



Office of the OSCE Special Representative and
Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Warsaw Human Dimension Conference Side Event

Trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation: Responding to prevention and protection challenges in the context of the Ukraine conflict

Venue: Meeting Room 5 (Opera), Sofitel Victoria, Warsaw, Poland

15:30 – 16:30, Thursday 6 October 2022

Link to online streaming: <https://youtu.be/iH9YKKuLtz8>

Organizers: United States Mission to the OSCE and Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Concept Note

Since 24 February 2022, unprecedented numbers of people seeking refuge from armed violence in Ukraine, most of them women and children, have been received by many OSCE participating States. UNHCR reported over 7.4 million refugees from Ukraine being recorded across Europe with over 4.1 million being registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes as of 20 September 2022. In addition, about 7 million Ukrainians are estimated to be internally displaced. As earlier migration crises have demonstrated, criminal groups or individuals will take advantage of large flows of people to exploit the most vulnerable in transit and destination countries. While undertaking their journeys or upon reaching a destination, people seeking refuge can be exposed to trafficking for various purposes, including for sexual exploitation.

A significant peculiarity of the humanitarian crisis related to the war in Ukraine is that the overwhelming majority of people fleeing armed violence – 90% – are women and children¹. Displaced, deprived of regular income, driven by the duty to provide for their families, the women who are seeking refuge become particularly vulnerable to trafficking in human beings. Before this humanitarian crisis, women and girls represented the majority of formally identified victims of sexual exploitation², a crime pattern which leads to an extremely dangerous outcome when combined with the profile of the current flows. Children, in their turn, have been facing alarmingly increasing risks of exploitation over the past years. According to the recent UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, in 2018, about one third of the overall detected victims were children

¹ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/press/releases/2022/March/targeted-by-traffickers---ukrainian-refugees-at-high-risk-of-exploitation.html> and <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/2022/4/62569be24/ukraine-crisis-creates-new-trafficking-risks.html>

² https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_Global_overview.pdf

and the number of identified child victims has tripled in the last 15 years³. The current humanitarian crisis exacerbates the vulnerability of children even further and feeds into a growing human trafficking market with high demand that fosters child exploitation. The number of children at risk is staggering as half of the people who have been forced to leave Ukraine by 1 May 2022 are children⁴. With or without parents, alone or in groups, in institutional care or having disabilities and special needs, all these children require unconditional protection in the countries of transit or destination. One of the overarching aims of such protection measures should be to ensure that children do not go missing and do not become victims of violence, including trafficking in human beings. These risks are particularly high for unaccompanied and separated children and children without parental care. As of the beginning of August 2022, EU Member States, Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway had registered over 25 000 unaccompanied and separated children arriving from Ukraine. Although participating States are making considerable efforts to ensure that these children are registered, have access to child protection systems, and do not go missing and exploited, more protection safeguards should be in place to ensure that girls and boys do not fall victim to sexual and other forms of exploitation⁵.

The risks of exploitation extend to the virtual space as Ukrainians are using Internet and social media to look for help and employment, while traffickers contact them under a pretext of assistance or job offers. Moreover, online searches for explicit content and sexual services from Ukrainian women and girls increased substantially. For example, global search traffic for “Ukrainian porn” increased by 600%, while searches for “Ukrainian escorts” increased by 200% in the early months of the humanitarian crisis (Thomson Reuters, March 2022). Although those online searches have decreased in recent months, new terms such as “Ukrainian Refugee Porn” have exploded in popularity (Thomson Reuters, June 2022). This spike in demand for sexual access to Ukrainian women and girls is an incentive for traffickers to recruit and exploit them at scale.

To help participating States addressing the risks, the OSR/CTHB issued two sets of recommendations, based on early assessment visits in neighboring countries⁶. The recommendations contained guidance for immediate prevention measures and responses to pressing needs, and policy measures to prevent and mitigate vulnerabilities. They also looked at longer-term challenges like integration into host communities. A separate set of recommendations calls on enhancing efforts to identify and mitigate risks of trafficking in human beings online.

While temporary protection measures by host countries and expressions of solidarity have been remarkable, visits and observations made by the OSCE confirmed that more extensive and robust efforts are needed to prevent the current humanitarian crisis from turning into a human trafficking crisis. While multiple actions have been taken, substantial gaps remain in the areas of prevention and protection remain and efforts are needed to develop short-, mid- and long-term anti-trafficking

³ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-nalysis/glotip.html>

⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/war-ukraine-pose-immediate-threat-children>

⁵ [OSCE/UN Roundtable calls for strengthening protection of children against violence, including trafficking, amid the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine | OSCE](#)

⁶ [Recommendations of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings on the need to enhance anti-trafficking prevention amid mass migration flows | OSCE](#), March 2022 and [Recommendations on enhancing efforts to identify and mitigate risks of trafficking in human beings online as a result of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine | OSCE](#), April 2022

strategies which would help participating States to deepen and extend their initial prevention efforts and complement them with measures to effectively detect and prosecute human trafficking, and protect its victims. This side event will provide a unique opportunity to identify and further these efforts.

Objectives

- Raise awareness around the current challenges in the areas of prevention and protection of women and girls at risk of sexual exploitation;
- Highlight the role of demand and technology facilitating sexual exploitation;
- Discuss the need for more effective prevention strategies with a specific focus on discouraging the demand that fosters trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Agenda

Welcoming and opening remarks:

- Uzra Zeya, US Under Secretary of State
- Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Speakers:

- Kateryna Cherepakha, President, “La Strada-Ukraine” (via Zoom)
- Kateryna Ryabiko, First Deputy Director, ODIHR
- Ioana Sandescu Bauer, Chairwoman, eLiberare, Romania
- Anna Ekstedt, Swedish Ambassador-at-large for Combating Trafficking in Persons

Moderator – Valiant Richey, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings