



Concept Note

Vienna Conference on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings

BUILDING RESILIENCE NOW: PREVENTING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

16 October 2025

Vienna School of International Studies

Trafficking in human beings remains a global phenomenon with a cross-border dimension. Decisive actions based on international collaboration as well as the development of sustainable, long-term strategies are key to combatting this crime. The need for action is urgent in light of current global crises and the emergence of new forms and channels for committing trafficking in human beings.

This includes preventive measures, the protection of survivors, prosecution and international cooperation. This holistic approach to combatting human trafficking addresses the issue on multiple levels, focusing on a victim-centred, trauma-sensitive and interdisciplinary approach.

The fight against human trafficking has been one of the main priorities of Austria's foreign policy since the establishment of the Task Force on Combatting Human Trafficking in 2004. Since 2007, the Task Force has organised the conference in cooperation with its partners, including the Principality of Liechtenstein, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the OSCE. The event, which takes place in connection with the EU Anti-Trafficking Day is one of the measures of the Austrian National Action Plan for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings. The event takes place annually with the participation of national and international experts and is a proven communication forum, as well as a strategic instrument with a different focus each year. The goal of the conference is to exchange experiences and raise awareness of existing challenges in the fight against human trafficking. A range of workshops allow an in-depth look at the topics of the conference.

This year's conference, under the heading **"Building Resilience Now: Preventing Trafficking in Human Beings in Times of Crisis"**, takes place in a hybrid format on 16 October 2025 at the Vienna School of International Studies and online.

Resilience against re-traumatisation and re-victimisation has political and social relevance and is of great importance both in the psychological debate and the care of survivors. The focus lies on strengthening vulnerable

groups regarding the risks of trafficking in human beings. It is also essential to sensitize society as a whole and establish effective systems against trafficking to prepare for foreseeable as well as for unexpected challenges. Current crises pose new hurdles for combatting human trafficking: natural disasters, geopolitical conflicts and hybrid threats increase risks of human trafficking, while creating opportunities for criminal networks. In view of the ongoing shift of trafficking in human beings into virtual spaces, new measures are necessary to increase resilience in the digital world. Information on prevention and counselling offer are just as essential as including survivor's perspectives to better understand the inherent dangers in the digital sphere. It is equally important to employ digital tools in the fight against human trafficking. These aspects will be addressed in more detail in the course of the workshops.

Workshops

Workshop 1

Invisible vulnerabilities. Secondary trauma in law enforcement (German and English)

Organised by the Criminal Intelligence Service Austria

Experts: Gerald Tatzgern (Criminal Intelligence Service Austria), Horst Schiller (Criminal Intelligence Service Austria), Gerry Foitik (Austrian Red Cross), Angelika Schäffer-Fischill (State Police Directorate)

It is an important challenge for trafficked persons to be able to view themselves as survivors of exploitation in order to emerge from this crisis and distress stronger than before and come to terms with the past.

Much less attention has been paid to the police investigators, who need to conduct objective investigations without facing secondary trauma. The workshop aims to discuss how to build resilience within law enforcement with various stakeholders including civil society, in order to show common determination in the fight against human trafficking.

Workshop 2

Safe and sound in Austria? Vulnerabilities and resilience of children from regions of crisis (English)

Organised by ECPAT Austria, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Fundamental and Human Rights (LBI) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Experts: Bernhard Wetschko (IOM Austria), Gaynor Melanie Teff, (UNICEF), Barbara Preitler (Hemayat), Olga Dunebabina (La Strada – Ukraine)

Crisis situations lead to increased risks of violence, abuse and exploitation, including human trafficking. Children on the move are especially vulnerable, particularly when regular migration pathways are not available and when children are travelling alone. Even after leaving a region in crisis, these vulnerabilities can persist due to a number of reasons, such as psychological trauma, a lack of reliable information and the duration of asylum procedures. At the same time, children can develop resilience strategies that can be fostered through interactions with and support by relevant actors. Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, state actors in particular have obligations to protect children's rights and ensure that decisions pertaining to them consider their best interest.

The workshop aims to shed light on the particular vulnerabilities of children in crisis situations, even after their arrival in Austria. Discussions will additionally focus on the resilience of children and how relevant actors can protect and empower children in the context of migration. Participants will have the opportunity to speak directly with diverse experts in interactive formats about means for reducing the risks of child trafficking.

Workshop 3

Coming back stronger. Turning vulnerabilities into resilience (English)

Organised by LEFÖ-IBF und MEN VIA

Experts: Katarzyna Winiecka (UNDOK), Silke Albert (UNODC)

Trafficked persons end up in situations of exploitation for various reasons, and the ways in which affected children, women, and men free themselves and build a self-determined future are just as diverse. In dealing with their vulnerability, their individual strength, resources, and resilience become visible.

The perspectives and experiences of trafficked men and women represent indispensable expertise and should be heard. Their knowledge is crucial to effectively develop measures against human trafficking – both nationally and internationally – in a way that places their dignity, rights, and self-determination at the centre, and ensures they are not defined solely by their status as victims. This workshop will discuss the conditions under which the participation and perspectives of survivors can be actively enabled and promoted-on national and international level- in a dignified manner.