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## TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS IN EUROPE THE PERSPECTIVE OF EUROPOL

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### 1. Executive summary

- Europol has supported Member State THB investigations **since 2003** with a dedicated project team of specialists and analysts.
- Europol has been represented in the **EU Commission's Group of Experts on THB** since 2007.
- Trafficking in human beings (THB) remains a serious problem in the EU. It is likely that **every single EU Member State is affected by THB** in one form or another with a number of Member States clearly favoured by traffickers as the main 'market places'.
- There is a trend towards **more EU nationals being identified** as victims of trafficking. This development is a consequence of some traditional source countries now being members of the EU, combined with the greater freedom of movement that all EU nationals have.
- The exact levels of trafficking in the EU are not easy to identify, not least because it is often hidden within other forms of criminality e.g. prostitution, illegal immigration and labour disputes. The lack of uniform and comparable data collection has also been a root cause in '**not knowing the big picture**'.
- Over the last decade there has been a significant increase in the level of raised awareness on THB in the EU but instances of trafficking are still not being recorded or investigated.
- A more serious consequence of trafficking not being identified as such is the potential for the **criminalisation of victims of trafficking**, especially where their exploitation amounts to the commission of crime.
- A contributory factor in the assessed escalation of trafficking in Europe and the difficulty in a) identifying both traffickers active in the EU and b) victims of trafficking being moved around Europe, is the **absence of physical border controls**.
- Outside the EU, the major Northern Hemisphere source countries are; the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, Turkey, Moldova, and as a region, the **Western Balkans**.
- The EU is also an area of operations for trafficking networks from Asia, Africa and South America and the number of people from these continents being identified as victims of trafficking or as suspected traffickers has increased.
- Currently, Bulgarian, Chinese, Hungarian, Nigerian, Romanian, Brazilian and Vietnamese criminal networks are the most active traffickers in the EU.

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- Although sexual exploitation is the most widely reported form of trafficking, labour exploitation is a common crime that often goes undetected due to a lack of general awareness of the subject.
- The **Internet** is being used by more sophisticated trafficking networks to recruit and to advertise sexual services.
- In 2011 Europol supported **22 cross border human trafficking investigations** with the provision of expertise and guidance, operational analysis and logistical support. Many of these investigations were supported 'on the spot' through the deployment of Europol's **mobile office**, allowing investigators to access Europol's databases and analytical tools directly from the field.
- THB is one of the eight strategic priorities set in June 2011 by the JHA Council for the fight against organised crime in the framework of the EU policy cycle 2011 and 2013 and this **EMPACT** priority is directly supported by Europol.

## 2. Europol's mandate in the field of THB

As the European Union law enforcement agency, Europol's mission is to support European Union (EU) Member States (MS) in preventing and combating all forms of serious and organised international crime and terrorism. Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) is one of Europol's mandated crime areas.

Europol has had a dedicated THB response since 2003. The current THB project is called **Analytical Work File (AWF) PHOENIX**. The purpose of this AWF is to support the competent authorities in preventing and combating the forms of criminality associated with trafficking in human beings by Organised Crime Groups (OCGs), as well as any associated criminal activities within Europol's mandate uncovered in the course of the investigation into these criminal networks in the MS concerned.

### 2.1. Operational support in the fight against trafficking in human beings

The Analytical Work File is a unique operational tool which enables the collection, analysis and dissemination of operational information from and to Europol operational partners. Europol's analysts use the AWF to identify opportunities for investigators which are often not recognised at national level, allowing them to tackle organised crime in the most comprehensive and effective manner possible.

AWF PHOENIX is one of only two projects at Europol allowed to collect, store and process data on victims of crime. The opportunity to work with the details of victims of trafficking provides significant opportunities for Europol analysts to link different and apparently unrelated cases in different Member States. Single THB investigations are often developed 'beyond the borders' leading to the identification of larger human trafficking networks.

Operational support is also extended to Member States with the deployment of the Europol mobile office; teams of dedicated analysts and experts providing on-the-spot assistance in the Member States during investigations. The mobile office provides a live connection to Europol's centralised databases and analytical tools from the operational environment, using the highest security standards.

