

Statement on EU strategy on victims' rights

The German Anti Trafficking NGO Network (KOK) strongly advocates for a comprehensive, human rights-based policy against trafficking in persons. This foundational approach firmly places the legal rights, physical safety, and diverse individual needs of all affected individuals at the very centre of political, institutional, and judicial action. KOK highly welcomes the European Union's commitment to upholding victim rights and uses this platform to provide critical, inclusive recommendations for the upcoming EU strategy.

Gender Biases and Stereotypes Expanding Frameworks

Traditional paradigms often treat human trafficking as an isolated crime that predominantly impacts women and girls. While this might be true for trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, KOK emphasizes that other serious forms of trafficking such as severe labour exploitation overwhelmingly affect men. The systemic failure to recognize male vulnerability fosters a widespread misconception that men rarely fall victim to these crimes. This lack of accurate perception leads to low public awareness, severe underreporting, and a lack of specialized support structures tailored to male survivors.

Universal and Inclusive Protection Measures

Protection and emergency housing must be accessible without institutional barriers. Safe houses and shelters must expand their criteria to offer inclusive environments for all demographics. Special protection measures must explicitly accommodate children, youth, individuals with physical or cognitive disabilities, as well as trans and non-binary persons who face heightened intersectional risks. - Decoupling Trafficking from Migration A critical misconception is that trafficking only affects foreign nationals or occurs solely across international borders into the European Union. KOK emphasizes that trafficking frequently occurs internally within a nation state, operating entirely independently of migration status, nationality, or cross-border movement. Anyone can become a target of exploitation regardless of identity, age, or citizenship status.

Enhancing Victim Identification and Public Prevention

Victims can only access their legal rights, social benefits, and recovery infrastructure once they are formally identified as survivors. When specific forms of exploitation (such as forced labour, forced criminality, or the exploitation of begging) remain poorly understood by the public and law enforcement, it becomes exponentially more difficult for society to recognize the signs, directly hindering early intervention and preventative efforts. To build an effective framework, the EU must transition to an all-encompassing strategy that dismantles stereotypical victim profiles, addresses internal domestic exploitation, ensures accessible shelter infrastructure for marginalized gender identities, and trains frontline responders to spot non-sexual exploitation forms. Only by addressing these systemic gaps genuine safety and comprehensive legal recourse for every individual affected by human trafficking can be realized.