

2022 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, considering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Romania was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included investigating more trafficking cases, prosecuting and convicting more traffickers, and implementing a pilot program that authorized funding at the local level to an NGO for victim services. Additionally, amendments to the criminal code entered into force, eliminating the statute of limitations for trafficking crimes and thereby giving the government additional time to prosecute such crimes. Furthermore, the government adopted an emergency ordinance and an action plan aimed at improving its capacity to assist vulnerable children and other at-risk populations and investigate various crimes against children, including trafficking. The government also adopted procedures for identifying victims among asylum-seekers and migrants and referring those victims to assistance. Moreover, the government amended the labor law on the protection of Romanian citizens working abroad to include a broader definition of temporary and seasonal workers and workers' rights, additional regulations for recruiting agencies, and increased fines for labor law violations. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Alleged complicity in trafficking crimes persisted, particularly with officials exploiting children in the care of government-run homes or placement centers. Many convicted traffickers received either suspended sentences or sentences that did not meet the minimum prescribed penalty under Romanian law, which weakened deterrence, did not adequately reflect the nature of the crime, and undercut broader efforts to fight trafficking. Authorities identified fewer trafficking victims and did not screen for trafficking indicators or identify victims among vulnerable populations, such as asylum-seekers, migrants, individuals in commercial sex, or children in government-run institutions. Moreover, the government did not provide sufficient funding to NGOs for assistance and protection services, leaving most victims without services and at risk of re-trafficking.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Proactively identify potential victims, especially among vulnerable populations, such as asylum-seekers, migrants, individuals in commercial sex, and children in government-run institutions, through enhanced training for police officers on recognizing indicators of exploitation.
- Sentence convicted traffickers to significant prison terms, as prescribed under Articles 210 and 211, and ensure they serve those sentences in practice.
- Significantly increase the quality and availability of specialized victim services for adults and children, such as improved access to medical assistance and psychological counseling.
- Vigorously investigate allegations of complicity—including of complicity in childcare institutions—and prosecute and convict complicit officials under the trafficking statute; hold them accountable by issuing significant prison sentences.
- Adopt legislation to allow for financial support to NGOs for victim services and develop and institute a formal mechanism for administering the funds.
- Increase the number of police officers investigating trafficking crimes and financial investigators specializing in trafficking cases.
- Increase efforts to enforce child labor laws, especially in rural areas and where social welfare services lacked personnel and capacity to address violations.
- Sanction recruiting agencies with criminal penalties for practices contributing to trafficking, such as charging workers with recruitment fees.
- Provide knowledgeable legal counsel and courtroom protections for victims assisting prosecutions, including exempting victims from in-person confrontations with their accused traffickers.

- Train labor inspectors to detect labor trafficking and grant them the legal authority to conduct unannounced inspections at all worksites.
- Expand efforts to train officials involved in judicial proceedings, particularly judges, on working with trafficking cases and victims, sensitivity to trafficking issues, and understanding all forms of trafficking.
- Train law enforcement officials on working with victims, evidence collection, and understanding psychological coercion and integrate that understanding into government-wide responses.

PROSECUTION

The government increased law enforcement efforts. Articles 210 and 211 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of three to 10 years' imprisonment for crimes involving an adult victim and five to 10 years' imprisonment for those involving a child. These penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. In 2021, the government enacted amendments to the criminal code that criminalized the acts of becoming aware of certain forms of trafficking and not immediately notifying the authorities. The amendments also eliminated the statute of limitations for trafficking crimes, thereby providing authorities with additional time to investigate and prosecute such crimes; previous amendments to the criminal code inadvertently shortened the statute of limitations for all child trafficking crimes committed and impeded authorities' ability to prosecute cases. The new amendments addressed direct concerns from the Council of Europe and civil society that the length of court proceedings, often due to delays, were deliberate attempts by corrupt officials to reach the statute of limitations, which in some cases led to impunity for traffickers.