The information exchange between investigators operating in different countries is a key element in the fight against trafficking networks operating on trans-national level. Europol has infrastructures in place to successfully provide investigators with a platform for the secure exchange of information, transmitted rapidly through the network of Europol National Units in each EU Member State and in third countries with which operational agreements are in place.

The number of cross-border investigations initiated by MS and supported by Europol is continuously increasing, as is the number of operations developed into

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Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) led by MS with the association of Europol. In 2011 Europol actively supported 22 high-level human trafficking investigations.

Information related to trafficking of human being amounts to 23% of the data entities stored in Europol's centralised database, the Europol Information System (EIS).

### 2.2. Awareness raising

Europol is engaged on a regular basis in various awareness raising activities on trafficking in human beings. Europol experts visit EU MS to provide specific information on THB to law enforcement officers. A much larger target audience is presented with information on THB by the same experts during international conferences, seminars and training programmes organised by various EU agencies and international organisations. The aim of these awareness sessions and presentations is not only to give a picture on the phenomenon at EU level but also to call the attention of the relevant stakeholders to the importance of prevention, prosecution and protection.

### 2.3. Support to financial investigations

One of the main factors behind human trafficking is the **profit** it generates. Europol established a dedicated unit which supports the activities of investigators engaged in the **seizure of criminal profits and assets**. The Europol Criminal Assets Bureau (ECAB) assists Member States' financial investigators to trace the proceeds of crime, when assets have been concealed outside the investigators' jurisdictional boundaries, within the European Union. This is a key element in the fight against THB.

#### CASE STUDY

##### Operation BUIDELWOLF

**Participating countries:** Netherlands, Belgium and Hungary

##### Scope of the operation:

- A Dutch investigation, with links to Belgium targeting a Hungarian organised crime group trafficking Hungarian women to the NL for the purposes of forced prostitution in the 'windows' of The Hague's red light district. This is a current investigation which has so far identified 21 victims of trafficking.

##### Role of Europol

This live investigation is supported by Europol within the framework of the EMPACT THB priority.

AWF Phoenix, in close cooperation with Europol's Criminal Asset Bureau (ECAB) prepared a substantial analytical report based on the analysis of data collected on all financial transactions made by the members of the trafficking network between the NL and Hungary. The objective of the analysis is to identify and trace the proceeds of crime by tracking the money flows generated by the group as they move their profit out of the country. The results of the analysis were presented to the investigators of the MS concerned during an operational meeting in May and next steps in the investigation have been established.

- **Result:** In the last few months four key suspects have been arrested.

### 3. THB in Europe

The 'big picture' that is THB in the EU is not so clear because the data required to accurately document and assess THB in the EU is not routinely collected.

In the absence of any standardised guidelines for data collection at EU level, it is no surprise that the current *ad hoc* and fragmented approach taken by EU Member States allows for significant intelligence gaps. The result is that assessments of the level of trafficking throughout the EU are based on incomplete data and are, at best, partially informed estimates.

Europol's THB intelligence database, built upon MS information clearly identifies that there are **more EU nationals being identified as victims of trafficking than Third country nationals**. This is due to a combination of some traditional source countries, such as Bulgaria and Romania, now being members of the EU, the greater freedom of movement that all EU nationals have and the fact that many trafficking networks are EU nationals who target their own nationalities.

The EU market place is also an area of activity for trafficking networks from Asia, Africa and South America. The incidence of nationals from these continents being identified as victims of trafficking and as suspected traffickers has increased.

#### 3.1. Victims

Victims will inevitably come from countries and regions which are subjected to economic hardship and other contributory factors which the traffickers will target. These '**push**' factors have not changed much in ten or more years:

- high unemployment;
- labour market not open to women and gender discrimination;
- lack of opportunity to improve quality of life;
- sexual or ethnic discrimination;
- escaping persecution, violence or abuse;
- escaping human rights violations;
- collapse of social infrastructure and poverty;
- other environmental conditions including conflict and war;

Although there are thousands of examples of individuals who have been targeted by traffickers because of their vulnerability, there are countless number of individuals who do not fit the stereotypical background of, for example, a lack of formal or secondary education, escaping abusive family or personal relationships, or unemployed with no future prospects.

