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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



CONFLICT IN UKRAINE: KEY EVIDENCE ON RISKS OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS AND SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS

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The outbreak of an armed conflict raises serious concerns about human trafficking inside the affected country; and about human trafficking and migrant smuggling of people fleeing across borders. This research brief sets out key data and research findings on trafficking and smuggling risks related to the war in Ukraine, in order to better understand and prevent these crimes, and protect victims of trafficking and other abuses.

This version, dated December 2022, is the second update of the original version, taking account of data and findings that have emerged since March 2022. Data are valid as of 22 December 2022. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is currently conducting research in European countries among people who fled Ukraine, with the findings due for publication in mid-2023.

⇒ THE CONFLICT MAKES PEOPLE VULNERABLE TO TRAFFICKING INSIDE UKRAINE

UNODC research shows that inside an affected country, vulnerabilities to trafficking in persons arise from the impacts of conflict: lack of income-generation opportunities; interruption in the provision of essential services; issues with rule of law; internal displacement; and the risk of exploitation in armed conflict. People living in conflict zones may adopt negative coping strategies to gain access to food and other supplies, or for their own safety and security.¹

The number of verified civilian casualties since the outbreak of the war has reached 17,595,

¹ All websites accessed 22.12.2022. UNODC (2018). *Trafficking in Persons in the Context of Armed Conflict*; UNODC (2018). *Countering Trafficking in Persons in Conflict Situations: Thematic Paper*; UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons (3 August 2021). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children Siobhán Mullally: A/76/263*; UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (19 April 2016). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences: A/HRC/32/42*; Healy, Claire (2019). *The Strength to Carry On: Resilience and Vulnerability to Trafficking and Other Abuses among People Travelling along Migration Routes to Europe*; ICMPD (2015). *Targeting Vulnerabilities: The Impact of the Syrian War and Refugee Situation on Trafficking in Persons*.

including 6,826 people killed and 10,769 injured, according to the United Nations (UN).²

The Ukrainian population prior to the outbreak of the war was 44 million people.³ UN agencies estimate that 17.7 million people need humanitarian aid and protection assistance, and 5.6 million people are internally displaced.⁴ 5.2 million people in Ukraine are returnees from other parts of Ukraine and from abroad.⁵

Inside Ukraine, access to income generation and to essential services and goods, including food, water, heating and electricity, is further deteriorating.⁶ Internally displaced people and people in areas of active conflict are at heightened vulnerability to physical and sexual violence, trauma and other abuses. This, in turn, increases the risk of sex trafficking, labour trafficking, and exploitation in armed conflict, particularly for children, minorities (especially Ukrainian Roma people), survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, the elderly, and people with disabilities.⁷ Ensuring sustained provision of humanitarian aid and access to essential services will make people more resilient to trafficking and exploitation, as well as other abuses.

² OHCHR (19 December 2022). *Ukraine Civilian Casualty Update*.

³ World Bank Population data.

⁴ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *Ukraine: Situation Report - Last updated: 19 December 2022*.

⁵ IOM DTM (20 December 2022). *Ukraine — Returns Report (25 November - 5 December 2022)*. Returnees in Ukraine comprise around 23% returnees from abroad and 77% returnees from a situation of internal displacement. IOM considers as returnees people who left their place of habitual residence after 24 February 2022, for a period of at least two weeks, and who since returned.

⁶ UNHCR (2 December 2022). *Ukraine Situation Flash Update #36*.

⁷ EUAA, IOM & OECD (October 2022). *Forced displacement from and within Ukraine: Profiles, experiences, and aspirations of affected populations*; Cockbain, E. & Sidebottom, A (29 April 2022). *The war in Ukraine and associated risks of human trafficking and exploitation Insights from an evidence-gathering roundtable*; UNHCR (April 2022). "Ukraine crisis creates new trafficking risks"; IOM (16 March 2022). "IOM Warns of Increased Risk of Trafficking in Persons for People Fleeing Ukraine".

