



# world congress 2021 report

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# Report Preparation and Authorship

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# About Survivor Alliance

Survivor Alliance is a non-governmental organization (NGO) whose mission is to unite and empower survivors of slavery and human trafficking around the world.

Founded by three survivors of human trafficking, we are of, by, and for survivors. We believe that investing in survivors is a key anti-trafficking intervention. For too long, survivors have been ignored and tokenized in anti-trafficking work. By uniting survivors of human trafficking around the world and building collective power, Survivor Alliance pursues an intersectional approach to social justice. We believe that survivors of human trafficking are more than their experience of this particular trauma, and we invite everyone to do the same. Our approach integrates personal healing and justice with community healing and justice.

Through empowering survivors – by which we mean providing resources, support, and training so that survivors can harness their own inner power – we are supporting the growth of educated, self-aware, and capable survivor leaders.

We share our lessons and methodology for working with survivors and link our members to opportunities in the anti-trafficking movement. In doing so, we are leading the field in how to engage with survivors and facilitating increased survivor-ally collaborations. In all of our programs, we focus on meaningful survivor inclusion, economic empowerment, and well-being.

As of June 2022, we have 729 members in over 25 countries.

Please visit our website to learn more about us:

[www.survivoralliance.org](http://www.survivoralliance.org).

**729**  
members  
in over  
**25**  
countries

# About this Report

**The 2021 Survivor Alliance World Congress (hereafter “Congress”) marked a pivotal moment for survivor leadership in the international fight against modern-day slavery and human trafficking. For the first time, survivor leaders outnumbered our allied colleagues as planning committee members, speakers, and participants at an anti-trafficking conference. Survivor leaders included adults over 18, people of all genders, and survivors of any type of human trafficking or slavery.**

The Congress was conceived with the deep knowledge and recognition of the power of the collective. Survivor Alliance believes that international unity among survivors of human trafficking can bring about real and lasting freedom for all. It was also designed to fulfill the need for strengthened survivor-ally relationships. Facilitated online during the global Covid-19 pandemic, the Congress objectives included: uniting survivor leaders across the globe; fostering transnational collaboration within survivor networks; and with our allied colleagues, building survivor leadership capacity and strengthening survivor-centered approaches to allyship.

This report details how the Congress planned to achieve these objectives, analyzes the discussions held during the Congress within the broader context of the international anti-trafficking community, shares key lessons learned, and maps out Survivor Alliance’s plan for maintaining the momentum of change generated by this catalyzing event.

Throughout the report you will see “Session Idea” or “Session Insights” that highlight some of the ideas and reflections coming from the rich discussions during the survivor-ally working groups. We are hoping these insights will inspire and encourage more conversations, more strategies, and more engagement to promote survivor leadership in the next decade.

The ideas shared in this report are based on the conversations and contributions made during the World Congress and do not necessarily represent the ideas of Survivor Alliance on the different topics discussed.



# 1. World Congress Vision & Purpose

Survivor Alliance (SA)<sup>1</sup> envisions a world where survivors of human trafficking and slavery are thriving members of society. In pursuit of this vision, SA's mission is to unite and empower survivors across the world because human beings cannot thrive when isolated and marginalized from their communities (Charuvastra & Cloitre, 2008; Kazemi et al., 2021; Schultz et al., 2016).

As the survivor<sup>2</sup> leadership movement has grown, so have our conversations about what it looks like to gather and envision together. Many of us have attended conferences specific to our lived experience, and we have noticed the glaring lack of survivor leadership when the anti-trafficking movement gathers in unity. We have watched as allies set the agenda and decide whose voices will be heard, for how long, and on what subjects.

Many of us have been disenfranchised from these events due to the exorbitantly high registration fees typically covered by the organizations that send our allied colleagues on their behalf. A dream born with the organization's inception, the Survivor Alliance World Congress aimed to flip the script on these dynamics. A conference designed, led, and attended predominantly by survivors, the Congress held a global space where survivors from all walks of life could gather to listen, learn, envision, and build relationships.

**200** survivor  
leaders from about  
**10** countries and  
about **60** allies  
attended the World  
Congress

[1] This word is used to refer to anyone who has lived experience of human trafficking or slavery based on the United Nations' definitions below, and who is currently out of or has exited that situation of exploitation.

Slavery: "Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised."

Human Trafficking: " 'Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."

[2] From here on out in this report, when we use survivor, we mean survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery.



## 1.1. Planning & Agenda

The World Congress planning committee comprised Survivor Alliance staff, SA members, and World Congress partners who held field expertise and lived experience (see Table 1). In selecting which members to invite to serve on the Congress planning committee, the SA staff first looked at the SA members who were already actively engaged in SA programs. Of this population, the SA staff then considered the geographical representation of the SA membership base and familiarity and understanding of SA vision and values.

**Table 1: Survivor Alliance World Congress Planning Committee**

COMMITTEE MEMBER	TITLE / ORGANIZATION <sup>3*</sup>	COMMITTEE ROLE	COUNTRY
Minh Dang	SA Executive Director	Co-Chair	United Kingdom
Alicia Rana	Social Worker	Co-Chair	United Kingdom
Brunilda Barci	UK CBI <sup>4</sup> Fellow (SA)	Committee Member	United Kingdom
Christine Nelson	UK CBI Fellow (SA)	Committee Member	United States
Jaclyn Bedsole	Product Manager/Annie Cannons	Committee Member	United States
Nasima Gain	UTTHAN	Committee Member	India
Moumita Biswas	Survivor Leader (UTTHAN, INDIA)	Committee Member	India
Shivan Pavin Alungnat	Activist, Research Consultant, Survivor Leader, Queer Survivor Advocate, Feminist and Artist	Committee Member	Uganda / Kenya
Supia Khatun	Youth Community Leader rooted in the grassroots of India, Member of UTTHAN and ILFAT	Committee Member	India
Syed Ahmed	Co-Leader of Survivor Alliance Nottingham Chapter UK, Lived Experience Expert, Member of MOMENTS Study Research Advisory Board	Committee Member	United Kingdom

[3] The following are the Committee Members titles at the time of planning.

