

ODIHR survey on the safety and security of women refugees from Ukraine



The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has been active in preventing and combating human trafficking in the OSCE region since 1999, focusing on the promotion of international human rights standards and gender-sensitive, child friendly, trauma-informed and victim and survivor-centred measures in all responses to trafficking. As part of its ongoing support to Ukraine, ODIHR conducted a survey of close to 1,000 Ukrainian refugee women to ensure their experiences and vulnerabilities are reflected in policy responses and development.

Context

Armed conflict exacerbates the risk of trafficking for women and children currently fleeing Ukraine, for example through the increase of social and economic vulnerabilities, the breakdown of the rule of law, and the overall disruption caused to the work of state institutions. One third of the detected victims of human trafficking globally are children, while women and children constitute 95% of all victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This means that the groups comprising the majority of refugees are also those most highly targeted by traffickers.

Key Survey Findings

Respondents cited a number of issues in their transit or destination countries impacting their safety and security. These included: insufficient knowledge of the local language;

lack of financial resources; inability to rent accommodation; lack of healthcare; lack of social networks and community; domestic violence; and discrimination. In addition, since leaving Ukraine, respondents had experienced fraud, received threats, and experienced blackmail or coercion.

Previous experience of sexual and gender-based violence creates an inherent vulnerability to human trafficking. Some respondents reported that since leaving Ukraine they had experienced sexual harassment; domestic violence; received requests for sexual favours; received proposals to work in the sex industry as well as offers of surrogacy, proposals to produce pornographic materials; and suffered sexual violence. Some respondents indicated that their own children, or children in their care, had experienced bullying, discrimination or harassment in schools, universities or the local community; domestic violence; sexual harassment; requests for sexual favours; or received proposals to produce pornographic materials.

Two in five respondents said they were worried about human trafficking, while almost half had not received any information on human trafficking nor on how to stay safe. One in five said that more needs to be done to stop the trafficking of women and girls, with a particular focus needed on the lack of control over the movement of refugees after crossing the border; insufficient information provided at border points in multiple languages; and gender-sensitive approaches in addressing human trafficking of female refugees.

Policy Recommendations

These 12 key policy recommendations aim to address vulnerabilities to human trafficking as well as to strengthen the prevention and identification efforts of Ukrainian refugees in transit and destination countries, with a special focus on children.

- Establish vetting procedures for accommodation providers, including a criminal records check, and develop longer-term safe housing solutions;
- Regulate employment agencies to prevent trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, including registration and robust monitoring, and ensure access to education and childcare in urban centres where employment is available;
- Provide information on rights in easy-to-understand language and format, as well as vetted interpreters and pro bono legal services/consultations;
- Monitor and remove online disinformation about the rights of Ukrainian refugees, and address hate speech and disinformation that targets Ukrainian refugees;
- Provide awareness-raising material in both Russian and Ukrainian at key locations, on social media, and on hotlines, as well as ensuring the availability of Ukrainian/Russian speaking staff working on emergency hotlines and engaging with diaspora communities, including survivors of trafficking;
- Train all stakeholders working with the refugees, including civil society organizations, on the identification of trafficking victims, on a trauma-informed approach, and on referral to the national referral mechanism or equivalent systems;
- Provide training for law enforcement at national and local levels, including for cybercrime law enforcement units, on the identification of trafficking victims and on a trauma-informed approach on proactive targeting and disruption of practices used for the recruitment and exploitation of Ukrainian women and child refugees;
- Increase labour inspections in the agricultural, service, hospitality, manufacturing, industrial, domestic work/elderly care sectors to identify trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation;
- Address and reduce demand for trafficking for the purpose of sexual and labour exploitation of Ukrainian refugee women and children;
- Set up robust registration systems for all unaccompanied and separated children, link them with national child protection systems and prioritize family reunification wherever necessary;
- Appoint and monitor legal guardians within 24 hours and conduct Best Interest of the Child (BIC) assessments as the basis for determining accommodation and other care, including for 16-18 year olds;
- Address vulnerabilities of Ukrainian children to exploitation for the production of child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) and other forms of sexual exploitation online.

Further information

[Survey findings infographic](#)

[“National Referral Mechanisms - Joining Efforts to Protect the Rights of Trafficked Persons” Handbook](#)

[ODIHR in Ukraine Factsheet](#)



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