



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**Seminar on Co-operation to Prevent  
Trafficking in Human Beings in the Mediterranean Region**

*Rome, Italian Chamber of Deputies, Palazzo Montecitorio, Sala del Mappamondo*  
8 February 2013

**Concept Note**

**Background**

**The OSCE's work, experience and commitment in the fight against trafficking in human beings**

The OSCE has been engaged in the fight against trafficking in human beings for more than a decade. Its dedication was reaffirmed by Ministerial Council Decisions adopted by the 57 participating States since 2000, and enhanced by the political and operational work of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, the ODIHR and the OSCE field missions.

The OSCE considers trafficking in human beings first and foremost as a serious violation of human rights and at the same time, a transnational threat to the security of States. For this reason, already in 2003, the OSCE adopted an Action Plan which recommends that participating States adopt an integrated approach to prevention, protection of victims' rights and prosecution. It is a multidisciplinary approach based on co-operation between institutions and civil society. The strong commitment of OSCE participating States to fight modern-day slavery was solemnly renewed in Vilnius in 2011 with the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration on combating all forms of human trafficking.

**Human trafficking as a focus for the Mediterranean Partnership**

Trafficking in human beings has been identified as one of the areas for possible OSCE engagement in the process of consultations with the Delegations of the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation initiated by the Secretary General in implementation of the MC.DEC/5/11.

The Seminar on “Co-operation to Prevent Trafficking in Human Beings in the Mediterranean Region” is among the first initiatives that focus on the phenomenon of human trafficking from the Southern rim of the Mediterranean to Europe and beyond. While hitherto most initiatives dealt with the phenomena of irregular migration and smuggling in the Mediterranean region, the added value of the seminar lies in its focus on the prevention of the exploitation of migrants.

In line with OSCE commitments and a human rights approach to anti-trafficking,<sup>1</sup> the seminar aims to enhance further Partnership for Co-operation, by discussing and promoting co-operation mechanisms between OSCE participating States and Mediterranean Partners in the prevention of all forms of trafficking, especially for labour exploitation, and in the protection of victims and potential victims. Furthermore, the event will promote international co-operation and exchange of experiences to better tackle criminal trafficking networks.

### **Trafficking in human beings: modern-day slavery, a growing global phenomenon**

Trafficking in human beings is a growing global phenomenon which has now reached a massive dimension. According to 2012 International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates, 20.9 million people are victims of forced labour/human trafficking globally, out of which over 3 million within the OSCE region: 68 per cent of the victims are exploited in the private economy and 22 per cent are victims of forced sexual exploitation. Women constitute 55 per cent of all victims.

Trafficking is a serious and unacceptable violation of fundamental human rights, and a threat to the security and stability of our democracies and societies. Nowadays, trafficking in human beings is one of the most prolific and dangerous forms of transnational organized crime; it is an extremely lucrative and almost risk-free criminal business, given the high rate of impunity enjoyed by perpetrators. Traffickers exploit women and children but also men for every possible purpose, ranging from sexual and labour exploitation to forced begging and forced criminality, as well as organ removal.

Mixed migration flows are a reality in many areas of the world including the Mediterranean region. People migrate for different reasons including conflicts, persecution, discrimination and poverty. In recent years there are indications that an increasing number of migrants are being exploited in slavery-like conditions. Such migrants are exploited particularly in economic sectors that are labour intensive such as agriculture, construction, textiles, food processing, tourism and domestic work. Migrants are forced to live and work in inhuman conditions in return for no, or almost no, remuneration. They are subjected to various forms of physical and psychological violence, which may even amount to torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Their documents are confiscated, threats are made to report them to the authorities for deportation, and they are increasingly subjugated via debt bondage, with the financial obligation growing in an arbitrary and exponential way that is impossible to wipe out.

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<sup>1</sup> OSCE Ministerial Council, *Decision No. 5/11 Partners for Co-Operation*, MC.DEC/5/11 (Vilnius, 7 December 2011); OSCE Ministerial Council, *Declaration on combating all forms of human trafficking*, MC.DOC/1/11/Corr.1 (7 December 2011).

This phenomenon is largely managed by organized crime networks that operate horizontally with small groups of highly flexible local criminals, segmented and functionally specialized in various criminal activities such as the production of false documents, logistics, or transport. These complex criminal articulations are particularly difficult to dismantle. Very often the links between the criminal cells that facilitate irregular migration and those that manage the recruitment and placement of migrant workers are not at all obvious or very difficult to detect. These trends highlight the complexity of a global social phenomenon in which migrants are considered human merchandise, easy to exploit and use to make big profits.

