

2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Romania

ROMANIA (Tier 2)

The Government of Romania does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Romania remained on Tier 2. These efforts included identifying significantly more trafficking victims and adopting a new four-year national action strategy and NAP to combat human trafficking. The government enacted amendments to the criminal code increasing penalties for human trafficking crimes and excluding the possibility of suspended sentences. The government also enacted amendments expanding victims' access to free legal assistance and financial compensation by eliminating the 60-day deadline in which victims needed to make criminal complaints against their traffickers as a prerequisite for those rights. Furthermore, the National Agency for the Management of Seized Assets (ANABI) allocated funds from its national fund of confiscated criminal assets to an NGO to provide legal assistance, medical care, and counseling, among other services to trafficking victims with disabilities. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Alleged complicity, misconduct, and negligence by government employees related to trafficking crimes, particularly those involving the exploitation of children, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities living in government-run homes or residential treatment centers, remained a concern. Authorities did not screen for trafficking indicators or proactively identify victims among vulnerable populations, such as Roma, migrant workers, or children in government-run institutions. Widespread child trafficking, particularly sex trafficking, persisted with children representing nearly half of all identified victims for six out of the last seven years. The NRM did not include procedures for the referral and assistance of adult foreign trafficking victims without legal residency in the EU. Finally, as in previous years, the government did not provide sufficient funding for victim protection, leaving most victims without adequate services and at risk of re-victimization.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Investigate all allegations of official complicity, misconduct, and negligence in human trafficking and hold complicit officials, including local authorities in law enforcement and social services, criminally accountable through prosecution and conviction.
- Proactively identify trafficking victims by screening for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, including Roma, asylum-seekers, migrant workers, persons with disabilities and elderly persons living in government residential treatment centers, and children living in government-run institutions or under supervision of child protection services, and refer all victims to protection services.
- Strengthen efforts to monitor and prevent child sex trafficking, particularly in government-run institutions, and to enforce child labor laws, especially in rural areas and where social welfare services lack personnel and capacity to address violations.
- Expand the NRM to formally include procedures for the referral and assistance of foreign victims without legal residency in the EU.
- Ensure all identified victims receive assistance by increasing the funding, integration, coordination, quality, and availability of protection services, including medical care, counseling, long-term housing, and short-term shelters, particularly for child trafficking victims.
- Establish a sustainable financial mechanism to fund victim protection and services to support and expand integrated victim services, shelters, and other forms of customized victim assistance and protection.

- Develop a mechanism to accurately track and report the amount of allocated funds dedicated to anti-trafficking activities, such as awareness campaigns, integrated victim services, shelters, and other forms of assistance and protection.
- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Increase staff, training, and resources within the Organized Crime and Terrorism Investigation Directorate (DIICOT) and the Department for Combating Organized Crime (DCCO) to effectively investigate and prosecute trafficking cases.
- Ensure trafficking victims are not inappropriately incarcerated, fined, or otherwise penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies, including by enforcing the law prohibiting worker-paid recruitment fees and holding recruitment agencies criminally accountable for practices contributing to trafficking.
- Provide knowledgeable legal counsel for victims assisting prosecutions.

PROSECUTION

The government increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

Articles 210 and 211 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of five to 12 years' imprisonment for crimes involving an adult victim and seven to 15 years' imprisonment for those involving a child. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. In April 2024, the government enacted amendments to Article 210 and 211 of the criminal code that increased penalties prescribed for trafficking crimes and removed the possibility of applying suspended sentences for traffickers convicted under these provisions. Additionally, the government amended provisions of the criminal code relating to "pimping" to ensure that sex trafficking crimes would be prosecuted under Article 210 and 211, instead of alternative provisions with more lenient penalties.

