ICMPD Webinar: *How are the Syrian conflict and the refugee situation affecting trafficking in persons in Syria and the neighbouring countries?*

6 June 2016

**Participants’ Discussion (in the chatroom)**

Many participants contributed to the webinar through inputs, discussions and questions in the chat section of the webinar. This was an opportunity to react and contribute to what was being discussed in the presentations and the Q&A, based on participants’ own experience and expertise.

In relation to the cases of **exploitation in terrorist activities** discussed by the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons during the webinar, participants from Nigeria and Lebanon were aware of such cases. Boko Haram in Nigeria has forced people into “suicide bombings”, as well as trafficking for forced marriage (e.g. the “Chibok girls”). However, there is little hard data on this; most information is based on media reports. In Lebanon, according to a participant, common forms include the trafficking of girls and young women from Syria for exploitation in prostitution, and the exploitation of boys and young men in armed conflict. Most boys trafficked for exploitation in armed conflict are Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

A participant from Tajikistan also mentioned a couple of cases of Tajikistani people recruited for combat/terrorism in Syria, where there were indicators of trafficking. The media reports on this are (in Russian):


In European countries, on the other hand, there is little information on this form of trafficking. In the EU as a whole, according to 2013-2014 Eurostat data cited by a participant from Portugal, **sexual exploitation** is the most commonly reported form, though methods of data collection and analysis vary. The participant from Portugal stated that trafficking for exploitation in armed conflict or terrorism had not been found there, with the most common form of trafficking identified in that country being **labour exploitation in agriculture**, followed by **sexual exploitation**. It is a subject of debate in the country why the rate of identification of sexual exploitation has been declining in recent years.

In the Netherlands, according to another participant, **labour exploitation in shops** is common, with victims usually young men aged 18-25 from Syria, Iraq and Eritrea who are asylum applicants, and shop-owners often being from Turkey or Morocco. This is characterised by poor working conditions rather than, necessarily, trafficking in persons. The factors of vulnerability for people who have left a conflict situation, according to the participant, are: indebtedness, lack of a social network and lack of familiarity with legislation in the destination country.
Another participant spoke of the exploitation of refugees and migrants in Idomeni, and in other parts of Greece, which was reported in the Greek media. This included sexual exploitation of women and girls by fellow camp residents. However, there has as yet been no official confirmation of this. The mayor of one of the Athens Municipalities hosting refugees publicly denounced cases of commercial sexual exploitation of girls in the surrounding area, and according to officials, and the cases are being investigated. The most recent suspicion raised by the Athens mayor is from 20 May 2016, though much of the information currently available is anecdotal.

In general, according to a participant, exploitation of refugees and migrants travelling along the irregular migration route to Europe is perpetrated by those promising to facilitate the journey, using social media, and people are recruited also in the camps. Even when the borders in the Western Balkans region remained open for refugees and migrants, they may not have been aware of this, and so they paid organised criminal groups to assist in crossing a border. They are then often subject to deprivation of liberty by the facilitators, and released only if they pay a sort of ransom. The authorities are sometimes aware of these cases and try to intervene. A documentary on this subject was made by Channel 4: [www.channel4.com/news/tracking-down-macedonias-migrant-kidnap-gang](http://www.channel4.com/news/tracking-down-macedonias-migrant-kidnap-gang).

One participant queried whether the terms temporary/forced marriage, human trafficking, etc., were explained in the report, to which Claire Healy, the author of the study Targeting Vulnerabilities, replied that the working definitions for the research are included in Chapter 1 (p.14-18) and the forms of trafficking are clarified throughout chapter 5 (p.138-202) (available for download at: [www.icmpd.org/our-work/capacity-building/trafficking-in-human-beings/targeting-vulnerabilities-the-impact-of-the-syrian-war-and-refugee-situation-on-trafficking-in-persons/](http://www.icmpd.org/our-work/capacity-building/trafficking-in-human-beings/targeting-vulnerabilities-the-impact-of-the-syrian-war-and-refugee-situation-on-trafficking-in-persons/)).


ICMPD wishes to thank all participants for their active contribution to the webinar!