### **Trafficking in human beings in the Mediterranean region**

All OSCE participating States are affected by human trafficking, either as countries of origin, transit or destination, or a combination of all three. The phenomenon also affects the countries of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation that are affected by regional and international migration flows, which are rapidly changing both in size and type. The Mediterranean Partners are in fact both countries of origin of trafficking in persons and also countries of transit and destination, particularly for migrants from Western and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Following developments known as the “Arab Spring” there was a rapid growth of irregular migration from the Southern Mediterranean to the North shore, and from there to many other European countries. Although in 2012 such migration flows showed a substantial decrease, and although it is difficult to evaluate the long term effects of the Arab Spring, we can expect that migration from and through North Africa to Europe will remain significant.

Issues relating to mixed migration in the Mediterranean Region, especially when criminal groups are involved, have usually been taken into consideration in the framework of smuggling of migrants. However, recent research and investigations demonstrate that a strong linkage exists between migration processes and subsequent exploitation taking place in European countries. This link often makes it difficult to distinguish between smuggling and trafficking, and requires a better understanding of the connections between the two criminal phenomena.

The journey of migrants trying to reach Europe, facilitated by unscrupulous smugglers, is always risky. Many women, men and children lose their lives during their tragic journey across the sea. Those who reach their destination frequently face abuse and exploitation, discrimination and xenophobia. Once in Europe, all migrants, including those entitled to international protection, find themselves in a situation of serious social and economic vulnerability, and often end up being contacted by criminal organizations that place them in certain work places where they are obliged to work in extreme exploitative conditions. The phenomenon of labour exploitation of migrants in slavery-like conditions affects mainly males but increasingly also women and children.

Recent investigations carried out in Southern European countries showed that migrant workers were obliged to work long hours in agriculture, for a very modest salary, without documents and constantly under threat of retaliation; sometimes intermediaries controlling the workers did not hesitate to threaten them with weapons. Moreover, workers were obliged to live far from the nearest population centres, in isolated locations under inhuman conditions, and to pay excessive fees for water, food and accommodation. In such cases migrants falling prey to criminal intermediaries and unscrupulous or criminal employers should be considered victims of trafficking and receive protection, both in the receiving state and in the source country in case of return.

The seminar will examine how these findings contribute to a greater understanding of such a complex situation, in which laws and regulations concerning human trafficking should be fully implemented to prevent and combat exploitation of migrants in slavery-like conditions.

### **Objectives of the seminar**

The principal objective of the seminar is to initiate a dialogue on trafficking in human beings in the Mediterranean Region. The added value of the seminar lies in its innovative approach. While issues relating to mixed migration in the region have been dealt with in the framework of irregular migration or smuggling, the seminar will shed light on exploitation of migrants, examine the intersecting issues, and highlight the need for full and correct implementation of laws and regulations on trafficking in human beings. The focus will be trafficking for labour exploitation including domestic servitude.

In conformity with the OSCE human rights approach to the prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings, the seminar will emphasize States' obligations regarding prevention including the promotion of workers' rights, the protection of victims and potential victims, and explore how protection granted to victims of human trafficking, international protection and protection against discrimination and xenophobia can enhance each other. The seminar will also explore ways to strengthen international co-operation at a bilateral and multilateral level, especially with regard to human rights protection. This will include strengthening prevention, investigation and prosecution as well as identification and support to trafficked and exploited persons. Partnerships, including partnerships with NGOs, will also be in focus.

The seminar will include two panels. The first panel will analyse features, trends and issues relating to trafficking in human beings in the Mediterranean region. The second panel will discuss good practices to enhance prevention and human rights protection.

## **Donors and Participants**

The seminar, convened by the OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, has been funded through a generous contribution from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg.

Participants include UN agencies and international organizations with specialized expertise on the subject such as UNHCR, IOM, UNODC, the Council of Europe and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation will be represented by:

- Senior level officials from governments, especially from ministries of interior, justice and social affairs;
- National co-ordinators on trafficking in human beings, as well as national rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms;
- Senior law enforcement officials, prosecutors and judges;
- Representatives of civil society including NGOs and independent experts.