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USDOS – US Department of State

2019 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 convicting significantly more traffickers; increasing funding to NGOs for victim assistance programs, resulting in the provision of support to more victims and at-risk individuals; and implementing reforms to the childcare system, including the removal of children from state-run institutions, such as orphanages. Although the government meets the minimum standards, authorities investigated and prosecuted fewer trafficking cases. A lack of victim protection during the investigation and trial process hampered law enforcement efforts, and a lack of knowledge within relevant agencies in recognizing indicators of child trafficking resulted in fewer child victims identified. Authorities inconsistently implemented victim identification and referral mechanisms throughout the country, especially in rural areas where officials’ propensity to blame trafficking victims persisted.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase efforts to proactively investigate and effectively prosecute sex trafficking and labor trafficking cases and impose prison sentences on convicted traffickers. • Increase efforts to identify victims, particularly children, through enhanced training for police and child protective services officials. • Implement formal victim identification and referral mechanisms for victim assistance throughout the country, especially in rural areas. • Protect victims from threats and re-victimization during the investigation and trial of trafficking cases. • 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. • Expand training for investigators and prosecutors on building trafficking cases, including collecting evidence to corroborate victim testimony. • Develop training for officials on working with victims and understanding all forms of trafficking.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased law enforcement efforts, but increased the number of convictions. 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 regards to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Authorities initiated 11 investigations (one for sex trafficking, 10 for labor trafficking, including forced criminality and forced begging), compared with 35 in 2017. The government initiated prosecutions of 31 suspected traffickers (54 in 2017) and convicted 44 traffickers under articles 147 and 157 (20 in 2017). Nearly all traffickers received prison sentences with terms ranging from one to eight years. However, courts suspended eight traffickers' jail sentences and sentenced four traffickers with fines and no jail sentences. Government officials reported collecting adequate evidence remained a problem in prosecuting trafficking cases, specifically cases that occurred outside of Lithuania. The government collaborated with foreign counterparts in 32 international trafficking investigations, compared with 21 in 2017. The general prosecutor's office received one request for extradition (one in 2017) and issued two European arrest orders in trafficking cases (five in 2017). The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in trafficking offenses.

The National Police organized training sessions on how to conduct trafficking-related criminal investigations for 30 police officers, 72 judges, and 33 specialized prosecutors who participated in conferences and trainings dedicated to combating trafficking. The border guard arranged anti-trafficking training events for 36 border officials. The interior ministry organized a seminar in five municipalities; approximately 220 local authorities and law enforcement officials attended.

PROTECTION

The government maintained protection efforts. Authorities identified 58 victims in 2018 (60 in 2017); three were minors (eight in 2017). Government-funded NGOs supported 239 trafficking victims and at-risk individuals (219 in 2017). The central government allocated NGOs €165,000 (\$189,220) for victim assistance programs, compared with €115,000 (\$131,880) in 2017; local governments allotted €48,000 (\$55,050) to support trafficking victims. The government assisted 19 Lithuanian trafficking victims exploited overseas in obtaining legal documents, providing consultations, and coordinating with local NGOs for additional aid. While authorities implemented formal victim identification and referral mechanisms for victim assistance, observers reported authorities in some parts of the country underutilized both. Observers also continued to report local officials' tendency to blame trafficking victims, especially in rural areas.

Authorities continued to place child victims in mixed-use shelters, as there were no shelters specifically for child trafficking victims. According to NGOs, child protective services lacked knowledge in recognizing indicators of child trafficking, especially in rural areas. Child sexual abuse victims, including trafficking victims, could seek assistance in the government-operated national support center in Vilnius. Five publicly funded men's crisis centers had the capacity to provide support to trafficking victims, including finding shelter; government-funded NGOs assisted 128 male victims. Law

enforcement’s shortcomings in adequately protecting victims during the investigation and the trial process contributed to victims’ reluctance to assist cases. In particular, traffickers 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. Authorities identified no foreign victims in 2018 and 20 in 2017. 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. In 2018, 19 victims received approximately €70,000 (\$80,280) in compensation; in 2017, 13 victims received approximately €34,000 (\$38,990) in compensation.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The government allocated approximately €183,000 (\$209,860) to implement its national action plan and maintained an interagency commission for coordinating anti-trafficking efforts. Municipalities financed and implemented reforms to the institutional child care system with the goal to move all children from institutions to families by 2020; for instance, the municipality of Kaunas moved 79 children from all state-run institutions, such as orphanages, to foster care homes. The interior ministry developed guidelines to help municipalities counter human trafficking at the local level; 19 municipalities adopted these guidelines. The interior ministry cooperated with the United Kingdom (UK) on combating trafficking, including partnering with civil society in the UK to provide assistance to victims. The interior ministry also organized an awareness campaign in schools located in Lithuanian communities in the UK and Spain. The government partially funded and participated in a regional project aimed at developing the Baltic countries as an international model for providing sustainable assistance to trafficking victims, and strengthening cooperation networks with countries of origin. The government and NGOs participated in awareness-raising campaigns organized by the interior ministry in cooperation with regional municipalities; the interior ministry allocated €53,000 (\$60,780) towards the campaigns. The police advertised and managed an email account that the public could use to report potential trafficking situations and ask for advice. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. The Labor Inspectorate established centers in five major regions to monitor trafficking and illegal labor practices targeting migrants in Lithuanian companies. The centers included representatives from multiple government institutions, including the police and migration department. The inspectorate conducted checks of business recruitment practices, focusing on whether businesses employed third country nationals and abided by anti-trafficking legislation. Additionally, the inspectorate and police inspected construction sites to ensure employers were complying with the law regarding third country nationals. The General Prosecutors’ Office organized an anti-trafficking training, and 15 labor inspectors attended. The State Labor Inspection Office also organized five training sessions throughout the country; 42 inspectors participated.

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. Women and girls exploited in sex trafficking within the country remain a problem. Reports indicate the percentage of male victims vulnerable to forced labor and criminal activity increased and composed the largest group of identified trafficking victims. Foreign workers from Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine are at risk of labor trafficking as long-haul truck drivers, builders, ship hull assemblers, and welders. The approximately 2,800 children institutionalized in approximately 90 orphanages are especially vulnerable to trafficking.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on trafficking in persons (covering April 2018 to March 2019)

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