

Horizontal Facility
for the Western
Balkans and Turkey
2019–2022



Acting together in face of crisis:

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

REGIONAL CONFERENCE

Online, 22-23 June 2021

PROGRAMME



Funded
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ACTING TOGETHER IN THE FACE OF CRISIS

The Council of Europe **Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings** requires States Parties to take specific measures to reduce children's vulnerability to trafficking, notably by creating a protective environment for them. Monitoring of the Convention by the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (**GRETA**) reveals that gaps persist in the prevention of child trafficking and in the identification and protection of child victims of trafficking and their rights.

The structural vulnerabilities to human trafficking have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdown measures and movement restrictions have contributed to a surge in sexual exploitation online, and there are reports of increased grooming and exploitation of children online through gaming sites and social media platforms. The pandemic crisis is likely to have long-term negative economic and social effects, further aggravating the root causes of human trafficking, amongst which are poverty, unemployment and gender inequality, and disproportionately affecting people in vulnerable situations. Reduced family incomes and school closure increase the risk of child labour. A joint report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and UNICEF, "**COVID-19 and Child Labour: A time of crisis, a time to act**", indicates that the pandemic may cause millions of children worldwide to fall into child labour, slavery, trafficking and prostitution. The ILO has declared **2021 as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour**. The Council of Europe, working with national governments and civil society organisations, is committed to contributing to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals which relate to ending human trafficking and child labour in all its forms.

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

In the Western Balkans, the overwhelming scale of the crisis exacerbates pre-existing inequalities, putting vulnerable populations at even greater economic and social risk. Data from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo* show that children represent the majority of the presumed and formally identified victims of trafficking (around 66% in 2020). These children are trafficked within their countries of origin, within the region and/or to European Union or neighbouring countries. Children from disadvantaged communities, children in street situations, as well as unaccompanied and separated children, are prime targets for traffickers and exploiters.

Building on the human rights and anti-trafficking co-operation in the framework of the joint European Union and Council of Europe programme **Horizontal Facility** for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022, the regional conference will take stock of the impact of the national anti-trafficking measures on combating child trafficking. It will likewise define areas where improvements can be induced through capacity building, co-ordination and co-operation. Drawing on existing evidence, in particular the findings of GRETA, the conference will discuss new areas for action against child trafficking in the Western Balkans, addressing the full range of vulnerabilities faced by children in the region. The conference will seek to underline the importance of placing the rights of the child at the heart of every measure taken, including responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, while emphasising sustainable solutions that address root causes of exploitation and trafficking.

**This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.*

TUESDAY, 22 JUNE 2021

**9:30 – 10:00 (CET) OPENING SESSION:
HUMAN RIGHTS AND HORIZONTAL COOPERATION BEYOND BORDERS**



The opening session will focus on the importance of working together to prevent and combat child trafficking, following a human rights-based and victim-centred approach. Human rights concerns in Europe create a political momentum for strengthening co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union. When properly leveraged, this can become a significant enabler for effective actions and enhanced coherence of initiatives. The protection of children's rights is a priority for both the Council of Europe and the European Union, and a guiding principle for their actions against child trafficking.

Welcome words by SAMIR RIZVO Assistant Minister and State Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration, Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina

VERENA TAYLOR Director of the Office of the Directorate General of Programmes, Council of Europe

ALEXANDRA ANTONIADIS Deputy Head of the Organised Crime, Drugs and Corruption Unit, DG HOME, European Commission

EKATERINA DORODNOVA Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Bosnia and Herzegovina

10:00 – 11:00 (CET)

**RECOGNISING AND ADDRESSING CHILD TRAFFICKING: AREAS OF RISKS,
VULNERABILITIES AND ACTION**



This session will examine evidence on trends and manifestations of child trafficking, and innovative measures to address them, including the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. New research in child trafficking sheds light on vulnerabilities, providing evidence for planning future measures. Recognising persisting and new challenges is crucial for the design of policy and operational measures which address all forms of child trafficking (grooming for sexual exploitation, including online, forced labour, domestic servitude, begging, forced criminality, forced marriages). Multidisciplinary co-operation in the identification and assistance of child victims of trafficking, and the application of the non-punishment principle to child victims of trafficking, are crucial for breaking the vicious cycle of abuse and exploitation. Better prevention can be achieved through a child participatory approach and the inclusion of the vulnerable groups' perspective in the design of anti-trafficking measures.