[4] Survivor Alliance Capacity Building Initiative (CBI) was funded from 2018 -2021 by the Pathways to Freedom Grant, a partnership between Novo Foundation and Humanity United. CBI developed survivor leaders in three US cities to expand local survivor leadership and deepen the city government's engagement with survivor leaders.



The planning committee first convened in September 2020 and was only able to meet two additional times. The first meeting focused on developing a relevant, survivor-centered theme for the Congress. The Committee selected the theme, Survivors Leading the Next Decade of Anti-Slavery and Anti-trafficking Work, and its associated tagline – “Unity & Solidarity” – in their second reconvening. The committee then began the work of planning an agenda that would stay true to the Congress theme and Survivor Alliance values. The realities of a global pandemic brought forth the importance of remote access to the event, despite the original intention and strong desire to gather in person.

The planning committee balanced crucial factors in choosing a hybrid event model with both in-person and remote access. These considerations included the uncertainty of when travel would be safe again and the challenges of organizing logistics for global travel in a pandemic setting, particularly for travelers who required visas. The planning committee finished its work in January 2021, after finalizing workshop topics, speakers, and presentation content. Out of respect for the volunteer-based planning committee’s time, the co-chairs and SA staff took on the remainder of the planning for operations and logistics.

## 1.2. World Congress Objectives

To achieve the World Congress vision and ensure complete alignment with its purpose, the conference was planned around four primary objectives determined by Survivor Alliance’s Theory of Change and aligned with the organization’s broader efforts and the World Congress event.

### Objective 1

#### **Build the leadership capacity of Survivor Alliance leaders to engage in anti-trafficking efforts**

Numerous opportunities were available for SA members to engage in leadership roles, such as in planning conference logistics, developing and delivering conference content, and public speaking opportunities as panelists for various sessions. Survivor conference presenters were invited to attend workshop preparation sessions before their presentations at the World Congress.

During the World Congress, numerous workshops that focused specifically on leadership development-related topics were offered (Table 2).

**Table 2: Leadership Development Workshops**

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS	
What do you want your life to feel like? A new perspective on dream boards	How to Start Your Own Non-profit/Business
From Trauma to Treasured Knowledge	Anti-Slavery Laws and Policies
Kenya Ethical Storytelling Project	Necessity and Practices of Mental Health
Leadership Building	Support in Community-based Rehabilitation
Survivors LEAD Panel	Lived Experience Expert Groups: Where to go from here
Managing Our Trauma as Survivor Leaders	Finding a Therapist: What questions to ask
Contributing to Research in the Anti-trafficking Field	Exploring the Risks of Re-exploitation of Survivors
Research Advisory Board	Job Interviewing Skills
Getting Listened To: A practice to reclaim our thinking and heal from oppression	Transitioning from Community Leader to Movement Leader

## Objective 2

### Foster transnational survivor leader collaborations

Special attention was paid to providing spaces for networking purposes to break down the silos naturally created by the diversity of geographical location and spoken language. Opportunities to have fun and build relationships with survivors from other countries, such as 'Mix and Mingle' networking events and the World Congress Talent Show hosted by Shivan Pavin Alungat, were woven throughout the agenda. Workshops like "Digital Town Square Reveal" offered participants the opportunity to learn about the Survivor Alliance Digital Town Square, an online forum to build relationships, share resources and insight, and foster international collaboration in a confidential, survivor-only community setting. These opportunities allowed participants to get to know one another and facilitated space to prompt collaborative discussions and insight into the many things that unite survivors despite our immense diversity.

## Objective 3

### **Convene a multi-stakeholder, multinational group of anti-trafficking thought leaders**

Invitations to attend the World Congress were strategically aligned with this objective. Invitations were sent primarily to Survivor Alliance members, after which we worked in collaboration with other allies, partners, and funders to expand our invitation list. The invite-only nature of this event ensured that all allied attendees already had an understanding of survivor leadership and its inherent value.

## Objective 4

### **Increase the capacity of allies to collaborate with survivor leaders**

Opportunities for survivors and allies to collaborate were mainstreamed throughout the Congress events, particularly through joint working sessions and workshops. These events brought survivors and allies together to listen, share, and learn from one another and create a shared vision for the future of survivor leadership.

In line with all four conference objectives, survivors and allies collaborated to discuss and create recommendations and action plans related to six topic areas that significantly impact survivor leadership and livelihoods:

- 1) Direct services
- 2) Fundraising
- 3) Media representation
- 4) Research
- 5) Policy Advocacy
- 6) Capacity building

## 2. Methodology

To achieve our objectives, Survivor Alliance was intentional about every aspect of the World Congress. Representation of SA's global membership was vital to ensuring geographical diversity among Congress attendees, without which the objective of transnational collaboration is moot. Additionally, honoring the diversity of survivors and their preferences for how much (if at all) they would like to be engaged as survivor leaders were considered. The number of attendees was capped, and strategic outreach that accounted for the above consideration informed the attendee invitation process. In the months leading up to the event, SA staff hosted meetings for invited participants to share more about the conference and the agenda. The SA staff also collaborated with local NGOs to support survivor attendees on a regional basis.

