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An EU Strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in Human beings

What is trafficking in Human beings?

Trafficking in Human beings is the slavery of our times. June 2012 estimates from the International Labour Organisation put the number of victims of forced labour, including forced sexual exploitation, at 20.9 million at a global level¹. 5.5 million of these are children. Such global estimates are even considered to be conservative.

Victims are often recruited, transported or harboured by force, coercion or fraud in abusive conditions, including sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, begging, criminal activities, or the removal of organs.

Trafficking in human beings is a severe crime that takes many different forms, but whether they were sold for sex, hard labour in agriculture, construction, or the textile industry, or forced into domestic labour, victims share similarly gruesome stories.

Having to provide services seven days a week to pay back ridiculous amounts of money to their traffickers, victims are often deprived of their passports, and in many cases locked in and only allowed out for 'work'. Barred from contacting their families, they are threatened by their traffickers and live in fear of retaliation. With virtually no money, and having been made fearful of the local authorities by their traffickers, the idea of escaping remains elusive - as is their prospect of returning to a 'normal' life.

What are the root causes?

Trafficking in human beings evolves with changing socio-economic circumstances. It affects women and men, girls and boys in vulnerable conditions.

It is rooted in vulnerability to poverty, lack of democratic cultures, gender inequality and violence against women, conflict and post-conflict situations, lack of social integration, lack of opportunities and employment, lack of access to education, child labour and discrimination. Other causes of trafficking in human beings include a booming sex industry and the consequent demand for sexual services. At the same time demand for cheap labour and products can also be considered as factors.

¹ International Labour Organisation, 'ILO 2012 Global estimates of forced labour', June 2012 (covering the period 2002-2011).

What is the situation in the EU?

Estimates put the number of victims across the European Union at hundreds of thousands.

Trafficking does not necessarily involve the crossing of a border, but it is predominantly a transnational type of crime, extending beyond individual Member States. While many victims come from non-EU countries, internal trafficking (i.e. EU citizens trafficked within the EU) appears to be the rise. Most traffickers work within well-established networks which allow them to move victims across borders or from one place to another within a country.

Preliminary data collected by the Commission shows that most of the registered victims in Member States are used for sexual exploitation (an increase from 70% in 2008 to 76% in 2010). The remaining is forced into labour (a decrease from 24% in 2008 to 14% in 2010), begging (3%) and domestic servitude (1%). This data appears consistent with those provided by international organisations, such as UNODC.

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 which 3% were boys) of victims between 2008 and 2010.

Comparable and reliable data is key in addressing trafficking in human beings. That is why the strategy foresees specific actions on data collection, including on the gender dimensions of human trafficking. In the autumn of 2012, the Commission, in cooperation with Eurostat, will already publish more detailed results.

What is already being done at EU level?

A major step forward was taken in form of the adoption of EU legislation ([Directive 2011/36/EU](#)) which focuses on preventing the crime, protecting the victims, prosecuting the traffickers and establishing partnerships, in particular with civil society ([IP/11/332](#)).

If the Directive is fully transposed by April 2013 as required, it has the potential to have a real and concrete impact on the lives of the victims and to prevent others from falling victim to such a devastating crime.

The Directive established the post of EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator with the task of ensuring policy coherence, improving the coordination of efforts in addressing trafficking in human beings within Union institutions and agencies and beyond and to contribute to the development of existing and new policies. Myria Vassiliadou was appointed as EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator on behalf of the Commission in December 2010 and took up her mandate in March 2011.

EU financial support already is and will continue to be one of the main tools in preventing trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (information on projects can be found on the EU [Anti-trafficking website](#)).

We are on the right track, but a lot remains to be done to eradicate human trafficking.

Why an EU strategy?

As a next step to the Directive, the Commission proposed concrete measures that complement legislation and the efforts undertaken by governments, international organisations and civil society in the EU and third countries.

It is a practical instrument addressing the main needs and challenges in the EU for the next five years from a human rights and gender-specific perspective.

The aim is to involve and ensure better coordination between all possible actors working towards the eradication of trafficking, such as police officers, border guards, immigration and asylum officials, public prosecutors, lawyers, housing, labour, health, social and safety inspectors, social and youth workers, consumer organisations, trade unions, employers organisations, temporary job agencies, recruitment agencies, etc.

Concrete actions will include the funding of research studies and projects, the establishment of platforms, coalitions and partnerships, the development of guidelines and best practices, awareness-raising campaigns and trainings, etc.

Which are the priorities identified by the strategy?

The strategy identifies five priorities and outlines a series of initiatives for each of them, such as:

1. Strengthening the identification, protection and assistance to victims, with a special emphasis on children.

- Developing a model for an EU Transnational Referral Mechanism which links national referral mechanisms (cooperative frameworks through which state actors fulfil their obligations to protect and promote the human rights of trafficked persons) to better identify, refer, protect and assist trafficked victims (2015).
- Providing and disseminating clear user-friendly information on the labour, social, migrant and compensation rights individuals are entitled to as victims of trafficking in human beings under EU law (2013).