In 2024, authorities investigated 538 trafficking cases (436 sex trafficking, 66 labor trafficking, and 36 unspecified forms of trafficking), the same number of investigations as in 2023. Authorities prosecuted 289 suspected traffickers (228 sex trafficking, 31 labor trafficking, and 30 unspecified forms of trafficking), compared with 290 in 2023. Courts convicted 161 traffickers (143 sex trafficking and 18 labor trafficking), compared with 162 in 2023. The majority of convicted traffickers received prison sentences that ranged from one year to 21 years. In 2024, DIICOT cooperated with European counterparts in 26 joint investigative teams (JIT), including four new JITs involving sex trafficking, an increase from 14 in 2023. In addition, Romanian authorities participated in a Europol-led hackathon on online human trafficking and a Frontex-led operation on criminal networks engaged in human trafficking. The Scotland Police seconded two Romanian police officers to its national human trafficking unit to address underreporting and recording of crimes perpetrated by and against Romanian nationals, provide culturally sensitive information to the Romanian diaspora and travelers, and train Scotland police officers on engaging with Romanian nationals.

DIICOT and DCCO were responsible for investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases. DIICOT maintained a dedicated anti-trafficking unit to prosecute trafficking crimes and provide training and support to prosecutors in DIICOT's regional offices. Additionally, DIICOT maintained a specialized unit for financial investigations, including trafficking-related crimes. Similarly, DCCO operated dedicated teams of anti-trafficking police officers nationwide and a financial investigations unit to enhance its capacity to investigate organized crime, including trafficking-related crime, and confiscate assets. ANABI provided support for financial investigations, traced assets internationally, and maintained a national fund of confiscated criminal assets available to finance trafficking victim compensation and grants to service providers. In 2024, ANABI allocated €65,000 (\$67,640) from the fund to an NGO to provide legal assistance, medical care, and counseling, among other services to 20 trafficking victims with disabilities.

Corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action during the year. In 2024, authorities investigated nine government employees for alleged trafficking crimes. Recent cases highlighted deeply rooted systemic issues in the social protection system, including corruption, a lack of oversight and accountability, and human rights abuses. In one case, a border police officer exploited two girls living in a government-run institution in sex trafficking, and, in another case, three government employees subjected persons with disabilities in residential centers to domestic servitude. NGOs and media continued to report concerns that staff working in government-run institutions for children facilitated trafficking. NGOs noted in certain counties Child Protection Services (CPS) officials acted as accomplices to traffickers. The General Police Inspectorate and the National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoption (ANDPDCA) maintained an identification and referral mechanism for trafficking cases among children in government-run institutions, facilitating cooperation and the exchange of information among police inspectorates and county-level CPS to help identify vulnerable children in government-run institutions who were at risk of trafficking. However, observers noted uneven levels of screening and proactive identification at the county level. The police maintained a specialized unit dedicated to investigating child sexual abuse cases, including potential child sex trafficking cases, but investigators reported difficulty proving the sexual coercion of children, attributing it to a lack of child-friendly interview techniques and engagement. DIICOT reported the need for resources to establish child-friendly hearing rooms in its local services.

Perennial staffing shortages, resource constraints, overburdened courts, and knowledge gaps continued to limit progress. Both DIICOT and DCCO operated with limited staff and resources, preventing them from effectively covering anti-trafficking cases in all jurisdictions. The high number of police officers retiring and anti-organized crime units shifting resources toward the fight against drugs created staff shortages and gaps in competency and impeded anti-trafficking efforts. Moreover, government and NGO representatives reported, even if fully staffed, the number of personnel dedicated to combating trafficking was insufficient. As a result, overextended investigators and prosecutors handled multiple cases simultaneously, making it difficult to build strong and successful prosecutions within the six-month period allowed for suspects to be held in pre-trial detention. Low retention and frequent transfers of prosecutors caused continuous reassignment of cases and, in turn, investigation delays. NGOs recommended amendments to the criminal code to reduce the length of trials, particularly the pre-trial case assessment, and improve the experience of victims during court proceedings. The police maintained a computer forensics system for detecting online sex trafficking and performing faster and more effective online investigations. In 2024, the police in some counties used technology to download content from websites and follow links to access new content for potential trafficking cases. Observers reported a lack of necessary resources and skills to perform fast and effective online investigations. While authorities developed some sensitivity to trafficking victims' situations and increasingly used a victim-centered approach, experts reported police, prosecutors, and judges continued to need training on trauma-informed, victim-centered practices as well as on current developments and trends, such as online trafficking. Experts also reported a need for training on financial investigations. The government's ability to fund and implement training programs, however, remained limited. Consequently, it relied on outside funding for most anti-trafficking training activities. The government, in partnership with other governments and NGOs, trained police, prosecutors, judges, labor inspectors, and other front-line workers on various topics, such as conducting interviews, understanding trafficking laws, and working with victims during criminal proceedings.

