

Contribution by Romania for the *Trafficking in women and girls: Report of the Secretary-General (A/RES/77/194)* to be presented during the 69th session of the UN General Assembly

Preventing and combating trafficking in persons continued to be high on the list of priorities of the government's plans during the terms of office of the two governments (which succeeded each other in office) in the period 2022-2023. Substantial efforts to combat trafficking in persons undertaken in the previous year by the Romanian authorities, together with partners from civil society and the private sector, have been consolidated and have reached a new stage of development, which is supported by the figures of persons convicted (136 traffickers in 2023) and victims identified (451 victims in 2023 – out of which 347 females: 182 girls and 165 women). These efforts demonstrate the determination of the Romanian authorities to ensure the coherence of previous years' initiatives and the effectiveness of the Romanian anti-trafficking system, with a proactive approach, including with regard to potential situations of vulnerability of non-EU citizens arriving in Romania, either as refugees or as labor force. The approval and implementation of the new National Identification and Referral Mechanism of Victims of Trafficking in Persons (MNIR) in March 2023 will continue the medium and long term strategic vision and commitments of the national authorities to ensure that the anti-trafficking system continues to develop in line with national realities, European and international approaches in this field and, at the same time, provides a coherent tool for integrated action of all actors involved in this phenomenon, promoting a victim – centered approach.

The fight against trafficking in person is a cross-sectoral responsibility, predominantly under the umbrella of the public-private-civil society partnership and therefore requires strategic planning between all actors involved, regardless of their legal nature.

A series of important measures have been adopted in 2023 to strengthen these efforts, including:

- **Coordination:** the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, through a State Counsellor, chaired the Inter-ministerial Committee for Strategic Inter-sectoral Coordination of the Fight against Trafficking in Persons, which brought as a novelty the presence of civil society, as a permanent guest in the Committee, with the participation of non-governmental organizations with direct experience in assisting victims of trafficking. At the same time, in the geopolitical context of regional security, the Department for Relations with the Republic of Moldova was included as a permanent guest. It is worth mentioning that, in January 2023, the former national coordination structure was adapted to the new realities, so that by a decision of the Prime Minister, the new Inter-ministerial Committee for Strategic Inter-sectoral Coordination of the Fight against Trafficking in Persons was established, with the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons providing the technical Secretariat of this body.
- **An Integrated Plan:** *the Integrated Plan of Measures to Respond to International Recommendations on Trafficking in Persons* guided anti-trafficking efforts during 2023, in parallel with the process of evaluating the National Strategy against Trafficking in Persons 2018-2022 (SNITP) and developing a new public policy.
- **A New Anti-trafficking Strategy:** the dynamic evaluation process of the SNITP 2018-2022, by a team of independent experts, was completed in September 2023 and an extensive inter-institutional and cross-sectoral process was initiated to develop the new Strategy (2024-2028), a document that addresses the priorities assumed by the Inter-ministerial Committee for Strategic Inter-sectoral Coordination of the Fight against Trafficking in Persons. It has priorities based on opportunities and needs, clear objectives and indicators and a realistic action plan, agreed upon by all partners, including civil society, around the 4 anti-trafficking pillars (*Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Partnership*). The main objectives of the strategy are: reducing the influence of risk factors and vulnerabilities leading to victimization through trafficking in persons; increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the

criminal justice system in cases of trafficking in persons; improving protection and assistance provided to victims of trafficking in persons; standardization of data collection processes in the field of trafficking in persons; enhancing cooperation in horizontal areas of the anti-trafficking system. It is expected to be approved in May 2024.

- **The National Identification and Referral Mechanism of Victims of Trafficking in Persons:** The new MNIR was approved by the Romanian Government Decision no. 88 of March 2023. This is the result of an extensive collaborative process with all relevant actors and leads to a coherent and consolidated response so that victims can benefit from integrated support based on their specific needs and situation. In order to support specialists and others, a user-friendly/simplified version of the Mechanism has been developed, with the aim of obtaining the response of the whole Romanian society.
- **Online registration system for minors from Ukraine:** Primero continued to be a tool used as part of the coordination mechanism in the Ukrainian refugee crisis. It also includes an assessment from a child trafficking perspective (screening) at the initial stage and, if necessary, a minor can be referred as a potential victim of trafficking.
- **Legislative changes:** Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code, in relation to the rights of parties to criminal proceedings, strengthen measures to prevent re-victimization and to protect and assist victims of human trafficking during criminal proceedings.
- **Support for victims:** Starting with 2022, and throughout 2023-2024, Romania has taken important steps by operationalizing the National Crime Support Prevention Mechanism, when a broad process of institutional adaptation of the enrollment of institutions and organizations has also started, in order to make it easier for victims to access the advance from compensation. This involves the allocation of resources for legal education, crime prevention, assistance and protection of victims of crime, and channeling of funds for state compensation to victims.
- **Surveillance:** special attention was paid to the online dimension of trafficking in persons, as well as to the abuse of technology in relation to this phenomenon, including to anticipate new threats such as *fake-news*, *deep-fake*, *web-crawl*, etc., in connection with the various facets of trafficking in persons, but in particular with regard to child victims. In December 2023, the Romanian Government adopted the draft law in connection with the establishment of measures for the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a single payment for digital services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC, as well as amending and supplementing Law No 365/2002 on electronic commerce. The draft law sets out a number of measures necessary for the implementation of the Digital Services Act (DSA) Regulation on the single market for digital services. This regulation will enter into force on 17 February 2024, and the principle that applies in all EU Member States from that moment onwards is that "everything that is illegal offline becomes illegal online". The law also aims to adopt measures to create a regime for cooperation with other public institutions and authorities in Romania, clarifying that market surveillance authorities in various sectors or areas of activity, referred to as relevant authorities, have the power to issue orders to remove illegal content from the online environment.

