

Fighting trafficking in human beings, an integrated approach and proposals for an action plan

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report by Edit **Bauer** (EPP-ED, SK), and called for a new EU strategy to fight trafficking in human beings. It considered that measures taken so far to reduce trafficking in human beings had not yielded results in the form of a reduction in the number of victims. On the contrary, trafficking in human beings was the fastest-growing criminal activity in comparison with other forms of organised crime in the EU. Parliament called on the Commission and Council to adopt an action plan to prevent and combat this criminal activity. Parliament addressed a series of recommendations to Council on the legal framework and enforcement of the action plan and laws related to trafficking, on preventing and reducing demand and on protecting victims.

Trafficking in human beings must be tackled by means of a coherent policy approach (migration, gender, employment, social, development, external, neighbourhood and visa policy) and consequent criminalisation, at least reaching the standards of EU legislation in accordance with Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA. Since trafficking in human beings was committed not only for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but also for labour exploitation, illegal adoptions, forced domestic servitude and selling organs, this indicates that fighting trafficking must go far beyond fighting forced prostitution and take all related forms of exploitation and oppression into account.

Parliament took the view that extremely severe penalties must be imposed on companies found to have been employing cheap labour supplied through human trafficking, particularly where the companies concerned have been acting fraudulently. Member States should better control the activities of labour agencies and agencies for recruitment of seasonal workers, and the Council should consider the networking of national labour inspections.

On methods of reducing demand, Parliament felt that discussion of trafficking in human beings should form part of education in schools and address the reduction of social and gender inequalities. The provision of information to the public and the raising of public awareness of trafficking as an unacceptable crime should be recognised as vital elements in fighting trafficking. The Commission was asked to launch a study on both the causal correlation between Member States' legislation on prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation and on the causal correlation between Member States' legislation and policy on migration and trafficking in human beings. In order to ensure the scientific credibility of the study, a standardised data collection method should be implemented so as to assure comparable figures.

Member States were asked to ensure that victims of trafficking were granted short-term residence status, including a reflection/recovery period for victims lasting no less than 30 days, and access to information on the legal and administrative procedures in a language that the victims understood, together with free legal assistance. The Commission and Member States should establish a multilingual hotline with a single European number with the aim of providing first assistance to the victims. Victims of trafficking should not be returned to the country of origin if they might suffer further harm through stigmatization and discrimination, or risk being re-trafficked. Parliament stressed the importance of safe return, reintegration and social inclusion programmes for victims with full respect of victim's rights to safety and privacy, including ensuring that states are responsible for conducting individual risk assessment prior, during and after the return of a victim.

Lastly, as far as child trafficking is concerned, Parliament asked Member States to respect the UN definition of child; i.e. any individual below the age of 18. Special protection measures for children and a child protection policy according to UNICEF Guidelines and Reference Guide should be implemented in both countries of origin and destination, including more street social work, family assistance, building a safety net for children, more information on the risks of unsafe migration, and assisted returns according to the views and best interest of the child.