

Strengthening the Role of Municipalities and Cities in Preventing & Combating Human Trafficking

The Importance of a Coordinated and Integrated Approach

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My focus is on the contribution that local authorities can make to preventing human trafficking and identifying trafficking situations and victims of crime. Of course, whenever a person is identified as a possible victim of traffickers (a “presumed victim of trafficking”), a system for protecting and assisting that person should automatically come into effect that involves withdrawing them from the control of criminals, referring them to appropriate services to protect and assist them, and doing so while evidence of crimes is collected and the criminal justice system targets the traffickers. This presentation does not focus on the role of local government services in this protection and assistance.

1. What is going on and who causes most harm to migrants?

What is happening in reality to migrants in Europe (rather than in the versions voiced by politicians and xenophobic media)? It is useful to have an accurate diagnosis and to understand how migrants are pushed into precarious work and depending on criminals. You can start by looking at the occupations in which trafficked people have been found working in elsewhere in Europe. E.g.

- Restaurants & Hospitality sector (hotels, cleaners, washing-up, etc)
- Agriculture, notably seasonal work (Bangladeshi strawberry pickers, forestry in the Czech Republic)
- Construction sites, including what is known as ‘social dumping’ in Austria.
- Forced begging (particularly children)
- Crime, e.g. growing cannabis in the United Kingdom, picking pockets in Vienna, and processing illegal contraband, such as cigarettes
- Domestic work in private households and for commercial cleaning companies
- Some prostitution/sex work (involuntary or involving any children) and related jobs in the entertainment industry.

2. Your legal obligations

Do you understand how the local economy works, including the informal economy? You need to. You have specific responsibilities with respect to:

1. Public procurement
2. Child protection services (for migrant as well as local children)
3. Some law enforcement (e.g. labour inspectors, not just policing)
4. Health services
5. Food safety (in restaurants and cafés)
6. Fire services (checking safety of commercial premises)
7. Setting up and participating in referral systems, e.g. coordinated by a telephone helpline and liaising with other local areas and with your National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

3. What else can you do at local level: assist with identification

Front-line services need to be able to recognise the “tell-tale” signs of a trafficking case (also known as “clues” or “indicators” of trafficking), but those who suggest these should understand the danger of stereotypes (“all victims are migrants/Roma/women”) and the risk of these becoming misinformation. So, it is important to select these “tell-tale” signs based on real case information, not inaccurate stereotypes. It is also vital that services do not interpret their mandate so narrowly that they ignore warning signs (e.g. health and safety inspectors who pay no attention to a worker who is said to have “slipped and hurt herself at home”).

Some lists of “tell-tale” signs mention things that front-line services cannot see (e.g. a worker’s indebtedness). Common “tell-tale” signs that they might notice include:

1. Person kept isolated or not allowed out (domestic or other workers, including foreign women kept in a brothel – although irregular workers might avoid public places for fear of arrest and deportation)
2. Extreme dependency (not speaking the local language despite long-term residency)
3. Not in possession of own passport or identity papers
4. No contract
5. Not paid (no bank account of his/her own)
6. Bad living conditions (living in workplace)
7. Wounds resulting from violence
8. Unduly long working hours and/or harsh/hazardous working conditions
9. (School age Children) No access to school/active on streets during school time

Consequently, many local services can play a role:

Social workers - particularly street outreach workers	Make contact with street children or sex workers (HIV prevention)
Officials checking or licencing bars, hotels, etc	Monitoring who is involved in the sex industry
Inspection staff, including labour inspectors, health and fire inspectors	Checking workplaces, including fire and food safety
Tax inspectors	‘Al Capone’ type tax investigations
Social assistance/ protection staff	Informed about who applies for financial assistance
Health care workers, including doctors, nurses, midwives, dentists etc.	Noting health & cause of wounds; providing care re reproductive health issues (pregnancy, STIs)
School staff	Monitoring children’s welfare /news about parents
Local police	Aware when to call in anti-trafficking specialists

They need training and coordination, e.g., via the establishment of a local referral mechanism and/or multidisciplinary teams. Civil society organisations also have an important role: migrant communities and their leaders, and interpreters working with them; advice centre workers and librarians; trade unions; church and other faith-based organisations; and specialist NGOs providing relevant services. It may also be helpful to interact regularly with well-informed individuals, such as taxi drivers, hotel staff and security guards, but in each case they will need help in avoiding stereotypes or confusing trafficking victims with migrants engaged in informal or unauthorised work.

There are also potential benefits to liaising directly with local government-level officials in other places, such as the areas from which children are trafficked to beg or steal (lessons can be learned from experiences of authorities in Paris and Oaş in Romania, and in Vienna and Bulgaria).