

## EMN Study

### The international dimension of Austrian measures to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings and protect the victims

#### SUMMARY

Trafficking in human beings is seen as a modern form of slavery as well as a serious violation of fundamental human rights and human dignity. It is a global phenomenon that can take various forms, for example sexual exploitation or domestic servitude and labour exploitation in the construction industry. Trafficking in human beings affects people regardless of age and gender. As a global phenomenon, trafficking in human beings can only be tackled at a global level and in an international context. As in previous years, Austria was a country of destination and transit for human trafficking also during the 2021–2023 period covered by the study. Therefore, the fight against human trafficking was both a domestic and foreign policy priority of the Federal Government and included in the government programme 2020–2024. The National Action Plan on Combating Human Trafficking for 2021–2023, developed by the Task Force on Combating Human Trafficking, was of key importance and it included a total of 109 measures and prioritized areas such as coordination, prevention/awareness-raising, the protection of trafficked persons, monitoring and evaluation, and law enforcement.

During the period covered by the study, Austria focused on a number of geographical regions – including South-East Europe, Ukraine and the Middle East – in its fight against human trafficking and funded anti-human trafficking projects in both EU Member States and third countries. Relevant projects in specific regions were funded through the Austrian Development Agency, which monitored human trafficking-related issues in the development cooperation projects.

In Austria, structured and institutionalized cooperation with third countries primarily concerned the cooperation of law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities. However, non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations were also involved in the fight against trafficking in human beings and in international cooperation.

Challenges faced when implementing measures to combat trafficking in human beings were identified in the different areas. This also includes new forms of exploitation, such as child trafficking for sexual exploitation using computer systems. This means that exploitation no longer requires a physical change of location, meaning that established prevention mechanisms are no longer effective.

As outlined in the National Action Plan implementation report, Austria had taken steps in all areas of the fight against human trafficking, from bilateral operational consultations to police exchange programmes and projects as well as initiatives carried out in close cooperation with international organizations.