On the specific protection needs of people with disabilities in this context, see: European Disability Forum and UNHCR (2 December 2022). *Ensuring the Protection of Persons with Disabilities Fleeing from Ukraine*.

⇒ LEGAL PATHWAYS PREVENT MIGRANT SMUGGLING

More than 8.13 million people have fled Ukraine to reside abroad since the beginning of the war. A total of 7.86 million people are recorded in European countries, including 2.85 million in the Russian Federation,⁸ 1.54 million in Poland, 1.02 million in Germany, 472,000 in Czech Republic, 173,000 in Italy, and 159,000 in Spain.⁹ The United Kingdom is among the few European countries requiring entry visas from Ukrainians; a total of 152,200 Ukraine visa holders have arrived in the UK.¹⁰

Around 270,000 Ukrainians are registered in Canada and the USA. By the end of September 2022, around 136,400 Ukrainians had fled to the USA: 82,000 Ukrainians and their families entered the USA under the Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program; at least 34,000 entered on different types of entry visas (tourist, student, etc.); over 20,000 travelled visa-free to Mexico, entered the US across the land border, and applied for asylum; and about 400 entered through the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).¹¹

By 11 December 2022, 132,400 Ukrainians had arrived in Canada under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) visa scheme. A further 735,900 had applied for visas under the scheme.¹²

Over 4.86 million people who fled Ukraine are registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes in European countries, comprising 96% Ukrainians, as well as non-Ukrainians from outside the EU (mostly Russians, Nigerians and Moroccans). By early November 2022, just 24,500 Ukrainians had applied for international protection through the regular asylum systems in EU countries.¹³

Around half of those who fled to European countries (not including the Russian Federation) are adult women, 40% per cent are children and 10% are adult men.¹⁴ Among the children are tens of thousands who are unaccompanied and separated.¹⁵ Gaps have been identified in the centralised registration of unaccompanied children, increasing the risk of trafficking. EU countries are not systematically reporting data on unaccompanied children fleeing Ukraine, so the exact number is not known.¹⁶ According to

⁸ Latest figures available for the Russian Federation are from 3 October 2022. Ukrainians can regularly enter the Russian Federation and apply for Refugee Status, Temporary Asylum, Temporary Residence Permit, Permanent Residence Permit or Russian citizenship. Non-Ukrainians fleeing the war can transit the Russian Federation regularly for up to 15 days. Source: UNHCR Refugees from Ukraine in Russia website.

Ukrainians currently in the Russian Federation have travelled there independently; been evacuated from Ukraine by the Russian Government; or are transiting *en route* to other countries of asylum. UNHCR (16 December 2022). *Ukraine Situation Flash Update #37*.

⁹ UNHCR Operational data portal on the situation in Ukraine.

¹⁰ UK Home Office (22 December 2022). Ukraine Family Scheme Application Data. This covers visas under both the Ukraine Family Scheme and the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme. An additional 46,300 people submitted an application and are waiting for a visa to be issued, and 56,700 were issued a visa but have not yet entered the UK.

¹¹ US Citizenship and Immigration Service. *Uniting for Ukraine*; US Citizenship and Immigration Service (December 2022). *Fiscal Year 2022 Progress Report*; MPI (13 July 2022). *Welcoming Afghans and Ukrainians to the United States: A Case in Similarities and Contrasts*.

¹² Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) statistics. Data for other non-European countries are not yet available.

¹³ UNHCR Operational data portal on the situation in Ukraine; EUAA (9 November 2022). *Analysis on Asylum and Temporary Protection in the EU+ in the Context of the Ukraine Crisis Weeks 43 and 44* (24 October-6 November 2022); EUAA, IOM & OECD (October 2022). *Op. Cit.*

¹⁴ UNHCR (26 October 2022). *Displacement Patterns, Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine - Regional Protection Analysis # 1*. Ukrainian men aged 18-60, and adult women with certain professions, are prohibited by the Ukrainian Government from leaving the country and taking up residence elsewhere, unless they fall under certain specific categories.

