% of community members thought that the number of TIP victims had increased in recent years, whereas in Tanzania 47% of community members were unsure and only 14% thought it was increasing.

Perspectives on whether COVID-19 had led to greater involvement of vehicle operators in TIP varied between the two countries and by type of respondent. In Uganda, 46% of vehicle operators thought drivers were less likely to be involved, while 42% thought that they were more likely to be involved. Just under half (48%) of community members in Uganda believed that COVID-19 had increased drivers' involvement in TIP. In Tanzania, in contrast, a large proportion of vehicle operators did not know (40%); only 6% reported that drivers were more likely to be involved. More than half (55%) of community members in Tanzania were uncertain about the impact of COVID-19 on drivers' involvement; 21% thought that they were less likely to be involved.

In Tanzania, over half (53%) of vehicle operators considered HGVs to be the vehicles most likely to be involved in TIP. In Uganda, 44% of vehicle operators put HGVs at the top of the list (Fig. 1).

Over half of vehicle operators (55% and 52% in Tanzania and Uganda, respectively) thought that drivers who were involved in TIP worked independently; 24% and 38%, respectively, thought that they did so with the knowledge and support of the companies or individuals they worked for. In contrast, among community members who believed that vehicle operators were involved in TIP, more than half in both countries thought that they were organised and worked in groups or with others (59% in Tanzania; 62% in Uganda); just over a third (34%) of community members in both countries thought that drivers worked on their own.

In Tanzania, 9% of vehicle operators disclosed that they had been asked to transport a victim of TIP. This figure was much higher in Uganda (37%). In both countries there were differences by vehicle type (Fig. 2). For example, in Uganda 35% of HGV operators said that they had been approached by a trafficker compared to only 11% in Tanzania. More car taxi drivers had been approached by a trafficker in Uganda than Tanzania (44% versus 4%).

Among community members, 25% in Tanzania and 62% in Uganda thought that vehicle operators using the nearby high volume transport corridors were involved in TIP. In both countries, community members thought that HGV drivers were more likely than other vehicle operators to be involved. There were differences in responses across research sites (Figs. 3 and 4).

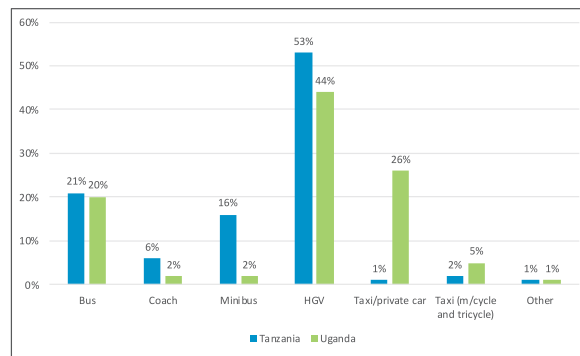
Border control officials and traffic police in Uganda were also convinced that vehicle operators played a role in facilitating TIP (Box 1). However, there were different perspectives on which vehicles were more likely to be involved.

In Tanzania, 9% of community members said that they had been approached by a trafficker. In Uganda, 27% of community members reported that they had been approached. These results show that TIP has to some extent become a part of the day-to-day lives

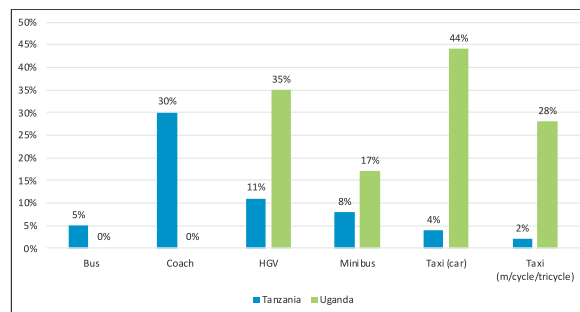
**Table 5**

Heard of TIP, by age and gender.

