



*Report on Human Trafficking Issues  
to the 2025 Annual Session  
of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly*

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by

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Madame President, fellow parliamentarians, please accept the following report on my activities since the 2024 Annual Session as the Special Representative on Human Trafficking Issues for the OSCE PA.

### **High-Level Meetings and Speaking Events**

I continue to take every opportunity to raise human trafficking concerns and discuss best practices with high-level officials, especially with every foreign delegation that I meet, which averages about 1-3 for every week the U.S. House of Representatives is in session. In addition, human trafficking concerns resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the enormous number of Ukrainian refugees it caused, have recently become a major focus of meetings and events, as has the importance of utilizing National Referral Mechanisms and the wisdom of local survivor-leaders.

#### **Here is an excerpt of just some of the high-profile actions taken this year:**

July 8, 2024. My House Foreign Affairs (HFAC) subcommittee hosted a briefing to discuss the newly released Department of State 2024 [Trafficking in Persons \(TIP\) report](#). Included within the report is a ranking of every country into tiers to rate government efforts to meet the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's (TVPA) minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking. This year's report included how criminal traffickers are expanding the use of forced labor in scam centers in SE Asia to target victims (especially children), and much more.

July 9, 2024. I chaired a hearing on "Examining the 2024 Annual Trafficking in Persons Report: Progress over Politics" with Ambassador Cindy Dyer and Jason Tower as witnesses to address the improvements and worsening of efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons. Highlights on the hearing included scam centers, organ trafficking, and child labor in cobalt mines.

July 11, 2024. I chaired a hearing under the Congressional-Executive Commission on China regarding two North Korean defectors forcibly repatriated from the People's Republic of China and how upon their return to North Korea, they are often subject to sexual assault, forced labor, forced abortion and, in some cases, execution.

July 26 – August 19, 2025. My HFAC subcommittee staff met with the Department of State to explore how the Department could internally collaborate on addressing child sex trafficking through training staff and implementing partners on the ground to respond to beneficiaries who are trafficking victims.

September 11, 2024. I spoke at an Anti-Trafficking in Persons (ATIP) Policy Roundtable (among nearly 100 organizations) in the US Senate on my legislation to reauthorize the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

October 8, 2024. My HFAC subcommittee hosted a briefing on human trafficking trends with one of the former U.S. Ambassadors to Monitor and Combat Trafficking.

December 12, 2024. My HFAC subcommittee hosted a bicameral briefing on the annual Trafficking in Persons Report Tier 3 Waivers via presidential determinations.

February 19, 2025. My team met with the New Jersey Attorney General's office to brainstorm on a human trafficking awareness campaign for the World Cup in New Jersey in the summer of 2026. We discussed the importance of ensuring that all modes of transportation and hotels are part of it.

March 6, 2025. I was a panelist on the NFRW Legislative Forum for a discussion titled "America First Policy: Strengthening National Security." I spoke about China and human trafficking and forced organ harvesting. 200 people from around the country attended it.

March 18, 2025. My team met with human trafficking survivors that are part of the Harriett Tubman Fellowship program where they discussed their experience as domestic servants and the difficulty of getting convictions for traffickers.

March 18, 2025. My team met with the Government Accountability office to conduct a study on the link between autism and human trafficking.

March 18, 2025. I chaired a hearing at the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa entitled "[Metals, Minerals, and Mining: How the CCP Fuels Conflict and Exploitation in Africa](#)" to examine the child labor and forced labor in cobalt mining in DRC and the sub-Saharan region. I called for an end to exploitation and corrupt fueling of conflict with these dollars and a path forward for clean supply chains through due diligence and certifications. I also introduced a bill HR 2310, COBALT Supply Chain Act of 2025 to create a rebuttable presumption on any cobalt-containing product arriving into the U.S. from China.

April 7, 2025. My office met with lawyer Gavi Mairone who was involved with prosecuting human traffickers from Kenya and Saudi Arabia for domestic workers and forced organ harvesting—it shed light on the state-sponsored human trafficking occurring in both cases where Kenya received large amounts for remittances.

May 7, 2025. I spoke at the Buckner International Anti-trafficking event, focused on efforts to combat child trafficking.

May 8, 2025. I met with the Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons to discuss the status of the TIP Report and other issues.