¹⁵ EU Solidarity Platform (under the lead of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator) (6 May 2022). *A Common Anti-Trafficking Plan to address the risks of trafficking in human beings and support potential victims among those fleeing the war in Ukraine*. UNICEF and UNHCR have set up over 30 "Blue Dot" safe spaces for Ukrainian refugee children and their families in Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

¹⁶ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) (October 2022). *The Russian War of Aggression against Ukraine — The Broad Fundamental Rights Impact in the EU Bulletin #2*.

Europol, Ukrainian children have been detected in the EU accompanied by adults who were not their relatives.¹⁷

The displacement has resulted in widespread family separation. Seventy-eight per cent of over 43,000 refugees from Ukraine interviewed by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Ukraine's bordering countries had to separate from at least one immediate family member in order to flee, because of military conscription or because the family member(s) did not want to or could not leave Ukraine.¹⁸

The 2001 European Union (EU) Temporary Protection Directive was activated for people fleeing Ukraine on 4 March 2022 and has been extended until March 2024.¹⁹ Temporary protection and similar national protection schemes that apply to Ukrainians arriving in European countries,²⁰ as well as visa-free entry for Ukrainians to almost all European countries, significantly reduce the need for those fleeing the war to use migrant smugglers. The vast majority of border crossings by people displaced by the war from Ukraine to the EU, *via* the Republic of Moldova to the EU, and within the EU, are considered by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) to be legal and orderly.²¹

The EU's "Dublin Regulation", requiring asylum applicants to apply for international protection in the first EU country of arrival, does not apply to temporary protection of people fleeing Ukraine. People with temporary protection status can travel to other EU countries for up to

90 days within a 180-day period.²² Therefore, it is also unlikely that smuggling of migrants is being perpetrated in the context of Ukrainians moving within the EU ("secondary movements"), as they can do so regularly.

Temporary protection status grants the holders an array of rights, contributing to their resilience to trafficking and other abuses. The temporary protection residence permit is valid for one year and can be extended for up to three years. Rights include access to employment, accommodation, social welfare, healthcare, education for children, and banking services.²³

The legal framework for refugees from Ukraine arriving in the EU is therefore distinct in very significant ways from the framework that applies to refugees, asylum applicants and migrants from other non-EU countries. Migrant smuggling is largely prevented, and legal entry and legal status are an important factor of resilience to trafficking in persons.

⇒ BUT THERE ARE ISOLATED INDICATIONS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING

Among respondents to the *Survey of Arriving Migrants from Ukraine* conducted by the EU Asylum Agency (EUAA) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) during March to August 2022, 22% had to pay someone for transportation out of the country. They paid on average €363, though amounts ranged from €9.30 to €9,300. However, it is likely that in most cases these were simply transportation costs for regularly exiting Ukraine and entering transit and destination countries.²⁴

Respondents also reported experiencing severe hardship (63%); shooting, bombing or threats (48%); emotional abuse, threat of physical assault (17%); racism or xenophobia (11%); and

¹⁷ Content analysis of Europol Monitoring Team Reports (EPMT) March – November 2022. Europol Unclassified – Basic Protection Level.

¹⁸ UNHCR (21 December 2022). *Ukraine situation: Regional protection profiling and monitoring factsheet*.

¹⁹ Council of the EU Implementing Decision (2022/382) to activate Article 5 of Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001, introducing temporary protection for Ukrainians arriving in EU countries, was taken on 4 March 2022.

²⁰ All 27 EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and Kosovo: S/RES/1244 (1999), Switzerland and the UK grant temporary protection or similar national protection statuses.

²¹ Frontex (2022). *Annual Risk Analysis for 2022/2023*, p15.