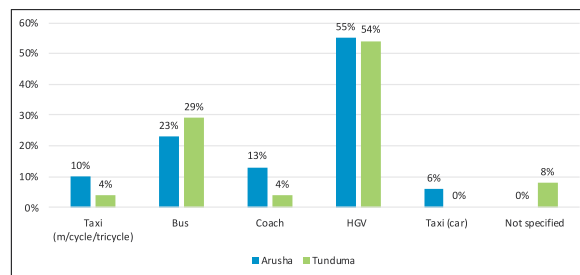
	Tanzania	Uganda
<b>Vehicle operators</b>		
18–24 years	47%	83%
25–34 years	79%	83%
35–49 years	81%	83%
50+ years	76%	87%
<b>Community members</b>		
18–24 years	49%	91%
25–34 years	64%	96%
35–49 years	71%	98%
50+ years	90%	97%
Male	72%	96%
Female	61%	95%



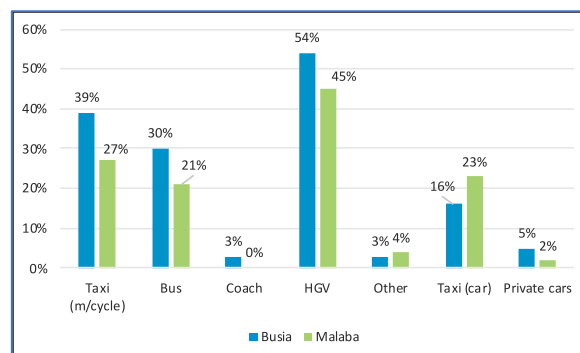
**Fig. 1.** Vehicle operators' views on vehicles most likely to be involved in TIP, by country.



**Fig. 2.** Vehicle operators ever asked to transport a TIP victim.



**Fig. 3.** Community views on drivers mostly likely involved in TIP, by location, Tanzania.



**Fig. 4.** Community views on drivers mostly likely involved in TIP, by location, Uganda.



**Box 1****Views of border officials and traffic police in Uganda on the role of vehicle operators in TIP**

“Those are the main transporters and channels. Without them TIP is no more.”

“They are involved. Some traffickers have a group of drivers they contact in case of any emergency.”

“In this border point most trafficking is done by motorcycle drivers and salon cars ...”

“Yes [they are involved] especially the truck and bus drivers who transport them not knowing that they are transporting people for trafficking.”

of communities and vehicle operators in the study countries, although the scale of TIP and the extent to which it has become entrenched seems to be higher in Uganda. In both countries, three times as many women than men had been approached by a trafficker, indicating that the practice has strong gender dimensions (Fig. 5).

Vehicle operators were asked what motivated them to participate in TIP. In Tanzania and Uganda, 90% and 87% of respondents, respectively, thought that money was the main motivation. Very few respondents thought that a lack of awareness of TIP as a crime was a key driver (9% in Tanzania; 7% in Uganda). In contrast, of the community members who thought that vehicle operators were involved in TIP, 84% in Tanzania and 92% in Uganda believed that they wanted to do a favour for a friend.

The majority of vehicle operators recognised that there was “a lot of risk” associated with being involved in TIP (78% in Tanzania; 73% in Uganda). However, 21% of bus drivers in Tanzania and 33% of minibus operators in Uganda felt there was little risk and a worrying percentage of respondents (10% in Tanzania; 6% in Uganda) were unsure of the risks. When asked about the sanctions when caught facilitating TIP, more than half (54%) of respondents in Uganda mentioned prison, 38% mentioned fines and 19% thought they could lose their job. Interestingly, age had a bearing on Ugandan vehicle operators’ understanding that they could lose their job: no one in the youngest age group (i.e. 18–24 years) mentioned this compared to 31% of the oldest respondents (i.e. age 50 plus). It is relevant that the youngest vehicle operators in Uganda were more likely to be self-employed than the oldest (40% versus 6%) and were therefore not answerable to an employer. In Tanzania, knowledge of the legal ramifications of being involved in TIP was high, with 85% of respondents confirming that prosecution and imprisonment were possible outcomes. As in Uganda, losing their job did not appear to be a major concern: only 9% of respondents mentioned this.

A significant proportion of vehicle operators who had been involved in TIP in the past (28% in Uganda; 11% in Tanzania) indicated that they would do it again, despite stating that they understood the personal risks involved.

Just under a third (32%) of vehicle operators in Tanzania did not know how to identify a victim of TIP. More respondents in Arusha than Tunduma (46% versus 19%) said that they were unsure. Just over a fifth (21%) of respondents in Uganda and a greater proportion of those in the age group 18–24 (37%) were unsure of how to identify a victim. Approximately a fifth of respondents (18% in Tanzania; 20% in Uganda) said that they had identified victims by speaking to them, reinforcing the finding that a high proportion of vehicle operators have come into contact with TIP victims.