The Organized Crime and Terrorism Investigation Directorate (DIICOT) and the Department for Combating Organized Crime (DCCO) were responsible for investigating and prosecuting trafficking cases. In 2021, DIICOT established a dedicated anti-trafficking unit with seven prosecutors for prosecuting trafficking crimes and providing training and support to prosecutors in DIICOT's regional offices. With the addition of the unit, both DIICOT and DCCO operated dedicated teams of anti-trafficking police officers and prosecutors. DIICOT prosecutors reported the need for legislative amendments to deconflict elements of the criminal code. Currently, the authority to investigate "trafficking in persons, trafficking in minors, and pimping committed by organized crime groups" remained with DIICOT, while other prosecutors were responsible for "regular pimping," "pimping through use of coercion," and "the exploitation of minors in forced begging and theft." These often overlapping elements of the criminal code and insufficient coordination in the prosecution service led to duplication of efforts, confusion, and subsequent inefficiency in the disposal of cases. Civil society experts agreed and advocated for a change, noting the overlap between the definitions led to some trafficking investigations being moved to a different department within the police, which did not maintain such expertise, and to more lenient penalties for perpetrators. During the reporting period, DIICOT and DCCO reported pandemic-related restrictions and COVID-19 infections among police and prosecutors constrained their ability to advance investigations in a timely manner. Nonetheless, in 2021, authorities opened 628 new trafficking cases (571 sex trafficking, 35 labor trafficking, 22 unspecified), an increase from 552 in 2020. Authorities prosecuted 522 suspected traffickers (506 sex trafficking, six labor trafficking, 10 unspecified), a significant increase from 234 in 2020. Courts convicted 162 traffickers (127 sex trafficking, 35 labor trafficking), an increase from 142 in 2020. The majority of convicted traffickers received sentences ranging from three to 12 years' imprisonment. However, 39 convicted traffickers (24 percent) received sentences of less than three years' imprisonment, which did not meet the minimum prescribed penalty under Articles 210 and 211, and 30 convicted traffickers (19 percent) received suspended sentences. Such lenient sentences issued to convicted traffickers weakened deterrence, did not adequately reflect the nature of the crime, and undercut broader efforts to fight trafficking. In 2021, DIICOT and DCCO participated in 20 joint investigative teams with European counterparts (35 in 2020). In one case, authorities from Romania and Northern Ireland cooperated on a sex trafficking investigation involving more than 20 Romanian women forced into commercial sex in Belgium, Germany, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom (UK), which resulted in authorities prosecuting 11 suspected traffickers. In another case, known as Operation Bear, Romanian, Scottish, and EUROPOL authorities cooperated on a sex trafficking investigation involving an organized crime group operating in Scotland, England, and Romania. The investigation resulted in the arrest of 27 Romanian nationals, who faced prosecution in Romania, and the identification of more than 30 trafficking victims across Europe.

Persistent, low-level official complicity in trafficking crimes remained a significant concern, undermining law enforcement action. Government efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict allegedly complicit officials remained inadequate. In 2021, authorities prosecuted a member of the gendarmerie for alleged sex trafficking crimes involving four child victims. Additionally, courts issued a three-year suspended sentence against a former chief of police, who, according to media reports, ignored criminal complaints submitted by families of child trafficking victims and attempted to reconcile the victims with traffickers. Separately, the United Nations reported that an investigation

into allegations of sex trafficking by a Romanian peacekeeper, originally reported in 2017, remained ongoing. Several NGOs continued to express suspicion that staff working in government-run institutions for children and residential centers for persons with disabilities facilitated trafficking. Experts reported Child Protection Services (CPS) employees who oversaw children in government-run institutions not only did not proactively try to prevent trafficking but sometimes encouraged girls to become involved in sex trafficking or knowingly tolerated the exploitation of child trafficking victims. NGOs noted in certain counties' CPS officials acted as accomplices to traffickers. The government did not report investigating such allegations. Experts stated the government did not adequately discipline child welfare officials who abused children in their care and lacked expertise among police to proactively identify trafficking victims. In the previous reporting period, the General Police Inspectorate and the National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoption (ANDPDCA) established an identification and referral mechanism for trafficking cases among children in government-run institutions. Additionally, to address the significant number of child sexual abuse cases, including potential child sex trafficking cases, the police maintained a unit dedicated to investigating such crimes.

