

Strengthening the Legislative Response to Human Trafficking Risks for Ukrainian Refugees

Joint Communiqué

We, parliamentarians from 13 European countries, met in Warsaw, Poland on the 27-28th June 2023, under the invitation of Elżbieta Witek, the Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, to discuss the risks of trafficking in human beings for people fleeing Ukraine and identify opportunities for strengthening legislation and policy measures to protect Ukrainian refugees from exploitation.

We condemn the actions of the Russian aggressor in Ukraine and call for immediate withdrawal of all Russian forces. We also condemn deportation and forced removal of Ukrainian citizens, in particular children, from the occupied Ukrainian territories to Russia. We understand that the number of illegally deported Ukrainian children to Russia is around 20,000. We call on the international community to continue using all possible measures to stop such genocide, as defined by international law, against Ukrainians, to stop issuing Russian passports to Ukrainian children, to ensure the return of children from Russian territory to Ukraine, and to bring all those guilty of this crime to justice.

We recognize there are severe risks of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual and labour exploitation, forced criminality and other forms of exploitation faced by people fleeing Ukraine, especially women and children, and commit to protecting them by adopting legislative and policy measures to prevent and mitigate their vulnerabilities.

We will bring together parliamentarians in each of our own countries who have a like-minded interest in making progress to reduce the risk of trafficking in human beings. These working groups will explore how we can strengthen long-term support for Ukrainian refugees, share intelligence and best practice and monitor technology, to ensure not solely individuals, but also the State, is resilient to human trafficking.

Long-term Support

- We will initiate, as appropriate, amendments to national laws to ensure long-term access to assistance and integration measures such as temporary residence permit, access to labour market, family preservation and reunification and age-appropriate care and education for children.
- We will ensure, through relevant legislative amendments, that victims of trafficking are provided with long-term tailored assistance, irrespective of their readiness to co-operate with law-enforcement.

Sharing Information

- We will advocate for establishing clear procedures for rapid exchange of information on people seeking protection, especially children, registered in transit and destination countries and their place of residence in order to prevent them from missing and reduce their vulnerability to trafficking in human beings.
- We will ensure that national law enables the rapid exchange of information amongst anti-trafficking actors to adjust responses according to the constantly changing traffickers' tactics as well as promoting awareness and monitoring among related agencies operating in the same space, with an emphasis on co-operation, technology and information sharing.

Prevention and Enforcement

- Deeply concerned by the use of technology to groom and recruit victims of trafficking, exercise power and control over them, and exploit them, we will undertake efforts to adopt legislation that enhances safety online, establishes mandatory efforts and liability for technology companies, and creates standards for monitoring and reporting of harmful acts online to protect potential victims and prevent future instances of exploitation. This requires a global response.
- Being aware that the majority of displaced Ukrainians seeking protection are women and children, we will consider adopting and amending laws to enable smoother monitoring of locations known for high risks of human trafficking, including those related to provision of sexual services, street begging and informal sectors of the economy as well as high-risk business sectors.
- Deeply alarmed by the rapid increase in demand that fosters human trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation, we will consider adopting legislative tools to improve States' responses to this problem, including regulations which strengthen and enforce legal obligations to identify and eliminate forced labour from business supply chains, import bans which restrict access to goods and services produced by forced labour, strict liability statutes that criminalize the purchase of sex from children and other victims of trafficking, as well as fostering greater attention towards prevention.