Vehicle checks at borders can help to combat TIP. In Tanzania, 81% of HGV drivers reported that their vehicles were always checked compared to 70% of coach operators, 21% of car taxi drivers, 20% of minibus operators, 6% of motorcycle and tricycle taxis and 6% of bus operators. Many bus, minibus and motorcycle/tricycle taxis (89%, 73% and 60% respectively) either indicated that they did not know how frequently their vehicles were checked or did not specify this. While 80% of the vehicles travelling long distances were always checked, 85% of vehicles travelling short distances were never checked. The quality of vehicle checks is also important. Just over half of respondents in Tanzania (56%) and 45% in Uganda felt that vehicle checks were always thorough. In Uganda, 66% of HGV operators, 45% of car taxi drivers and 38% of motorcycle taxis indicated that border officials always checked their vehicle at border posts. Among long-distance drivers, 65% reported that they were always checked at borders compared to 42% of short-distance

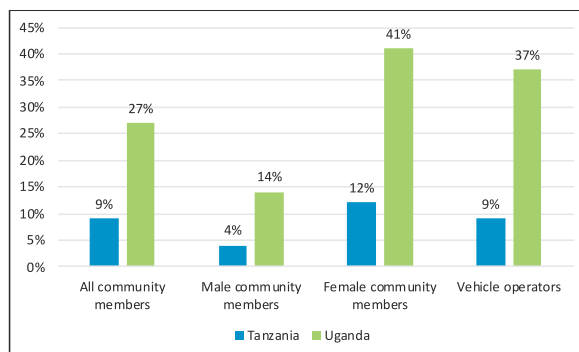


Fig. 5. Ever approached by a trafficker.



drivers. These results confirm that many vehicles are not subjected to checks at borders and hence opportunities to intervene are being missed.

Border control officers in Uganda indicated that the government needs to recruit more officers to help combat TIP; provide motorcycles for patrols, especially in porous border areas, and provide more training on TIP for officers (Box 2). In contrast, CSO representatives felt that these officials were susceptible to being bribed by traffickers – the implication being that extra resources would not make a difference. As one CSO respondent argued: “If you refuse to take the bribe, the next person is going to take it.” One border official confirmed that there were temptations: “Border control officials should not stay so long in an area since they make a lot of friends, and this therefore compromises on security.” Five out of seven border control officers confirmed that their peers had been approached by traffickers.

A high proportion of respondents in Uganda (79% in Busia; 58% in Malaba) thought that border officials received bribes, in cash or in kind, from traffickers. In Tanzania, fewer vehicle operators (38%) thought that border officials were bribed, although 15% believed that they were involved in other ways (e.g. turned a blind eye, had some form of agreement with traffickers, or were traffickers themselves). When asked what measures would help border officials combat TIP, vehicle operators mentioned better training (37% in Tanzania; 24% in Uganda), better supervision (20% in Tanzania; 35% in Uganda), better pay (15% in Tanzania; 13% in Uganda) and recruiting more staff (13% in Tanzania; 13% in Uganda).

Vehicle operators were also asked their views on whether traffic police did enough to help tackle TIP. In Tanzania and Uganda, 42% and 26% of vehicle operators, respectively, agreed that they did enough. However, over half of respondents (51%) in Tanzania and 84% in Uganda thought that traffic police were actively or passively involved in TIP in some way, whether by taking bribes, working in tandem with traffickers, turning a blind eye to traffickers’ activities, or by personally organising trafficking. Better supervision of traffic police was mentioned as an important intervention by 42% of respondents in Uganda and 18% in Tanzania. In Tanzania, more emphasis was placed on the need for better training (49% versus 27% in Uganda).

Many community members in the two research countries also lacked confidence in the ability of regulatory officials to combat TIP. Of community members in Uganda who said that they interacted with border control officials, 69% believed that the latter played a role in TIP. In contrast, very few community members in Tanzania had a view on this issue. Half of community members in Uganda and 21% in Tanzania thought that traffic police were involved in TIP.

