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USDOS – US Department of State

2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Lithuania

LITHUANIA: Tier 1

The Government of Lithuania fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting period; therefore Lithuania remained on Tier 1. These efforts included authorities investigating more domestic trafficking cases; collaborating with foreign counterparts on more international trafficking investigations; and establishing an association of anti-trafficking NGOs to expand assistance to victims. Although the government meets the minimum standards, authorities prosecuted fewer suspects, convicted significantly fewer traffickers, and identified the lowest number of victims in five years. Shortcomings in victim protection during the investigation and trial process hampered law enforcement efforts, and concerns persisted that relevant agencies lacked the knowledge to recognize indicators of child trafficking. Additionally, authorities inconsistently implemented victim identification and referral mechanisms throughout the country, especially in rural areas.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increase efforts to vigorously investigate and effectively prosecute sex trafficking and labor trafficking cases and convict traffickers. • Proactively identify victims, particularly children, and provide training for authorities and child protective services officials. • Implement formal victim identification and referral mechanisms for victim assistance throughout the country, especially in rural areas. • Expand efforts to protect victims from threats and re-victimization during the investigation and trial of trafficking cases, including by developing clear procedures on how to protect victims. • Expand training for investigators and prosecutors on building trafficking cases, including collecting evidence to corroborate victim testimony. • Provide specialized services to child victims in foster care homes and mixed-use shelters. • Ensure victims have access to appropriate mental health professionals during the interrogation process. • Develop a more comprehensive data collection system, which disaggregates data, including by type of trafficking.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased law enforcement efforts. Articles 147 and 157 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties ranging from two to 12 years' imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Authorities investigated 13 trafficking cases (six sex trafficking and seven labor trafficking, including forced criminality), compared with 11 in 2018, 35 in 2017, and 29 in 2016. Continuing a multi-year decline, the government initiated prosecutions of 24 suspected traffickers (31 in 2018, 54 in 2017, and 64 in 2016) and convicted 12 traffickers, a significant decrease from 44 in 2018 (20 in 2017, 23 in 2016). Nearly all traffickers received prison sentences with terms ranging from three to eight years and four months. Specialized prosecutors led the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases in five municipalities. Government officials reported collecting adequate evidence remained a problem in prosecuting trafficking cases that occurred outside of Lithuania. The government collaborated with foreign counterparts in 42 international trafficking investigations (32 in 2018), including a sex trafficking case, which involved 118 victims and resulted in the arrest of 13 Lithuanian suspects living in Spain. The general prosecutor's office received no extradition requests (one in 2018) and issued three European arrest orders in trafficking cases (two in 2018). The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in trafficking offenses. The general prosecutor's office organized four anti-trafficking training events for 30 specialized prosecutors, and the courts administration organized an anti-trafficking training for 27 judges. The Border Guards Service arranged anti-trafficking training events for 53 border officials. The Ministry of Interior organized anti-trafficking training events for more than 200 law enforcement officials in five cities.

PROTECTION

The government decreased protection efforts. Authorities identified 36 victims in 2019, the lowest number of identified victims in five years and a decline from 58 in 2018 and 60 in 2017. As in previous years, the government did not report the types of exploitation of victims, corroborating experts' concerns that the data collected across government agencies and civil society were inconsistent and did not provide a comprehensive picture of the trafficking situation. While authorities implemented formal victim identification and referral mechanisms for victim

assistance, observers reported authorities in some parts of the country underutilized both and lacked the skills to identify victims. Amid reports indicating an increase in the exploitation of foreign workers, authorities identified six foreign victims in 2019 (none in 2018, 20 in 2017). Observers reported a decrease in rural areas of local officials’ propensity to blame victims. Government-funded NGOs supported 224 trafficking victims and at-risk individuals (239 in 2018, 219 in 2017). The government allocated NGOs €165,000 (\$185,390) for victim assistance programs, the same amount as in 2018; local governments did not report allotting funds to support trafficking victims in 2019, compared with €48,000 (\$53,930) in 2018.

Experts raised concerns about inadequate protection and assistance measures for child trafficking victims. Authorities placed child victims in foster care homes or mixed-use shelters, as there were no shelters specifically for child trafficking victims. According to observers, child protective services struggled to identify child trafficking victims and refer them to care, especially in rural areas. In 2019, authorities identified four minors (three in 2018, eight in 2017). Child sexual abuse victims, including trafficking victims, could seek assistance in the government-operated national support center in Vilnius. The government placed Lithuanian female trafficking victims in municipal and NGO-facilitated shelters for victims of domestic violence and had the option to place foreign victims at a refugee reception center in Rukla. Law enforcement’s shortcomings in adequately protecting victims during the investigation and the trial process, including the absence of clear policy, contributed to victims’ reluctance to assist in cases. In particular, traffickers sometimes threatened victims as they were entering or exiting the courtroom and victims lacked access to mental health professionals during or after their interrogations by law enforcement. Legislation allowed foreign trafficking victims a 30-day reflection period to decide whether to cooperate with law enforcement; foreign victims cooperating with law enforcement could receive temporary residency. While the government provided legal representation to victims, observers reported attorneys had little experience with trafficking issues; as a result, NGOs often hired private attorneys for victims.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The government allocated approximately €183,000 (\$205,620) to implement its 2017-2019 national action plan and maintained an interagency commission for coordinating anti-trafficking efforts. The commission reported a new action plan was in development for 2020. During the reporting period, the commission supported the establishment of a national anti-trafficking NGO association to expand assistance to victims and to advise on anti-trafficking laws, regulations, policies, programs, and implementations. Municipalities continued to finance and implement reforms to the institutional child care system with the goal to move all children from institutions to families by 2020; the minister of social affairs and labor signed a decree prohibiting the placement of new children into care at orphanages as of January 1, 2020. In cooperation with the United Kingdom (UK), the government developed migration policies to protect Lithuanian migrants; it also appointed a specialized trafficking police officer to serve as an attaché in the Lithuanian embassy in the UK. The government and NGOs participated in awareness-raising campaigns organized by the interior ministry in cooperation with regional municipalities, including informing victims and vulnerable groups of their rights and providing information on how to receive financial, health, and social care assistance. Additionally, the police organized an anti-trafficking awareness event in the municipality of Kaunas to inform residents about different forms of trafficking and assistance. The police advertised and managed an email account that the public could use to report potential trafficking situations and solicit advice. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts, fining 16 individuals for buying sexual services. The Labor Inspectorate and police inspected construction sites to ensure employers were complying with the law regarding third country nationals and reported 26 illegally hired individuals as potential labor trafficking victims. The inspectorate noted labor inspectors lacked the skills to identify labor trafficking victims and subsequently organized five trainings for 60 new inspectors on how to identify recruitment practices known to facilitate human trafficking.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Lithuania, and traffickers exploit victims from Lithuania abroad. Law enforcement reports the majority of trafficking cases involve Lithuanian trafficking networks that prey on Lithuanian victims. Traffickers exploit Lithuanian men and boys in criminal activities, such as shoplifting, and Lithuanian women and children in commercial sex in Western Europe and Scandinavia. They also continue to exploit women and girls in sex trafficking within the country. Authorities report an increase in the number of women recruited for brokered marriages abroad; these women are vulnerable to sex trafficking, domestic servitude, and forced labor. Reports indicate an increase in exploitation of foreign workers from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. Foreign workers are at risk of labor trafficking as long-haul truck drivers, builders, ship hull assemblers, and welders. The 1,953 children institutionalized in approximately 97 child care institutions are vulnerable to trafficking.

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Austrian Red Cross Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)	Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583 F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589 info@ecoi.net	Contact Imprint & Disclaimer F.A.Q. Data Protection Notice
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