

New anti-trafficking research calls for political action to implement gender mainstreaming at EU hotspots

By Brianna Hertford, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (24.07.2019) – Earlier this month, the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) published the report: [Detecting and protecting victims of trafficking in hotspots: Ex-Post Evaluation](#). This research focuses on the gendered dynamics of human trafficking and provides recommendations to strengthen the protection of vulnerable individuals at the external borders of the European Union (EU).

The majority of individuals worldwide who are trafficked are women and girls. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees have been identified by the European Parliament as particularly vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. As such, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality requested the EPRS to conduct research on the nine hotspots in Italy and Greece. These hotspots were established in 2015 as a temporary system for processing asylum claims. This report evaluates the identification process of victims of trafficking, the subsequent protections they are provided, and the overall preventative measures taken to reduce the risk of exploitation and trafficking at hotspots.

The EU has taken a strong stance on trafficking as a violation of individuals' basic human rights. There has been much progress in both Greece and Italy in the past two years towards addressing this issue. However, there are still many barriers to identifying and protecting victims of trafficking, as well as preventing exploitation and trafficking once migrants arrive in the EU.

For example, the report noted that in Greece, nationals from certain countries are assumed to be "economic migrants" instead of in need of international protection. Consequently, their asylum requests are systematically rushed so as to return them to Turkey under the EU-Turkey agreement as quickly as possible. Expediting the evaluation of asylum applications greatly reduces the ability to screen for vulnerability.

An agreement between Italy and Libya has resulted in less asylum seekers reaching Italian shores since 2017, which has had a beneficial impact on living conditions at Italian hotspots. However, due to the well-documented abuses of human rights occurring in Libya, it is a controversial arrangement. This report notes that 'cooperation with Libya has shifted many of the issues related to trafficking from the European shores to Libya.'

This evaluation details the capacity of European agencies and systems in place to assist states at the EU's external border. It discusses challenges in the "hotspot approach" and in creating a cohesive reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) that both the European Parliament and Commission would agree to. The EPRS recommends concrete measures that would provide a gender-sensitive approach 'such as more female staff in hotspots, prevention of gender-based violence, better gender mainstreaming in practices' and calls for political action to increase the protection and support provided to victims of trafficking at the borders of the EU.

Source:

European Parliamentary Research Service

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/631757/EPRS_STU\(2019\)631757_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/631757/EPRS_STU(2019)631757_EN.pdf)