Human trafficking: EU stands with victims and wants their voice to be heard

Worldwide, the trafficking of human beings for purposes of forced labour, criminal activities or sexual exploitation affects around 24 million people. Socio-economic instability, gender inequality, poverty or war are some of the reasons which can prompt the victims' vulnerabilities and give organised crime margin to act.

The European Union and its Member States, in a joint effort with partner countries and international organisations, works to tackle the main roots of this threat. The EU stands up for the victims of these
crimes, and EU concerted action is focused to see to it that those who commit these crimes do not get away with impunity. October 18, which marks the EU Anti-Trafficking Day, raises awareness about the problem and sends a message of support to the victims as well as a message of warning to those who commit these awful crimes.

Modern slavery, forced labour and sexual exploitation fall under the Article 5 of EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights, whereby no one shall be held in slavery and human trafficking is prohibited. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that women and girls represent 99% of victims of sexual exploitation, but the abductions range from men to children, towards begging schemes, organs removal or drug trafficking.

The EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking of Human Beings 2012-2016 was a cornerstone to address these crimes. Under the political framework of the Directive 2011/36/EU on combating trafficking in human beings, the Strategy focused on prevention, prosecution, protection of victims, partnerships, and increased knowledge on the many forms of the crime.

In the aftermath of the Strategy, in December 2017, the Commission drew on a Communication stepping up EU action to follow up the Strategy and identify further actions to be taken.

The EU is focusing on tackling the problem at its roots by acting along with Member States, third countries and international organisations to dismantle criminal networks that facilitate human trafficking. The EU Anti-trafficking Coordinator, Myria Vassiliadou, has a vital role in improving coordination and coherence among EU institutions, EU agencies, Member States and international actors.

Disrupting organised business models of criminal networks, working on a coordinated response both outside and within the EU and raising awareness for the rights of the victims, bringing to light the dimension of the problem, are currently the EU's priorities to deliver an effective response.

Other forms of organised crime such as migrant smuggling, tied to drug or gun trafficking and forced labour or sexual exploitation, are strongly related to human trafficking: they are dots connecting these criminal networks – and turning it into a profitable business.

The EU works relentlessly with partner countries and in international fora to dismantle these networks and bring forward the EU vision. In the words of High Representative / Vice-President Federica Mogherini this is a “vision based on human rights, responsibility, and mutual solidarity. A vision where traffickers, smugglers and the connected criminal organisations find no place”.

The EU has a number of actions in place to fight trafficking.

Operation Sophia is an EU military operation that, as all Member States have reconfirmed, “plays a key strategic role that is vital for the European Union to fight human trafficking.” To break the business model of migrant smugglers and human traffickers, the EU’s naval operation has apprehended 151 suspected traffickers and smugglers and removed 551 vessels from the criminal organisations.

On 14 June 2018 the Council of the EU transposed into EU law sanctions adopted by the UN, 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 and smugglers.

Libya is a destination and transit country for men, women and children mainly coming from Sub-Saharan Africa, some of whom have been reported to be victims of trafficking. In particular, migrants in Libya are extremely vulnerable to trafficking and smuggling, including those seeking employment.
or transiting through Libya en route to Europe.

The EU's Border Assistance Mission in Libya, EUBAM Libya, engages Libyan counterparts on the planning of Border, Policing and Criminal Justice services. EUBAM assists Libyan counterparts by assessing together with the Libyan government how to develop Libyan responses to human trafficking and smuggling of migrants.

Two other civilian Missions, EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUCAP Sahel Mali provide capacity building, training and advice to the internal security forces of these two Sahel countries. Their transfer of know-how through training and advice supports the development of the national internal security forces on their path towards modern security providers working within the framework of human rights and the rule of law.

See also

HRVP at EP session on Progress on UN Global Compact for safe, regular and orderly migration and UN Global Compact on refugees
Factsheet: The EU’s Global Engagement to Counter Smuggling and Trafficking Networks
First Report on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings
Joint Statement of commitment to working together against trafficking in human beings 2018
World Day against Human Trafficking: EU combats crime and fights for the rights of victims

www.eeas.europa.eu

Source URL: