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RISK OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING DURING MARTIAL LAW IN UKRAINE

According to estimates by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), more than 5.5 million people have fled since the start of the war on February 24 from Ukraine, seeking asylum in neighboring countries, mainly in Poland, Hungary, Moldova, Romania and Slovakia, and more than 7.7 million were internally displaced. The scale of destruction and casualties among the civilian population, caused by the war, have led to one of the biggest European humanitarian crises in recent times. By according to UNICEF estimates, at least 7.5 million children were affected by the war in Ukraine. Since men aged 18 and 60 are not allowed to leave the country, mostly women and children seek protection abroad [1].

Human trafficking is an illegal transaction involving a person, as well as the recruitment, transportation, harboring, transfer or receipt of a person committed for the purpose of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, by means of deception, fraud, blackmail, or taking advantage of a person's vulnerable condition or the use or threat of violence, abuse of office or material or other dependence on another person, which are recognized as a crime under the Criminal Code of Ukraine [2].

Human trafficking can take many forms:

- labor exploitation;
- sexual exploitation, use in prostitution and pornography;
- forced begging;
- forced involvement in criminal activities and armed conflicts;
- human trafficking for the purpose of organ removal, forced surrogacy, etc.

Signs that a person is in a situation related to human trafficking:

- a passport or other documents were taken away;

- deprived of free movement and communication with family members;
- Threatened, beaten or raped, mocked or subjected to psychological pressure;
- Forced to do work they did not want to do, using physical or psychological violence;
- forced to work off fictitious debts;
- there was no possibility to leave the job at will;
- forced to work overtime;
- used against their will in an armed conflict [3].

To Ukrainian refugees in other countries, the La Strada representative says that the best place for Ukrainians abroad to look for information that will help them avoid becoming victims of human trafficking is in Ukrainian sources that know the specifics of presenting information to the Ukrainian audience and publish it in a language they understand [4].

In order to inform the public on how to avoid falling into labor or sexual slavery, the EU-funded project "Ukrainians about the European Union", together with the International Organization for Migration, has developed a number of information materials aimed at preventing and avoiding getting involved in crimes related to human trafficking [3].

From February 24, 2022, to October 2023, 264 criminal offenses under the article on human trafficking were detected, and 169 people were served with suspicion notices, the Ministry of Internal Affairs said in a statement. According to the ministry, over the past two years, the National Police of Ukraine has stopped the activities of six organized groups of human traffickers. The Interior Ministry says that the members of these criminal groups have been brought to justice. In addition, during 2022-2023, 215 people were recognized as victims in criminal proceedings on human trafficking, 23 of them children [5].

EU by activating the Temporary Protection Directive (Directive 2001/55/EC) and launching emergency assistance programs emergency assistance programs that cover basic needs and offer assistance at the EU borders immediately intervened to help civilians affected by the war in Ukraine. On March 16, the European Commission proposed operational

guidelines to support Member States in implementing the directive, including specific chapters on children, unaccompanied minors and human trafficking. The Commission strongly calls on Member States to introduce adequate preventive measures against persons fleeing Ukraine. These measures include and border authorities, as well as improving the identification and detection of victims, raising awareness of key professionals who may come into contact with potential victims, training and providing guidance to relevant law enforcement and border authorities and border authorities, as well as improving early identification, assistance and support to victims of trafficking in human beings. The Commission emphasizes that the protection of migrant children arriving from Ukraine is a top priority for the EU, and that special attention should be paid to unaccompanied minors, separated children and orphans. On March 23, the European Commission called on EU member states to once again be "particularly vigilant" about children who may be trafficked or abducted, emphasizing the importance of identification and registration [1].

References:

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