On 30 – 31 March 2015, a Meeting of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of Central and South Eastern Europe was held in Vienna, Austria. The meeting was organised by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in cooperation with the British Embassy in Vienna (FCO) and Austrian Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs (BMEIA). The meeting had three interlinked objectives:

- to facilitate the development of bilateral/multilateral networks;
- to discuss common thematic priorities and potential joint initiatives;
- to strengthen the regional anti-trafficking response.

National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators were present from 16 European countries - Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and the UK. The composition of the meeting built upon the existing framework of the meeting of National Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of South Eastern Europe, a regional forum ICMPD acts as Secretariat of that is convened regularly under the auspices of the Brdo Process, a regional cooperation dialogue in the Western Balkan region.

As well as the traditional participants of the Brdo Process meeting, national authorities from Central European countries attended, as well as representatives from the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Home Office (HO) and Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC). Guest speakers during the event included the Executive Secretary of the Council of Europe Secretariat of the Convention against Trafficking, terre des hommes, and the NSPCC, a UK-based child protection NGO.

Common priorities and challenges facing National Coordinators from the region were highlighted, as were areas on which to focus future interventions in order to strengthening the response to trafficking in human beings. Priority areas identified included:

- making effective use of existing mechanisms for information and data exchange between European countries, such as EUROPOL and EUROJUST, as well as embassy and liaison officer networks;
- broadening the stakeholder groups involved in national and transnational referral of trafficking victims beyond law enforcement actors to include “soft” ministries, such as labour and social ministries, as well as civil society actors;
- developing tailored measures for the protection of vulnerable children on the move;
- encouraging strategic partnerships between countries of origin, transit and destination for the development of transnational referral mechanisms.

In the first session, the UK’s presentation by Mr. Kevin Hyland, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, alongside the Home Office Modern Slavery Unit set out the UK’s anticipated international response to modern slavery through measures such as the development of embassy action plans in priority countries, improved intelligence sharing practices through the effective use
of EUROPOL, EUROJUST and other cooperation platforms, and through increased use of Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) when conducting transnational criminal investigations.

On the topic of data exchange, it was noted that sharing of generic data between countries is currently possible through existing law enforcement coordination mechanisms. National Coordinators stated that the development of formalised processes for sharing information between non-law enforcement stakeholders would be welcome as a means to strengthening victim care and identifying trends in countries of origin, in order to prevent future cases of trafficking. It was strongly stressed that protection of individual’s personal data was paramount, and any data exchange processes must be established in line with national and international data protection regulations.

The second session focused on the role played by National Coordinators and challenges facing the conduct of their mandate. A tour-de-table of the national coordinators highlighted a diverse range of approaches and frameworks employed across Europe, further emphasising the need to focus on a coordinated transnational approach. The response from a European Migration Network (EMN) ad-hoc query on the implementation of Article 19 of the EU Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims was presented. A full summary of responses to the ad-hoc query are attached.

Challenges highlighted by National Coordinators were lack of financial, technical and human resources, and linking a law enforcement response with ‘softer’ approaches to prevention and victim care, via labour and social ministries, as well as civil society.

Regional platforms such as the Brdo Process meeting of National Coordinators of South East Europe (SEE), Council of Europe and EU Coordinators meeting were highlighted as the primary political platforms for developing regional cooperation between countries, and it was recommended that future activity build upon these forums.

A thematic session on trafficking of vulnerable children in Europe was included in the agenda, based on concerns raised during previous meetings of the Brdo Process group of National Coordinators from SEE. Experts from terre des hommes (tdh) presented the latest trends of trafficking of vulnerable children in Europe based on research conducted by the Mario Project. The NSPCC and ICMPD complemented this respectively with presentations on current policy and operational challenges to child safeguarding in Europe and an overview of current data collection and usage practices for assessing THB at a European level.

European children are often at risk of falling into gaps between the existing policy and operational frameworks dealing with national children and non-EU third country children. A need for more adequate services and procedures catering for the needs of vulnerable EU children on the move was identified, as was greater focus on non-EU children transiting European countries.

It was recommended that the scope of transnational collaboration between anti-trafficking actors is expanded to reflect the broad range of child safeguarding concerns. This should include the full range of relevant stakeholders involved in transnational processes for the identification, protection and decision-making processes for vulnerable children on the move – for both EU and third country children.

National Coordinators highlighted the importance of developing transnational referral mechanisms (TRM), which standardise procedures for identification, referral and treatment of all trafficked persons between countries of origin and destination. Several participants also noted the added benefits that TRM development has on refining and complementing national referral mechanisms and facilitating government/NGO partnerships.

The Council of Europe (CoE) Secretariat presented a pilot project proposal jointly developed with ICMPD for the development of a European Transnational Referral Mechanism. As a long term
solution, participants also considered whether an additional protocol on standardised victim care requirements could be added to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

The activities of RAVOT-EUR, a joint initiative to establish a TRM between Belgium, Hungary and the Netherlands was also presented. Ongoing issues that the development of this TRM aims to address include the unsuccessful reintegration of victims, lack of knowledge among professionals of the respective service providers and institutional/ legal frameworks in partner countries and the natural fluctuation of professionals.

Finally, it was recommended that strategic ‘clusters’ of countries of origin, transit and destination are identified in order to develop targeted transnational referral mechanisms in response to existing trafficking trends in order to maximise the impact of interventions.