

**TASK FORCE ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TF TiP)
PROTECTION AND INCLUSION WORKING GROUP**

19.06.2025, 10:00

Palisády 29, Bratislava

Attendees:

In person

Zuzana Bartalská (IOM), Olga Pietruchová (UNHCR), Vladimír Bilohuščin (Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic), Tibor Terifaj (Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic)

Online

Miroslava Fialová (Department of Crime Prevention and Information Centre Office of Minister of the Interior of the Slovak Republic) Kamila Džurnáková (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic), Jana Drgoncová (Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities), Renata Brennerová (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic), Zuzana Špinderová (IOM), Markéta Vigašová (KIND), Martina Sukovská (Centre for Legal Aid)

Agenda:

- Approval of the minutes from the last meeting
- Regular update of partners from the Department of Crime Prevention and Information Centre Office of Minister of the Interior of the Slovak Republic, Slovak Catholic Charity, Program of support and protection of victims of human trafficking; IOM
- Presentation of the Ministry of Education – Situation of underaged students from Ukraine during summer months – ***Guidelines on the Admission Procedure, Language Preparation, Enrolment in Studies, Accommodation Contracts, Tutoring System, Health Insurance and Health Care for Foreign Students at Slovak Higher Education Institutions***
- AOB (Any other business)

Ms Zuzana Bartalská (IOM) welcomed participants and thanked them for joining the TF on TiP. Then, she asked for the approval of the Minutes of the last meeting, which took place in April 2025. Since there were no comments on the Meeting Minutes, she opened a floor for **Ms Fialová from the Department of Crime Prevention and Information Centre Office of Minister of the Interior of the Slovak Republic**, who presented an update on their activities, and some of the latest statistics on THB victims enrolled in the specialized support programme. **Men were predominantly subjected to labour exploitation**, while **women** were primarily **victims of sexual exploitation**. **Children** were more frequently exploited for **sexual purposes**. Among **adults**, the most common forms of exploitation included **labour exploitation, and sexual exploitation**. Total number of victims enrolled in the Programme of Support and Protection of Victim is **21**. **Slovak Catholic Charity** is responsible for **15 individuals**, including **12 women** and **3 men**. Among them are **6 minors (girls)** and **3 individuals from Nepal**. The most frequently identified form of exploitation was **sexual**

exploitation – 10 women (including girls). 2 other women and 3 men were victims of **forced labour**. Victims from Nepal did not ask for assisted voluntary return to their country of origin. **Greek Catholic Charity** is responsible for **6 individuals**, including **5 women (4 girls)** and **1 man**. **Women were sexually exploited** and **one man** was a victim of **forced labour**. **One woman re-entered the programme** (she was already enrolled in 2019). Victims are predominantly **Slovak**, except for 3 Nepalese. In May, **Slovak National Helpline for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings** received **34 calls**, with **5 related to suspected cases of TiP**, including **one potential victim**. In June, **42 calls** were received, with **8 related to TiP**, and with no potential victim detected. Currently, they are handling a case of a Slovak woman who is planning to travel to Egypt to get married with an Egyptian. **In June**, a court ruled in favour of a **woman** included in the programme, awarding her **EUR 3,000 in compensation**. In May, **lectures were delivered to high school students in Bratislava and Košice, as well as to 9th-grade elementary school students in Bratislava**. The focus was on providing **practical information** and **preventive guidance before traveling abroad**. At the end of May, a **lecture** was also held **for students from the University of Texas**. The most recent **meeting of national rapporteurs** under the auspices of the European Commission **focused on child victims and the online dimension of trafficking in persons**, including the **prevention of inappropriate content**.

Ms Vigašová (KIND) asked whether they identified victims with disabilities.

Ms Fialová replied that currently, there is **no specific statistical category for persons with disabilities among victims of trafficking as far as they lack definition what might be understood and covered by disability for statistical purposes**. Authorities must assess and classify the cases – determining whether the condition is permanent, whether it existed prior to the trafficking situation, or whether it developed as a result of trafficking. **A research study** on the issue of disability among victims of trafficking in Slovakia **is planned**, in line with GRETA's recommendation. Information gathered from organizations indicates **that victim of TiP tend to have mental disabilities**. In most cases, **the condition existed before** the trafficking occurred, although in some instances, it developed during the trafficking.

