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UKRAINE (Tier 2)

The Government of Ukraine 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 Ukraine remained on Tier 2. These efforts included adopting a 2023-2025 NAP, resuming labor inspections and identifying potential trafficking cases during those inspections, and cooperating with European counterparts on anti-trafficking investigations, despite diminished resources and capacity because of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Although prosecution data was not fully disaggregated, authorities investigated, prosecuted, and convicted more traffickers and created a specialized anti-human trafficking prosecution unit. The government identified more trafficking victims and continued extensive awareness raising campaigns in coordination with international organizations. Ukraine's government operated on a total war footing to withstand Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion, performing a range of core functions to mitigate trafficking risks despite major war-related challenges, continued Russian strikes on Ukrainian civilian and critical infrastructure targets, and displacement of nearly one-third of Ukraine's population, many of whom faced increased human trafficking risks. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. Judges continued to issue lenient sentences that did not include prison time for most convicted traffickers, which weakened deterrence, did not adequately reflect the nature of the crime, and undercut broader efforts to fight trafficking. Despite persistent concerns of corruption fostering impunity for trafficking crimes and ongoing investigations of complicit officials, for the seventh consecutive year the government did not secure any convictions of complicit officials. The government did not identify any foreign national trafficking victims, and while the government took some steps to protect unaccompanied children, deficiencies in the government's oversight of children evacuated from Ukrainian care institutions increased their risk of trafficking. NGOs continued to identify systemic shortcomings in the implementation of the NRM and victim services.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Identify and certify the official status of more victims to ensure they are afforded their rights under the trafficking law and modify the procedure for granting victim status to lessen the burden on victims to self-identify and divulge sensitive information. * Vigorously investigate and prosecute alleged trafficking crimes and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms. * Increase protections for, and maintain information on, unaccompanied and separated children, including children evacuated from Ukrainian care institutions in Ukraine and abroad. * Provide an alternative to requiring victims to be physically present in court for preliminary court hearings in cases where it is not possible because of displacement. * Increase efforts to investigate, prosecute, and convict officials allegedly complicit in trafficking crimes under the trafficking statute. * Increase efforts to identify victims and vigorously screen for trafficking victims among highly vulnerable populations, such as IDPs, refugees, unaccompanied and separated children, children evacuated from care institutions, undocumented persons, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, women in commercial sex, and Ukrainian citizens whom Russia has forcibly deported to its territory or transferred inside Russia-controlled areas of Ukraine. * Provide additional, extensive training on the NRM and the difference between trafficking and other crimes for local officials, front-line workers, and service providers, and continue to expand the NRM nationwide. * Increase training for law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges on the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases, particularly labor trafficking, and the use of victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches. * Establish and fill a dedicated national coordinator position to lead national efforts to coordinate and implement anti-trafficking policies. * Consistently enforce strong regulations and oversight of labor recruitment companies,

including by eliminating recruitment fees charged to migrant workers and holding fraudulent labor recruiters criminally accountable. * Continue government funding for anti-trafficking efforts, particularly funding for local communities. * Finalize the anti-trafficking strategy and allocate resources to its implementation. * Increase the availability of trafficking-specific services in existing shelters and consider resourcing a shelter dedicated to victims of trafficking. * Maintain victims' access to legal assistance throughout the criminal process and improve victims' ability to access court-ordered restitution in criminal cases and compensation through civil proceedings.

PROSECUTION

The government slightly increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts. Article 149 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of three to eight years' imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. The law defined trafficking broadly to include illegal adoption without the purpose of exploitation.

Law enforcement capacity remained affected by other critical wartime policing needs in government-controlled areas or lack of access to occupied territory. An international organization reported Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine significantly and adversely affected the court system, delaying judicial proceedings. Law enforcement only operated in areas that remained under government control, but not in territories occupied by Russia's forces. Law enforcement investigated 142 new trafficking cases – 44 for sex trafficking, 87 for labor trafficking, including 32 for forced criminality, and 11 for unspecified forms of trafficking – in 2023, compared with 70 investigations in 2022 and 222 in 2021. In addition, the government continued investigating 115 cases. The government prosecuted 126 suspected traffickers – 52 for sex trafficking, 74 for labor trafficking, including 11 for forced criminality – in 2023, an increase compared with 70 prosecutions in 2022 and 101 in 2021. The government investigated and prosecuted additional cases as “adoption for commercial purposes” and “use in the pornography business” which are considered human trafficking under Ukrainian law, Article 149. The government convicted 35 traffickers in 2023, compared with 18 in 2022 and 24 in 2021. Of the 35 convicted traffickers sentenced in 2023, only eight (23 percent) received prison sentences (17 percent in 2022). Twenty traffickers received suspended sentences, three received fines, and four convicted traffickers did not yet receive a sentence. Observers reported many judges underestimated the severity of trafficking crimes and continued to hold entrenched stereotypes about what constituted trafficking in persons, while others engaged in corrupt practices. These lenient sentences weakened deterrence, did not adequately reflect the nature of the crime, created safety concerns, and undercut broader efforts to fight trafficking.