May 12, 2025. I spoke at the Human Trafficking Symposium, hosted by my district's Monmouth County Sheriff's Office to discuss the importance of local law enforcement and justice efforts to combat trafficking in our local communities.

June 10, 2025. My team hosted a meeting with Cuba human rights advocates, trying to combat trafficking of medical providers, including the leading attorney, Sam Dubbin, suing PAHO for the trafficking of Cuban physicians.

June 10, 2025. I was invited to speak at The Adam Smith Center for Economic Freedom of Florida International University on "Cuba's Medical Missions and U.S. Anti-Trafficking Enforcement". My staff spoke on my behalf.

## **Legislative Efforts**

As parliamentarians, we must take legislative action to stop human trafficking abuses and protect the most vulnerable. As the principal author of the original Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-386) and its three subsequent reauthorizations and International Megan's Law, I have seen firsthand how legislation has helped prevent trafficking, protect individuals, and hold perpetrators accountable for their heinous crimes. I urge all of you to consider whether stronger legislation is needed in your country.

Currently, I have four bipartisan anti-trafficking bills in Congress.

**H.R. 1144, the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act**, ensures the continuation of the United States' most comprehensive anti-trafficking framework. While Congress has passed related bills, H.R. 1144 contains the remaining authorities and programs still in need of reauthorization, including the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, domestic child trafficking prevention education programs, first-time authorization of housing, reauthorization of International Megan's Law and the Department of Homeland Security Angel Watch Program to protect children, and much more.

**H.R. 2961, the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act**, focuses on authorizations needed to continue to fight trafficking in the United States, including domestic child trafficking prevention education programs to train children, teachers and parents how to identify and respond to human trafficking and child sexual abuse and exploitation; first-time authorization of housing through the U.S. Department of

Justice; reauthorization of International Megan’s Law and the Department of Homeland Security Angel Watch Program to protect children from child sex predators traveling abroad; and ensuring our anti-trafficking victim support services lead to healing and self-reliance.

**H.R. 2310, The COBALT Supply Chain Act** creates a rebuttable presumption for cobalt entering the U.S.—this means that it is presumed that any cobalt-related item entering the U.S. has been tainted with child forced labor and must be proven otherwise. Most cobalt is sourced and refined through child forced labor in Democratic Republic of Congo mines—largely owned and run by China. We must ensure that the supply chains for our electronics and electric vehicles are not tainted with the blood of children. The UK has introduced a companion bill.

**H.R. 1503, the Stop Forced Organ Harvesting Act** confronts one of the most grotesque human rights abuses in our time: the trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ harvesting. This is butchering and murder masquerading as medicine. This most commonly occurs through Chinese CCP state-sanctioned murder of prisoners of conscience—especially Uyghurs and Falun Gong practitioners—for the purpose of organ harvesting. These are crimes against humanity, where bodies are commodified and young lives are extinguished for profit. The United States will impose strict sanctions on those involved in or benefitting from this horrific trade—including asset freezes, visa bans, fines up to \$1 million and criminal penalties up to 20 years in prison. This bill also requires the United States to produce comprehensive reports on organ trafficking to hold perpetrators accountable.

### **Concern about Ukrainian Children Forcibly Transferred by Russia**

Since the start of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has taken thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia or Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine. Most are still missing and may have been put up for adoption or forcibly Russified, which is a war crime. Russia has claimed that it is protecting Ukrainian children; more recently it is claiming that Ukrainian children living in the areas of Ukraine, which Russia illegally occupies are now Russian citizens, so no international law applies. In reality, Russia is forcibly Russifying Ukrainian children in an apparent strategy to erase their identity, which could amount to genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention. In February 2023, Yale’s Humanitarian Research Lab (Yale HRL) documented the relocation of over 6,000 children from Ukraine via a network of 43 re-education and adoption facilities stretching from Crimea to Siberia. According to the report, the majority of camps engage in pro-Russia re-education initiatives, while others have given children military training and prevented their return to their parents, violating international human rights law.

In May 2023, a number of OSCE participating States invoked the “Moscow Mechanism,” an OSCE tool that triggers and international investigation of a particularly serious human rights issue, to examine Russia’s forced transfer and assimilation of Ukrainian children. The resulting report found that Russia placed Ukrainian children in Russian institutions or families – including through adoption, guardianship or foster families, where they have been subjected to pro-Russian information campaigns often amounting to targeted re-education. Moreover, it found that Russia has created obstacles for families seeking to get their children back and its non-consensual “evacuations”, transfers and prolonged displacement of Ukrainian children, which the report concluded constitute violations of international humanitarian law, and in certain cases amount to war crimes.

As of March 2025, according to various sources, only 1,236 Ukrainian children have been returned from Russia. Russia has refused to give Ukrainian authorities a list of children taken to Russia—as required by international law—and has engaged in various activities to conceal their forced deportation and illegal adoption of children from Ukraine. Russia must be held accountable for these crimes and atrocities against Ukraine. We also must call for the safe return and reunification of these children with their families or for those without families, find permanent placements for them.

### **Orphanage Voluntourism and Orphanage Trafficking**

Children are being trafficked into orphanages—not because they are orphans, but because traffickers know they can profit from well-meaning volunteers, child sex predators, donations, and voluntourism. Shockingly, 80% of the estimated 5.5 million children living in orphanages and residential care globally have at least one living parent and a family they could return to. Families are deceived with false promises of education and care, only to have their children exploited for profit. This is modern slavery. Children are denied access to their families, subjected to neglect, abuse, and forced to live in institutions designed to maximize profits, not for the benefit of the child.

The United States is one of the largest sources of volunteers and donations to orphanages worldwide. Many well-intentioned Americans unknowingly contribute to orphanage tourism and child trafficking. A study done by Fatih in Action on Christians in America found that 34,000,000 Americans contributed financially to orphanage and residential care and 4,000,000 had gone on orphan trips. This is not limited to the United States; I urge you look at whether well-meaning individuals in your countries are similarly unknowingly contributing to this form of child trafficking.

We have an opportunity to protect children by recognizing Orphanage Tourism and Trafficking as a form of modern slavery and human trafficking. We must ensure that legislation

in our countries hold organizations accountable and ensure that donations and volunteer hours do not contribute to child trafficking or modern slavery. This could be done by:

1. Formally recognize Orphanage Trafficking as a form of human trafficking by including it in legislation and in national strategies to combat human trafficking. I hope to introduce legislation on this issue very soon.
2. Require organizations that place volunteers in orphanages in other countries as part of Orphan Tourism to include mandatory training and background checks on all volunteers and to conduct annual audits on the legitimacy of the orphanages, safety and welfare of the children in the orphanages, as well as a reintegration program for each location where they operate.
3. Create a public reporting mechanism/whistleblower portal where individuals who encounter child trafficking can report it directly to the government, allowing potential volunteers and donors insight into organizations that work with vulnerable children.

### **Continued Support for the OSCE/ODIHR International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council**

I continue to support the OSCE/ODIHR “International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Council,” or ISTAC, the first such council established by an international organization. I also believe that the OSCE should develop staff training on trauma-informed approaches and for the prevention and response to harassment in the workplace for OSCE staff to better inform their engagements with vulnerable populations, including trafficking survivor-leaders.

The United States established its own Advisory Council on Human Trafficking in 2015 as a platform to enable trafficking survivors to provide recommendations on federal anti-trafficking policies to the President’s Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Members of the Council are appointed by the President for two-year terms. In 2019, the U.S. State Department launched its own Human Trafficking Expert Consultant Network (the Network), which among other things, has provided comments to the U.S. delegation during negotiations of OSCE Ministerial decisions. I, myself, find recommendations from survivors extremely valuable in the legislative process for both hearing testimony and writing legislation, as they have informed the original TVPA of 2000 and subsequent reauthorizations.

ISTAC members have been actively participating in OSCE and other international events, where they have made many valuable recommendations. I urge all your countries to consult with ISTAC members as well as to create your own survivor-leader councils to provide a platform for survivor voices to be heard by policymakers.

## **U.S. State Department *Trafficking in Persons Report 2024***

The 2024 *Trafficking in Persons Report*<sup>1</sup> was released on June 24, 2023, by Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Required by my *Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000*, this report is one of the most successful ways the U.S. promotes best practices and ensures government accountability for the minimum standards to eliminate human trafficking. This annual report lays bare the progress of 187 countries, including the United States, via a tier ranking and narrative—with recommendations for improvements.

Tier 1 countries fully meet the minimum standards for eliminating human trafficking. Tier 2 countries do not meet the minimum standards but are making a significant effort to do so. Tier 2 Watch List countries are in a grace period and in real danger of becoming Tier 3 unless they show significant effort to go along with their promise. Tier 3 countries do not meet the minimum standards and are not making significant effort to do so. Along with the embarrassment of being listed on Tier 3, Tier 3 countries are open to sanctions by the U.S. government.

