

20 years of ICMPD Anti-Trafficking Programme Development and milestones (2002 – 2022)

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ICMPD set up a dedicated Anti-Trafficking Programme (ATP) shortly after the signing of the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC). Today, ATP has expanded its activities to over 65 countries by implementing over 90 projects and actions and publishing over 70 publications, research studies and articles. ICMPD delivers its anti-trafficking expertise by advising governments on their anti-trafficking policies and legislation, providing knowledge and skills to front-line responders, researching and analysing trafficking-related data, advocating for the rights of the victims, developing and supporting cooperation networks of anti-trafficking stakeholders at the national and regional levels, and engaging in the global efforts to respond effectively to trafficking in human beings (THB). This paper gives an overview of the evolution and the current scope of ICMPD's anti-THB portfolio.

❖ Accumulating thematic knowledge and expertise

The signing of UNTOC and especially of its protocols - the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, marked the start of a period of rapid adoption and transposition of their articles into national legal contexts on a global scale.

Responding to the accumulation of political will and the readiness of the governments of its Member States to add the response to the transnational organised crime, particularly to THB to their migration agenda, ICMPD gathered a team of experts to work on countering THB to partner with other international organisations and develop ICMPD's expertise. By 2005, the newly formed Programme had established cooperation with the major international organisation working in the anti-trafficking field – UNODC, ODIHR, OSCE, UNICEF, ILO, IOM, UNHCHR, etc. ICMPD was participating in the **Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe Task Force on Trafficking in Human Beings**, the **OSCE Alliance against Trafficking in Persons** and its **Expert Coordination Team**. A significant contribution to the international anti-trafficking efforts was ICMPD's work for the **EU Experts Group on Trafficking in Human Beings**.

❖ Building regional standards and national anti-trafficking responses

In 2003, ICMPD published the outcome of its **first regional anti-trafficking action** *Regional Standards for Anti-Trafficking Police Training in South-Eastern Europe (SEE)*. Building upon the established cooperation on THB and expertise in the SEE region, in 2004-2005, ICMPD supported the countries to elaborate *Regional standards and guidelines for developing and implementing comprehensive national anti-trafficking responses*. These aimed to foster a shared understanding and coordinated action of all THB stakeholders in a country to ensure the protection of victims, political and financial support and accountability. To advance the knowledge management from these processes, in 2010 ICMPD published *Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook for National Action Plans (NAP) against Trafficking in Human Beings*. This tool adds the missing link for assessing the impact of the established anti-

trafficking policies. It offers guidelines to monitor, review, evaluate and report on the implementation of NAPs.

Based on these tools, many SEE countries adopted their first national anti-trafficking strategies and action plans to combat THB, followed by capacity-building actions, such as designing training curricula and conducting multi-agency training for law enforcement officers, labour inspectors, judges, prosecutors and staff of non-governmental organisations. In 2021, the two publications were revised, updated and republished as the joint *Practitioner's Guide - Developing and Monitoring National Anti-Trafficking Response*.



Fig.1: The first ATP publication, 2003.

In 2007, ATP developed tools to support governmental agencies in collecting concrete and reliable data on human trafficking. *The Handbook on Anti-Trafficking Data Collection in SEE: Developing Regional Criteria* was translated and used in ten SEE countries. In 2010, this concept led to an EU-focused initiative to create a transnational harmonised information management system, incl. common indicators for data collection.

◆ Driving cooperation and a coordinated response

ICMPD built extensive experience guiding anti-trafficking stakeholders towards coordinated actions at national and regional levels. In the period 2006 – 2012 in the framework of another flagship initiative - **Programme to Support the Development of Transnational Referral Mechanisms for Trafficked Persons in SEE**, ATP developed, piloted and successfully implemented a **model for transnational referral (TRM)** of victims of THB. This was the first initiative to establish a **unified regional approach to refer victims of cross-border THB**. The 2009 *Guidelines for the Transnational Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking in SEE* were successfully adapted to the local contexts in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. The model was further expanded to the EU Member States in response to the *EU Action Plan* while building upon the lessons learnt in SEE.



Fig.2: Second Regional Seminar, November 2007, Sarajevo, BiH. TRM project.

Guidelines for the Transnational Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking - EU represented an updated version of the SEE Guidelines, providing a model for cooperation and referral of victims between the countries of exploitation and origin.

* 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.

