



European  
Commission

# Study on **high-risk**

groups for trafficking  
in human beings

*Executive summary*



Migration and  
Home Affairs

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children across Europe are trafficked for a variety of criminal and exploitation purposes. They are trafficked within their countries and within and across the EU. Trafficking hinders the development of children and damages them permanently. Trafficked children are excluded from education, health and a safe and protective environment.

This study is a deliverable of the EU strategy towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings 2012-2016, which recognised that vulnerable groups, such as children, are at greater risk of human trafficking.

This study on high-risk groups for trafficking in human beings (THB) looked at risk and resilience factors that influence the likelihood for children to become victims of THB, with a view to establishing risk profiles and developing recommendations for improvements in policies in the EU and Member States. This was done by collecting information in all Member States from key informants and through desk research. **The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on the concrete experience of children and practitioners in the field of rights of the child and child trafficking in EU Member States.** This study places the experience of children at the centre of the analysis and, based on this, further elaborates on typologies of child trafficking as well as risk and resilience factors. This study does not address the issue of demand in detail, but focuses on factors that render children vulnerable. That is to say that vulnerabilities per se do not cause or result in THB. Trafficking in human beings is a demand-driven and profit-driven crime, as well as a grave human rights violation. Trafficking in human beings is about demand for the services of victims and for the goods produced through their exploitation: it is about profits. Risk factors render people, and in particular children, vulnerable to victimisation.

## Key features of child trafficking in EU Member States

**Data:** In the period 2010-2012, 16 % of the total number of registered victims of THB were below the age of 18, 13 % girls and 3 % boys. Of the registered victims 2 % were aged 0-11 years, 17 % were registered aged 12-17, 36 % were registered as aged 18-24 and 45 % were aged 25 or older <sup>(1)</sup>.

The systematic and comprehensive collection of data on trafficking in general and children in particular requires further improvement, especially related to comparable data. Reasons for this lack of comparable data are among others: the absence of standardised guidelines for data collection at EU level <sup>(2)</sup>; the lack of detection of child trafficking in combination with the underreporting of such incidents, and the large number of organisations involved, each recording data related to their own responsibility. Law enforcement often focuses on visible criminal activities such as property crime and shoplifting and less on the potential trafficking cases behind these. Also the interpretation of concepts differs strongly, causing strong variations in statistics <sup>(3)</sup>. To this effect, a European Police Office (Europol) report confirmed that an increasing number of children are being trafficked throughout the EU <sup>(4)</sup>.

**Recruitment:** Regarding recruitment mechanisms, increases and changing tactics in the practice of grooming (to befriend or influence (a child), now especially via the internet, in preparation for future sexual abuse <sup>(5)</sup>) were observed in some Member States. Perpetrators were reported to have moved away from an approach based on predominantly exercising physical violence, towards an approach of exploiting the weaknesses and dependent attitudes of their victims. An increase was also noted in the reported incidence of possible sexual exploitation or abuse via social networking sites. A number of interviewed stakeholders noted that the ongoing deinstitutionalisation process of care in many countries has led to traffickers reorientating themselves to schools as a main source of recruitment of possible victims.

<sup>(1)</sup> Eurostat (2014), Trafficking in human beings, European Union, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-is-new/news/news/docs/20141017\\_working\\_paper\\_on\\_statistics\\_on\\_trafficking\\_in\\_human\\_beings\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-is-new/news/news/docs/20141017_working_paper_on_statistics_on_trafficking_in_human_beings_en.pdf) (checked on 7.05.2015).

<sup>(2)</sup> Europol (2011), Knowledge product, Trafficking in Human Beings in the European Union, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/trafficking-in-human-beings-in-the-european-union-2011.pdf> (checked on 7.5.2015).

<sup>(3)</sup> Europol (2014), Intelligence Notification, Child trafficking for exploitation in forced criminal activities and forced begging, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/child-trafficking-exploitation-forced-criminal-activities-and-forced-begging> (checked on 7.5.2015).

