

EUSDR Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation”

## Danube Cities against Human Trafficking (D-CAHT)

### Round Table on Preventing & Combating Human Trafficking and Exploitation at Local Level

24 November 2017 | Vienna City Hall

#### Summary

Trafficking in human beings (THB) is a complex phenomenon that requires specific capacities and resources for detection, combatting and preventing. Local actors – be it public authorities, non-governmental organisations or citizens – have a crucial role in this issue, as they are often closest to both victims and traffickers. Although cities and municipalities offer a variety of possibilities for effectively counteracting human trafficking, local actors tend to lack capacities, resources or know-how in order to initiate activities. Additionally, stakeholders need a transnational approach in order to effectively tackle the international dynamics of trafficking in human beings. In particular, the Danube Region encompasses regions that face both the recruitment – with a high share of victims recruited from Romania and Bulgaria – and exploitation of victims of human trafficking. Against this background, Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region is working towards a thematic networking initiative – the Danube Cities Against Human Trafficking (D-CAHT) initiative – which shall address in particular cities, towns, relevant NGOs, experts and local institutions in order to enhance capacity-building and know-how transfer on this genuinely transnational and transversal issue.

Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation”/City of Vienna organised in cooperation with the Regional Implementation Initiative the **Round Table on “Preventing & Combating Human Trafficking and Exploitation at Local Level”** in Vienna on the **24<sup>th</sup> November 2017**. The seminar gathered over thirty representatives from cities, civil society, international organisations and research to discuss needs and opportunities for local cooperation.



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In her opening speech, **Claudia Singer** (EUSDR Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation”) emphasised the role of local actors in the fight against trafficking in human beings. In order to contribute to the support of local actors, Priority Area 10 of the EU Strategy of the Danube Region (EUSDR) published the “Guidelines for Municipalities” for the Danube Region that were based on the guidelines for the Baltic Sea Region.

**Helga Konrad** (Regional Implementation Initiative, RII) further introduced the issue of preventing & combating human trafficking and exploitation at local level. Experts studied this issue from different perspectives and developed helpful instruments to politicians. However, the problem still does not seem to diminish. Two major reasons have been identified:

- 1) local actors must become more aware of their role in the fight against and prevention of trafficking in human beings;
- 2) policy makers are focused on the migration crisis in Europe and tend to forget that it is linked to human trafficking.

Additionally, there is a strong focus on security issues, but barely on victims' rights. At European level, the main legal instruments in the fight against trafficking in human beings are:

- UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children ("Palermo Protocol");
- Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims

Additionally, every country has its own, national legislation on human trafficking and migration but most of them share difficulties in implementing these measures.

**Mike Dottridge** (Independent Anti-Trafficking Expert and Consultant)

underlines the importance to involve local actors in the fight against trafficking in human beings. Not least because of their legal obligations local authorities should be aware of the problem and willing to engage since if they do not comply, they might be held accountable at the European Court of Human Rights. One example of this is public procurement: It is not enough to apply the legal procedures and control the applicants. In fact, the winner of the bid could sub-contract to any company whose reliability is not checked by public bodies and that could hide exploitation or any kind of illegal activities. He also points out that in some cases, the lack of attention to human trafficking at local level might be intentional. For instance, omissions in child protection can be the outcome of instructions to avoid other negative outcomes such as police men, who are instructed to "turn a blind eye" in order to avoid the risk of being accused of racism, if they addressed children from ethnic minorities (e.g. Roma). Local actors need to be trained to notice indicators, or "tell-tale" signs, i.e. small clues that if well interpreted can lead to discover exploitation episodes. Despite some of these signs are hard to see, some can be noticed and may lead to the respective actions if trained accordingly. The services that can play a role in noticing these clues are many, they include social service workers, officials in bars or hotels, inspection staff, school staff, local police and similar. These services need to be coordinated in order to function and to do so multidisciplinary teams must be created aiming at developing a local referral system.



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**Enrico Ragaglia** (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, ICMPD) presented preliminary findings of the research conducted by ICMPD: "Trafficking Along Migration Routes (TRAM)". The research focuses on eight countries: Greece, Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia, Serbia, Austria, Germany, Sweden and Finland aiming at understanding a) the risks of exploitation and trafficking for vulnerable migrants or refugees (including unaccompanied and separated children); b) the gaps and training needs of frontline responders to allow them to identify trafficking cases and respond; c) gaps, needs and good practices in protecting and rehabilitating trafficked people.



He underlines that over the past two years routes have shifted leading to an increase in the interest of European politicians on the topic but still policies are not able to properly face it and this is because for non-experts it is difficult to understand the problem. The research findings reiterated that a link exists between the migrant crisis and trafficking and exploitation in Europe; often asylum and migration officers don't see themselves as responsible for

identifying trafficking cases; more restrictive migration policies make migrants even more exposed to trafficking and exploitation; children trafficking seems to follow the trends of trafficking of adults. Moreover, it confirmed that the majority of victims in Europe comes from two countries of the Danube region: Romania and Bulgaria.