PROTECTION

The government maintained victim protection efforts.

In 2024, the government identified 600 trafficking victims (449 sex trafficking, 96 labor trafficking, and 30 other or unspecified forms of trafficking), a significant increase from 428 victims identified in 2023. Of the 600 victims, 332 were children (55 percent), and 258 were girl sex trafficking

victims. The vast majority of identified victims were Romanian citizens, of which traffickers exploited 432 in Romania and 145 in Western Europe. Authorities identified 23 foreign victims, a four-fold increase from five in 2023 (two in 2022); however, observers reported the number of identified foreign victims remained low compared with the estimated scale, particularly among labor migrants and asylum-seekers. Observers attributed the increase in victim identification to the implementation of the NRM, the development of practical guides to enhance proactive identification, and ongoing legislative reforms. The NRM outlined procedures for victim identification, referral, and assistance and defined the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders. However, it did not outline procedures for the referral and assistance of adult foreign victims without legal residency to the EU, and the government did not report if these foreign victims could receive the same benefits as EU citizens. The government maintained separate procedures for identifying and screening refugees arriving from Ukraine; in 2024, authorities did not identify any trafficking victims from Ukraine. The NRM comprised supplemental requirements for the proactive identification of child trafficking victims, including a mandatory needs assessment conducted by CPS and the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP) – the government’s central point for the NRM. To enhance child victim identification efforts, the National Authority for the Protection of Children’s Rights and Adoption and an NGO developed guides for the identification and referral of child trafficking victims and trained county-level CPS. Additionally, the Ministry of Education maintained a guide on the identification and referral of potential child trafficking victims as part of a broader campaign to combat violence against children in schools. NGOs reported victim identification remained mostly reactive, and authorities did not generally proactively screen for trafficking indicators among vulnerable groups. In 2024, the government provided a series of guides and training on implementing the NRM to law enforcement, social workers, healthcare personnel, and others interacting with potential victims.

During the identification process, authorities worked with ANITP to refer victims to assistance, and ANITP consulted CPS if a child trafficking victim was involved. Victims were not required to participate in criminal proceedings to access assistance. However, civil society reported, in practice, victims had to participate in criminal proceedings to be identified or receive any government-supported assistance. In 2024, 307 of the 600 identified victims (51 percent) received assistance from the government and government supported NGOs; the government did not report the number of victims who received assistance in 2023 (180 of 492, respectively, in 2022 – 37 percent). The main government entities providing services to victims were county-level directorates for social assistance and CPS. However, the quality of and access to services differed throughout the country with reports indicating some directorates, due to limited staff, training, and funding stopped offering services altogether. Romania maintained a total of three local government shelters exclusively dedicated to adult trafficking victims, one for child trafficking victims, and a shelter in each county designated for vulnerable persons, including victims of domestic violence and other abuses, children separated from their families, and persons with disabilities, that could assist trafficking victims. The government provided psychological counseling, legal assistance, and career counseling to victims through multi-disciplinary teams. In 2024, the government did not report the amount allocated for general victim assistance and protection services, compared with 66.6 million Romanian lei (RON) (\$13.9 million) allocated in 2023. NGOs continued to report multi-disciplinary teams did not receive adequate funding from the local government and the quality of government-provided assistance, especially medical services and psychological counseling was inadequate. Despite Romanian law entitling all victims to medical and psychological care, the government did not provide sufficient mental health counseling sessions or finance medical care costs. Moreover, access to medical care and social services required Romanian victims to return to their home districts to receive proof of medical insurance. The government maintained a working group on increasing the quality of medical assistance for trafficking victims, composed of public and private health care providers and government officials and focused on providing tailored medical services to victims and training medical service providers to identify victims.

