



Co-funded by the European Union

Budapest Process and EMN Hungary

Conference on Trafficking in Persons

Dates: 20-21 October 2022

Location: Budapest, Hungary

Report

1. Budapest Process and European Migration Network representatives from all participating and observer states were invited to attend the Conference on Trafficking in Persons (TiP). The meeting gathered **79 participants from 22 countries and several organisations** – Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Georgia, Hungary, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Moldova, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Poland, Serbia, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and the United States of America as well as European Migration Network (EMN), European Commission, European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA), European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL), International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations High Council for Refugees (UNHCR).

2. Meeting background and objectives:

The Budapest Process (BP) has highlighted the importance of trafficking in persons, most notably in its [political declaration and action plan adopted in 2019](#). Priority Goals 1 and 5 of the Action Plan, focus on law enforcement cooperation to counter trafficking in persons and protection of victims of trafficking. In keeping with the BP's [Implementation Plan](#), the main objectives of this conference were to explore the latest trends of TiP along the routes; understand ongoing challenges and learn from good practices; gain an insight into the protection structures for victims of trafficking; and promote opportunities for cooperation among countries along the routes to develop and implement effective measures to prevent and counter TiP. The meeting was held under Chatham House Rule.

3. The meeting was opened by the Hungarian Co-Chair of the Budapest Process. Subsequently, **opening statements** were delivered by the Turkish Chair, the Chair of the EMN and the Head of the Budapest Process Secretariat. **Key note speeches** from the Hungarian Ministry of Interior's Deputy State Secretary for Coordination of EU Development, Judith Toth, and the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, Diane Schmitt, highlighted the continued importance of international cooperation to counter TiP, which transcends borders due to the transnational nature of the crime.

4. An expert **set the scene** with a presentation on insights into recent data and trends, and good practices of international cooperation to improve detection of victims of TiP. In recent surveys, acute socio-economic deprivation and the need for immediate financial means for basic sustenance is identified as a primary factor that places people at a high risk of being trafficked. Furthermore, an increase in use of online tactics by traffickers has added further complexity to the fight against TiP.

5. This conference comprised of three panels. As a result of the interventions and discussions over the two days, the following **recommendations and conclusions** emerged:

Panel 1: National experiences in addressing irregular migration and countering & preventing trafficking in persons

- A **multi-agency identification process** within the government and with non-governmental organisations involved is needed and options for a longer temporary stay, i.e., providing an adequate ‘reflection period’ is encouraged in order to provide space for VoTs to regain their agency and be more likely to cooperate;
- Systematic **capacity building of government officials**, in particular border control/frontline officers, increases their expertise in **early identification** of trafficking cases, such as during in visa processes;
- Looking beyond trafficking in countries of transit and destination, it is important to focus on preventative measures in countries of origin as well as transit and destination such as: **awareness-raising (using a whole-of-society approach, especially engaging youth)** on the risks of trafficking especially for vulnerable groups as well as the **options for protection** while also tackling **pull factors** for exploitation in countries of destination;
- It is important to learn about the ‘**social path for the formal identification of trafficked victims**’ implemented by some countries already – it has the benefit of building positive, assistance-based relationships with victims – relationships that can actually improve future cooperation in investigations; as access to protection is improved, trust in national authorities is increased;
- There needs to be increased attention paid to the **provision of asylum (followed by integration via the ‘social path’)** and **timely and sustainable reintegration upon return of victims of trafficking**, especially when the victims are returned to difficult socio-economic contexts, the circumstances of which made the person vulnerable in the first place. If returns are rushed to such contexts, then the person might be forced to re-migrate;
- **Assistance to Victims of Trafficking (VoTs) should not be conditional on their participation in criminal proceedings** bearing in mind that evidence for assistance and evidence for prosecution are different; It is advised to conduct ‘effective identification’, which implies a process wherein the state provides an environment to the identified VoT to feel encouraged to cooperate with the authorities;