**Stefano Volpicelli** (Trainer and Researcher on Migration and Trafficking in Human Beings) argues that trafficking is strictly linked to exploitation. In fact, there would be no reason for human trafficking to exist if not for exploiting purposes. He emphasises the role of local actors for the detection of victims as they are closest to them. Civil servants in cities and municipalities are well trained to identify victims but still it is difficult because victims often do not perceive themselves as victims with respective rights or they fear severe consequences from the traffickers. But the most important reason is that they don't see any benefits in reporting as in most of the cases they will end up in detention and probably repatriated. He stresses that it is important that assistance and protection is provided regardless the collaboration of victims with the authorities and that they should be given the opportunity to access justice and compensation for their losses.



Local experts from city administration and civil society organisations presented good practices in the area of stakeholder coordination (Vienna), cooperation between civil society and law enforcement (Ljubljana), assistance to victims (Barcelona) and awareness raising (Moscow). (See the good practices below)

**Marc van der Reek** (The smile of the child, Ambassador (hon.)) introduces the issue of child trafficking. His organisation provides services to all children in Greece such as health assistance, accommodation and support centres. It also tries to prevent episodes of violence against victims and avoid family separation due to migration. He underlines the difference between "shelter" and "home" when dealing with human rights, especially for children. A shelter is providing a roof and some food to survive. Providing it is not a solution: houses are the places where children or families can feel safe and start again planning their lives. The same is true for orphanages. In this big houses with plenty of children, they do not feel assisted and will probably run away from there.

He also stresses that motivation in fighting trafficking in human beings is paramount for being effective. Training of civil servants is not enough if they are not motivated and still believe they are not responsible for victims.



Finally, he stresses that the fight against human trafficking is about creating trust. Most of the victims trust their traffickers because they see in them stability and protection and are often the only bond they have left. According to Europol, over 10.000 children disappeared in 2015. Even if they are not all victims of trafficking, the figure is relevant to understand how improvement in children protection is needed. Local civil servants must be trained and have enough autonomy to be able to intervene in the first 24 hours, thus increasing the chances to find the missing child again. Important are the hotlines that are often underestimated, like the European hotline for missing children which could be much more advertised. Something that is usually not considered when talking about children trafficking is what happens when they turn 18. The passing to the adult world is not gradual for these children. Often it takes ages to confirm the status of those children in a country and before

they do so, children turn 18. They are suddenly treated according to different rules and moved to centres with other adults with no support at all.

### Good practices of cooperation against trafficking in human beings in cities

#### Vienna – local GRETA Working Group for coordination of local actors

In 2014, the city council of Vienna endorsed the human rights city declaration and thereby committed to prioritise and strengthen aspects of human rights in urban policies. In 2015, Vienna established a human rights office that raises awareness on human rights issues in city policies and coordinates human rights initiatives within the city. In this function, the Human Rights Office in Vienna established a standing working group based on the expert group of the Council of Europe against trafficking in human beings (GRETA) that includes representatives from public administration, civil society and research in Vienna. **Shams Asadi** (Human Rights Office, Vienna) stresses the importance in advocating the issue in cities as experience showed that civil servants often do not realise that trafficking in human beings takes place in cities like Vienna. **Evelyn Probst** (LEFÖ-ibf), member of the standing working group in Vienna, underlines the human rights' perspective to trafficking in human beings. The working group is a good example of cooperation among different administrative levels because even though potential victims' cases are dealt with at the federal level, Vienna has been going through greater efforts to offer support because the city acknowledged the trend that many victims will be trafficked to the capital.



#### Ljubljana – Memorandum of Cooperation between civil society and law enforcement



In Ljubljana, civil society has a central role in service provision for victim of trafficking in human beings. Organisations such as the Society Ključ – Centre for Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings) provide shelter and reintegration programmes to victims with encouraging success. Additionally, Society Ključ works together with law enforcement confirmed through a Memorandum of Cooperation. **Polona Kovač** (Society Ključ) described how the organisation cooperates with the local police: The police nominated contact persons, who have special training on detecting and fighting trafficking in human beings. These contact persons can be contacted, if criminal activities related to trafficking in human beings are observed. Following this notification, investigators carry out investigations and intervene if deemed necessary.

#### Barcelona – Assistance to victims of human trafficking

Barcelona addressed the issue of assistance and health care for victims of human trafficking within a project. **Veronica Asensio Capote** and **Gemma Uix** (Unity Against Human Trafficking, Barcelona) emphasise the importance of comprehensive and constant assistance to victims at all levels. This requires close cooperation between public authorities and further service providers and training for civil service. Another aspect is to bridge administrative barriers between cities and other public authorities. In Spain, cities have to deal with different police bodies and cooperation between cities often is challenging as they have different approaches in managing trafficking in human beings.



#### Russian Federation – Raising awareness to engage law enforcement

In the Russian Federation, public support for fighting trafficking in human beings is widely lacking. Without legislative tools and no financial resources, law enforcement draws hardly no attention to the issue. **Vera Gracheva** (the Volunteers' Movement Alternative, Moscow) works together with a team of engaged and dedicated people, who founded a movement for assisting victims of trafficking in human beings. They provide help for victims to leave their exploitative environment. In the past six years, the movement managed to rescue almost 500 victims of trafficking in human beings. Another crucial task is raising awareness for the issue in the media in order to increase pressure on public authorities and improve the operating structures for fighting human trafficking.



More information and documents on Danube Cities Against Human Trafficking (D-CAHT) at [www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/danube-cities-against-human-trafficking](http://www.danube-capacitycooperation.eu/danube-cities-against-human-trafficking)