Few vehicle operators had been trained or given information on TIP (7% in Tanzania; 10% in Uganda). Employers were the main providers of training inputs, and in a small number of cases in Tanzania, CSOs had provided training. Interviews with driver training schools in both countries confirmed that TIP is not covered in their driver training curricula. TIP has not been included either in the East African Community Standardised Driver Training Curriculum, which countries in the region plan to adopt. Transport associations reported that limited time was spent on the topic in their communications and interactions with members.

Among vehicle operators who had received information or training, the impact was positive: 85% of those targeted in Tanzania and 87% in Uganda indicated that it had changed the way they thought about or responded to TIP. Among vehicle operators as a whole, 63% and 73% in Tanzania and Uganda, respectively, indicated that they would welcome information or training on TIP. Priority training topics were how to identify victims, what vehicle operators can do to help combat TIP, victim services and how to refer cases, as well as information on the law on TIP. These results suggested a concern for victims and an interest in intervening in order to help them.

The 12 survivors of TIP who were interviewed as part of the research were all female and between 17 and 40 years old. All were recruited by family members, family friends or community members, which confirmed the extent to which TIP has become embedded in the everyday life of communities. Seven of the women were trafficked domestically and five (all Ugandan) were trafficked internationally (to Oman, Dubai and Kenya). Seven of the survivors were recruited for domestic work and five for sex work. None of the survivors was fully aware that they had been trafficked until they reached their destination. However, many began to experience various forms of deprivation while in transit (e.g. lack of food, lack of information, lack of sleep, verbal abuse). Long-distance buses featured prominently in the domestic trafficking cases, supported by motorcycle taxis that transferred the women to transit hubs. Buses and motorcycle taxis also featured prominently in the early stages of the journeys undertaken by the women who crossed borders. All survivors were either threatened with or suffered physical or sexual abuse, which included verbal threats, physical attacks or sexual assault (Box 3). All had been offered psychosocial support by the CSOs that played a role in their rescue or recovery.

## Box 2

Border officials’ views on changes required to facilitate their anti-trafficking role

“By increasing manpower, by having motorcycles and vehicles for patrolling in those [porous] areas, and through emotional support by the government.”

“Motorbikes should be used to patrol porous border points. Better supervision to counter officers who take bribes.”

“I think they should train more officers about this, create big awareness and provide resources to officers handling TIP.”

“More training is needed to keep them reminded about the laws against TIP. They need better accommodation, better pay and other related things.”

Based on their experiences, the survivors made practical recommendations for government, traffic police and border officials, transport companies and vehicle operators (Table 6).

#### 4. Discussion

The study revealed that TIP is evident within – and within the vicinity of – communities that are located close to high volume transport corridors in Tanzania and Uganda. TIP also permeates the activities and lives of many vehicle operators, although on a significantly larger scale in Uganda. The human impacts of TIP, including serious health impacts, were plain to see in the evidence gathered from survivors. It is vital, therefore, that the links between TIP and the transport sector are more readily acknowledged and that this drives further research and changes to policy and practice.

Although a high proportion of vehicle operators in both countries indicated that they understood the risks and repercussions of TIP, very few had been trained or even given basic information on TIP. Those who had benefited from awareness-raising or capacity-building reported significant changes in their attitudes and behaviour, which bodes well for similar interventions. As requested by vehicle operators, training needs to offer detailed information on what the law says about TIP; victim identification; and the steps that drivers, conductors and turnboys can take if they encounter a trafficking situation. As part of any training, it will be important to place the safety and well-being of survivors at the centre of the response.

In both Uganda and Tanzania, most driver training schools and transport associations had not considered adopting a proactive role in the fight against TIP. Both could do more. The East African Community's standardised curriculum for training drivers of large commercial vehicles lacks any mention of TIP prevention or response. Discussions are needed at regional level about the inclusion of a mandatory training module. Both the Uganda and Tanzanian governments could also consider making it mandatory for transport associations to address TIP. However, it is worth noting that the latter are generally poorly resourced and will require support to do this.

Different intervention strategies will be needed to reach vehicle operators working in the formal versus informal sectors, and those working for large employers versus small businesses. This requires careful planning backed by further research into the best ways to intervene in each sub-sector. Some transport associations represent smaller vehicle operators and hence offer an opportunity to target groups that might otherwise be difficult to reach. Another way to reach the informal transport sector could be through ride-hailing app companies.

