

Data Shortfalls Hamper Fiji's Fight Against Human Trafficking

August 2, 2025

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Efforts to combat human trafficking in Fiji are being hindered by inadequate data management and limited coordination among enforcement agencies, according to government officials. Information gaps are affecting both the prosecution of offenders and the protection of victims, raising concerns about the effectiveness of current anti-trafficking efforts.

Director of Labour Standards at the Ministry of Employment, Daniel Tagivakatini, stated that without reliable and coordinated data, it becomes difficult for agencies to assess needs and deliver timely support. He stressed that the appointment of a Case Management Coordinator, as outlined under the National Action Plan 2021–2026, is a step toward addressing these shortcomings.

Tagivakatini explained that although Chief Investigating Officers may follow their own procedures for handling victims, a lack of shared information weakens the overall response. “Perhaps victim protection is the most important aspect in such cases of trafficking. That is my take on data sharing or data on trafficking in persons,” he said, underlining the need for cross-agency collaboration.

A significant challenge, he noted, is underreporting. Many victims do not come forward, meaning that cases often go unnoticed or unaddressed. This contributes to limited support services and missed opportunities to hold traffickers accountable.

Former military officer Samuela Tupou echoed these concerns, highlighting that victims require comprehensive aftercare, including shelter, food, medical treatment, and legal support. He warned that the existing infrastructure falls short, especially when it comes to aiding prosecution. “From what we’ve experienced so far, such as the current case we have with Immigration and the Department of Labour, you should provide shelter, food, medical care, and legal assistance. However, I’ve seen that we currently lack those facilities and capacities, including support for prosecution,” Tupou said.

The Ministry of Labour Standards affirmed that while it is committed to assisting victims, it maintains that financial responsibility should rest with the perpetrators rather than the government. Nevertheless, the Ministry maintains its commitment to the goals outlined in the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons 2021–2026, which prioritises improved data collection, coordination between agencies, and enhanced victim protection frameworks.

As Fiji continues its efforts against human trafficking, officials emphasise that robust and integrated data systems are essential to making real progress in both supporting victims and prosecuting those responsible.