



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**Report to the Permanent Council by Dr. Kari Johnstone, OSCE Special  
Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings  
9 November 2023**

Thank you, Mr. Chair

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is my **first report to the Permanent Council**, and I thank the Chair for the warm welcome as I step into my role.

It is a privilege to be here with you and to have the opportunity to fulfill **the mandate** of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

At its core, our mission is to help you, all 57 participating States, to prevent, combat, and ultimately end trafficking in human beings and protect victims. When stepping into my new role, I am committed to keeping the mandate you designed and approved at the forefront of my actions and decisions. It is comprehensive, and you have given us a robust set of tools to implement it.

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The Office of the Special Representative has been through a year of internal transition. Yet, despite changes in leadership, it has consistently and relentlessly fulfilled its mandate.

It's also been a year with persistent and emerging challenges across the OSCE region and a volatile international security situation. War, conflict, and displacement exacerbate vulnerabilities, and people in vulnerable positions are at increasing risk of exploitation, including human trafficking. Exploitation violates the dignity of those who suffer it, it creates trauma that can last a lifetime, and it frays the fabric of our communities. This is not only a **human rights issue** but also a **security issue, extending across all three dimensions**.

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## The work in 2023

I will showcase the work carried out in 2023 in three parts. **First**, the SR Office has continued to **assist participating States in the implementation of OSCE commitments** through research, policy development, tailored technical assistance, and capacity-building. **Second**, the Office continued to ensure **impactful co-ordination of all the OSCE work in combating trafficking** in human beings across the three dimensions, within the OSCE, as well as with external partners. **Third**, the Office continued to raise **the public and political profile of the OSCE anti-trafficking agenda** in relevant international and national fora.

Let me now delve into the first part, on the implementation of OSCE commitments through our activities.

One of the pillars of the work of the Office is conducting **country-visits**, designed to assess and help strengthen national anti-trafficking frameworks. Earlier this year, we published the country visit reports from the Special Representative's visits to **the United Kingdom, Norway, and Latvia**, all undertaken in 2022, and we conducted a country visit to **Kyrgyzstan** in February 2023.

We also organized several regional events this year, with a tailored focus on specific regional challenges. Our best – and our most practical – example of this is our **simulation-based exercises**.

In June, in Astana, Kazakhstan, for example, the Office conducted the first Central Asian simulation-based training for **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan** – which gathered over 100 anti-trafficking multi-agency practitioners from all the five States, working together to identify and assist victims of trafficking in mixed migration flows, as well as investigate and prosecute traffickers. The simulation was carried out with great help from our colleagues in the Central Asian OSCE Field Operations. It was the first time these stakeholders, who are all invested and work in combating trafficking nationally, came together to train and share their experiences with each other. This is an excellent example of the OSCE's ability to effect tangible change, and a testament to the usefulness of the mandate for participating States.

It is highly rewarding to see that States find the format of the live simulation-based training developed by our Office beneficial and actively replicate it in national contexts. Only this year, we facilitated **national simulation-based trainings** in **Moldova** and **Ukraine** (organized by the respective colleagues there), as well as in **Georgia**, in just a few weeks. And we are currently conducting a regional simulation in **Germany**, in partnership with the **Council of Baltic Sea States**.

The ultimate goal for us is to hand over the format to national authorities and help them integrate it in their regular anti-trafficking training curricula for all anti-trafficking stakeholders, ranging from police to social service providers, from prosecutors to migration authorities, from labour inspectors to shelter staff.

In addition to the simulations, we implement a **“policy to practice” approach** in other areas of our work as well. In assisting to prevent and combat **labour trafficking in supply chains**, for example, we have taken a multi-faceted approach this year. Let’s start from the work we conduct internally in partnership with the Department of Management and Finance, to ensure the OSCE’s own procurement does not foster forced labour. This year, we released the second edition of our procurement guidance, rolled out mandatory e-learning for all OSCE procurement staff, and continued procurement trainings for OSCE Field Operations’ staff. We have now also incorporated social criteria in high-risk tenders.

But our ambition for tangible impact extends beyond the OSCE. A major achievement this year was our Office’s ascension to the **Secretariat** of the multi-agency **UN Task Force for Combating Human Trafficking and Forced Labour in Supply Chains**, which is designed to leverage the UN's extensive procurement power to address trafficking for forced labour within its supply chains. This achievement further underscores the OSCE’s recognized international leadership on this key topic.

