



Recommendations to improve the prevention of human trafficking and the protection of survivors of trafficking in Germany

Forced Displacement & Human Trafficking

Both studies¹ and IRC's practical experience show that refugees are at a particularly high risk of being affected by human trafficking. The political and social environment in which refugees find themselves in Germany is characterized by safety deficits that exacerbate these risks and increase the vulnerability of refugees to human trafficking.

At the same time, Germany is obliged to implement comprehensive measures to prevent human trafficking and to protect those affected “without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status“ in accordance with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The EU Directive on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting Its Victims 2011/36/EU (amended by Directive 2024/1712/EU of 13 June 2024) sets out binding requirements for the prevention of human trafficking and the protection of survivors of trafficking. Germany has a deadline of 15 July 2026 to implement the EU Directive.

Based on IRC's program work, IRC proposes the following measures to prevent human trafficking and provide affected refugees with a safe environment in Germany.

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** is an international humanitarian organisation that was founded in 1933 at the suggestion of Albert Einstein. Since then, IRC has been supporting people fleeing political crises, war, persecution or natural disasters. IRC has also been active in Germany since 2016 and supports people seeking protection throughout the country.

Prevention

Article 5 (2) of the Council of Europe Convention requires the development of information, awareness and education campaigns as well as training programs, especially for people at risk. To improve prevention efforts, IRC calls for:

1. Expansion of awareness programs in schools

In Germany, around a third of all victims of human trafficking are minors. Awareness programs in schools on forms of recruitment (cyber-grooming, loverboy method, trauma bonding) and exploitation (labour exploitation, forced marriage, forced prostitution) must be intensified and included in the curricula of the federal states. This applies to both regular and “welcome classes”². This is particularly relevant for adolescents who are under great pressure to quickly assume financial responsibility and/or fall out of state support systems when they come of age.

2. Inclusion of course content on human trafficking and exploitation in integration courses³

Integration courses offer a large-scale opportunity to raise refugees' awareness of human trafficking and to impart skills in (labour) law issues. The curriculum of integration courses should be expanded to include these topics and contact points for human trafficking, labour exploitation and forced marriage should be provided. In addition to teaching about rights and risks, topics such as trauma bonding and other relevant aspects should also be addressed.

¹ Tambini Stollwerck, Rollmann, Friederich *et. al.* Responding to human trafficking among refugees: prevalence and test accuracy of a modified version of the adult human trafficking screening tool. *BMC Public Health* 24:1685 (2014).

ICMPD. New research: How are the war in Syria and the refugee crisis affecting human trafficking? (2016).

² „Welcome classes“ (German: *Willkommensklassen*) are special classes for newly arrived children and young people to help them learn the German language and integrate into the German school system.

³ Integration courses (German: *Integrationskurse*) are educational programs designed to help newly arrived adults learn the German language and become familiar with the culture and social norms to facilitate their integration.

Protection

To improve support and care for those affected in accordance with Article 11 of the EU Directive, IRC calls for:

3. Expansion of multilingual psychotherapeutic internet-based services

Internet-based psychotherapy is a way of increasing the capacity for psychosocial support and access for those affected. It enables those affected to take part in sessions flexibly and from any location in a familiar and safe environment. In addition, therapy can be continued with a familiar therapist if the patient moves to another location. This means that those affected receive the support they need, regardless of where they are. As part of the I-REACH project funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research at the Freie Universität Berlin, the ALMAMAR app was created in Arabic and Farsi. There is an urgent need to expand this or similar services to include other languages, e.g. English, Ukrainian and others, and to focus on human trafficking and the resulting trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

4. Employment of persons with qualifications acquired abroad

o Recognition of qualifications in social professions

Trauma caused by war experiences has increased the need for psychosocial support for refugees. The involvement of refugee professionals in this area needs to be encouraged and expanded, regardless of their language skills. Accelerated recognition of the qualifications of professionals who have worked in the social sector prior to displacement is an important step in ensuring adequate support and care for those affected. Employing professionals with own experience of forced displacement not only helps to address the shortage of skilled workers in the social sector, but also provides a linguistically and culturally sensitive response to victims of exploitation and trafficking, as well as other vulnerable groups.

o Create opportunities for language mediators to specialize in human trafficking

Art. 18b (1) of the EU Directive provides for the training of professionals who are more likely to come into contact with trafficked persons. Language mediators should be included in this group and receive training in the field of trafficking in human beings. The training should cover indicators and risk areas, the legal framework, trauma-sensitive communication, victim-centered information provision obligations and boundary-setting techniques. The use of language mediators trained in the issue of trafficking in human beings is necessary during the initial reception, identification and further assistance in order to avoid secondary traumatization of the language mediators themselves and secondary victimization of the trafficked persons.

5. Funding and promotion of shelters

Article 11(5) of the EU Directive requires that trafficked persons be accommodated in appropriate and safe shelters. Shelters are an important point of contact for potential victims of trafficking. Therefore, there is a need for secure and long-term funding from federal or state sources, as well as a universal legal entitlement (regardless of residence status or entitlement to benefits) to a shelter that can be used nationwide. The legal entitlement also requires an expansion of protection capacities, e.g. for trafficked men and other groups, such as trans people, for whom there are currently no shelters in Germany.
