

# Trafficking in human beings

## the slavery of our times

Trafficking in human beings is the slavery of our times. It is a human rights violation and a terrible crime. Victims are lured and kept in horrible conditions for the purposes of **sexual or labour exploitation, begging, criminal activities** or the **removal of organs, only to name a few.**

There can be hundreds of thousands of victims around us. The International Labour Organization (June 2012) estimates the number of **victims exploited for forced labour and sexual services** to be around 880 000 in the EU alone and nearly **21 million** worldwide. And these are only conservative estimates...

### 5 MYTHS ABOUT TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

► **Myth 1: Slavery is history. There are no more slaves today.**

**Fact:** Today, we are still surrounded by slaves in our societies. We may even be promoting their exploitation. Slavery is closer than we think. Victims of trafficking are baking our bread, tailoring our clothes, constructing our houses or locked in rooms to provide sexual services. Trafficking in human beings takes many different forms. Yet, regardless of being exploited for sex, for labour in agriculture, construction or the textile industry, for domestic servitude or for the removal of organs, victims share similarly gruesome stories.

Victims often have to provide services seven days a week to pay back inconceivable amounts of money to their traffickers in exchange of their future freedom – or so they are led to believe. Usually, the victims are deprived of their passports and, in many



cases, locked behind closed doors to be let out only for 'work'. Barred from contacting their families, they are threatened by

their traffickers and live in fear of retaliation. With virtually no money and deceived by the traffickers to fear the local authorities, the idea of escape is unthinkable.

▶ **Myth 2: Trafficking victims come from outside the EU.**

**Fact:** The majority of victims reported by EU Member States come from within the Union and predominantly from Romania and Bulgaria. In 2008-10, 61 % of victims registered by EU Member States were EU citizens. Trafficking in human beings is **different from human smuggling** or facilitated irregular migration. Victims are trafficked in order to be exploited and abused, and they do not have to cross borders for being trafficked.

▶ **Myth 3: Traffickers are shady underground characters.**

**Fact:** Actually, traffickers are often **persons the victims trust**. A study on the trafficking of women from Romania to Germany found that in many cases the first contact person between the victim and the recruiter was an individual from the victim's close circle of family and friends. (UNODC, Global Patterns Report, 2006: 61). The recruiters are not always violent in the beginning; they are often smooth operators luring victims into wonderful jobs and promises. And nowadays, the terrible story very often starts **online**.

▶ **Myth 4: Trafficking is a very risky business.**

**Fact:** Traffickers make huge profits and very few of them end up behind bars. It is a highly profitable form of organised crime that creates dozens of billions of Euro in profits for the perpetrators each year. UNODC **estimates the market for sexual exploitation in Europe at € 2.5 billion** a year.

▶ **Myth 5: As an individual, there is nothing I can do to stop trafficking in human beings.**

**Fact:** It takes **one individual to make a change** and you can be that individual. Look for signs and indicators of trafficking in human beings around you and, most importantly, report them to the authorities! You can also change your purchasing patterns and be more aware of the products you buy and how they are produced. Your choices have power. You have the power to effect change.

## THE EU RESPONSE

The EU is uniquely positioned to address trafficking in human beings: as a family of states we **legislate together** and create binding obligations related to trafficking in human beings. We have **robust enforcement mechanisms**, a comprehensive **policy framework** and available **funding**, which help us to deliver.

The EU legislation conveys a clear message of **zero tolerance** to anyone involved in any way in trafficking in human beings. Our legislation **places victims at its heart and is gender specific and human rights based**. Trafficking in human beings is criminalised across the EU and victims have the right to support, assistance and protection throughout the Union.

Our dynamic policy framework is guided by the **EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings (2012-16)**. This Strategy consists of **40 concrete and practical actions** drawn on input from a wide range of stakeholders and focuses on five priorities (protection, prevention, prosecution, partnership and increased knowledge).

To coordinate this work, the European Commission appointed Ms Myria Vassiliadou as the **EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator**. She is mandated to provide policy orientation and coherence for EU action, ultimately making sure that we are working together to address trafficking in human beings. ■

## FOR MORE INFO:

[www.ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking](http://www.ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking)  
[www.ec.europa.eu/home-affairs](http://www.ec.europa.eu/home-affairs)