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Subject:	Council conclusions on combating trafficking in human beings, with particular attention to the situation related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the protection of minors - Council Conclusions (12 June 2025)
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Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on combating trafficking in human beings, with particular attention to the situation related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the protection of minors, approved by the Council (Justice and Home Affairs) at its 4102nd meeting held on 12 June 2025.

Council conclusions
on combating trafficking in human beings, with particular attention to the situation related to
Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the protection of minors

Introduction

- a) Human trafficking remains one of the most serious threats to security and human rights in the European Union and it is a gross violation of fundamental rights.
- b) The EU Anti-trafficking Directive¹ is the EU's main legal instrument to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings and protect its victims. The Directive was amended in 2024 to reinforce the fight against this crime (the 'revised EU Anti-trafficking Directive')². The new rules explicitly cover new forms of exploitation, including those taking place online, ensure early detection of victims and guarantee a higher level of assistance and support to victims in accordance with Article 11 of the revised EU Anti-trafficking Directive.
- c) The EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2021–2025 (the 'EU Strategy')³ was issued by the Commission in April 2021. It provides for a comprehensive response to preventing the crime, protecting and empowering victims and to bringing traffickers to justice. This strategy is closely linked to the EU Strategy to Tackle Organised Crime⁴ given that trafficking in human beings can be perpetrated by organised crime groups.

¹ Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA, OJ L 101, 15.4.2011, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/36/oj>.

² Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, OJ L, 2024/1712, 24.6.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1712/oj>.

³ 8090/21.

⁴ Communication from the Commission on the EU Strategy to tackle Organised Crime 2021-2025, COM(2021) 170 final (2021), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52021DC0170>.

- d) Since 2022, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and other armed conflicts in EU neighbouring regions have increased the risk of human trafficking among persons seeking international protection and displaced persons, including women and children. The Common Anti-Trafficking Plan⁵ and the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive⁶ considerably reduced the vulnerabilities of those fleeing the Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The application of the Temporary Protection Directive was prolonged until March 2026⁷.
- e) The European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) is a key European cooperation tool to fight trafficking in human beings, which is one of the EU's crime priorities of the current EMPACT cycle (2022–2025)⁸. The relevant EMPACT's Operational Action Plan aims at disrupting criminal networks engaged in trafficking in human beings for all forms of exploitation, with a special focus on those who exploit minors⁹.
- f) As regards international cooperation, the 2000 United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime¹⁰, and the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings¹¹ are crucial steps in the process of enhancing international cooperation against trafficking in human beings.

⁵ European Commission, 'A Common Anti-Trafficking Plan to address the risks of trafficking in human beings and support potential victims among those fleeing the war in Ukraine', 11 May 2022, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-05/Anti-Trafficking%20Plan_en.pdf.

⁶ Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection, OJ L 71, 4.3.2022, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2022/382/oj.

⁷ Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2024/1836 of 25 June 2024 extending temporary protection as introduced by Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382, OJ L, 2024/1836, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2024/1836/oj.

⁸ 7101/23.

⁹ 7101/23.

¹⁰ UN General Assembly resolutions 55/25 and 55/255 adopting the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and its Protocols, 15.11.2000.

¹¹ CETS No. 197 of 16.05.2005, <https://rm.coe.int/168008371d>.

- g) In combating trafficking in human beings, with the support of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, full use should be made of all existing relevant instruments, including of the EU Strategy combating trafficking in human beings 2021–2025 and of previous Council conclusions¹². Additional efforts and measures are needed at EU and national level to effectively fight this crime.

General considerations

1. Preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and assisting and supporting all victims of trafficking, remain a priority for the Union and the Member States.
2. Human trafficking, including sexual exploitation of children online and offline, have a profound impact on the societies and economies of EU Member States.
3. There has been a significant increase in the number of victims of human trafficking in the European Union. Between 2021 and 2022, the number of registered victims of human trafficking in the EU increased by 20.5 % compared to the 2019-2020 period¹³. The increase in victim detection is likely also the result of intensified efforts by relevant national bodies and agencies, in particular law enforcement authorities and civil society organisations, to early detect and identify victims.
4. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups targeted by organised criminal groups involved in the trafficking in human beings. Such criminal groups often exploit children by recruiting them and later using them to commit criminal activities or forcing them into forced marriage or sexual exploitation. In 2021-2022, 81 % of the child victims were EU citizens (2 401 children). Child victims constituted almost one-fifth of all registered victims in the EU (19 %)¹⁴. Digitalisation has led to a worrying increase in cases of sexual exploitation of minors leading to trafficking¹⁵.

¹² Such as 11838/6/12 and 10024/22.

¹³ 5728/25.

¹⁴ See footnote 13.

¹⁵ See footnote 13.