Corruption, particularly in the police and judiciary, and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns inhibiting law enforcement action. Although the government continued to report investigations and prosecutions of officials allegedly complicit in trafficking, for the seventh consecutive year, the government did not convict any complicit officials, further exacerbating impunity for trafficking crimes. In 2023, the Lviv prosecutor's office prosecuted a government official for alleged sex trafficking in France; the Office of the Prosecutor General (OPG) investigated a military commander for alleged forced labor; Kyiv city police investigated a former deputy police chief and police officer for alleged sex trafficking; and prosecutors indicted two former police officers for labor trafficking. The government reported multiple prosecutions involving complicit officials in trafficking crimes initiated in previous years remained ongoing.

The National Police of Ukraine (NPU) expanded its international and national partnerships, despite also assuming more national security tasks; and in April 2023, the Migration Police (MIPOL) established a dedicated unit on transnational investigations and international cooperation, including human trafficking. The NPU and MIPOL cooperated extensively with foreign counterparts, including Norway, Lithuania, and Türkiye, to exchange information for investigations. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, MIPOL and the NPU investigated trafficking cases among civilians, while the Security Service of Ukraine investigated war crimes, including those with a trafficking nexus. Authorities cooperated extensively with foreign governments on multiple

transnational investigations including with Czechia and Germany, joint action days with EUROPOL, including against online criminal activity, extradition requests with Georgia and Poland, and legal assistance. The joint action days specifically focused on online criminal activity and recruitment and identifying Ukrainian and People's Republic of China (PRC)-national trafficking victims, including among refugees in European countries. In September, Ukraine and Poland signed a new agreement on information sharing between authorities, including on human trafficking cases.

There continued to be widespread turnover in many government institutions, including in the ranks of the NPU and judiciary. As of December 2023, the government reported more than 3,500 judicial vacancies; these vacancies exacerbated delays in court cases, though the government took steps to address the shortage by reforming its judge selection process and resumed the functioning of the body responsible for selection of judicial candidates in 2023. Courts were critically understaffed, and judges did not specialize in trafficking cases. The impacts of the full-scale invasion, including power outages and disruption to Internet connectivity, delayed court proceedings. Furthermore, the criminal code required all victims of crime, including trafficking victims, to be present in court for preliminary court hearings; this resulted in more than 80 trafficking cases stalling in the courts, many of which involved victims displaced because of the full-scale invasion. In 2023, OPG established a specialized unit consisting of five prosecutors focused solely on prosecuting human trafficking cases and convened regional prosecutors to analyze more than 60 trafficking cases. The government, with donor funding and international partners, trained law enforcement, civil servants, prosecutors, legal aid providers, and other officials on investigative techniques, victim identification, child sex trafficking, trauma-informed approaches, legal aid for victims, prevention, cybercrime, and the heightened risks of trafficking after the full-scale invasion. All new police recruits received trafficking training. However, observers assessed MIPOL staff and NPU investigators were not sufficiently trained on trafficking.

PROTECTION

The government maintained victim protection. Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine reduced the government's capacity to provide services to trafficking victims, as it diverted resources to the humanitarian response, and services were unavailable to trafficking victims in Russia-occupied territories or near the front line. In 2023, the government reported granting official victim status to 110 victims – a status that allowed victims access to government services upon approval of an application – an increase compared with 47 officially identified victims in 2022 and 64 in 2021. The government also identified six victims of “use in the pornography business” and two victims of “sale of a child” which is considered human trafficking under Ukrainian law. The government did not report how many potential victims police identified. Observers reported Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine impeded the processing time for granting official victim status because of significant strains on resources and the displacement of staff. While some observers reported the government diverted anti-trafficking resources to the humanitarian response, others assessed the overall increase in humanitarian service provision, including shelters and aid to people in desperate need, may have reduced the risks of human trafficking, as coordination among service providers increased. The government reported screening undocumented foreign migrants for trafficking indicators; however, observers noted authorities did not consistently do so. Authorities did not report identifying any foreign national trafficking victims in 2023. The government did not report continuing efforts, in cooperation with international organizations, to visit and screen for potential trafficking victimization at facilities for IDPs and children. However, the government reported screening Ukrainian children returnees among those forcibly deported to Russia for human trafficking indicators.