²² FRA (October 2022). *Op. Cit.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ EUAA, IOM & OECD (October 2022). *Forced displacement from and within Ukraine: Profiles, experiences, and aspirations of affected populations*. The survey was self-administered using a mobile phone and was available to respondents residing in all EU countries, in Ukrainian, Russian and English.

financial fraud or exploitation (11%) *en route*. Individual respondents to the survey indicated corruption and fraudulent activity in the temporary protection application procedure, through intermediaries advertising their services online.²⁵

During the years prior to the war, Ukrainians were among the top nationalities of people detected as irregularly residing, irregularly entering and using fraudulent documents in the EU.²⁶

Information reported to Europol in 2022 indicates the detection in the EU of potential smuggling cases involving the use of fraudulent Ukrainian documents, including identity cards, driving licenses, passports, and residence permits by non-Ukrainians in order to enter and access temporary protection status. However, it is not clear whether smugglers (third parties facilitating the provision of the documents) were involved.²⁷

The visa-free and temporary protection provisions do not apply to non-Ukrainian, non-EU citizens who were residing in Ukraine at the outbreak of the war, with the exception of recognized refugees and some categories of long-term permanent residents. This means that this group (mostly from Türkiye, Russian Federation, India, Azerbaijan, Israel, and Georgia)²⁸ may need migrant smuggling in order to leave Ukraine and enter another country irregularly, and are more vulnerable to trafficking in persons in this context. Non-Ukrainians from outside the EU who fled the war also face challenges in accessing rights and services in EU countries.²⁹ 580,500 non-

Ukrainians from outside the EU have exited Ukraine since the outbreak of the war.³⁰

⇒ THE DISPLACEMENT SITUATION IS HIGHLY DYNAMIC

In recent months, many people have moved on from the countries bordering Ukraine to other parts of Europe. If Ukrainians or others are trafficked *en route*, it is difficult for final destination countries to follow up on abuses perpetrated in origin or transit countries.

Around 70% of people surveyed by the EUAA and OECD, who had fled Ukraine since the outbreak of the war and were located in EU countries, had already reached their preferred destination country. The remainder were not yet at their final intended destination or were undecided. For those intending to move on, the preferred destination countries were mostly within the EU (over 63%), but 15% cited the UK, 12% Canada, and 10% the USA as preferred destination countries.³¹ None of the latter three countries grant visa-free entry to Ukrainians, meaning that there is a potential risk of migrant smuggling.

Meanwhile, the displacement situation is highly dynamic. People have crossed Ukraine's borders back into the country 8.7 million times, for reasons including temporary trips to check on family, property and businesses, joining family, accessing economic opportunities, and perception of safety in specific areas.³² Around 1.2 million people are officially registered by IOM as returnees to Ukraine from abroad.³³ Of

²⁵ EUAA, IOM & OECD (October 2022). *Op. Cit.*

²⁶ Frontex (2022). *Annual Risk Analysis for 2022/2023*; Frontex (2021). *Annual Risk Analysis for 2021*; Europol EMSC (2022). *European Migrant Smuggling Centre 6th Annual Report*.

²⁷ Content analysis of Europol Monitoring Team Reports (EPMT) March – November 2022. Europol Unclassified – Basic Protection Level.

²⁸ EUAA, IOM & OECD (October 2022). *Op. Cit.*

²⁹ FRA (October 2022). *Op. Cit.*

³⁰ IOM Ukraine (14 December 2022). *Ukraine Crisis Response Operational Update 5 – 11 December*.

³¹ EUAA, IOM & OECD (October 2022), *Op. cit.*

³² REACH & UNHCR (28 April 2022): *Situation Overview: Movement of Ukrainians back into Ukraine from Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova*; UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe (12 July 2022). *Lives on Hold: Profiles and Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine*; UNHCR Operational data portal on the situation in Ukraine.

