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VIENNA, 16 October 2009 (UNODC). In the run up to EU anti-trafficking day (18 October), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has issued a report showing that trafficking in persons is an under-detected crime in Europe.

The report, based on UNODC's Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (launched in February 2009), says less people (1 in 100,000) are being convicted for human trafficking in Europe than for rare crimes like kidnapping. Only 9,000 victims were reported in 2006 - around 30 times less than the total estimated number. "Perhaps police are not finding the traffickers and victims because they are not looking for them", said the UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa.

The report shows a high degree of internal trafficking, both domestically within European countries and regionally within the European Union (predominantly from South-eastern to Western Europe). At the same time, European victims represent just a fraction of the total number of victims detected in Europe. Recent trends show a steady decline of flows from traditional sources, and a marked increase in victims from China and Central Asia.

Most identified victims of human trafficking in Europe are young women, trafficked for sexual exploitation. Around 10% of trafficking victims in Europe are children. There are also detected cases of men in forced labour, like construction and agriculture. "Lives should not be for sale or for rent on a continent that prohibits slavery and forced labour, and prides itself on upholding human dignity", said Mr. Costa.

Most of the prosecuted traffickers are locals, predominantly men. Where foreign traffickers are present, they are often of the same nationality as the victims. Curiously, for a crime where most victims are women, the number of prosecuted female offenders is higher for human trafficking than for other crimes. "We need to better understand why people traffic their kin, and why women exploit other women", said the head of UNODC.

On a positive note, the report shows that in the past six years since the UN Protocol to Prevent,

Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children came into force in December 2003, most European countries have criminalized trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and forced labour.

It also highlights the progress that has been made to improve collection of data on human trafficking within the European Union.

Full report: Trafficking in Persons - An Analysis of Europe