

Fight against trafficking in human beings in the EU's external relations

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The European Parliament adopted by 504 votes to 30, with 148 abstentions, a resolution on the fight against trafficking in human beings in the EU's external relations.

Members recalled that, according to the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2014) of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), **70 % of the total number of detected victims are women and girls**; women represent 79 % of the detected victims of sexual exploitation, and men represent 83 % of detected victims of forced labour.

Furthermore, **more than 10 000 unaccompanied refugee and migrant children have disappeared in Europe** according to the press declaration by the Europol Chief of staff. Many among those children have been forced into sex trafficking rings, begging, the illicit and lucrative organ transplant market or the slave trade.

According to the latest Global Slavery Index, 35.8 million persons are estimated to be trapped in situations of modern slavery worldwide.

Global trends in trafficking of human beings: Parliament denounced trafficking in human beings, which it considered as **a modern kind of slavery**, and a serious crime which constitutes one of the worst forms of human rights violations that cannot be accepted in societies that are based on the respect for human rights including gender equality. Trafficking in human beings has to be **understood in a holistic manner**, focusing not only on sexual exploitation, but also on forced labour, organ trafficking, forced begging, forced marriages, child soldiers and the trafficking of babies.

Recalling that trafficking in human beings is **a transnational crime of global nature**, Parliament stressed the need for a consistent approach to the internal and external dimensions of the EU's policies for combating trafficking. It deplored the **persistent lack of adequate legislation** to criminalise and effectively combat trafficking in human beings, as well as the wide gap between the legislation that does exist and implementation thereof, including on the one hand the **limited or non-existent access to justice for victims** and on the other hand the lack of prosecution of perpetrators.

Parliament underscored **the critical distinction between the concepts of trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling**. While noting that smuggling is also among the activities of criminal networks and organised crime and can lead to a situation of trafficking, it underlined that the two concepts require different legal and practical responses and involve different state obligations.

Observing that the **internet and social networks** are increasingly being used by criminal networks to recruit and exploit victims, Parliament called on the Commission to: (i) evaluate the use of the internet in the context of human trafficking, particularly as regards online sexual exploitation; (ii) adjust its cooperation with third countries to take into consideration the new development of trafficking via the internet.

The economy of trafficking in human beings: Parliament denounced the fact that trafficking in human beings is a highly lucrative business and that the proceeds from this criminal activity are largely re-injected into the global economy and financial system. According to the ILO's most recent estimates, the illicit annual profit from forced labour, including through money laundering, is about USD 150 billion.

It therefore called for a stronger focus on money laundering activities, and for the EU to reinforce cooperation, with third countries to locate and confiscate the proceeds from those criminal activities. Confiscated assets should be used to support and compensate victims of trafficking.

Furthermore, governments must make greater efforts to **fight against corruption**, which contributes to human trafficking and encourage multi-stakeholder dialogue and partnerships to bring together businesses, anti-trafficking experts and NGOs and carry out joint actions against human trafficking.

Different forms of exploitation: in this regard, Members called on the Union and its Member States to:

- **combat forced labour** in EU industries abroad, and in relation to third countries, by applying and enforcing labour standards and supporting governments in adopting labour laws providing minimum protection standards for workers;
- give more support to charitable organisations offering access to psychological care to **victims of forced prostitution** (the clear link between trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes and prostitution has been highlighted);
- consider **forced marriage** as a form of trafficking in human beings if it contains an element of exploitation of the victim;
- harmonise national legislation and to solicit third-country governments to enact and enforce legal provisions as regards **forced begging** as a form of trafficking in human beings under Directive 2011/36/EU;
- adopt a multi-sector, multi-disciplinary approach in addressing illicit human organ procurement, including human trafficking for organ removal, which has developed into a global problem.

Parliament condemned the practice of trafficking in human beings for forced surrogacy as a violation of the woman's rights and the rights of the child. It insisted that children who are victims of trafficking in human beings be identified as such and their best interests, rights and needs be considered paramount at all times.

The EU is urged to continue its efforts to combat the phenomenon of **child soldiers**.

Victims' rights: Parliament called on the EU and the Member States to have a **human rights-based and victim-centred approach**. It called on the Member States, including countries of origin, transit and destination, to provide or facilitate access to remedies that are fair, adequate and appropriate to all trafficked persons within their respective territories and subject to their respective jurisdictions, including non-citizens.

Victims of trafficking must have the **right to an effective remedy**, including access to justice, recognition of legal identity and citizenship, return of property, adequate reparation as well as medical and psychological care, legal and social services, and long-term (re) integration support, including economic support.

Members also called on the Member States to: (i) ensure that law-enforcement authorities and asylum authorities cooperate in order to help **human trafficking victims in need of international protection** to lodge an application for protection; (ii) guarantee asylum seekers who are victims of trafficking the same rights as those afforded to other victims of trafficking.

Cooperation at regional and international level: Parliament called for:

- enhanced coordination and cooperation and the **systematic exchange of information** to investigate and combat transnational trafficking in human beings;

- the EU to **enhance police and judicial cooperation** between Member States and with third countries – in particular via Europol and Eurojust;
- the establishment of **cross-border labour migration mechanisms** in the EU and at international level in order to increase and formalise regular labour migration;
- the EU to develop a regional approach, concentrating on the ‘**trafficking routes**’ and offering responses which are adapted to the type of exploitation in the different regions.

EU policy on trafficking in human beings in its external action: Parliament considered it essential that strategies aimed at the prevention of trafficking in human beings address the facilitating factors and the underlining causes and circumstances behind this phenomenon.

It asked the **EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator** to:

- further develop concrete joint action and measures among the EU, the Member States, third countries and international actors so as to set up a more coherent and efficient cooperation in establishing systems that identify, protect and assist victims of trafficking;
- step up the prevention of trafficking in human beings, seek increased prosecution of traffickers and (iii) establish a network capable of responding to emerging concerns.
- Members also called on EU representatives to pay particular attention to trafficking in human beings in the **EU's political dialogue with third countries**, and also through its cooperation programmes and within multilateral and regional fora.

The EU is urged to make the necessary efforts at international level to prevent and suppress the slave trade, to bring about progressively and as soon as possible, the **complete abolition of slavery** in all its forms.