<sup>(4)</sup> Europol (2011), Op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>(5)</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary

**Typologies:** This study has identified several typologies of children at risk, such as: child victims of war and crisis; so-called orphans of European labour migration; children in need of care; child victims of family violence, and children from marginalised communities. A number of interviewed stakeholders have observed these new trends with regard to the profile and geographical origin of victims. The Syrian civil war and turmoil in the Middle East and parts of Africa are associated with a strong influx of unaccompanied children, especially to Greece, Italy and Malta. A common denominator of these groups of children is the lack of appropriate care, whether it is due to war, crisis or other humanitarian catastrophe, or due to an economic situation that is pushing their parents to move abroad for work, leaving their children behind.

## Risk and resilience factors

The analysis of risk and resilience factors revealed that the extent to which a child is vulnerable to trafficking is only rarely determined by one particular factor. Rather, children are usually exposed to a combination of circumstances which result in them becoming victims of trafficking. It should be noted that the factors themselves do not cause trafficking. Trafficking happens because of the demand for the services of the victims and for the goods produced through their exploitation, generating huge profits.

Nevertheless, both practitioners' opinions and descriptions of individual cases made it possible to extract valuable findings with regard to the relative importance of four main groups of factors (**individual, family-related, socioeconomic, and structural**), the interplay between them and the key elements within each group that impact on risk and resilience.

At the level of broad categories of risk and resilience factors, a first important finding is that **family structure** on the one hand, and **socioeconomic characteristics** on the other hand, are the two most important areas and they also appear to be the underlying cause of individual conditions observed in relation to risk.

Most of the reports demonstrated that two crucial individual factors — **a history of abuse and a vulnerable emotional state** — could often be traced back to a **dysfunctional family situation, underpinned by material deprivation**. Similarly, **social exclusion and marginalisation were commonly associated with poverty and a lack of options**, which influenced both the emotional state of children and their overall risk-taking behaviour, as they sought ways to escape their situation. Poverty is also related to the educational level of children, which was identified as an important (albeit not sufficient per se) resilience factor. Lack of financial means often motivated parents not to send their children to school (and to engage them in the generation of family income instead), but also contributed to parents being more likely to naively believe the promises of traffickers regarding opportunities for children to go abroad to receive an education.

## Structural factors

Structural factors concerning those characteristics, policies and attitudes in a society that go beyond the local level, were considered by practitioners to be particularly relevant as acting in support of or against the influence of crucial family and socioeconomic circumstances, themselves underpinned by individual factors. **As a key structural risk factor, practitioners noted a general culture and tendency in society to discriminate against women and children, and to tolerate violence and exploitation**. The societal attitude can easily influence the family and peer environment, and act as a trigger towards the acceptance of abuse and exploitation, hyper-sexualised behaviour, and emotional disorders among children.

Awareness-raising campaigns were once again identified as a strong resilience factor that can counteract such tendencies in society; however practitioners warned that such campaigns should be undertaken in a targeted manner, and avoid sensational reporting. The other key determinant of resilience is the overall functioning of the child protection and social support system at a local level, including its legal and policy framework. This includes a coherent strategy and implementation of a child protection system; trained and supported legal guardians, and national monitoring and reporting systems identifying children at risk of being trafficked. Regular training of professionals; raising awareness of law enforcement, of the judiciary, and of professionals dealing with children; and structures able to cater for child victims of trafficking, were all identified as key elements of a well-functioning protection system.

### Socioeconomic factors

Among socioeconomic factors **social exclusion and marginalisation**, especially when paired with lack of employment opportunities and with material deprivation, was a key risk factor identified by practitioners. **A culture of tolerance for sexual or labour exploitation involving children in the community was a strong reinforcing factor in this respect.** While marginalisation often featured together with ethnicity, the overwhelming opinion was that it is **low socioeconomic status and a lack of options among marginalised communities which increase the vulnerability of children towards trafficking, rather than ethnicity per se.** In fact, cases of trafficked children demonstrate that marginalisation and exclusion can also occur within cultural or ethnic sub-groups, and on the basis of social status within the community, or on the basis of sexual orientation.

In turn, the community level also offered a number of mechanisms that could strengthen resilience, such as access to peer groups, to social protection and to health and educational services. Peer groups, especially among classmates, were singled out as a particularly helpful way of detecting signs of possible risk of trafficking, and targeted awareness-raising at the level of schools was therefore seen as crucial. Thus, access to school was also regarded as important for resilience, not only because of the possibility to draw upon peer support, but also because of the role that teachers might play in monitoring behaviour and absence, as well as their potential role as confidants to children at risk. Similarly, health practitioners were also regarded as important as they could identify signs of physical or mental abuse, as well as emotional disorders that increase the vulnerability of children.

**The importance of targeting and equipping practitioners to recognise and take into account the specifics of working with child victims of trafficking was widely considered to be a precondition for effective child protection and support. Finally, the importance of effective intervention strategies at the local level aiming to enhance resilience against trafficking through a coordinated, multi-agency approach was repeatedly stressed by stakeholders and practitioners.**

### Family-related factors

**Family-related factors emerged as the key group of both risk and resilience factors related to the trafficking of children.** Among those, stable structure of the family unit paired with a good, trust-based relationship between parent and child, which includes a healthy level of parental monitoring, were found to be the most powerful resilience factors. **Importantly, while a household's economic status was considered very significant in terms of risks, many practitioners seemed hesitant to assign it a strong weight with regard to resilience.** It was commonly observed that many trafficked children come from materially secure families.

As regards risk factors related to the family situation, **a situation of family breakdown was considered especially important as it often manifested itself in neglect, abuse, or abandonment of children.** A disruption of family ties was particularly salient when it resulted in a child running away, entering residential care, becoming orphaned and/or homeless. **Two broad groups of cases were distinguished: children from eastern Europe where parents had either no means of sustaining their upbringing, or had migrated abroad for economic reasons, leaving the children in the care of relatives or in a residential care facility; and children from conflict and poverty-stricken countries and areas, who had abruptly lost their families and had to provide for themselves.** In both cases, trafficked children exhibited a limited awareness of risks and an excessive trust in strangers. They also suffered from material deprivation and a lack of positive role models, which pushed them into the hands of traffickers.

**Next to situations of family breakdown, dysfunctional families were also very strongly related to child trafficking, as they usually involved one or more family members as the perpetrator(s).** Practitioners broadly outlined three such possible situations. Firstly, in some cases parents had sexually or physically abused their children before pushing them into further exploitation outside the family circle. Secondly, patriarchal family structures and a traditional understanding and social acceptance of arranged child marriages, as well as child labour (including child begging) played a strong role in the decision of parents to be involved in the trafficking of their child. Finally, sending a child abroad was often observed as part of a family project, in which the parents had limited awareness of the level of exploitation awaiting their child in the destination country, as they often considered it to involve a respectable occupation, or studying abroad.



## Individual factors

Pertaining to individual factors, the extent to which children seemed to be aware of the risks and signs of trafficking was influenced by their degree of attachment to the perpetrator. This happened especially in the cases where the perpetrator was either a family member or someone exploiting the victim on the basis of their need for attention and love that was missing within their family. Nonetheless, while a low level of awareness of the trafficking situation was observed among child victims of trafficking by the majority of country practitioners, few considered that awareness alone was sufficient as a resilience factor. In practical terms, in fact, it often did not matter whether children realised the situation they were in, since they had no options to escape from it; especially when the perpetrators were family members.

## Demand and enabling conditions

The country reports confirmed that there is little research on the demand side of child trafficking in the EU, as most research is focused on the supply side. As a result, few country reports were able to indicate research and present a thorough analysis of the demand aspects of child trafficking in the EU.

### Demand for sexual services and cheap labour

The demand for sexual services has been identified in many EU Member States (MS) as a primary cause for child trafficking. The legal status of prostitution was pointed to as a factor affecting the demand in some countries. Some national stakeholders indicated that the demand for low cost labour, which is identified as a risk factor for child trafficking, has increased due to the economic crisis.

### Underlying conditions

- Lifting of controls at the internal borders of the EU along with the free movement of people and goods across the EU reduces the chance of detection of traffickers and could potentially open up new opportunities for traffickers, as Europol notes in SOCTA 2013 <sup>(6)</sup>. Further conditions mentioned by the research include: the availability of cheap flights (within and into Europe) and other relatively easy and cheap possibilities of travelling within Europe, inherent difficulties in detection of THB at the borders, and a shortage in EU border guards who are specialised or trained in the detection of THB.
- Factors related to governance and politics (corruption within the law enforcement agencies and links between organised crime networks and the police, low political interest and fear of intervening on sensitive subjects).
- Factors related to the presence and prevalence of organised crime (traffickers increasingly informed and organised to exploit advantages of trafficking in children).
- Factors related to insufficient institutional provisions (insufficient data systems, staffing of law enforcement and child protection bodies, awareness of professionals, etc.).

### The role of the internet as an enabling factor

Particular attention has been paid in this study to the role of the internet as an enabling factor for child trafficking. Stakeholders in 11 of the EU MS indicated that the internet plays no significant role in child trafficking, that no cases have (yet) been identified, or that there is no information available; however in other MS there are indeed cases reported where the internet has played a (major) role. This being said, most experts on child trafficking share the view that the role of the internet might become more important in the near future.

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<sup>(6)</sup> The EU serious and organised crime threat assessment (SOCTA), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/eu-serious-and-organised-crime-threat-assessment-socta> (checked on 7.5.2015).

A Romanian girl from a small rural town was contacted at the age of 16 by an older man on a social media website. After about a month of online communication, he convinced her to go and meet him at his place in Bucharest without telling her parents. He told her there would be a party there, but when she arrived there were two other girls tricked in the same way. The perpetrator locked them up and forced them to offer sexual services to strangers.

## Who are the children at risk? A typology based on risk profiles

Based on the analysis of the risk and resilience factors, it was possible to identify a number of typical risk profiles, or risk categories. Each risk category is characterised by a specific configuration of risk and resilience factors, although some risk factors are common to more categories. The risk categories have been identified with a view to defining the right intervention approach. One overall finding is that it is not possible to address the vulnerability of children with a single approach, as the reasons for vulnerability and the type of resilience resources they possess are very different.

### Child victims of family violence, abuse, and neglect

Children who have been trafficked are often characterised by a history of family violence, abuse or neglect. The research documented many cases of children from broken, unstable families and unstructured or dysfunctional families. A lack of attention, a lack of love, family violence and/or sexual abuse are features that trafficked children in this risk category have in common. In some cases parents were actively involved in the trafficking or abuse of the child. **Poverty often, but not necessarily, plays a role.**

A German girl was sexually abused by her father from early childhood, probably around the age of three. Her parents were divorced. The father was part of an organised crime group and he later forced her into prostitution. It was only when the girl reached adolescence that she gathered strength to seek help. In another example from Germany, a girl was abused by her grandfather, who also passed her on to his circle of paedophile friends and 'rewarded' her with money and gifts; she got used to the behaviour and the material benefits coming from it, and then continued into prostitution when she was a teenager.

A 16-year-old girl from Romania sought assistance after her aunt forced her into marrying her cousin. It turned out that the girl, whose parents were in jail, was being raised by her grandmother, and was forced to beg and steal for years by the aunt and other relatives before eventually being married off within the family.

A girl from a dysfunctional family had been born with foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) due to her mother's alcohol addiction. Her father had died before she was born and her mother had been partially deprived of her parental rights. She was abused sexually when she was 16 years old by the cohabitant of her mother. She met two Bulgarian men with whom she spent some time in hotels and private houses. She later entered into prostitution in a brothel in Germany.

