

Meeting of the National Anti-trafficking Coordinators in South-Eastern Europe 13-15 November 2017, Skopje

REPORT

On 13-15 November 2017, a Meeting of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators (NATCs) of South Eastern Europe (SEE) was held in Skopje, Macedonia. The meeting was hosted by Magdalena Nestorovska, NATC of Macedonia. The meeting was co-organised by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in its role as Secretariat of the NATCs SEE Network, the Permanent Mission of the French Republic to the International Organisations in Vienna and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Discuss policy models for addressing trafficking in human beings (THB) for sexual exploitation;
- Share existing good practices and successful cases to enhance criminal responses and international cooperation on THB for sexual exploitation;
- Focus on the functioning of existing National Referral Mechanisms (NRM) in relation to the need to increase the number of victims identified;
- Strengthen the network of NATCs engaged in the fight against THB in SEE.

The participants were welcomed by the Deputy Minister of Interior of Macedonia, Mr Agim Muhiu, Ambassador of France in Macedonia, H.E. Christian Thimonier both assigning great importance to the efforts directed by the participating countries together with ICMPD and UNODC in combating THB phenomenon. The participants were welcomed by representatives of UNODC (Davor Raus) and ICMPD (Melita Gruevska-Graham).

The welcoming session was followed by a tour-de-table with all the participants and a brief presentation by ICMPD on behalf of NATC of Slovenia introducing the basic features of the NATCs network (NW).

The opening session of the meeting focused on the issue of THB for the purpose of sexual exploitation and was moderated by the French regional expert on THB in SEE (Caroline Charpentier)

Per Anders Sunesson, Sweden's Ambassador at large on fight against THB, and Jean Claude Brunet, France's Ambassador at large on transnational organised crime both presented the experience of their respective countries. Mr Sunesson interestingly pointed out that the introduction of the so-called Swedish approach has by now brought about the change in the mind-set among the post-legislation generation so that purchase of sex services is increasingly seen not as a normal behaviour. During the entry into force of the legislation in 1999, some 50% of the population was in favour of the legislation while today the support has grown to 80%. Also the law enforcement has become a supporter of the Swedish model since they see in practice that the sex workers are more willing to approach and address the authorities.



The presentations of both Ambassadors were followed by a vivid Q&A and thereafter by a tour into a scientific side of researching prostitution. Mr Albert Kraler, ICMPD's Senior Research Officer presented the comprehensive research DemandAT about different regulative regimes applied to prostitution and how these reflect in the results in curbing THB. The presentation was delivered by Mr Kraler via Adobe Connect from ICMPD's Vienna offices. The essential arguments of the presentation can be found in the Policy Brief at http://www.demandat.eu/sites/default/files/DemandAT_PolicyBrief_Preventing%20Vulnerability.pdf. The rest of the DemandAT publications are available at <http://www.demandat.eu/publicationsnew>. Serbian NATC thanked for the thorough scientific tour however asking that practitioners would need simpler and concrete recommendations.

The afternoon session moderated by the French regional expert on THB in SEE (Caroline Charpentier) focused on the issue of prosecution and exchanging good practices in the SEE countries in prosecuting THB cases. Prosecutors from Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro each presented a THB case study from their practice, while also their peers from Moldova, Slovenia, and Romania shared their experiences from the floor.

The meeting was then continued as a closed meeting of NATCs only.

Sandi Curin (Slovenia) proposed to have a declaration on SEE NATCs network in the framework of the next Brdo Process Ministerial Meeting, expected to take place 15/16 March 2018. It is expected that the meeting will tackle the issues of terrorism and migration, while THB could be added to the list. In that regard the idea would be to propose to the Slovenian MoI to have a declaration whereby the work of NATC's network up until now would be recognized and welcomed, and support to their further efforts expressed.

While Romania, Moldova and Bulgaria are not part of Brdo Process, the meeting participants do not expect this to be an obstacle for Brdo Process countries to express their support to the NATCs' network regardless of this fact.

Slovenian NATC in cooperation with ICMPD will prepare a draft text / insert for a declaration, which will then be shared with the NATCs for consolidation; Slovenian NATC to send the consolidated draft to Slovenian MoI.

Kamelia Dimitrova (Bulgaria) proposed to bring the NATCs and THB issue onto the agenda of Bulgaria's upcoming EU presidency in 2018. There are five priority areas for the current EU presidency trio (Estonia, Bulgaria, Austria) - jobs and competitiveness; empowering and protecting citizens (incl. social justice, non-discrimination, gender equality, fighting poverty, etc.); energy union; freedom and justice (incl. organised crime, cyber-crime, terrorism, etc); EU as a strong global partner. Bulgaria has identified three priorities (three Cs) for itself: consensus, competitiveness, and cohesion.