Deficiencies within law enforcement, such as staffing shortages and unsustainable workloads, as well as knowledge gaps, continued to limit progress despite positive developments. According to NGOs, in trafficking cases involving foreign migrant victims, law enforcement did not effectively implement the law. Law enforcement often charged suspected traffickers for crimes other than trafficking, such as pandering, to avoid lengthy, expensive, and time-consuming investigations. DIICOT and DCCO continued to operate with limited staff and resources. DIICOT reported investigators and prosecutors avoided specializing in trafficking because of the complexity of the crime and the trauma and burnout associated with handling trafficking cases. As a result, overextended investigators and prosecutors handled multiple cases simultaneously, which resulted in difficulty building strong cases for prosecution within the six month period allowed for a suspect to be held in pre-trial detention. DIICOT also reported one specialized anti-trafficking prosecutor and investigator regularly covered regions with approximately one million residents and concurrently oversaw 100 investigations. To help address staffing shortages, in 2021, DIICOT added 11 new positions. Furthermore, NGOs noted the government employed a limited number of dedicated financial investigators—eight covering the entire country—which restricted financial investigations and asset seizures, inhibiting evidence collection in trafficking cases to corroborate witness testimony. In 2021, the government submitted a request to the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to hire 42 financial investigators nationwide; the request remained pending at the end of the reporting period. To assist in financial investigations, the government passed an executive order in August 2021 allowing prosecutors access to the country's internal revenue service database to investigate the bank accounts of criminal suspects. The government also adopted a national strategy in August 2021 on the recovery of criminal assets to operationalize a national fund that would confiscate assets to provide compensation and protection to victims. In 2021, prosecutors in DIICOT's specialized anti-trafficking unit confiscated approximately 213,000 Romanian lei (RON) (\$48,840) in assets. Reports indicated the shift to online recruitment of victims remained a serious problem, which the government addressed by allocating 13 million RON (\$2.98 million) in 2021 to equip the police with a computer forensics system for detecting online sex trafficking and performing faster and more effective online investigations. NGOs reported, while law enforcement authorities developed some sensitivity to trafficking victims' situations, some police officers and judges continued to lack specialized training and a basic understanding of trafficking crimes and victim trauma. Judges agreed with the need for training for law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges, specifically on trauma-informed, victim-centered interviewing. The government, in partnership with other governments, NGOs and international organizations, addressed knowledge gaps by training investigators, prosecutors, judges, labor inspectors, and other front-line workers throughout the year on various topics, such as trauma-informed and victim-centered approaches to investigations, trafficking indicators, and the country's legal framework on trafficking. The government supported additional educational efforts by introducing, as part of the mandatory curricula for all local and central police, lessons on preventing and combating trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts, although significant gaps remained. Authorities used the existing national victim identification and referral mechanism to identify victims and refer them to care. Under the mechanism, any entity, including diplomatic missions, NGOs, and other organizations, could identify victims. In 2021, the government reported 488 identified victims (378 sex trafficking, 42 labor trafficking, 68 unspecified), a decrease from 596 in 2020. Of the 488 victims, 171 were children (255 in 2020). Authorities identified one foreign victim, the same as in 2020, but observers estimated there were numerous unidentified foreign victims, particularly among asylum-seekers. NGOs reported authorities did not screen asylum-seekers and foreign migrants for trafficking indicators and were reluctant to identify them because of the significant time and resources that an investigation would entail. In 2021, the General Inspectorate for Immigration adopted procedures for identifying victims among asylum-seekers and migrants and referring those victims to the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP), the government's lead agency

for coordinating anti-trafficking efforts. Furthermore, the government did not provide specialized training on the psychological trauma of trafficking on victims, which hindered authorities' ability to correctly identify potential victimization among individuals in commercial sex. 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. Authorities identified most victims after a criminal investigation started. After identification, authorities informed victims of the services available to them and subsequently referred adult victims to ANITP and child victims to CPS for assistance.

The government made recent reforms and regulations that officials noted bolstered assistance, particularly for child trafficking victims. However, officials also acknowledged challenges, such as access to assistance and protecting children in government institutions, remained. Assistance was conditional upon a person's status as an identified trafficking victim. Two-thirds of identified victims received assistance. In 2021, approximately 64 percent (313) of identified victims received assistance from public institutions, public-private partnerships, and NGOs, compared with 48 percent in 2020. The government provided emotional support, psychological counseling, legal assistance, and career counseling to domestic and foreign victims. Victims received protection and assistance services in government-run facilities for victims of crime, including trafficking, and in NGO-run trafficking shelters. The government maintained a limited number of government-run shelters designated for vulnerable adults, including trafficking victims. Authorities placed child victims in specialized facilities for child trafficking victims, general child facilities, or facilities for children with disabilities run by CPS. County-level CPS allocated 55 million RON (\$12.6 million) to services for child trafficking victims, which included emergency accommodation, counseling, social and psychological assessment, and other types of services. CPS in each county received some funding from local governments to maintain multi-disciplinary teams composed of social workers, psychologists, legal advisors, and pediatricians, who were responsible for providing services to child victims. In 2021, the government continued to establish these teams across the country, and by the end of the reporting period, there were 23 county-level directorates for child protection and social assistance with multi-disciplinary teams that could provide support to trafficking victims, including some adult victims. However, these teams utilized the same methodology regardless of the type of abuse identified. In 2021, ANDPDCA initiated amending the methodology that the multi-disciplinary teams used to address child trafficking, including crisis intervention trainings and developing practices specific to regional challenges. NGOs reported county-level CPS did not have adequate expertise in trafficking and resources to provide quality care. ANDPDCA also reported local CPS lacked the necessary knowledge that would allow them to justify funding requests for specialized services. In an effort to provide consistent quality care to all child victims, the government implemented a 2020 regulation requiring minimum standards of assistance for child victims of crime, including trafficking. Under the regulation, 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 regulation 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. Nonetheless, perennial problems of abuse and neglect of children in government-run institutions, coupled with the lack of proactive identification and assistance in government facilities, left children in placement centers vulnerable to trafficking. Experts reported CPS employees who oversaw children in government-run institutions not only did not proactively try to prevent trafficking but were sometimes complicit in the trafficking. The 2021 identification and referral mechanism established by ANDPDCA and the General Police Inspectorate mandated county-level CPS and police inspectorates to cooperate and exchange information on a regular basis to help identify vulnerable children in government-run institutions who were at risk of trafficking.

The government implemented new initiatives that addressed limited resources and inadequate services. Government funding for NGO assistance and protection services remained limited. While the government relied on NGOs to accommodate and assist victims, it did not allocate grants directly to NGOs due to legislation precluding direct funding. Civil society emphasized the need for a funding mechanism for service providers and other NGOs in the anti-trafficking space. To address this need, in 2021, the government coordinated a pilot program authorizing the city of Bucharest to fund an NGO for victim services; however, during the reporting period, no NGOs were able to take advantage of the program. The government proposed extending the program to other cities and providing training to NGOs on applying for local government grants, thus, establishing a framework for public funding to NGOs at the local level. In addition, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection estimated allocating 1.75 million RON (\$401,280) for services for adult trafficking victims and 6.26 million RON (\$1.44 million) for child trafficking victims. NGOs continued to report the quality of care was overall inadequate, especially medical services and psychological counseling. Despite Romanian law entitling all victims to psychological and medical care, the government did not provide more than one mental health counseling session and did not finance medical care costs. NGOs paid all psychological services costs for victims due to the government's refusal to reimburse psychologists who assisted victims. NGOs also covered victims' emergency medical care costs because the government did not provide financial assistance and medical care required payment upfront. Moreover, access to medical care required Romanian victims to return to their home districts to obtain identity

documents. The process presented logistical and financial hurdles for many trafficking victims; NGOs also covered these associated costs. In 2021, the government established a working group on increasing the quality of medical assistance for trafficking victims composed of public and private healthcare providers and Ministry of Health officials and created an action plan for providing tailored medical services to trafficking victims and for training medical service providers to identify victims.

In general, victims lacked adequate support during criminal cases; however, the government instituted some protections during the reporting period. Reports of victim intimidation during and after court proceedings persisted. NGOs reported many courts did not impose sanctions on traffickers' lawyers when they harassed and mocked the victims during proceedings. Judges relied heavily on the victim's in-person testimony, preferably in front of the trafficker, further traumatizing victims. The Council of Europe found Romanian courts lacked national practices to protect child victims of sexual assault. To address these concerns, the government introduced regulations mandating each county establish private hearing rooms for child victims of crime and standardized child-friendly questioning methodologies; there were 11 such rooms available in 2021. The government also established interdisciplinary teams, consisting of psychologists, social workers, police officers, and prosecutors, to coordinate the participation of children in legal proceedings and prevent re-traumatization. In 2021, the government provided 427 trafficking victims participating in criminal proceedings physical protection and transportation services. While the government offered free legal aid to victims, court appointed lawyers often lacked experience working with trafficking victims; in 2021, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) worked with the National Bar Association to provide trafficking-related training to lawyers. Also, courts did not always grant free legal aid to victims, particularly if they were not sex trafficking victims, and access to free legal aid was contingent on proof of indigence. Furthermore, court appointed lawyers 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 trafficking victims to receive restitution from the trafficker in a criminal case, file a civil suit against the trafficker, or receive compensation from the government. If victims did not obtain restitution in court, the government could reimburse them for expenses related to hospitalization, material damage caused by the traffickers, and income lost. In the event traffickers' assets were not seized but a guilty verdict was reached, the government could pay material damages for documented expenses such as medical bills. Throughout 2021, courts granted compensation to 235 victims who filed civil claims within criminal lawsuits. The total amount of compensation for moral and material damage granted to victims was approximately 3.63 million RON (\$832,380). In 2021, the MOJ conducted an assessment on the compensation and restitution mechanisms to identify possible areas of improvement. Romanian law permitted foreign victims who cooperated with authorities to receive a renewable, six-month temporary residence permit. Additionally, the law permitted foreign victims "tolerated status" for up to six months and granted asylum-seekers the right to work after three months.

PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The government continued to implement the 2021-2022 anti-trafficking national action plan (NAP) as part of the 2018-2022 national strategy and dedicated financial resources to all of its proposed activities. The NAP assigned financial and operational responsibility to various government agencies and ministries, which allocated approximately 41.2 million RON (\$9.45 million) toward the proposed activities, such as the repatriation of Romanian victims abroad. In September 2021, the government adopted an emergency ordinance and an action plan aimed at improving assistance to vulnerable children and other at-risk populations and the investigations of various crimes against children, including trafficking. The ordinance established a missing child alert system and a national hotline focused on consolidating the government's capacity to identify child abuse, including trafficking. During the reporting period, the government transferred responsibility of the inter-ministerial committee, which monitored implementation of the strategy and comprised representatives from several agencies, DIICOT, and the police, to the Department for Vulnerable Groups and Community Social Responsibility in the Prime Minister's Office to improve interagency coordination and elevate efforts to combat trafficking. In addition, the government established a Department for Community Social Responsibility and Vulnerable Populations within the Prime Minister's Office to monitor implementation of the recently adopted action plan and coordinate interagency cooperation focused on expanding protection efforts for victims of trafficking, child abuse, and domestic violence. ANITP continued to publish yearly reports and statistics on trafficking and organized 153 educational events for middle school and high school students and 26 awareness campaigns (94 in 2020), including educating the public on responding to trafficking situations and recognizing trafficking indicators. In addition, ANITP, an NGO, and the Romanian Orthodox Church worked to raise awareness throughout the Church's vast community and to provide guidance on how to report trafficking cases. Furthermore, ANITP managed a 24-hour hotline 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 16 calls that led to criminal investigations (seven in 2020). A 2021 report on protecting rights at borders criticized the government for continued violent pushbacks of asylum-seekers and migrants into Serbia, a practice

that potentially increased a persons' vulnerability to trafficking, exacerbated distrust of foreign officials, and disallowed for the reporting of any exploitation experienced. In 2021, Romanian and UK officials cooperated to develop strategic approaches on combating trafficking, including a project bringing together prevention efforts, victim protection, and prosecuting criminals. The government made efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts by investigating 13 individuals suspected of purchasing commercial sex.

During the reporting period, ANITP conducted a campaign raising awareness on labor trafficking among Romanians seeking jobs abroad. After an incident involving thousands of Romanian workers traveling to Germany to harvest asparagus during the pandemic with few protections in place, members of Parliament examined the enforcement of labor protections for Romanian citizens working abroad. As a result, in 2021, the government amended the labor law on the protection of Romanian citizens working abroad to include a broader definition of temporary and seasonal workers, clarification of workers' rights, additional regulations for recruiting agencies, and increased fines for labor law violations. According to an official, enforcement, however, remained the biggest hurdle to improve protections for Romanian workers abroad. 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. The law required employers of foreign workers to submit applications for work permits. Observers reported this practice left foreign workers vulnerable to abuse, including trafficking, and sometimes working without appropriate documentation because work permits were a requirement to obtaining or extending residence permits. Observers also reported the government tolerated practices through which employers confiscated foreign workers' residence permits and travel documents to limit their freedom and facilitate potential deportations. The law required the General Inspectorate for Immigration to issue work permits within 30 to 45 days of receiving an application; before issuing work permits, the General Inspectorate verified job offers and employers' profiles to prevent fraud. In 2021, the General Inspectorate and the Labor Inspectorate conducted a campaign to inform employers who hired or were interested in hiring foreign workers about their rights and responsibilities and the risks of illegal work and exploitation. The General Inspectorate also implemented awareness activities aimed at foreign students in Romania to inform them about their rights as employees. According to some NGOs, police remained unresponsive to reports of labor trafficking, and labor inspectors lacked the competency for detecting trafficking and the legal authority for unannounced inspections to several categories of worksites. ANDPDCA monitored and coordinated all programs for the prevention and elimination of child labor and investigated child labor abuse reports, some of which may have been forced child labor. 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. Experts noted a continued lack of awareness about labor trafficking among stakeholders and insufficient attention to identifying cases among labor law violations.