Widespread child trafficking persisted throughout the country as children continued to represent half of all identified victims, and limited resources, expertise, and support created vulnerabilities in the country’s child protection system. Courts and committees for the protection of children determined whether child victims were placed in a residential treatment center or returned to their families; however, expertise and understanding of trafficking varied among these officials

throughout the country. Authorities placed child victims in need of residential treatment in shelters, centers for vulnerable children, or foster care centers, which rarely included specialized services for trafficking victims. Limited availability and resources significantly constrained accommodation options for child trafficking victims. County-level CPS provided services for child trafficking victims in public shelters, which included counseling, social and psychological assessment, health care, and other types of services, through multi-disciplinary teams of social workers, psychologists, lawyers, and pediatricians who were responsible for advising case managers and conducting prevention activities. To provide consistent quality care, the law required minimum standards of assistance for child victims of crime, including trafficking, in which licensed service providers offering shelter and assistance to identified child victims followed a set of specific requirements, including providing safe environments, specialized psychological counseling, and visitations with families. The law also required local governments to include training programs for staff involved in providing services to child victims of crimes, including trafficking, in their annual budget requests. Experts reported CPS employees who oversaw children in government-run institutions not only neglected to prevent trafficking but were sometimes complicit in the trafficking. Observers reported local government institutions were reluctant to intervene when underage Roma girls were “sold” into marriage and often considered this a “cultural practice,” hindering authorities’ ability to identify victims among this vulnerable group. Furthermore, experts noted the government did not adequately address trafficking concerns among Roma children.

Overall government funding for victim assistance and protection services remained insufficient. The process for providing services to trafficking victims was mostly informal and highly reliant on donor funding and NGO service providers due to fundamental issues in the government’s service provision structure. NGOs emphasized the need for an updated licensing mechanism for service providers and a more flexible funding mechanism in the anti-trafficking space.

Romanian law required authorities to interview victims in separate rooms, provide psychological counseling during court proceedings, expedite cases involving child trafficking victims, and order closed courts at the request of victims or prosecutors. In addition, the law allowed crime victims, including trafficking victims, to receive advanced payments equivalent to five times the yearly minimum wage – 15,000 RON (\$3,140) – for emergency expenses, as part of government-provided financial compensation. Furthermore, under the law, prosecutors and judges could order measures to protect victims’ physical security and privacy, including through witness programs, extensive initial hearings, and video testimonies. More judges than in previous years allowed video testimonies during court proceedings, but most judges continued to rely heavily on victims’ in-person testimony. Moreover, some judges lacked awareness of child trafficking and showed bias against victims who came from socially disadvantaged groups, such as Roma. While the government offered free legal aid to victims, court-appointed lawyers often lacked experience working with trafficking victims, were not aware of the special laws on compensation for trafficking victims, and did not inform victims, who could unknowingly renounce compensation claims during proceedings. The law allowed victims to obtain restitution from traffickers in criminal cases and file civil suits against traffickers for compensation. In 2024, courts ordered traffickers to pay 912,000 RON (\$190,840) and €786,500 (\$818,420) in restitution to 68 victims. The government did not report the number of victims who received payment; to enforce restitution, victims had to hire a bailiff and start new cumbersome and lengthy legal procedures. In 2024, the government enacted amendments to the criminal code expanding victims’ access to financial compensation and free legal assistance by eliminating the 60-day deadline in which victims needed to make criminal complaints against their traffickers as a prerequisite those rights.