Bulgarian NATC would like Bulgaria to assist Western Balkans (WB) countries in their pre-accession processes. Specifically they propose to conduct a brief and light mapping exercise to identify main gaps and best practices in the area of combating THB and meeting EU *acquis* in that field. The findings of this mapping could serve as the source for identifying



topics and issues of common interest for all WB countries that could be discussed at an event organized by Bulgaria. As an example, the participants suggested the issue of compensation for VoTs, also Standard Operating Procedures (incl. also cross-border SOPs), consolidation of TAIEX assistance maps in the WB countries. The event is tentatively foreseen for 31 May - 1 June 2018 and would be aimed at NATCs, not ministers. An idea for further consideration is inviting EU THB Coordinator to the event.

UNODC (Davor Raus) informed the participants of an upcoming regional project in 2018-19, focusing on THB for the purposes of forced engagement in criminal acts, to be funded by the French Government (tentatively up to EUR 200,000 available). The project foresees 3 regional workshops and an outcome paper as the final results. The target group would be NATCs and anti-THB practitioners in the 11 SEE countries. Implementation, if approved, is expected to start in the autumn of 2018.

The morning session on 15 November focused on the issue of NRM-related developments.

The participants updated each other of the key developments relating to their respective NRMs, victim profiles, inter-institutional cooperation in identification and referral and other related matters. The discussion saw extensive and fruitful contributions from all of the participants.

The following and the final session of the meeting, tackled the issue of partnerships, specifically international cooperation.

The main conclusions and recommendations

Prosecution:

- Clear criteria for identifying victims of THB are important; The criteria need to keep up with the pace of changing forms of THB in a country;
- Need to be aware of the possibility that THB can occur also within a family;
- The partnerships with civil society organisations remains crucial;
- Application of new investigation techniques relevant in THB investigations (e.g. using cyber counter-measure especially in internet-based THB cases);
- Financial investigations to be conducted in THB cases to track the money.

National Referral Mechanism:

- **Legal framework:** Revision of legal status of NRMs is vital to ensure their sustainability and functioning: move from a mere guidance of good practices towards a system stipulated in the country's legal framework;
- **Capacity-building:** Lack of specialist knowledge is still seen as one of the leitmotif problems. Training is needed, particularly for local level actors within the NRM, but not only; Often first responders are not aware of the already existing guidance materials (such as indicators) and/or have no skills to apply these in practice;
- **Monitoring:** Continuous monitoring of the THB-related developments in a country is necessary to adapt the response mechanisms to the real life situation; THB evolves



and changes over time and understanding these changes is important for tuning adequate response methods (e.g. THB cases of multiple exploitation; recruitment of VoTs via internet; THB for exploitation in pornographic industry); Targeted mapping exercises can prove additionally useful, for instance, mapping of existing good practices throughout the SEE region (e.g. in matters related to compensation for victims);

- Specific focus issue: Setting up compensation mechanisms for VoTs within the overall systems of compensating crime victims (incl. specific issues such as how to quantify the redress claims for material damages), appears to be an issue of joint interest and concern, and hence the countries would benefit of mapping good practices in that area and further discussions and sharing of practices (can also be one of the focus topics for the high-level meeting during the Bulgarian presidency);

International cooperation:

- Most of the participating countries in the NATCs' network have among themselves signed bilateral and multilateral agreements on cooperation in criminal matters;
- Confirmed relevance and effectiveness of engaging police liaison officer and regional cooperation platforms, such as SELEC, Police Cooperation Convention for South Eastern Europe and Joint Operational Office (Vienna) in THB investigations;
- Joint Investigations Teams (JIT) are frequently used in the region and proven to be relevant instrument for cross-border cooperation in investigating THB cases. The issue of concern in using JITs is protection and assistance to victims, which is in most cases neglected as JITs are only dealing with criminal investigation and prosecution aspects of a THB case;
- Task forces are increasingly in use as a model for institutional cooperation between police and prosecutors. Establishing national task forces on THB, followed by forming of local mobile teams which will have capacity for cross-border cooperation with similar structures in neighbouring countries is proposed for consideration.
- Examples of recruitment for THB via social networks and internet-based technologies (Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber etc.), particularly for exploitation of minors, for child pornography purposes and use of Bitcoins as a mean of payment, present a great challenge for countries of the region;
- Use of action weeks, with destinations countries' representatives from police, prosecutors and social workers conducting site visits in countries of origin, in the towns where most of potential or identified VoTs are coming from has proven to be of a value;
- Protocols for direct communication and exchange of evidences, signed on the state level by general prosecutors, was promoted as a good practice in overcoming challenges of international cooperation in criminal matters through diplomatic channels.

