# FACTSHEET BULGARIA

## Overview

*This factsheet demonstrates problems and possible solutions compiled by 22 experts of different fields as part of a "Living Lab" (round table discussion) in Sofia in the following three areas:*

***Identification, Investigational process, Prosecution and Court Proceeding***

***Protection and Support for Victims***

***Interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral cooperation (national and international)***

# 1. Identification, Investigational process, Prosecution and Court Proceeding

## *Problems*

- **Police** does not sufficiently focus on **the prevention of the crime of human trafficking**: It is essential for institutions to have personnel who can anticipate criminal activity and intervene before it occurs.
- **Police does not properly recognize** sexual exploitation, drug trafficking, and labour exploitation, even though they are not hidden, but in plain sight.
- There is a **lack of ongoing training** for different authorities.
- There is still a **lack of official information on victim identification**, and a need for enhanced coordination and early interaction during the identification process.
- For the General Directorate Combating Organized Crime (GDCOC), **the victim is the best and most compelling evidence against traffickers**, particularly in cases of sexual and labour exploitation. But there is a **lack of victim awareness and willingness to cooperate** (victims appear to have put themselves in the situation voluntarily; victims do not see a benefit in testifying).
- The **crime of human trafficking** is especially **hard to prove**: The success of investigations highly depends on the collection of relevant, sufficient, and high-quality evidence, and especially on the victim's cooperation. Using information obtained outside the Criminal Procedure Code objectively in court, is a significant challenge.

## *Solutions*

- **Governments** must strengthen law enforcement efforts in order to target and dismantle trafficking networks by providing **enhanced training** and **more resources for law enforcement agencies**.
- Even though Bulgarian border police officers are instructed and trained to recognise the signs of human trafficking, **border patrol agents must be continually trained on the latest techniques employed by traffickers**.

- **Police must increase their use of technology to monitor and track online platforms** where human trafficking may occur.
- Often, **victims realise their victim status** when they do not receive the promised benefits from traffickers. Law enforcement agencies should consider that often victims turn to them in a way to seek retribution against the traffickers.
- **The Association of Prosecutors should launch educational campaigns** to increase public awareness of human trafficking, so that students or people in general will be able to recognize and report suspicious activities.
- **Collaboration with non-governmental organisations** need to be strengthened, as they can play a substantial role in victim identification, aid, and advocacy.

## 2. Protection and Support for Victims

### *Problems*

- **Bulgaria is a country of origin**, transit and destination for human trafficking; prevention efforts are needed.
- **Lack of proper attention to victims** – emphasis should be first and foremost on them. Victims need individualized/tailored assistance to rebuild their lives.
- **Lack of finances for tailored and comprehensive support for victims.**
- There is often a **personal relationship between the victim and the trafficker** and they are in direct contact.

## *Solutions*

- **Prevention: Tackling underlying factors that make individuals susceptible to human trafficking,** such as poverty, lack of education, and social inequality, to reduce the number of potential victims.
- **Prevention**: The Association of Prosecutors in Bulgaria, which already organizes several trainings, should **provide more training for adolescents**, such as in schools, on the process of victim recruitment – how the victims become hooked, how they are recruited, etc., to understand and dismantle methods used by traffickers.
- **Continual evaluation and improvement of the current victim support systems**, so that institutions can develop a more effective and compassionate response to victims of various forms of exploitation.
- **Implementation of *tailored* support for victims of exploitation including a variety of specialised services**, such as safe shelters and housing, medical and psychological care for trauma, legal assistance for navigating the justice system, education and vocational training to improve skills, and reintegration programmes to facilitate their return to society.
- **A careful analysis of each situation and detail** is required to determine the required assistance. **Knowledge of distinct mechanisms to address minors' unique needs and vulnerabilities** needs to be spread.
- **Introduction of a mechanism to temporarily prohibit or hinder interaction between the victim and the trafficker**, e.g. placing the victim in a location without internet access or in greater physical distance to the perpetrator.

## 3. Interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral cooperation (national and international)

### *Problems*

- Human trafficking is often a **transnational crime requiring international cooperation**.
- **Coordination and Collaboration between multiple institutions and nations must still improve** to effectively combat human trafficking for sexual exploitation.
- **Lack of coordination of assistance** for effective victim interaction and support, e.g. addressing the unique needs and vulnerabilities of minors.

### *Solutions*

- **Implementation of additional actions** such as enhancing cross-border coordination, sharing intelligence, and implementing targeted awareness campaigns.
- **Encouragement of data sharing** between various organisations and agencies in order to identify trafficking patterns and hotspots.
- **Collaboration with non-governmental organisations need to be strengthened**, as they can play a substantial role in victim identification, aid, and advocacy.
- **Improvement of coordination between law enforcement and NGOs** in regards to the victim support systems. The General Directorate Combating Organized Crime (GDCOC) should **facilitate interactions between institutions and the NGO sector.**

## Final Recommendations

- *to address the root causes of trafficking to prevent the recruitment of victims in Bulgaria*
- *to provide ongoing training and resources for law enforcement agencies*
- *to provide official information on victim identification*
- to implement public awareness campaigns
- *to continually evaluate and improve the current victim support system, and to focus on tailored, needs-based support, especially in the case of minors*
- *to facilitate collaboration and data sharing between all stakeholders, especially with the NGO sector*

## Good Practice

*Bulgaria and Greece have notably productive operational cooperation. A contact centre that operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, facilitates communication and addresses cases primarily concerning irregular migration.*
*In addition, institutional cooperation in Bulgaria is good, with all involved parties accessible via their personal mobile phones. This level of participation strengthens the collective effort to combat human trafficking and protect vulnerable individuals.*

Border police representative, Sofia, 21.07.2023