World Day against Human Trafficking: EU combats crime and fights for the rights of victims

Today marks the World Day against Trafficking in Persons. Behind each victim lie frightful suffering and experiences that must be appropriately addressed and prevented. Globally an estimated number of 2.45 million people, of which 1.2 million children, are trafficked every year. The EU takes the fight against trafficking in human beings very seriously.

The fact that organised criminals exploit vulnerable people for financial gain is a shame for the whole humankind. It is against the fundamental values the European Union stands for and a gross violation
of human rights. To this end, the EU has established a comprehensive legal and policy framework for combating trafficking in human beings over the past years.

Article 5 (3) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights explicitly prohibits this form of serious and organised crime and the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU defines it as a particularly serious crime with a cross-border dimension.

The EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings has been the main policy instrument for coordinating and implementing EU action in this field. Moreover, there is an EU Anti-Trafficking Day in place which is recognised on 18 October every year. This dedicated day serves to raise awareness as well as increase the exchange of information, knowledge and best practices amongst the different actors involved. The EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator has a vital role in improving coordination and coherence among EU institutions, EU agencies, Member States and international actors.

As a follow-up to this Strategy, in December 2017 the Commission proposed a set of priorities to increase the European Union's efforts to prevent trafficking in human beings and highlighted the need to tackle the links between trafficking in human beings and other crimes, including migrant smuggling, terrorism, corruption, drug trafficking, cybercrime and online sexual exploitation and others. These priorities focus on disrupting the business model that trafficking in human beings depends on, improving victims' access to rights and ensuring that EU internal and external action provide a coordinated and consistent response, within and outside the EU.

High Representative / Vice-President Federica Mogherini and the EU continue to ensure that the fight against trafficking in human beings is raised in all relevant international fora and with countries around the world.

The saving and protecting of lives of people in need, which is the most urgent priority of the EU's external migration policy, goes hand-in-hand with the breaking of the business model of traffickers and smugglers. Operation Sophia has helped to apprehend 148 traffickers and smugglers and removed 550 vessels from the criminal organisations in the Southern Central Mediterranean.

Three civilian EU Missions in Libya, Mali and Niger support the capacity building of the police and other internal security forces to counter trafficking of human beings. The transfer of know-how through training and advice by EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUBAM Libya supports the development of the national internal security forces on their path toward modern security providers that work within the framework of human rights and rule of law.

On 14 June of this year the Council transposed into EU law sanctions which were adopted by the UN on 7 June, imposing a travel ban and asset freeze on six human traffickers and smugglers operating in Libya. This was the first time that the UN imposed sanctions against human traffickers.

The work of the Joint AU-EU-UN Taskforce which was established in the margins of the AU-EU Summit in November 2017 essentially contributes to that end. As High Representative / Vice-President Mogherini said, "hundreds of smugglers and traffickers were given to justice, thanks to a good cooperation – that we decided to increase today – sharing information and operating jointly from the African side and from the European side, so that our action against the criminal organizations can be more effective".

The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa is acting along the main migratory routes to foster stability and address the root causes of irregular migration, for projects to offer job opportunities as well as fight against traffickers and smugglers. The EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection
and Reintegration of Returnees has yielded important results for vulnerable migrants along the Central Mediterranean migration route. The saving of lives has always been and continues to be the highest priority. Offering voluntary return assistance as well as reintegration support to migrants are also key elements of joint work. Sensitisation projects, for example benefitting more than 53,000 beneficiaries in Niger, also included explanations of trafficking risks. These are all actions which should reduce the chances for traffickers having access to potential victims.

Human trafficking is further discussed in EU dialogues with countries in South/South-East Asia, and in regional formats such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the European Union have launched a four-year (2015-2019) initiative worth EUR 11 million – the "Global Action to Prevent and Address Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants" – which assists 13 strategically selected countries in enhancing capacities and developing and implementing comprehensive national counter-trafficking and counter-smuggling responses.

The EU continues to work towards the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals which pursue the objective of ending trafficking in human beings. With women and girls being particularly affected, the components related to trafficking in human beings of the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls will also guide the EU’s work.

Photo: Flickr/Global Panorama

See also

Trafficking explained - Together against trafficking in human beings
EU Anti-Trafficking Day - Together against trafficking in human beings
World Day against Trafficking in Persons - United Nations
Remarks by HRVP Mogherini following the meeting at political level of the European Union - African Union - United Nations - TF
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