Romanian law permitted foreign victims a 90-day recovery and reflection period to decide whether to cooperate with law enforcement, during which they were eligible to receive psychological counselling, medical care, medication, food, and shelter. The law also permitted prosecutors to grant “tolerated status” for up to six-months to foreign victims who cooperated with authorities and entitled those victims to the same benefits as Romanian citizens. Additionally, the law granted asylum-seekers the right to work after three months. Despite the criminal code including provisions to prevent the inappropriate penalization of trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, according to NGOs, authorities continued to fine persons in commercial sex without screening for trafficking indicators. However, authorities typically dropped

charges or fines once investigators and prosecutors realized a suspect was a trafficking victim. Victims could also challenge fines after they were identified.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts.

ANITP acted as the national rapporteur, coordinating, evaluating, and monitoring anti-trafficking efforts nationwide. The Prime Minister's Office oversaw the government's monitoring committee for combating human trafficking, which consisted of government and civil society and was responsible for monitoring and implementing the country's national strategy against human trafficking. In 2024, the government adopted the 2024-2028 national strategy and 2024-2026 NAP as part of the strategy, which assigned financial and operational responsibility to various government agencies and outlined strategic objectives. The government funded several anti-trafficking efforts but did not provide data on the total amount of money spent because it allocated funds to agencies and not to anti-trafficking-specific programs. According to the government, most agencies did not have a mandate focused exclusively on combating trafficking and, consequently, struggled to disaggregate expenses based on anti-trafficking efforts. Thus, the government provided an estimated figure – 128.2 million RON (\$26.8 million) – for its 2024 anti-trafficking funding (106.2 million RON [\$22.2 million] in 2023) but was unable to fully clarify the expenses covered due to their breakdown by institution rather than thematic category. Throughout the year, the government systematically collected and published data on the prosecution and conviction of traffickers. As in previous years, ANITP published an annual report with information on trends, statistics, and efforts to combat trafficking, and, while it operated with limited resources and authority, particularly at the local level, ANITP organized several awareness campaigns and educational projects, including raising awareness about victim reintegration, targeting different social and professional groups. Additionally, ANITP continued to work with a telecommunications company to develop a mobile application, providing users with information on victimization, ways to protect themselves from traffickers, and contact points for assistance. During the reporting period, the parliament re-established the joint special commission to combat human trafficking, which included representatives from all parties in parliament and focused on analyzing the causes of human trafficking, evaluating the effectiveness of ongoing efforts, and drafting relevant legislation; in 2024, the commission played a key role in pushing through amendments to the trafficking statute. Romania and the UK maintained a bilateral partnership addressing shared priorities on human trafficking, including initiatives to prevent trafficking, improve law enforcement cooperation, and support effective reintegration of victims. In 2024, ANITP collaborated with the London Metropolitan Police and conducted awareness campaign on trafficking risks targeting vulnerable Romanians in London and Luton. ANITP managed a dedicated hotline for trafficking victims and staffed an operator during regular business hours. The hotline provided services in Romanian and English and primarily focused on informing Romanians about working abroad safely. The hotline received eight calls that led to investigations in 2024. The government maintained an online platform with information on services available for potential trafficking victims among refugees fleeing the Russia-Ukraine War. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts by conducting an awareness campaign featuring a trafficking survivor sharing their experiences to help sensitize the public on the plight of exploited persons.

In 2024, Romania signed a multi-year Child Protection Compact Partnership with the United States to strengthen capacity to effectively investigate cases to prosecute and convict child traffickers, provide comprehensive trauma-informed care for child trafficking victims, and prevent child trafficking in all its forms. The government maintained a missing child alert system and a national hotline focused on strengthening the government's capacity to identify child abuse, including trafficking. ANDPDCA monitored and coordinated all programs for the prevention and elimination of child labor and investigated child labor abuse reports, including forced child labor. However, the government did not effectively enforce child labor laws, especially in rural areas and where social welfare services lacked personnel and capacity to address violations. Government efforts focused

on reacting to reported cases, and ANDPDCA directed its limited resources to prevention programs. Observers believed incidents of forced child labor were much higher than official statistics indicated.