### Children subject to a migration project planned by their families

As opposed to children with a history of abuse, the children in this risk category often have a strong family background. **Children are intentionally sent away in the expectation of a better future for the child.** In most cases parents are not aware of the potential dangers for their child. Sometimes the family explicitly or implicitly expects to receive financial support once the child is settled in the country of destination. The family's expectations are typical of a migratory project, planned around and imposed upon a child, which takes the form of a family investment. Organised crime networks intervene to take advantage of the dreams and hopes of the family.

Two girls from Nigeria were trafficked to Europe for sexual exploitation. Their mothers both worked at a market and were approached by the mother of a madam working in a European brothel. This lady began grooming them with the promise to arrange an opportunity for their daughters to study abroad, get jobs and send money back home. The mothers and the daughters were told they would have a better life. The grooming process took a few months before the girls were moved to Europe. There was a network of perpetrators. The mother of the madam running the brothel led the initial grooming of the mothers at the market. A number of men were then involved in arranging the documentation. Other men collected the girls when they arrived at the airport in Europe. (United Kingdom)

A 17-year-old Vietnamese boy who came from an economically deprived household was under pressure to earn money for his family, but also wanted to go to school. Under pressure from his mother who had financial problems, he decided to travel to western Europe to earn money for the family. His mother ran into debt to finance his journey. He travelled first to Russia and then to his destination country where he was basically detained in a warehouse and forced to work for a Vietnamese man, who took his documents from him. (Poland)

In a case from France, a 7-year-old girl was sent without her prior knowledge, but with the explicit consent of her mother, to a family in France. There, she was subjected to forced labour and abuse, and did not attend school regularly (as had been the expectation of the mother).

### Children left alone

Children left on their own are children without parents or other relatives who take care of them. They may be living on the streets, in institutions for orphans or be left to the care of relative strangers. **These children are very vulnerable to child trafficking.** A particular group of children are the so-called 'home alone children', also referred to as 'children left behind' or '**orphans of labour migration**'. This is reported in this study as a growing problem in some eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, Poland and Romania. These children are not materially deprived (e.g. they have access to the internet) but are short of care, structure, supervision, and emotional support.

### Child victims of war, crisis and (natural) disaster

**Children in post-humanitarian disaster areas are highly vulnerable.** A large number of unaccompanied child asylum-seekers in the EU arrive from countries and regions in conflict, such as Afghanistan, Somalia and recently Syria. These children may have lost their families and are vulnerable to exploitation during and after their journey.

A boy from Kosovo <sup>(7)</sup> grew up with his grandfather after losing both his parents in the war. He does not remember his mother. His grandfather died when he was about 8 years old and he had to take care of himself. He has never gone to school. He has been recruited several times by different men, first to work on two farms in the mountains where he experienced violence if he didn't work hard enough. Then when he was about 12 years old, a man took him to Pristina and promised that he could go to school. In Pristina he was forced to beg and steal in the street. (Austria)

(7) This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.



An 11-year-old girl from Uganda was forced to become a child soldier before the age of 11 after a rebel attack on her village killed her mother, and she herself was kidnapped. Together with other children she managed to escape at night from the place she had been taken to. She went to Juba, the first bigger city after the Uganda-South Sudan border, where she was homeless and lived on the street. There she met a European who promised her education in Europe. He took her to the Netherlands where he kept the girl in a house in the countryside; and later a house in Germany. At this time the girl was almost 16 years old. The girl claims not having been abused sexually, but at the same time she has almost no memory of the time when she was kept at the house of this man in the Netherlands. (Germany)

### Children engaging in risky behaviour

A particular risk category is children (mainly girls) whose **risk-taking behaviours** put them at a heightened risk of grooming. **There are often profound psychological reasons why children engage in risky activities and seek attention in this way.** For girls, in particular, media-related and social expectations regarding likeability and attractiveness were thought by stakeholders to play a role. Weakened emotional states were also thought to be a risk factor in this respect, rather than necessarily a lack of cognitive abilities.