In parallel with the work on TRM, the ATP supported the governments of EU Member States and third countries to develop and assess the implementation of their **national referral mechanisms (NRM)** or **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** for support of victims. From there on, ICMPD focused on facilitating the process of development or improvement of already existing mechanisms – e.g. in Bulgaria (2010 and 2017), Lebanon (2013), Azerbaijan (2015), Moldova (2016), Albania (2016), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2016), Pakistan (2016), Sweden (2016), Jordan (2019), EU Member States (2018-2019), Brazil (2020), Western Balkans (2020), Sierra Leone (2022).

The experience and knowledge gathered in developing context-relevant approaches and procedures for the referral of THB victims currently serve as a blueprint for creating a **regional referral mechanism for victims of trafficking among the Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**. In 2022, ICMPD’s experience was also used to facilitate the development of a bilateral referral mechanism for victims of THB between Nigeria and Niger.

In 2020-2021, ICMPD used its experience to undertake two assessments of the existing [regional and bilateral mechanisms for cooperation on THB cases](#) and NRMs for victims of trafficking in the fifteen Member States of ECOWAS and Mauritania. Guided by the need for practical tools to develop further the existing national referral frameworks, in 2022, ATP experts produced three guidelines with valuable tools and practices to address [the effective communication and cooperation between NRM actors](#), [the facilitation of CSO participation in the NRM](#), and [the inclusion of survivors in the policy development and the operational response to THB](#).

❖ Ensuring victims’ rights: the core of the anti-trafficking response

ICMPD promotes the protection of victims, safeguarding their rights and instalment of a victim-centred approach throughout the design and implementation of anti-trafficking legislative, policy and operational tools as the fundamental elements of the effective response to THB. In the past 20 years, ICMPD has explored different aspects of victim protection while researching the specific angle on the quality of the services available for victims during the phases of identification, referral and assistance. This process resulted in two publications: 2007, *Listening to Victims. Experiences of identification, return, and assistance in South-Eastern Europe* (based on interviews with THB victims) and 2010 *Study on Post-Trafficking Experiences in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy and Portugal*. Both studies formulate recommendations for adjustment of the existing services based on victims’ reflections and suggestions.



Pic.3: Performative interactive workshop held by “Together Strong”, an advocacy group of survivors of THB from The Netherlands. Transnational Training, November 2011, Belgrade, Serbia. TRM II project.

ICMPD continued its efforts to ensure that the stakeholders engaged with various aspects of the protection process apply in their actions a victim-centred approach. ICMPD developed training modules addressing different professional groups, for instance: 2015 Manual [Human Trafficking – How to Investigate It](#) targets law enforcement representatives and focuses on human trafficking criminal investigations – how to apply a victim-centred approach and to avoid re-traumatisation of victims; 2018 [Training Curriculum for Labour Inspectors on Trafficking in Human Beings in Jordan](#) addresses the specificities of trafficking for labour exploitation and the identification of victims; 2017 [Media and](#)

[Trafficking in Human Beings Guidelines](#) provide recommendations for media representatives on reporting human trafficking acknowledging the human rights and victim-centred approaches.

✦ Understanding vulnerabilities in the framework of migration

Since 2014, ICMPD has been conducting empirical research on **human trafficking in dynamic mixed**

ICMPD is making another step further by striving to **include survivors** of THB in the implementation of its actions – be these consultation processes on NRM and SOPs assessments, in research, exploring the nexus between THB and migration and other related phenomena, examining transnational procedures for referral of cases, capacity building of THB specialists, conference participation, etc.

migration contexts and humanitarian crises. In 2015, ATP published a comprehensive study entitled [Targeting Vulnerabilities: The Impact of the Syrian War and Refugee Situation on Trafficking in Persons – A Study of Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq](#) - the first empirical, multi-country research study to assess the links between conflict, displacement and THB. The research focused on the effects of the conflict and the displacement on human trafficking in Syria and its neighbouring countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. In 2017-2018, ICMPD took part in a multi-partner research initiative that assessed the gaps, needs and challenges in the identification, referral, protection and rehabilitation of trafficked people who used migration routes to Europe, covering Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia, Austria, Germany, Sweden and Finland. The findings were published in [Trafficking along Migration Routes: Bridging the Gap between Migration, Asylum and Trafficking](#). In a follow-up action, ICMPD adapted the research methodology and developed [The Strength to Carry On: Resilience and Vulnerability to Trafficking and Other Abuses among People Travelling along Migration Routes to Europe](#) (2019). The countries under study were situated along the main Balkan migration route: Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Germany and Italy – which remains active and challenging until today.