The Digital Services Act brings clear and extensive EU-wide rules for the various digital services, setting an increasing scale of obligations depending on the type and size of intermediary service providers. Overall, the Digital Services Act is a significant effort to create a safer and more ethical digital environment, promoting online responsibility and protecting users' fundamental rights.

SNITP 2024 - 2028 foresees, in the margin of the general objectives, the reducing the influence of risk factors and vulnerabilities leading to victimization through trafficking in persons, also targeting the virtual space, as the online environment is constantly developing and changing the specifics of daily life. The Internet is characterized by its usefulness, accessibility and attractiveness, but it also poses risks to the safety and security of its users and is increasingly used as a tool to facilitate recruitment and exploitation through human trafficking, including the emergence of hybrid forms of exploitation such as video chat. The implementation of information and awareness raising campaigns on trafficking in persons in the online environment is crucial to reduce the risks of victimization and must be complemented by effective administrative measures, including the obligation for hosting service

providers to report, without delay, to law enforcement authorities all suspicions of human trafficking, child trafficking and child pornography offences, and with the application of the new European legislative framework (DSA), this becomes an obligation, whereas until recently it was only a recommendation!

- **Conflict-related risk situations, COVID 19 pandemic, vulnerable groups** - The COVID 19 pandemic and the presence of refugees from Ukraine were two phenomena that led to multiple changes, including in the anti-trafficking area and in the sphere of internalized institutional direction and responsibilities, in the process of institutional sedimentation. The restrictions on free movement imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have limited the criminal activities of some groups or led to changes in their modus operandi (groups "specializing" in the sexual exploitation of victims have turned their criminal interest towards the predominant use of virtual means of committing crimes: pornography, video-chat). Inter-personal relations have moved predominantly online, in the sense that the recruitment of victims in Romania through various applications and social networks has increased considerably. At the same time, there has been a trend towards the exploitation of increasingly young, underage victims, who lack the necessary life experience and the full capacity to discern the consequences of interacting with known individuals in cyberspace or who fail to be aware of the various risks that may exist on the Internet.

From February 2022 to the end of February 2024, 7.4 million Ukrainian citizens entered Romania, out of which almost 150,000 Ukrainians received temporary protection. Currently, around 80,000 Ukrainians benefit from temporary protection, out of which 75% are women and children, a category at high risk of trafficking. Prevention measures have included the provision of financial aid and support for adaptation to Romanian society. In addition, Ukrainians benefit from free access to education, the public health system and the right to work. Romania has set up a mechanism to prevent situations of vulnerability of Ukrainian citizens that could put them at risk of becoming victims of trafficking. At the same time, the safety of refugees entering Romania remains a primary concern of the Romanian authorities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and, of course, the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons (ANITP). At national level, a series of meetings have been organized, involving all authorities, but also international organizations and non-governmental organizations, to identify the best way to manage the situation.

For the information of specialists working on the front line in support of refugees, migrants and displaced persons, ANITP, through its Regional Centers, has distributed a set of indicators for the identification of potential victims and the provisions of MNIR, so as to ensure the earliest possible detection and notification of possible cases of human trafficking.

At the same time, the most recent prevention campaigns targeting migrants were launched at the end of January 2024 and implemented by ANITP and the General Inspectorate for Immigration (IGI). The three campaigns, developed and implemented in parallel, aim to address various aspects of trafficking in persons in a comprehensive and effective manner.

First of all, the campaigns aim to increase the information and awareness of migrants in Romania about the risks and dangers of human trafficking. The aim is to provide migrants with essential tools and knowledge to protect themselves and avoid the risks of human trafficking. Secondly, the campaigns also target vulnerable groups, aiming to address those who are particularly at risk of being trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation, labor or begging, providing them with the resources and knowledge to protect themselves and stay safe. The campaigns also aim to raise awareness among the general public of the complexity and seriousness of the phenomenon of trafficking in persons. Through clear and convincing messages, the aim is to draw public attention to the risks associated with human trafficking and the need for collective action to reduce the scale of the phenomenon.