A Dutch girl of 15 years was being groomed by an older boy who she considered to be her boyfriend. After a while, he convinced her to have sex with other men in order to help him solve his financial difficulties. A schoolmate of the girl noticed changes in her behaviour, and after observing the boy being aggressive to her, notified school authorities, who in turn contacted youth protection services and placed the girl in a protected emergency shelter.

### Children with physical, learning and developmental disabilities

Traffickers take advantage of these vulnerabilities to involve the child in exploitative activities beyond his/her awareness (in the case of intellectual disability), or to exploit prejudiced societal views towards disability. This may be the case of **girls with learning or developmental disorders who are sexual exploited as well as physically disabled children exploited in child begging.** There is often a relation with traumatisation from war and crisis or with a family background characterised by abuse or neglect.

A 14-year-old Estonian girl with learning and developmental disabilities, who was from a rural area, was sexually abused and exploited by a large group of men from the local neighbourhood. They kidnapped her and took her to other towns where they forced her into prostitution. Despite signals from her family to the police and to social services, and a widespread knowledge among the community about what was going on, it took over 2 years to acknowledge the situation and start an official investigation.

### Children from marginalised communities or neighbourhoods

Sometimes the greatest source of risk for a child to become caught in trafficking networks does not come from individual or family characteristics, but from living in a neighbourhood, community or geographical area which is socially excluded or marginalised from mainstream society. This can be the case with ethnic minorities (e.g. Roma) who are confined to special areas or camps, with limited access to mainstream health, education and social services; but also of other marginal communities with no specific ethnic connotation. **The common denominator is that marginalisation blocks the road to regular social, employment and educational integration and paves the way for recruitment into illegal activities by criminal networks.**

A Romanian girl was sold by her parents to traffickers who transported her and other children of her age to Hungary and Italy for begging. When she was identified and taken to a shelter in Hungary she could hardly speak Hungarian or Romanian as there had been almost no one to speak to her for years. (Hungary)

A girl from Bulgaria repeatedly fell victim of trafficking. She comes from a poor household in one of the poorest regions in Bulgaria. Her mother abandoned the family. Her father tried the best he could. There was a widespread acceptance by the girl and her peers that girls should display a certain provocative behaviour and accept a level of abuse by men in order to succeed in life. She was chosen and targeted because of her social networking website profile with provocative pictures of herself. She was identified by an organised group of traffickers and targeted in an orchestrated manner. She was forced into prostitution in Vienna by being offered a job opportunity as waitress. She was identified by social workers in Vienna and taken back to Bulgaria. A few months later she fell into the same pattern, met a boy, went with him to Greece and was exploited again. (Bulgaria)

### Implications for policy and practice

The study concludes with a number of recommendations related to individual, family-related, socioeconomic and structural/institutional risk and resilience factors. The recommendations are directed to policymakers, at national and EU level and aim to contribute to more evidence-based policy development. Finally, these recommendations should be in line with the best interests of the child, should be child-centred and should follow the rights of the child approach.

#### Structural factors: promote inter-agency cooperation for stronger child protection systems

Recommendations related to structural and institutional factors include a range of actions at different levels. Law enforcement authorities and all professionals dealing with children at risk, e.g. **prosecutors, teachers, and health professionals** should be provided with adequate training and clear guidelines aimed at implementing a **child-centred and victim-centred approach**. The establishment of hotline services, the provision of specialised psychological counselling, and more street workers dealing with homeless children and children in conflict with the law have been mentioned as important elements of a strong protection and support system, which has yet to be realised.

Moreover, it is important to reinforce **interinstitutional cooperation and networks**, at various levels: cooperation at national level of all involved stakeholders and services, ideally under a designated referral mechanism; intra-EU cooperation, in terms of controls/prevention and in terms of specific mechanisms for the support and reintegration of trafficked children. EU funding provided under the fundamental rights, equality and citizenship programme already seeks to foster integrated child protection systems, and other instruments could usefully foster this same approach. To avoid re-victimisation, it is also important to invest in ensuring appropriate support and protection for child victims of trafficking including treatment, follow-up and any judicial involvement. Victims of trafficking should also be supported once they become adults, in order to avoid that they are marginalised from society and become vulnerable again once the assistance ends (18 years old).