Closely related is the **financial sector**. This year, the Office has worked closely with financial intelligence units and the financial sector in several States, to develop guidance on how to identify cases of trafficking through financial transaction-monitoring and financial intelligence. With the same “policy to practice” approach, we seek to ensure our work is operational, such as with financial investigations. For example, our work closely supported the release of **Cyprus’** first operational alert to its financial institutions that has already led to investigations of several cases of trafficking for sham marriages.

To foster partnerships between the public sector and financial institutions, together with the Council of Europe, we organized a joint regional round-table in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** in September on strengthening the role of the private sector and financial institutions in detecting and preventing trafficking in human beings. The roundtable brought together almost 60 participants from law enforcement agencies, prosecutor's offices, anti-trafficking co-ordination structures, financial intelligence units, financial institutions, trade unions, and academia from **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia**. To sustain momentum on emerging threats and risks that the financial sector faces in the OSCE region, we are updating our flagship 2019 paper on "Following the Money" to keep up with the fast-changing nature of trafficking and incorporate red flag-indicators of emerging forms of human trafficking, such as forced criminality and those related to crypto currencies.

Speaking of emerging trends – the intersection between **technology and trafficking** in human beings remains one of the defining topics of the current global conversation on efforts to end human trafficking. Indeed, the future success of countries in eradicating human trafficking will very much depend on how they are prepared for and equipped to harness technology to fight this crime.

To assist States to address this, we invited participating States to **four different regional workshops** this year, which focused on raising awareness and exchange of good practices with regards to addressing the misuse of technology for trafficking in human beings, as well as the positive use of tech to combat trafficking. These regional workshops involved policymakers, law enforcement and prosecutors.

Additionally, on 18 October, EU Anti-Trafficking Day, we launched our latest study – a result of several years of research – "**Mapping the online landscape of risks of trafficking in human beings on sexual services websites across the OSCE region.**" This study seeks to address the information gap existing in the anti-trafficking community about websites at high risk of facilitating sex trafficking across the OSCE area. The report's findings are based on the mapping and analysis of almost 2,900 sex services websites containing over 3 million advertisements across 40 OSCE participating States. Nothing of this scale has ever been done before. Interestingly, what we found is that regardless of geographical location, economic or cultural standing, national jurisdiction or the like, **every country has platforms with high risks of trafficking**. This is why

*international* measures, covering *all* participating States, are required, in order for us to get ahead of criminals and systematically monitor online platforms.

The mapping report was **the last of three studies on several topics we issued this year**. In March, we published a study on **“the ‘social path’ to identification and assistance”** for victims of trafficking, central to any strong anti-trafficking system. The paper provides an analysis of how to identify and assist victims of trafficking outside of the criminal justice framework. In October this year, we also began conducting national workshops related to this paper, to assist in carrying out the work from policy to practice. Last month, workshops on this were held in **Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania**. By the end of the year, we will have completed workshops in **Bulgaria, Portugal, and Slovakia**, as well as in every region of **Moldova**.

In June, we issued a comprehensive study on how to modernize **National Action Plans** on combating trafficking in human beings, selecting best practices from across the entire OSCE region.

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Now to the second part of our work. In 2023, the Office **continued to ensure impactful co-ordination of all the OSCE work in combating trafficking in human beings** across the three dimensions, within the OSCE, as well as with external partners.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of July this year, we supported a **joint OSCE committee meeting** by the three Chairs of the committees, organized in connection with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, which showcased the continued relevance of that visionary document to which all participating States subscribed.

Effective co-ordination with **OSCE Field Operations** and other **executive structures**, and especially the **CTHB focal points**, is critical. In 2023, we continued to gather them all in order to operationalize that co-ordination and to build synergies and alignment, and I will chair the next focal point meeting in December. Focal Points provide invaluable assistance and expertise to participating States. We are currently about to finalize a joint publication together with **ODIHR**, which provides a comprehensive exploration of the complex dynamics involved in trafficking of persons belonging to minorities, including national minorities.

The Special Representative's Office leverages and maintains its good co-operation with **external partners** through different channels. We regularly engage with the UN and other international organizations through the coordination mechanism known as **ICAT**, the Interagency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons. Just yesterday, I was delighted to participate, on behalf of the OSCE Secretary General, in the Principals meeting for ICAT, led by the 2023 co-chairs, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (OSRSG VAC), which endorsed a joint **Call to Action to combat and end child trafficking**.

We also continue to enhance our practice of co-organizing annual meetings of National Anti-Trafficking Co-ordinators and Rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms with the **Council of Europe**. The 2023 meeting was hosted by the Council of Europe, and gathered representatives from 60 States across the OSCE region. This year's discussions focused on combating human trafficking for the purpose of forced criminality, improving identification of and assistance to foreign trafficking victims, as well as the proactive use of financial investigations in human trafficking cases.

Additionally, in connection with the country visits that I already spoke about, regular co-ordination of country visits with the **Council of Europe** continues to promote synergies and advance the anti-trafficking agendas in the Council of Europe and the OSCE region. Importantly, such co-ordination avoids duplication of efforts and allows for coherent and comprehensive advice and support to national anti-trafficking stakeholders. For example, in January, we held joint meetings with the Council of Europe and the Bulgarian National Commission on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings as well as the Bulgarian Parliament to present the findings from the respective country reports.

Collaboration with the office of the **EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator** has also included joint work and advocacy on addressing technology-facilitated trafficking and responding to the humanitarian crisis related to Ukraine. We have also been providing our support and expertise to the **European Parliament's** members in their drafting efforts on the new EU anti-trafficking Directive, particularly on the complex issue of how to discourage the **demand** that fosters sexual exploitation, and on advocating for comprehensive policies to address the misuse of technology.

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Now, let me turn to the third and last grouping of activities carried out this year. The Office has continued to **raise the public and political profile** of the OSCE anti-trafficking agenda in relevant international and national fora.

This year, the Office kept up a strong profile and efforts in assisting participating States in preventing the humanitarian situation related to **Ukraine** from turning into a human trafficking crisis.

Just last month, then Acting-Co-ordinator Andrea Salvoni – now my Deputy – joined colleagues from the Support Programme to Ukraine in Lviv for one of the simulation-based exercises I mentioned earlier, which they organized to support Ukraine identify and protect trafficking victims and investigate cases within the country, alongside our efforts focusing outside the country.

This year alone, we conducted **workshops in 15 participating States** – Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Austria, Portugal, Bulgaria, Greece, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom – on the recommendations we issued last year on the need to enhance anti-trafficking prevention amid mass migration flows to protect those fleeing the war from becoming trafficking victims. We still have another one coming up before we end the year, in Sweden; and others are being planned for early next year, including in North America.

Following these workshops, we have enhanced our efforts to support countries in boosting their mechanisms for identification of and assistance to trafficking victims. This is timely – based on lessons learnt from previous crises – we are likely approaching a phase when more trafficking cases and victims will be identified.

Alongside the programmatic work to support anti-trafficking authorities in your capitals, we have continued working to keep this issue high on the political agenda, both here in Vienna and beyond. One example is the Ambassadorial breakfast the Secretary General hosted together with my predecessor, to discuss political prioritization of anti-trafficking work in your respective countries in light of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ukraine. Another example is the workshop for members of Parliament we supported in Warsaw in June on strengthening the legislative response to trafficking in human beings, organized together with the UK's All-Party Parliamentary Group on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery and the Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland.

Yet another example, which many of you are familiar with, is **the BeSafe Campaign**, developed together with Thomson Reuters; we revamped it this year for World Day against Trafficking in Persons in July. I would like to thank the Ambassadors and Delegates in this room – and also the OSCE Secretary General – who took the time to participate and shared the video we published. The campaign has been a tool to raise awareness on the human trafficking risks for Ukrainian refugees. With **the total number of engagements** with this campaign about to reach *half a million* – and being the most trending campaign under the “End Trafficking” hashtag (#) on Twitter on the World Day, it is safe to say that it has been successful. Thank you for your contributions.

Last but not least, let me recognize the **23rd Conference of the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons in April** this year, with the theme of “National Leadership to End Human Trafficking.” It focused on raising the political will to ensure effective anti-trafficking work can take place. This year’s Alliance drew a record number of registered participants, 850, with speakers ranging from the former Prime Minister of the **United Kingdom**, the Deputy Prime-Minister of **Bulgaria**, the Minister of Justice of **Spain**, and the Chair of the International Relations Committee of the Senate of **Uzbekistan** - to a panel of **survivor leaders**.