2. Stepping up the prevention of trafficking in human beings, including by reducing demand

- Funding research on the reduction of demand for and supply of services by victims of trafficking, including for the purpose of sexual exploitation (up to € 2.5 million under the 7th Framework Programme in 2013).
- Facilitating the establishment a European Business Coalition against trafficking in Human Beings to improve cooperation between companies and stakeholders (2014).

3. Increasing prosecution of traffickers

- Supporting the establishment of national law enforcement units specialised in human trafficking. These dedicated teams should become the contact points for EU agencies, in particular Europol, and focus on all forms of trafficking (Ongoing).
- Developing proactive financial investigations and cooperation with EU agencies on trafficking cases through the sharing of best practices. Gathering more evidence from money trails might provide the necessary additional proof, particularly in high risk sectors, thus relieving victims of the burden of testifying in Court (2013).

4. Enhancing coordination, cooperation and coherence within the EU, with international organisations, and with third countries, including civil society and the private sector

- Establishing an EU platform of civil society organisations and service providers working on victim protection and assistance in Member States and third countries (2013).
- Designing more uniform and consistent trainings for those who work in the field, targeting in particular judiciary and cross border law enforcement officials (2012).

5. Increasing knowledge of, and effective response to, emerging trends in human trafficking

- Developing an EU wide system for the collection and publication of reliable and comparable data, which will notably help better understanding on new flows and trends, such as internal trafficking, and the gender dimension of trafficking (2014).
- Supporting research projects targeting the Internet and social networks which have become increasingly popular recruitment tools for traffickers (2014).

How will it improve the situation for victims?

Working towards the elimination of trafficking in human beings cannot be achieved without placing the victim at the centre of any actions and initiatives.

This victim-centred approach is present throughout the whole strategy.

One priority is to better identify, protect and assist victims. The identification of trafficking cases remains difficult, even though many people could potentially come in contact with a victim. The Commission proposes, for instance, to develop guidelines to help practitioners as well as consular officials and border guards better identify victims of trafficking.

In order to better assist victims in a cross-border situation the strategy also suggests to develop a model for an EU Transnational Referral Mechanism which will link different national referral mechanisms to better identify, refer, protect and assist victims. These national referral mechanisms formalise cooperation among government agencies and non-governmental groups dealing with trafficked persons. Such a mechanism can, for example, establish contact points in the countries involved and clearly assign responsibilities to the relevant actors so that the victim is assisted and protected at all times. This is particularly important in order to ensure that victims who decide to return to their country of origin continue to be supported in that country so that they can fully recover and re-integrate into society.

The strategy also aims to provide clear information to victims on their rights under EU law and national legislation, in particular their rights to assistance and health care, their right to a residence permit and their labour rights, their rights regarding access to justice and to a lawyer, and on the possibilities of claiming compensation.

How is the particular situation of children addressed?

Children are trafficked for various reasons including sexual and labour exploitation. 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 Strategy, just as the Directive, recognises the importance of addressing trafficking in children who are particularly vulnerable to victimisation and re-trafficking, including during their adult lives. It proposes developing a best practice model for the role of the guardians and/or legal representation of the child victims and guidelines on child protection systems. The Strategy also calls on Member States to strengthen such child protection systems.

What is proposed to step-up prevention?

A better understanding about how to reduce the demand and supply for services of trafficking in human beings victims could be reached through launching a study, raising awareness in cooperation with the private sector via a European Business Coalition (to be established in 2014) and promoting trafficking free supply chains in and outside the EU.

In 2014 the Commission will launch EU-wide awareness-raising activities targeting specific vulnerable groups, such as women and children at risk, domestic workers, Roma communities, undocumented workers and situations such as major sporting events.

The Commission will also assist Member States in strengthening measures to prevent human trafficking via temporary work agencies and intermediaries, such as job, marriage and adoption agencies.

What can be done to increase prosecution of traffickers?

The total number of cases prosecuted in the EU remains low. In fact, preliminary results of recent data shows that the number of convictions on trafficking in human beings has decreased from around 1 500 in 2008 to around 1 250 in 2010.

The strategy promotes multidisciplinary cooperation at the local, national and transnational level, encouraging Member States to set up, for example, a dedicated national police intelligence unit and to stimulate cooperation between administrative and law enforcement authorities.

Developing pro-active financial investigations is key when dealing with trafficking cases. Evidence gathered from money trails might provide the necessary additional proof, particularly in high-risk sectors (agriculture, construction, the textile industry, healthcare, domestic service and the sex industry)², which will also relieve victims of the burden of testifying in court.

² Europol, 'EU Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2011'.

What emerging concerns should also be taken into account?

The trends, patterns and working methods of traffickers are changing in all the different forms of trafficking in human beings, adapting to demand and supply and to legal and policy loopholes. It is necessary to understand such trends quickly and ensure an effective response.

For instance, internal trafficking, in which the victims are EU citizens who are trafficked within their own or another Member State, is on the rise. Understanding the flows and trends of internal trafficking will be an important part of the data collection initiative at EU level. Research on the gender dimension of trafficking and the vulnerability of high risks groups is also foreseen.

The internet offers numerous possibilities to recruit victims. It is anticipated that this trend will increase, as will the number of women sexually exploited in less visible, online environments. The Commission will fund projects enhancing knowledge of online recruitment that takes place via simple search engines and online advertisements, chat rooms, spam mail, or social networking tools.