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Item 10 of the provisional agenda

Rail Security

Combating human trafficking on the railways

Submitted by the Secretariat

I. Introduction and mandate

1. On 18–19 June 2024 a Special Session of the Working Party on Rail Transport was convened to address two areas of great importance to the railways, focused on vulnerable rail users, in collaboration with the International Union of Railways (UIC). Delegates were able to discuss and address the combatting of human trafficking on the railways and the security of women on the railways. At the end of the session, delegates agreed that, in addition to the report of the session (ECE/TRANS/SC.2/245, paragraph 34), a summary document would be prepared on the two subjects also highlighting possible ways forward based on the discussions at the session. This document covers those aspects related to combatting human trafficking.

II. Summary of proceedings

2. Session 2 of the Workshop on vulnerable rail users focused on “Combating trafficking of human beings in the rail environment”. Rail transport is one of the main transport modes for human trafficking. Presenters highlighted the critical role of staff training. The training provides guidelines to help staff detect potential threats and respond effectively. Presenters also stressed the need for raising awareness among staff and the public regarding the risks and consequences of human trafficking. Sufficient information and assistance should be provided to railway users also through hotlines or mobile apps to facilitate early reporting of the crimes. Furthermore, international cooperation was underscored as essential, given the cross-border nature of many human trafficking cases. Facilitating collaboration among governments, civil society, railway companies and authorities was emphasized. Lastly, presenters noted the importance of addressing the data gap. The lack of data on human trafficking using the railways hinders the development of effective responses and policy making. It was encouraged to make efforts to improve data collection and analysis in this regard.



3. The representative of UNODC highlighted that consent is irrelevant in cases of human trafficking. According to the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022, fewer human trafficking victims were detected globally during COVID-19 pandemic; however, female and child victims experienced more violent forms of human trafficking during this period. They emphasized that 41 per cent of victims rely on “self-rescue” to escape exploitation, underscoring the importance of implementing better detection and support measures. The UNODC stressed the necessity of developing guidance and standard operating procedures for referral of human trafficking cases, along by using existing resources such as UNODC human trafficking indicators to detect instances of human trafficking. They recommended accompanying these measures with awareness raising campaigns and training.

4. The speaker from OSCE introduced their Action Plan with the four “Ps”: Protection of victims, prevention of human trafficking, prosecution of perpetrators, and partnerships. They emphasized a victim and survivor-centred approach, advocating for trauma-informed and needs-based measures. The OSCE highlighted the importance of training programmes and establishment of national and international trafficking hotlines to report potential cases. They also showcased their campaigns, including the LOOK AGAIN and BeSafe campaigns, which primarily target Ukrainian refugees but are accessible to anyone in need.

5. The representatives of PKP S.A. and PLK S.A. addressed human trafficking in the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The PKP S.A. reported that Polish train stations experienced high congestion following the outbreak of hostilities, particularly in February and March 2022. In response, they organized additional train and increased the number of security guards to ensure smooth and safe transport. They also deployed volunteers, established hotlines and mobile apps to provide assistance to Ukrainian refugees and for reporting suspicious activities. Additionally, posters were displayed in stations about the risks of trusting strangers. The PLK S.A. noted the decreasing trend in crimes on the railway area, especially during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. They highlighted their close collaboration with police and other security-related public services.

6. It's a Penalty utilizes social media and press to raise public awareness, prevent exploitation, and encourage reporting of suspicious activities. They collaborate closely with airlines, airports, transport hubs, tourism companies, hotels, and local communities to combat human trafficking. Their campaigns include distributing posters and lists of missing persons, which feature hotline numbers and QR codes linking to their webpage. For instance, during the 2022 campaign in Birmingham, they displayed posters on 36 screens across five train stations, potentially reaching over seven million people. This effort led to the discovery of 22 missing people.

7. The speaker from DB reported that approximately 300,000 Ukrainian refugees arrived in Germany between March and April 2022, with about 80 per cent entering via a DB central station. Many volunteers, including DB staff and citizens, assisted in identifying suspicious activities. Police or security personnel escorted individuals behaving suspiciously out of the train station. “Help for Refugee” flyers were distributed containing useful information and QR codes in multiple languages, including English, German, Russian and Ukrainian.