This year's report has a focus on the Exploring the Role and Impacts of Digital Technology on Human Trafficking.

The report highlights the duality of technology, both as providing innovative solutions to preventing trafficking while also creating opportunities for traffickers to exploit and profit. According to the report, “Traffickers use technology to recruit, control, market and exploit vulnerable individuals while also evading detection. Traffickers do this, for example, by using the Internet to advertise and sell children online for sex, advertise false jobs on social media platforms that are actually human trafficking schemes, transfer cryptocurrency to other traffickers, and perpetuate online scam operations. At the same time, anti-trafficking stakeholders are using technological innovations to prevent human trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute traffickers.”

“Renewed attention was brought to the issue because many people shifted their daily activities online at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Reports from several countries demonstrated drastic increases in online commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking, including online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC), and demand for and distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM).” “Additionally, traffickers can use the Internet to facilitate forced criminality, an increasingly common mechanism involving traffickers coercing their victims to

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report* (June 2024) [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/TIP-Report-2024 Introduction V10 508-accessible 2.13.2025.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/TIP-Report-2024%20Introduction%20V10%20508-accessible%202.13.2025.pdf)

engage in or support criminal activities ranging from working as part of online scam operations to commercial sex.”

“Technology also plays an important role in investigating and countering human trafficking. Digital technology, including mobile applications, social media campaigns, and online hubs, can be used to further share information, resources, and training on human trafficking. It can also be used to improve access to online support services for victims, survivors, and vulnerable populations.”

“Digital technology and literacy expand the reach of prevention efforts to raise awareness and educate the public on human trafficking globally. Given the increase in online activity among children, governments and parents should even further prioritize education around online safety for children and youth, and could take advantage of online tools to inform children of the risks related to the internet. Fortunately, there are already a number of beneficial training tools for young people using social media and mobile applications, as well as for parents and guardians, that help support early interventions to prevent technology-facilitated trafficking of youth. One example of how technology is being used for public awareness is through online campaigns including the Can You See Me? campaign administered by A21, a global anti-trafficking organization in the United States, aimed at informing the general public on how to spot signs of human trafficking and where to report it.”

#### Participating States Making Measurable Progress: Bulgaria and Poland

There were some changes in the last year in terms of Tier rankings of OSCE participating States. Two standouts were Bulgaria and Poland; Bulgaria moved up to Tier 2 and Poland moved up to Tier 1.

Bulgaria “demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore Bulgaria was upgraded to Tier 2. These efforts included prosecuting significantly more traffickers; increasing funding for anti-trafficking programs; and adopting the 2023 NAP. The government also adopted a four-year national program for the prevention of violence and child abuse and a corresponding implementation plan, including measures for child trafficking victims. Additionally, the Prosecution Service (PS) and the Ministry of Interior (MOI) established an interagency unit for combating human trafficking, among other crimes, to support pre-trial investigations and collect and analyze information regarding organized crime groups. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) re-established its council on criminology, assembling police, prosecutors, judges, and academia to analyze criminal cases, including trafficking cases, and propose measures to improve the effectiveness of investigations and court proceedings. In addition, the government provided new services, including four counseling centers, one shelter for temporary accommodation, two shelters for overnight accommodation, and two crisis centers,

to victims of violence, including trafficking victims, and licensed 20 social services providers, mostly NGOs, to operate the crisis centers and provide services.”<sup>2</sup>

Poland “made key achievements to do so during the reporting period; therefore Poland was upgraded to Tier 1. These achievements included prosecuting and convicting more traffickers, increasing funding for victim services for the first time in eight years, and increasing funding for NAP implementation for the first time in six years. The government increased efforts to investigate and identify labor trafficking; 79 percent of ongoing prosecutions were for labor trafficking and an overwhelming majority of victims authorities identified were labor trafficking victims. The government funded two NGOs that provided assistance to more potential trafficking victims for the second consecutive year. Courts awarded restitution to trafficking victims in four cases, the first time courts awarded restitution since 2020. In addition, the government created an inter-ministerial anti-trafficking body to enhance coordination efforts.”<sup>3</sup>

### Participating States Losing Ground in the Fight Against Trafficking: Kyrgyzstan, Malta and Tajikistan

The fight against trafficking in persons requires constant vigilance. Kyrgyzstan, Malta, and Tajikistan were downgraded to the Tier 2 Watchlist.

Kyrgyzstan “did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period. The government did not identify or refer any victims to services. Resources for victim services and the availability of shelter for victims, especially children and male victims, remained insufficient. The government did not uniformly apply SOPs to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, reportedly resulting in the inappropriate penalization of some unidentified victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Authorities investigated and prosecuted fewer suspects and did not secure any convictions for a third consecutive year. The government extended its moratorium on unannounced labor inspections, increasing difficulties in ensuring compliance with labor laws and identifying forced labor cases. There were significant gaps in law enforcement’s understanding of trafficking crimes resulting in the misclassification of human trafficking cases, unidentified victims, and lower penalties for traffickers, including cases involving allegedly complicit officials. Therefore the Kyrgyz Republic was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/bulgaria/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/poland/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/kyrgyzstan/>

Malta “did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period. The government investigated fewer trafficking cases and initiated fewer prosecutions against suspected traffickers. Anti-trafficking training for judges remained inadequate and courts continued to frequently overturn trafficking convictions on appeal for administrative technicalities. Gaps in victim identification persisted and the government did not report identifying any Maltese nationals, asylum-seekers, or undocumented migrants as trafficking victims. For the third consecutive year, the government did not identify any child trafficking victims. The government decreased funding for prevention, continued to lack coordination among ministries, and has never awarded restitution or compensation to any trafficking victims. The government did not report efforts to effectively enforce labor regulations to prevent recruitment fees charged to workers, which increase workers’ vulnerability to trafficking. The government did not make concrete efforts to increase oversight and regulation of massage parlors where there was a higher incidence of trafficking indicators. Therefore, Malta was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List.”<sup>5</sup>

Tajikistan “did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period. The government identified fewer victims, continued to refer a small proportion of victims identified to protection services, heavily relied on international organizations to provide victim services without adequate funding or in-kind assistance, and prosecuted fewer traffickers. The government remained without comprehensive SOPs for victim identification and referral, contributing to inadequate victim identification efforts and potentially inappropriately penalizing sex trafficking victims for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Despite allegations of possible official complicity in some localities, including forced labor by local officials in the cotton harvest, the government did not report any criminal investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes. Although the government publicized the ban on child labor in the cotton harvest in previous years, it did not do so for the second consecutive year, and observers reported allegations of officials mobilizing children. There was a lack of oversight in sectors vulnerable to forced labor, including construction, and the government continued to disproportionately focus on transnational trafficking crimes without taking adequate action to address internal trafficking crimes. Therefore Tajikistan was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List.”<sup>6</sup>

OSCE Participating States Remaining on Tier 3: Belarus, Russia and Turkmenistan.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/malta/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/tajikistan/>

Three OSCE participating States have remained on Tier 3 for several years. Belarus “took some steps to address trafficking, including supporting a safe labor migration awareness-raising campaign. However, during the reporting period there was a government policy or pattern of forced labor in “labor therapy centers.” Authorities forced thousands of individuals with drug or alcohol addiction, as well as political prisoners and persons leading an “asocial lifestyle,” to perform a wide range of labor at “labor therapy centers.” Reports indicated the government planned to increase the number of “labor therapy centers” in 2024, providing space for up to 10,000 individuals. The government also decreased trafficking-related investigations and did not report if it investigated, prosecuted, or convicted any traffickers under its trafficking statute. Belarusian authorities facilitated the transfer of Ukrainian children to Belarus; it was unknown how many remained in Belarus at the end of the reporting period. All Ukrainian children transferred to Belarus were highly vulnerable to trafficking. Authorities continued to facilitate the entry into Belarus and onward travel of many third-country migrants and asylum-seekers who arrived in the country as part of state-sponsored migration heightening these migrants’ trafficking vulnerabilities. The government returned some of these migrants to their countries of origin without screening for trafficking; the government also did not report screening Ukrainian refugees. Moreover, as part of its broader repression of civil society and independent, pro-democracy activism, the government widely restricted the activities of civil society organizations, including organizations providing support to trafficking victims, and did not provide funding to NGOs. The government did not directly provide adequate protection services to trafficking victims, and its efforts to prevent labor trafficking remained inadequate. For the seventh consecutive year, the government did not report investigating or filing charges related to illegal recruitment of migrant workers.”<sup>7</sup>

Russia also remained on Tier 3. “There was a government policy or pattern of trafficking of Ukrainian citizens and North Korean workers. There were also reports of Russian officials forcing, deceiving, or coercing foreign national adults to fight in Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. As part of its war of aggression against Ukraine, the Russian government operated a sprawling filtration operation and detention system that included the use of forced labor. The government continued to perpetuate the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s (DPRK) imposition of forced labor conditions on North Korean workers. The government did not screen North Korean workers in Russia for trafficking indicators or identify any North Korean trafficking victims, despite credible reports in previous years that the DPRK operated work camps in Russia and exploited thousands of North Korean workers in forced labor. Moreover, the government repatriated North Korean workers who had attempted to escape, without screening them for trafficking indicators; these individuals were highly vulnerable to forced labor and other grave harms, such as arrest, imprisonment, torture, or execution, upon

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/belarus/>

return to the DPRK. The government did not report how many North Korean workers remained in Russia in 2023. Separate from this complicity, the government did not report investigating, prosecuting, or convicting any traffickers and did not report identifying any trafficking victims. Authorities continued to lack a process for victim identification and referral to care, and the criminal code did not establish a definition for a trafficking victim, hindering identification efforts and limiting access to victim services. The government offered no funding or programs to provide services for trafficking victims, and authorities routinely penalized victims and potential victims for unlawful acts committed solely as a direct result of being trafficked. As in previous years, the government did not draft a national strategy or assign roles and responsibilities to government agencies to combat human trafficking.

“Additionally, the government engaged in conduct that created populations that were highly vulnerable to trafficking. The government’s forcible transfer of tens of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia, including by forcibly separating some children from their parents or guardians, greatly increased the separated children’s vulnerability to trafficking. Additionally, the government created significant vulnerabilities to trafficking for Ukrainian citizens in Russia-occupied territory in Ukraine by restricting access to a wide range of services and employment for those who did not acquire Russian citizenship. Moreover, the government’s war against Ukraine forced millions of refugees to flee Ukraine, as well as those internally displaced by Russia’s aggression, all of whom were highly vulnerable to trafficking. The scale and scope of such conduct raised real and serious concerns regarding significant potential risks of trafficking.”<sup>8</sup>

Turkmenistan “took some steps to address trafficking, including by signing and implementing a roadmap of cooperation with the International Labor Organization (ILO), which included the independent observation of the 2023 cotton harvest by ILO observers, an analysis of the labor legislation of Turkmenistan, and recommendations for compliance and alignment with international labor standards. The government also provided funding and in-kind support for anti-trafficking awareness campaigns and established new social worker positions within the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection to provide assistance to vulnerable populations, including trafficking victims. However, during the reporting period there was a government policy or pattern of forced labor; the government continued to direct policies that perpetuated the mobilization of adults and children for forced labor in the annual cotton harvest, in public works projects, and in other sectors. As in previous years, the government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions; did not hold any officials accountable for their

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/russia/>

complicity in forced labor crimes; identified no victims; and did not fund any victim assistance programs.”<sup>9</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine continues to pose a major challenge to our effort to prevent and combat human trafficking. We must act to ensure the safe return and reunification of Ukrainian children forcibly transferred by Russia with their families. And we must continue to do all we can to prevent and protect Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons from falling prey to human traffickers as well as to identify and assist victims, and to prosecute traffickers.

We also must step up our efforts to prevent and stop orphanage trafficking through legislative and policy measures to protect vulnerable children and ensure that well-meaning citizens do not unknowingly contribute to this form of child trafficking. We need to address child forced labor in the cobalt mining industry, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Likewise, we must be vigilant about how forced organ harvesting and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of organ removal remain hidden in plain sight. We should collaborate with UNODC and others who have taken the lead to combat this crime.

We must also take measures to address convicted child sex offenders traveling to other countries to engage in “child sex tourism” through the development of laws like International Megan’s Law. International Megan’s Law acts through the Angel Watch Center to notify destination countries of their intent to travel and the opportunity to refuse entry of the child predators into their countries.

I urge you all to work within your parliaments to strengthen your legislation and policies to combat human trafficking. We need international cooperation and coordination now more than ever. Please join me in this effort until we have raised a generation that is free of human trafficking.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/turkmenistan/>