The low level of awareness of TIP among community members who live and work close to high volume transport corridors, particularly in Tanzania and more so among women than men, increases their vulnerability to being trafficked or to being recruited by traffickers. In Uganda, where TIP seems to be happening on a greater scale and appears to be more entrenched within communities, knowledge of TIP was higher. Despite this, job offers are generally perceived as rare and not-to-be-missed opportunities and the potential trauma experienced by victims is not fully appreciated. In both countries, public information campaigns are desperately needed. Targeted campaigns in border communities and places where TIP victims are commonly seen, such as bus stations, restaurants, in buses and at border truck stops, would make sense. In Uganda certain occupations seemed more likely to come into contact with victims of TIP (e.g. sex workers, money changers, clearing and forwarding agents). Finding ways to engage with representatives of these groups and involve them as individuals who can signpost victim support services will be important.

The research highlighted the lack of confidence of vehicle operators and communities in the ability of border control officials and traffic police to combat TIP. These regulatory officials need to become more visible and proactive in the fight against TIP. Training at all levels, including of senior managers, is required, backed up by effective supervision and appropriate resourcing of the roles. A public relations campaign that shares successes and achievements from a TIP perspective would help to build greater confidence in regulatory officials.

The research found that certain vehicles, especially different types of taxi and minibus, seem to avoid vehicle and passenger checks at borders and are therefore likely to be favoured modes of transport for traffickers. It will be important to target these vehicles for spot checks in order to challenge the perception that they are "safe" forms of transport for TIP. Because some of these vehicles do not routinely pass through formal check points, regulatory officials will likely require more resources to pursue traffickers on favoured non-official cross-border routes.

Transport companies have an important role to play in combating TIP. In view of the widespread perception among community members and vehicle operators in both Uganda and Tanzania that HGV drivers are heavily involved in TIP, HGV companies need to take steps to provide training for their drivers and to monitor and supervise them better. They could also consider introducing codes of conduct for drivers and may wish to appoint anti-TIP champions to lead mainstreaming efforts. Companies that share the positive steps that they are taking via social media could encourage other organisations to follow suit.

Considering the apparent scale and embeddedness of TIP in both countries, there appears to be considerable scope to strengthen the implementation of anti-TIP laws. These laws should act as a strong deterrent to TIP, but the fact that a sizeable group of would-be "repeat offenders" exists in both countries suggests that the threat of sanctions is not as strong as it could be. As a deterrent, drivers involved in TIP who are successfully prosecuted should lose their entitlement to drive passenger service vehicles, commercial trucks, and so on, in addition to any other punishment.

Finally, considering the apparent scale of TIP across East Africa, there may be scope to establish a regional cross-border committee to monitor TIP from a transport perspective.

**Box 3****Mental and physical health impacts of TIP – Voices of survivors**

“The lady who was my employer started mistreating me. She denied me food and basic needs, verbally abused me and refused to pay my wages.” (Survivor, Tanzania)

“The man who received me said that there was no work and he wanted to marry me if I was ready. He never gave me food. When I refused his attentions, he raped me and that is when I realised that I had been trafficked and there was no work. He used to rape me every day.” (Survivor, Tanzania).

“When I arrived in Dar es Salaam, my neighbour handed me over to a bar owner and that was when I realised that I had been trafficked. I was forced to sleep with clients. I refused and was sometimes beaten by the bar owner.” (Survivor, Tanzania).

“... instead of taking me to school they took me to a house with a woman who used to stay with many girls ... I was 17 at the time. The man of the house had business, he used to go and return to the house and abused me sexually.” (Survivor, Uganda).

“Once I was in Dubai an unknown man grabbed me and took my passport ... My salary was paid to “the office” ... I was beaten and my legs were swollen.” (Survivor, Uganda).

“When I started working [in Oman], I realised that the situation would not be good. The kids started to shout at me and mistreated me, for example after I ironed clothes, they brought back all the clothes to be ironed again. They did not allow me to go back home after my contract ended. I was ok during the weekdays because the boss was around, and he was nice. But the madam started slapping and hitting me at some point when I reported mistreatment from the children.” (Survivor, Uganda).

**Table 6**

Survivors' recommendations on actions to combat TIP.