Participants gathered over five days, with the first three days open only to survivor leaders to dive into content developed for and by survivors. The remaining two days of the conference brought survivors and allies together to discuss topic areas through joint survivor-ally workshops and working sessions. Notetakers were present for each session to ensure that qualitative data generated from each discussion was collected thoroughly and accurately.

The discussions between survivors and allies on the last two days were informed by a pre-survey that captured participants' thoughts on the Congress theme. Specifically, the survey asked participants their thoughts on how they envisioned survivor leadership over the next ten years. Given the disparate power dynamics that exist in ally-survivor relationships, the pre-survey offered survivor participants to not only begin thinking about Congress discussion topics before the event itself but also allowed SA to incorporate these thoughts into the discussions pre-emptively, creating a space that inherently recognized survivor expertise regardless of an individual's comfort level for speaking up in a group setting.

## 2.1. Event Types

The survivor-only portion of the World Congress involved four different events designed to meet the Congress's objectives through key speaker presentations, group discussions, social networking, and capacity and skills-building activities.

- **Networking Sessions** took place throughout the conference program and included discussion forums, regional-specific meetups, and general opportunities for World Congress attendees to get to know one another. Additionally, “mix and mingle” networking sessions were hosted as informal spaces for attendees to meet survivors from other parts of the world. They included scheduled interpreters based on time zone criteria. Each “mix and mingle” session included an SA representative and volunteer to help start conversations. However, most sessions had no specific agenda but offered a space to unite survivors from across the globe.
- **Mainstage Events** gathered all participants in one virtual space to listen to a survivor leader speaker. No workshops were hosted during this time to ensure full participation and access.
- **Leadership Workshops** ran concurrently and offered a range of leadership topic areas specific to anti-trafficking work and skills-building activities. Survivor attendees were asked to choose one workshop for each time block. Materials from all workshops were available through EventMobi so participants could access discussion content if they could not attend the live session.
- **Wellbeing Workshops** to ensure the prioritization of survivor-wellbeing, these workshops were available to participants throughout the Congress and focused on practical skills and well-being exercises. In addition, basic self-care resources were available throughout the conference on the EventMobi page.

The survivor-ally joint sessions on each of the six topics were organized in three sections:

### Part 1. Survivor Leader Panels

These sessions featured three survivor leaders who shared their vision for how survivors will lead the sector in the next ten years. Each panel was co-chaired by a survivor leader and an ally and wrapped up with a Q & A discussion with the audience.

### Part 2. Survivor-Ally Working Sessions

These sessions allowed survivors and allies to consolidate the ideas generated during the survivor-only sessions and discuss similarities and differences among all the ideas shared. Working sessions focused on categorizing ideas and springboarding the discussion to determine key priorities for each topic.

## Part 3. COMBINED Survivor-Ally Workshop Sessions

These sessions combined two groups on the same topic. We had two workshops on the same topic but at different times of the day and with different interpreters. These "combined" sessions were for those who could come together from those individual sessions, to reflect and explore if there was overlap in their discussions.

The World Conference ended with a session that brought all conference participants together to report on key action steps discussed during the working group session.

### 2.2. Equity & Wellness

Creating a welcoming and inclusive virtual environment was paramount to fostering true collaboration among survivors from 20 different countries in a remote setting. Toward this end, the World Congress planning committee focused on addressing barriers related to global time zone differences, spoken language diversity, equitable access to information and technology, and overall survivor well-being. Both equity and wellness were considered in all aspects of planning, from scheduling and language access, to how Congress information was written and disseminated. Equity also required a thoughtful approach to leveling power dynamics that inevitably occur in survivor-ally conversations due to the disparate allocation of resources and power toward allies at the expense of survivor-led organizations and survivor professionals in the field.

To address this, the Congress was structured to include only survivor attendees for the first half of the week. In addition to the pre-survey content, gathering first among peers allowed survivor participants to get comfortable with the content, incubate their thoughts around certain issues, and learn from one another in the safety of a peer environment. In addition, gift boxes were mailed to all survivor participants ahead of the Congress and included wellness-related gifts and activities which supported well-being and connection to community. Whenever possible, items in the gift box were sourced from survivor-led businesses in support of survivor-leader entrepreneurs. Gift boxes were more than just the objects they contain. They functioned, too, as a symbolic gesture of honor, gratitude, and acknowledgment of the value that lived experiences bring to anti-trafficking conversations.



## 2.2.1. Accessibility

Equitable access to events like the World Congress is essential. Given the diversity in global time zones and work schedule flexibility, ensuring access to Congress events required scheduling an agenda staggered and duplicated for important events. This scheduling format allowed all participants to attend the Congress during reasonable hours regardless of their geographic location or work schedule.

Language barriers can be one of the biggest challenges to global collaboration. The World Congress events offered simultaneous interpretation in Bengali, Hindi, Spanish, Swahili, and Tamil for select Congress events and activities. In selecting these languages, Survivor Alliance reviewed its membership data to determine the most prevalent languages spoken among its members. Additional funding was secured for Tamil language translation to ensure the survivor leader participants in Freedom Funded programs could fully participate in the Congress. Events and languages offered were selected based on time zone criteria that allowed planners to anticipate which events attendees were most likely to attend based on their regional location and the availability of supplemental volunteer interpreters. In addition, all written conference materials were offered in the above languages.