The law prohibited Romania-based recruitment companies from charging recruitment fees and facilitating the exploitation of citizens abroad; violations were considered a misdemeanor and punishable by a civil fine. In 2024, the government approved an admission quota of 100,000 migrant workers, the same level as the previous three years, most of whom worked in the construction and hospitality industries and were at particular risk of trafficking because of the lack of access to information in their native language and deceptive employment practices. Observers raised concerns about the government's limited capacity to identify trafficking victims among migrants as well as its understanding of the scale of the problem given the lack of services provided to foreign victims without legal residency and victims' distrust in the criminal justice system. Furthermore, experts noted ineffective implementation of the law in trafficking cases involving foreign victims and insufficient attention to identifying trafficking cases among labor law violations. In 2024, the Labor Inspectorate conducted inspections aimed at identifying illegal work practices, including trafficking, in various at-risk sectors, such as construction and transportation, however the number of inspectors was insufficient to adequately cover the country. Throughout 2024, the government conducted multiple awareness campaigns on labor trafficking risks and immigration laws targeting foreigners seeking employment in Romania and Romanians seeking jobs abroad, including one on detecting fraudulent employment practices.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Romania, and traffickers exploit victims from Romania abroad. Romania remains a primary source country for trafficking victims in Europe. The majority of identified victims are women and girls exploited in sex trafficking in Romania and other European countries, including Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK. Populations vulnerable to trafficking include children in or aging out of government-run institutions, children whose parents travel abroad for work, members of the Roma community, women with little education and income, migrants, and asylum-seekers. Reports indicate a rise in the exploitation of the elderly and persons with disabilities in government-funded residential treatment facilities by complicit officials and employees, who subject victims to years of sexual abuse, forced labor, domestic servitude, and violence; ignore complaints about the inhumane treatment and poor living conditions; and falsify documents to hide evidence of abuse or neglect. Typically, traffickers are Romanian and operate individually or in small groups based on familial ties or common interests; however, Romanians are also involved in organized trafficking networks in the EU. The recruitment of victims through violence has significantly decreased as traffickers engage more in emotional manipulation, blackmail, and romance scams. Trafficking networks tend to specialize in a range of criminal activities, including economic and financial crimes, drug trafficking, or online crime. Traffickers increasingly use technology, including social media and videochat, to recruit victims, particularly children, and advertise victims for commercial sex. Children continue to remain among the most vulnerable to trafficking in Romania. Children in government-run institutions, particularly girls living in homes and placement centers for persons with disabilities, are at risk of sex trafficking. Several NGOs note former residents of government-run homes or residential centers serve as recruiters of underage girls from the same facilities. NGOs and media report cases of Roma girls and boys, as young as 11 years old, "sold" into marriage, which often included further exploitation in sex or labor trafficking, by their families. Traffickers exploit Roma children in sex trafficking and forced begging. Child labor abuse continues to be underreported, with children as young as five exploited in child labor, including forced child labor. Traffickers subject Romanian children and adults to labor trafficking in construction, hotels, manufacturing, and domestic service, as well as forced begging and theft in Romania and other European countries, including Sweden and the UK. Authorities note an increase in the number of male victims exploited in the agriculture sector. In contrast to previous years, the majority of labor trafficking cases occurred in Romania as opposed

to abroad. The government reported a rise in migrant workers seeking employment in Romania; migrants from Asia and Türkiye, who work in the construction and hospitality industries, are at a particular risk of trafficking due to the lack of access to information in their native language and deceptive practices by employers. Traffickers exploit migrants from Africa, Asia, and Europe in sex and labor trafficking in Romania. Thousands of refugees fleeing the Russia-Ukraine War and seeking sanctuary in Romania are highly vulnerable to trafficking. Government corruption in law enforcement and the judiciary continues to enable some trafficking crimes, and officials have been investigated for suspected involvement in trafficking.