

# Directorate General of Human Rights Equality Division



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HDIM.IO/71/06  
3 October 2006



## Action against Trafficking in Human Beings

### Introduction

Since the late 1980s, the Council of Europe has been active in the fight against trafficking in human beings. The Organisation has, among its member states countries of origin, transit and destination of the victims of trafficking. All these countries are directly concerned by the scourge of trafficking.

Trafficking in human beings constitutes a violation of human rights and an offence to the dignity

and the integrity of the human being. The Council of Europe, whose principal vocation is to safeguard and promote human rights, became the "natural home" for activities aiming to combat a phenomenon that constitutes a violation of people's dignity and integrity, their freedom of movement, as well as, in some cases, their right to life.

As far as the individual is concerned, trafficking undermines

the principle of the equal dignity of all human beings. At society level, it constitutes a modern form of slavery and calls in question the rule of law and fundamental democratic values.

Based on the fundamental principles of pluralist democracy, respect of human rights and the rule of law, the Council of Europe has organised activities aimed at combating trafficking in human beings.

### Actions undertaken by the Council of Europe

As far back as 1991, a *Seminar on Action Against Trafficking in Women, considered as a violation of human rights and human dignity*, was organised by the Council of Europe.

Then, through the *Group of Experts on traffic in women* (1992-93), which reported to the *Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men* (CDEG), the Council of Europe identified the most urgent areas for action which were included in a **Plan of action against trafficking in women**. The Plan proposed areas for reflection and investigation in view of making recommendations to the member states on legislative, judicial and punishment aspects of trafficking; on assisting, supporting and rehabilitating its victims and on prevention programmes.

Trafficking aroused the collective concern of Council of Europe Heads of State and Government at the **Strasbourg Summit** (October 1997): the final declaration states that violence against women and all forms of sexual exploitation of

women constitute a threat to citizens' security and democracy.

Numerous activities have been organised since the Summit. The first type of activity was concerned both with raising awareness and action. The Council of Europe organised seminars to **heighten the awareness** of governments and civil society to this new form of slavery in order to alert the different players (police, judges, social workers, embassy staff, teachers etc) to their role vis-à-vis trafficking victims and the dangers facing certain individuals.

In addition, member states were encouraged to draw up national action plans against trafficking. To that end, the Council of Europe prepared the above-mentioned model plan of action against trafficking in women in 1996 and since then has encouraged the preparation of both **national and regional action plans**, in particular in South-East Europe and the South Caucasus.

**Studies and research** have also been carried out to apprehend the problem of trafficking from its many different angles. In particular the CDEG prepared a report on the *Impact of the use of new information technologies on trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation*.

In addition, targeted seminars and meetings of experts have taken place in many member states, providing them with both the necessary **technical assistance** for drawing up or revising legislation in this area and assisting them to adopt the necessary measures for combating this scourge. In particular, the *LARA Project* to support the reform of criminal legislation in South-East Europe as a means of preventing and combating trafficking in human beings (July 2002 - November 2003). This Council of Europe Project, implemented within the framework of the Stability Pact Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings, enabled the participating countries to

adapt and review their national legislation in this field. As a result of this Project, nearly all the participating countries adopted national action plans against trafficking in human beings, covering

prevention, prosecution of traffickers and protection of the victims.

During the 3rd Summit of the Council of Europe (Warsaw, May 2005) the Heads of State and Government of the member States

firmly condemned trafficking in human beings which undermine the enjoyment of human rights and which is an offence to the dignity and integrity of the human being.

## Legal texts

The awareness-raising activities led to setting up a **legal framework** for combating trafficking in human beings. The Committee of Ministers adopted two legal texts dealing specifically with trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation, most of whose victims are women and children:

- Recommendation No. R (2000) 11 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on action against trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation;
- Recommendation Rec (2001) 16 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of children against sexual exploitation.

These put forward a pan-European strategy taking in definitions, general measures, a methodological and action framework, prevention, victim assistance and protection, criminal measures, judicial cooperation and arrangements for international cooperation and coordination.

Furthermore, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has adopted the following texts:

- Recommendation 1325 (1997) on traffic in women and forced prostitution in Council of Europe member States
- Recommendation 1450 (2000) Violence against women in Europe
- Recommendation 1523 (2001) on domestic slavery

- Recommendation 1526 (2001) on a campaign against trafficking in minors to put a stop to the east European route: the example of Moldova
- Recommendation 1545 (2002) on a campaign against trafficking in women
- Recommendation 1610 (2003) on migration connected with trafficking in women and prostitution
- Recommendation 1611 (2003) on trafficking in organs in Europe
- Recommendation 1663 (2004) on domestic slavery: servitude, au pairs and mail-order brides.

## Council of Europe Convention on action against trafficking in human beings

The Council of Europe considered that it was necessary to draft a legally binding instrument which goes beyond recommendations or specific actions. On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2005, the Committee of Ministers adopted the *Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*. The Convention was opened for signature in Warsaw on 16 May 2005, on the occasion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe who underlined that this new Convention is a major step forward in the fight against trafficking.

On the occasion of the 6th European Ministerial Conference on

Equality between Women Men (Stockholm, 8-9 June 2006), the Ministers adopted a Resolution in which, *inter alia*, member States were encouraged to sign and ratify the *Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings* and to participate actively in the Council of Europe Campaign in this field.

This new Convention, the first European treaty in this field, is a comprehensive treaty focussing mainly on the protection of victims of trafficking and the safeguard of their rights. It also aims to prevent trafficking and to prosecute traffickers. In addition, the

Convention provides for the setting up of an effective and independent monitoring mechanism capable of controlling the implementation of the obligations contained in the Convention.

The Convention will enter into force when it has been ratified by 10 states, eight of which must be Council of Europe member states.

A Fact Sheet on this Convention is available on the following website: [www.coe.int/trafficking](http://www.coe.int/trafficking).

## Council of Europe Campaign to combat trafficking in human beings

The *Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings* was launched in 2006. The Campaign aims to raise awareness among governments, parliamentarians, NGOs and civil society of the extent of the problem of trafficking in human beings in

Europe today. It will highlight the different measures which can be taken to prevent this new form of slavery, as well as measures to protect the human rights of victims and prosecute the traffickers and their accomplices. The campaign also aims to promote the widest possible

signature and ratification of the *Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings* in order that it may enter into force rapidly.

Update September 2006