Ms Bartalská thanked **Ms Fialová** and reported that several individuals contacted **the IOM's prevention helpline** to verify **the legitimacy of summer job offers or recruitment agencies**. At the request of a student dormitory, **information sessions** were organized in **Žilina, Svit, and Košice**. These sessions focused on **raising awareness** and **providing guidance** related to **safe employment opportunities abroad**. A group of **students from the University of Texas** visited and attended a lecture highlighting **IOM's prevention efforts in the area of human trafficking**. As part of a **training for Czech and Slovak labour inspectors** organized by **the European Labour Authority (ELA)**, a **presentation** was delivered on **recent trends in human trafficking**. In June, **IOM** also **organised the Training of Facilitators (ToF)** focused on a training manual to equip facilitators with tools for implementing prevention activities in the area of TiP. **A webinar** was held to inform participants about the **risks associated with summer jobs**. It was

noted that **students, particularly those from Ukraine, are more likely to accept job offers that include accommodation**, as many dormitories are closed during the summer months.

Ms Bartalská also presented that participants of TF expressed **interest in holding meetings** on a quarterly basis (once **every three months**) based on the questionnaire sent to participants previously. They appreciated receiving **up-to-date information** and viewed the meetings as a **valuable tool for connecting relevant stakeholders**.

Suggestions for future topics included:

- *Showcasing prevention activities implemented in Slovakia and other EU countries as sources of inspiration.*
- *Addressing the issue of child victims of sexual exploitation and the risks minors face in the online space, in connection with GRETA's recommendations for Slovakia.*
- *Focusing on victim identification, prosecutorial oversight, the protection of victims' rights in criminal proceedings, the need for continued education of prosecutors, and the shortage of certified judicial experts.*

Ms Bartalská thanked participants for their active involvement. The suggested topics will be considered for future meetings starting in September.

Ms Pietruchová (UNHCR) noted that two weeks ago, a working group meeting was held on the topic of protection and inclusion, with a focus on **secondary school students**. It was highlighted that **most secondary school dormitories in Slovakia are closed over the weekends**, leaving students with no place to stay. As a result, many of them travel by train during this time. Some cities are making efforts to address this issue, but it remains a **broader systemic problem**. The discussion also touched on the recruitment of children from Ukraine to study in Slovakia. Although **guardianship is formally established**, in practice **one legal guardian may be responsible for as many as 30 children**. While these guardians sign legal documents on behalf of the children, they often do not attend to their actual needs. **This situation significantly increases the vulnerability of these young people.**

Ms Bartalská gave the floor to **Mr Bilohuščin** from the **Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic** who delivered a presentation on the **guidelines for selected areas concerning foreign students at Slovak universities**, which include **measures to prevent human trafficking**. These guidelines are of a **recommendatory nature** and cover aspects such as the admission process, language preparation, enrolment, accommodation contracts, tutoring systems, health insurance, and medical care (Reference: [Ministry of Education Guidelines](#)).

Statistical Overview (as of October 31, 2024):

- Total number of students: **143,783**
- Foreign students: **24,661** (representing **17%** of the total)

- **Students from Ukraine: 13,846** (approximately **9.6%** of all students), of whom **3,453** are **minors (25% of Ukrainian students)**. Many Ukrainian students arrive as minors due to differences in the education systems and **do not have full legal capacity** under Slovak law.

Among students who began their studies in 2023, **32.9%** dropped out. By the third year, the dropout rate decreases to **3.8%**. Among **Ukrainian students**, the **first-year dropout rate is as high as 45%**, with **many cases where it is unclear what happens to them afterward**. Some students reportedly **do not realize they are formally enrolled** in university upon arrival, suggesting that the system is being **used as a means to obtain visas and residence**. Between 2023 and 2025, dropout rates were **52% for Russian students** and **45.1% for Belarusian students**.

As a result of several stakeholder meetings, the Ministry has issued **guidance for foreign students**, with a particular focus on students from Ukraine. At universities that **do not conduct entrance interviews**, dropout rates are as high as **60%**. **Intermediary agencies** often charge students **fees starting at EUR 3,000** for processing paperwork. Universities report that they are **not legally required to conduct Slovak language exams** for foreign students. If a student lacks a recognized language certificate, those issued abroad **may not be accepted**. **Conditional admission** is sometimes granted, requiring students to **learn Slovak to at least A2 level** before starting their studies, and to continue learning alongside their academic program.