8. The International Justice Mission highlighted that, according to the International Labour Organization statistics, over 50 million people are in a situation of human trafficking worldwide. Eurostat reveals that 63 per cent of human trafficking victims among Ukrainian refugees are women and girls. They implement a European anti-trafficking programme, focusing on combating cross-border human trafficking. The organization underscored the critical need for international collaboration, between source and destination countries. Additionally, they advocated for victim-focused solutions, early identification and reporting of crimes and a rapid response plan.

9. In the joint panel discussion and questions and answer segment that followed the presentations, delegates inquired about the sources of human trafficking data presented and asked whether data on the locations of incidents were available, which were not in most countries. They noted the importance of collecting reliable data.

10. The Working Party welcomed discussions highlighting the importance of combatting human trafficking on the railways. It noted that follow-up work in this area could focus on assistance on training of railway staff, on awareness raising on combatting human trafficking, on international cooperation between the railways and in the improvement of data availability. The Working Party asked the secretariat, in collaboration with UIC, to arrange for the preparation of recommendations for combatting human trafficking on the railways through the creation of a dedicated informal group of experts set up for this purpose. The Working Party asked the secretariat to prepare a document for the next session of SC.2 setting out the framework for this work as well as a terms of reference for the group identifying the tasks to undertake to reach a recommendations document.

III. Developing recommendations

11. As identified in the previous section, a key output of the Special Session was a call from member States to develop recommendations on combatting human trafficking on the railways. These recommendations are to be developed through the activities of a dedicated Informal Group of Experts. Draft terms of reference for the Informal Group are included in the annex to this document.

12. The recommendations should build on the discussion at the Special Session and thus seek to draw on best practice examples to identify possible areas of focus for the recommendations. In particular, experts at the session pointed to:

- Appropriate and dedicated training for train and station staff to identify situations of human trafficking and to alert the relevant authorities to take action.
- General public awareness raising on human trafficking in order to make the public aware of what to look out for, but also what to do when there is a suspicion of human trafficking.
- Information campaigns aimed at targeting potential human trafficking victims to identify for them how to safely contact the authorities.
- Developing international cooperation and coordination mechanisms to collect and share data, practices and actions in a homogeneous way (potentially through an online platform) on:
 - Potential human trafficking flows;
 - Data availability;
 - Coordinated action to limit something that is inherently cross border and international.

IV. Next steps

13. The Working Party may wish to consider the terms of reference in annex and decide on possible next steps.

Annex

Terms of reference

I. Scope of tasks and achievements expected

1. The informal Group of Experts on combatting human trafficking on the railways shall be set up as a subsidiary body of the Working Party on Rail Transport and will focus its work on the following areas:

(a) Identify current practices in combatting human trafficking on the railways encompassing actions of railway companies, national and international authorities and institutions and other stakeholders;

(b) Identify transferable best practice examples from other sectors (e.g., tourism, labour, shipping, ride share, trucking, ...);

(c) Develop recommendations on combatting human trafficking for member States and railway companies focused on:

- Staff training;
- Data collection;
- Data sharing;
- Public awareness;
- Information for victims;
- International cooperation;

(d) Report back to the Working Party on Rail Transport for further consideration.

II. Methods of Work

2. The Informal Group of Experts is convened in collaboration with the International Union of Railways (UIC). Its work should take into consideration legal instruments, standards and guidelines already in place on combatting human trafficking by national, international and intergovernmental organisations as well as the sector itself. It should also look at good practice examples from other sectors.

3. The Informal Group of Experts is expected to meet online once every two months, or more frequently if necessary.

4. The Informal Group of Experts is expected to meet in 2025 and 2026 before concluding its activities with the transmission of a report to the Working Party on Rail Transport at its eightieth session (November 2026, Geneva).

5. As this is an informal group, all documentation and meetings will be in English only unless additional resources are identified for one or more, in-person, formal meetings and/or interpretation and/or document translation.

6. Participation in the informal Group of Experts is open to all concerned United Nations member countries and experts. Concerned intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as concerned railway administration authorities and companies, passenger associations and related entities are invited to participate and provide expert advice in compliance with United Nations rules and practices.

III. Secretariat

7. As an informal Group of Experts, no secretariat services will be provided, except in the event of any formal meetings. However UNECE, in collaboration with UIC, will facilitate all other meetings on the subject.