According to the minister of foreign affairs, nearly half a million refugees had entered Romania since the start of Russia's further invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In response to this inflow of Ukrainian refugees, the government adopted several measures to counter trafficking, including enhancing border security, training border agents to screen for trafficking indicators, credentialing NGO staff who were assisting refugees at border crossings, and providing transportation from the border to shelters. Additionally, the government partnered with UNHCR and a local software company to design verification software to establish registries and vet individuals who were hosting and providing transportation to refugees. Furthermore, the government developed a set of procedures for registering and tracking unaccompanied children and established county-level task forces composed of representatives from the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection, NGOs, and international organizations, as well as school and public health officials. Although most NGOs and civil society representatives commended the government for its response to address the immediate needs of refugees, some raised concerns about medium- and long- term planning, particularly for vulnerable populations. NGOs stated a better process was needed at the border to identify the medical, social, and psychological needs of refugees and to assess their vulnerability, including screening for indicators of trafficking or exploitation. NGOs also highlighted the need for better information and legal counseling to lessen the possibility of trafficking, especially in a country with known criminal trafficking networks. While civil society representatives and government officials assessed trafficking cases were likely to be few and isolated, despite inherent risk of underreporting given language barriers and refugees' overall vulnerability, police identified one potential trafficking victim crossing the border, who received assistance from an international organization.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported 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 sex trafficking and labor trafficking victims in Europe. The vast majority of identified victims (77 percent) in 2021 are sex trafficking victims. Traffickers are typically Romanian citizens

working as part of an organized crime group based on family and ethnic ties, who exploit Romanian women and children in sex trafficking in Romania and other European countries, including the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Spain, and the UK. Experts continue to report Romanian women recruited for sham marriages in Western Europe; after entering these marriages, traffickers force the women into commercial sex or labor. Children represent more than a third of identified trafficking victims in Romania. Government officials and NGOs report increased recruitment of children via the internet and social media as a result of the pandemic. Media outlets allege the online sexual exploitation and abuse of girls as young as 12 years old. Children in government-run institutions, particularly girls living in homes and placement centers for persons with disabilities, remain vulnerable to sex trafficking. Several NGOs note former residents of government-run homes or residential centers serve as recruiters of underage girls from the same facilities. Traffickers exploit Romani children in sex trafficking and forced begging. Child labor abuse continues to be underreported, with children as young as five exploited in child labor. Traffickers subject Romanian adults and children to labor trafficking in agriculture, construction, hotels, manufacturing, and domestic service, as well as forced begging and theft in Romania and other European countries. Some reports suggest traffickers operating in Romania and Moldova exploit Moldovan women and girls from Romania in operations in Europe; the extent of the trafficking is unknown. Romania is a destination country for foreign migrants from Africa, Europe, and South and Southeast Asia, exploited in the construction, hotel, and food-processing industries. Migrants from East Asia, 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. NGOs report a recent rise in the number of foreign migrants, citing an unusually high number from the Middle East and South and Central Asia entering Romania at the Serbia border and a record number of them—approximately 9,590—submitting applications for asylum in 2021. While their main goal is to continue their path toward Western and Northern Europe, many of these migrants may be or may become trafficking victims while in Romania. Nearly half a million foreign nationals and Ukrainian refugees, predominantly women, children, and the elderly, who are fleeing Russia's further invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and crossing the Romania border seeking sanctuary, are highly vulnerable to trafficking; approximately 80,000 are staying in country, and more than a third are children. Since Russia's further invasion of Ukraine, Romanian border authorities have admitted approximately 460 children who had been in Ukrainian institutions; approximately 168 Ukrainian children remain in Romanian child protection centers around Romania. Government corruption in law enforcement and the judiciary continues to enable trafficking crimes, and officials have been investigated for suspected involvement in 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

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