The government approved 88 percent (118 of 134) of applications for official victim status in 2023, compared with 81 percent (47 of 58) of applications in 2022. The National Social Service continued its role of granting official victim status to potential victims. The government drafted a bill to simplify the procedure for certifying official victim status by delegating this responsibility to local authorities; however, this bill remained pending at the end of the reporting period. Officials noted several factors, because of the war, might affect victims' ability to apply for victim status, including

some victims not being able to self-report trafficking crimes, some who may not have recognized they were exploited, or Ukrainian refugees exploited abroad who may not have reported exploitation to authorities upon their return to Ukraine. Observers noted male trafficking victims may have been reluctant to seek assistance from the government because of a fear of being conscripted. NGOs reported victims exploited in the occupied territories might fear coming forward to Ukrainian authorities for fear of being labeled as “collaborators” with Russia, under a law passed shortly after the full-scale invasion, instead of being treated as trafficking victims. Civil society previously reported the government rejected a high percentage of victim applications because of strict internal guidelines for classifying cases as trafficking crimes, police pursuing indictments under statutes other than the trafficking law, and the government demanding additional evidence to confirm victim status, contrary to Ukrainian law, including confirmation the victim was recognized as such in court proceedings or demanding evidence to show movement across a border. In the context of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, authorities informed victims of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) of their right to apply for official victim status. Experts expressed concern the government may conflate CRSV with sex trafficking, instead of seeing these as distinct crimes.

Newly devolved local administrative structures were part of the NRM; however, civil society reported continued, systemic shortcomings in the functioning of the NRM in part because of war-related capacity limitations, decentralization, and high personnel turnover. The Ministry of Social Policy (MSP) partnered with international organizations to expand the NRM nationwide even under conditions of martial law. Experts noted social services capacities at the local level were overwhelmed with providing services to IDPs. Some communities, especially smaller ones, lacked sufficient personnel, infrastructure, or financial resources to effectively provide services to trafficking victims. Observers noted some local officials responsible for identifying and screening victims were not trained on trafficking. The government continued to rely on international organizations and NGOs, with international donor funding, to identify victims and provide most victim protection and assistance. While not all anti-trafficking organizations in Ukraine reported the number of victims they served, one international organization in Ukraine reported assisting 374 victims in 2023, compared with 361 in 2022, and 1,010 victims in 2021. This organization reported traffickers exploited the majority (83 percent) of these victims in labor trafficking in agriculture, construction, or the service industry; most of those exploited after the full-scale invasion were exploited in Ukraine. One NGO reported identifying two victims exploited by Russian forces in forced labor in the occupied territories of Ukraine.

The government allocated 970,000 hryvnia (\$25,470) to the national budget and 1.914 million hryvnia (\$50,250) to local budgets for victim protection efforts in 2023, compared with 2.19 million hryvnia (\$57,500) to the national budget and no funding reported to local budgets in 2022. Ukraine’s trafficking law entitled victims with official victim status to accommodations at a government shelter, psychological assistance, medical services, employment counseling, and vocational training, regardless of whether a victim cooperated with law enforcement or if a criminal case proceeded. The government did not operate a trafficking-specific shelter. The government reported vulnerable populations, including trafficking victims, could access government-funded services through a total of 51 shelters, 61 day centers, 60 crisis rooms, 89 consultative services, and 579 mobile brigades, and 25 other facilities. The shelters did not report how many trafficking victims received services such as legal assistance, accommodations, medical aid, or psycho-social support. Adult victims could stay at government-run centers for psycho-social assistance for up to 90 days, with the option to extend, and receive psychological and medical support, lodging, food, and legal and social assistance. Authorities could accommodate families and child victims in 27 local government or NGO-run centers for socio-psychological support could administer social, medical, psychological, education, legal, and other types of assistance. Authorities identified 14 child trafficking victims in 2023; all received financial support and medical and psycho-social care. Observers reported government assistance remained insufficient to meet victims’ needs, and victims continued to rely on NGOs for assistance. Foreign victims were entitled to the same benefits as Ukrainian citizens and had additional access to interpretation services, temporary legal stay, and voluntary repatriation. Although legally entitled to the same benefits, observers noted some foreign nationals and members of underserved communities faced barriers to accessing services. Authorities could grant permanent residency to foreign victims in danger of retribution should they

return to their country of origin. Foreign victims were able to obtain an immigration permit after residing continuously in Ukraine for three years.

The Witness Protection Law provided protections for victims, but observers noted courts rarely used protection measures. The government reported witness protection measures had not been requested nor provided for a trafficking victim since 2020. Victims with official victim status were eligible for free legal aid. In August 2023, the government passed a law to expand access to secondary legal aid for victims of crime, including trafficking. Courts continued to utilize closed hearings and remote procedures for questioning and identification to protect victims' participation in criminal justice proceedings. Fourteen courts throughout the country utilized video testimony systems to ensure the complete separation of victims or witnesses from the accused during criminal justice proceedings. The government, with the assistance from an international organization, operated several regional specialized centers for child victims or witnesses. At these centers, specialized staff interviewed children in a trauma-informed manner and children received psycho-social, legal, and medical care, as needed. The OPG maintained a specialized staff members to assist all children in the judicial process. The government increased the one-time financial payment amount to adult trafficking victims from 7,888 hryvnia (\$210) to 8,052 hryvnia (\$210); the government reported all victims with official status received this financial aid. The government did not report awarding restitution to victims in 2023.

PREVENTION

The government slightly increased prevention efforts. The MSP continued to lead anti-trafficking efforts at the national and local levels, but observers continued to criticize the ministry for ineffective coordination and engagement on anti-trafficking efforts, especially as Russia's war against Ukraine affected MSP resources and personnel. With the MSP, the position of national coordinator was specifically tasked to fulfill the anti-trafficking responsibilities. The government did not convene the interdepartmental working group for combating trafficking in 2023. However, MSP coordinated a planning session with international organizations and NGOs in June to discuss anti-trafficking efforts, victim protection, forced labor in supply chains, and reducing the demand for commercial sex. In June 2023, the government, in partnership with an international organization, approved a 2023-2025 NAP which sought to account for the impacts of Russia's war against Ukraine, strengthen cooperation among stakeholders, prevent human trafficking, establish a system for data collection, and identify and protect trafficking victims, including among vulnerable groups such as children evacuated abroad and Ukrainians abroad. MSP worked with regional officials to develop and approve corresponding action plans at the regional level; however, none were finalized by the end of the reporting period, so some oblasts may have pursued their own anti-trafficking measures. In 2023, the government drafted legislative amendments in response to social and economic hardship resulting from Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine to simplify the procedure of granting official victim status; improve victims' access to assistance; and ensure compensation for potential trafficking victims exploited by Russian forces. MSP drafted a law to provide medical, education, and other social support to Ukrainian children who Russia forced into military activities and who returned to government-controlled territory; however, this law remained pending at the close of the reporting period. The government continued to sponsor a hotline dedicated to trafficking, GBV, and violence against children. In 2023, the government hotline received 7,465 calls, and hotline staff identified or referred 73 potential victims to protection services. A separate government hotline continued to receive international calls from Ukrainians who fled the war, including potential trafficking victims. NGOs operated additional anti-trafficking and migrant advice hotlines, which received more than 53,000 calls, resulting in the identification and referral to services of at least 77 potential trafficking victims. OPG, in collaboration with partner organizations, continued to operate dedicated channels on social media platforms to prevent and detect child trafficking. Although the national budget did not allocate funds to awareness campaigns, regional governments allocated 386,083 hryvnia (\$10,140) to awareness campaigns. Authorities, in coordination with NGOs, international organizations, and local partners, conducted awareness campaigns, available in Ukrainian and English, throughout the country, including via television, news outlets, social media, phone applications, text message, print media, video, chat bots, and public awareness events. The campaigns focused on the risks of trafficking during the war

for displaced persons, refugees, and Ukrainians abroad, particularly at train stations and border crossings.