## 2.2.2. Technology

Solutions to ensuring equity and wellness require creative uses of technology, particularly when ensuring equitable access to information across the global spectrum of national representation of participants. EventMobi is a conference management platform for free download as a smartphone application. Through this platform, attendees could view static information about Congress events, including at-a-glance and full agendas in multiple languages and according to regional time zones and supplemental content related to each topic area and broader topics like wellbeing. Both survivor and allied attendees had access to EventMobi; however, survivor-only content was only accessible to survivor attendees to ensure alignment with the Congress vision. EventMobi also stored static information and content related to Congress events and logistics. This content included resources related to well-being and self-care, powerpoints from workshops, and copies of the World Congress ground rules translated into various languages.

To address varying levels of technological fluency, Zoom guides in various languages were available for all sessions to assist participants in using the platform. Participants also had access to a World Congress help desk through EventMobi to answer general and frequently asked questions, like those about the conference schedule.



# 3. The Discussion: Survivors Leading the Next Decade

Over five days, 200 survivor leaders and more than 60 allies attended the Congress. During this time, survivors led the discussion and collaborated with allies to build a vision for the next ten years of survivor leadership in the anti-trafficking movement. This section synthesizes the pre-survey data collected from survivor participants and session discussion notes, offering analysis and insight into the broader context of the international anti-trafficking community.

## 3.1. Survivors Leading Direct Service

To date, survivor involvement in direct service work has been limited to emergency shelter and recovery programs. In this role, we have founded organizations, directed programs, designed curricula, and advised on promising practices, pushing the field forward in supporting our peers as they begin the rebuilding phase of their journeys.

With this expanded perception of direct service, survivors envisioned their involvement as psychologists, teachers, gynecologists, judges, lawyers, barristers, law enforcement, legislators, and more. Indeed, any service that directly meets a survivor's needs is a direct service role and most of these roles are not informed by, let alone occupied by, people with lived experience. And yet, survivor leadership in frontline and direct service sectors would catapult anti-trafficking prevention in schools, increase the capacity of frontline medical professionals to identify patients in exploitative situations, work toward the protection of survivors who are re-exploited by structurally oppressive criminal justice systems, create lasting impact through policy and legislation, and so much more.

**SESSION INSIGHT:**  
During the group discussion, many of the contributions of allies stayed within the bounds of an understandable yet narrow view of the direct service sector for anti-trafficking specific interventions. Survivors in the conversation moved far beyond anti-trafficking specificity, focusing on direct services related to survivor needs.

Of all sectors in the anti-trafficking field, direct services is arguably the sector where developing trust is most critical, given the vulnerability required of those who receive services. Survivor pre-survey data highlighted the role lived experience plays when building trust, elaborating on the inherent trust formed when a person can relate directly to one's lived experience. Survivor leaders also expressed that when direct services are led by people with lived experience, they are in a better position to build a greater capacity to relate to client needs, establishing greater trust and more effective service delivery.

**SESSION INSIGHT: "If direct services were led by survivors in the anti-trafficking movement, a lot [of] other survivors will stop feeling re-exploited because we shall have people that relate to us, know our challenges and can easily tell what help a survivor needs."**

Also salient in the conversation was the importance of lasting change and the need to move beyond a focus on the 30 to 90-day direct service program toward a focus on a survivor's ability to maintain balanced and thriving lives. Allies voiced the importance of including, valuing, and prioritizing survivor perspectives in anti-trafficking work to achieve lasting impact in direct service. Additionally, survivor leadership in monitoring, evaluation, and learning for all programs and interventions was noted as essential to forward progress, course correction, and ultimately lasting change.

The importance of a culture shift was threaded throughout the focus on lasting change. **For the anti-trafficking community to collectively envision those of us with lived experience as doctors, lawyers, and judges, we must first be seen as whole, complex human beings defined by more than our stories and capable of more than our survivorship.** This perception shift requires the kind of dialogue offered by the World Congress and a commitment to radical power-sharing by the allied community. Given the many barriers survivors face when seeking inclusion in the professional sector, support for career pathways into direct service-related professions is critical. Survivors offered numerous ideas about how to support career pathways into the direct service sector, noting that barriers to employment were not dissimilar to other traditionally marginalized populations and required serious investment in ensuring access to education and training programs, and opportunities for entry-level positions to gain professional experience through survivor-centered recruitment and hiring practices.

Overall, survivors in this discussion broadened the scope of how the anti-trafficking sector traditionally views direct service work. In doing so, **they also broadened the group's understanding of empowerment beyond economic influence to include direct service roles with political and social influence.** Not only would survivors on the judicial bench require little if any training to identify cases of human trafficking in their courtroom, but their assessment and judgment on these cases would also invariably account for the complexity and nuance of the survivor reality within criminal justice systems.

**SESSION IDEA:  
"Establish a search firm that creates diverse career pathways for survivors."**

## 3.2. Survivors Leading Philanthropy

The philanthropy sector offers perhaps the starkest example of how survivors continue to hold the least amount of power and influence in anti-trafficking work. Even at the grassroots level, anti-trafficking work requires funding and resources. Nevertheless, survivors have little influence over how and to whom these critical funds are distributed.

During the discussion, participants prioritized survivor leadership in positions with meaningful influence and authority to design grants and determine how and to whom funds are distributed. Survivors in both the pre-survey and the survivor-ally discussion consistently mentioned the potential positive impact that lived experience could play in decision-making roles in philanthropy, because survivors know firsthand what we need to rebuild and thrive after leaving exploitation. Survivor leaders in funding decisions would ensure that adequate funding flow toward survivor-informed priorities, such as education programs to build survivor leader capacity. Similarly, more consideration might be given to funding programs that support survivor interests in pursuing career paths outside of the anti-trafficking movement, and ensure access to these funds in the decades after leaving a trafficking situation as opposed to only the immediate aftermath.

