

**Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention
against Transnational Organized Crime
Working Group on Trafficking in Persons
Vienna, 12-13 October 2021**

Agenda item 2: "Successful strategies for addressing the use of technology to facilitate trafficking in persons and to prevent and investigate trafficking in persons"

Mr. Chair,

Trafficking in persons remains a serious crime. As all types of crime, it continuously evolves, which also means that perpetrators take advantage of the latest technologies to facilitate access to victims. On the other hand, new technologies also serve the law enforcement to fight this crime more efficiently.

Due to widespread digitalization, a general increase in online crime can be observed. The perpetrators search for future victims via websites or networking platforms; at later stages, they communicate with victims using instant messaging.

In cases of sexual exploitation, the perpetrators use portals for adults where women place their advertisements. Then, they intimidate them and force them to share the profit they make. The situation is similar when it comes to forced labor. The perpetrators publish job advertisements on public websites, interested persons respond to them. The contact is maintained via available instant messengers.

When it comes to counteracting such crimes, the activities undertaken by the police include monitoring websites and advertisements posted on publicly available websites. Checks are also carried out on websites indicated by citizens, NGOs or revealed in the course of other proceedings.

A great challenge for law enforcement agencies is the phenomenon of trafficking in children on the Internet. As far as the detection of this type of crime is concerned, relevant units of the Police monitor the content of ads posted on the Internet, using the open source intelligence analysis tools and collecting information from publicly available sources. Regardless of the above, both public institutions and NGOs focus on developing effective information policies, aimed at potential victims and their environment, as well as warning against negative phenomena and dangers lurking online.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and linked epidemiological restrictions, person-to-person contacts had been limited and more and more contacts have been taking place via the Internet, including through networking platforms. For this reason, the area to be monitored has increased considerably. The web offers more anonymity to the perpetrators, and the dangers are even greater, when the victim is a person with little technical knowledge of using the web safely.

Mr. Chair,

An example of a national good practice in the use of technology to fight trafficking in persons is the establishment of an email address and an emergency phone number by the Department for Human Trafficking of the Police Headquarters in 2014. It is one of the most important media used in the current difficult epidemiological situation. In numerous cases, the information provided via those channels led to the rescuing of victims and apprehension of the perpetrators.

Moreover, in January 2020, the Ministry of Digitalisation inaugurated the work of the Working Group for Child and Youth Online Safety.

Mr. Chair,

In an ever growing number of cases, also due to the use of new technologies, the crime of human trafficking requires international cooperation. In all investigations it is necessary to take all operational and procedural steps aimed at swiftly securing evidence, especially of electronic nature. In this respect, cooperation between states, with the aim of rapid implementation of mutual requests to secure and provide access to all data, information and electronic evidence for the purposes of the conducted criminal proceedings, is a substantial issue.

In this context, an equally important issue is the development of principles of cooperation between law enforcement authorities and rapid acquisition of relevant data from private entities, including providers of electronic services. Unfortunately, due to different legislations in particular countries, it is not always possible.

Another key tool is information exchange. Such exchange is possible via accredited liaison officers, but also through secure channels for information exchange, such as Siena channel used within Europol. Also the establishment of Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) significantly increases the chances of detecting persons responsible for trafficking in persons through modern communication means.

Mr. Chair,

To sum up, the effective fight against trafficking in persons, in light of ever broader use of new technologies, requires taking adequate steps not only at a national, but also international level. Only then will we be able to counteract it in a timely and efficient manner.