Minors must have a legal guardian or an authorized representative to enrol in university studies, as they cannot sign documents on their own. Some schools allow online enrolment, but **this method is not appropriate for foreign or underage students**, as it prevents verification of the legal representative's identity.

Ms Pietruchová (UNHCR) emphasized that **unaccompanied minors under the age of 18 must have a court-appointed guardian**.

Ms Brennerová (Ministry of Labour) noted that the terms “guardianship” and “unaccompanied minors” are **used inconsistently** and are subject to different interpretations and that Slovakia has a **bilateral agreement with Ukraine**, which stipulates that **decisions regarding guardianship are made on the territory of Ukraine**, not in Slovakia. Minors, typically aged **16-18**, enjoy **freedom of movement within the EU**. If they are present in Slovakia, it is often **based on their parents' consent**. However, no mechanism is currently in place to regulate the role of intermediary agencies, and it remains unclear whether **any criminal complaints have been filed** regarding these practices. Minors studying at Slovak universities are **not considered unaccompanied**, but rather fall into the category of **“separated children.”** In such cases, **guardianship is not automatically determined**. **Unaccompanied minors**, by contrast, are placed in **Centres for Children and Families (CDR)**,

if they enter the system. A common issue arises when **ambassadors or relatives attempt to remove the children**, citing restrictions on their freedom of movement.

Mr Bilohuščin continued with the presentation stating that schools are advised to **maintain lists of all underage foreign students**, including **contact details for their legal guardians and authorized representatives**. A **tutoring system** has been established to support students with integration into academic and social life. A tutor is assigned to each student **in their first year of study**, following enrolment at a Slovak university. The tutor supports the student for **at least one semester**, and in the case of **underage students**, the support continues **until they reach the age of 18**. If authorized by the student's legal guardian, the tutor is also responsible for **accompanying the underage student to medical appointments**. **Mr Bilohuščin** also noted that up to **20% of students currently lack health insurance**. The insurance company **Union** has expressed interest in offering an **affordable insurance option** for individuals who are **not registered as displaced persons (ongoing discussions)**.

Ms Vigašová (KIND) asked about the **limitations of contractual authorization** for minors. Specifically, **even when a minor is represented by an authorized person based on a power of attorney**, certain legal actions – particularly in the area of **residency and migration status**—require a **court-appointed guardian**. She stated that under Slovak law, a **minor must be represented either by a parent or a court-appointed guardian**. A **contractual power of attorney is not sufficient** for all legal matters. For example, in order to apply for **temporary residence or temporary protection**, the presence of a **legal representative (not merely an authorized agent)** is required. She also emphasized that **contractual authorization does not cover the full scope of legal representation** necessary for such procedures.

Ms Brennerová (Ministry of Labour) replied that in the context of **temporary protection for foreigners**, particularly **unaccompanied minors**, there are multiple situations where a **court-appointed guardian or legal representative is legally required**. A **contractual power of attorney is insufficient** in such cases. It was suggested that the **Bureau of Border and Alien Police** should provide an official response to clarify these procedures. Additionally, a representative from the **Ministry of Education** should consider **Slovakia's potential inclusion in the LEX UA framework**, given that the **state of emergency remains in effect**. This could help address related issues such as the **closure of student dormitories on weekends** and the condition that **school admission requires regulated residence status** – a **90-day visa is not sufficient**. In cases where a child has **no relatives present** and their **parents are missing or unreachable**, the child is considered an **unaccompanied minor**. In such situations, a **guardian is appointed by the court**, who acts as the **legal representative**, and the child is placed in the care of **Centres for Children and Families (CDRs)** – unless another individual legally assumes parental responsibility.

Ms Bartalská mentioned **two calls for proposals** by the **Ministry of Education**. The first supports the organization of **language courses**, and the second focuses on establishing **counselling** or **support centres** at universities. These centres are intended to offer more targeted assistance, including tutoring programs. It was also mentioned that some agencies offer to arrange temporary residence permits for students, although temporary protection is often more beneficial – especially in terms of access to health insurance.

Lastly, **Ms Bartalská** thanked all those who provided their inputs, comments, and concluded the session. The next meeting of the working group will take place after summer break or in the case of urgent matter.