Survivors in the conversation also highlighted the key role we have to play in vetting organizations that receive funding. Survivor communities have long been frustrated with decisions to fund organizations whose practices further harm clients despite written impact statements that say otherwise.

Complementing the need to have more lived-experienced staff in decision making positions within donor organizations, participants also discuss the need to have stronger mechanisms to enable additional survivor voices to inform decisions made by donors. This is to avoid resting on a token survivor whose sole role it would be to bring their lived experience, and to ensure diverse survivor voices are included in funding decisions.

Partnerships between funders and survivor-led organizations, was an agreed point of prioritization during the session. These partnerships were seen as critical to the sustainable growth of allied and survivor-led organizations, offering a mutually beneficial relationship that leverages access to funding and the value of survivor leader expertise. Nurturing relationships between survivor-led organizations and funders will ensure that there are fewer hurdles and intermediaries between survivor-led organizations and donors. Although we understand that some donors prefer to operate with an intermediary, this is not the case for all funders.

Direct communication between philanthropic organizations and survivor leaders when making funding decisions could help mitigate this harmful trend, as could survivor leadership in pre-vetting organizations in the grant application process.

Survivors and allies also touched on the importance of transparency and accountability for funded organizations, naming faith-based organizations as particularly lacking in transparency. While faith-based organizations have an important role in anti-trafficking work, the high levels of non-governmental funding generated by these organizations and their subsequent influence warrant greater oversight than is currently required. Survivor leaders in roles such as Program Advisors were seen as a potential solution in mitigating a trend of poor practices, such as the prevalence of “rescue” missions that often place survivors in positions of greater vulnerability post-intervention and inadvertently perpetuate colonialist systems of oppression.

Both survivors and allies in the discussion saw survivor leaders as essential actors in providing clarity around ethics and responsibility for funded organizations, including **establishing ethical guidelines to be adopted by all funded organizations**. Interestingly, both survivors and allies espoused the importance of allies engaging in volunteer (uncompensated) work as a potential antidote to poor practices by allies in the field, who do not hold a commitment to our shared mission.

**SESSION IDEA:**  
**Philanthropic and donor organizations could host workshops for survivor leaders to build the technical skills required for grant writing.**

This survivor-centered practice would further accountability among organizations who include survivors only as volunteers rather than compensated employees and consultants.

Data from the survivor-only pre-survey also showed the importance of building capacity and skills among survivor leaders to equip them to participate fully in grant writing and awardee selection.

### 3.3. Survivors Leading Media & Representation

Currently, survivor access to mainstream media opportunities still falls largely within the storytelling arena. While survivor participants in the conversation recognized the important role stories play in educating our allied partners about the breadth and depth of diversity of survivors and our experiences, they also noted several areas for improvement.

**The orientation of all storytelling approaches should be toward opportunities that benefit the survivor directly.** Ideally, these opportunities would benefit both the media organization and the survivor being interviewed; however, whether or not survivors benefit from the story-telling process continues to be absent from the conversation or is brought forth as an afterthought rather than a primary intention. This requires a shift in focus on survivors as the primary beneficiaries of our stories, rather than the general public or the organizations and agencies that platform our voices.

Ownership of one's story was a central theme in the conversation. Many survivors who have had experiences with the media have felt stripped of their rights to control how their stories are represented when told by others through the media. The importance of access for survivors to edit and post their narratives was offered as one method of change in this direction. **Opportunities to reclaim ownership of our stories in the media would have an impact that reaches far beyond individual survivor empowerment and work toward mental model shifts that reduce stigma and dehumanizing perceptions of survivors within our communities.** The diversity of our stories, the languages we choose to tell them in, and the unique angles, tones, and details we share would increase dramatically.



As a result, accurate and authentic portrayals of survivors, our humanity, our strengths, and our universal resilience would outshine current portrayals, which serve as voyeuristic and generally inaccurate narratives steeped in the harmful mythologies that portray how communities perceive, talk about, and interact with survivors. Leveraging the power of the media in this way offers a powerful opportunity, the ripple effect of which would likely touch every aspect of our field.

**SESSION INSIGHT: “If survivors earn back the power of representing our own stories, a lot of stigma will be fought...There is always more about survivors than just sad stories.”**

Despite survivors' important role in the media, much work is needed in supporting infrastructures to ensure that media experiences are safe and empowering. This includes directing **resources to enable equitable access to collegiate-level media courses and increasing the capacity of media networks to engage in trauma-informed, survivor-centered practices.** Additionally, survivors in the conversation offered numerous examples of projects with potential for survivor leadership, including documentaries, art, music projects, radio shows, podcasts, social media platforms like Youtube channels, graphic design, and other production-related roles.

The conversation among survivors and allies highlighted similar themes to those captured in the survivor-only pre-survey discussion. **Including survivors with professional roles in the newsroom was offered as a key step in changing the culture of harmful media portrayals of survivors** and a way to push back on the dominant focus on the trafficking experience, toward a world in which survivors are depicted as full, complex human beings with unique interests, skills, concerns, and experiences.