Opening and moderation by Svetlana VLAHOVIKJ DIMANOVSKA

Deputy Anti-trafficking Coordinator, National Commission on Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration, North Macedonia

SIOBHÁN MULLALLY UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially in Women and Children

PETYA NESTOROVA Executive Secretary of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings

DAVID GVINERIA Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Albania

AMELA EFENDIĆ Head of Sarajevo Office, NGO International Forum for Solidarity-Emmaus, Bosnia and Herzegovina

OLIVIER PEYROUX Sociologist and Expert on Migration and Trafficking in Human Beings, France

11:00 – 12:30 (CET)

CHILDREN ON THE MOVE AND VULNERABILITIES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING



Children make up one third of all refugees and migrants stranded in the Western Balkan region and many of them are unaccompanied or separated. Challenges linked to age assessment, guardianship and access to appropriate services, including accommodation, education and healthcare, as well as delays in international protection procedures, family reunification and resettlement, expose migrant children to increased risks of trafficking and abuse. Simultaneously, the identification of potential victims and victims of trafficking among these children is challenging and the statistics available do not reflect the actual scale of the phenomenon. This session will explore ways to develop policies which focus on creating a protective environment for children and improve cooperation at all levels.

Opening and moderation by Mitar ĐURAŠKOVIĆ

National Anti-trafficking Co-ordinator, Ministry of the Interior of Serbia

DRAHOSLAV ŠTEFÁNEK Ambassador, Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General on Migration and Refugees

DAJA WENKE International Researcher and Policy Analyst, Italy

OLEKSANDR KYRYLENKO Programme Officer, OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

KIRSTEN THEUNS Head of Southern Europe Delegation, Terre des Hommes Foundation

JELENA HRNJAK Programme Manager, NGO ATINA, Serbia

DISCUSSION

12:30 (CET) CONCLUSIONS OF DAY 1

9:30 – 11:30 (CET)

RECAP OF DAY 1 AND INTRODUCTION FOR DAY 2
VIRTUAL ROUND TABLES RUNNING SIMULTANEOUSLY



Participants will be divided into three breakout groups, each focusing on a theme, and involving peer-to-peer exchange around a set of pre-prepared questions. The aim will be to come up with proposals for:

- Prompt and effective identification and referral of children in situations of vulnerability;
- Appropriate care and multidisciplinary assistance to child victims;
- Effective prevention, including from online abuse and exploitation through, inter alia, education, social and economic measures, and work with families and communities.

ROUND TABLE 1:

ADDRESSING CHILD TRAFFICKING AS A FORM OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Moderator: Svetlana VLAHOVIC DIMANOVSKA, Deputy Anti-trafficking Coordinator, National Commission on Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration, North Macedonia

Rapporteur: Lori MANN, International Consultant

National experts: Lejla GAČANICA, Legal Advisor and Researcher, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Marija ANDJELKOVIĆ, Director of NGO ASTRA, Serbia; Svetlana CVETKOVSKA, Chair of the National Sub-Group on Children and Head of Unit on Preventing and Combating All Kinds of Discrimination in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, North Macedonia

ROUND TABLE 2:

PROTECTING MIGRANT CHILDREN FROM HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Moderator: Saliha ĐUDERIJA, Assistant Minister, Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Rapporteur: Marco BUFO, Regional Coordinator and Team Leader of CIVIPOL's Activities in the EU and German Government-funded Programme Better Migration Management

National experts: Melisa HASANOVIĆ, Head of the Centre for Social Welfare Hadžići, Cantonal CSW Sarajevo; Aleksandra MICIC, Project Co-ordinator, Centre for Youth Integration, Serbia; Irena ZDRAVKOVA, Macedonian Young Lawyers' Association, North Macedonia

ROUND TABLE 3:

ADDRESSING FACTORS UNDERLYING CHILD TRAFFICKING FOR THE PURPOSE OF FORCE LABOUR AND SERVICES, FORCED BEGGING AND FORCED CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES

Moderator: Mitar ĐURAŠKOVIĆ, National Anti-trafficking Co-ordinator, Ministry of the Interior of Serbia

Rapporteur: Kamelia DIMITROVA, Executive Director of Dignita Foundation, Bulgaria

National experts: Mirsada BAJRAMOVIĆ, Director of NGO Zemlja djece-Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Miroslav JOVANOVIĆ, Center for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection, Serbia; Stojne DIMISHKOVSKA, Programme Manager, NGO Open Gate/La Strada, North Macedonia

11:30 – 12:00 (CET)

CONCLUSIONS OF THE ROUND TABLES AND CONFERENCE, CLOSURE