³³ IOM DTM (11 December 2022). *Ukraine — Internal Displacement Report — General Population Survey Round 11 (25 November - 5 December 2022)*. IOM considers as returnees people who left their place of habitual residence after 24 February 2022, for a period of at least two weeks, and who since returned.

the respondents to the EUAA-OECD survey, 14% had returned to Ukraine at least once, and half stated that they wish to return to Ukraine as soon as it is safe. Thirty-six percent do not intend to return.³⁴

⇒ SOME PEOPLE FLEEING THE COUNTRY MAY BE AT RISK OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

People fleeing Ukraine are vulnerable to different forms of trafficking due to the displacement context and attendant vulnerabilities during the journey and upon arrival in a country of destination. According to the EU Common Anti-Trafficking Plan to respond to the crisis, launched on 6 May 2022, the threat of trafficking in persons is considered “*high and imminent*.”³⁵

The risks of trafficking in persons are higher for certain groups: unaccompanied and separated children and children travelling with adults whose relationship with the children cannot be verified; people who were previously internally displaced within Ukraine;³⁶ people who are unable to access temporary protection, because they are not eligible, or due to lack of information or incorrect information; non-Ukrainians, including undocumented and stateless people; Ukrainian Roma people; LGBTQI+ people; elderly people; and people with mental and physical disabilities.³⁷

³⁴ EUAA, IOM & OECD (October 2022). *Op. Cit.*, p43.

³⁵ EU Solidarity Platform (under the lead of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator) (6 May 2022). *A Common Anti-Trafficking Plan to address the risks of trafficking in human beings and support potential victims among those fleeing the war in Ukraine*.

³⁶ EUAA, IOM & OECD (October 2022). *Op. Cit.* 22% of survey respondents stated they had been internally displaced in Ukraine before they entered the EU.

³⁷ Hoff, Suzanne & Eefje de Volder (May 2022). *Preventing human trafficking of refugees from Ukraine: A rapid assessment of risks and gaps in the anti-trafficking response*. La Strada International & Freedom Fund; Europol (March 2022). *Early Warning Notification: War in Ukraine – refugees arriving to the EU from Ukraine at risk of exploitation as part of THB*. Ref No. 2022-340; UNICEF (19 March 2022). “Children fleeing war in Ukraine at heightened risk of trafficking and exploitation”; IOM (16 March 2022). *Op. Cit.*

Risk factors include: refugees’ determination to flee and travel onwards as quickly as possible, and the large numbers of unregistered individuals offering help, transportation and accommodation, to people who are fleeing, a small minority of whom may intend to traffic refugees.³⁸ The situation with regard to the risks of unregistered individuals offering travel and accommodation has reportedly improved since the first months after the outbreak of the war, with some EU countries now requiring such people to register with the authorities.³⁹

The fact that Ukrainians can travel through Europe regularly, quickly, safely and cheaply, and access employment and social services, is a major source of resilience to trafficking in persons.⁴⁰ However, criminal networks operating between Ukraine and countries in Europe and Central Asia may take advantage of people separated from their support networks and with an acute need to identify alternative methods of income generation. UNODC research has found that economic need is one of the most commonly identified vulnerability factors for trafficking in persons.⁴¹

The forms of trafficking that refugees from Ukraine are at risk of include sexual exploitation, forced labour, illegal adoption and surrogacy,⁴² forced begging, and forced criminality.⁴³

The Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU (FRA) requested information from EU Member States on suspected and confirmed cases of trafficking in persons involving Ukrainian refugees, for the purposes of the agency’s study on the

³⁸ UNHCR (13 April 2022). “Ukraine crisis creates new trafficking risks.”

³⁹ FRA (October 2022). *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁰ Cockbain, E. & Sidebottom, A (29 April 2022). *Op. Cit.*

⁴¹ UNODC (2020). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*.

⁴² It should be noted that under the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, illegal adoption is generally only considered a form of trafficking if the intent is to exploit the child or their labour. Commercial surrogacy also falls under legal frameworks other than trafficking in persons, though some states do explicitly criminalize trafficking in pregnant women and girls for the purpose of selling their babies. See: UNODC (2015). *Issue Paper: The Concept of ‘Exploitation’ in the Trafficking in Persons Protocol*, especially pp. 38-39.

⁴³ Europol (March 2022), *Op. Cit.*

fundamental rights implications of the war in Ukraine, covering the period mid-April to end of July 2022. EU Member States reported over 80 suspected trafficking cases in total, but only a minority of them were confirmed as trafficking cases after criminal investigation.⁴⁴

Of 19 suspected trafficking cases involving Ukrainians in Austria, none were confirmed as trafficking cases. In Slovenia, none of the “several” suspected trafficking cases investigated were established as such. The Czech police were working on “a few” cases of trafficking and sexual exploitation of people under temporary protection, but no one had been convicted. In Germany, the Federal Criminal Police Office was aware of 17 trafficking investigations (trafficking, forced prostitution or exploitation crimes). In Poland, of four trafficking investigations involving Ukrainians, two had been established as not constituting trafficking and two were still ongoing. Three complaints on the trafficking of Ukrainian refugees for sexual or labour exploitation were being investigated by the Spanish police in Madrid.⁴⁵

The Swedish police recorded 11 suspected trafficking cases involving Ukrainian refugees, for sexual and labour exploitation. The Swedish police had also “*come across Ukrainian women who had been forced into prostitution after fleeing Ukraine and that many of them come to Sweden through agencies based in Ukraine that had taken up to 50% of their income.*”⁴⁶

The Dutch media reported on cases of sexual exploitation and “illegal prostitution” among Ukrainians in Amsterdam. The Portuguese media reported on 22 suspected cases of trafficking, two of which were being investigated. Eight other EU countries reported that they had no recorded cases of trafficking involving Ukrainian refugees.⁴⁷

Other suspected trafficking cases were reported to Europol from across the EU, involving suspected Ukrainian traffickers recruiting Ukrainians for labour exploitation and forced begging. Other suspected cases reported related to child trafficking, particularly in the context of illegal adoption and commercial surrogacy. Inter-country adoptions from Ukraine are currently prohibited. The Ukrainian authorities also reported to Europol the existence of a criminal network operating in Ukraine and in the EU, facilitating illegal adoptions for EU nationals through surrogacy programmes.⁴⁸

There is particular concern around the risks of online sexual exploitation and abuse, as many Ukrainians use messaging apps and social media (particularly Viber, Telegram and Facebook)⁴⁹ to seek support, and sex traffickers carry out recruitment of victims and advertise exploitative services online. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) cites Thomson Reuters data indicating “*huge spikes in online searches – across multiple languages and countries – for explicit content and sexual services from Ukrainian women and girls.*”⁵⁰

In a case covered by the media in July 2022, the Ukrainian authorities investigated a suspected case of sex trafficking of at least ten Ukrainian women to Türkiye. The police intercepted a 21-year-old Ukrainian woman, allegedly being trafficked for sexual exploitation in prostitution in Türkiye, via Hungary and Austria. According to a Ukrainian prosecutor, cited in a media article: “*Her vulnerable condition was clear: absence of money, a child to support, overall financial difficulties because of the war.*” The investigation led to the arrest of a suspected trafficking organizer in Kyiv, Ukraine. The 30-year-old man

⁴⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) (October 2022). *The Russian War of Aggression against Ukraine – The Broad Fundamental Rights Impact in the EU* Bulletin #2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Content analysis of Europol Monitoring Team Reports (EPMT) March – November 2022. Europol Unclassified – Basic Protection Level.

⁴⁹ EUAA, IOM & OECD (October 2022). *Op. Cit.*

⁵⁰ OSCE (22 April 2022). *Recommendations on enhancing efforts to identify and mitigate risks of trafficking in human beings online as a result of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine*. On internet-based trafficking, see also Chapter 5 of UNODC *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020*.

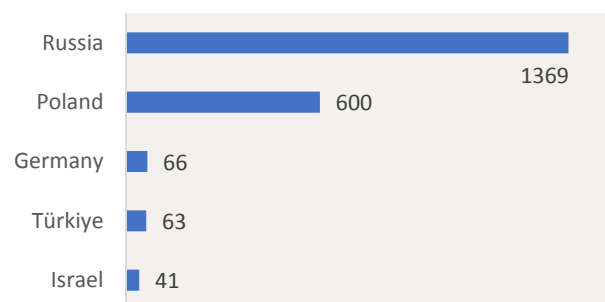
allegedly led a group of men who moderated targeted Telegram channels to recruit victims.⁵¹

However, a dramatic increase in detections of cases of trafficking in persons involving Ukrainian victims has not been recorded. This may be due to the fact that the cases have not yet come to the attention of the authorities. On the other hand, it may indicate that the incidence of trafficking among Ukrainian refugees is relatively low, and that visa-free travel and temporary protection status – with all of the rights attached to the status -, together with the extensive anti-trafficking measures in place in destination countries,⁵² have effectively mitigated the risks of trafficking in persons in this context.

