



Republic of Latvia Ombudsman

Ombudsman's role in preventing and combating trafficking in human beings

Functions of the Ombudsman

Section 11 and 12 of the Ombudsman Law:

- Consultation on Human Rights;
- Information to the public;
- The process of drafting legislation;
- Monitoring;
- Research.

Functions of the Ombudsman

Section 50.⁷ of the Immigration Law:

- The forced return process is monitored by the Ombudsman;
- Monitoring of the forced return process includes:
 - Observation of conditions;
 - Interrogation of a foreigner;
 - Observation of procedures.

Ombudsman's main activities in the field of preventing human trafficking

- 1) The 2017 Research "The Role of Local Governments' Social Services, Orphan's and Custody Courts and Branch Offices of the State Employment Agency of Latvia in the Process of Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings";
- 2) Mechanism for recognizing and assisting victims of human trafficking;
- 3) Project "Effective implementation of surveillance and removal process";
- 4) Research "Human trafficking risks in Latvian boarding schools".

(1) Research "The Role of Local Governments' Social Services, Orphan's and Custody Courts and Branch Offices of the State Employment Agency of Latvia in the Process of Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings"

The main conclusions:

- Many institutions see their role only as whistleblowers who report to the police for investigating a crime;
- The Social Services and the Orphan's and Custody Courts of many municipalities do not recognize victims of trafficking and even don't think that it's their job to recognize human trafficking;
- They do not know where victim of human trafficking can get social rehabilitation;
- The State Employment Agency does not have a methodology for identifying victims.

(1) Research "The Role of Local Governments' Social Services, Orphan's and Custody Courts and Branch Offices of the State Employment Agency of Latvia in the Process of Identification of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings"

The main recommendations:

- Informing the public about trafficking in human beings;
- Reducing the risks of trafficking in human beings;
- Trainings for local and national authorities.

(2) Mechanism for recognizing and assisting victims of human trafficking

- In Latvia there isn't currently an effective mechanism for the transmission and exchange of information between public authorities and service providers, which, in turn,
- Runs the risk that victims of trafficking in human beings may not receive social assistance from the state to recover from the consequences;
- It is important that the public authority, which is the first to recognize a potential victim of human trafficking, can effectively pass this information not only to the State Police, but also to the service provider;
- There is a need for serious consideration and discussion on the development of new regulatory framework that will establish the precise procedures by which public authorities recognise potential victims of trafficking and pass this information on to the service provider.

(2) Mechanism for recognizing and assisting victims of human trafficking

Next steps:

- To establish a mechanism for recognition and referral of victims of human trafficking to social service providers and strengthening of such procedure at the level of regulatory framework;
- To discuss the development of one comprehensive (umbrella) law on trafficking in human beings, covering all aspects of preventing trafficking in human beings.

(3) Project "Effective implementation of surveillance and removal process"

- In March 2019, the Ombudsman's Office launched a multi-year project;
- The project is being run in cooperation with the State Border Guard and the State Border Guard College;
- The overall objective is to ensure that the process of supervising persons to be expelled is in compliance with the requirements of European Union law;
- The direct objective of the project, on the other hand, is to improve the monitoring mechanism for forced expulsion of foreigners in compliance with European Union standards and requirements;
- The project will pay particular attention to the protection of the rights of unaccompanied minors and the development of procedures for the recognition of victims of human trafficking in the expulsion process;

(3) Project "Effective implementation of surveillance and removal process"

- One of the activities of the project will be related to the current practice of recognizing victims of trafficking in procedures conducted by the State Border Guard (for example, interviews);
- When interviewing expelled foreigners, it is necessary to recognize a range of additional issues that will help the observer recognize potential victims of trafficking and, in cooperation with authorities responsible for preventing trafficking, to ensure the protection of their rights;
- As a result of the project, interinstitutional cooperation will be strengthened to identify victims of trafficking before expulsion and to ensure their rights, including against re-victimization and subjugation by traffickers.

(4) Research "Human trafficking risks in Latvian boarding schools"

- In 2019, the Ombudsman conducted a study on the risks of human trafficking in Latvian boarding schools;
- Although, according to statistics compiled by the Ministry of the Interior, no child has been a victim of trafficking in Latvia in 2018 and the first six months of 2019, the Ombudsman believes, that these data show, that the authorities still have significant difficulties in identifying the victims, which denies victims the necessary support and assistance;
- As part of the research, employees of the Ombudsman's Office educated boarding school pupils and teachers about the risks of trafficking, and questioned children and teachers to determine whether children and educators recognize the risks of trafficking and are aware of how to respond to risk situations;

(4) Research "Human trafficking risks in Latvian boarding schools"

- Ombudsman conducted a survey of both pupils (grades 7-9) and boarding school teachers;
- A total of 356 children were interviewed. In turn, 319 questionnaires were collected, including 195 for boys and 124 for girls. 80 educators were also interviewed;
- Evaluating the results of these questionnaires, it can be concluded, that there is a need to continue educating both children and educators on the risks of trafficking in human beings, as the overall level of awareness is insufficient. Educators also indicated, that they would need additional knowledge on identifying the risks of trafficking.



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Thank you for your attention!