

Context, awareness and attitudes underpinning the sale and sexual exploitation of children

The EU would like to share the good practice of raising public awareness on issues of sale and sexual exploitation of children at the local, national regional and global level.

- The European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, developed the **Vega Handbook Airports**: a practical handbook on the detection and disruption of criminal organisations involved in the trafficking of human beings (THB) and people smuggling at air borders. Frontex and the EU Member States have concluded that there is a clear need to increase the awareness of frontline officers on THB issues improving victims' protection and evidences' collection. It is available in 32 languages.
- The Europol **#SayNo campaign** was launched in June 2017. It is a preventive initiative aimed at providing children and adults with information on preventing and dealing with sexual extortion and coercion online. A short video featuring two subjects was developed by Europol with the assistance of students from the International School of the Hague and funded through the EMPACT strategic framework. The video shows how children are sexually extorted for financial gain and for additional sexualised material respectively. It also shows how those situations can be avoided and what to do if it happens to you stressing that this is a crime and that children are victims of that crime. Uniquely, the video was produced in each of the languages of the EU, used appropriate teen oriented language and was made available through the Europol Public Website. The initiative has been adopted in many EU countries and incorporated into education curricula in several. It has also been adopted outside the EU using the original source material provided by Europol.

Children's vulnerability to sale and sexual exploitation, including in the context of cross-border challenges, technology and innovation

- The EU would like to highlight that **children in migration**, in particular when unaccompanied, are especially vulnerable to exploitation. This is even more the case when children are coming from minorities of developing countries where, due to poverty and/or conflict, community members see a business opportunity in exploiting the children, for prostitution purposes or other purposes, like the cultivation and/or sale of drugs, begging, petty crime, etc.
- Children's rights should also be recognised and respected in the **digital environment**. The EU *Better Internet for Children strategy*¹ sets out a coherent EU-wide strategy to provide concrete measures for making the internet a trusted place for children and young people, including funding, coordination, awareness-raising and facilitating industry self-regulation. In November 2018, a revised *Audio-visual Media Services*

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012DC0196&from=EN>

Directive was adopted with an aim to reinforce the protection of children when consuming audio-visual content, including online videos. As the impact of new technologies on the rights of the child worldwide will only increase, the EU participates in the International Advisory Board of the *We Protect Global Alliance to End Child Sexual Exploitation Online* (WPGA): a global organisation aiming to create a more effective response to child sexual abuse online by bringing together key stakeholders.

The overarching legal-normative framework, commitment and institutional capacity

- **The Europol Victim Identification Task Force (VIDTF)** is an annual ongoing initiative by Europol in support of EU Member States and partner countries with which it has an Operational Agreement. It is an intensive two week period of activity to locate child victims whose personal integrity has been violated through sexual abuse and exploitation. The recording and documenting of that violation by those involved has then been circulated online, distributed and made available to other offenders seeking such material. Europol brings together experts with experience in Victim Identification from around the world and enables them to review child abuse and exploitation material to discover clues that will allow them to localise investigations to a region or country so that an investigation can be referred there and a child identified. The investigators can also request, from Europol, intelligence relating to the material seized that can localise, strengthen and clarify their findings about the material and make the identification of a child possible. The experts in VIDTF upload material to the International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database hosted at INTERPOL so that their work can contribute to the localisation, identification and removal from harm of children who have been abused throughout the world. There have been 6 VIDTFs since 2014 resulting in 305 children being safeguarded and 126 offenders prosecuted. In all there have been at least 2600 series uploaded to ICSE of which 1750 are previously unknown and over 800 have added material to already existing series. All of these actions give the children in that material a better chance of being identified and rescued from further harm.
- **The Europol “Stop Child Abuse – Trace an Object”** initiative began in June 2017. It is a victim focused initiative using crowd sourcing of law enforcement and the public to discover the origins of objects relating to the sexual abuse of a child. Objects are selected by the Victim Identification team at Europol from images that either directly or indirectly related to the sexual abuse of children. Those objects are then exposed first to law enforcement and later, if they can’t be identified by them, to the public through the Europol website. The feedback from the public is given anonymously and provides clues to where an object may originate or be available. This is then used by the Victim Identification team to localise the relevant investigation giving the children involved a better chance to be identified. In the initiative material is taken from ‘cold’ cases where there are no on-going investigations and no other means of identifying the child is available.