Greater freedom of movement and travel, low cost international transport and global communication links, combined with previously unavailable opportunities to work overseas and self confidence, are all contributory factors in the recruitment by traffickers of persons who would not normally be thought of as vulnerable.

The common factor in relation to how people from diverse backgrounds become victims of trafficking is deceit, usually via the promise of education, employment, good working conditions, a salary that does not exist, in general terms a better quality of life and existence.

Most trafficked victims are women and children but men are now equally exploited in the area of labour exploitation. The most vulnerable, of course, are children where less sophistication is required in the recruitment process. The most extreme form of this would be where the parents themselves or other members of the family are complicit with the trafficking process or are indeed, the traffickers themselves.

### 3.2. Nature and Characteristics of the Criminal Groups Involved

**Trafficking in human beings is driven by profit.** In the same way that legitimate businesses look at market forces so do the traffickers, who are professional and organised criminals.

In many MS, the criminal groups and networks involved in THB meet the EU criteria for defining them as organised crime (OC). Although there are some indications of hierarchically structured OC groups, human trafficking networks are more likely to be structured as small groups, which operate both independently as well as in cooperation with other crime groups. The interaction is often connected to the provision of a service that cannot be undertaken by another group.

It is usual for those involved in the recruitment phase to be of the same nationality or ethnic origin of the victims that they target. However, the tendency for homogeneous groups to engage or work together with other nationality crime groups in order to realise their goals is increasing. All groups show some similarities: the ability to adapt easily to new environments, conditions and markets and to respond quickly to counter trafficking initiatives.

Some trafficking groups are family or clan-based with strong codes of conduct and allegiances and provide significant challenges for law enforcement to penetrate, e.g. Albanian-speaking organised crime groups and ethnic Roma crime groups. Nigerian trafficking groups rely heavily upon contracts with their victims that have been reinforced by a voodoo or Juju ritual. The ritual process is both a controlling element for the traffickers, pimps and madams and one which acts as a significant obstacle in dealing with victims who have been subjected to this process.

Currently, Bulgarian, Chinese, Hungarian, Nigerian, Romanian, Brazilian and Vietnamese criminal networks are the most active in the EU.

### 3.3. The use of the Internet

The use of the Internet to facilitate the trafficking process is rapidly expanding with regards the recruitment of victims and their exploitation i.e. advertising their services. Most often linked to a more sophisticated or organised trafficking network, this is very much trafficking behind closed doors. Meetings between victims and clients can be organised through dedicated websites with customers 'shopping around'. Victims will often be moved very quickly to fulfil demands, especially with regards specific requests for the services of a large number of women or girls. The anonymity of online services provides discretion and the mass audience improves the profitability of the service.

### 3.4. Sexual Exploitation

Trafficking for sexual exploitation is **the most commonly reported form of trafficking**. Victims are moved in and around the EU, both across borders and internally, and are exploited in all environments. The active rotation of women forced into prostitution is aimed not only at maximising the profit by supplying new 'faces' to clients and by exploring new markets, but also at avoiding victims establishing relationships and, consequently, avoiding law enforcement detection.

EU national victims of trafficking can be recruited with false promises of free housing, well paid jobs or groomed by 'lover boys', with the usual promise of a better life and marriage; many victims are minors. The criminal groups can target a family network or an ethnic community often having identified the persons to be recruited. They will use their contacts in the family network or community to recruit girls and women with one intention, to exploit them in forced prostitution.

Organised traffickers will usually have widespread contacts across Europe and the victims will inevitably be exploited in more than one country. The victims can be transported from the origin country directly to the country of destination using low

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cost airlines, with tickets purchased by the traffickers or transported on land routes through several transit countries. Once in the country of destination the victims are provided with accommodation and transportation to the work place where they have to engage in prostitution. The victims are offered "protection" while practicing prostitution in brothels, bars, private flats or on the street and they are closely monitored by the traffickers. A high level of pressure is put on the girls to have as many clients as possible every day. They are forced to work long hours, 12-15 hours on a daily basis is not uncommon and their earnings are collected by the criminals. In the rare event that a girl is allowed to retain some of the money she has earned, much of it will be taken back by the traffickers in the form of expenses for accommodation, food, or as fines for non compliance or fictitious Police pay offs.

