



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1484 Vienna, 25 July 2024

EU Statement on the occasion of the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons

1. On the occasion of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, the EU reiterates its strong commitment to pursue all efforts to eradicate this crime and abhorrent practice. Traffickers disproportionately target the most vulnerable, including children displaced persons and refugees, persons belonging to minorities, and persons with disabilities. Combatting this crime requires concerted efforts at national, regional and international levels. The OSCE and the EU play a vital role in fighting human trafficking and are key partners in this endeavour. We value the work of the Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the in-depth discussions held at the OSCE, including this year's Alliance Conference, the recent Security Committee meeting and the Asian Partners for Co-operation Group meeting.
2. This World Day against Trafficking in Persons comes once again as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine continues unabated. Russia's war has forced millions of Ukrainians to flee their homes, leaving in particular women and children at heightened risk of being trafficked. The EU responded swiftly and addressed the risk of human trafficking with the required seriousness from the outset. The Common Anti-Trafficking Plan was set up by the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator to prevent human trafficking, increase law enforcement and judicial cooperation, and protect victims. The Temporary Protection Directive was also activated, granting over 4.2 million Ukrainian refugees access to the labour market, health, social care and education, thereby making them less vulnerable to trafficking.
3. The theme of this year's World Day "leave no child behind in the fight against

human trafficking” underscores the urgency of accelerated efforts to end child trafficking. Children represent a third of trafficking victims worldwide, with girls being disproportionately affected. Over the past 15 years, child trafficking has tripled globally. Overlapping crises such as armed conflicts, displacement, socio-economic inequalities and environmental challenges significantly escalate trafficking risks for children. As a consequence of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, 1.2 million Ukrainian children are currently displaced and 50% of refugees who have fled the country are estimated to be children.

4. Identifying and protecting child victims remain challenging due to issues such as underreporting, lack of awareness and inadequate resources for victim support services. In the EU, 15% of detected and registered victims of trafficking are children, the majority of which are girls. Protecting children and their rights from all forms of violence, supporting victims and addressing gendered aspects of child trafficking are key priorities of the EU. Based on a human rights, victim-centred, gender- and child-sensitive approach, we have built a strong legal and policy framework to address human trafficking.
5. The EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025) addresses prevention, protection and identification of victims, and prosecution of perpetrators, with a focus on discouraging demand and breaking the criminal model of traffickers, including online. Specifically vulnerable groups, such as child victims and children at risk of trafficking, demand special attention in terms of protection, support and empowerment. The revised EU Anti-trafficking Directive of 13 June 2024 emphasises the protection of children and requires Member States to take the necessary measures to assist and support child victims of trafficking by establishing national child protection systems which develop specific plans to prevent human trafficking. Every protection, support and assistance measure needs to be taken with the best interests of the child in mind.
6. The proliferation of online platforms poses additional risks as traffickers use these numerous tools to recruit, exploit, control and advertise victims, organise their transport and accommodation and communicate with clients and other perpetrators. Technology also amplifies traffickers’ capabilities, enabling exploitation and commercialisation of victims on a larger scale while providing

greater anonymity and lower risk. Young people are also particularly vulnerable to online exploitation due to poor digital hygiene and lack of adequate safeguards. It is essential to keep considering these trends in our approach.

7. The World Day against Trafficking in Persons is also an essential part of UNODC's "Blue Heart Campaign". This global awareness-raising initiative seeks to encourage involvement of all stakeholders, to inspire action and help prevent this crime. The UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons provides invaluable humanitarian, legal, and financial aid to victims through established channels of assistance, including governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.
8. To conclude, we reaffirm our commitment to work with our partners to leave no child behind in the fight against human trafficking and to ensure that this issue remains high on the agenda. The European Union, its Member States and the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator will continue to pay special attention to combating trafficking of children and look forward to continuing cooperation with the OSCE and our partners to eradicate human trafficking together.

The Candidate Countries TÜRKIYE, NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA*, ALBANIA*, UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA*, and GEORGIA, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.