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

24.4.2025, 10:00

Palisády 29, Bratislava

Attendees:

In person

Zuzana Bartalská (IOM), Anastasia Hochharenko (UNHCR), Katarína Štiglincová

Online

Martin Borza (Ministry of Interior), Miroslava Vrábelová (National Unit for Combating Illegal Migration), Katarína Stiglincova (UNHCR), Peter Halas(Migration office, MoI), Matúš Ferenčík (Človek v ohrození), Lucia Baloghová (Department of Crime Prevention and Information Centre Office of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic), Petra Melikantová (KIND), Juraj Plaza (Ministry of Labour of SR), Lukáš Andrejčák (Človek v ohrození), Miroslava Mesíková (Slovak Catholic Charity), Jana Drgoncová (Government Office of Plenipotentiary for Roma community), Petra Blažejová (Migration office, MoI), Katka Levčíkova (Mareena)

Agenda:

- Approval of the Minutes from the last meeting;
- Presentation of the Situation report for the area of combating TiP in the Slovak Republic in 2024, Lucia Baloghová from the Department of Crime Prevention and Information Centre Office of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic
- Regular update from partners from Department of Crime Prevention and Information Centre Office of Minister of the Interior of the Slovak Republic; National Unit for Combating Illegal Migration; Slovak Catholic Charity, Program of support and protection of victims of human trafficking; IOM
- AOB (Any other business)

Ms Zuzana Bartalská (IOM) welcomed participants and thanked them for attending the 2nd meeting of TF on TiP in 2025, and asked for the approval of the Minutes of the last meeting.

Further, she opened the floor to **Ms Lucia Baloghová** from the Department of Crime Prevention and Information Centre Office of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic with presentation on the Situation report for the area of combating TiP in the Slovak Republic in 2024. According to 2024 data, patterns of exploitation varied notably by gender and age. **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, sexual exploitation,** and **forced begging.**

Ms Baloghová mentioned that a significant proportion of the victims were children. Out of a total of 43 identified victims, **23 were minors** aged between 6 and 17 years. Notably, **the minimum age of recruitment has decreased**, with the youngest victim being recruited only at the age of **6 years**, compared to the previous minimum of 9 years.

In 2024, the majority of identified victims originated from the eastern regions of Slovakia, with 35% from the Prešov Region and 32.5% from the Košice Region. Victims from Prešov were predominantly subjected to **sexual exploitation** within the Slovak Republic, while a small number - three adult men - were trafficked for forced labour in the Netherlands. Of the 14 victims identified from the Prešov Region, **nine were children.**

Slovakia continued to serve both as a source and destination country for trafficking in 2024. A total of **31 victims were exploited within Slovak territory**. In addition, **three foreign nationals** - citizens of other EU member states - were also identified among the victims.

In 2024, there was a notable increase in the number of trafficking victims accessing the Specialized Program for Support and Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking (63% of all identified victims). The program primarily provided legal counselling, psychosocial support, and material assistance.

Moreover, **44% of identified victims** were granted the **status of injured parties** in criminal proceedings, ensuring their rights and interests were formally recognized in the judicial process. **From a law enforcement perspective, criminal proceedings were initiated in 18 cases throughout the year.** Prosecutors filed **charges against 22 individuals**, the majority of whom (21) were Slovak nationals. One accused person held Turkish citizenship.

In 2024, the modus operandi of human traffickers remained largely unchanged. While perpetrators increasingly exploited the online space to post fraudulent job offers, personal contact continued to be the predominant method of recruitment.

Ms Baloghová also presented several key recommendations aimed at strengthening cooperation and cooperation. These included the regular meetings of expert working groups and targeted legislative amendments - particularly **to increase sentencing severity, eliminate the practice of issuing suspended sentences,** and **ensure consistent application of victim compensation measures.**

Given the growing use of technology in trafficking-related crimes, the recommendations also emphasized the need to build institutional capacity. Authorities were urged to bolster investigative capabilities by **equipping law enforcement with the tools and training necessary to monitor online environments,** carry out undercover digital operations, and conduct thorough analyses of social media networks to proactively detect and prevent trafficking activities.

Another key measures included the **formal definition of labour exploitation** in national legislation; the need to **unify and formalize procedures related to the identification and reporting of victims**; and **strengthening information and counselling services for migrant and foreign workers**.

Ms Baloghová also presented information about the **compliance with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.** The Slovak Republic has completed the third evaluation round of the GRETA monitoring process, with the fourth round currently underway. An unofficial report dated 26 March 2024 has been made available but has yet to be submitted to the Committee of the Parties, which is scheduled to assess it in June. Despite its unofficial status, the report is already being addressed to facilitate the implementation of its recommendations.

Monitoring under the Convention generally follows a four-year cycle, with a mid-term assessment after two years. Key priorities emerging from the current evaluation include:

- **Strengthening child protection** in children's centres, re-education institutions, and state care facilities;
- **Targeted prevention measures** aimed at reducing the trafficking of individuals from Serbian communities;
- **Enhancing victim identification mechanisms**, particularly by building the capacity of labour inspectors;
- **Reflecting GRETA's recommendations in national legislation**, including the adoption of a legally mandated recovery and reflection period for presumed victims, granting them access to assistance prior to formal identification;
- **Ensuring proactive and timely investigations** of TiP cases, leading to effective, proportionate, and dissuasive penalties - including the elimination of suspended or lenient sentencing practices;
- **Facilitating access to compensation** for victims by enabling early access to legal aid, systematically gathering evidence of illicit financial gains, and making full use of asset freezing and forfeiture mechanisms.