Increasing the diversity of representation was also called out as a critical step forward in authentic media portrayals, particularly regarding race and gender. Currently, the stereotypical profile of survivors continues to proliferate in western media images and content, excluding all but white women and girls who experience sex trafficking from the public imagination. While these images may not be prevalent globally, western countries continue to hold most of the power, resources, and influence over international anti-trafficking work and thus impact survivors everywhere. **Reducing barriers to lift the voices and experiences of survivors of color, labor trafficking survivors, male survivors, gender and sexual minorities, and other marginalized communities is essential to accurate and authentic depictions of the issue. Representation reflecting the global diversity of survivors rather than focusing on survivors from the United States was also prioritized.**

**SESSION VISION:**  
**“Survivor leaders can challenge current misrepresentations and narratives in the public domain and shape the future.”**

Additionally, allies in the conversation discussed the importance of media portrayals of survivors as experts, policy influencers, and social change leaders. They also envisioned survivors' important roles as filmmakers, journalists, and in other artistic spaces to ensure authentic representation and survivor-centered motivations for trafficking-related discussions in the media.

### 3.4. Survivors Leading Research

Survivor leadership in research was seen as a major platform for change with vast untapped potential. Although some examples exist where survivors are engaged as lead researchers or peer researchers (Dang & Leyden, 2021; Lundstrom, 2021; Henniger et al., 2020; Price, 2019), survivors are typically asked to participate in research as survey respondents or research interviewees.

Survivors and allies discussed the extractive nature of dominant research approaches where disparate researcher-participant power dynamics underpin the primary methodologies and methods in anti-trafficking research. Survivors highlighted participatory action research (PAR) as a methodology with the potential to flip these power dynamics and increase opportunities for meaningful survivor leadership in research spaces while furthering beneficial aspects of engaging in the research process as participants.

Using PAR methods, opportunities for survivors to engage in research would increase beyond roles as participants in data collection activities and instead serve as key research team members throughout the entirety of the research process, from design, implementation, analysis, dissemination, and beyond, toward leading efforts which use study results to create actionable change. Leadership in the research space would position survivors to challenge current research methods and methodologies, which do not benefit and, at times, harm survivor participants, by furthering survivor-centered research practices; driving forward-thinking, grounded, solutions-minded research studies; and building better rapport between research teams and survivor participants. Similarly, survivor leadership on research teams would bolster values-related frameworks to ensure anti-racist, do-no-harm, shame-free, and judgment-free practices.

Survivor participation in research is not limited to PAR methods. During the conversation, survivors envisioned a wide range of opportunities for involvement, including survivor-only research teams overseen by research advisory boards that included allies.



Both survivors and allies noted that equitable access to leadership opportunities in research required capacity building through access to training and education. Similarly, research focused on barriers to survivor involvement in research would help identify strategic pathways to increase access and opportunity in academia. Access to resources and mentoring to guide survivors in navigating researcher-participant power dynamics and making fully informed choices to engage as participants were also identified as important areas for growth in this sector.

**SESSION VISION:**  
“Maybe in the next ten years, we [survivors] will be doing our own thing with our allies who want to be on board, as opposed to it being the other way around as it feels like it can be now.”

Survivor leadership in this space would also lead to research products with greater relevance and actionability in the anti-trafficking space leading to strategies and approaches that contributed to meaningful and lasting change within survivor communities. Survivors highlighted the value of diverse survivor input to understand better the unique ways diverse communities (e.g., disabled and trans communities) are affected by trafficking and the sub-layers of communities that exist within diverse populations when viewed through racial, ethnic, and gendered lenses. Similarly, survivor leadership in research would add great value to the design and topical focus of research studies. The breadth of research focus could expand beyond topics that examine how trafficking occurs to strengths-based approaches, which bring aspects of survivor resilience, problem-solving capacity, and the potential of harm-reduction efforts to cultivate community cultures that enable thriving survivor livelihoods.

## 3.5. Survivors Leading Policy and Advocacy

Over the past two decades, the anti-trafficking field has come a long way in recognizing the critical importance of survivor voices in policy and advocacy. It is important to note that this recognition has come largely from the efforts of survivor leaders who pioneered spaces to influence policy discussions at all government levels. As a result of this hard work, bodies like the [Indian Leadership Forum Against Trafficking](#), the [US Advisory Council on Human Trafficking](#), the [International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council](#), as well as countless grassroots organizations, have led to significant changes in how survivors shape the policies that directly affect our lives.

**SESSION VISION: “I will be very happy to see [a world where] policies cannot be passed without survivors’ opinions.”**

However, this progress is only a starting point and the World Congress discussion reflected the need for continued improvement in this area. The discussion on survivor leadership in policy advocacy touched on themes such as opening broader **access to opportunities to create rather than comment on trafficking-related policies, advising stakeholders on policy implementation, and giving feedback on changes to existing policies to meet the needs of diverse survivors within their communities.**

The lack of meaningful survivor leadership in the policy and advocacy space has led to legislation that fails to meet survivors’ needs or causes further harm. Implementing laws, particularly in the context of law enforcement responses that criminalize survivors, was brought forth as a much-needed area for improvement. Survivor leadership in this realm could bring tremendous value to avoiding unintended harm caused by well-intentioned policies and developing strategies for mitigating these consequences. Ineffective implementation of existing policies was identified as another significant barrier in this arena. Participants described that some policies could have had lasting positive impact if implementation and enforcement efforts were supported by survivor leadership.

Survivor leadership was seen as an effective antidote to both poorly designed policy and poor implementation of policy, and the only practical path forward for lasting change. Both **survivors and allies envisioned survivors in positions as legislators, parliament members, policy analysts, and other political offices at the local and national levels.** Survivors paving the way through grassroots advocacy was noted as an avenue for shifting the status quo of current power dynamics and opening pathways toward meaningful and lasting change in survivors’ lives.

Outside of official political positions, opportunities for survivors to give input on new policy initiatives were discussed as a priority practice across the sector. Similarly, survivor involvement in policy and advocacy work in intersecting sectors, like climate change, would further leverage the value of survivor input in crafting policies that address the on-the-ground needs of those most vulnerable to trafficking.