	Government	Traffic Police and Border Officials	Transport Sector
<b>Tanzania</b>	<p>“Information on TIP should be made available to young people like me at school so that from a young age one is aware of the vice and knows the measures to be taken to prevent or to seek help.”</p> <p>“There should be provision for training about human trafficking issues since the majority of people are unaware of these activities.”</p>	<p>“The police need to check the identification documents of girls and people who travel and establish reasons for travel.”</p> <p>“... the police should be vigilant in major transport stations to check the people who arrive from different places and rescue the ones being trafficked.”</p> <p>“The police must check vehicles, especially buses from villages to towns. They should ask passengers questions.”</p> <p>“The traffic police and border officials should be given training on human trafficking.”</p>	<p>“Drivers should be taught about human trafficking at driver training school.”</p> <p>“Drivers need to be more attentive and ensure they know the reasons for travel for girls who travel in buses.”</p> <p>“... drivers should be careful not to allow children or very young girls travel by themselves.”</p> <p>“Transport companies should set strict rules and not allow drivers to engage in human trafficking activities.”</p> <p>“Transport companies should set rules which prohibit the truckers to carry passengers in their trucks.”</p>
<b>Uganda</b>	<p>“The government needs to educate people about trafficking and do counselling because when you have knowledge, it is easier.”</p> <p>“The authorities could help by talking to and counselling parents since in most cases parents are involved.”</p> <p>“The government can put more checks at the borders, since people are mostly trafficked through the borders, not the airport.”</p>	<p>“Some travellers hide children on the bus so the police on the roads should thoroughly check each vehicle instead of just peeping at the window. The police should ask, “Is this your mother?” The children are threatened to be killed so it becomes hard to talk.”</p> <p>“Everyone at a border must be checked, especially people crossing with children.”</p> <p>“The officials need to be strict on their jobs.”</p>	<p>“Drivers need to ensure that they engage each passenger.”</p> <p>“Transport companies need to find a way to regulate drivers to ensure their drivers follow the law.”</p> <p>“Communities should also ask questions of drivers, especially if they see any suspicious activity on buses, or if they see children who are travelling by themselves.”</p> <p>“Other passengers should be concerned about children or very young girls travelling by themselves and should interrogate them.”</p>

**4.1. Study limitations**

At the time the research was implemented COVID-19 was a relatively new phenomenon and its effects and impacts on traffickers and victims may not have been entirely clear to respondents. This could explain why COVID-related responses differed quite

considerably between the two research countries and between respondent groups. A further limitation was the small number of respondents in the conductor and turnboy categories, which made it difficult to draw any meaningful comparisons between the different cadres of vehicle operators. The low numbers of bus and coach operators included in the study (10% of vehicle operators, mainly in Tanzania) was a further limitation of the study. Finally, a significant proportion of respondents in both countries believed that border officials and traffic police were actively involved in TIP in ways that extend beyond negligence. Our research team was unable to speak directly to regulatory officers in Tanzania due to the authorities' refusal to grant permission. This meant that cross-country comparisons could not be made on some important topics. Further research in this area could help to identify solutions that will help to interrupt TIP.

## 5. Conclusions

This case study of Tanzania and Uganda confirmed that the transport sectors in both countries play a key role in TIP, and also offer an important entry point for raising the awareness of would-be traffickers and for identifying and supporting victims of TIP. The study methodology can be adapted for use in other low-income countries across Africa and the Global South more generally. The findings indicate that there is a strong case for investing in anti-TIP interventions whenever a high volume transport road is built or a formal border post established. Recognition of TIP as a potential negative externality of transport infrastructure development is long overdue. The interviews carried out with survivors of TIP provided insights into the human impacts of TIP and hinted at the trauma experienced by those caught up in the illicit trade. The recommendations for governments, regulatory authorities and transport actors made by survivors are a call to action.

## Author contributions

Cathy Green: was responsible for project conceptualization, methodology, qualitative data collection, data curation, data analysis and interpretation, investigation, project co-ordination, supervision, stakeholder engagement, and writing of the original and subsequent manuscript drafts.

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Japheth Kioko: was responsible for data analysis and reporting.

Eva Mwai: was responsible for project conceptualization, methodology, stakeholder engagement, supervision, and reviewing and editing of manuscript drafts.

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## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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