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Combatting the slavery of our times: 40 new measures for an EU strategy against trafficking in human beings

Hundreds of thousands of people are trafficked in the EU every year. Women and men, boys and girls in vulnerable positions are traded for the purpose of sexual or labour exploitation, removal of organs, begging, domestic servitude, forced marriage, illegal adoption as well as other forms of exploitation.

Today, the Commission adopted the EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings (2012-2016), a set of concrete and practical measures to be implemented over the next five years. These include the establishment of national law enforcement units specialised in human trafficking and the creation of joint European investigation teams to prosecute cross-border trafficking cases.

"Unfortunately slavery hasn't yet been left to the history books. It is appalling to see that in our times human beings are still being put up for sale and being trafficked into forced labour or prostitution. Ensuring that victims can get support and bringing traffickers to justice is at the heart of our actions. We are far from there yet, but we can have only one aim: to eradicate trafficking in human beings", said Cecilia Malmström, Home Affairs Commissioner.

A new European strategy

The strategy includes prevention, protection and support of the victims, as well as prosecution of the traffickers. It identifies five priorities and outlines a series of initiatives for each of them, such as:

- Supporting the establishment of national law enforcement units specialised in human trafficking.
- Creating joint investigation teams and involving Europol and Eurojust in all cross-border trafficking cases.
- Providing clear information to victims on their rights under EU law and national legislation, in particular their right to assistance and health care, their right to a residence permit and their labour rights.
- Creating an EU Mechanism to better identify, refer, protect and assist trafficked victims.
- Establishing a European Business Coalition against trafficking in Human Beings to improve cooperation between companies and stakeholders.
- Establishing an EU platform of civil society organisations and service providers working on victim protection and assistance in Member States and third countries.
- Supporting research projects examining the Internet and social networks as increasingly popular recruitment tools for traffickers.

Some figures

Recent estimates from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) put the number of victims of forced labour, including forced sexual exploitation, at 20.9 million worldwide. 5.5 million of them are children. According to Europol, children forced into criminal activities, such as organised begging and shoplifting, are being traded as commodities with €20 000 price tags.

The estimated number of victims in the developed economies (US, Canada, Australia, Japan, Norway and EU countries) amounts to around 1.5 million forced labourers, 7% of the total worldwide. Trafficking in human beings generates more than €25 billion profits a year for international criminal organisations worldwide. While many victims come from non-EU countries, internal trafficking (i.e. EU citizens trafficked within the EU) appears to be the rise.

Preliminary data collected by Member States at EU level appear consistent with those provided by international organisations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), showing that three quarters of victims identified in EU Member States are trafficked for sexual exploitation (76% in 2010). Other victims are forced into labour exploitation (14%), begging (3%) and domestic servitude (1%).

From a gender-specific point of view, preliminary data available show that women and girls are the main victims of trafficking in human beings; female victims accounted for 79% (of whom 12% were girls) and men for 21% (of whom 3% were boys) of victims between 2008 and 2010.

Yet too few perpetrators end up behind bars while victims struggle to recover and re-integrate themselves into society: preliminary results of recent data collected shows that the number of convictions in trafficking cases has decreased from around 1 500 in 2008 to around 1 250 in 2010. Europeans agree that something needs to be done: in the latest [survey](#) 93% of citizens agreed that EU Member States should cooperate to tackle trafficking in human beings.

Background

With the "EU Strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in Human Beings (2012-2016)", the Commission is focusing on concrete actions that will support and complement the implementation of EU legislation on trafficking ([Directive 2011/36/EU](#)) - whose deadline for transposition is April 2013.

The measures included in the strategy are the result of extensive consultations with experts, governments, civil society and international organisations, social partners and academics. They reflect their main concerns, as well as the views of victims, and will complement existing efforts.

The Strategy will now be discussed by the European Parliament and the Council.

The Commission will continue to assess progress made in addressing trafficking and will report every two years to the European Parliament and the Council. The first report, to be issued in 2014, will include a midterm evaluation of the Strategy.

For more information

[MEMO/12/455](#)

Interviews with victims of trafficking in downloadable versions:

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/focus/index.cfm?&focusid=264&page=focus&sitelang=en>

Homepage of Cecilia Malmström, Commissioner for Home Affairs:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/malmstrom/welcome/default_en.htm

Homepage DG Home Affairs:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/index_en.htm

European Commission Anti-trafficking website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/index>

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