In order to ensure the widest possible reach of the prevention messages, the campaigns are implemented on the social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, supported by paid promotion to reach the largest and most diverse audience.

In a proactive and targeted approach to the specific needs of different communities, the campaigns have been adapted and translated into several relevant languages, namely Romanian, English, Ukrainian, Arabic, Bengali and Nepali - the languages of origin of the main nationalities living in Romania, according to IGI statistics, in order to ensure access to information also for people who do not know Romanian but live in Romania. This linguistic diversity reflects the concern of ANITP and IGI to ensure that no community is neglected and that all inhabitants of Romania are informed and protected against human trafficking.

- **Awareness-raising activities and training of frontline specialists** - to give an overview of the scope of the information activities carried out, we mention that, for example, in 2023, the Agency and its partners implemented a total of 175 educational projects and 25 national and local campaigns to prevent human trafficking. In the framework of these, 3,679 information-prevention activities were carried out, which resulted in the delivery of anti-trafficking messages to more than 246,000 direct beneficiaries from different social and professional categories, namely: pupils, students, teachers, parents and carers, volunteers, priests, job-seekers, institutionalized young people, asylum seekers, prostitutes, professionals involved in the fight against trafficking, as well as representatives of the general public. It is also worth mentioning that the posts with anti-trafficking messages and useful recommendations on ANITP Facebook page and TikTok account alone have had an impact of over 7,000,000 unique users.

Also, with a view to streamlining the efforts carried out in the fight against trafficking, especially in terms of improving the capacity to detect and identify early victims of trafficking and to assist them, the work of ANITP included, in 2023, the organization and support of 178 training sessions for socio-professional categories that may come into contact with victims/potential victims of human trafficking, addressing approximately 6.039 beneficiaries (teachers and school/educational counsellors, priests, national and local police officers, prosecutors, judges, association and NGO workers, social workers and psychologists, volunteers, civil servants, nurses and medical staff, gendarmes, etc.).

- **Statistics** - Figures collected nationally show a decrease in the number of victims identified each year. The decrease has also occurred as a result of the reconfiguration of some criminal activities in the field of trafficking, which has led to a decrease in trafficking and exploitation to certain countries, in particular for the purpose of labor exploitation, and thus to a gradual reduction in the number of exploited adults, which has resulted in the phenomenon now having a very extensive component of exploitation, mainly sexual, of minors, which takes place mainly on national territory. An indicator that captures even more accurately the dimensions of the phenomenon is the victimization rate, the number of victims identified in relation to the volume of Romania's population; this has seen a reduction from 3.59 in 2019 to 2.37 in 2023.

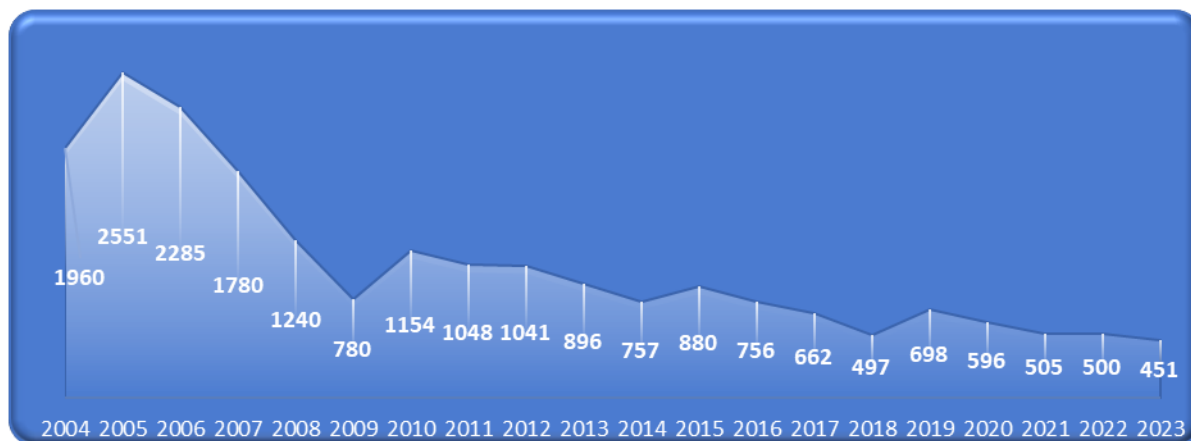


Figure 1 Dynamics of identified victims of trafficking for the 2004 – 2023

Dynamics of female victims of trafficking for the 2018 - 2023

