Preventing and combating trafficking in human beings, and protecting victims

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The Commission presents its second report on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings. Whilst continuing to monitor how Member States implement Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings ('the Anti-Trafficking Directive'), the Commission notes that it implemented the 2012-2016 EU Strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings. In addition, in December 2017, the Commission identified further concrete actions to improve prevention of trafficking in its Communication reporting on the follow-up to the EU Strategy.

This report, together with its accompanying staff working document, presents emerging patterns based on data and trends, actions taken under the EU Strategy and the progress in implementing the 2017 Communication, in line with the commitment undertaken therein. The report also analyses statistical data provided by Member States and presents an update on the implementation of Directive 2004/81/EC7 on residence permits for victims of trafficking.

The main points are as follows:

Emerging trends: the data for 2015-2016 show similar patterns among registered victims and traffickers in contact with the police and criminal justice system to those found in previous reporting periods:

- there were 20 532 registered victims of trafficking in the EU. However, the report states that the actual number is likely to be significantly higher as many victims remain undetected;
- children were almost one quarter (23%) of the registered victims;
- 5979 prosecutions and 2927 convictions for trafficking in human beings were reported, which is low;
- EU citizens made up (44%) of registered victims, the main countries of citizenship being Romania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland and Bulgaria. These are the same countries as in 2010-2012 and in the first Commission progress report;
- the top five non-EU countries of citizenship of registered victims were Nigeria, Albania, Vietnam, China and Eritrea;
- 56% of trafficking in human beings was for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and this remains the most widespread form. Around one quarter (26%) was trafficking for labour exploitation, while other forms (such as forced begging, organ removal) (18%) made up the remainder. The majority (61%) of the registered victims of trafficking for labour exploitation are found in the UK, so data from the UK significantly changes the proportion of trafficking for labour exploitation at the EU level.

The report also highlights an **increase in trafficking within Member States** and targeting of younger victims and persons with disabilities. The use of Internet and social media to recruit victims is also noted as well as the heightened risk of trafficking in the context of migration.

The Commission states that there have been **certain improvements**. Generally, cross-border cooperation through Europol and Eurojust channels has increased. In 2014-2015, a large number of joint investigation teams were set up within Eurojust. Furthermore, Member States report that they are cooperating more closely with **civil society organisations**. The Commission cites the use of financial investigations, setting up joint investigation teams, and developing national and transnational referral mechanisms.

Nevertheless, trafficking in human beings remains a crime **characterised by impunity** for the perpetrators. The findings of this report do not indicate that trafficking has decreased. Further, the analysis of the data reveals a **tendency to identify victims of prioritised forms of exploitation,** with certain categories of victims placed at the forefront of action, while others receive less attention. Information from the Member States reveals persisting complexities and a **lack of progress in key areas**. As a result, the Commission outlines a number of priority areas for Member States to focus on to combat trafficking in human beings, inter alia:

Improved data collection: Member States should improve the recording and registration of data particularly on gender, age, forms of exploitation, citizenship of victims and perpetrators, as well as on assistance and protection.

Increasing the effectiveness of prosecutions and convictions: EU rules already allow for the criminalisation of those who knowingly use services provided by victims of trafficking and the Commission encourages the Member States to implement those provisions in their national laws. The Commission actively supports national authorities to focus on improving the effectiveness of investigations and prosecutions through measures allowing them to follow the money and the profits from trafficking, and **criminalising those who use the services of victims.**

Promoting a coordinated response: Member States should continue enhancing transnational law enforcement and judicial cooperation while at the same time promoting cooperation with non-EU countries.

Ensuring victims' access to justice: Member States are encouraged to give effect to national legislation by ensuring tools are in place for early identification of victims, providing access to compensation, and promoting appropriate training and capacity building of relevant professionals.

Awareness-raising: raising awareness and training measures should be targeted at achieving concrete results, especially to prevent the crime. Member States are encouraged to better measure impact. Upholding accountability towards the victims also means ensuring that **businesses** are held accountable for their actions or inaction.

The Commission states that it has implemented many of the concrete actions of the 2017 Communication and will continue to assist in every possibly way, including by financially supporting the development of policy and operational measures.