### 3.5. Labour Exploitation

**Labour exploitation in the EU is not a recent development.** Due partly to the fact that it is largely a hidden crime, which has traditionally not been a priority for law enforcement action, in general terms it has remained undetected.

The traffickers involved specifically seek to target their own nationals for exploitation and recent cases that Europol have supported have highlighted the involvement of not only Poles, Lithuanians, Romanians and Bulgarians but also Portuguese and British nationals in trafficking their countrymen.

Typical examples of the industries and areas where victims of trafficking for labour exploitation will be found are: Agricultural/farming sector, Construction industry, Service sector, Manufacturing sector and domestic service.

The investigation of labour exploitation is now firmly on the agenda of many countries. This indicates the willingness of countries to recognise, adapt to and combat new forms of trafficking.

#### CASE STUDY

##### Operation Taffeta

**Participating countries:** United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Slovakia

##### Scope of the operation

- An investigation into human trafficking of Eastern European nationals, usually of Roma ethnicity into the UK for **exploitation linked to benefit fraud**. The traffickers are engaged with labour and sexual exploitation with no difference in modus operandi, only the outcome is varied. The OCG is linked to employment agencies owned by British nationals, who provide the contracts for the work carried out by the victims. The 'work' is the systematic fraud and abuse of the UK welfare system. Roma are recruited and trafficked, usually by other Roma, especially families with many children and they are presented to the authorities as a family requesting assistance and support. Once the 'family' have been registered with that authority they are moved to another authority area and the process is repeated.

##### Role of Europol

- Upon the request of the CZ, SK and UK authorities, an operational meeting was organised in September 2011 at Europol where AWF Phoenix presented an operational analysis giving an overview of the labour exploitation in the UK, identifying as main actors specific Slovak and Czech suspects and victims. The emphasis was made on the nature of the OCGs identified in two UK cities and the investigators were able to determine appropriate 'next steps'. The enquiry is ongoing.

### 3.6. Child Exploitation

**An increasing number of children are being trafficked throughout the EU.** Current reporting indicates that social security, welfare and benefits systems are being targeted by traffickers using trafficked children to support and justify claims linked to family and housing benefits – as described above. This is in addition to the commission of street crime offences and the involvement of trafficked children in the production, manufacture and supply of controlled drugs e.g. Vietnamese ‘cannabis farmers’.

These are all instances of forced labour orchestrated by organised crime groups. These activities generate massive profits and very often, as previously mentioned, the victim’s parents or other members of the family network can be complicit in the trafficking of the child.

For organised trafficking groups, moving children across controlled borders is a straightforward activity. In many cases the victims often travel on genuine passports of non related adults. Where photographs of the children are included in the passport, due to the resemblance that young children have to each other, many non related children are not identified.

Within the Schengen Travel Area, where routine and systematic border control no longer exists, it is difficult to identify a trafficked person, child or otherwise, in transit.

## 4. Conclusions

Based on current reporting, intelligence, trends and patterns, it is unlikely that there will be any immediate reduction in the levels of trafficking of human beings in Europe.

This crime will continue to have a major impact upon the EU and, in the current financial climate, it is highly likely that labour exploitation in Europe will rise.

## 5. Recommendations

- Member States should fulfil their obligations as defined by existing EU legislation and policy, e.g. *EU Directive on preventing and combating THB and protecting its victims 2011/36/EU*, and the European Court of Human Rights judgement *Rantsev v. Cyprus and Russia (2010)*.
- Member States to address trafficking as described in the new EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012-16.
- Recognising that most instances of trafficking have an international dimension, Member States investigators and prosecutors should ensure that local, regional and national THB investigations are developed beyond the borders to ensure that their investigations target the trafficking networks.
- Member States to involve Europol and Eurojust in all cross border trafficking cases.