## 3.6. Survivors Leading Capacity Building (for survivor peers)

Equitable access to meaningful opportunities to participate in anti-trafficking work requires an investment in survivor leader capacity building. The discussion defined capacity as developing survivor skills, knowledge, and experience in anti-trafficking work. Salient to the survivor conversation was the importance of meeting a survivor's individual needs, like a safe home, income, food, and internet access, before or in tandem with capacity-building initiatives. Similarly, survivor access to local communities where we feel dignified, respected, and empowered to actively engage as community members were key to ensuring a strong foundation that sets survivors up for success and allows us to leverage capacity-building opportunities fully.

**SESSION INSIGHT: "Capacity building may actually first [require] supporting survivors in becoming active members of local communities."**

Survivor community and connection were held up as essential to survivor professional development and leadership. Survivor networks were seen as a strengthening factor for mentorship, peer support, and shared learning. Building community, networks, and solidarity among survivors locally, regionally, and internationally is the pathway to fully harnessing survivor power and potential for the greater good of individual survivors and the field. Global survivor unity was discussed as equally important to reflecting survivor diversity in capacity-building.

The skills and opportunities highlighted in both the survivor and ally discussion reflected the wide diversity of the survivor population and the stratification of privilege within the survivor community itself. This diversity requires capacity-building efforts to reflect the local community and individual context, where needs range from literacy to high-level professional development skills to support continued learning and growth for all survivors. Survivors also questioned the dominance of Western leadership models in capacity-building initiatives and felt initiatives that foster global leadership styles were worth considering for the future.

Survivors highlighted the importance of access to diverse entry-level opportunities to build professional skills through hands-on experience and find their niche in the field. For many survivors, lack of access to professional opportunities requires organizations and agencies to privilege lived experience over gaps in professional experience so survivors can begin to build professional skills in the field. This requires survivor-centered recruitment and hiring processes and a true understanding of what lived experience adds to the professional skill set in the field.

Of utmost importance is that survivors are compensated for our time regardless of where we are on the lived experience to professional expertise spectrum.<sup>5</sup> Access to capacity-building initiatives requires compensating survivors for their time; this ensures that socio-economic privilege is not the determinant for a survivor's inclusion in skills-building programs. Similarly, survivor leader access and influence to donor priorities is essential to closing the communication gap between survivors and funders so that funding streams go to programs that have a long-term impact.

**SESSION INSIGHT:**  
**"Address stigma and stereotypes – we need to first believe in survivor leadership, and that survivor leaders have the capacity to lead with excellence and in new ways (no lip service)."**

[5] Powers, L. (2019). Experience to expertise spectrum. Survivor Alliance CBI Leadership Training Manual (p19).

## 3.7. Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL)

The World Congress MEL framework used specific indicators of change to measure progress and achievement of the four objectives. Data was collected through internal sources like RSVP lists, workshop registration, as well as a post-Congress survey sent to survivors and allies after the event. For survey questions measuring percent change, 5-point Likert scales ranging from “strongly agreed” to “strongly disagreed” were used. The table below highlights survey data for each objective's major impact areas.

**Table 3: MEL Results**

OBJECTIVE	INDICATOR	RESULTS
1. Build the leadership capacity of Survivor Alliance leaders to engage in anti-trafficking efforts	Increased confidence to participate as leaders in anti-trafficking efforts	<p>As a direct result of the World Congress, 46.15% of survivor respondents (N=52) “strongly agreed” and 36.12% “agreed” that they had increased confidence about their leadership skills.</p> <p>51.9% of survivor respondents (N=52) “strongly agreed” and 40.38% “agreed” that the Congress directly increased confidence in their ability to have a positive impact on anti-trafficking efforts.</p>
	Increased knowledge of anti-trafficking field	As a direct result of the World Congress, 44.23% of survivor respondents (N=52) “strongly agreed” and 38.26% “agreed” that their participation increased their knowledge of ethical storytelling.
	Improved abilities related to managing trauma as a survivor leader	As a direct result of the World Congress, 48% of survivor respondents (N=52) “strongly agreed” that the Congress improved their abilities to take steps to support their own wellbeing.

OBJECTIVE	INDICATOR	RESULTS
2. Foster transnational survivor leader collaborations	Increased confidence related to building new relationships with other survivors	As a direct result of the World Congress, 44.23% of survivor respondents (N=52) “strongly agreed” and 42.32% “agreed” that they had increased confidence in building new relationships with other survivors.
	Increased knowledge and improved abilities to build solidarity with survivors across the globe	As a direct result of the World Congress, 44.23% of survivor respondents (N=52) “strongly agreed” and 38.26% “agreed” that their participation increased their knowledge of ethical storytelling.
3. Convene a multi-stakeholder, multinational group of anti-trafficking thought leaders	Diverse global attendance of anti-trafficking professionals in remote setting	200 survivor leaders from about 10 countries and about 60 allies (including philanthropy/donors, direct service providers, researchers, and other NGOs) attended the Congress.
	Increased survivor leader peer professional networks and increased survivor leader-ally professional networks	<p>Allies and survivors engaged in 16 joint sessions during the World Congress.</p> <p>11 allies and 11 survivors co-facilitated 11 sessions during the World Congress.</p> <p>10 survivors worked together in the planning committee.</p> <p>14 allies served as volunteers throughout the WC.</p>