#### And primarily: change societal attitudes, address the demand side

**In order to promote a cultural change in societal attitudes towards violence, exploitation and discrimination against children and women, as well as trafficking specifically, it is useful to invest in tailored and non-sensationalist awareness-raising actions.** These should also be based on a better understanding of the demand side factors that sustain and foster child trafficking, and accompanied by legislative frameworks supporting this normative change. It would be important to gain better knowledge on how the demand for sexual services affects child trafficking, who the adults seeking sexual services from children are, and the most effective ways to eliminate this demand. The Commission in particular should further examine the role of demand and publish the report required under Article 23.2 of Directive 2011/36/EU assessing the impact of existing national law, establishing the criminalisation of those who knowingly use victims of trafficking, within the context of prevention of trafficking in human beings.

**On the same note, an area of equal merit is the demand for child labour.** Actions could include the engagement of business leaders and unions within those sectors where child labour exploitation is a particular concern; ensuring that child labour exploitation is taken into account within regulatory frameworks, and stronger enforcement of the prosecution of individuals who receive goods produced via child labour exploitation (in line within Directive 2011/36/EU).

#### Socioeconomic factors: cater for children's wellbeing in inclusive communities

Recommendations related to socioeconomic factors revolve around **the need to provide support to marginalised communities through programmes ensuring their economic and social inclusion.**

As social attitudes towards violence and child labour play a role, **there is a need to promote a culture of zero tolerance, at a local level, of violence against women and children, as well as of child labour exploitation.** This can be done by involving families and communities in awareness-raising programmes specifically focusing on the negative consequences of the violent punishment of children and by creating strong opposition to violence against women, as well as by implementing relevant legislation.

It is also important that the socioeconomic wellbeing of children is ensured more broadly by providing them with access to adequate resources, quality education and health services, decent housing and a safe environment in which to develop. EU funding (in particular the European Social Fund and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived) should be used to support such initiatives to combat child poverty, as recommended by the European Commission <sup>(8)</sup>.

#### Family-related factors: support safe family environments

The 2013 Commission recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage' underlined the need to provide family and parenting support, also with regard to parental labour market integration. This study again underlines the need for multi-agency interventions in this area. In the case of situations of family breakdown, a network of agencies at local level, including schools, should cooperate to **identify and report** risk situations and offer support (family counsellors, social workers specialised in trafficking, dedicated family shelters) to families/parents in order to maintain as much as possible at least one family tie for the child. When this is not possible, involvement of the child protection system should be ensured at an early stage in order to limit risk factors. Economic support should be offered to the family in the case the economic conditions prove to be a determinant risk factor.

#### Individual factors: ensure that every child receives appropriate care and protection

Recommendations related to individual factors should focus on ensuring that children receive the care and protection required for their development. Among others, actions should target the need to strengthen children's individual resilience; for instance by investing in programmes tailored to reinforcing self-esteem and valuing diversity and individuality. It is also important to inform children about trafficking risks and to raise their awareness of the consequences of trafficking, while providing concrete support to them and ensuring that all children receive high quality care and protection.

Other recommendations are to invest in programmes aimed at providing support in schools and preventing early school leaving, and to directly engage children in defining effective prevention and supporting actions. Their wishes and aspirations should be taken into account when designing and delivering these programmes and when making choices that concern them more generally, as prescribed by Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Strengthening the voice of the child within all services and support systems for children should be a priority. At the EU level, the rights, equality and citizenship funding programme has in recent years sought to improve the capacity of judicial, child protection and other professionals working for and with children, focusing on the rights of the child and making respect for the views of the child an integral part of any such project. At national level Member States should also invest in this direction.

<sup>(8)</sup> Commission Recommendation of 20.2.2013, 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage', C(2013) 778 final, [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c\\_2013\\_778\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/c_2013_778_en.pdf)