Unaccompanied and separated children, children in government-run institutions, and thousands of children forcibly transferred or deported to Russia and occupied areas of Ukraine were at high risk of trafficking. To track and protect such children, the government maintained a register for “displaced” children; however, observers noted there continued to be insufficient data on unaccompanied Ukrainian children abroad. NGOs observed there continued to be insufficient data on unaccompanied Ukrainian children across Europe, which may have increased their risk of trafficking. Even before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, observers assessed protection of children in Ukraine’s government-run care system was inadequate. Human rights groups and media reported unsafe conditions in institutions, and there were allegations officials of several state-run institutions and orphanages had been complicit or willfully negligent in the sex and labor trafficking of girls and boys under their care. NGOs reported trafficking risks increased for such children because of the conflict. After the full-scale invasion, the government evacuated Ukrainian children from institutions in areas of armed hostilities to other areas in Ukraine and abroad. At least 195 education, health care, social protection, and private institutions for children were evacuated. The government continued to conduct site visits of institutions for children and worked with international law enforcement to identify possible child trafficking victims. Experts expressed serious concerns about the government’s protection efforts with consistent and troubling reports highlighting Ukrainian children’s vulnerability to exploitation, including trafficking. Experts also noted concerns about protections for institutionalized Ukrainian children evacuated to refugee host countries, including those with disabilities. Observers raised concern about abuse and neglect of Ukrainian refugee children housed in a hotel in Türkiye, although there were no confirmed trafficking victims among this group.

NPU and MIPOL continued to monitor and investigate formal and informal recruitment networks, including companies advertising jobs abroad, and worked with other stakeholders to raise awareness about known recruitment schemes. The Ministry of Economic Development and Trade oversaw the licensing of labor recruitment agencies and conducted regular and random inspections on their activities. In October 2023, the government passed a law requiring recruiting agencies to register with the government and prohibiting agencies from collecting fees from job seekers for employment abroad. In 2023, the State Labor Service (SLS) resumed planned and unplanned labor inspections, which were previously suspended because of the conflict. SLS conducted 313 planned and unplanned labor inspections which led to the identification of 25 potential labor trafficking. NGOs previously reported there was an insufficient number of labor inspectors to effectively meet their mandate. Observers expressed concern about the lack of oversight of the labor market, with reports of workers not receiving payments, although the SLS continued awareness efforts and informal monitoring. The SLS published recommendations for Ukrainians contemplating working abroad, including information on trafficking risks on its website. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts. Article 149 reportedly criminalized the act of knowingly soliciting or patronizing a sex trafficking victim, but an NGO noted the language in the statute is broad.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Ukraine, and traffickers exploit victims from Ukraine abroad. Traffickers exploit Ukrainian victims in sex trafficking and forced labor in Ukraine as well as in Russia, Poland, Germany, and other parts of Europe, the PRC, Kazakhstan, and the Middle East. Ukrainian victims are increasingly exploited in EU member states. Traffickers exploit some Ukrainian children and vulnerable adults in forced begging. Child sex trafficking in Ukraine remains underreported. NGOs estimate 10 to 15 percent of the Roma community lack identification documents, leaving them unable to access state social assistance programs and thereby increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. Traffickers exploit victims in forced labor in Ukraine and abroad, including in the construction, manufacturing, and agriculture sectors, and in forced criminality and forced begging. Traffickers force some victims to participate in the illegal production of counterfeit tobacco products, and well-established

criminal groups force some Ukrainian victims to engage in other illegal activities abroad. Traffickers target low-skilled workers transiting Ukraine; increasingly, well-educated workers are vulnerable to labor exploitation. Traffickers increasingly use anonymized accounts to recruit potential victims online for sex trafficking or forced labor, including for forced criminality in fraudulent appropriation of social benefits. Children institutionalized in state-run orphanages, many evacuated abroad, and more than 3,000 who remain abroad, during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, are at especially high risk of trafficking. Officials of several state-run residential institutions and institutions have allegedly been complicit or willfully negligent in the sex and labor trafficking of girls and boys under their care.

Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, employment options were limited in areas of eastern Ukraine occupied by Russia-led forces; Russia's proxies placed restrictions on international humanitarian aid intended to help meet civilian needs. IDPs, those living in Russia-occupied territory, and residents of Crimea face significant barriers to obtaining or renewing identification documents, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation. Widespread reports indicated Russian authorities confiscate Ukrainians' identification documents and force adoption of Russian passports. Observers reported Russia-led forces conscripted those living in eastern Ukraine to fight or engage in forced labor, such as clearing rubble or disposing of corpses. International organizations report the demographics of Ukrainian trafficking victims have shifted since 2014 to include more urban, younger, and male victims. They are increasingly exploited in forced labor, including in forced criminality for drug trafficking and as couriers. Traffickers reportedly kidnap women and girls from conflict-affected areas for sex and labor trafficking in Ukraine and Russia. Traffickers target IDPs and subjected some Ukrainians to forced labor, forced conscription, and sexual exploitation in Russia-occupied areas, often via kidnapping, torture, and extortion. These abuses and vulnerabilities likely continued and worsened after the full-scale invasion.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine forced 6.4 million people to flee Ukraine by March 2024 and displaced more than 3.4 million more in its borders. Most who initially fled the country were women and children, and more than half of Ukraine's children have been displaced. These refugee and displaced populations are especially vulnerable to human trafficking. At the start of the full-scale invasion, traffickers allegedly sought to exploit refugees at border crossings and transit centers. Media reported traffickers allegedly targeted displaced Ukrainians at the Polish border by offering them transportation or accommodations contingent upon domestic labor or commercial sex. Traffickers may use false claims victims could lose their temporary protection status to threaten them and prevent them from reporting exploitation to host country authorities. Some NGOs anticipate increased risks of trafficking as the economic impacts of the full-scale invasion unfold in the future. Experts note thousands of unaccompanied children, and children evacuated from at least 195 facilities, including those with disabilities, are at especially high risk of trafficking. Even for Ukrainians not displaced, the war and its economic impacts heighten individuals' vulnerability to trafficking. One 2022 survey found more than half of Ukrainians were at risk of exploitation, and willing to accept a risky job offer that could lead to exploitation; a follow-up survey in 2023 showed many groups remained willing to accept a risky offer. This includes Ukrainian men and, increasingly, educated Ukrainians seeking to provide for their needs. Observers report Ukrainian women and girls are recruited for sex trafficking abroad. Online searches for "Ukrainian escorts" and other search terms related to the sexual exploitation of Ukrainian women and girls increased. Traffickers target displaced Ukrainians via information posted online or on social media. Across Europe, Ukrainian refugees are at risk of forced labor including in domestic work, childcare, cleaning, hospitality, and agriculture. Traffickers promise jobs or housing, but then confiscate identity documents or exploit victims in forced labor. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, potential or confirmed trafficking victims from Ukraine have been identified across Europe, including in Albania, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and other countries, such as Panama, Argentina, and Israel. To date, authorities have identified only a few confirmed trafficking cases across Europe; experts observed language barriers, fear of reporting to foreign authorities, lack of awareness of available resources, and other factors, could prevent victims from reporting trafficking crimes.

Russian forces forcibly transferred as many as 1.6 million Ukrainians, including thousands of children, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities, to Russia, Belarus, and occupied territories of Ukraine, including many to remote areas. As of January 2024, Russian authorities reportedly returned approximately 500 children to Ukraine, a miniscule number compared to the thousands of children forcibly deported. In March 2022, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Russian officials allegedly responsible for the unlawful relocation of Ukrainian children to Russia. These children are highly vulnerable to trafficking. Multiple sources report Russian authorities forced Ukrainian civilians to work on the front lines, and Russia-led forces in Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine forced prisoners from Ukrainian prisons to renovate the premises and build defensive fortifications, often under the threat of violence. Reports indicate Russian authorities, middlemen, private military companies, or Russia-affiliated forces coerced, used deception, and in some cases force to recruit foreign nationals, particularly Central and South Asian migrants, as well as citizens from Cuba and Syria to fight in Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Reports also allege Russian authorities recruit through force, fraud, or coercion Central Asians, including prisoners, to fight in Russia's war against Ukraine. Media consistently reported migrants are at risk of forced labor in Russia-occupied Ukrainian territory. An international organization reported Ukrainian armed forces recruited and used one child for intelligence gathering in 2022. Reports of Russia-led forces using children as soldiers, informants, and human shields persist. Russia-led forces in Russia-occupied areas of the Donbas have reportedly used children to take direct and indirect part in the armed conflict to perform armed duty at checkpoints, as combatants, and to serve as guards and other support roles. According to media reports, Russian armed forces routinely prepare Ukrainian children for conscripted service in Russia's armed forces in military camps in Russia and occupied eastern Ukraine. The recruitment of children by Russia-led forces took place in territory occupied by Russia and in areas where the government was unable to enforce national prohibitions against the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict.