



Event Report

Policy Lab “National Rapporteur Models on Trafficking in Human Beings”

Date: 14 January 2026

Venue: Sofia, InterContinental Hotel

Organisers: Policy and Citizens' Observatory & National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Partner: Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bulgaria

Purpose of the Event

The Policy Lab aimed to provide a structured platform for in-depth exchange of expertise and experience on European models of National Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms on trafficking in human beings. The discussions focused on independent monitoring, data collection and analysis, and their role in shaping effective, evidence-based anti-trafficking policies. Particular attention was given to the applicability of these models in the Bulgarian context, in light of GRETA recommendations and recent EU legislative developments.

Participants¹

The event brought together **over 90 participants**, including representatives of:

- national institutions and the legislative branch,
- the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings,
- non-governmental and international organisations,
- academia and research institutions.

International speakers and guests included:

- the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator,
- National Rapporteurs or representatives of equivalent mechanisms from the **Kingdom of the Netherlands, Finland, Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Portuguese Republic**.

Programme Highlights

The Policy Lab was opened with official remarks by representatives of the Bulgarian authorities and partner institutions, followed by a keynote address by the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, which framed the discussions within the broader European policy context.

Panel I focused on different European models of National Rapporteurs. Speakers presented various institutional arrangements, mandates, levels of independence, and relationships with National Anti-trafficking Coordinator. National Rapporteurs from the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Finland, Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the

¹ List of participants attached

Portuguese Republic, highlighting both strengths and challenges of the different approaches.

Following the panel, participants engaged in **four parallel working groups**, addressing the Bulgarian context regarding:

- independence and institutional positioning;
- mandate and core functions;
- resources and sustainability;
- cooperation with the National Coordinator and other key stakeholders.

Panel II addressed **data collection and independent analysis** as a cornerstone of effective anti-trafficking policy. National Rapporteurs shared methodologies, data systems, and good practices for using data to monitor trends, identify gaps, and inform policy development.

Key Findings

Key conclusions from the Policy Lab included:

- the need for clear **institutional separation** between policy coordination and independent monitoring;
- the crucial role of an **independent National Rapporteur** in assessing policy effectiveness, analysing trends, and ensuring public accountability; Potentially, the Rapporteur could be under the Ombudsman's Office, shared responsibility between the Ombudsmen and the Anti-discrimination Commission, or Institute/Lab under University.
- the importance the National Rapporteur to have access to **reliable, comparable and integrated data**, including contributions from civil society and academia;
- the necessity of adequate resources and a clearly defined mandate to ensure the credibility and sustainability of the mechanism.

Outcomes and Next Steps

The Policy Lab concluded with a plenary discussion that identified concrete pathways for the establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism on trafficking in human beings in Bulgaria. The discussions highlighted key institutional options, core principles such as independence, credibility, and a clear mandate, as well as the central role of reliable data collection and analysis in supporting evidence-based policy-making.

Participants expressed a strong and shared understanding that a National Rapporteur should be established as an independent institutional function, clearly separated from policy coordination and implementation. At the same time, it was underlined that such a mechanism should complement and support, rather than interfere with or duplicate, the operational role of the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, thereby strengthening overall coherence and accountability within the national framework.

The organisers committed to systematising the key conclusions, proposals, and decision options emerging from the working groups and plenary sessions and to using these outcomes as a foundation for further expert consultations and policy-level discussions. These steps aim to support informed national decision-making and to contribute to the development of a sustainable and effective monitoring framework aligned with European and international standards.