



European Union

**EU Statement on
Agenda item 3**

Twelfth session of the Working Group on Trafficking in Persons

**Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational
Organised Crime**

Vienna, 29 – 30 June 2022

Agenda Item 3: Best practices in joint investigations and specialised prosecutions

Mister Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Serbia*, Albania*, Ukraine*, the Republic of Moldova*, Bosnia and Herzegovina* and Iceland*.

Transnational and international law enforcement and judicial cooperation are crucial to ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of cross-border trafficking cases and to provide victims with adequate protection, assistance and support regardless of their location.

The number of prosecutions and convictions remains worryingly low. This is not just due to the difficulty in proving the elements of trafficking in human beings in court, but also to investigative and prosecution challenges in cross-border cases.

The EU legal and policy framework recognises this. Coordination between Member States, the EU Agencies, EUROPOL and EUROJUST ensures that borders do not become an obstacle to law enforcement and the judicial response.

* Candidate Countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova as well as potential Candidate Country Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

* Iceland is a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

Law enforcement and judicial cooperation benefit from Joint Operations and Joint Investigative Teams supported by the EU Agencies, with the participation of the authorities of EU Member States and of non-EU countries of origin and transit, both in the neighbourhood and afar.

In the last months only, three separate joint operations involving EU Member States, Latin American countries and the United Kingdom led to 22 arrests and the identification of a total of 41 victims who were trafficked for sexual exploitation, forced labour and begging.

In 2019-2021, 486 investigations and prosecutions were referred to EUROJUST for assistance and, in the same period, supported 156 Joint Investigation Teams for trafficking cases.

The Joint Investigation Teams have been successful in addressing specific challenges with connection to several countries, as they allow for dynamic collaboration, flexible and rapid adjustment of investigative measures and the agreement of common investigative goals.

Mister Chair,

Law enforcement and judicial authorities need capacity, tools and structured cooperation allowing them to tackle established *modi operandi* and emerging challenges, such as those posed by the online dimension of trafficking.

Building a robust criminal justice response entails also specialisation. This is why the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025 calls for the establishment of specialised units among competent authorities at national and local level.

It also places emphasis on specialised training of law enforcement and judicial practitioners, as well as other stakeholders, on all elements of the crime.

In addition to this, the Commission has facilitated, with EUROJUST, the creation of a focus group of specialised prosecutors on trafficking in human beings, with a view to intensifying judicial cooperation at the EU level.

The first meeting of the focus group took place on 14 June. It was an opportunity to discuss with specialised prosecutors from the EU Member States on how to enhance the criminal justice response, address the specific challenges arising from the war in Ukraine and establish the way forward for this Group.

In recent months, the EMPACT (*European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats*) Operational Action Plan on Trafficking in Human Beings, has been

refocused to better address the new challenges posed by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine

Our response to the risks of vulnerability of persons fleeing the war in Ukraine included a Common Anti-trafficking Plan endorsed by the Solidarity Platform on 11 May 2022.

Its five main priorities include strengthening awareness raising; reinforcing prevention; enhancing the law enforcement and judicial response; improving early identification, support and protection of victims; addressing the risks of trafficking in non-EU countries, especially Ukraine and Moldova, including through EU missions on the ground, which contribute to the facilitation of the flow of refugees.

Finally, let me point out other actions taken by the EU agencies.

EUROPOL has put in place a secured Virtual Command Post for immediate exchange of information and set up a Temporary Task Management Group on Trafficking in Human Beings, which is open to Member States and partners.

EUROJUST disseminated an Information Note to Member States aimed to raise awareness among judicial authorities, encourage exchange of information and offer its availability to assist in investigations and in speeding up judicial cooperation, including with Ukraine.

We commend today's meeting and encourage to continue joining forces and working together to make a difference on the ground.

Thank you Mister Chair.