

World Day Against Trafficking in Persons 2022: joint statement to the OSCE

Thank you Chair.

I am honoured to deliver this Statement on behalf of Albania, Canada, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Switzerland, Ukraine and United Kingdom.

The 30th of July is the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. Millions of people globally are suffering because of this serious crime, and it is those most marginalized who are most affected.

The Russian Federation's illegal and unjustified war against Ukraine has caused the largest flow of refugees and displaced persons and the biggest humanitarian crisis we have faced in the OSCE region since the Second World War. Most of these refugees are women and children, who also make up the majority of those who fall victims to trafficking. Particularly concerning are the heightened risks unaccompanied minors and separated children face. This humanitarian crisis has the potential to become a human trafficking one.

The theme of this year's World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, "the use and abuse of technology", highlights that technology has significantly exacerbated exploitation and trafficking. The misuse of technology is central to the business model of exploitation, from traffickers using technology to advertise women and girls on adult services platforms, to people smugglers who may use technology to recruit victims and organise illegal migration.

There has been a frightening increase in online searches and demand for Ukrainian women and girls following the humanitarian and refugee crisis caused by Russia's war of aggression. Global online search traffic for "Ukrainian escorts" increased between 200% and 300% from February to March. In some countries of transit and destination, online searches for "Ukrainian porn" increased by 600%. Searches in Europe for terms such as "Ukrainian rape" went up by 300%, from being virtually undetected by search engines before 24 February.

This data, gathered by the Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, presents a startling picture of the seriousness of the situation and the urgency to respond to tech-facilitated trafficking and exploitation and the targeting of Ukrainian women and girls. It is also testimony to the fact that traffickers target and exploit those in vulnerable and precarious situations.

Technology can also provide important opportunities to respond to the needs of victims and survivors, to enhance prosecutions and to aid investigations,

to raise awareness and lower the risks of trafficking. Therefore, it is essential to partner with tech companies to counter recruitment and exploitation facilitated by the internet and technology. An example of the great value of such partnerships is the upcoming [joint awareness-raising campaign](#) by the Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Thomson Reuters Special Services, that will increase awareness around risks of trafficking and improve the visibility of human trafficking hotlines.

The OSCE is a valuable platform for coordinated responses and knowledge sharing to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings. We highly appreciate the excellent work of OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and Special Representative Valiant Richey and his office, including their quick and appropriate response to the unfolding situation in Ukraine. This applies to their valuable work on the project level and policy recommendations.

We cannot allow the crisis caused by Russia's war of aggression to put more people at risk of being trafficked. Our anti-trafficking efforts must be based on a victim-centred, trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, human rights-based approach, in partnership with civil society, businesses and tech companies. It is also essential to end impunity for cybercrime, and enhance internet safety for at-risk users, including children and young people, who are among those most engaged and connected online in today's world.

As long as Russia continues its war against Ukraine, the risks of trafficking continue. Russia must immediately and unconditionally stop its aggression.

The World Day Against Trafficking in Persons this year is a call to action for all of us to enhance efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking in all its forms, online and offline, and to protect those especially at-high risk, support victims and survivors, end impunity and ensure justice.

I thank you.