



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1384 Vienna, 28 July 2022**

#### **EU Statement on the World Day against Trafficking in Persons**

1. On 30 July, we will mark the World Day against Trafficking in Persons that regrettably takes place, this year, against the backdrop of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, which we condemn in the strongest possible terms as a blatant violation of international law, the UN Charter and OSCE principles and commitments. As a result, Europe is experiencing its largest refugee crisis since the Second World War, with millions of people in Ukraine forced to flee their country or internally displaced. The EU reiterates its call on Russia to immediately and unconditionally cease its military actions and withdraw all its troops and equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine, including the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula.
2. Russia's war against Ukraine has also led to a growing online demand for sexual services or pornographic content involving Ukrainian women and girls, as well as to dubious offers for housing and jobs. The ongoing war is likely to increase the risk of falling victim to traffickers also in the longer term and will require our constant attention in order to monitor and mitigate such risks, be it for sexual or labour exploitation. We are also concerned about reports of forced deportations of Ukrainian citizens to Russia or Russia-occupied territories in Ukraine, including through so-called "filtration camps", with no access to legal assistance or information.
3. EU Member States are welcoming and supporting an unprecedented number of people fleeing the war in Ukraine. The EU Temporary Protection Directive, as well

as the Common Anti-Trafficking Plan, address the risks of trafficking in human beings and support potential victims among those fleeing the war in Ukraine. Member States are providing them food, shelter, as well as access to health services, education and the labour market. We will continue to provide protection to those seeking shelter and we will help those looking for a safe way home. At the same time, as foreseen in the Common Anti-Trafficking Plan, prepared under the lead of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, awareness raising on and prevention of Trafficking in Persons have to continue. Identification and protection of victims is key. Cooperation between law enforcement and judicial authorities, as well as with Europol and Eurojust, contribute to stopping criminals and bringing them to justice. These joint actions between the EU, its agencies, EU Member States, civil society organisations, Ukraine and Moldova lead to concrete results.

4. The EU commends this year's theme "use and abuse of technology", which highlights that technology can be misused by traffickers but also serves as an opportunity to strengthen our anti-trafficking efforts in this regard. It is a timely focus given that multiple reports have shown that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on trafficking in human beings, partly due to the expanded use of digital technologies and increased presence and activities online by criminal networks and traffickers.
5. The World Day against Trafficking in Persons is also the final day of UNODC's month long "Blue Heart Campaign", in which the EU and its Member States are particularly mobilised. This global awareness-raising initiative seeks to encourage involvement of all stakeholders, to inspire action and help prevent this heinous crime and its impact on society. The UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons provides humanitarian, legal, and financial aid to victims of trafficking in persons through established channels of assistance including governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations across the globe.
6. The fight against trafficking in human beings is a core element of the OSCE's and the EU's work. In the OSCE context, the role of technology in THB was discussed most recently during the third Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, which had a dedicated session on trafficking in cyberspace. This provided an opportunity

for fruitful discussion between participating States, victims of trafficking, civil society and other relevant actors on threats, problems and vulnerabilities in online trafficking in human beings and exploitation.

7. We would also like to commend the cooperation between the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (OSR/CTHB) and the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator. We welcome the contribution of his Office to the publication on “Policy Responses to Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings” and the OSR/CTHB’s timely recommendations to identify and mitigate risks of trafficking in human beings online stemming from the war in Ukraine.
8. The EU promotes a comprehensive approach when addressing trafficking in human beings, which is human rights-based, victim-centred, gender-sensitive and age-specific. This approach goes from preventing the crime, and protecting and empowering victims, to bringing traffickers to justice. In line with the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025, which recognises the need to tackle the online business model of traffickers, the EU has engaged in a dialogue with relevant internet and technology companies.
9. The EU and its Member States remain committed to working closely with international partners, including the OSCE, to promote adherence to international legal standards on combatting trafficking in persons.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ALBANIA\*, UKRAINE and REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, the Potential Candidate Country GEORGIA, as well as ANDORRA, MONACO and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.