Ms Bartalská mentioned **the number of detected child victims** rose according to the UNODC's report. She asked whether any measures were being prepared to tackle this issue. **Ms Baloghová** responded to the question stating that there are ongoing discussions between **the Headquarters of Social Affairs and Family Work and the National Unit for Combatting Illegal Migration.** She mentioned that the identification of victims - particularly children - reflects the effectiveness of early detection measures, which are a key component of the National Program to Combat Human Trafficking. These mechanisms are proving to be functional, enabling authorities to identify victims while they are still minors. She believes, there is a space to foster dialogue and collaboration with the **Ministry of Education** as well.

Ms Bartalská thanked **Ms Baloghová** and gave the floor to **Ms Miroslava Vrábelová** from the National Unit for Combating Illegal Migration (NJBPNM). **Ms Vrábelová** reported that, as of April 23, there are currently **11 ongoing criminal proceedings** related to TiP. In **one case**, an **indictment** has already been filed, and in **four** others, **motions to file indictments** have been submitted. Around **50 TiP cases are being investigated** by 20 investigators. Many of these cases have been ongoing for several years. A total of **15 victims** have been identified, including **11 children** - 9 girls and 2 boys. The **four adult victims** include **three foreign nationals**: two from Ukraine and one woman from Moldova. **Several cases were linked to forced begging. Victims** range in age **from 9 to 61 years**, with the youngest being a boy. **Ms Vrábelová** noted that younger boys are increasingly targeted by traffickers. The reported forms of exploitation include **7 cases of sexual exploitation, 3 of forced begging,** and **1 of labour exploitation.** Most cases involved exploitation within Slovakia, with one victim also being exploited in Austria and Slovakia. **Ms Vrábelová** emphasized NJBPNM's long-term, active cooperation with various partners, including the Information Centre, the Prosecutor General's Office, The National Labour Inspectorate, IOM, and the Slovak Catholic Charity. The Ministry of the Interior and the National Labour Inspectorate are debating on mutual cooperation, with the shared goal monitoring business entities - particularly to identify potential victims of TiP. NJBPNM also works closely with various institutions to support prevention efforts and provide assistance to child victims of TiP.

Ms Bartalská thanked **Ms Vrábelová** for her input.

Later, **Ms Bartalská** highlighted key findings from the UNODC 2024 Trafficking in Persons report and global trends:

- **The number of child victims** of TiP **continues to rise.**
- **Victim detection increased** during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Labour exploitation** now accounts for the **largest share of trafficking cases globally.**
- Despite this shift, most **criminal convictions still focus on sexual exploitation.**
- **Women and girls,** particularly from **African countries**, remain the **most detected victims.** Contributing factors include **political instability, climate change,** and **local conflicts.**

Ms Bartalská invited **Ms Mesíková** from the Slovak Catholic Charity to share updates on the Programme of Support and Protection of Victims. Currently, **18 individuals** are enrolled in the programme, including 14 women and 4 men. Among them are 8 minors (girls) and 3 individuals from Nepal. The most frequently identified form of exploitation was **sexual exploitation.** In March, they received **46 calls,** with **7 related to suspected cases of TiP,** including **one potential victim of sexual exploitation.** In April, **17 calls** were received, with none related to TiP. Most callers reached out in search of material assistance and support.

Ms Bartalská asked whether any of the TiP-related or other calls came from children. **Ms Mesíková** confirmed that **none** of the callers were minors.

Ms Bartalská reported that IOM continues its prevention efforts, including a **recent training** held at the **detention centre** in Sečovce focused on **identifying vulnerabilities and improving detection.** IOM has also finalized an updated version of the **Training Manual on the Prevention of Human Trafficking,** designed as a practical tool for facilitators working with various groups such as teachers and youth workers. A training session on the use of the manual was conducted in Košice, with another planned for June in Bratislava. Invitations will be distributed in advance. The main objective of the training is to demonstrate interactive methods for engaging different target groups. IOM also promotes preventive tools such as the **Safework** website (https://safework.iom.sk) and the **SAFE app** (https://www.safe.iom.sk/#/landing). The SAFE app is designed for young people and features interactive scenario-based learning. In addition, **ELA** is organizing a **coordination meeting** for **Czech and Slovak labour inspectors** to facilitate the **exchange of best practices.** A notable success from the Czech Republic includes the launch of a pilot project employing two cultural mediators to help overcome communication barriers.

Mr Plaza noted that **ELA is developing a handbook** for each Member State outlining legislation related to the posting of third-country nationals, including regulations on temporary employment agencies and procedures for obtaining visas and work permits. The handbook will be freely accessible to all labour inspectors.

Ms Bartalská appreciates the initiative, noting that the topic of identification of foreign nationals in Slovakia has been criticized in both GRETA reports and the TIP Report.

Ms Baloghová asked if the IOM training manual was freely accessible on the website. She also offered to assist with proofreading the handbook being prepared by ELA.

Ms Bartalska responded that the material is freely accessible on the website (Training manual). The ones who complete the training session on the use of the manual will also receive a printed copy along with a certificate.

Lastly, **Ms Bartalská** thanked all those who provided their inputs, comments, and concluded the session. The next meeting of the working group is tentatively scheduled for the second half of June.