In 2022, ICMPD joined the international efforts to respond to the millions of people fleeing the war in Ukraine. Based on the nature of the vulnerabilities to exploitation and trafficking, ATP provided guidance for the state anti-trafficking authorities and other government bodies as to where the countries hosting the people displaced by the war need to invest their attention and efforts to tackle the increased dangers of human trafficking (find more [here](#)).

✦ Building strong international partnerships

With its 2022 [Counselling Victims of Trafficking and People Vulnerable to Trafficking and Exploitation. Blueprint for Return Counsellors](#) ICMPD makes an effort to address the missing link in the EU Strategy on Return and Reintegration (2021) to potential victims of trafficking among the returnees. The Publication provides EU return counsellors and other relevant frontline practitioners with practical tools and guidance for working with vulnerable people, including victims of trafficking.

Network of Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of South-East Europe

Recognising ICMPD's anti-trafficking competence and extending experience in SEE, in 2010, ICMPD was entrusted to serve as the [Secretariat for the Network of Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of South-East Europe \(NATC-SEE\)](#). Brought to life at the initiative of the Republic of Slovenia, it is a state-led platform joining Anti-Trafficking Coordinators from 11 NATC SEE members, offering a venue for sharing good practices, discussing the needs of its members and identifying the areas for potential cooperation, building upon the regional TRM model. The value of NATC-SEE is in its geopolitical structure as it includes the EU Member States and others either already in the accession negotiations or aspiring to start, allowing for the sharing of anti-trafficking experience in the EU accession context.

In the past 12 years, ICMPD has supported NATC SEE in developing the Network's strategic and policy documents: [Strategy Paper 2020-2024](#), joint statements and declarations, non-papers, social media campaigns, etc. In 2022, ATP facilitated the establishment of closer cooperation between NATC SEE, the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, and the EU Network of National Rapporteurs or Equivalent Mechanisms. Following the established professional partnerships through the NATC SEE, **the Bulgarian and the Slovenian EU Presidencies** sought ATP's support in planning and implementing the anti-trafficking components of their respective Presidency work plans. In this framework, ICMPD developed two non-paper documents, "[Combating Human Trafficking in the Western Balkans Region](#)" in 2018 and "[Beyond Joint Actions: Towards integrated anti-trafficking responses of European Union Member States and Western Balkans](#)", in 2021.

Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons

In 2016, ICMPD became a member of the [Working Group](#) of the [Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons \(ICAT\)](#). ICAT is a high-level policy forum mandated by the UN General Assembly to improve coordination among UN agencies and other relevant international organisations on actions in the anti-trafficking field and to facilitate a holistic and comprehensive approach to preventing and combating THB, including protection and support for victims of trafficking. Building on its active contribution, **in 2022, ICMPD served as a Co-chair of ICAT together with UNODC**. ICMPD's six priority areas for the co-chairmanship were: 1) Enhanced inclusion of survivors; 2) Collaboration of ICAT with CSOs, the academia and the private sector; 3) Closer coordination with and at the field level; 4) Investing in knowledge production and dissemination; 5) Expanding ICAT's pool of partners; 6) Promoting a regional focus.

ICMPD coordinated and facilitated the implementation of five ICAT events, coordinated and developed the [Issue Brief "Addressing Vulnerability to Trafficking in Persons"](#), a [Joint Statement](#) on the occasion of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons 2022, and led a Joint submission in response to the public consultation on the revision of *the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive*.



Pic.4: Meeting between the ICAT members and the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, October 2022, Brussels.

In the past 20 years, ICMPD has been contributing to the international coordination in the fight against THB by continuing its involvement in international platforms and networks such as the OSCE Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons, Alliance 8.7, Office of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, Office of the UN Special Rapporteur for Trafficking in Persons, European Commission, ECOWAS Commission, Council of Europe, Council of the Baltic Sea States, migration dialogues like Prague Process, Rabat Process, Budapest Process, Khartoum Process, etc.

Through its Anti-Trafficking Programme, ICMPD has been supporting governments in their efforts to develop, implement and monitor the implementation of their national anti-trafficking responses and has placed itself among the international anti-trafficking actors. Making combatting trafficking in human beings one of ICMPD's thematic expertise fields has allowed the steady development of knowledge and proficiency in this field. Reaching the milestones that we are reflecting upon today has been made possible through the continuous support from the ICMPD Management to the Anti-Trafficking Programme and the hard work and devotion of all its team members throughout the past twenty years.