

## **Meeting of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of South Eastern Europe**

**11-12 May 2016**

### **Meeting report**

On 11-12 May 2016, a Meeting of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators (NATCs) of South Eastern Europe (SEE) was held in Tirana, Albania. The meeting was hosted by Ms Elona Gjebrea-Hoxha, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs and National Anti-trafficking Coordinator of Albania, and co-organised by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Presence in Albania and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

The objectives of **the meeting** were to:

- 1) Discuss the current and the future challenges, good practices and needs in the fight against trafficking in human beings (THB), with a **focus on unaccompanied and separated children in the SEE region**;
- 2) Facilitate the development and **strengthening of networks between the National Coordinators** engaged in the fight against trafficking in human beings.

The Albanian National Anti-trafficking Coordinator, Ms Elona Gjebrea-Hoxha opened the meeting and presented the challenges Albania is facing, both in the context of the present migration flows from conflict zones and as a country of origin of unaccompanied minors, travelling to EU. Among positive measures Ms Gjebrea-Hoxha mentioned the recent obligation imposed on children's traveling, requiring the formal approval of both parents. **Bilateral agreements with the neighboring countries and a number of EU countries** were mentioned as a positive step towards the return of Albanian children. She stressed that collaboration between countries of origin and destination is essential for the verification of asylum claims on grounds of trafficking.

The Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, Ambassador Florian Raunig, called the meeting an opportunity to exchange views and good practices among the countries in fighting human trafficking. He also stressed that such meetings provide an opportunity to explore ways to collaborate in addressing the highly concerning phenomenon of unaccompanied minors, who are the most vulnerable group to human trafficking. Ambassador Raunig reiterated that since 2008, the OSCE Presence has **actively supported regional and bilateral co-operation** in this regard by working together with the National Co-ordinator's Office and NGOs to develop and follow-up on bilateral agreements between Albania and the neighbouring countries to address child trafficking in an international perspective.

Ms Elisa Trossero, Head of the Anti-trafficking Programme of ICMPD, mentioned the relevance of this meeting within the framework of the Brdo Process, highlighting that events like this have served as fora for sharing good practices, discussing needs and **identifying areas for potential cooperation beyond the usual channels** in the past years. In the previous SEE NATCs meeting in Stockholm, in November 2015, were identified **common challenges related to the vulnerability of migrants along the European routes**, such as lack of

identification of potential victims of trafficking. For this reason, the present meeting is timely to discuss which specific measures, services and procedures catering for the needs of unaccompanied minors transiting through the SEE region should be in place.

Mr Oleksandr Kyrylenko, Programme Officer of the OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings noted that the OSCE, as the world's largest regional security organisation, fully recognises the **importance of strengthening regional co-operation**. The alarming influx of refugees and migrants from the Middle East moving along the **Balkan route** calls for decisive and well-coordinated efforts by the national authorities and civil society in the Balkans and neighbouring countries. On **17 June**, the OSCE will host a high-level launch of the project on **Combating Human Trafficking along Migration Routes**. The project aims to enhance the capacities of various stakeholders to comprehensively respond to trafficking in human beings along migration routes and to improve victim identification and assistance. A substantial part of it will be devoted to the practical issues of child identification and protection, and the first exercise will be attended by the **relevant stakeholders from the Western Balkans**.



During the tour de table, the NATCs made an overview of their respective countries' anti-trafficking efforts, focusing on the issue of unaccompanied minors (UAM) and the current migration flows in the region. The specific focus of discussions was on the **challenges in the identification of potential victims of trafficking (VoTs) among UAMs**. Suggestions were made on enhancing international cooperation at law enforcement and services providers' levels. It appeared that the **current mechanisms in place are largely oriented towards the identification of children victims of trafficking that are not in the context of humanitarian assistance or large migration flows**.

Participants agreed that UAM are at high risk of THB and that the **current indicators for the identification of children victims of trafficking should be adapted** to the developing migration context. The Western Balkans countries, highly affected by the migration flows,

mentioned the practical difficulties in identifying possible victims of trafficking among minors. Identification and protection of UAMs is particularly challenging in transit countries, considering that migrants neither wish to apply for asylum nor to remain there. Other challenges include the lack of IDs to define the relationship between the minors and the adults they travel with; lack of interpreters in Arabic and other languages; cultural barriers in situations where male UAMs refused to receive a female special guardian; and lack of specialized facilities for children victims of trafficking.

Among the good practices mentioned by the NATCs were the joint investigation teams (JIT) between countries of origin and countries of destination. Bilateral agreements on anti-THB cooperation were mentioned as a good practice; however they should be further enforced by regular coordination and exchange of information.

The participants **agreed on the need to adopt a special approach to the identification of victims of trafficking, in response to the current migration situation.** There was consent on the effective role of NGOs, which have demonstrated good examples in developing THB indicators and referral procedures as well as in monitoring the migration situation. International cooperation among law-enforcement mechanisms shall be further enhanced and formal procedures enacted. Terre des Hommes suggested the need to broaden the indicators of unaccompanied minors. Terre des Hommes also highlighted that a transnational mechanisms for the case management procedure should be in place, which should be multi-disciplinary oriented.

Following the roundtable discussion, Mr Kevin Hyland, the United Kingdom Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, provided an overview of the response to modern slavery in the UK. The Commissioner highlighted a number of good practices such as the development of bilateral cooperation plans with priority countries according to a multidisciplinary approach, the need to have improved intelligence-sharing practices including crime recording, the importance of a culturally tailored approach towards victims referral as well as the need of engaging the private sector to prevent THB.



In summary, the main recommendations of the meeting were:

- **Existing referral mechanisms, Standard Operating Procedures, indicators and protocols need to be adapted and harmonized** to provide an adequate response to the vulnerability to THB and exploitation among migrants transiting in the region, in particular unaccompanied and separated children, and to ensure that such models are complementary with other existing tools for international cooperation;
- Develop **early warning systems** which are able to ensure the identification of VoTs at the first approach/contact with authorities in the country of transit and/or destination;
- Adopt specific measures to **strengthen the cooperation with cultural mediators and guardians** for unaccompanied and separated children;
- Improve **the information flows** from countries of destination as well as data gathering, including dedicated training for border guards for early identification and measures to address the recruitment of young boys for criminal activities;
- Further develop **transnational mechanisms for ‘case management procedure’** to ensure that the whole spectrum of service provision from identification and referral to voluntary return, re-integration and long-term support, are aligned to same standards.



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**List of participants**

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