⇒ **PRIOR TO THE CONFLICT, UKRAINIANS WERE IDENTIFIED AS TRAFFICKED TO MANY DIFFERENT COUNTRIES**

Traffickers have recruited and exploited victims in Ukraine, and Ukrainians have been recorded as trafficked both domestically and internationally for many years.

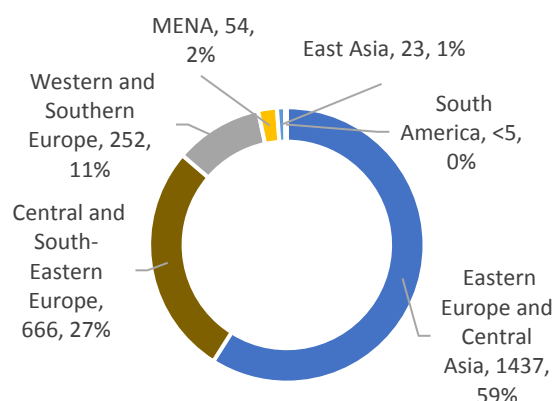
Figure 1: Top 5 countries where Ukrainian victims of trafficking were identified 2017 – 2020 (total: 2,437)



⁵¹ Tondo, Lorenzo (7 July 2022). "Ukraine prosecutors uncover sex trafficking ring preying on women fleeing country". *The Guardian*.

⁵² E.g., the European Commission website for people fleeing Ukraine (available in English, Russian, and Ukrainian), with a section with advice on how to avoid being trafficked. For further details on specific anti-trafficking measures for Ukrainian refugees across the EU, see: European Commission (19 December 2022). *Report on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings (Fourth Report)* 736 final.

Figure 2: Regions of destination for Ukrainian victims of trafficking 2017 – 2020 (total: 2,437)*



*Data for 2020 are still partial.

The UNODC Global Database on Trafficking in Persons provides evidence of Ukrainian victims trafficked to many different countries (29 countries reported Ukrainian victims in 2018). While most Ukrainian victims were identified in neighbouring countries like Russian Federation and Poland, others were detected in the Middle East and South Asia.

Ukrainian victims were either trafficked by domestic traffickers with lower levels of organisation, or by complex networks of individuals spanning multiple nationalities, linking several of the countries in the region.⁵³ Some court case proceedings make explicit mention of transnational organized criminal group structures with higher numbers of victims, perpetrating multiple forms of exploitation.⁵⁴

While many victims were recruited in Ukraine and exploited abroad, others were trafficked domestically, for a range of forms of exploitation, but predominantly for forced labour.⁵⁵

⁵³ UNODC (2020). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons: Court Case Summaries*. The UNODC *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* is due for publication in January 2023.

⁵⁴ UNODC (2020). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons: Court Case Summaries*.

⁵⁵ UNODC (2020). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons: Country Profiles: Ukraine*; UNODC (2020). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons: Court Case Summaries*. Many were recruited by traffickers and exploited in agriculture, stone processing, construction or similar physically demanding sectors.

While efforts to find a resolution to the war are ongoing, concerted and evidence-based measures by the international community, as well as by state and non-state organizations, can ensure that vulnerabilities to trafficking in Ukraine are alleviated, by ensuring access to safety and essential services. For people fleeing Ukraine and seeking safety in neighbouring countries and further afield, legal entry and legal status, as well as access to essential services, employment and education, are crucial in preventing both migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