The Conference was also **former Special Representative Valiant Richey’s** last day in Office, and he closed it by urging States to prioritize anti-trafficking efforts and outlining ten specific areas where action was urgently needed. Those ten areas, **the “Decalogue”** as it was called, remains a very inspiring and valid roadmap to guide States’ anti-trafficking efforts and this Office’s work in coming years.

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**It is clear: Despite internal turnover and external turmoil across the OSCE region, this Office keeps on delivering.**

In total, the Office has been physically present in **39 participating States** this year alone in various capacities, and interacted with *all* of you in different fora.

### ***The Future***

As I begin this new role, I pledge to work closely to support you, participating States, to implement your commitments to combat all forms of human trafficking and to maintain a collaborative, inclusive, and transparent approach in doing so.



I will focus on further enhancing co-ordination among OSCE executive structures, national institutions, and other partners including international organizations, civil society, survivors, and the private sector to maximize impact and efficiency. I am also committed to ensuring the OSCE's CTHB efforts are as strategic, nimble, and proactive as possible—all things that have placed the Organization as a global leader in the fight against human trafficking.

To this end, the Office will continue to meet States' requests for practical tools, analysis, and exchange of best practices to help respond to emerging challenges and opportunities, as it has done on technology, financial investigations, and people fleeing war. We will work to help States meaningfully implement victim-centred, gender-sensitive, trauma- and survivor-informed policies and programmes, such as proactive, broad victim identification and comprehensive services. In addition to supporting States on strengthening criminal justice responses, I would like to support States' provision of remedies and compensation for victims. We will work to enhance efforts to combat the rapidly growing form of trafficking for forced criminality, including to help prevent punishment of victims in these circumstances. As conditions evolve and traffickers adapt, we will focus on helping participating States and OSCE institutions tailor their efforts to prevent trafficking and protect vulnerable individuals including minorities, persons with disabilities, and those fleeing conflict or natural disasters.

The OSCE should be proud of its contributions as a leader in the global fight against human trafficking. It truly stands out in a number of areas, including as the only multilateral organization with strong procurement policies to prevent trafficking in its own supply chains and – looking at the OSCE more broadly – establishing an advisory body of experts with lived experience of human trafficking, the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council (ISTAC). More States are taking measures to prevent trafficking in supply chains, and more States are consulting survivors with lived experience and integrating their expertise into anti-trafficking policies and laws. However, more can and should be done at the national level to more fully integrate the unique insights of those with lived experience. Together with ODIHR, we stand ready to help you do so, and I am confident your anti-trafficking laws, policies, and practices will be even more effective and impactful.

### ***Thanks***

Before I close, allow me to express my gratitude to a few people.

First, I wish to thank you, **the OSCE participating States** and the **Chair in Office** for your constant support to and open engagement with the Office. I look forward to collaborating with you to support your anti-trafficking efforts and will do my best to live up to your expectations.

I also wish to thank **Secretary General Helga Schmid**, who has been an extraordinary and vocal anti-trafficking champion, and who has trusted and supported the Office, my Deputy Andrea Salvoni, and the team, during this time of transition, and over the years she has been in Office.

I would like to extend my thanks to **our donors** for extra-budgetary project contributions in 2023, in particular the governments of Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, Norway, Poland, Switzerland, Spain, the UK, and the US. A special thanks also to Germany, Italy, Norway, and the United States for **seconding staff** to the Office: your support is very much appreciated and crucial for the success of the Office.

Finally, I want to thank the dedicated, talented team at the Office who have continued to deliver for you and people facing human trafficking throughout the OSCE region. It is an honour to join them and to build on Special Representative Richey's leadership.

Ending trafficking in human beings is a continuous and **shared challenge**. Human trafficking remains an open wound in all of our societies, and it is time to prioritize the necessary political, human, and financial resources to meet the challenge. The OSCE has a particularly innovative set of commitments, expertise, and tools to tackle it, coupled with a steadfast commitment to combat human trafficking and identify common solutions to persistent and emerging challenges. The magnitude of the problem forces us to tackle it **together**, and recent years' experience confirms this is the right approach. Working together we can make an impact to reduce the suffering and trauma that traffickers cause and advance our shared commitments to combat human trafficking.

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I look forward to supporting and collaborating with you, getting to know you, and building on the excellent work of the Office.

Thank you for your kind attention, commitment, and support.