



The [Blue Heart Campaign](#) is an initiative of the [UNODC \(United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime\)](#). It was launched in 2009, with the objective of combating human trafficking and its impact on society. The Blue Heart Campaign aims to encourage the public to become involved in the eradication of this crime and to show their solidarity with the victims of human trafficking through the use of the Blue Heart.

Human trafficking is a crime that robs the individual of their rights, their dreams and their dignity. It is a global problem and no country is exempt. Every year millions of victims are trapped and exploited in what is considered a modern form of slavery. Data compiled in 2010 revealed that the total number of victims at any one time was 2.5 million. Trafficking affects every region of the world and generates tens of billions of dollars in profits for criminals each year.

The Blue Heart represents the sadness of all those who are victims of this crime and reminds us of those who are able to buy and sell human beings. The blue colour plays a dual role, since it also alludes to the United Nations commitment to combat this crime against human dignity. In the same way that the image of the red ribbon became an international symbol of AIDS / HIV, the image of the Blue Heart aims to be an international symbol against human trafficking. UNODC launched the Blue Heart Campaign in March 2009.

UNODC was established in 1997 to support countries in implementing the three UN conventions on drugs. In 2000, after the UN General Assembly adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons especially Women and Children, UNODC also became the "guardian" of this protocol and assumed the functions of fighting against human trafficking.

To date, more than 147 countries have ratified and signed the Protocol. However, the enforcement of such international legal instruments still remains a major challenge. According to UNODC, "very few criminals are being brought to justice and most victims are never identified or assisted".

Blue Heart in Europe

The Blue Heart campaign will be launched in Portugal in April. Spain was the first country in Europe to join the Blue Heart Campaign. It did so during its Presidency of the European Union (EU) in June 2010. "Europeans believe that slavery was abolished centuries ago. But look around - slaves are in our midst. We must do more to reduce demand for slave-made products and exploitation," said former UNODC Executive Director Mr. Costa at the time.

UNODC's report in 2010 'Trafficking in persons to Europe for sexual exploitation' shows that trafficking in persons is, in fact, one of the most lucrative illicit businesses in Europe. Criminal groups in Europe are making around €2.5 billion per year through sexual exploitation and forced labour.

According to UNODC, at any one time, over 140,000 victims are trapped in the vicious cycle of violence, abuse and degradation across Europe. As many as 70,000 additional victims are exploited in Europe every year. 84% of victims in Europe are trafficked for sexual exploitation. Up to one in every seven sex workers in Europe may be enslaved into prostitution through trafficking. The vast majority of victims are young women.

The majority of the victims come from the Balkans (32%) and countries of the former Soviet Union (19%). 13% come from South America, 7% from Central Europe, 5% from Africa and 3% from East Asia.

Compared to the number of victims, relatively few people have been prosecuted for human trafficking in Western Europe.(UNODC)

European Union action

The European Union's policy on preventing and combating trafficking of human beings is based on a multi-disciplinary approach (Europol). It includes law enforcement but also a broad range

of prevention and victim support measures.

Over the past ten years, the **EU has adopted binding legislation** to prevent trafficking, to effectively prosecute criminals, and to better protect the victims, in line with the highest European standards.

The most recent is the [Directive 2011/36/EU](#), on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims. It aims to make legislation and penalties more effective, ensuring successful prevention and prosecution of trafficking as well as enhanced protection of, and assistance to, victims.

Another binding instrument, [Council Directive 2004/81](#) adopted in 2004, introduced a residence permit for victims who cooperate with the police, prosecution service and other competent authorities. This means that every victim of human trafficking who is not an EU national and is staying illegally should be offered a so-called reflection period, during which the victim can make a decision on whether to cooperate with the authorities in criminal proceedings.

In December 2011, the European Commission appointed Ms Myria Vassiliadou as **Anti-Trafficking Coordinator** with a view to improving coordination and coherence between EU institutions and agencies as well as with Member States and international actors. The establishment of the coordinator also aims to provide for an overall strategic and policy orientation in the field of trafficking in human beings. By bringing together prevention, law enforcement, and victim protection, she will ensure that all appropriate means for EU action against trafficking are adequately used and mobilized.

On a **national level**, the EU Member States have taken legal measures to combat human trafficking. The approaches often depend on the nature of the problem or whether they are a country of origin, transit or destination. As regards Case Law, trafficking in human beings has been considered by the **European Court of Human Rights** on several occasions and there are a small number of reported cases concerning immigration matters relating to trafficked persons in Member States.

The **European Police Office** (Europol), the European organisation that handles criminal intelligence, assists the law enforcement authorities of EU Member States in their fight against

serious and organised crime. Trafficking in human beings is one of Europol's mandated crime areas.

In its 2011 report 'Trafficking in Human Beings in the European Union' https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/trafficking_in_human_beings_in_the_european_union_2011.pdf, Europol concludes that "the positive steps taken by many Member States and the EU to prevent and combat trafficking in Europe have ensured that the current level of response in tackling this crime has never been higher. Lengthy prison sentences for convicted traffickers are now routine in some countries, the levels of awareness amongst law enforcement and the judiciary has been raised, victim protection and support is prioritised and national action plans provide clear examples of Member State strategy and intent. The investigation of labour exploitation is now firmly on the agenda of many countries and again indicates the willingness of countries to recognise, adapt to and combat new forms of trafficking. However, based on current reporting, intelligence, trends and patterns, it is unlikely that there will be any immediate reduction in the levels of trafficking of human beings in Europe. This crime will continue to have a major impact upon the EU."

Useful links:

<http://www.unodc.org/>

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html?ref=menu>

<http://www.unodc.org/blueheart/>

https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/trafficking_in_human_beings_in_the_european_union_2011.pdf

<http://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/section.action?sectionId=d4c7e512-98bb-4668-b35c-0d22d1da30a7&;sectionType=SUBSECTIONS&page=1&breadCrumbReset=true>

<http://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/entity.action?id=e72b38b6-2724-40c5-810a-f444fdc8849a>