New and innovative strategies to effectively prevent and protect children from sale exploitation

- In terms of sufficiently accessible complaints mechanisms available to victims and their representatives, the would EU like to underline that Frontex established a **Complaints Mechanism** to mirror the Regulation 1624/2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard. This mechanism allows anybody directly affected by the actions of staff involved in a joint operation, pilot project, rapid border intervention, migration management support team deployment, migration management support teams, return operation, or return intervention to submit a complaint if the person considers him or herself to have been the subject of a breach of his or her fundamental rights due to those actions, or any party representing such a person. The Frontex Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO) has the mandate to set up, develop and further raise awareness on the individual complaints mechanism. The aim is to safeguard the respect for fundamental rights in all the activities of the Agency. This mechanism is an administrative remedy whereby the FRO should be responsible for handling complaints received by the Agency in accordance with the right to good administration.

In order to facilitate the reception of complaints, the FRO developed several ways for submission:

- Electronically, using the complaints form via Frontex website: <https://microsite.frontex.europa.eu/en/Complaints>
 - Via email sent to the functional email address: complaints@frontex.europa.eu
 - Via letter to the Frontex Headquarter, addressed to Fundamental Rights Office, Complaints Team
 - By the end of this year, 2019, the FRO will launch a new way for submission of complaints via smartphones. A friendly and easy tool to send electronically the complaints directly from the mobiles.
- In relation to the awareness raising strategy for the complaints mechanism, the FRO and the Complaints Team have developed several information materials available in eleven languages (English, French, Spanish, Albanian, Serbian, Russian, Arabic, Urdu, Pashtu, Farsi and Tigrinya). Along with the complaints forms available in the Frontex website, there is also booklet information on the complaints mechanism and a poster with relevant information on how to complain to Frontex available in all operational areas. Further steps will be taken focusing on vulnerable groups, thus it is expected by 2020 to develop child materials to explain and facilitate the submission of complaints by them .It is also important to highlight the efforts the Complaints Team is doing in delivering presentations on the complaints mechanism, both internally and externally. Thus, the team goes to operational areas to inform deployed officers on their duty to inform about the mechanism, the obligation to have information materials displayed. At the same time, the team meets main stakeholders from the EU Member States, both governmental and civil society organisations, to promote the mechanism. For a broader

picture of complaints mechanisms in border management in Europe, please see the research carried out by the Centre for European Policy Studies: <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/complaint-mechanisms-border-management-and-expulsion-operations-europe-effective/>

- **Trafficking in human beings.** The EU legal and policy framework, under the horizontal mandate of the EU Anti-trafficking Coordinator, is gender specific and child sensitive, anchored in the EU Anti-trafficking Directive and complemented by the EU Strategy 2012-2016 and the 2017 Communication stepping up EU action. European Commission Second progress report on trafficking in human beings (December 2018) indicate that 23% of the registered victims of trafficking in the EU are children. The report indicates that rapid development of the Internet and new means of communication, including social media, especially influences the modus operandi associated with trafficking for sexual exploitation. Traffickers use the internet and social networking tools to recruit victims, for logistics, and to enable the exploitation of victims in the sex and entertainment industry. Child-trafficking is amongst Europol priorities, under the EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime and the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT). A lot has been achieved in the past years in developing policy programmes that take into account children's particular vulnerability to trafficking in human beings, and the structural and contextual factors exacerbating it. It is however vital to acknowledge that vulnerabilities alone do not result in trafficking. Trafficking in human beings is fuelled by the high profits it generates for all actors along the trafficking chain, in legal and illegal sectors, and by the demand for the services exacted from the victims. In this respect, Europol 2018 Child trafficking report explicitly indicated that trafficking of girls for sexual exploitation can be particularly profitable for traffickers. The 2017 Communication places prevention at the core, including by countering the culture of impunity for all perpetrators, stepping up investigations and prosecutions. As stipulated in Article 18(4) of the EU Anti-trafficking Directive, to effectively prevent the crime, EU Member States shall consider taking measures to establish as a criminal offence the use of services which are the objects of exploitation of victims of trafficking. It remains a priority for the European Commission to encourage the EU Member States to criminalise those who knowingly use the services exacted from victims of trafficking.

Data and monitoring

With regard to effective tools and monitoring systems, including collection, analysis and publication of routine data, in supporting the prevention of and response to the sale and exploitation of children, it is worth to mention that more and more data are being collected by Frontex. Since 2018, Frontex receives disaggregated data which allows to have an enhanced situational picture of the irregular border crossings by men, women and children (accompanied or not). This enhanced situational picture facilitates the targeting of the operational response by informing the contingency plans. The collection of more information, such as on the

number and type of cases referred to national authorities would further enhance the situational picture and ensure a harmonised approach towards effective protection of vulnerable groups.