OBJECTIVE	INDICATOR	RESULTS
<p>4. Increase the capacity of allies to collaborate with survivor leaders</p>	<p>Increased knowledge and improved abilities to collaborate with survivor leaders</p>	<p>As a direct result of the World Congress, 51.43% of ally respondents (N=35) “strongly agreed” and 42.86% “agreed” their participation increased their knowledge of the challenges faced by survivor leaders in the anti-trafficking movement.</p> <p>As a direct result of the World Congress, 58.82% of ally respondents (N=35) “strongly agreed” and 32.35% “agreed” their participation increased their knowledge of the perspectives of survivor leaders regarding priorities for the anti-trafficking sector.</p> <p>As a direct result of the World Congress, 28.57% of ally participants (N=35) “strongly agreed” and 60% “agreed” that their participation improved their abilities to collaborate with survivor leaders to inform their work.</p> <p>As a direct result of the World Congress, 22.86% of ally participants (N=35) “strongly agreed” and 60% “agreed” that their participation improved their abilities to identify specific, paid roles for survivor leaders to inform anti-trafficking work.</p>



# 4. Limitations & Lessons Learned

## 4.1. Equitable Access

Given the realities of funding constraints and the desire to prioritize adequate funding to ensure the complex implementation processes required to uphold Survivor Alliance values and achieve the World Congress vision, the planning committee was entirely volunteer-based. While this posed limitations to the equitable access of SA member participation, additional considerations were made to ensure participation as part of the planning committee team benefited team members in various ways, including expanded professional networks and experience planning an international anti-trafficking convening – an opportunity previously held almost exclusively by allies.

## 4.2. Covid-19

Planning a global convening during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic posed several limitations to achieving the original World Congress vision. Most notably, there was a shift away from the original intention to hold the event as an in-person gathering toward prioritizing the health and safety of participants. The timeline for the event also shifted. Initially intended to start October 2019, the World Congress planning did not commence until August 2020 as Survivor Alliance and the anti-trafficking community shifted priorities and focus areas in support of survivors whose livelihoods were severely disrupted. Additionally, the necessary shift in priorities across the anti-trafficking field limited the organization's capacity to fundraise for the World Congress to support the redirection of resources toward survivors' immediate needs in the pandemic reality.

## 4.3. Online Global Convening

The decision to host the World Congress as an online event added significant complexity to the planning process. Considerations around equitable access to technology and language required a significant investment of time and resources. Although the planning committee found thoughtful and creative solutions to many of these challenges, implementation offered a few lessons learned to inform future planning efforts.

Using volunteer language interpreters is cost-effective but not practical unless the volunteers are committed to receiving training on the translation software in advance. Those who did not attend the training struggled to understand the nuances of the software or troubleshoot when issues arose. Also, volunteers did not always keep their shift, which caused a huge challenge for ensuring participants could understand the workshop content. The cost of simultaneous interpretation in multiple languages was prohibitive. The digital platform we thought was most suitable for our needs required us to utilize their partner company for interpretation. We had not budgeted for the costs that they requested.

## 5. What Comes Next?

Although the World Congress was over one year ago, Survivor Alliance continues to advance the work that started at the World Congress. The experience left our staff, members, and allies with the willingness to move the conversations and commitment further, and create a process to develop an Action Plan for Survivor Leadership in the next decade.

As a result of this, Survivor Alliance initiated a Movement Building portfolio to build and implement a strategy for developing the Action Plan. Since July 2021, we have:

- Reviewed data from our feedback survey of all participants
- Applied for and secured funding for our Movement Building portfolio
- Hired a Movement Building Director and Coordinator
- Held conversations with allies and survivors to review our approach and framework for Movement Building
- Developed a participatory methodology to ensure meaningful engagement with survivor leaders moving forward
- Recruited, hired, and on-boarded survivor leader consultants to serve as facilitators of the methodology

A key insight from our conversations with survivors and allies was the continuing need to manage the power imbalance between survivor leaders and professional allies. As a result, rather than move forward with allies and survivors working together as we initially planned, we decided that a fully survivor-led and informed Action Plan is what is needed to advance a self-led social justice movement where survivors are the heart of the movement and driving the actions for change. We have and will continue to host separate conversations with our allies to provide updates on our process and seek additional input.

The first component of our methodology was to expand the breadth of contributions from survivor leaders. Recognizing that the World Congress was not truly globally representative in our participant demographics, we wanted to include more voices in creating a shared vision for survivor leadership. During July and August 2022, more than 150 survivor leaders from across 20 countries joined one of twelve Visioning Workshops to collectively dream about how they wanted to see and experience survivor leadership in the anti-trafficking and anti-slavery movement. Data from these Visioning Workshops, along with the data presented in this report, will be utilized in the next step of our methodology.

Next, we will host Working Groups focused on co-creating an action plan based on that vision. The Working Groups will consist of 60 survivor leaders organized into six Working Groups. Over six months, the Working Groups will offer a space for survivor leaders to strategize, connect, and learn from each other, while developing actions to build an intersectional and inclusive movement that is truly by, of, and for survivors of slavery and human trafficking. Our hope is to finish this Action Plan in July 2023.

For our allies reading this, we hope that you will continue to collaborate with us to enact the released Action Plan. As you know, Survivor Alliance believes that people with lived experience should be at the center of the movement. But we also believe and trust in the engagement and commitment of our allies to work side by side with us to advance in that direction.

As with so many other sectors and movements during the Covid-19 pandemic, we have had to learn to connect, make community, and advance our strategies online. For now, Survivor Alliance will continue to do this to enable easier access and more connections across the global miles. We are also looking forward to the possibility of meeting in person and engaging in further conversations and collaborative action to unite and empower survivors of human trafficking around the world.

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