5. In the EU, detected labour exploitation increased by 51 % in 2021–2022 compared to 2019–2020, while in 2022 the shares of sexual exploitation and labour exploitation were even (41 %). The nationality and the profile of the victims largely depends on the sector of exploitation. Recruitment is often carried out online with deceptive job advertisements and fraudulent promises of a permit. The structure of the victims' origin is changing, with an increasing number of third-country nationals (54 % of the registered victims)¹⁶. This underlines the cross-border and international nature of the phenomenon and the great importance to ensure the appropriate tools to protect the victims on the basis of the whole-of-route approach.
6. Migrants from outside the EU, including from Latin America and African and Asian countries, are at particular risk of becoming victims of trafficking. They often find themselves in vulnerable situations when seeking employment in the EU, thus being more susceptible to forced labour, labour exploitation and sexual exploitation.
7. Armed conflicts have led to an increase in the number of persons seeking international protection within the EU, while Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has significantly contributed to this increase by raising the number of Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) beneficiaries. Persons seeking international protection and TPD beneficiaries, including women and children, are facing various risks of exploitation due to economic hardship and limited integration.
8. Prior to being exploited or trafficked from armed conflicts areas, third country nationals seeking international protection may have become victims of core international crimes (e.g. war crimes). This creates an additional challenge to law enforcement and judicial authorities to identify and prosecute perpetrators of several types of crimes.
9. Some EU countries have introduced additional assistance programmes, but there is an urgent need for further measures linked, for example, to basic services, such as housing, education and health care.

¹⁶ See footnote 13.

10. The digital space (including social media, instant messaging, job portals) has become one of the main tools used to recruit, exploit and control victims of human trafficking or involve them as collaborators in other types of crime. This is particularly dangerous for minors and people in a vulnerable position.
11. Criminals are increasingly using encrypted communication channels and cryptocurrencies making it more difficult for law enforcement and judicial authorities to identify perpetrators, secure relevant evidence and dismantle criminal networks.
12. In response to this growing threat, analytical tools, including those based on artificial intelligence, are being developed to support internet monitoring and detection of criminal activity.
13. Joint, coordinated action and the harmonisation of definitions and procedures are key to effectively combat cross-border trafficking in human beings.

The Council invites the Member States to:

14. Without prejudice to the independence of the judiciary, promote closer coordination between law enforcement and judicial authorities, as well as with civil society organisations and private parties, such as online platforms and network operators, to early detect, identify and block human trafficking activities, with an emphasis on online recruitment and exploitation; also, to identify and locate victims who may have experienced or witnessed core international crimes (e.g. war crimes), with a view to preserving the information they may hold.
15. Promote inter-agency cooperation with labour inspectors, civil society organisations and other authorities at national level to detect and to assist victims in a victim-centred approach, avoid secondary victimisation and actively use administrative approaches.
16. Promote the use of the tools made available by the EU agencies, including Europol, Eurojust, Frontex and CEPOL, as well as other international organisations, including Interpol, to fight trafficking in human beings.

17. Promote the development of public-private partnerships (including with online platforms and network operators) to create and implement effective tools for identifying, reporting, preventing and disrupting (online and offline) human trafficking activities.
18. Continue to support cooperation among Member States and with the EU agencies in the context of EMPACT in the area of trafficking in human beings.
19. Continue to closely monitor border areas and carry out activities aiming at strengthening protective measures in reception environments, including the prevention of human trafficking, the identification of victims and the protection of vulnerable persons, in cooperation, where necessary, with civil society organisations and international organisations.
20. Ensure that victims of trafficking in human beings receive appropriate protection in a victim-centred approach, including by having access, where appropriate, to witness protection programmes or other similar measures, and by avoiding secondary victimisation.

The Council invites the Commission to:

21. Timely launch the Anti-trafficking Hub, which will support Member States in the implementation of the revised EU Anti-Trafficking Directive and the EU Strategy, by developing guidelines, facilitating the exchange of best practices, fostering dialogue amongst anti-trafficking professionals and reinforcing cooperation.
22. Support the Member States in introducing targeted prevention and support programmes linked to trafficking in human beings, in particular women and children, including, but not limited to, those fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
23. Enhance cross-border cooperation and partnerships with third countries, especially countries of origin and transit for trafficking, through joint prevention and investigation initiatives, to address and fight transnational trafficking networks.
24. Encourage the use of funding sources and programmes available in the EU to fight trafficking in human beings, with a particular focus on EMPACT and early identification of victims and their referral to specialised services.

25. Take the present conclusions into account when developing the EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2026–2029 to address emerging challenges and steer the new priorities in a coherent manner.
26. Promote, with the support of the EU Anti-trafficking Coordinator, the exchange of information and best practices with the national anti-trafficking coordinators and national rapporteurs, the EU Agencies, as well with other competent international organisations.
27. Cooperate with Member States in strengthening the accountability of private sector, including within the EU Internet Forum, regarding labour or other forms of exploitation, as well as other activities that could possibly aggravate the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings.

The Council invites Europol, Eurojust, Frontex and CEPOL, within their mandate, to:

28. Strengthen the expertise of Member States, including training, and foster the exchange of best practices between them to better identify human trafficking offences in cyberspace, potential victims and perpetrators.
29. Promote the extensive use of tools made available by them in the field of law enforcement and judicial cooperation, information exchange, criminal analysis and capacity building.
30. Foster cooperation with the private sector and promote the development of public-private partnerships, including in the IT and telecom sectors, to develop data analysis tools, including AI-based, and to create mechanisms to early detect, identify and block trafficking activities and swiftly report suspicious activity.