



26 February 2015 – "Belgium's multi-disciplinary approach to tackling modern forms of slavery, which brings together various stakeholders at policy and operational level is an example of good practice," told United Nations Special Rapporteur Urmila Bhoola journalists at today's press conference in Brussels.

Relevant provisions in Belgium's Criminal Code, which have exploitation at their core, are broad and encompass contemporary forms of slavery, such as forced begging, forced labour and domestic servitude.

Courts can impose more severe penalties when exploitation is secured through violence, threats, coercion, where vulnerability of a person is abused or where a child is exploited.

The expert was encouraged by the steps taken to address domestic servitude in diplomatic households, through advising employees of their rights and monitoring that they work in compliance with human dignity and labour standards.

According to the Special Rapporteur, the system of service vouchers introduced in 2004 is also a commendable initiative and has had success in regulating the sector of domestic work and reducing vulnerability to exploitation.

Addressing vulnerabilities

"However, potential victims, including children and other vulnerable groups, are not always detected, identified and referred to the appropriate structures, which leaves them susceptible to abuse and exploitation," Ms Bhoola added.

The Special Rapporteur stressed the need to ensure that all frontline actors, including in the police, relevant inspectorates, social and health services and the guardians of unaccompanied children receive necessary training in identifying victims of contemporary forms of slavery.

"Further training is also necessary to ensure that the victims are adequately informed of their rights, including the 45 day reflection period, and to understand the central role in support and assistance of specialised centres to which they can be referred", she said.

"It is also crucial to increase focus on awareness-raising and information campaigns aimed at the general public, in order for them to also be alert to cases of contemporary forms of slavery", she said.

"This preventive aspect, including in continuing to address specific vulnerabilities of those most discriminated and marginalized, needs strengthening."

The human rights expert noted that the collection and recording of detailed statistical data could be strengthened.

"Data from different sources should be consolidated to enable better identification of trends in order to inform policy-making," Ms Bhoola said.

A full report with the Special Rapporteur's findings and recommendations will be presented at the September 2015 session of the UN Human Rights Council.