Panel 2: Protection and support measures for Victims of Trafficking

- It is **crucial that national referral systems and services leave no one behind** and are inclusive to all VoTs; this includes shelters with specific amenities for minors and guardianship mechanisms for minors, separate procedures for victims and statutory victims especially in light of the ongoing concern of **disappearance of VoTs** after detection;
- A good practice to improve **VoT identification** is to have a **screening tool** for police officers and first line support officers who come into contact with potentials VoTs using indicators that are intended to improve the spotting of situations and signs of human trafficking; it would be good if the tool can be used offline and on mobile phones; Other tools, whether legal, strategic or operational, can be used to support protection of VoTs;
- **Practitioners in the TiP field need to cooperate with practitioners in the Asylum field** as VoTs are also **identified in reception centres for asylum seekers**, especially minors.
- Having ‘cultural mediators’ support first and second line responders is considered a good practice;
- A **Single Point of Contact (SPOC)** is a good practice, especially to prevent inconvenience caused by the turnover in social workers and first-line responders who help identify VoTs;
- It is important for countries to have ‘disaster risk reduction strategies’ (DRR) in order to be **prepared in cases of disasters** or specific cases such as the Ukraine and Afghanistan, where

vulnerabilities of people are exacerbated and they are placed at high risk of trafficking – thus, DRR strategies must incorporate anti TIP measures;

- It is **important to have options for parallel channels for procedures** when international protection and protection from trafficking coincide in a specific case, in this context **mixed vulnerabilities and rights** are to be considered;

Panel 3: Gaps and challenges in the fight against Trafficking in Persons with a particular focus on enhancing international law enforcement cooperation

- **Cooperation on bi-/multi-lateral law enforcement issues should be conducted on strategic and operational levels;** agreements should contain practical and mutually acceptable modalities;
- Based on the agreements, **direct contacts to exchange information** with counterparts in neighbouring countries and countries along the routes is essential for timely action to save victims and crack down on trafficking networks and OCGs;
- **Police Liaison Officers, link officers and/or law enforcement Attachés** (from ministries of interior/home affairs) that are deployed abroad and hosted in the countries along the routes should be utilised to facilitate all possible sorts of communication and cooperation;
- **Dedicated communication channels** are essential such as the SIENA system (intra-Europe) and Interpol (between European and third countries) for transnational investigations;
- **Cooperation of LEAs with private enterprises** (e.g. employers) is very important in improving identification of forced labour;
- **Joint Investigation Team (JIT)** – is considered a good practice as these can be used for short term goals as well as more complex longer term operations;
- Law enforcement agencies (LEAs) should **make good use of data and analytics to inform their strategies and day-to-day operations**. Good practice: Establishing a Single Data Centre that helps police officers in focusing on certain key areas/aspects as well as how to mobilise resources for a particularly alarming trend or modus operandi;
- **Tracking and disrupting traffickers in the online landscape** is very hard and requires the cooperation of social media companies – pressure must be placed by national and international authorities on social media companies to have a greater focus on detecting predatory messaging and closer cooperation with legitimate demands of law enforcement authorities;
- It is important for LEAs to have a **special legal arsenal** so that wiretapping, interrogations, etc. can be made possible against OCGs/traffickers; the fight against money laundering is very important when countering TIP as financial transactions conducted by traffickers can be tracked and can lead to arrests if a legal framework allows for it;
- OCGs are becoming increasingly sophisticated and involved in **poly-criminality** (document fraud, money laundering, drug trafficking and distribution, etc.), it is therefore important to look at TIP within the context of overall OCG behaviour to expand business opportunities; Hence parallel investigations must be conducted and information shared across units and task forces of LEAs.

6. Way forward:

- The **Budapest Process will continue to focus on irregular migration**, with a focus on smuggling of migrants (SoM) and trafficking in persons (TIP).
- In this regard, the **Budapest Process has also formed a Community of Law Enforcement Practitioners (COLEP)** which allows law enforcement officials from countries along the routes to engage in meaningful peer-to-peer learning and exchange of information by sharing modern methods and best practices to prevent and counter irregular migration, in particular SoM and TIP. COLEP will follow up on the above recommendations related to international law enforcement cooperation to counter TIP.